UAE Sports Arbitration Centre Kicks Off Operations

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The Court of Arbitration for Sport ("CAS") is based in Switzerland and is considered the elite international dispute resolution forum for legal disputes relating to sports, including commercial disputes (i.e., issues arising from sponsorship agreements or player contracts) and discipline (i.e., doping, non-compliance with codes of conduct). CAS also acts as an appeals court for decisions made by the arbitration systems of sports organizations or dispute resolution mechanisms, including global associations with disciplinary arms such as FIFA and the International Olympic Committee.

In May 2012, Abu Dhabi hosted the first seat for the Court of Arbitration for Sport outside Switzerland. Now, Abu Dhabi is home to its own arbitration centre, dubbed the UAE Sports Arbitration Centre ("UAE SAC") which has been established under the Federal Law No 16 for 2016 issued by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

UAE SAC partly began operations in 2016, but as of June 2020, it has commenced full operations. The UAE SAC is equipped with every facility, which is available for anyone seeking to resolve their disputes related to sports through mediation or arbitration. This significant milestone is a positive development in sport, aiming at spreading a culture of sports mediation or arbitration in the United Arab Emirates.

According to a recent study, Dubai's burgeoning sports industry now exceeds USD 1.7 billion annually; this accounts for 0.8% of Dubai's GDP. Of the USD 1.763 billion, USD 670

million originates from overseas markets, which indicates Dubai's growing importance as a world sporting destination.

The UAE is renowned as a prime emerging sports market and continues to grow and offer a landscape for development. This aptitude across the nation brings vast opportunities and challenges and will most certainly act as a catalyst for sustainable development; with such development requiring a parallel expansion in the legal infrastructure of the sports market.

The UAE SAC will seek to be the answer to the legal challenges in play and assist in the sustainable development of the market. Although the UAE SAC has yet to unveil its rules of arbitration, they will most likely be revealed to the public in the coming weeks. However, looking at the CAS – which the UAE SAC is closely modeled after – we can arguably presume that the standard clause to be inserted into contracts for resolution by the UAE SAC will look like this:

"Any dispute arising from or related to the present contract will be submitted exclusively to the Sports Arbitration Centre in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and resolved definitively in accordance with the [UAE SAC Rules]."

Optional explanatory phrases:

"The Panel will consist of one [or three] arbitrator(s)."

"The language of the arbitration will be…"

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