

17 SPORT

# SPORT AND PURPOSE

AN IMPACTFUL  
COMBINATION FOR  
BRANDS LOOKING  
TO THRIVE

17 Sport study validates the belief that sport is an effective platform for brands to activate their organizational purpose and simultaneously do good and do well.

# INTRODUCTION

There is compelling [evidence](#) that companies who harness the power of purpose achieve better financial results, attract and retain the best talent and build loyal customer relationships. Today's executives recognize the importance of having an aspirational reason for being which inspires and provides a call to action for an organization whilst simultaneously providing benefit to society.

As more companies commit to being purpose-driven, they are looking for persuasive ways in which to articulate and act on their purpose. At 17 Sport, we believe that sport offers a highly effective platform for companies to do this. Sport is simple, flexible, and hugely popular across the world. It has the power to attract, mobilize, and inspire people at scale. It also has tremendous educational potential and, through its desirable values, is able to promote peace, cohesion, physical and mental wellbeing, and instill valuable life skills. Furthermore, with sport increasingly feeling the impact of climate change, it is becoming a powerful platform to influence thinking and actions that can turn the tide on climate change.

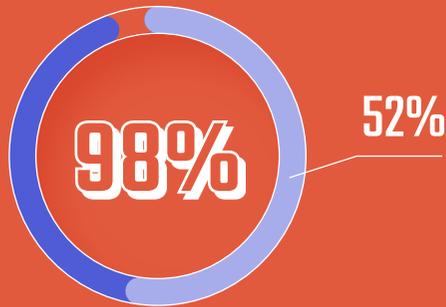
With this in mind, **17 Sport conducted research to quantify the extent to which brands believe in and are choosing sport as an effective platform to bring their organizational purpose to life and what impact that is having.**

We engaged with over 100 senior marketing and sponsorship decision-makers spanning 17 countries and representing some of the world's largest brands whose voices shape the marketing landscape. We engaged with respondents via an online survey to gauge their interest in purpose, the extent to which it is integrated with their organization and their sports sponsorship investments, and how they measure its impact.



We defined a purpose-driven organization for this study as an organization that stands for and acts on something bigger than its products and services in ways that create long-term value for the company, for society, the planet, and all the people they serve - solving real world problems. A purpose-driven organization is more than just a responsible organization. It places purpose at the core of the entire organization and uses its purpose as the guiding principle for all decisions.

# KEY FINDINGS



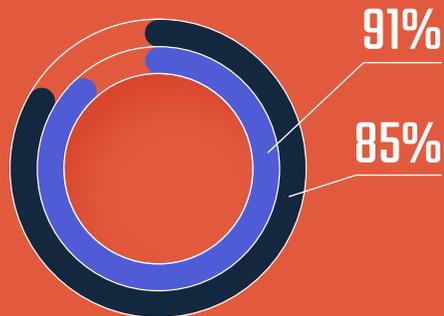
98% of businesses currently include purpose at some level of their organizational strategy and over half (52%) say purpose is important or highly important to their sports sponsorship activities.



78% believe that sport is an effective platform to activate a brand's purpose.



58% said that their purpose-led sponsorships perform better than their non-purpose-led sponsorships.



Purpose-led sponsorships perform better than traditional sponsorship campaigns, particularly in terms of enhancing brand perceptions (91%) and building stronger brand affinity (85%).



72% believe that purpose-focused sports activations are likely to increase in the coming years.

# KEY THEMES

## ROOM FOR GROWTH

There is significant room for growth in better integrating a brand's organizational purpose with its sports sponsorship investments.

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## PURPOSE STRENGTHENS SPONSORSHIP PERFORMANCE

Purpose-led sponsorships perform better than traditional sponsorships.

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## SPORT AMPLIFIES PURPOSE

Sport is an effective platform to activate a brand's purpose.

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## SPORT AS A SOLUTION

Sport has a role to play across a number of the world's most pressing issues.

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## FANS ARE KEY

Fans are key to purpose-led sponsorship activations.

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## DIVERSIFY MEDIA CHANNELS

Linear TV is underutilized as a platform to activate purpose-led sponsorships.

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# KEY THEMES

## WALK THE TALK

Authenticity is key when creating a purpose-led sponsorship strategy.

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## EVOLVE METRICS

Current sponsorship metrics require an evolution to adequately capture social return on investment.

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# ROOM FOR GROWTH

DESPITE PURPOSE ALREADY BEING PRIORITIZED BY THE CORPORATE SECTOR, THERE IS STILL SIGNIFICANT ROOM FOR GROWTH IN UNDERSTANDING, IMPLEMENTING, AND MEASURING TO BETTER INTEGRATE PURPOSE ACROSS THEIR SPORTS SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY

Companies are realizing the importance of purpose to their business, with 98% of businesses currently including purpose at some level and 30% of companies truly integrating purpose within their organization and translating it into practical action across all spheres of the business. Seven in ten companies say purpose is important to their business, and 42% of executives indicate that their sponsorship assets are aligned and serving their organizational corporate purpose.

There appears to be a significant gap between the belief in the importance of purpose and actually prioritizing it and engaging purposefully with staff, customers, and other stakeholders. 42% of companies rate their organization's performance in terms of engaging in purpose as "less than we should" while only 4% say their organization is doing "more than we should". In addition, only 42% of respondents indicate that they have somewhat or fully involved current stakeholders in their purpose-led sponsorship program, a clear miss considering that purpose-led sponsorship outperforms non-purpose-led sponsorship when looking at key metrics like building brand affinity and awareness and

sharing a brand's story in an authentic and meaningful way.

This highlights a huge opportunity to assist more brands in bringing their purpose to life. Data suggests that organizations are also calling out for help from experts who can support them in activating their purpose through sports sponsorships with 88% saying they are willing to partner with an organization specializing in purpose-driven sports sponsorship programs (with 1 in 4 being 'very willing') and 1 in 3 likely to do so in the next 12 months.

If you are looking for compelling ways to bring your organizational purpose to life through the power of sport, please contact:

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# PURPOSE STRENGTHENS SPONSORSHIP PERFORMANCE

**PURPOSE-LED SPONSORSHIPS PERFORM BETTER THAN TRADITIONAL SPONSORSHIPS AGAINST KEY BRAND METRICS.**

58% of brands claimed that their purpose-led sponsorships perform better than their non-purpose-led sponsorships, and only 9% said they perform worse.

**When looking at key brand metrics like brand perception, brand affinity, and brand awareness, activating a brand's sports sponsorship in a purposeful way overwhelmingly outperforms that of traditional sponsorship, as demonstrated below.**

In fact, when we consider the outside impact of purposeful sponsorship when compared to traditional sports sponsorship on brand awareness (with executives stating brand awareness is driven 78% more effectively), this also lends to promising financial results underpinned by recent [Nielsen research](#) indicating a 1-point gain in brand awareness driving a 1% increase in sales. [Nielsen data](#) in France between 2017 and 2020 further emphasizes this point, revealing that 30% of purpose-driven campaigns increased

short-term sales by 50% and longer term purpose-driven campaigns improved sales between 1.2 and 3 times.

If you want to use purpose to improve your sponsorship performance against key brand metrics, please contact:

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**ACTIVATING A BRAND'S SPORT SPONSORSHIP PORTFOLIO IN A PURPOSEFUL WAY OUTPERFORMS TRADITIONAL SPORTS SPONSORSHIP IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:**

**91%**

Enhances brand perception and positioning within the community

**85%**

Builds stronger brand affinity than traditional sponsorship

**78%**

Builds stronger brand awareness than traditional sponsorship

These data points paint a compelling picture especially when we consider that brand affinity and brand awareness were identified as the top two KPIs executives indicated as most important to their sports sponsorship performance.

**THE TOP FIVE METRICS INDICATED AS MOST IMPORTANT TO SPONSORS SPONSORSHIP PERFORMANCE:**



- 71% Brand Affinity
- 68% Brand Awareness
- 65% Increased Market Share
- 65% Increased Profit Margin
- 64% Brand Preference

# SPORT AMPLIFIES PURPOSE

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## SPORT IS AN EFFECTIVE PLATFORM TO ACTIVATE A BRAND'S PURPOSE

Companies are seeing sport as a viable platform to engage with employees and customers around their purpose with 8 in 10 (78%) believing that purpose-led marketing fits well with sport and a further 72% stating that the importance of purpose-focused activations in sports sponsorship is likely to increase in the coming years.

The world of sport needs to do more to capitalize on this positive sentiment. Partnerships between brands and Teams, Leagues, Athletes, and Federations must be fostered so that a brand's organizational purpose can be activated through sport in ways that engage fans and extend impact.



# SPORT AS A SOLUTION

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## SPORT HAS A ROLE TO PLAY ACROSS A NUMBER OF THE WORLD'S MOST PRESSING ISSUES

Not only do companies see sport as an effective platform to drive purpose, but there are certain global challenges in particular that they believe sport is well placed to help solve. By far the highest among these is mental health and wellbeing at 70%, followed by gender equality (50%), and racial equality (49%).

The prominence given to mental health is likely driven by athletes such as Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka who have spoken out about the pressure faced by today's athletes and its impact on their mental health. Added to this, the mental benefits of sport are extensively validated by [research](#), with sport having a proven positive effect in combating depression, anxiety, cognitive decline, and other mental health issues.

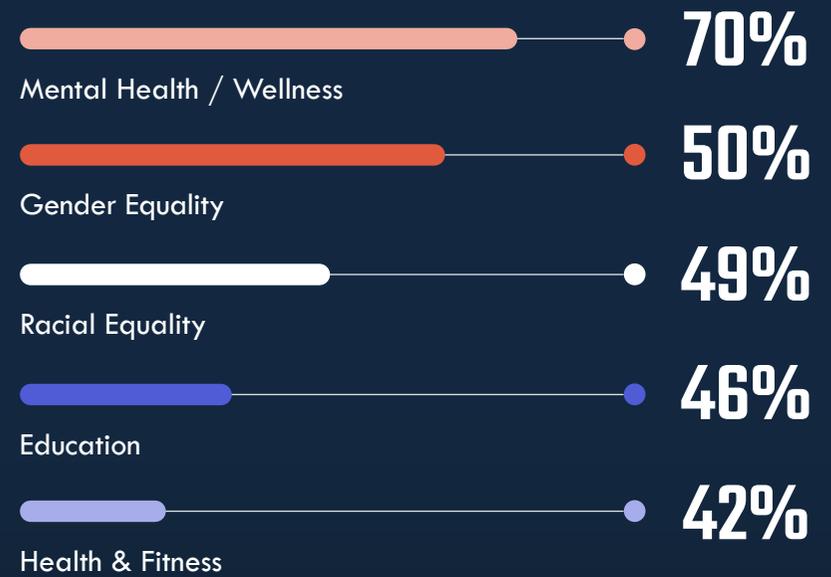
Interestingly, despite ranking as the 2nd most important social concern facing the world, climate change was seen as less of a fit with sport. Climate change was ranked as the 9th most appropriate issue for sport to play a part in solving. Considering that the sporting ecosystem is already being directly affected by shifting weather patterns brought about by climate

change and that sport is a significant contributor to the issue, it is surprising that more brands aren't prioritizing sport's role in helping to fight climate change and aligning their climate change efforts with the sports sector. Fortunately, the sports sector is increasingly factoring climate change into its organizational thinking with a number of sports federations, teams, leagues, and venues developing sustainability strategies with bold targets to help mitigate against the effects of climate change. If brands were better educated on the positive role sport is playing in addressing climate change, more would probably look to partner with the sports ecosystem to accelerate impact.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE A PROBLEM FACING THE WORLD TODAY?



### WHICH CAUSES DO YOU FEEL SPORT IS FIT TO HELP SOLVE?



If you are looking for ways to amplify your organizational purpose through sport, please contact:

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# BRANDS THAT ARE GETTING IT RIGHT

To help demonstrate that sport is a valuable and useful platform to address and advocate on global issues, here are some recent initiatives between brands and sports organizations that seek to respond to these issues:

## MENTAL HEALTH / WELLNESS



Naomi Osaka and [Modern Health](#) are collaborating to destigmatize mental health and bring improved mental health resources to underserved communities. Osaka is the Chief Community Health Advocate of the brand's community impact program, Modern Health Community. She has co-created a series of personalized meditation tools, collaborated at events promoting mental health skills through play and sport to young girls, and is looking to train and empower underrepresented providers to improve access to mental health resources in underserved communities.

## CLIMATE CHANGE



The environmental pioneer, [Polymateria](#), uses its partnership with Extreme E to highlight its mission to address the plastic pollution crisis. Polymateria's Lifecycle technology allows plastic products to return to nature after only one year, leaving no toxins and microplastics behind. This technology is used to provide cups at all Extreme E events where Polymateria also conducts onsite activations to educate fans about plastic pollution and its impact on our planet.

## EDUCATION



[Extramarks](#) a global provider of online learning solutions, has partnered with Arsenal to expand its audience and impact to new markets. Through the partnership Extramarks and Arsenal use their voices as a force of good to make learning more accessible and to showcase how football and education can motivate and inspire learners.



**ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT / SUSTAINABILITY**



**ENGIE** is helping the French Tennis Federation reduce its carbon footprint and improve the energy efficiency of the facilities at Roland Garros. Since 2016, ENGIE has powered the stadium's facilities with 100% renewable green energy and uses "Green Teams" at the event to educate fans and encourage more sustainable behavior.

**RACIAL EQUALITY**



**PepsiCo** has partnered with the nonprofit RISE to harness the power of sport to combat racism and advance equity and inclusion in the USA. The collaboration focuses on experiential learning opportunities for fans, athletes, and coaches across multiple levels of sports and is implemented across the major leagues that PepsiCo is invested in - NFL, NBA, and NHL.

**GENDER EQUALITY**



**adidas** has created the Breaking Barriers Project, a Pan-European gender equity program focused on building the capacity of the sports industry in Europe to better serve women and girls. In collaboration with experts in gender equity and sport (Common Goal, Women Win, and Soccer Without Borders), the project aims to positively influence the lives of 50,000 women and girls by 2025.

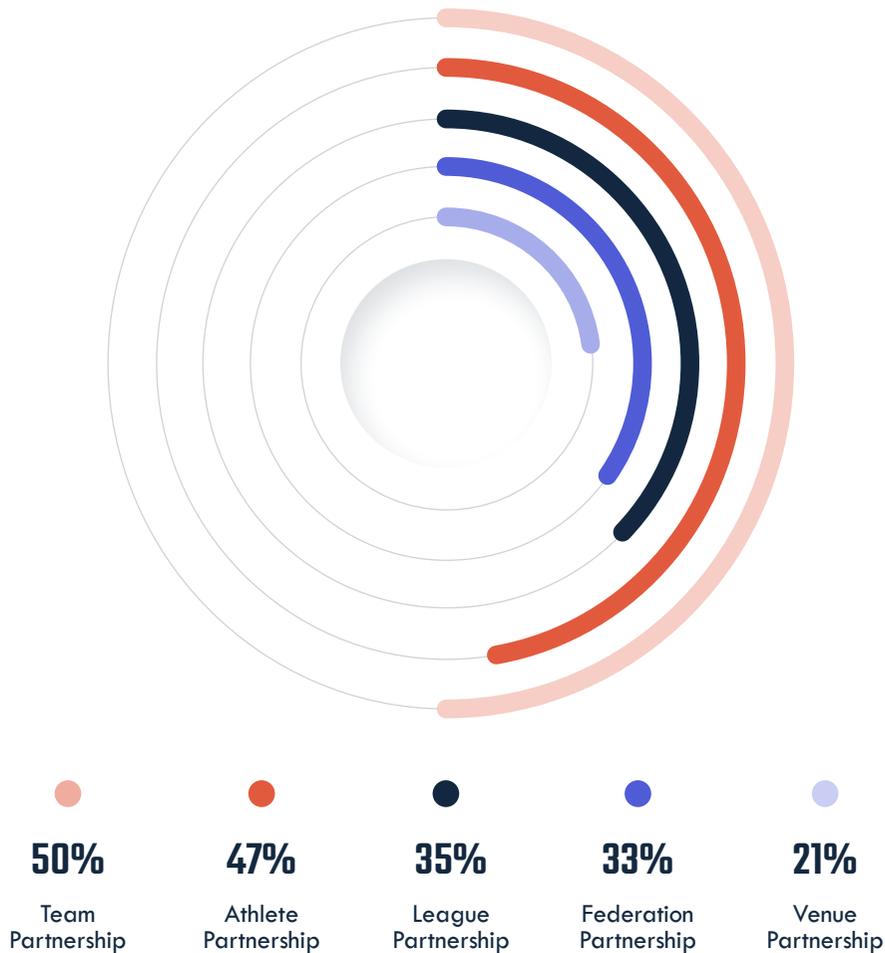
# FANS ARE KEY

GAINING ACCESS TO FANS THROUGH TEAM AND ATHLETE PARTNERSHIPS IS KEY TO PURPOSE-LED SPONSORSHIP ACTIVATIONS

Brands believe that aligning with a team or an athlete is more effective than a league or sports federation partnership to bring their purpose to life. Key to these partnerships is the access to the fanbase that they provide. Nearly three quarters of the brands surveyed in this study prioritize fans in their purpose-based sports activations. This makes sense since fans are the ones calling for brands to be more purposeful and, by aligning with a sport and tapping into its fan base, a brand gains access to a large and receptive audience to engage with around its purpose.



**SPORTS PLATFORMS THAT ARE THE BEST FIT FOR YOUR PURPOSE-FOCUSED ACTIVATIONS**



The preference given to teams and athletes over leagues and federations is likely because of the stronger emotional connection fans have towards them, making the potential for positive change arguably greater than what could be anticipated by activating purpose via a league or federation. This trend is confirmed by [Nielsen](#) in their latest insights report.

However, leagues and governing bodies are important stakeholders in the sports ecosystem and they face increasing scrutiny to act with sustainability in mind. Considering the wealth and resources they typically have at their disposal, the opportunity they present to leverage a brand's purpose should not be ignored and we anticipate growth in this area going forward.

If you need help identifying the best sports platform to activate your purpose, please contact:

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# DIVERSIFY MEDIA CHANNELS

## LINEAR TV IS UNDER-UTILIZED AS A PLATFORM TO ACTIVATE PURPOSE-LED SPONSORSHIPS

Brands are currently activating their purpose-led sponsorships predominantly via social media (67%), in-person events (60%), and digital mobile (50%). These platforms have probably been selected to reach the younger, more purpose-conscious Millennial and Gen Z demographics. However, if purpose-driven activations continue to grow (meaning either frequency on already-used platforms will need to increase and/or additional activation platforms will need to be used) then linear TV broadcasts could be a viable platform for brands to consider. With only 18% of brands currently activating their purpose-led sponsorships via linear TV, it is being vastly under-utilized given the level of traditional investment as well as consumption of TV. TV is still the best way to reach mass audiences so the integration of purpose marketing into linear TV sports broadcasts could be an opportunity worth pursuing.



# WALK THE TALK

## AUTHENTICITY IS KEY WHEN CREATING A PURPOSE-LED SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY

Unsurprisingly, the brands surveyed in this report said that authenticity is the most important factor when creating a purpose-focused sports activation.

Today's consumers want to support brands that make a real and measurable contribution to creating a better world, and they are looking to brands to do more, as referenced in the latest [Edelman Trust Barometer](#). However, they are also hyper-sensitive to brands who are insincere in their efforts. Authenticity requires doing as well as saying, and sport gives brands a platform to convert their purpose statement into something tangible where fans can actively get involved in supporting their favorite brands and sports to make the world a better place.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT IN CREATING YOUR PURPOSE-FOCUSED ACTIVATION?



# EVOLVE METRICS

THE METRICS TO GAUGE THE IMPACT OF PURPOSE-DRIVEN SPONSORSHIPS REQUIRE AN EVOLUTION OF THE CURRENT SPONSORSHIP MEASUREMENT MODEL IN ORDER TO CAPTURE THE SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT (SROI) CREATED BY A BRAND

When executives were asked specifically which KPIs were most positively impacted by their purpose-led sponsorship activations, community impact and social impact rose to the top with 63% and 62% respectively. That being said, the current model for measuring sponsorship success fails to take into account community and social value, historically only employing measurement methods such as custom sponsor research, market mixed modeling, and holistic media valuations to measure the ROI of their sponsorship investments. This is leaving important value created for sponsors unaccounted for.

In order for this social value creation to be accurately accounted for, an evolution of the traditional **sponsorship measurement process needs to include more purpose-focused metrics that capture community impact alongside brand and financial impact.** At 17 Sport we have co-developed a Social Return on Investment (SROI) measurement model, with our measurement partner Substance, that assigns a monetary value to change across

impact metrics such as social, environmental, health, and economic factors whilst also measuring against the traditional sponsorship KPIs.

If you want to measure the impact of your purpose-driven sport sponsorships, please contact:

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# WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

The future of sport as a platform to activate a brand's purpose looks promising. Over three quarters of the brands in this survey agree that sport is an effective platform to activate their purpose, and their purpose-led sponsorships are outperforming their traditional sponsorships against key brand metrics, including an uptick in sales. Sixty percent of brands indicated a willingness to partner with an organization specializing in purpose sponsorships to support them in activating their goals through sport and a third said they are likely to do so in the next 12 months.

At 17 Sport we firmly believe that sport has the power to help change the world for the better. Aligning a brand's organizational purpose with sport adds a level of engagement and scale that few other things can match. And, through collaboration, we can all help to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and create the positive change we want to see in the world.



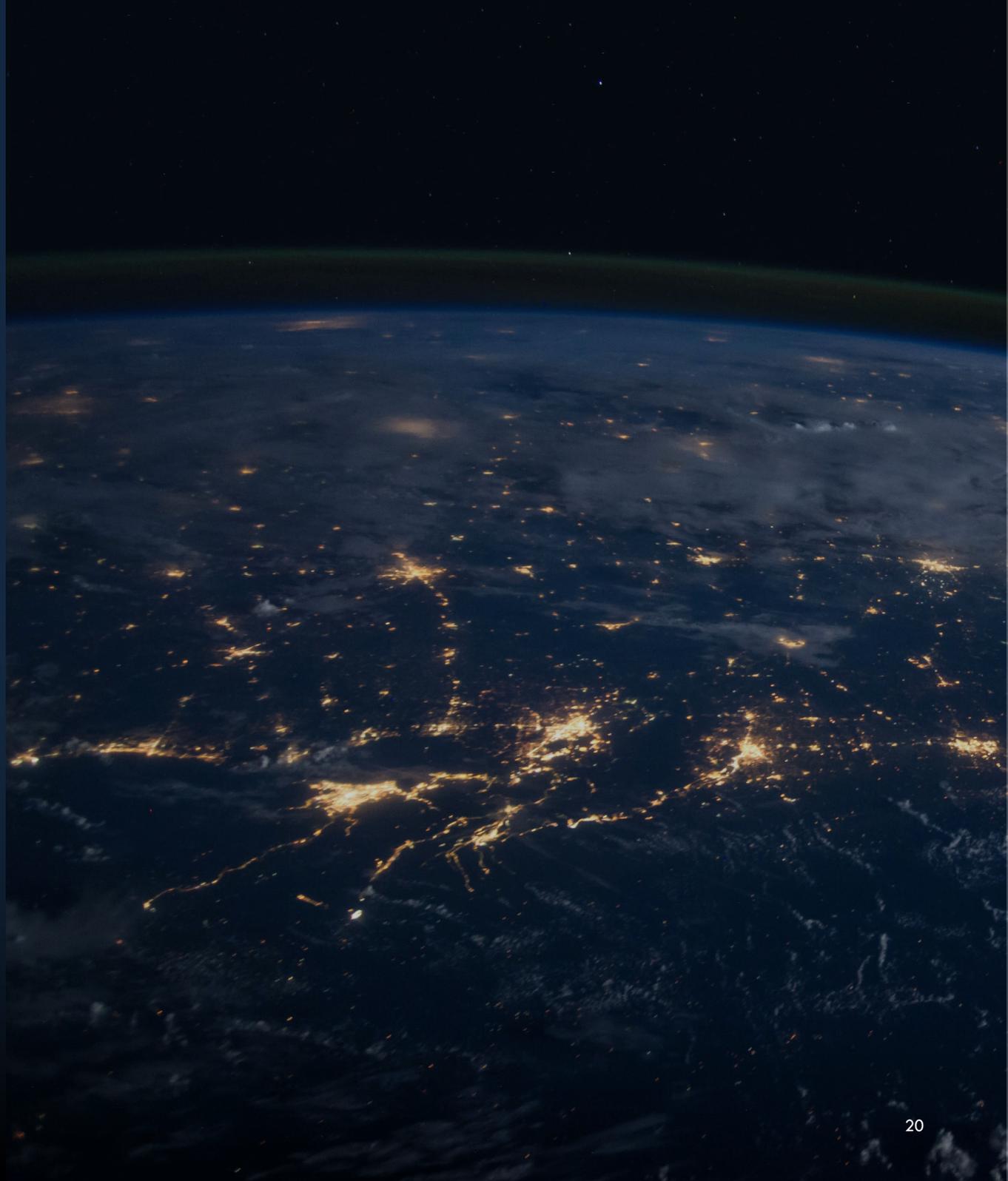
If you would like more information or are ready to start activating your purpose through sport, please contact:

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# ABOUT 17 SPORT

17 Sport is an impact company operating at the intersection of sports, business, and purpose. We partner with progressive brands, sport properties, and athletes to activate their purpose, internally and externally, to deliver positive financial, social, and environmental outcomes.

[www.17-sport.com](http://www.17-sport.com)





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