

Why Sports Rights Need Neutral Infrastructure

This memo explains why recurring sports rights failures are structural rather than contractual, and why neutral representation infrastructure is a necessary precondition for coordination.

The recurring failure

- Sports rights repeatedly break down into disputes, renegotiations, blackouts, or opaque reallocations, even among highly sophisticated leagues, broadcasters, platforms, and regulators.
 - These failures recur across different sports, jurisdictions, distribution technologies, and legal regimes.
 - Each instance is typically explained as a local failure—bad contracts, aggressive platforms, regulatory lag, or misaligned incentives.
 - Yet the same failure modes reappear regardless of who is in control.
 - The consistent variable is not intelligence, intent, or legal capacity, but the absence of a shared structural representation of rights.
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Why rights remain non-computable

- Sports rights are primarily defined through narrative legal instruments: contracts, amendments, schedules, and policy documents.
 - These instruments are designed for human interpretation and dispute resolution, not for computational clarity.
 - Core attributes of rights—such as scope, territory, duration, exclusivity, sublicensing, and carve-outs—are described inconsistently, embedded in prose, and redefined over time.
 - There is no canonical, machine-readable representation of what rights exist, who holds them, where and when they apply, or how they interact.
 - As a result:
 - auditing requires manual reconstruction,
 - entitlement verification is platform-specific,
 - and conflicts can only be resolved through negotiation or litigation.
 - Rights enforcement becomes reactive and adversarial rather than inspectable and preventative.
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What “infrastructure” means here

- Infrastructure, in this context, does not mean a platform, marketplace, or intermediary.
- It refers to a neutral representation layer that sits beneath commercial, legal, and operational systems.
- This layer does not make decisions or enforce outcomes; it makes states and relationships legible.
- Comparable infrastructure layers exist in other domains:
 - DNS for domain resolution,
 - ISINs for securities identification,
 - GTINs for product identity.

- These systems do not replace markets or law; they make coordination possible without central control.
 - In the absence of such a layer, every participant is forced to maintain private representations, resolve conflicts bilaterally, and repeatedly reinterpret the same underlying facts.
 - Infrastructure reduces ambiguity without centralizing authority.
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What USG is (and is not)

- The Universal Sports Graph (USG) is a protocol framework for representing sports events, entities, rights, and entitlements as interoperable data.
- It defines canonical identifiers, shared schemas, and structural relationships between objects.
- USG focuses on representation, not execution.
- It makes rights, events, and entities legible and referable, not enforceable.
- USG is intentionally minimal and composable, designed to sit beneath contracts, platforms, regulatory regimes, and commercial systems.

USG is not:

- a streaming or distribution platform,
 - a rights marketplace or exchange,
 - a rights enforcement or DRM system,
 - a business model or commercial service,
 - or a replacement for law, contracts, or negotiation.
 - USG does not determine outcomes.
 - It defines a shared language in which outcomes can be reasoned about.
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How the layers fit together

- USG is structured as a set of loosely coupled layers, each with a distinct responsibility.
 - RFCs define the conceptual and structural standards: object types, identifier formats, schemas, and allowed relationships.
 - The Reference Registry provides canonical identifiers, authoritative records, and versioned snapshots of the data model.
 - The Resolver exposes deterministic identifier-to-record lookup for read-only inspection and verification.
 - Each layer can be evaluated independently:
 - the RFCs without the registry,
 - the registry without the resolver,
 - the resolver without operational deployment.
 - Together, the layers demonstrate that USG is structurally coherent, inspectable end-to-end, and implementable without central control.
 - This separation allows experimentation and verification without committing to adoption or operation.
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What this unlocks

- A shared representation layer makes sports rights independently inspectable rather than privately interpreted.
 - Rights claims can be audited against a canonical structure instead of reconstructed from bespoke agreements.
 - Entitlements can be verified across organizations without requiring shared platforms or bilateral trust.
 - Conflicting claims can be identified earlier, before they harden into disputes or litigation.
 - Aggregation and sublicensing become structurally clearer because relationships are explicit rather than implied.
 - Downstream systems can reference the same underlying objects without collapsing into a single operator.
 - This creates preconditions for automated reporting, clearer revenue attribution, and eventual settlement primitives—without requiring those systems to exist yet.
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What this avoids

- Without neutral infrastructure, coordination defaults to private interpretation rather than shared reference.
 - Platform-specific entitlement systems centralize definition power and entrench incumbents.
 - Standardization efforts without neutral infrastructure often collapse into vendor control, bespoke integrations, or compliance theater.
 - Disputes are repeatedly resolved through renegotiation, litigation, or regulatory intervention rather than structural clarity.
 - Policy and enforcement are forced to compensate for architectural gaps.
 - Each new technology shift reintroduces the same interpretive conflicts.
 - Infrastructure does not eliminate disagreement, but it prevents ambiguity from becoming the primary battleground.
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Scope and non-goals

- USG does not mandate adoption by any league, platform, or regulator.
 - USG does not replace contracts, collective bargaining, or legal interpretation.
 - USG does not determine commercial terms, pricing, or revenue allocation.
 - USG does not enforce rights, resolve disputes, or adjudicate conflicts.
 - USG does not prescribe governance, ownership models, or institutional control.
 - USG is concerned solely with representation, not authority.
 - Any operational, commercial, or regulatory use of USG would occur downstream and outside the scope of the protocol itself.
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Current status

- USG exists today as a reference-grade infrastructure stack, not an operational system.
- The work includes published RFCs, a versioned reference registry, and a public, read-only resolver.

- These artifacts are sufficient to evaluate the coherence of the model, verify referential integrity, and assess viability.
 - This phase prioritizes legibility and verification rather than adoption or deployment.
 - No claims are made regarding industry uptake, operational readiness, or timeline.
 - Any future work would occur downstream and independently of the protocol itself.
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Revision note (v1.0.1): Added a brief orienting sentence and clarified memo classification. No substantive changes.