



**GROWTH OF THE**  
**KINGS**  
**LEAGUE**  
**IN MENA**





# 1. INTRODUCTION: The Convergence of Sport, Culture and Digital Identity

The global sports industry is currently undergoing a structural metamorphosis, shifting from a model defined by passive linear consumption to one predicated on active, digital-first engagement. Nowhere is this shift more pronounced, or more strategically accelerated, than in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The launch of the Kings League MENA in 2025 serves as the primary case study for this transition, representing a deliberate fusion of European sporting intellectual property with the high-velocity digital culture of the Arab world.

This report provides an exhaustive, forensic analysis of the league's formation, its inaugural competitive season (The Kings Cup MENA 2025), and the complex ecosystem of viewership and commercialization that surrounds it. By dissecting the partnership between the Kings League organization and Saudi Arabia's SURJ Sports Investment, we reveal a project that is not merely a football tournament, but a sophisticated geopolitical and socio-economic instrument designed to capture the attention of a demographic that traditional football is at risk of losing.

The analysis draws upon a wide array of primary data points, including viewership metrics from Esports Charts, corporate filings regarding the Joint Venture structure, and operational reports from the Riyadh Season 2025. Through this data, a clear narrative emerges: Kings League MENA has successfully established a "third pole" in regional entertainment, sitting comfortably between the rigidity of professional football (Saudi Pro League) and the anarchy of pure streaming content.





## 2. Strategic Genesis: The Institutional and Economic Architecture

To understand the trajectory of Kings League MENA, one must first analyze the bedrock upon which it was built. The league did not emerge organically from the grassroots; it was a top-down, capital-intensive insertion into the market, engineered by two of the most powerful entities in modern sports business.

### 2.1 The Investment Thesis: SURJ and the Vision 2030 Mandate

The driving force behind the league's existence in the region is SURJ Sports Investment, a subsidiary of the Public Investment Fund (PIF) of Saudi Arabia. The mandate of SURJ differs significantly from other sovereign investment vehicles. While other entities may acquire heritage assets for global prestige, SURJ focuses on high-growth, disruptive intellectual property that can be localized to drive the domestic economy.

#### The strategic rationale for partnering with Kings League was multifaceted:

- 1. Demographic Alignment:** Data analysis revealed that nearly 70% of Saudi Arabia's population is under the age of 30. This demographic is characterized by high smartphone penetration and a preference for short-form, personality-driven content. The Kings League was identified as the optimal product for this cohort.
- 2. Sector Development:** The partnership was explicitly aimed at "developing the sports sector and enhancing the Kingdom's position as a leading destination for hosting major global tournaments".
- 3. Economic Diversification:** The venture was designed to create a new revenue stream within the entertainment sector, contributing to the non-oil GDP targets of Vision 2030.



## 2.2 The Joint Venture Structure

The legal framework of the league was established through a Joint Venture (JV) agreement signed on May 28, 2025, between Kings League and SURJ Sports Investment. This was not a simple licensing deal; it was a co-ownership model designed to anchor the IP in the region permanently.

### **Legal and Advisory Context:**

The complexity of the deal required tier-one legal counsel. White & Case LLP advised SURJ Sports Investment on the formation of the JV. The involvement of such a firm highlights the significant capital and intellectual property valuation attributed to the project. The agreement stipulated that while the core "Kings League" format and brand would be retained, the operational execution, talent sourcing, and commercial rights would be localized under the new entity, Kings League MENA.

### **Operational Leadership:**

The leadership structure reflects this hybrid approach. Djamel Agaoua, CEO of Kings League, emphasized that the partnership was about "taking the Kings League into MENA," implying a direct transplantation of the Spanish model's DNA excitement, competition, and fan engagement into the Saudi operational context.





## 3. The Operational Timeline: From Concept to Kickoff

### 3.1 Phase I: Announcement and Hype Generation (May – August 2025)

- **May 28, 2025:** The partnership was officially announced. At this stage, the project was a corporate abstraction, promising a "regionally anchored" version of the league. The announcement strategically coincided with the end of the traditional football season.
- **August 11, 2025:** The first tangible activation occurred during the Esports World Cup in Riyadh. This choice of venue was highly symbolic. By launching the football league at an esports event, the organizers signaled that Kings League MENA belongs to the gaming ecosystem as much as, if not more than, the football ecosystem.

The speed of execution for Kings League MENA was unprecedented, moving from a contractual agreement to a stadium-filling tournament in under six months. This rapid deployment demonstrates the logistical capabilities of the Saudi entertainment infrastructure, particularly when integrated with the General Entertainment Authority (GEA).

### 3.2 Phase II: Talent Acquisition and Team Unveiling (August – September 2025)

During the Esports World Cup event, the league unveiled its most critical asset: the Team Presidents. Unlike the franchise models of the NFL or the club models of the Premier League, Kings League teams are defined by the digital influencers who lead them. Parallel to the president reveal, the league opened its player draft portal. This "open tryout" mechanism served a dual purpose:

1. **Talent Identification:** It allowed the league to scout amateur and semi-professional talent that had slipped through the cracks of the rigid club academy systems in MENA.
2. **Community Engagement:** It gave the audience a sense of ownership, as they watched ordinary citizens from their cities attempt to make the teams.



### 3.3 Phase III: The Launch and Inaugural Tournament (October – November 2025)

- **October 7, 2025:** The official launch ceremony confirmed the schedule and venue. The decision was made to host the event at Boulevard Riyadh City, the crown jewel of the Riyadh Season infrastructure.
- **October 24, 2025:** Kickoff of the Kings Cup MENA.
- **November 14, 2025:** The Grand Final.

This timeline reveals a strategy of "shock and awe" a compressed, high-intensity introduction to the market designed to dominate social media conversation for a four-week window. 2025: Kickoff of the Kings Cup MENA.





## 4. The ecosystem of influence: Teams, Presidents and Market Segmentation

The genius of the Kings League model lies in its decentralized marketing. By assigning team ownership to content creators, the league outsources audience acquisition to individuals who already command the attention of millions. In the MENA region, the selection of presidents was meticulously calibrated to cover key national markets and platform demographics.





# 4.1 The President Roster: A Pan-Regional Strategy

The inaugural Kings Cup MENA featured 8 founding teams, strategically selected to represent the region's largest digital markets:

	<b>PRESIDENT (CREATOR)</b> Ahmed "SHoNgxBoNg" Alqahtani	<b>PRIMARY PLATFORM</b> KICK / YOUTUBE
	<b>HOME COUNTRY</b> Saudi Arabia	
<b>MARKET STRATEGY &amp; CULTURAL CONTEXT</b>		
<b>The Hardcore Gamer</b> SHoNgxBoNg is a Titan of the Saudi gaming scene. His move to the Kick platform represents the bleeding edge of streaming. His team targets the core Gen-Z Saudi male demographic.		

	<b>PRESIDENT (CREATOR)</b> AboFlah	<b>PRIMARY PLATFORM</b> YOUTUBE
	<b>HOME COUNTRY</b> Qatar	
	<b>MARKET STRATEGY &amp; CULTURAL CONTEXT</b>	
	<b>The Family / Mainstream</b> With charity streams raising millions of dollars, AboFlah appeals to a broader, younger, family-oriented audience across the entire Arab world.	





**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Mufreh "Drb7h" Asir

**HOME COUNTRY**

Saudi Arabia

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

TWITCH/  
YOUTUBE

**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**The Local Rival**

Drb7h provides the necessary foil to SXB. Their rivalry fuels the domestic Saudi narrative, essential for ticket sales in Riyadh.



**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Ilyas "ilyaselmaliki" El Maliki

**HOME COUNTRY**

Morocco

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

TWITCH

**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**The North African Bridge**

Morocco is a football powerhouse. Ilyas captures the Maghreb audience, ensuring the league is not seen as solely a "Gulf" product.



**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Saleh "Tarboun"

**HOME COUNTRY**

Egypt

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

YOUTUBE



**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT**

**The Demographic Giant**

Egypt has the largest population in the Arab world. Tarboun's inclusion activates the massive Egyptian youth market.



**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Fawaz "Fwaz" Hamad

**HOME COUNTRY**

Qatar

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

YOUTUBE

**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT****The World Cup Legacy**

Representing Qatar, Fwaz taps into the sophisticated football infrastructure and fandom built post-2022 World Cup.

**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Maher "Maherco" Sultaneh

**HOME COUNTRY**

Jordan

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

YOUTUBE

**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT****The Levant Competitor**

Represents the gaming-savvy youth of Jordan and the Levant.

**PRESIDENT (CREATOR)**

Hani "Absi" Al Qoublan

**HOME COUNTRY**

Jordan

**PRIMARY PLATFORM**

TWITCH

**MARKET STRATEGY & CULTURAL CONTEXT****The Counter-Narrative**

Creating a "Derby" dynamic within the Jordanian representation alongside the Red Zone.





## 4.2 Narrative Construction and Rivalries

The interaction between these presidents is the primary content engine of the league. The "Kings Cup MENA" was not marketed solely as a football tournament, but as a clash of communities.



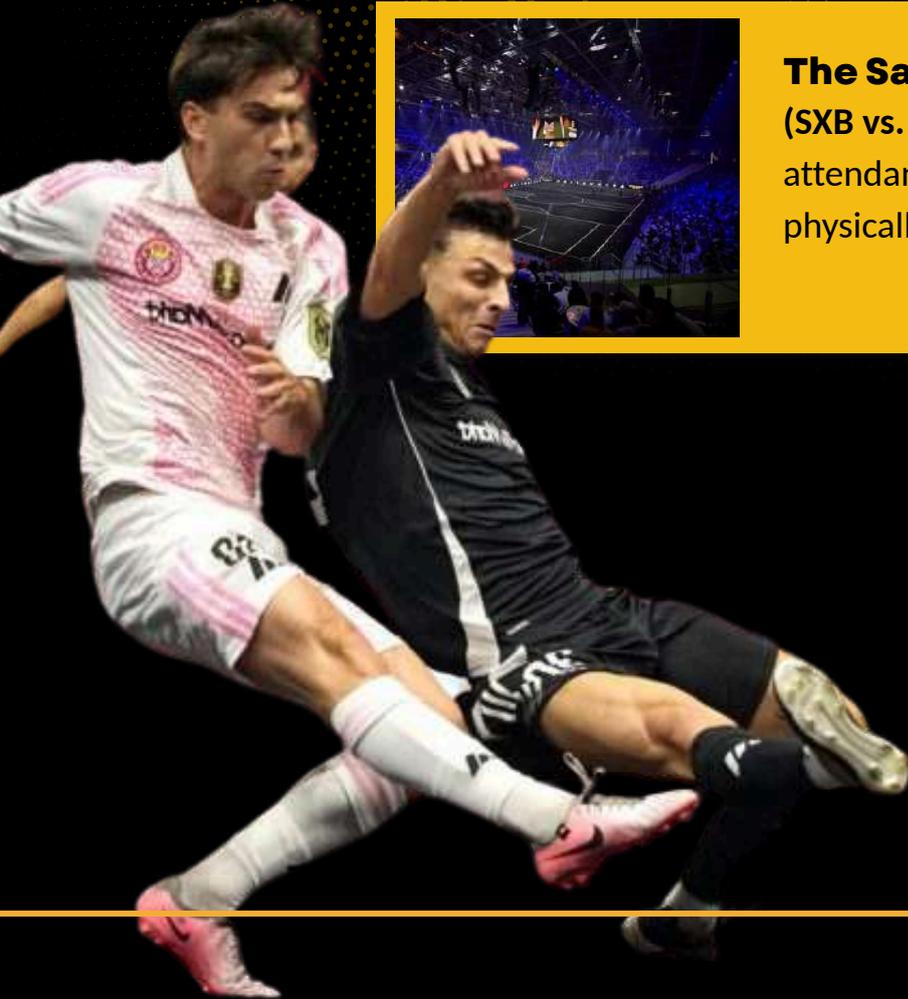
### **Saudi vs. Morocco**

(SXB vs. Ultra Chmicha): This matchup became a focal point of viewership, tapping into the long-standing friendly rivalry between Saudi and North African football cultures.



### **The Saudi Derby**

(SXB vs. DR7): This narrative drove the on-ground attendance at Boulevard Riyadh City, as local fans physically rallied behind their digital idols.





## 5. The Inaugural Tournament: The Kings Cup MENA 2025

The first competitive activation of the league was the Kings Cup MENA, a tournament format designed to test the waters before a full league rollout.

### 5.1 Format & Venue

The tournament was held over intense days of competition between October 24 and November 14, 2025.

#### **Venue:**

The "Kings League Arena" at Boulevard Riyadh City. The choice of a compact, custom-built arena enhanced the atmosphere, creating a "boiler room" effect that translates well to broadcast.

#### **Ruleset:**

The matches featured the standard Kings League gamification: 7-a-side play, unlimited substitutions, and "Secret Weapon" cards that allow teams to remove an opponent player or double their goals for a set period.



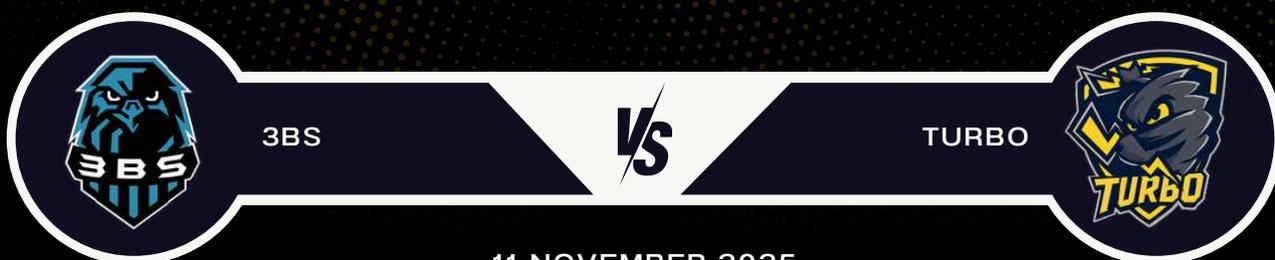


## 5.2 Competitive Narrative and Match Analysis

The tournament delivered on its promise of high-scoring, unpredictable drama. Unlike traditional football, where a 0-0 draw is a possibility, the Kings League format forces engagement.



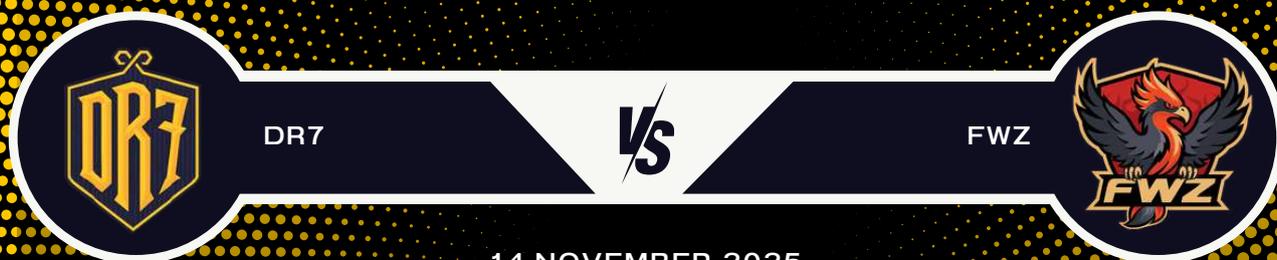
This match in Week 3 was a viewership juggernaut, confirming that the clash of presidents translates to screens.



A Quarter/Semi-final clash that drew massive numbers, highlighting the engagement of the Jordanian and Egyptian fanbases.



# THE GRAND FINAL



14 NOVEMBER 2025

The culmination of the tournament on November 14, 2025, was a sporting spectacle that validated the league's competitive integrity.

## The Matchup:

Team DR7 (Saudi Arabia) vs. Team FWZ (Qatar).

## The Result:

Team DR7 6 - 5 Team FWZ.

## Analysis:

A 6-5 scoreline is the ideal advertisement for the Kings League. It indicates a match of constant lead changes, offensive focus, and likely late-game drama involving the "double goal" mechanic.

## The Aftermath:

Team DR7 was crowned the first-ever Kings Cup MENA champions.





## 6. Viewership Forensics: Analyzing the "Attention Economy"

The success of Kings League MENA is measured not in ticket revenue, but in Peak Viewers (PV) and Hours Watched (HW). The data from the inaugural cup is staggering and requires detailed dissection.

### 6.1 Aggregate Performance Metrics

The Kings Cup MENA 2025 achieved a Peak Viewership of 831,189. To put this into context:

- This figure significantly outperformed other Kings League expansions. For example, the **Kings Cup Germany 2025** only managed a peak of **98,125 viewers**.
- **Insight:** This disparity suggests that the MENA market has a much higher "Product-Market Fit" for influencer-led sports than Western Europe (outside of Spain). The centralized nature of Arab digital culture, where a few creators hold massive sway, allows for easier mobilization of audiences compared to the fragmented German market.

### 6.2 Match-Level Granularity

The data reveals that viewership was driven by specific "event" matchups rather than a consistent baseline.

**3BS vs. Turbo: 717,990 PV.**

**SXB vs. Ultra Chmicha: 663,119 PV.**

**Observation:** The matches involving cross-border rivalries (Jordan vs. Egypt, Saudi vs. Morocco) performed exceptionally well, validating the "Champions League" style structure of the presidency.



## 6.3 Platform Dynamics: The "Kick" Anomaly

A crucial finding in the research is the platform distribution. While Twitch is the global home of Kings League, the MENA region showed a massive deviation toward Kick.

A laptop screen is the central focus, displaying the Kick logo at the top. Below the logo, the text is organized into two sections: 'SXB ON KICK:' and 'IMPLICATION:'. The background of the laptop screen is a dark, textured pattern. The laptop is positioned in front of a crowd of silhouettes, with several hands raised in the air, some pointing upwards. The overall background is a dark gradient with a greenish tint.

**KICK**

### **SXB ON KICK:**

The president of Team SXB streamed the matches on his personal Kick channel. His channel alone generated 304,825 Peak Viewers and over 3.2 Million Hours Watched.

### **IMPLICATION:**

This single channel accounted for nearly 36% of the total tournament peak viewership. This highlights the risk/reward of the creator model: the league is heavily dependent on individual creators like SHoNgxBonG remaining active and engaged.



## 6.4 The YouTube First: Ecosystem

Despite the Kick anomaly, YouTube remained a dominant force for the broader ecosystem. Global stats for Kings League 2025 show YouTube accounting for more than half of total viewership, a trend that is likely even more pronounced in MENA given the region's historical affinity for the platform.





# 7. Media Rights and Commercialization: The Hybrid Model

The commercial structure of Kings League MENA is more sophisticated than its European counterparts, employing a "Hybrid Distribution Model" that bridges the gap between old and new media.

## 7.1 The MBC Group Partnership: Linear Legitimacy

In a landmark move, the league signed a media rights deal with MBC Group, the largest media conglomerate in the Middle East.

**MBC Action:** Matches were broadcast live on free-to-air television. This partnership legitimizes the product to older generations and advertisers who still prioritize TV ratings.

**Shahid:** The deal included streaming on Shahid, the region's leading OTT platform. This ensures high-bitrate, stable streams for smart TV users.

## 7.2 Sponsorship and Monetization

The league attracted Tier-1 sponsors immediately, signaling strong corporate confidence.

**Saudi National Bank (SNB):** Signed as the "Main Partner". For a financial institution like SNB, the Kings League offers a rare channel to speak directly to Gen-Z Saudis, their future customer base, in an environment they trust.

**Riyadh Season Integration:** By operating under the umbrella of Riyadh Season, the league benefited from state-level marketing support and venue provision, significantly reducing the "Customer Acquisition Cost" (CAC) for the new league.





## 8. Future Outlook: The 2026 Roadmap and Expansion

The successful delivery of the Kings Cup 2025 was merely the proof-of-concept. The roadmap for 2026 suggests a rapid acceleration of the ecosystem.

### 8.1 The Kings World Cup Nations 2026

In a landmark move, the league signed a media rights deal with MBC Group, the largest media conglomerate in the Middle East.

#### QATAR'S ENTRY

Qatar's Entry: A national team from Qatar has been confirmed, with AboFlah (President of ABO FC) slated to lead the national delegation.

#### GLOBAL INTEGRATION:

The MENA teams will compete against global powerhouses led by icons like Neymar (Brazil) and the newly announced Ronaldo (Brazil President).

### 8.2. The "Queens League" Opportunity

The global Kings League ecosystem includes a "Queens League". Given the rapid development of women's football in Saudi Arabia (with the establishment of the women's national team and league), it is probable that 2026 or 2027 will see the launch of a regional women's iteration, aligning with Vision 2030's goals of female empowerment and participation in sports.





## 9. Conclusion: The "Glocalization" of Sports Entertainment



The Kings League MENA is a triumphant exercise in "Glocalization" the adaptation of a global product to local cultural specifications. By taking the framework created by Piqué in Barcelona and injecting it with Saudi capital (SURJ), regional media power (MBC), and indigenous digital talent (SHoNgxBonG, Drb7h), the organizers have created a product that feels native to the region.



The data from the inaugural Kings Cup 2025 is conclusive: the demand for "Sportainment" in MENA is immense. With a peak viewership of over 830,000, the league has instantly established itself as a major player in the region's media landscape, rivaling traditional sports properties that have existed for decades.



The victory of Team DR7 in November 2025 was not just a win on the pitch; it was a validation of a business model that understands a fundamental truth about the modern Arab youth: they do not just want to watch sports; they want to participate in a narrative where the lines between the game, the chat, and the celebrity are irrevocably blurred. As the league pivots to 2026, it stands as the vanguard of the new sports economy in the Middle East.

