

## BLOG REPORT

# EFL Private Equity Value Creation: Monetising Players as a Digital Asset Portfolio



## The Shifting Landscape of Football Revenue and the PE Opportunity

Private Equity (PE) firms have historically honed their due diligence capabilities with a laser focus on financial metrics, market share, operational efficiencies, and future revenue projections. Their comfort zone lies in dissecting balance sheets, projecting cash flows, and modeling the synergistic effects of strategic acquisitions. This traditional approach has served them well across a myriad of industries. The world of elite sports properties is no exception, having seen significant PE investment in recent years, from football clubs, cricket franchises and basketball teams to F1 franchises and SailGP teams to entire sports leagues.

English EFL football clubs stand on the precipice of a profound transformation in how they generate revenue and create sustainable value. By adopting a disruptive strategy that marries the rigorous principles of private equity portfolio management with cutting-edge data, AI, and robust cybersecurity resilience, clubs can fundamentally reshape their financial future. This innovative approach centers on viewing and actively monetising elite players not merely as sporting talent, but as a dynamic and highly lucrative portfolio of digital assets.

- **The Challenge:** For many EFL clubs, traditional revenue streams—matchday income, limited broadcast deals, and sporadic sponsorship—are proving insufficient to fuel ambition and ensure long-term sustainability in an increasingly competitive sports landscape. The imperative to diversify and grow is more urgent than ever.
- **The Opportunity:** The exponential growth of the digital economy presents an unprecedented, largely untapped frontier for football clubs. This is where significant value creation and profitable revenue growth can be found, transforming fans into active digital consumers and players into high-value digital IP.
- **The Disruption:** This article proposes a fundamental shift: applying private equity's disciplined asset management, leveraging advanced data and AI capabilities, and fortifying this ecosystem with strategic cybersecurity. This isn't about marginal gains; it's about a holistic re-engineering of the club's revenue model.
- **Thesis Statement:** The strategic adoption of private equity portfolio management best practices, specifically focused on **monetising players as a digital asset portfolio**, is the definitive new approach for **EFL Private Equity Value Creation**. Underpinned by robust data analytics, AI innovation, and unwavering cybersecurity resilience, this strategy offers a unique pathway to maximise profitable digital revenue growth and achieve significant disruption within the next 18 months.

## Private Equity Value Creation: Monetising Players as a Digital Asset Portfolio

- **Football Redefined: An Investment Portfolio of Digital Assets:** This disruptive approach redefines how EFL clubs perceive and manage their most valuable resource: their players. Rather than singular entities, players are collectively treated as a diversified, high-growth portfolio of **digital assets**, ripe for strategic investment and monetization, a hallmark of private equity value creation.

- **The Player as a Multi-Faceted Digital Asset for Monetisation:** Beyond their athletic prowess, each player possesses a rich and monetizable digital footprint and intellectual property (IP). This includes:
  - **Image and Likeness Rights:** Their visual identity, invaluable for merchandising, licensing in video games, and use in new digital experiences (e.g., metaverse activations).
  - **Voice and Persona:** Audio rights, crucial for immersive fan engagement, voice assistants, or personalized digital content.
  - **Social Media Footprint:** Their audience reach, engagement metrics, and influence across platforms – a direct channel for brand partnerships, content distribution, and targeted advertising.
  - **Performance Data & Biometrics:** Anonymized and aggregated data from on-field performance, training, and biometric monitoring, which can be leveraged for insights, gamification, and even specialized data products.
  - **Unique Digital Content Creation:** Their ability to generate authentic, compelling content (short-form videos, live streams, interactive Q&As) that resonates directly with fans and creates new digital product opportunities.
  
- **Portfolio Management for Exponential Value Creation and Monetisation:** A unified, portfolio-centric strategy, mirroring PE best practices, aggregates individual player value to create exponential returns:
  - **Synergistic Monetisation Campaigns:** Orchestrating cross-promotional digital campaigns that leverage the combined reach and appeal of multiple players simultaneously, maximizing sponsorship value and fan engagement.
  - **Economies of Scale in IP Monetisation:** Centralizing the negotiation and licensing of digital IP rights for the entire squad (or specific player groups) to secure more lucrative deals than fragmented individual contracts. This creates a stronger bargaining position.
  - **Diversified Revenue Streams & Risk Mitigation:** Spreading digital monetization efforts across the squad reduces reliance on any single player's brand or performance, creating more resilient revenue streams. The portfolio approach actively mitigates risks associated with individual player fluctuations.
  - **Aggregated Data for Enhanced Commercial Intelligence:** Collecting and analyzing digital performance across the entire player portfolio provides unparalleled insights into fan preferences, content trends, and commercial opportunities, driving more intelligent monetization strategies.
  
- **Profitable Growth through Strategic Digital IP Management:** This PE-inspired approach directly fuels profitable growth by:
  - **Unlocking New Digital IP Revenue Streams:** Developing innovative, direct-to-consumer digital products and services, such as exclusive player-led NFTs, personalized AI-driven fan interactions, or premium subscription tiers for behind-the-scenes content that leverages collective player IP.
  - **Optimizing Existing Digital Channels:** Transforming standard club channels into high-conversion digital storefronts, leveraging player appeal to drive merchandise sales, enhancing fan engagement on social platforms to attract premium brand partnerships, and creating highly targeted advertising opportunities.
  - **Strategic Investment in Digital Asset Development:** Player acquisition, development, and retention strategies are augmented to include an assessment of a player's digital potential and brand-building capacity. This involves investing in media training, content creation support, and

digital strategy for players, enhancing their overall asset value.

- **The Disruptive Edge for EFL Clubs (Next 18 Months):** This private equity portfolio approach offers a profound and achievable differentiator. While top-tier clubs have larger legacy operations, many EFL clubs possess passionate, digitally-engaged fan bases and players with significant untapped digital appeal. By rapidly adopting this model over the next 18 months, EFL clubs can:
  - **Outpace Competitors:** Develop sophisticated digital monetization and value creation strategies far quicker than rivals still operating on traditional models.
  - **Attract & Retain Top Talent:** Offer players a clear pathway to grow their personal digital brand and maximize their digital IP earnings, making the club a highly attractive destination that nurtures both sporting and commercial potential.
  - **Forge Deeper Fan Engagement:** Build more personalized, interactive, and monetizable digital relationships with fans globally, transforming them from passive consumers into active participants and digital customers.
  - **Generate Significant New Capital:** The strategic aggregation and active monetization of player digital IP can generate substantial new capital, which can be reinvested into squad development, club infrastructure, and further digital innovation, creating a virtuous and self-sustaining cycle of growth and value creation.

## Data, AI, and Cybersecurity Resilience as the Foundation for Digital Growth

- **The Digital Backbone of PE Portfolio Management:** A sophisticated private equity-style approach to player management and digital asset maximization is fundamentally dependent on a robust and intelligent digital infrastructure. Without this technological bedrock, the aspirations of digital value creation and monetisation remain theoretical.
- **Data as the New Currency of Football:** High-quality, comprehensive data is the crucial element for understanding player value, predicting market trends, optimizing fan engagement strategies, and identifying new monetization opportunities. It powers every decision within the digital asset portfolio.
- **AI for Predictive Power and Optimization:**
  - **Data-Driven Player Performance:** AI-powered analytics can analyze vast datasets of player metrics (on-field performance, training loads, biometric data) to optimize training regimes, inform tactical decisions, and predict injury risks, thereby enhancing on-field performance and market value as a digital asset.
  - **Data-Driven Scouting:** AI algorithms revolutionize talent identification by processing global scouting data, social media sentiment, video analysis, and performance statistics to unearth hidden gems and assess potential with unprecedented accuracy, often at an earlier stage, securing talent at lower cost for future digital upside.
  - **Personalized Digital Experiences:** AI enables clubs to tailor digital content, interactions, and marketing messages to individual fan preferences, maximizing engagement, conversion rates, and revenue per fan by delivering hyper-relevant experiences, thereby enhancing the monetization potential of the digital asset portfolio.
- **Cybersecurity as a Growth Enabler, Not Just a Shield:** Cybersecurity is no longer merely a protective measure; it is a critical enabler of digital growth and value creation. Without an ironclad security posture, the trust, reliability, and secure environment necessary for digital transactions, fan interactions, and IP monetization are compromised, severely hindering revenue potential and

eroding the value of digital assets.

- **Digital Resiliency for Uninterrupted Growth:** Emphasize the importance of a resilient digital infrastructure capable of withstanding sophisticated cyberattacks, rapidly recovering from breaches, and ensuring continuous operation of all digital platforms and revenue-generating activities. This minimizes downtime and protects critical revenue streams flowing from the monetized digital assets.

## Data-Driven Player Performance, Scouting, and Digital IP Management

- **Integrated Data Ecosystem for Player Management:**
  - **On-Field Performance Data:** Deep analytics on player statistics, physical data, and tactical contributions to inform coaching, player development, and market valuation. This directly impacts their perceived value as a sporting asset within the portfolio.
  - **Off-Field Digital Footprint Analysis:** Comprehensive tracking and analysis of a player's digital presence across social media, streaming platforms, and other digital channels to understand their brand reach, influence, and engagement metrics. This quantifies their value as a digital asset for commercial partners.
- **Optimizing Talent Acquisition with Data-Driven Scouting:**
  - **Global Talent Identification:** Leveraging big data analytics and AI to identify promising talent pools globally, often before they become widely recognized, allowing for strategic and cost-effective acquisition. This includes assessing not just sporting ability but also digital potential and marketability, critical for the digital asset portfolio.
  - **Risk Assessment and Fit:** Data-driven insights provide a holistic view of potential recruits, including performance consistency, injury history, personality profiles, and market fit, reducing recruitment risks. This extends to analyzing their existing digital footprint for potential risks or opportunities that could impact their asset value.
- **Strategic Digital Data Asset Management of Player IP Rights:**
  - **Defining and Valuing Digital IP:** Clearly delineating what constitutes a player's digital intellectual property (e.g., image rights, voice rights, unique digital content, social media presence, likeness, personal data generated by their digital activity). This forms the core of the monetizable digital asset.
  - **Proactive Monetisation Strategies:** Developing innovative strategies to monetize these digital assets, such as creating exclusive digital content for specific fan segments, licensing image rights for games/metaverse applications, and structuring brand ambassador endorsements that maximize digital reach and engagement. This requires a dynamic approach to IP licensing and content creation to continually extract value.
  - **The "Win-Win-Win" Paradigm for Value Creation:** This approach ensures that the monetization of digital IP rights is mutually beneficial for the club (**increased revenue and asset value**), the players' talent agencies (enhanced deal value and broadened reach), and the players themselves (personal brand growth, diversified income streams, and greater control over their digital identity). This collaborative model fosters transparency, trust, and shared success, which is crucial for player buy-in, long-term asset value, and ultimately, sustainable **value creation** for the club's digital asset portfolio.

## Placing a Digital Bodyguard Cybersecurity Resiliency Around Players and Their Families

- **The Unseen Threat to Digital Assets:** In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the very players who represent lucrative digital data assets and contribute significantly to the club's PE value creation strategy are increasingly vulnerable. The spiralling sophistication of AI-augmented cybercrime poses a direct threat not only to individual privacy and well-being but also to the significant digital monetization potential of both the club and the players. An attack on a player's digital security is a direct threat to a valuable asset within the club's PE portfolio.
- **Specific AI-Augmented Cybercrime Threats Impacting Asset Value:**
  - **AI Deepfakes:** Maliciously fabricated audio or video content that can damage a player's reputation, create public relations crises, and undermine trust, directly impacting endorsement deals and fan engagement – thereby depreciating their digital asset value.
  - **Ransomware Attacks:** Targeting sensitive personal or club data, these attacks can disrupt operations, compromise player privacy, and hold valuable digital assets hostage, leading to severe financial loss, reputational damage, and operational paralysis, destroying monetisation opportunities.
  - **AI Voice Cloning:** Used for sophisticated phishing attacks, impersonation, fraud, or harassment, threatening a player's identity and control over their digital persona, and potentially compromising sensitive information crucial for their digital integrity.
  - **Doxing / Digital Harassment:** The public release of private information and organized online abuse can severely impact a player's mental health, distract from performance, and deter potential sponsors. This directly affects their well-being and ability to deliver on-field, thereby impacting their overall asset value and marketability.
  - **AI Copyright Infringement:** Unauthorized use of a player's digital image, voice, or content, leading to dilution of their digital IP rights, loss of potential revenue, and brand misappropriation, directly undermining the monetisation strategy.
- **The Impact on Player Performance and Digital Monetization:** Without a robust digital bodyguard in place, these threats directly jeopardize a player's focus, mental well-being, and ability to perform at their peak. Critically, the digital monetization potential of the club and the players – including lucrative digital IP rights, brand ambassador endorsements, and content revenue – risks being destroyed or significantly diluted. The value created through PE portfolio management can be rapidly eroded if these digital assets are not protected.
- **The "Digital Bodyguard" Solution: Safeguarding Value:** This proactive and comprehensive cybersecurity resiliency strategy is designed to protect the integrity and value of the players as digital assets. It's a proactive investment in value preservation and enhancement.
  - **Proactive Threat Intelligence & Monitoring:** Utilizing advanced AI-driven tools to continuously monitor the digital landscape for emerging threats, identify vulnerabilities specific to players, and detect malicious activities targeting them and their families. This includes monitoring for dark web mentions and suspicious digital activity.
  - **Personalized Digital Security Protocols:** Implementing tailored cybersecurity measures for individual players and their immediate families, including secure communication channels, advanced privacy settings optimization across all platforms, multi-factor authentication, and identity theft protection services.
  - **Reputation Management & Crisis Response:** Establishing rapid response protocols for

managing and mitigating the fallout from deepfakes, doxing, or other digital attacks, including legal support, digital forensics, and professional digital clean-up services to control narratives and protect the player's brand value.

- **Digital IP Protection & Enforcement:** Actively safeguarding and enforcing the digital intellectual property rights of players against infringement through digital rights management (DRM) technologies, legal actions, and proactive content monitoring, ensuring maximum value extraction from their digital personas.
- **Education & Awareness:** Providing ongoing, bespoke training for players and their families on cybersecurity best practices, recognizing social engineering tactics, secure use of social media, and safe online behavior. This empowers them to be the first line of defense in protecting their own digital assets.
- **A Strategic Investment in Value Preservation:** Investing in a "digital bodyguard" is not merely a defensive cost but a strategic investment that preserves and enhances the profitability of the club's digital assets and secures the lucrative upside of maximizing digital IP rights. It ensures the longevity and integrity of the player pool as a core component of the PE portfolio management strategy, directly contributing to long-term **value creation**.

## Conclusion: The Future of Football Revenue Growth and PE Value Creation

- **Recap:** This blog has unveiled a transformative approach for EFL clubs: adopting private equity portfolio management for players, viewing and **monetising them as highly valuable digital/data assets**. This paradigm is rigorously underpinned by the foundational pillars of data, AI, and comprehensive cybersecurity, including the crucial "digital bodyguard" for players and their families.
  - **Competitive Advantage in a Digital Era:** Clubs embracing this integrated strategy will gain a significant and disruptive competitive advantage in attracting and developing talent, engaging fans on a global scale, and securing innovative, lucrative partnerships in the rapidly evolving digital landscape of modern football. This approach sets them apart as forward-thinking investment opportunities.
  - **Long-Term Sustainability and Profitability:** This forward-thinking model ensures more sustainable and diversified revenue growth, moving EFL clubs beyond traditional reliance on gate receipts and broadcast deals. It creates a robust framework for continuous **value creation** through the strategic management and monetization of digital IP, providing attractive returns for PE investors.
  - **A Call to Action for Progressive Clubs and Investors:** The opportunity for disruption and substantial **value creation** within the next 18 months is immense. Progressive EFL clubs must act decisively to implement this innovative paradigm, positioning themselves as leaders in digital football. For Private Equity firms, this represents a compelling and strategically sound investment thesis, where traditional sporting assets are unlocked for exponential digital returns. The era of the digital player asset is here, and those who master its management will redefine success and **EFL Private Equity Value Creation**.
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*Jon is the co-founder of Arahi, a boutique consulting advisory company in the private equity sector in 2021, having spent two decades in Private Equity Value Creation.*

*Jon started his career with PwC where he worked across the Audit, Training and Transaction Services functions.*

*He subsequently moved into Private Equity, where he spent more than 13 years in senior roles at Lloyds Development Capital (LDC) and Inflexion, establishing and leading the value creation functions at both firms. His responsibilities included managing LDC's investment in Virgin Racing Formula1 team as the COO.*

*Jon is a veteran of over 100 value creation programmes and has held a wide variety of roles including CFO, COO, CIO, Executive Chair, and Non-Executive Chair. He currently serves as Chair of a Bridges Fund Management business, Nexgen Services.*

*Jon is an authority in the Private Equity industry, he leads several flagship courses for the British Venture Capital Association, and is a regular speaker for PEP-Talks, a peer-to-peer network for investment-backed CEOs. Jon is a published author with Strategic Value Creation (2024) which he wrote together with Rupert Morrison.*

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*David is the Founder & Managing Partner at TIAKI, a niche consulting practice helping executive leadership in sport make confident, informed decisions on their risks, investments and business outcomes powered by secure 'data-at-scale'. He collaborates with bold and determined leaders in the sports ecosystem to define their data, AI and cybersecurity strategies to deliver sustainable value.*

*David's vision for TIAKI is to empower sports franchise CEOs, leadership teams, sports media broadcasters and investors in the global sports industry with strategic advisory frameworks to deliver secure, pioneering digital fan experiences and new ecosystem business models to achieve breakthrough returns.*

*David has over 20 years of strategy and technology enabled business transformation experience, providing consulting expertise in cloud native technologies, data strategy, digital business enablement and cybersecurity strategy. He is passionate about helping talented leadership teams succeed in securely growing their differentiated business models in the data-driven, digital sports economy.*

*Based in Stockholm, David previously worked for IBM Consulting, EY, Accenture Strategy and Orange Business. He studied Chemistry at Durham University and holds an MBA from Trinity College, Dublin Business School.*



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