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Issue 2

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# Entrepreneur

For youth interested in entrepreneurship



Sport and entrepreneurship | Entrepreneurs in sport

Intellectual property | Failed ventures



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# SPORT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP



*One of the primary reasons sport drives innovation is the demand for marginal gains.*

Sport, by its very nature, is dynamic, competitive, and constantly evolving—making it an ideal context for innovation. Athletes and teams are always searching for a competitive edge, whether it's through better equipment, smarter technology, improved nutrition, or data-driven performance analysis. This relentless pursuit of excellence creates a fertile ground for entrepreneurial innovation and product development.

## 1. High Demand for Performance Optimization

One of the primary reasons sport drives innovation is the demand for marginal gains. At elite levels, even a 1% improvement in performance can mean the difference between victory and defeat. This performance pressure fuels constant experimentation and adoption of new products, ranging from carbon fibre bicycles to breathable fabrics and advanced wearables. For example, innovations such as aerodynamic skinsuits in cycling, motion-sensor bats in cricket, or heart-rate monitors in endurance sports reflect how product development is tightly linked to athletic performance.

This same performance-focused mindset trickles down to amateur and recreational athletes, who are eager to adopt professional-level innovations to enhance their own experiences. That expanding consumer base makes sports an attractive market for product developers and startups alike.

## 2. Real-World Testing Grounds

Sport provides a unique real-time environment for product validation and feedback. Athletes, coaches, and sport scientists offer precise, high-frequency, and often public feedback. This accelerates the product development cycle and allows innovators to rapidly prototype, test, and iterate.

Moreover, many sports are played under unpredictable and high-pressure conditions—perfect for testing durability, responsiveness, and user-centric design. For instance, trail running shoes can be tested on varying terrains and weather, while cricket bats endure fast-paced impacts, allowing brands to identify real-world use cases early in development.

Another reason entrepreneurs are drawn to sport is the opportunity to tie product development to powerful narratives. Sport is emotional and tribal—it builds communities and heroes. When a product helps an athlete break a world record or overcome injury, it gains instant credibility and emotional resonance with fans and consumers.

Brands like Nike, Under Armour, and GoPro have leveraged athlete stories to drive product innovation and marketing. Startups also benefit from the strong brand-building potential within sport, particularly in niche communities like rock climbing, surfing, or women's football, where authenticity and purpose resonate deeply.

## 4. Intersection of Technology, Health, and Lifestyle

Modern sport sits at the intersection of health, wellness, entertainment, and technology. This opens opportunities for crossover products with broad market appeal. For example, wearable fitness trackers started in the sport sector but are now mainstream wellness tools. Innovations in hydration systems, plant-based nutrition, and injury recovery have also spilled into consumer health markets.

Entrepreneurs can leverage this cross-sector relevance to diversify their offerings or secure multiple streams of revenue from one innovation. For instance, compression garments designed for runners are now widely used in physiotherapy and post-surgical recovery.

## 5. Supportive Ecosystem

Many countries have well-established ecosystems that support sports innovation. From government grants for youth physical activity startups to university R&D partnerships in sports science, the ecosystem is becoming more favourable. Events like the Olympics and World Cups also act as launchpads for products due to global visibility and accelerated adoption.

In Australia, for example, programs like the AIS's Innovation Hub and Sport Australia's partnership initiatives have helped startups pilot new technologies for athlete training and injury prevention.



*Sport offers a rich, dynamic, and high-impact context for innovation in product development.*

Such infrastructure lowers barriers for entry and encourages experimentation.

## Why Entrepreneurs are Drawn to Sport

Entrepreneurs are drawn to sport for several interconnected reasons:

- **Passion & Lifestyle Alignment:** Many founders are athletes themselves or sport enthusiasts, making the sector a natural fit for their lifestyle and values.
- **Scalable Niche Markets:** Sports markets are often niche but global. For example, mountain biking is a specialized segment but with millions of participants globally. This allows startups to scale without needing mass-market appeal immediately.
- **First-Mover Advantage:** With sport-specific problems often underserved, there's room for high-impact innovation. Whether it's a new grip for tennis players or hydration tracking for rowers, opportunities exist for tailored solutions.
- **Media & Influencer Leverage:** Sport has built-in audiences, media coverage, and influencer networks. A successful product can go viral quickly through athlete endorsement or broadcast exposure.

## Benefits of Innovating in the Sport Sector

- **Brand Visibility:** Association with performance, health, and resilience enhances a brand's image.
- **Fast Feedback Loops:** Real-time feedback from users allows rapid product iteration.
- **Diverse Revenue Models:** Opportunities range from direct-to-consumer retail to B2B with clubs, leagues, and schools.
- **Health and Social Impact:** Many sport innovations directly benefit public health, inclusivity, and youth development—attracting ethical investors and grants.

## Challenges Faced by Entrepreneurs in Sport

Despite the many opportunities, the sports sector presents real challenges:

- **Seasonality and Limited Budgets:** Many sports have seasonal cycles and consumers with limited discretionary income. Schools and clubs often have tight budgets.
- **Intellectual Property Risks:** Copycat designs and patent disputes are common, especially in equipment and apparel.
- **Endorsement Costs:** Athlete endorsements are powerful but expensive. For new brands, aligning with high-profile athletes may be financially prohibitive.
- **Regulatory and Safety Concerns:** Products like supplements, protective gear, or performance tech must meet rigorous safety standards, adding complexity and cost.
- **Rapid Technological Obsolescence:** Wearables and software in sport can quickly become outdated, requiring constant reinvestment in R&D.

Sport offers a rich, dynamic, and high-impact context for innovation in product development. The combination of passionate user bases, real-world testing environments, and global visibility makes it a unique and rewarding space for entrepreneurs. While there are financial, regulatory, and marketing challenges, the rewards—both economic and social—can be substantial. For the right founder with a compelling idea and a connection to the sporting world, this sector offers not just commercial potential, but the chance to change how people move, perform, and connect through sport. **T**

*When a product helps an athlete break a world record or overcome injury, it gains instant credibility and emotional resonance with fans and consumers.*



# ENTREPRENEURS IN SPORT

## SIMON ANDERSON (AUSTRALIA)

## HALEY ROSEN (USA)

## CRAIG JOHNSTON (AUSTRALIA)

## CHELSEA FISHMAN (USA)



Simon Anderson is a pioneering Australian surfer and surfboard shaper renowned for inventing the “Thruster,” a three-fin surfboard design that revolutionized surfing in the early 1980s. His innovation not only transformed surfboard design but also marked a significant entrepreneurial leap in the surfing industry.

In October 1980, while competing on the professional tour, Anderson was struggling with the performance of existing surfboard designs, particularly in small waves. Inspired by the twin-fin boards of the era, he conceptualized adding a third, central fin to enhance control and manoeuvrability. This led to the creation of the “Thruster,” a board featuring three fins arranged in a triangular configuration. He debuted this design at the 1981 Bells Beach Classic, where he secured victory, demonstrating the board’s quality.

Anderson faced initial scepticism from the surfing community regarding the three-fin design. Overcoming this resistance required persistence and confidence in. His entrepreneurial spirit was evident as he established Energy Surfboards in 1975, a company that played a crucial role in developing and promoting the Thruster.

The impact of the Thruster was profound. It became the standard surfboard design worldwide, influencing both professional and recreational surfers. The innovation contributed to the evolution of modern surfing, allowing for more dynamic and powerful manoeuvres.

Anderson’s success as an entrepreneur can be attributed to several key characteristics:

- **Innovation:** His ability to identify performance gaps and create solutions led to a ground-breaking product.
- **Resilience:** Despite initial doubts, he remained committed to his vision, refining the design and promoting its benefits.
- **Vision:** Anderson foresaw the potential of his design to transform the surfing experience, aligning his entrepreneurial efforts with the needs of the surfing community.

Image: Wikipedia



Haley Rosen is a trailblazing entrepreneur who founded Just Women’s Sports (JWS) in 2020 to address the glaring disparity in media coverage between men’s and women’s sports. Her venture aims to provide comprehensive, engaging content that celebrates and elevates women in sports.

After retiring from professional soccer, she found it challenging to follow the careers of her friends and former teammates due to the limited media coverage of women’s sports. This gap in coverage was particularly evident considering that women constitute 44% of athletes, yet receive only about 4% of sports media coverage. Determined to change this narrative, Rosen launched JWS to create a platform that offers in-depth coverage, interviews, highlights, and analysis of women’s sports.

Starting a media company focused exclusively on women’s sports presented several challenges. One significant hurdle was securing funding, as investors were initially sceptical about the viability of a niche sports media outlet. However, Rosen’s unwavering belief in the potential of women’s sports attracted investors, including venture capital firms and professional athletes, who recognized the untapped market. Additionally, building a dedicated audience required consistent, high-quality content and strategic partnerships to establish credibility and attract viewers.

Since its inception, JWS has made a significant impact on the visibility of women’s sports. The platform has attracted a dedicated fan base and secured partnerships with major sports leagues, providing comprehensive coverage of various women’s sports events.

Her resilience and determination were evident as she navigated the challenges of starting a media company in a competitive industry. Rosen’s ability to secure funding and build strategic partnerships demonstrates her strong leadership and business acumen.

Haley Rosen’s journey from a professional athlete to a pioneering entrepreneur underscores the power of identifying gaps in the market and creating solutions that resonate with audiences. Image: Medium



Craig Johnston, a former Australian footballer renowned for his time at Liverpool FC, transitioned into a successful entrepreneur by revolutionizing football footwear with the creation of the Adidas Predator boots.

While coaching schoolchildren, he observed their struggles with traditional leather boots, which lacked grip on wet grass. This observation led him to experiment with adding rubber ridges to the boots to enhance control and grip.

Determined to bring his idea to fruition, Johnston invested considerable personal funds into developing the design. Despite facing rejections from major sportswear companies like Adidas, Nike, and Reebok, he persisted. His breakthrough came when he persuaded German football legends Franz Beckenbauer, Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, and Paul Breitner to wear his prototype boots during snowy conditions.

Johnston’s journey was fraught with challenges. The initial rejection of his idea by leading sportswear brands was a significant setback. Additionally, securing funding for the development of the boots was a constant struggle. Despite these obstacles, Johnston’s unwavering belief in his innovation kept him moving forward.

The process of refining the design and ensuring its effectiveness on the field required extensive testing.

The release of the Adidas Predator boots in 1994 marked a significant milestone in football history. The boots featured rubber elements on the upper, providing players with enhanced grip and control over the ball. This innovation allowed players to execute more precise passes and shots, fundamentally changing the way the game was played.

The success of the Predator boots not only solidified Johnston’s reputation as an innovator but also revitalized Adidas during a challenging period. The boots became a staple for professional players worldwide, including icons like David Beckham and Zinedine Zidane.

Johnston’s entrepreneurial journey was characterized by resilience, creativity, and a deep understanding of the needs of football players. His ability to identify a problem and devise an innovative solution demonstrated his forward-thinking approach. Image: SBS



Chelsea Fishman is a dynamic young entrepreneur who is reshaping the landscape of sports culture in Atlanta. In 2025, she is set to open Jolene Jolene, Atlanta’s first sports bar dedicated exclusively to women’s sports.

Chelsea’s inspiration for Jolene Jolene stemmed from her recognition of a significant gap in the sports entertainment industry. Despite the growing popularity of women’s sports, there was a noticeable absence of venues that celebrated and showcased these events. Fishman envisioned a space where fans could not only watch games but also engage in a community that champions female athletes. The name “Jolene Jolene,” inspired by Dolly Parton’s iconic song, reflects her commitment to honouring women in sports.

Chelsea faced several challenges typical for young founders. Securing funding was a significant hurdle, as many investors were initially hesitant to back a niche concept. Additionally, finding a suitable location in Atlanta that aligned with her vision proved to be a complex task. However, Chelsea’s determination and innovative approach led her to explore alternative funding avenues, including community support through platforms like Venmo and personal checks.

The venture also had to navigate the complexities of the hospitality industry, from obtaining necessary permits to ensuring compliance with local regulations.

Chelsea embodies several key traits that are often found in successful young entrepreneurs. Her resilience and determination have been evident in her ability to overcome obstacles and persist in the face of adversity. She demonstrates a strong sense of purpose, driven by a commitment to social change and community empowerment. Additionally, Chelsea’s innovative mindset allows her to approach challenges creatively, finding solutions that align with her values and vision.

By addressing a critical gap in the sports entertainment industry, she is not only creating a successful business but also contributing to a cultural shift towards greater inclusivity and recognition of women in sports.

Find out more: KB Sports Media | Image: LinkedIn

# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY: CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS



In the world of sport, entrepreneurship is thriving. From cutting-edge equipment and wearable technologies to performance apps and athlete branding, sport offers a dynamic arena for business development. However, as innovation grows, so too does the importance of protecting the ideas, products, and brand identities that underpin these entrepreneurial ventures. Intellectual property (IP) is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of starting and scaling a business in sport. While IP protection offers substantial benefits to entrepreneurs, it also comes with unique challenges that require careful navigation.

## Understanding Intellectual Property in the Sporting Sector

Intellectual property refers to legal rights that protect the creations of the mind—whether inventions, designs, trade marks, brand names, or original works. In sport, IP covers a broad spectrum: from patented equipment like performance-enhancing footwear to registered trade marks associated with clubs, events or individual athletes, and copyrighted material such as broadcast footage, software, and training content.

For entrepreneurs, understanding how to protect these assets is key to securing market advantage and commercial success. At the same time, sport is a highly competitive and high-profile field. The visibility that draws entrepreneurs to the industry can also attract imitators, legal disputes, and infringement claims if IP is not carefully managed.

## Benefits of IP for Sport Entrepreneurs

### 1. Commercial Exclusivity and Market Differentiation

IP protection grants legal exclusivity over a product or brand, allowing entrepreneurs to maintain a competitive edge. For example, a patented wearable device that monitors hydration levels during sport can prevent direct competitors from copying the innovation for a certain period—usually 20 years under patent law. This exclusive market position allows the original developer to build brand recognition, charge premium prices, and recoup development costs.

### 2. Enhanced Business Valuation

Start-ups and small ventures often find it difficult to raise capital,

but well-managed IP portfolios can significantly boost investor confidence. A patented technology or a well-recognised trade mark signals credibility, innovation and future growth potential. Investors are more likely to support a business that has legally protected its core assets, as it reduces the risk of imitation and market dilution.

### 3. Licensing and Royalty Opportunities

IP also enables licensing agreements, allowing entrepreneurs to generate passive income or expand reach without giving up control of the core business. For instance, a sport entrepreneur who designs a new resistance training device might license the patent to fitness equipment manufacturers globally. Licensing can open doors to international markets and commercial partnerships, especially when the business lacks resources to scale independently.

### 4. Stronger Branding and Athlete Partnerships

Sport is as much about branding as it is about performance. A distinctive name, logo, or tagline that is trade marked can build customer loyalty and brand equity. For example, entrepreneurs selling performance gear or nutritional supplements can use trade marks to position their brand as elite, eco-friendly, or athlete-approved. Trade marked slogans, packaging and design all contribute to perceived value and customer trust.

## Common IP Challenges in Sport Entrepreneurship

### 1. Cost and Complexity of Protection

Protecting IP, particularly patents, can be costly and time-consuming. Entrepreneurs may face legal fees, application charges, and administrative hurdles—especially when pursuing international protection. Many early-stage sport businesses operate on lean budgets and may delay filing for protection, leaving them vulnerable to copycats or disputes.

Moreover, navigating IP law requires specialised knowledge. Entrepreneurs may not realise which elements of their innovation are protectable, or how to manage overlapping rights (e.g. a product may involve a patent, trade mark, and copyright simultaneously).

### 2. Risk of Infringing Existing Rights

A common pitfall is inadvertently infringing someone else's IP—especially in sport where there's a dense landscape of logos, slogans, product designs, and technology. For example, launching a brand with a name similar to a well-known club or using colour schemes and fonts similar to existing teams may lead to legal action or cease-and-desist orders.

Entrepreneurs must perform thorough IP searches before launching products or marketing campaigns. Ignorance is not a legal defence in infringement cases, and being forced to rebrand or redesign a product can be costly and damaging to reputation.

### 3. Difficulty Enforcing IP Rights

Even if a business holds registered IP rights, enforcement can be difficult, especially across jurisdictions. Counterfeiting is rife

in the sport apparel and equipment industry, with unauthorised reproductions of boots, kits and wearable tech sold through global online marketplaces. For small entrepreneurs, pursuing litigation against infringers—especially overseas—is often not viable.

Digital piracy also presents challenges. Coaching videos, sport analytics apps, and other digital content are susceptible to unauthorised distribution. Entrepreneurs must rely not only on registration but also on monitoring and enforcement strategies, which require time and resources.

Even if a business holds registered IP rights, enforcement can be difficult...

### 4. IP Ownership in Collaborative Ventures

In sport, many innovations are developed in collaboration—with athletes, coaches, clubs or universities. Disputes can arise over who owns the IP. For example, if a physiotherapist and a startup co-create a new recovery device, and no formal agreement exists, ownership may be unclear. This can delay commercialisation or lead to legal battles. Clear contracts and upfront negotiations are essential when co-developing products or content in the sporting sector.

## The Australian Context

In Australia, IP Australia is the government agency responsible for managing IP rights. Entrepreneurs have access to a range of resources and support, including the Australian Government's IP Toolkit for Collaboration, which is particularly useful for those working with research institutions or athletes. Startups are encouraged to consider IP strategies early in their business planning.

Australia is also party to international treaties like the Patent Cooperation Treaty and Madrid Protocol, which makes it easier for sport entrepreneurs to protect their IP globally—critical for those targeting international markets such as the US, Europe or Asia.

Entrepreneurship in sport is driven by innovation, performance, and identity—three areas deeply intertwined with intellectual property. IP offers substantial benefits, from protecting originality and market share to enhancing brand value and enabling commercial partnerships. At the same time, the challenges—costs, legal complexity, enforcement issues and potential disputes—require entrepreneurs to be proactive, informed and strategic.

In an increasingly global and digital sports landscape, strong IP management is not just a legal safeguard; it's a business imperative. For Australian entrepreneurs entering the sports sector, early investment in understanding and securing intellectual property can be the difference between a fleeting idea and a lasting legacy.

# FAILED VENTURES

Many sporting ventures fail. Here are some examples.

## 1. Puma Pumaphone (2010)

Puma teamed up with Sagem to launch a smartphone aimed at active users, with fitness features like GPS and pedometers.

Despite the brand strength, the phone was overpriced, underpowered, and poorly marketed, leading to minimal sales and its quiet withdrawal from the market.

## 2. Adidas Micropacer (Reissue, 2000s)

Originally revolutionary in 1984 for its built-in pedometer and digital screen in the tongue of the shoe, the 2000s reissues failed.

They were bulky, outdated in the age of smartwatches, and more novelty than performance-driven — appealing to collectors rather than athletes.

## 3. Snauwaert Ergonom Tennis Racquet (1980s)

This Belgian racquet featured an unusually curved head designed to increase sweet spot contact. Its radical shape confused players and didn't deliver consistent performance, quickly disappearing from competitive use.

## 4. Reebok The Pump 2.0 (Early 2000s)

A sequel to Reebok's original Pump shoe, this version attempted to revive the brand's glory but was over-engineered and expensive.

Consumers didn't find the air-cushioning system necessary or effective, and it failed to resonate with newer generations.

## 5. Sensor-equipped Smart Cricket Bat (Various brands, 2010s)

Multiple brands tried embedding sensors in cricket bats to collect swing data and feedback. Despite innovation, most failed commercially due to high costs, battery issues, and doubts about their use during actual matches.

## 6. Oakley Thump Sunglasses with MP3 Player (2004)

These sporty sunglasses with built-in MP3 playback were ahead of their time in concept but awkward in design and function. They were heavy, had limited storage, and didn't appeal to athletes who preferred lightweight performance gear.

These examples show how sporting product innovation can fail due to poor usability, timing, price sensitivity, or technological redundancy — even when backed by strong brands or clever ideas.



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