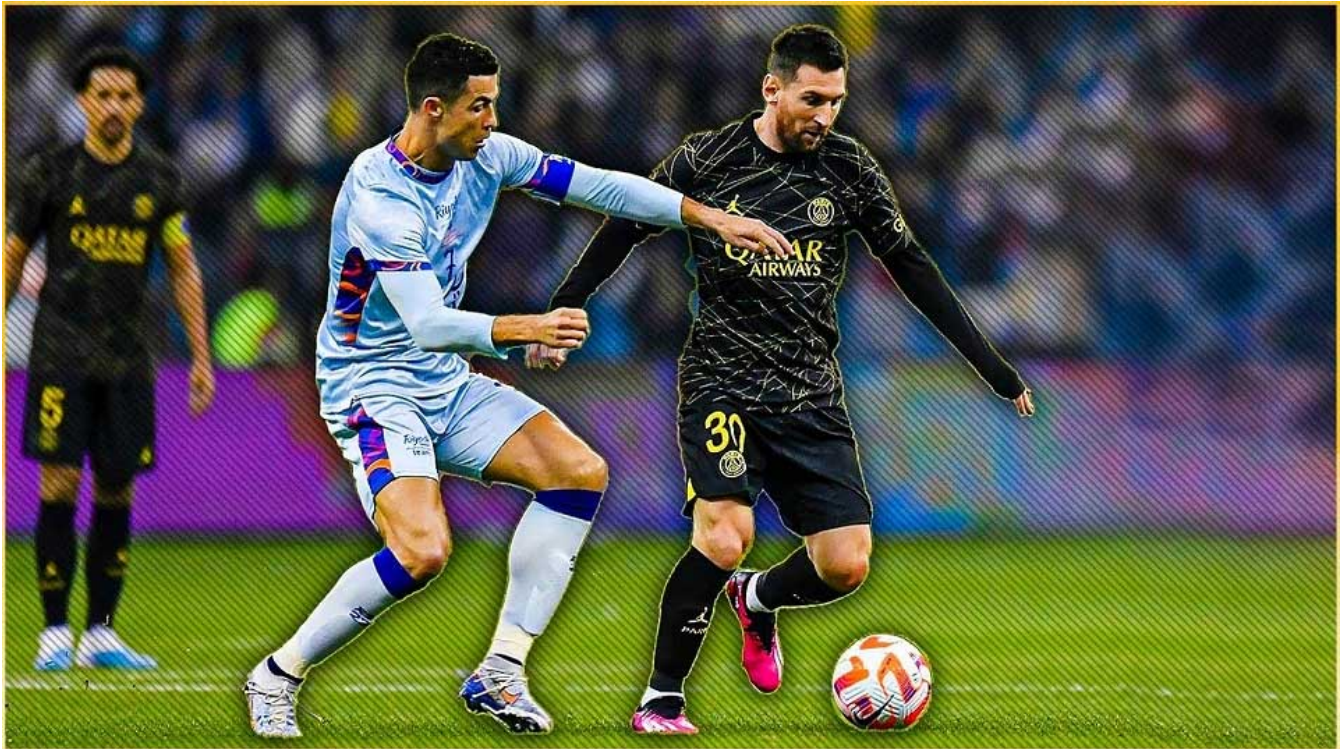


Athletes drive sports tourism boom

- A Monitor Desk Report

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Dhaka: Countries worldwide are increasingly using top athletes as ambassadors to promote sports tourism, a sector that accounts for about 10pc of global tourism spending, roughly €600 billion.

Saudi Arabia is leading the trend, enlisting football stars Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi to enhance its international profile.

Ronaldo's campaign, "I Came for Football, I Stayed for More," highlights the kingdom's diverse attractions, while Messi has served as an official tourism ambassador since 2022.

Saudi Arabia is also hosting major events, including the 2034 FIFA World Cup and a Formula 1 Grand Prix, alongside cultural festivals.

In the Caribbean, Jamaica promotes tourism through Usain Bolt, whose authentic connection to the island amplifies its appeal.

Kenya's tourism board emphasizes selecting ambassadors who reflect core values, partnering with athletes like marathoners Eliud Kipchoge and Faith Kipyegon, and leveraging digital campaigns for genuine engagement.

Europe features tennis legend Roger Federer promoting Switzerland's alpine scenery, Rafael Nadal spotlighting Mallorca, and cyclist Tadej Pogacar showcasing Slovenia. These athletes bring global recognition and authenticity to their regions.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization has appointed NBA star Stephen Curry and former basketball player Zaza Pachulia as sports tourism ambassadors, highlighting the sector's growth potential to \$1.3 trillion by 2032.

Major events like the upcoming 2024 Paris Olympics and the 2026 FIFA World Cup in North America are expected to drive significant tourism boosts.

Destination Management Organizations increasingly use AI and targeted digital campaigns to sustain traveler interest beyond events.

While athlete endorsements can be costly, their emotional appeal and economic influence are seen as valuable tools for unlocking new markets and promoting travel.

Athletes like Ronaldo, Messi, Bolt, and Federer exemplify how sports figures are reshaping destination marketing, proving that sports tourism is more than just games—it's a powerful global industry.

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