GREEN FOOTBALL WEEKEND
UNLEASHING THE POWER OF FOOTBALL TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE
2023 REPORT AND INSIGHTS
Green Football Weekend 2023 Report
Unleashing the power of football to tackle climate change

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Executive summary

In February 2023, the first ever Green Football Weekend unleashed the power of football to tackle climate change. Clubs battled it out for the Green Football Cup in a tournament where fan climate-friendly actions—from eating more veggies to taking shorter showers—decided the winner. In taking action fans not only supported their club and helped protect our world, but also had the chance to win exciting prizes. Over the weekend, clubs wore green armbands and took part in ‘greener games’ to reduce their carbon pollution and showcase their sustainability work. Players and pundits took on climate-friendly challenges and Sky and BT Sport put on an incredible spread of original content.

The 2023 Green Football Weekend campaign reached up to 30 million fans with a climate action message, actively engaged an estimated 39 thousand fans online and activated 3,211 fans in 63,370 actions or pledges via an innovative tournament model.

The first year of the campaign demonstrated the power of football, one of the world’s greatest cultural forces, to reach fans and shape their attitudes to climate change. It helped fans to:

- Understand how climate change is affecting the things they love;
- Consider doing more to combat climate change;
- Share with their clubs the action they’re taking and demonstrate their willingness for the beautiful game to be a greater force for good in the climate crisis.

Crucially, Green Football Weekend’s impact went beyond the stands. By engaging fans, the campaign signalled to clubs that their fans are in support of taking action on climate and communicating about it. It has also shone light on fans’ overwhelming support for their clubs making real efforts to make football more sustainable.

It also demonstrated the ability to engage the fans that are concerned about climate change in taking emissions-reducing actions. With clubs and active fans on board to participate in future editions, a significant opportunity for Green Football Weekend in the years to come will be to connect to the larger number of fans who are concerned about climate but are not yet acting or sharing that they are acting.

This report seeks to capture the breadth of the partnered campaign effort, the impact it had, and learnings that will prove useful for building an even stronger 2024 Green Football Weekend and for other sports actors aiming to drive engagement campaigns on climate.

Green Football Weekend 2023 was a collaborative campaign powered by BT Sport, Count Us In, the Football Supporters Association, Planet League, Pledgeball, and Sky Sports. It was backed by more than 30 major supporters, including Athletes of the World, BASIS, County FAs, Church of England, Common Goal, EFL, Extreme Hangout, the FA, First News, Football for Future, Football Manager, Goal Click, Global Action Plan, Her Game Too, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Let’s Go Zero, Met Office, National Trust, Rewriting Extinction, Rainforest Trust UK, RSPB, Sport Positive, Supporters Direct Scotland, The Climate Coalition, UEFA, Vegetarian Society, We Play Green, Wildlife Trust, WSL and WWF.
Campaign overview

Objectives
At its inception, Green Football Weekend had an ambitious vision to:
- Raise awareness that individual action can make a significant difference on climate change when we take it together.
- Drive masses of football fans in the UK to take climate-friendly action
- Encourage football clubs to commit to take action to reduce their carbon footprint further

The call to action
Green Football Weekend aimed to develop a launch narrative that stood out from other environmental campaigns and that had the potential to appeal to sports-loving audiences without a particular affinity with climate messaging.

As such, the campaign focused largely on appealing to football’s competitiveness and the strong sense of community embedded within clubs’ fandom. The primary call to action of the campaign invited fans to “score green goals for your club”.

The breadth of the campaign
To achieve its goals, Green Football Weekend:
- Rolled out awareness building and engagement activities before the weekend.
- Introduced original on-screen content and at-game activations during the weekend.
- Invited fans to visit greenfootballweekend.com, where they chose to take an action or a pledge via two Climate Action Platforms (Planet League and Pledgeball).
Widespread promotion and community activations made Green Football Weekend visible in the build up to and during the weekend, reaching fans across the country and encompassing clubs, schools, the media, players, and pundits. The most notable examples include:

- **Three days of creative takeover by broadcast partners Sky Sports and BT Sport** featured original content, live leaderboards, pundit challenges and pitch side interviews.

- **More than 80 top clubs took part in the fan engagement tournament, with 40 taking part in ‘greener games’.** Activity included:
  - **Sharing social content** to raise awareness of the event and encouraging fans to take part in the action tournament.
  - **Wearing green armbands** on pitch to build awareness and show their support for taking climate action, notable at-stadium and on-air.
  - **Donating space on hoardings and LED screens at stadiums** to promote Green Football Weekend.
  - **Offering incentives and support for fans** to take action through subsidising public transport for fans, offering discounted veggie food, and providing refill stations for reusable bottles.
  - **Fan zone activities related to Green Football Weekend actions** such as Layer Up Challenges in the fan zones of Norwich and Cambidge FC.
  - **Announcing new sustainability commitments** such as Wolves’ One Pack, One Planet project, Milwall’s launch of an ESG strategy, or Swindon’s appointment of a new Sustainability Officer.

- **Schools across the country** held themed lessons supported by Green Football Weekend educational content.

- **More than 25 players, pundits, and famous supporters** took part in notable promotions of Green Football Weekend in general as well as demonstrating or engaging in specific actions.

- **Earned media promotion including more than 60 top-tier features** covering dedicated stories, match commentary, and promotional stunts across both national and regional media on TV, radio and print.

- **Over 20 supporting organisations, across NGOs, business and media, shared content** across their digital channels (including social media and newsletters).

**What was measured**

We amassed a variety of analytics data from several touchpoints, and conducted surveys of fans and partners. We also conducted follow-up interviews with individual football clubs, leagues and willing fans who completed the survey (see next page).
Engaging fans in a tournament like no other

Green Football Weekend appealed to fans’ competitive spirit through the Green Football Cup tournament, where they alone had the power to help their clubs’ win, by pledging or taking climate-positive actions. The data gathered provides a high-level indication of the fan tournament campaign performance. It measures:

- Awareness through the aggregated reach of TV viewership and social media
- Consideration, through traffic to greenfootballweekend.com
- Activation, through the actions pledged or taken by fans, and the carbon impact of those actions

We were unable to track other impact data like at-game fan engagement, press and radio coverage reach and unreported community-led activations.
Observations

- **Green Football Weekend generated over 55 million impressions on social media.** This is notable considering that it was UK exclusive and all impressions were organic, without any paid-for advertising driving its virality. The impressions were generated from approximately 6,000 posts, meaning that the posting accounts and users had a high potential reach. Influencers leading the conversation included Reuters, Sky Sports and BBC Sport.

- **General social media sentiment about the campaign was positive with low negative keywords by volume** - 100 million potential positive impressions versus 25 million potential negative impressions - signalling fans' overwhelming support for climate action in sports.

- **A roughly estimated 38,692 users engaged online,** the estimate accounting for potential overlaps between greenfootballweekend.com, the primary online destination, and the two climate action platforms that it sent people to: Planet League and Pledgeball. The estimate also includes social media engagement.

- **Almost 4 thousand users joined the social media conversation during the month of January.** Most of them were males in the UK with an interest in football. Interestingly, 29% of these were Liverpool supporters and 22% were climate-conscious users.

- **Almost 100% of the social media conversation happened on Twitter.** The Green Football Weekend URL was shared in over 300 original tweets.

- **Social media was a significant driver of users.** It was the source of 23.7% of discernable new users arriving at greenfootballweekend.com.

- **Conversion to action was stronger deeper into the campaign journey.** While only a roughly estimated % of the estimated number of fans reached by the campaign arrived as visitors at greenfootballweekend.com, a much higher proportion of those visitors went on to engage in actions or pledges.

- **There are greater gains to be made in optimising the conversion of the sum reach of fans into visitors of greenfootball.com.** However, there can still be optimisation of the conversion of greenfootball.com visitors into fans taking actions or pledges.

The actions fans took

Green Football Weekend activated 3,211 fans to complete 20,044 actions and make 43,326 pledges on one of the two climate action platforms. 96 types of action and 64 types of pledge were available, which fell into six main categories across food, home, lifestyle, travel, voice, and other behaviours. Fans self-reported the following actions:
Observations

- The most popular actions and pledges were related to the *home* category, such as recycling and optimising the use of energy and water. Home accounted for 51.0% of the actions and pledges.
- However, getting around greener was the top specific action across all categories including the *home* category taken.
- The promoted Layer Up Challenge was the 37th most popular action to be completed on the PlanetLeague platform with 116 reported actions. There is no data to say much more this action was taken because of greater promotion by the campaign. This activation did not have a direct emissions reduction impact.
- The least popular category of actions and pledges were related to using your voice, such as writing to your council or making a poster. Voice accounted for just 2.3% of the actions and pledges.
- Familiar actions were the most popular to engage in. Fan survey respondents registered actions they were already doing (81%) or had wanted to do for a while (47.4%). Some respondents took an action they hadn't yet considered (21%).

The carbon impact of fan actions

The actions taken during Green Football Weekend are estimated to have potentially saved **53,913 kg of CO2e emissions**. The pledges could reduce an estimated **8,739,358 kg of CO2e of emissions** per year in the future, equivalent to taking 1,945 petrol-operated cars off the road per year.

These estimates are based on models of emissions reductions measurement used by Pledgeball and Planet League. Potential estimates were calculated based on fans taking on new actions that they would have otherwise not taken, and that they will take the actions they pledged.

Green goals fans scored for their club

The Green Football Cup tournament saw football clubs going head to head to accumulate the most “green goals” based on their fans' planet-friendly actions and pledges. Fans’ scores for their clubs were updated live on a virtual and broadcast leaderboard, and helped them enter the chance to win exciting prizes, which further motivated them to take climate-positive actions.

Fans’ pledges via Pledgeball, were valued at a total of 3 green goals (regardless of the number of pledges), while each verified action via Planet League scored 3 goals.

A total of **86 clubs** (see breakdown in next page) engaged in **102 promotional activities**—from wearing armbands on field to conducting Layer Up Challenges—and fans scored **82,291 goals** for their clubs in the tournament competition.
Fans and their perceptions

Fan attitudes and perceptions were captured from two sources. First, Sky studied both the general public and sports customers’ recognition and attitudes about Green Football Weekend. Second, users of the two action platforms were surveyed and several of the surveyed fans took part in follow-up interviews.

Themes from Sky’s survey of sports customers

Sky conducted a structured survey with over 300 UK Sky Sports customers and 350 UK residents. Nearly two-fifths of customers were aware of Green Football Weekend. The overall perception of Green Football Weekend was positive, particularly among sports customers who recognised the campaign. Among them:

- The campaign was perceived as appealing (92%) and relevant (79%).
- 83% felt Green Football Weekend offered an angle to climate change that they had not considered before.
- 86% said Green Football Weekend helped them understand climate change impacts the things they love.
- 76% said it encouraged them to take environmental issues into day-to-day consideration.
- 76% said it made them want to do more to combat the climate crisis.

Surveying fans taking part in the action tournament

Planet League and Pledgeball disseminated a survey to fans who engaged with the platforms. 58 individuals completed the survey—proportionally about 5% of the fans who took action—and 25 respondents indicated interest in participating in follow-up interviews.
Themes from the survey respondents
Survey respondents were nearly evenly split by gender, representing a wide age range from 11 to 78, with a majority between the ages of 30 to 64. **86% of respondents were either somewhat or very worried about climate**, a greater proportion than the 67% of the UK population reporting the same levels of concern. This may suggest the survey drew fans who are more concerned about climate.

- **Respondents expected club engagement on climate, and were motivated to help their club score goals and win.** 93% of survey respondents said they thought their football club should promote and implement measures to protect the climate. 76% of survey respondents reported being motivated to take action to help their club win, far outperforming all other motivations.
- **TV and social media were strong contributors to awareness and activation.** Most survey respondents heard about Green Football Weekend through TV (36%) social media (31%), or via their club (31%). During the weekend, they noticed Green Football Weekend activations via social media (47%), the Green Football Weekend league table (35%), and the matchday programme (22%).
- **In comments, respondents expressed their expectations for easier and more tailored web experiences, as well as more and earlier promotions.**

Themes from the interviewees
Nine 15-20 minute long qualitative interviews were conducted with the 25 survey respondents we contacted who indicated interest in a follow-up interview. We spoke with 2 females and 7 males ranging in age from 24 to 65. All participants were very aware of climate change and all had already been taking action prior to Green Football Weekend.

Because these fans had an overall positive support for Green Football Weekend, which aligned with the Sky survey, the interviews focused on fans’ perceived concerns, obstacles, and recommendations for improvements.

- **Interviewees agreed on the relevance of the campaign and were all in favour of a Green Football Weekend 2024.** Overall, interviewees acknowledge that there is a need for a campaign like Green Football Weekend that manages to unite a variety of football stakeholders behind one shared goal and have expressed the wish for it to take place more often than once a year.
- **Interviewees perceived lacking club participation on Green Football Weekend as negative.** They noticed that key stakeholders, including their own or other clubs did not get involved which they perceived negatively and/or identified as a reason for why fans did not engage with Green Football Weekend. Respondents also mentioned that clubs, leagues, governing bodies, etc., set the scene for fans to make decisions and therefore need to “do their bit” as well.
- **Interviewees mentioned that they have come across Green Football Weekend rather late or via the periphery.** Many of their friends and acquaintances didn't hear about Green Football Weekend at all, or only heard on the weekend itself.
- **Interviewees want climate activations, like Green Football Weekend, to have a legacy.** Respondents suggested it needs to be someone’s responsibility to keep the

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conversation and actions going pre and post Green Football Weekend, to truly make football more sustainable.

- **Interviewees who were supporters of lower league clubs** mentioned the perceived disproportionate coverage of games and clubs' activities depending on the division they're in. Interviewees mentioned a need to differentiate between the women's and the men's game as well as between the grassroots, semi-professional and professional game. More equal representation but also a differentiation in terms of the campaign's strategy and messaging were raised.

- **Interviewees know that they have to do their bit, yet they are also aware of professional football's unsustainable mode of operation which needs to be addressed.** Short-haul flights and sponsors with high carbon emissions were specifically cited.

- **Interviewees indicated the tension of balancing "fun and entertaining" promotions with the risk of devaluing "the seriousness of the message".** Cited examples include the Layer Up Challenge and hugging a tree, which risk coming across as gimmicky or tokenistic, particularly among climate-invested segments.

### Reception from clubs and their feedback

**Surveying fans taking part in the action tournament**

We conducted 30-minute interviews with seven participating clubs: four from the Premier League (three men's teams and one women's) and one from each of the Championship, League One and League Two. Six of the seven interviewees were employed by the club itself, and the remaining one was a Club Foundation staff member. Interviewees worked in communications, engagement or sustainability divisions at the clubs.

- **Clubs felt the messaging was really positive.** Some also felt positively that it spanned across all divisions of football.

- Interviewees expressed that Green Football Weekend gives clubs an **opportunity to showcase what they're doing, talk to fans about it and engage them to take action.** It also allows them to showcase what they are doing, the progress they are making and the challenges they face.

- **Clubs are focused on longer-term sustainability work and want their Green Football Weekend activities to reflect that.** They are less keen to make big changes specifically around the campaign.

- **Clubs are happy / keen to work together on sustainability.** They see learning from each other as important.

- **Fan travel is a priority issue.** Eating sustainability and reusable cups/recycling are seen to be the other most relevant issues. Reducing energy consumption is also important.

- Clubs feel that **reward and recognition for fans is critical** to encourage them to adopt new habits.

- More clubs are acknowledging the importance of and **starting to identify and support players who want to champion sustainability.** Authenticity is key - it needs to be an issue a player or manager genuinely cares about.

- Team education on climate issues is seen to be important to engage players.

- Asking fans to score green goals to protect our world and help their club win the Green Football Cup **worked really well for younger audiences but not necessarily for the broader fan base.**
● Clubs are under constant media scrutiny and can be cautious about speaking out about climate when they feel they don't have their house in order (e.g. a published sustainability strategy).
● To maximise their engagement, clubs need at least six weeks of preparation time.
● Clubs are keen to prioritise this issue, but some also feel the season is already crowded with different campaigns.
● It would be easier for clubs to engage if the leagues are really clear with clubs about their support.
● Clubs want a really clear, simple call to action to engage with. Green Football Weekend's asks weren't always clear enough.
● It's hard for clubs to engage fans if the team is doing badly - it can make fans angry and won't get the attention it deserves.
● The window for focus is short: a week could work better than a weekend, when most attention will be on the match itself.
● Executive boards need the right arguments for clubs to engage more meaningfully in Green Football Weekend.
● Clubs—and club CCOs—aren't always joined up internally. Communicating with the right people within the club is critical.

Learnings
Green Football Weekend 2023 demonstrated the ability to reach and engage the football fans who are concerned about climate and are most often already taking action, helping them to show the action they’re taking and then do more or commit to more. A greater challenge will be connecting to the probable larger number of fans who are concerned about climate but are not acting or sharing that they are acting, generating even greater outcomes next year. The good news is that the large majority of the public is concerned about climate change, and football fans are no exception.

Mobilising fans to take climate action
The patterns in this report largely aligned with the previous efforts analysing football fans in the context of climate change. Situating the Green Football Weekend findings within previous research, the following general recommendations with regards to mobilising football fans on climate change.

1. Reach fans early with a recurring and clear time-bound call to action. Fans that took action report lack of awareness amongst them and their peers, and many of the actions require and benefit from setting plans or preparation to drive greater adoption.

FOR EXAMPLE
Promote a headline action in advance of Green Football Weekend along with an immediate step that can be taken so that it is part of one's default plans for the weekend.
2. Make climate action normal and expected by featuring fans in sport communications. Individuals drastically underestimate how many of their peers believe climate action is important and expected of them. Make this expectation more evident, and make taking action feel more normal. Showing that others within a group are taking action has been shown to spur sustainable action.

3. Align with fans’ own values for an impact that resonates. Not all fan groups are the same, so engage with them as they see themselves. Focus on the fan groups to engage and align aspects of the campaign to each of the groups and their local environment.

4. Clubs/leagues should lead by example so individuals believe in their impact. Inaction by clubs provides excuses for fans to not engage, believing their action doesn’t matter if the large club and league system’s carbon-generating actions cancel out their own positive actions. Clubs and governing bodies can show that they take climate change seriously by acting on it.

5. Maximise fan engagement through research-based climate communications. Tailor easy-to-apply guidelines like Climate Outreach’s Britain Talks Climate resource, including their Climate Visuals principles, and Rare’s 8 Principles for Effective and Inviting Climate Communication.

6. Draw attention to fewer, high-impact, actions. While everyone should have an action that is accessible to them, multi-campaign studies are showing that campaigns and interventions with fewer higher-impact actions can have greater impact than those with more lower-impact actions.

7. Keep an eye on all activations for a complete campaign assessment. While more resource intensive, tracking data points on community activations, media reach and in-stadium fan engagement can draw a better-rounded overview of the campaign impact.

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2 Rare. (2022). *Climate Culture Index*. Rare.org.
Measuring Green Football Weekend 2024

Thanks to many supportive partners who shared the data they captured, we were able to create this report on Green Football Weekend following the campaign. For future editions, we have identified the opportunity to plan in advance the most critical measures, and coordinate data capture and reporting to benefit each stakeholder and the campaign as a whole.

- **Coordinate the performance measures that matter most.** Establish Key Performance Indicators and a coordinate means of measuring these KPIs across partners who play key roles in engagement. For instance, a KPI to convert awareness into online engagement might result in a coordinated plan to create UTM codes to track sources of traffic to online destinations.
- **Plan for deeper learning where performance might most be improved.** Devise measurable tests focused on engaging the potentially large number of fans who are concerned about climate but are not currently taking action or sharing that they are taking action.
- **Engage in on-the-ground research to find opportunities in the fan experience.** In person research with fans both at matches and at on-location promotions can reveal more about the obstacles and opportunities for driving engagement and activation. Advance coordination of resources and access to the events would be necessary.

**Data collection**

- Reach data was collected from partners and the social media tools Audiense and Pulsar
- Web analytics data was collected from PlanetLeague and Pledgeball as well as greenfootball.com for the period of 19 January to 5 February.
- The fan survey was disseminated by PlanetLeague and Pledgeball following Green Football Weekend.
- Fan interviews were conducted in March.

**Contributors**

The following organisations and people contributed to this report.

- **Count Us In** and **Rare** collected data on social media engagement, Greenfootballweekend.com analytics, and helped aggregate and analyse overall campaign performance.
- **Jennifer Amann**, doctoral researcher, University of Brighton, provided fan survey design and analysis as well as fan interview research and analysis.
- **Planet League** provided analytics from their action platform.
- **Pledgeball** provided analytics from their action platform.
- **Sky** provided customer survey insights
GREEN FOOTBALL WEEKEND 2024 WILL GROW IN SCALE AND IMPACT

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