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Not waiting for the tweets: Sports already lead the way in sustainability

Green Sports Alliance calls on sports fans to take Live Green or Die™ Challenge

June 7, 2017: Portland, OR – As so many in the world react to news of President Donald J. Trump’s intention to withdraw US governmental support for [The Paris Agreement](#), the world of sports – never content to rest on its already impressive track record – is stepping up its game in leading the sustainability movement. Sports has been at the forefront of the greening movement for many years: this news from the White House will only spur on its resolve.

The [Green Sports Alliance](#), a membership organization of nearly 500 professional and collegiate leagues, teams, and venues; supporting organizations such as vendors, suppliers, and sponsoring corporations –as well as individual athletes — today issued a challenge to all sports lovers: join the Alliance in the fight against climate change.

“In the current climate, we’ve gone from a state of concern to a state of emergency,” said Justin Zeulner, executive director for the Green Sports Alliance. “Climate change threatens the sports industry’s very existence. It has never been more urgent for the industry to take action – and it’s doing just that.

“Across the board, from owners to athletes, sports organizations are focusing their attention and resources on greening their sport. That singular focus is essential to winning in sports – and in the battle against climate change. The stakes are too high to risk inaction. Losing is not an option.”

And now, the Alliance is opening up its membership ranks to include individual fans.

“Live green or die” has been basketball Hall-of-famer Bill Walton’s battle cry for many years, and today the Alliance adopted it as well. Together, the Alliance and Bill Walton urge athletes, fans, and all sports lovers to take the **LIVE GREEN OR DIE™** challenge. Anyone can go to [LIVE GREEN OR DIE™](#), take a pledge, commit to greater sustainability, and join the Alliance in leading the sports greening movement.

“We have the moral obligation, duty, and responsibility to do everything we can to remedy what’s happening – environmental cancers, poisoned water, and unbreathable air – all due to climate change, which is a self-inflicted tragedy,” said Walton. He urged people to take the challenge. “Get on the Green Sports Alliance express. This is not something that will happen by itself. Our success, our future, our lives depend on each of us taking positive and concentrated steps forward based on knowledge, science, and technology.”

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Sports industry leaders are not waiting.

Elite athletes like Walton, along with league executives, team owners, and builders of venues, together with corporate sponsors, vendors, concessionaires, and sports fans alike – are not waiting to take action on saving the planet. **In fact, they are already way ahead in the game because they’ve been working on sustainability for years.**

Professional athletes are not waiting.

It’s not only Bill Walton. Hundreds of athletes lend their name and give their time, talent, and cash to environmental causes – and they are speaking out.

Andrew Ference

“It is incredibly disappointing to see the global efforts to combat climate change being politicized in the United States,” said former National Hockey League player [Andrew Ference](#). “People and businesses from across the country don’t see this as a left or right issue, rather an issue which means going forward or backward. The world is stronger when America moves forward.”

Ference created the [NHL Players Association Carbon Neutral Challenge](#) in 2007, the first major environmental initiative in professional hockey. He encouraged more than 500 players to go carbon neutral, creating a cultural shift across the league that established him as a leader in the green sports movement. He holds a certificate in Corporate Sustainability and Innovation from Harvard Extension School, and is the most recent recipient of the Green Sports Alliance’s Environmental Leadership Award.

Mary Harvey

Olympic Gold medalist [Mary V. Harvey](#) summed it up this way: “Recent events are extremely disappointing and are a rallying cry for all of us to step up our game. And we will.”

Harvey’s eight-year career with the US Women’s National Soccer Team includes both a FIFA World Cup win in 1991 and Olympic Gold in 1996. During the reform process for FIFA, she helped organize a global campaign calling for gender equity as a core tenet of reform. Over 12 weeks, #WomeninFIFA reached more than 10 million people. She has served as a sport envoy for the US State Department’s SportUnited to missions to Iraq, Jordan, Canada, and Mexico. Recently Harvey became the first woman to receive the [Werner Fricker Builder Award](#) from US Soccer for her long-term advocacy of the sport.

She is just as passionate about the well-being of the planet. “Climate change is real, and we all have a responsibility to advocate for protecting our environment,” Harvey said. “The Green Sports Alliance, and the sports industry, its teams, leagues, venues, owners, commissioners and athletes, have been out in front, advocating for a more sustainable future.”

Will Witherspoon

Former National Football League player [Will Witherspoon](#) provided invaluable leadership as a linebacker for the St. Louis Rams, Philadelphia Eagles, and Tennessee Titans during his 12-year career in the NFL. Now he manages his [Shire Gate Farm](#), a 500-acre, grass-fed cattle farm in Missouri, renowned for its use of sustainable farming techniques and certified by Animal Welfare Approved. Reacting to the news, he said, “The voices of the few should not outweigh the voices of the many. The work we do together is critical – now more than ever.”



Sports organizations are not waiting.

Whatever happens at the federal level, when it comes to acknowledging and responding to the scientific reality of climate change, the business of the greening of sports has moved on, and moved on powerfully. People in the world of sports aren't waiting to be forced to act through government regulations: **they have made, and continue to make significant investments in their sports businesses and in the health of the planet for the next generation and every generation to follow.**

Sports facilities are among the greenest in the world – and with every new project, they become more environmentally sustainable.

From the first concept drawings to the ceremonial ribbon-cutting at the dedication to operations and beyond, new facilities factor sustainability into their DNA. Consider one of the jewels in the crown of American venues: [Golden 1 Center](#), home to the Sacramento Kings basketball team.

Golden 1 Center has already been certified [LEED](#) Platinum, the most rigorous standard in green building. In addition to being fully powered by renewable energy, its farm-to-court food philosophy includes a 10-point charter that spells out just how Executive Chef Michael Tuohy and his team plan to revolutionize how arenas feed a crowd – in this case, 17,600 at a time – for example, by sourcing 90% of ingredients from within a 150-mile radius of the arena.

Team owners aren't waiting. A come-from-behind win is still possible.

Already reports in the news have made it apparent that the President's stand does not reflect the position taken by most American leaders – whether in the sports industry, state and local governments, major corporations, small businesses, and not-for-profit organizations.

“It is tremendously disheartening to see the recent step back from climate change leadership,” said [Vivek Ranadivé](#), owner and chairman of the [Sacramento Kings](#). “However, through sport as a platform for good, we're witnessing tremendous strides and new records in how businesses operate, how fans mitigate their impact on the planet, and how together, communities are working to preserve our environment for generations to come.

“No matter the tone set by public officials,” Ranadivé continued, “look for sports teams, their fans and partners to continue to drive action and environmental awareness around the world by standing as examples of innovation and education.”

Pioneers never wait.

Several clubs –all founding members of the Alliance—stepped out early into the field of greening sports venues:

- [The Seattle Mariners Baseball Club's Safeco Field](#) was the first in Major League Baseball to go LED in its lighting. They improved their waste diversion stats quite impressively: starting in 2005, in just ten seasons, they went from a .120 average to .880 in 2015 – diverting 88% of waste away from landfill and into recycling and compost.

- The [Portland Trail Blazers home arena, the Moda Center](#), was retrofitted to LEED Gold standards, making it the first multi-purpose venue to do so. In the 2016-2017 season, they replaced older mercury-based lighting with mercury-free LED units, offsetting almost 450 tons of CO2 emissions while generating thousands in savings.
- The Seattle Seahawks were among the first to install solar panels on their roof at [CenturyLink Field](#). There are more than 600 recycle and compost bins throughout. All food containers are compostable; all plastic bottles are recyclable.
- [At Rogers Arena, the Vancouver Canucks](#) have encouraged waste diversion and have used renewable energy for years now, making them among the very first arenas to do so. Their comprehensive Zero Waste program involves a focus on local products, ownership of sustainable salmon and sable farming, and gathering up unserved food and delivering it to the Vancouver Food Bank.

Builders of venues are not waiting.

The firm behind several of the most sustainable sports structures in North America, is the global design, architecture, engineering, and planning firm [HOK](#). Their projects include Met Life Stadium outside New York City (Jets, Giants), Rogers Place in Edmonton (Oilers), Little Caesars Arena in Detroit (Pistons, Red Wings), and Nationals Park, among others. “We are encouraged by the number of current sports projects that are pursuing ambitious sustainable design goals,” said Chris DeVolder, senior vice president and managing principal. In addition to supporting the Paris Agreement, the firm was an early signatory to the AIA 2030 Commitment, which targets carbon neutrality for all new buildings, developments, and major renovations by 2030. “We stand by our commitment to AIA 2030 and the companies, organizations, and US cities, counties, and states that continue to honor the Paris Agreement. As a global firm, we can do no less.”

Collegiate sports aren't waiting.

At [Arizona State University](#), notes [Ray Anderson](#), vice president for University Athletics and athletic director, “We are, and continue to be committed to sustainable and eco-friendly athletic facilities, incorporating solar energy, water conservation practices, and climate-friendly solutions.”

Forbes Magazine named him one of the 25 Most Influential Minorities in Sports in February 2016, noting that he had “helped position the Sun Devils as one of the most innovative brands in college sports.”

In his continuing effort to develop Sun Devil athletic facilities, Anderson is deeply committed to doing so in the most eco-friendly way possible. As a result, the National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and USG Corporation announced Arizona State as the winner of the [2016 USG NACDA Sustainability Award](#) for its work on Sun Devil Stadium and the Weatherup Center.

“Sports has an unmatched ability to change and influence society for the greater good and lead the way to a more sustainable world,” said Anderson. “I, for one, will continue to advocate for and support the sports greening movement.”



Student athletes aren't waiting.

At Oregon State University, student athletes who are the [Beaver Athletes Sustainability Team \(BAST\)](#) work indefatigably to make OSU “the most sustainable and environmentally conscious athletic department in the Pac-12.” They collect giveaway items after games and educate fans on recycling. They are working toward an end-of-year goal of composting at all team meals and installing light timers on electronics to save energy. In short, they are “constantly pushing OSU athletics to make Oregon orange again.”

Adds Jesikah Cavanaugh, Class of 2017 (women’s swimming) “The passion and excitement our student athletes have shown in establishing these initiatives for our community have been second to none.

"If BAST can make a difference, no matter how small, we understand that those small changes will eventually lead to making a greater impact," said Sam Lewis, Class of 2017 (women’s cross-country and track). “We ultimately want to reduce the carbon footprint of OSU's athletic department and show the Pac-12 and country that OSU is committed to making a positive difference."

All of sport is committed to making a difference in the way only sport can: to reach the pinnacle of achievement in a very visible way; to break records once thought unbreakable; to be graceful in victory and unbroken in defeat; to showcase the very best of humanity – and in so doing, to inspire fans and the public alike.

The traditional virtues that sport brings to the contest – fairness, integrity, responsibility, hard work, team play, and respect, these are the very same virtues that sport brings to winning the sustainability game. And while these results may not show up in the box scores, they will be on full display in the beauty and health of the planet we leave for our children, and their children.

This is the true essence of sports leadership.

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About the Green Sports Alliance

The Green Sports Alliance leverages the cultural and market influence of sports to promote healthy, sustainable communities where people live and play. The Alliance inspires professional sports leagues, sports governing bodies, colleges, teams, venues, their partners and millions of fans to embrace renewable energy, healthy food, recycling, water efficiency, safer chemicals and other environmentally preferable practices. Alliance members now number nearly 500 organizations representing 15 leagues in 14 countries. Visit greensportsalliance.org for more information.