

PANORAMIC

SPORTS LAW

China



LEXOLOGY

Sports Law

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REGULATORY

Governance structure

What is the regulatory governance structure in professional sport in your jurisdiction?

China adopts a government-led, association-administered, club-operated model. The General Administration of Sport of China (GASC), a ministry-level agency under the State Council, oversees sports nationwide by setting overall strategy, formulating policy and supervising disciplinary matters.

Sports associations, such as the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), are not-for-profits organisations registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and operate under GASC supervision. They are responsible for organising and administering leagues, registering athletes and enforcing disciplinary codes.

Professional clubs are commercial entities with day-to-day operational autonomy, but they must comply with GASC's policies and their respective associations' rules on finance, registration and disciplinary protocols. Entry into, and continued participation in, any league requires formal registration and ongoing compliance certification.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

Protection from liability

To what extent are participants protected from liability for their on-field actions under civil and criminal law?

Chinese law affords participants limited immunity for conduct occurring in the course of play, principally grounded in the voluntary assumption of risk doctrine under the Civil Code. Civil liability is generally precluded where the conduct: (1) falls within the reasonable scope of the sport; (2) is neither intentional nor grossly negligent; and (3) involves risks knowingly accepted by the injured party.

This immunity does not apply in two circumstances: first, where the act is clearly intended to cause harm, such as a deliberate strike to a vulnerable part of the body; and second, when it constitutes a flagrant breach of safety rules amounting to gross negligence or intentional misconduct.

As regards criminal liability, negligent conduct that causes injury during competition will generally not constitute a criminal offence. Criminal liability arises only if the conduct clearly exceeds the normal scope of the sport and involves: (1) negligent or intentional killing; or (2) intentional infliction of serious injury.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

Doping regulation

What is the regulatory framework for doping matters in your jurisdiction? Is there also potential secondary liability for doping offences under civil or criminal law?

China operates a centralised, state-led anti-doping framework managed by the China Anti-Doping Agency (CHINADA), which is an agency under the GASC. CHINADA is responsible for conducting testing and investigations, and for organising hearings where necessary. Thereafter, the relevant national sports association or other competent disciplinary body determines and imposes the applicable sanctions.

Athletes found to have violated anti-doping rules may face sanctions such as disqualification, stripping of medals or prizes, and suspensions. Support personnel, including coaches and team doctors, can also be penalised for assisting, encouraging, concealing or otherwise participating in doping offences. Their sanctions may include fines, restrictions on their professional activities or suspension from their positions.

Doping-related conduct may give rise to civil liability, such as claims by third parties for personal injury, reputational damage or losses arising from breach of commercial and sponsorship contracts.

The Criminal Law prohibits inducing, instigating or deceiving athletes into using doping substances in connection with major sports competitions, as well as supplying such substances to them, organising doping activities for them, or forcing them to use such substances. Depending on the circumstances, such conduct may also give rise to related criminal charges, such as smuggling, illegal business operations, drug offences and – where doping substances are administered through food products – the production or sale of toxic or harmful food.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

Financial controls

What financial controls exist for participant organisations within professional sport?

Financial controls are primarily enforced through regulations issued by the relevant sports associations or league operators. For example, the Chinese Professional Football League imposes caps on clubs' total annual expenditure, player salaries and per-match bonuses for major competitions. If a club exceeds these caps, it may face sporting sanctions such as point deductions or relegation. Players may also face disciplinary action, including suspensions and fines.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Jurisdiction

Who has jurisdiction over the resolution of professional sport disputes in your jurisdiction, and how is this determined?

National sports associations typically maintain internal dispute resolution mechanisms competent to hear disputes concerning registration, transfers, eligibility and other matters arising from their regulations.

China has also established the China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS). It is competent to hear the following categories of disputes:

- appeals against decisions made by relevant sports associations;
- athlete registration and transfer disputes; and
- other disputes arising in connection with competitive sports activities.

Disputes involving foreign parties may be subject to the jurisdiction of international sports organisations, such as FIFA and CAS, pursuant to the applicable dispute resolution clauses.

Law stated - 18  2026

Enforcement

How are decisions of domestic professional sports regulatory bodies enforced?

The majority of decisions, including suspensions and disqualifications, are typically enforced by the relevant sports leagues through their disciplinary frameworks. Sanctioned clubs or individuals generally pay fines of their own accord; compulsory enforcement by the regulatory body is reserved for exceptional cases.

Law stated - 18  2026

Court enforcement

Can the decisions of professional sports regulatory bodies be challenged or enforced in the national courts?

Any party dissatisfied with a decision made by a sports association may appeal to the China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS) for review. CCAS awards are final and binding and may be enforced in the competent Chinese courts.

On application by any party, the national courts may set aside a CCAS award on the following statutory grounds:

- the dispute falls outside the scope of sports arbitration;
- serious procedural irregularities;
- fraudulent evidence or concealment of evidence;
- arbitrator misconduct; or
- violation of public policy.

Law stated - 18  2026

SPONSORSHIP AND IMAGE RIGHTS

Concept of image rights

Is the concept of an individual's image right legally recognised in your jurisdiction?

Yes. Individuals are entitled to personal image rights under the Civil Code as an integral part of their personality rights, without registration. Unauthorised commercial use of an individual's image may constitute infringement. Where a personal image is registered as a trademark, the individual may enjoy enhanced protection under the Trademark Law, including administrative enforcement and criminal sanctions against infringers.

Law stated - 18  2026

Commercialisation and protection

What are the key legal considerations for the commercialisation and protection of individuals' image rights?

Commercial use of an individual's image generally requires the individual's prior consent. In practice, such consent is usually evidenced by a written licence or endorsement agreement. Key provisions typically cover the licensed rights, permitted purposes, territory, term, exclusivity and sublicensing rights.

Law stated - 18  2026

Commercialisation and protection

How are image rights used commercially by professional organisations within sport?

In practice, the athlete's employment contract or separate licence contract may authorise the club to use his or her portrait, name, signature, voice and other identifiable personal attributes for club-related activities. Clubs or sports associations may further license commercial sponsors to use such player or team imagery for marketing and promotion purposes.

Law stated - 18  2026

Morality clauses

How can morality clauses be drafted, and are they enforceable?

In China, morality clauses are generally included in athlete contracts, sponsorship agreements, and endorsement agreements. Such clauses usually require athletes to comply with laws, regulations, sports governing body rules and generally accepted standards of conduct, and to refrain from conduct that may damage the reputation of the clubs, associations, event organisers or sponsors. Common triggers include criminal offences, gambling-related misconduct, doping offences, match-fixing, serious violence, inappropriate public statements and other serious misconduct.

The contract may provide remedies including suspension of performance, bonus reduction, termination, and damages. Provided that the aggrieved party can establish the breach, morality clauses are generally enforceable in judicial or arbitration proceedings.

Law stated - 18 Feb 2026

Restrictions

Are there any restrictions on sponsorship, advertising or marketing in professional sport?

According to the Advertising Law, sports sponsorship, advertising and marketing activities must not contain any content that is obscene, pornographic, gambling-related, superstitious, terrorist, violent or discriminatory on grounds of ethnicity, race, religion or gender.

Tobacco advertising is strictly prohibited in all forms. Alcohol advertising, while not prohibited per se, is subject to stringent restrictions: it must not induce or encourage drinking, promote immoderate consumption, or depict the act of drinking; nor may it imply that alcohol consumption has effects such as relieving stress or increasing physical strength.

Law stated - 18 Feb 2026

BRAND MANAGEMENT

Protecting brands

How can sports organisations protect their brand value?

Brand value is protected under the Trademark Law, the Anti-Unfair Competition Law, the Copyright Law and other laws. Sports organisations can protect their brand value by registering key brand symbols, such as names, logos, team crests, event marks and mascots, as trademarks. Defensive filings in related classes may also be considered to reduce the risk of third-party squatting or ambush marketing.

Where brand assets are used in sponsorship, broadcasting, merchandising or event operations, the relevant agreements should clearly define the permitted use, duration, territory, sublicensing arrangements, morality clauses, consequences of breach and termination rights. In the case of infringement or contractual breach, sports organisations may seek injunctions, damages or other remedies through litigation or arbitration.

Law stated - 18 Feb 2026

Protecting brands

How can individuals protect their brands?

Individuals may also protect their personal brands through the aforementioned means. In addition, individuals may seek protection under the personality rights provisions of the Civil Code.

Cybersquatting

How can sports brands and individuals prevent cybersquatting?

Cybersquatting risks may be mitigated through defensive domain name registrations and ongoing monitoring of new domain name registrations. Where a domain name is registered and used in bad faith, and the registrant has no rights or legitimate interests therein, rights holders may seek cancellation or transfer of the domain name, injunctive relief, and damages under applicable laws.

Right holders may also include contractual restrictions on sponsorship, licensing and agency agreements to prevent commercial partners from registering or using domain names incorporating relevant names, marks or other brand identifiers without authorisation.

Law stated - 18  2026

Media coverage

How can individuals and organisations protect against adverse media coverage?

Individuals and sports organisations can request online platforms to remove, block or disable access to inaccurate or misleading content. They may also request the publisher to correct false information, issue a clarification or apology. Relevant evidence may be preserved by notarisation or blockchain timestamping.

If the content infringes upon rights to reputation, privacy, portrait or other civil rights, the rights holder may seek cessation of the infringement, elimination of adverse effects, an apology and damages.

Law stated - 18  2026

BROADCASTING

Regulations

Which broadcasting regulations are particularly relevant to professional sports?

The Sports Law generally prohibits unauthorised collection or dissemination of on-site audio-visual content of sporting events for commercial purposes. Broadcasting rights for sports events can only be acquired or transferred on the principles of fairness, openness and transparency. For major international sporting events, including the Olympic Games, the Asian Games and the FIFA World Cup, China Central Television holds the exclusive right to purchase broadcasting rights and may sublicense them to other media platforms.

Law stated - 18  2026

Restriction of illegal broadcasting

What means are available to restrict illegal broadcasting of professional sports events?

The following enforcement measures are available:

- incorporating prohibitory clauses and liquidated damages provisions in ticket terms and conditions;
- prohibiting spectators from bringing professional-grade photographic or recording equipment into the venue;
- submitting takedown notices to online service providers to remove infringing content;
- applying to the court for a preliminary injunction (act preservation) to immediately halt unauthorised broadcasting;
- commencing legal proceedings for injunctive relief, elimination of adverse effects and compensation for damages; and
- filing a criminal complaint with the public security authorities for criminal copyright infringement.

Law stated - 18 Jan 2026

EVENT ORGANISATION

Regulation

What are the key regulatory issues for venue hire and event organisation?

The organisation of sporting events requires approval from the competent administrative authorities, with the level of approval varying from local sports departments to the State Council depending on the event category.

The permits and approvals required will vary depending on the nature and scale of the event. These may include, but are not limited to, safety approvals for large-scale public events, food service permits for on-site catering, entry visas and work permits for foreign athletes and support personnel, and broadcasting licences for the event.

Law stated - 18 Jan 2026

Ambush marketing

What protections exist against ambush marketing for events?

Ambush marketing is regulated under the Trademark Law, the Copyright Law, the Anti-Unfair Competition Law and the Advertising Law. Specifically, the following types of conduct are prohibited:

- unauthorised use of event names, logos, indicia or event-related intellectual property in commercial activities;

- misleading descriptions such as "official partner" or "officially endorsed" in commercial activities;
- unauthorised registration of domain names or URLs incorporating event-related intellectual property; and
- other conduct that is likely to create a false impression of official commercial affiliation with the event.

In the event of any of the foregoing, the rights holder is entitled to claim cessation of infringement, elimination of adverse effects and compensation for losses.

Law stated - 18  2026

Ticket sale and resale

Can restrictions be imposed on ticket sale and resale?

China prohibits ticket touting, ticket hoarding, trading of counterfeit tickets and other market-disrupting activities. Such conduct may be subject to administrative penalties and, in serious cases, criminal penalties.

Event organisers may also set terms and conditions that restrict resale. These restrictions are often more stringent under real-name ticketing and identity verification systems.

Law stated - 18  2026

IMMIGRATION

Work permits and visas

What is the process for clubs to obtain work permits or visas for foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff?

First, the club shall apply for the Notification for Foreigner's Work Permit. The application materials shall be submitted through the Service System for Foreigners Working in China, including the application form, the labour contract, the applicant's passport, and supporting documentation.

Upon obtaining the Notification for Foreigner's Work Permit, the aforementioned individuals may apply for Z-type visas at the Chinese embassy or consulate abroad. Upon entry into China, they shall present their Z-type visas and cooperate with immigration inspection. Within 30 days of entry, they shall apply for a residence permit from the entry-exit administration authority of the public security organs.

Law stated - 18  2026

Work permits and visas

What is the position regarding work permits or visas for foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, temporarily competing in your jurisdiction?

There is no single visa category that automatically applies to all foreign professional athletes, coaches or administrative staff who enter China temporarily for sports competitions. In practice, the common options may include an M visa for commercial or trade-related activities, an F visa for exchanges, visits or non-commercial sports cooperation, and visa-free entry where applicable under the relevant policies.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

Residency requirements

What residency requirements must foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, satisfy to remain in your jurisdiction long term or permanently?

Long-term stay in China normally requires a residence permit corresponding to the lawful purpose of residence. For athletes, coaches and staff employed by Chinese clubs, this is usually a work-type residence permit supported by a valid work permit and employment contract.

Permanent residence constitutes an exceptional immigration status reserved for individuals with extraordinary abilities. To qualify, applicants must:

- comply with Chinese laws;
- be in good health;
- have no criminal record; and
- have made significant and outstanding contributions to China or be deemed to be specially needed by the state.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

Residency requirements

Do the family members of foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, legally resident in your jurisdiction have the same residency rights?

No. Family members do not automatically obtain the same residence rights. Spouses, parents, children under 18 and parents-in-law of a foreign national residing in China for work may apply for S1 visas for long-term family visits or private affairs. Other family members may be eligible for S2 visas for short-term visits. However, family members are not allowed to work under these visas.

Law stated - 18 Jul 2026

SPORTS UNIONS

Incorporation and regulation

How are professional sporting unions incorporated and regulated?

China does not have independent professional sporting unions. Trade unions may exist within the enterprises to which sports clubs belong, and are incorporated and regulated under the Trade Union Law and the Constitution of Chinese Trade Unions.

For example, the Chinese Basketball Association has established the athletes' committees that mediate labour disputes and promote insurance schemes. However, these committees operate under the control of the relevant sports association and lack independent trade union status.

Law stated - 18 2026

Membership

Can professional sports bodies and clubs restrict union membership?

Professional clubs cannot legally restrict athletes from joining trade unions. The Trade Union Law guarantees all wage-earning workers, including professional athletes, the right to form and join unions without interference. Clubs violating the law may face scrutiny from trade unions and labour authorities.

Law stated - 18 2026

Strike action

Are there any restrictions on professional sports unions taking strike action?

The Trade Union Law directs unions to resolve workplace grievances through consultation, mediation and the labour dispute resolution mechanisms. In the event that a work stoppage gives rise to threats to public order or occupational safety, such incident may be subject to the supervision and intervention of the public security authorities in accordance with applicable laws.

Law stated - 18 2026

EMPLOYMENT

Transfers

What is the legal framework for individual transfers? What restrictions can be placed on individuals moving between clubs?

Individual player transfers are primarily governed by the transfer regulations of the relevant sports associations at national, continental and international levels.

For instance, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA)'s principal restrictions on player transfers are as follows:

- transfers may only be completed during the registration periods;
- any transfer during the term of a player's contract requires the prior consent of the player's current club;
- where the current club offers the salary increase prescribed by the league rules, it shall have a right of first refusal to renew the contract; and
- the new club shall be liable to pay training compensation to the former club in respect of certain categories of players, unless the former club waives its right to such compensation.

Law stated - 18 Jan 2026

Ending contractual obligations

Can individuals buy their way out of their contractual obligations to professional sports clubs?

No. The CBA and Chinese Football Association (CFA) rules stipulate that players generally cannot buy their way out of their contractual obligations without the consent of the original club.

However, players may terminate their contracts unilaterally only where the club (1) defaults on the payment of agreed wages or bonuses (under both CBA and CFA rules), or (2) fails to provide playing opportunities as required by the applicable association rules (under CFA rules).

Law stated - 18 Jan 2026

Welfare obligations

What are the key athlete welfare obligations for employers?

Employers are obliged to:

- pay wages;
- provide safe and hygienic training and competition conditions;
- ensure basic rest and leave;
- pay social insurance for athletes; and
- bear costs that fall outside the coverage of the work-related injury social insurance fund, which may be supplemented by commercial insurance policies.

Law stated - 18 Jan 2026

Young athletes

| Are there restrictions on the employment and transfer of young athletes?

Yes. According to the CFA regulations, athletes under the age of 16 are not permitted to sign employment contracts. Athletes aged 16 to 18 may sign employment contracts only if they are financially self-sufficient through their own earnings. As a general rule, only athletes aged 16 or over are eligible for domestic transfers, and only those aged 18 or over are eligible for international transfers.

Law stated - 18  2026

| Young athletes

| What are the key child protection rules and safeguarding considerations?

The CFA has formulated a Child Safeguarding Handbook based on FIFA's child safeguarding guidelines. The CFA requires all coaches and staff involved in youth football to undergo rigorous background checks to confirm that they have no criminal record, and strictly prohibits any form of child abuse, corporal punishment or violation of children's rights.

Furthermore, clubs are required to ensure the safety of facilities during training and matches and to establish medical emergency response plans. The CFA has also established reporting channels to safeguard children's rights and welfare in football activities.

Law stated - 18  2026

| Club and country representation

| What employment relationship issues arise when athletes represent both club and country?

The key issues pertain to the reconciliation of club and national team commitments (training and matches), player remuneration and insurance coverage, compliance with medical and anti-doping regulations, and the allocation of liability for injuries.

Law stated - 18  2026

| Selection and eligibility

| How are selection and eligibility disputes dealt with by national bodies?

Selection and eligibility disputes are generally resolved pursuant to the internal regulations of the relevant national sports associations. The CCAS retains jurisdiction over eligibility disputes and may render final and binding awards.

Law stated - 18  2026

TAXATION

| Key issues

What are the key taxation issues for foreign athletes competing in your jurisdiction to be aware of?

Taxable income includes all China-source income, such as prize money and endorsement fees, although certain sports-related prizes awarded by approved foreign or international organisations may be exempt from Individual Income Tax. Non-resident athletes are subject to tax only on China-source income, while resident individuals (generally those physically present in China for 183 days or more in a tax year) may be subject to broader tax obligations. If resident, progressive rates ranging from 3% to 45% will apply.

China has entered into tax treaties with a number of jurisdictions under which reduced rates or exemptions may be available. Clubs and event organisers, as withholding agents, are responsible for tax withholding and remittance.

Law stated - 18  2026

UPDATE AND TRENDS

Key developments of the past year

Are there any emerging trends or hot topics in your jurisdiction?

Since its establishment in 2023, CCAS has significantly advanced the country's sports arbitration system. As at August 2025, the Commission had received 151 cases, encompassing common categories of sports disputes such as contract disputes, registration and transfer disputes, and disciplinary matters.

The Arbitration Law, as revised and effective 1 March 2026, expressly confirms for the first time that sports arbitration shall be governed by the Sports Law, thereby affirming the independence of the sports arbitration system. This revision confers formal legal status upon China's sports dispute-resolution mechanism.

Law stated - 18  2026