

A close-up, low-angle shot of a diverse group of people, primarily women, cheering enthusiastically. Their hands are raised in the air, and they are all smiling or shouting. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting an outdoor setting at dusk or dawn. The background is blurred, focusing attention on the crowd's energy.

✱ Together

Why the 90-minute match

is no longer enough.

The Changing Face of Fandom

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The changing face of fandom:

Why the 90-minute match is no longer enough

According to a recent YouGov survey of fans who travel for sport, live music (38%) and food trucks or stands (35%) ranked as the top two motivators for attending or engaging with an event if they were linked to a sporting fixture.

Those are the building blocks of any great fanzone: enticing fans from near and far to engage with your brand, and ultimately making a fanzone a destination all its own. Today, the fanzone is no longer just a holding pen with a burger van; it is a vital commercial engine that encourages real-life connection with other fans, the team, and the venue itself.

In a climate where the cost-of-living makes every pound spent a considered choice, fans are demanding more value from their day out. Fanzones are the ultimate tool for capturing modern attendance because they cater directly to the desire for socialisation, interactive technology, and a festival-like atmosphere. They serve as the critical bridge between the digital world younger demographics inhabit and the physical reality of the game.



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Chapter 1



Fandom is Now Fluid

Engaging younger audiences with personality-driven activation

Known for short attention spans and a preference for bite-sized media, it's perhaps no surprise that Gen Z don't necessarily become fans of a single team by inheritance or default. The days of supporting the local club purely because your parents did are fading.

Instead, their loyalties are highly fluid, driven by individual personalities, creator culture, and viral moments. According to WSC Sports, **62% of Gen Z fans have discovered a new team, player, or league** through short-form video, and 76% followed a new sport, team, or player in 2025. They move at pace, often following an individual athlete from club to club, but their eyes are always open for the next big thing.



Chapter 1

What does this mean for sporting entities and brands? Youth audiences will connect with you via moments, not necessarily matches.

Once they are through the hypothetical doors, your fanzone is the ideal staging ground to give your new fans direct access to the personalities they love. Panel talks, live podcast recordings, Q&As, or even interactive challenges with digital creators bring a distinctly human, relatable feel that appeals to the social generation. You can actively design these spaces to be "clippable," providing lighting and backdrops that turn these interactions into high-quality social content. This gives an easy entry point to new audiences, piquing their interest online and driving their physical footfall into the fanzone for the next event.

However, don't overlook the Millennial core: **85% of Millennials identify as die-hard or regular fans of sport**, and they lead in "purchasing intent and willingness to buy through personalised highlights" (WSC Sports report). Dubbed "the experience generation" by Eventbrite, Millennials invest heavily in real-life cultural experiences. By offering premium, personality-driven activations, fanzones provide the exact cultural cachet this generation is willing to spend their time and money on.



Chapter 2



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Women in sport and the shift in spending power

Women's sport has evolved from a growth area into one of the most powerful segments in the UK's sporting landscape. EY-Parthenon's Sports Engagement Index notes that amongst women's football followers, **35% started following the sport within the last two years**, and 66% within the last five. Total attendance for women's professional football in the UK hit an incredible 2.12 million in 2024.



Chapter 2



Mark Waugh/The Guardian

This rapid influx is creating a completely different matchday atmosphere, and crucially, a different commercial blueprint. Unlike the tribal and often male-dominated environments of traditional fixtures, crowds at women's sports are notably more inclusive, family-oriented, and community-driven.

This demographic shift brings a marked difference in spending habits. Research indicates that this newer, diverse fanbase prioritises the holistic event experience. They are willing to spend significantly on high-quality, diverse food and beverage offerings

(moving far beyond the traditional pint and pie), experiential merchandise, and interactive brand pop-ups.

For brands and rights holders, this means fanzones cannot simply be a "copy-paste" of the men's game. To unlock this massive spending power, the industry must champion the creation of safe, welcoming spaces that cater to collective celebration. The women's sport fanzone is essentially a blank canvas, allowing brands to innovate and build deep, authentic loyalty with a highly receptive audience.



Chapter 3

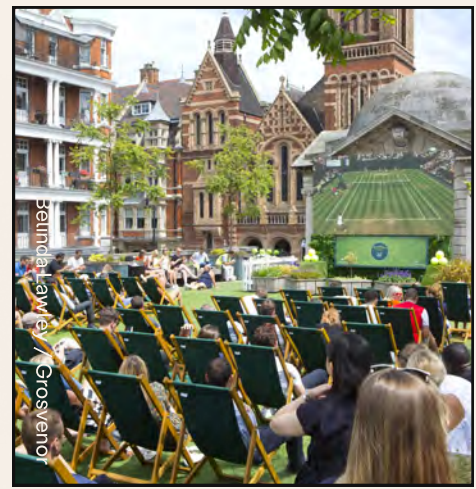
Second screen experiences bleeding into real life

As a generation, Millennials and Gen Z look for a multi-layered experience. Even when watching sports at home, 77% of fans say that they have participated in at least one sports-related activity while watching—whether looking up live stats, checking rival fan opinions on social media, updating fantasy sports leagues, or texting in group chats.



Chapter 3

A modern fanzone doesn't fight this behaviour; it effectively brings all of these concurrent activities into one physical place. The "phygital" (physical + digital) expectation is now the baseline. Rather than forcing fans to put their phones away, the most successful live events embrace the second screen as a tool for deeper engagement.



By integrating high-speed Wi-Fi, live social media aggregators on big screens, QR-code-activated predictive gaming, and real-time data visualisations, fanzones transform isolated mobile scrolling into a collective, interactive activity. Imagine a fanzone where scanning a code on your table allows you to vote for the Player of the Match, and the results update live on the main stage screen. It's about creating an environment where digital interaction instantly connects you to the thousands of fans standing right next to you.



The "phygital" (physical + digital) expectation is now the baseline.

Chapter 4



Shared experience and community vs. at-home viewing

In an era of digital saturation and the rise of remote working, physical connection holds a premium cultural currency. While watching a match at home on the sofa offers undeniable convenience, it severely lacks the visceral, shared emotional release of a crowd.



Chapter 4

Sociologists often talk about the need for a "third place" – a social surrounding separate from the two usual social environments of home and the workplace. Fanzones have become the modern "third place" for sports enthusiasts. They provide the ultimate stage for emotional connection, transforming a solitary viewing habit into a highly communal memory.

Furthermore, for younger demographics, attendance is a crucial form of social proof. The "FOMO" (Fear Of Missing Out) generated by a crowd

reacting to a last-minute winner simply cannot be replicated in a living room. Fanzones are highly "Instagrammable" by design, catering to the desire to document and share experiences. This physical connection pays off commercially, too: 77% of consumers say their trust in a brand increased following an interaction at a live event (Freeman Brand Experience Report). Fanzones build this deep, lasting trust by facilitating authentic, shared joy that you just can't get from a broadcast alone.



"FOMO" (Fear Of Missing Out)

Chapter 4

Inclusive and social forms of sport continue to draw in new audiences, creating a bigger potential market than ever before. Women's football and rugby have reached record attendance levels while attracting larger broadcast deals and sustained investment. Padel has expanded rapidly in the UK with participation rising by more than 2,500% since 2019, and pickleball has become the fastest growing sport in the United States. Together these signals point to a lasting broadening of the sport audience rather than a short-lived surge. [Elixirr]



Padel has expanded rapidly in the UK with participation rising by more than

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Chapter 5

The Festivalisation of sporting events

Ultimately, the 90-minute match is no longer the sole event; it is merely the anchor. UK sports culture is undergoing a rapid "festivalisation," where fans expect a highly curated, full-day itinerary akin to a summer music festival like Glastonbury or All Points East.

According to Ocean Outdoor, dwell time in official fanzones now averages 65 minutes, driven by the demand for diverse street food vendors, live DJ sets, interactive gaming zones, and immersive brand activations.



Chapter 5

This festival approach offers massive logistical and commercial benefits. By opening a compelling fanzone hours before kick-off, organisers can stagger crowd arrivals, easing the pressure on local transport and stadium turnstiles. Post-match, a vibrant fanzone keeps fans on-site, easing egress bottlenecks while capturing late-day food and beverage revenue.

The traditional "quick pint at the local" is being superseded by these high-production spaces that offer something for everyone –from the die-hard ultra wanting to soak up the pre-match atmosphere to the casual tag-along looking for a great meal and a lively vibe. By treating the matchday like a multi-sensory festival, forward-thinking brands and venues can capture fan attention long before kick-off, and keep them engaged well after the final whistle.



The changing face of fandom

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