

## Match Day for Climate Action

by Jackson Franks

It appears that each time it's my turn to write the blog we are at the start or in the midst of a major sporting event. This time round it's the autumn rugby internationals. For those who are unaware of the annual occasion, it's the time of year when the Southern Hemisphere nations leave their +20°C blue sky climates and head up North to the depths of darkness, rain, and wind. A month's long rugby tour against the Northern Hemisphere countries then ensues. For our British and South African readers, it's a highly anticipated tour this time round for the British Island's. The Springbok's face off against Wales, Scotland, and England, who will each seek retribution from losing the British & Irish Lions tour to South Africa earlier on in the year. However, the home nations should perhaps look to the climate activists who seem to be making head way in their retribution against Global leaders in attendance at COP26, who are showing signs of understanding the commonly used phrase; actions speak louder than words.

As an avid sports fan, the autumn internationals bring great excitement, however, one matter that can't be ignored is the amount of travel the eight Southern Hemisphere nations will embark on and therefore the environmental impact. Over 100,000 km will be travelled by air, and with planes emitting an average of c.115 grams of Co2 per passenger per km the impact to the environment will be sizable. Now, I am not saying the Autumn festival should be cancelled, but with professional sporting entertainment being a huge part of society globally, governing bodies across sports need to act.

Progress is being made and at COP26, over 280 sports organisations have pledged support to the UN's Sport for Climate Action Framework. The aim of the framework is for sporting events to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040. Headway has also been made in the English Premier League ("EPL") where this year we saw the world's first net zero carbon football game at an elite level when Tottenham Hotspur hosted Chelsea.

Although this was a major step forward in the right direction, just a month later, Manchester United took a 20-minute flight to Leicester, a 100-mile trip. Their argument: to beat traffic! Governing bodies need to remain consistent in their approach for these targets to be met, so perhaps prohibiting air travel for matches in the EPL should be the next point on the Premier League climate strategy agenda. To contextualise the impact that such a change could have, a study showed that EPL clubs produced 1,134 tonnes of Co2 emissions because of travel in the 2016/17 season, the equivalent of 2 flights per day for 365 days from London to Sydney (17,016km per flight). With England only 965km north to south and 485km east to west, the carbon footprint of the EPL is substantial. Alternative transportation should be sought, especially when passenger trains emit 35.1 grams per passenger per km, circa 70% less than air travel.

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For more information, please contact your adviser or alternatively contact:

Belvest Investment Services Limited  
研富投資服務有限公司  
9th Floor, Centre Mark II  
305-313 Queen's Road Central  
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong

Tel +852 2827 1199  
Fax +852 2827 0270  
belvest@bis.hk  
[www.bis.hk](http://www.bis.hk)

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