irdeta

Protect. Renew. Empower.

E-BOOK

WHEN SPORTS BECOME PART OF THE MENU

DESIGNING THE STREAMING EXPERIENCE AS ENTERTAINMENT PLATFORMS INTEGRATE LIVE SPORTS

The video entertainment market is under growing pressure. Audiences are fragmented, subscription fatigue is rising and competition for attention is intensifying. Viewers manage multiple services and are increasingly selective about what they pay for and how long they stay.

In response, entertainment platforms are rethinking their strategies. Ad-supported and hybrid models are becoming standard. Personalization and relevance are no longer optional. Live content that can still command real-time attention is becoming more valuable.

This is where sports become central to the discussion.

Pay-TV operators, telcos, broadcasters, studios and general entertainment streamers are increasingly integrating sports into broader entertainment offers. Global platforms are moving in this direction to attract premium audiences and strengthen engagement in an increasingly competitive market.

With a new cycle of major international sports events on the horizon, many platforms are accelerating these plans. But adding sports is not just a content decision. It is a platform decision.

Sports introduce operational and audience-related complexities that differ fundamentally from on-demand entertainment. Live audiences arrive together. Performance is judged in real time. Rights are complex and dynamic. Monetization windows are short. Tolerance for failure is low.

Treating sports as just another content category leads to poor delivery and architectures that fail to scale, resulting in higher costs, greater operational risk and missed opportunities.

This E-Book is written for teams building, upgrading or extending entertainment streaming platforms where sports are becoming part of the menu. It focuses on what sports change at a platform level and what decision-makers need to get right from the start.

The following sections describe five platform realities that shape sports-enabled entertainment streaming, across five areas: performance, user personalization, content rights, monetization and data.

Adding sports is not a content decision, it is a platform decision.

PERFORMANCE
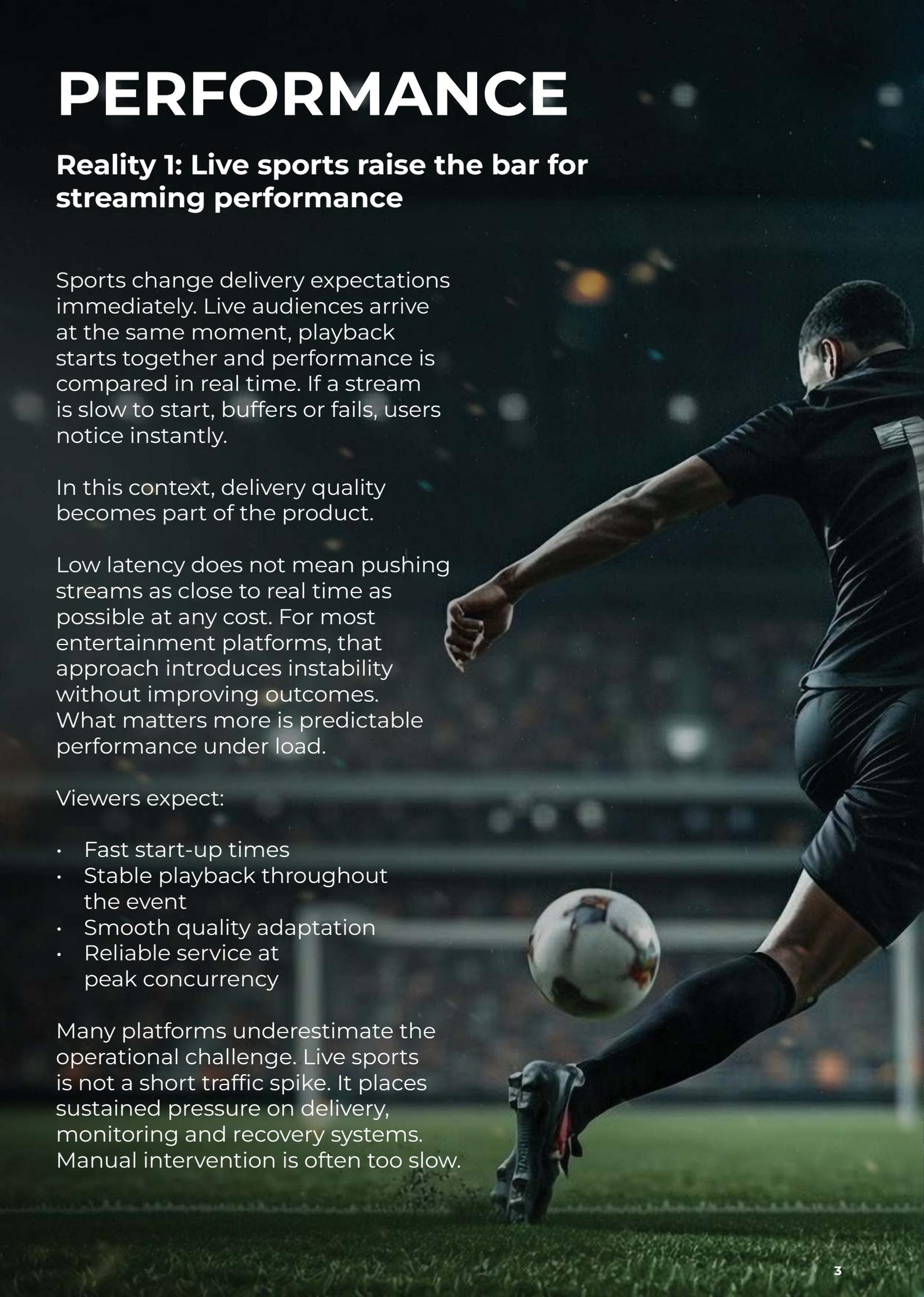
Reality 1: Live sports raise the bar for streaming performance

Sports change delivery expectations immediately. Live audiences arrive at the same moment, playback starts together and performance is compared in real time. If a stream is slow to start, buffers or fails, users notice instantly.

In this context, delivery quality becomes part of the product.

Low latency does not mean pushing streams as close to real time as possible at any cost. For most entertainment platforms, that approach introduces instability without improving outcomes. What matters more is predictable performance under load.

Viewers expect:

- Fast start-up times
- Stable playback throughout the event
- Smooth quality adaptation
- Reliable service at peak concurrency

Many platforms underestimate the operational challenge. Live sports is not a short traffic spike. It places sustained pressure on delivery, monitoring and recovery systems. Manual intervention is often too slow.

PLATFORM CAPABILITIES THAT REDUCE RISK

Multi-CDN delivery to avoid single points of failure

Elastic cloud scaling for synchronized audience growth

Fast start-up pipelines to reduce time to first frame

Real-time monitoring of playback, buffering and errors

Automated failover and recovery

Multi-DRM support across devices and regions

DECISION-MAKER TAKEAWAY

As entertainment platforms introduce live sports, operational exposure increases. Engineering for predictable performance under pressure becomes foundational.

When sports go live, streaming performance becomes the product.

PERSONALIZATION

Reality 2: Personalization must be precise, not exploratory

Personalization works differently in sports. Viewers arrive with intent. They follow specific teams, leagues and players. When recommendations miss, frustration is immediate.

In sports-enabled platforms, personalization is not about discovery. It is about relevance at the right moment.

Good sports personalization answers one question quickly:

Is this relevant to me right now?

This requires:

• Recognizing team, league and player loyalty
• Understanding live-event timing and urgency
• Prioritizing active matches over generic content

Unlike on-demand entertainment, sports personalization cannot rely heavily on experimentation. Precision matters more than variety. A recommendation that feels wrong during live play damages trust.

WHERE PLATFORMS STRUGGLE

• Applying movie-style recommendation logic to sports
• Overloading interfaces during live events
• Surfacing content users cannot access due to rights
• Failing to adapt recommendations as events start or end

PLATFORM CAPABILITIES THAT SUPPORT PRECISION

Preference-based models for teams, leagues and players

Real-time context awareness tied to event states

Rights-aware recommendation logic

Cross-device personalization continuity

Editorial control over automated recommendations

DECISION-MAKER TAKEAWAY

As sports becomes part of entertainment platforms, viewer intent becomes more explicit. Personalization must prioritize relevance, timing and fan loyalty.

In sports, relevance matters more than discovery.

CONTENT RIGHTS

Reality 3: Rights define platform flexibility

Sports rights are among the most competitive and expensive assets in media. They are time-bound, region-specific and fragmented across platforms, devices and business models. For entertainment companies expanding into sports, acquiring rights is not enough, the platform must be built to support them.

In sports-enabled entertainment platforms, rights shape how content is accessed, discovered and monetized. As rights strategies evolve, the platform must adapt without disruption. This makes rights management a core platform capability, not only a legal or commercial function.

In streaming terms, sports rights define:

- Live, replay and highlight availability
- Device and platform access
- Regional entitlements
- Monetization models

These conditions change frequently across a season. Static or hard-coded approaches do not hold.

WHERE COMPLEXITY IS UNDERESTIMATED

Complexity increases quickly when sports is introduced.

Common challenges include:

- Managing different rules for live and on-demand content
- Supporting multiple business models in parallel
- Enforcing regional restrictions without breaking playback
- Preventing discovery of inaccessible content
- When handled poorly, these issues create user frustration, operational risk and lost revenue.

PLATFORM CAPABILITIES THAT ENABLE CONTROL

Centralized rights and
entitlement management

Multi-DRM support

Token-based authentication
and authorization

Dynamic entitlement evaluation

Rights-aware content discovery

Compliance with regional regulations

DECISION-MAKER TAKEAWAY

As sports rights strategies evolve, platform complexity
increases. Rights management must operate as a
dynamic system across discovery, access
and monetization.

Rights complexity is operational,
not just contractual.

MONETIZATION

Reality 4: Attention is short. Revenue windows are shorter

Subscription models alone no longer sustain growth. Churn is normalized, and advertising is a primary growth lever. Sports delivers focused, real-time attention, but only for a limited window.

If platforms do not monetize during the moment, the opportunity is lost.

Sports monetization is constrained by limited breaks and low tolerance for disruption. Simply inserting more ads does not work. Value comes from aligning monetization with viewer focus.

What effective sports monetization looks like

- Hybrid business models (AVOD, SVOD, TVOD)
- In-stream formats that do not interrupt play
- Context-aware ad decisioning
- Monetization designed into the experience
- Advanced engagement features (e.g. tracking match progress, quizzes, trivia, polls)

WHERE PLATFORMS LOSE REVENUE

- Rigid ad stacks
- Slow integration cycles
- Limited personalization
- Fragmented delivery across devices

PLATFORM CAPABILITIES THAT UNLOCK YIELD

Support for advanced ad formats (overlays, pause ads, interactive formats)

Real-time ad decisioning using session context

Flexible ad insertion approaches

Consistent delivery and measurement across devices

DECISION-MAKER TAKEAWAY

As live sports concentrates audience attention, monetization windows become shorter. Platforms must align revenue models with the live viewing experience.

Poor ad execution harms both revenue and experience.

DATA

Reality 5: Spikes are seasonal. Growth should not be

Sports drives intense bursts of attention followed by drop-off. Acquisition is strong. Retention is the challenge.

Data determines whether sports becomes a short-term spike or a long-term growth driver.

In sports-enabled platforms, data must connect experience, monetization and retention in near real time.

WHAT DATA NEEDS TO SUPPORT

- Movement between live events, replays, highlights and entertainment
- Churn risk before, during and after sports seasons
- Content combinations that extend engagement
- Monetization performance by format and timing

WHERE PLATFORMS STRUGGLE

- Fragmented data across systems
- Delayed insights
- Limited visibility into sports-driven behavior
- Weak links between performance issues and churn

PLATFORM CAPABILITIES FOR CONTINUOUS GROWTH

Unified data collection across playback and monetization

Real-time analytics

Churn and retention modeling

Audience segmentation by sports affinity

Recommendation feedback loops

Experimentation frameworks

DECISION-MAKER TAKEAWAY

As sports drives audience spikes, retention becomes the real measure of success. Platforms must use data to convert event-driven traffic into sustained engagement.

Retention after the season defines long-term success.

A PLATFORM LENS FOR SPORTS-ENABLED ENTERTAINMENT

Sports can be a powerful accelerator for entertainment platforms. It brings urgency, attention and premium audiences. It also exposes weaknesses quickly and publicly.

The platforms that succeed are not those that add the most features. They are the ones that treat sports as a structural capability and design for performance under pressure, relevance over novelty, control over complexity, and growth beyond the season.

The five platform realities in this E-Book provide a practical lens for assessing readiness across delivery, personalization, rights, monetization, and data.

The question is no longer whether to add sports.

It is whether the platform is ready for it.
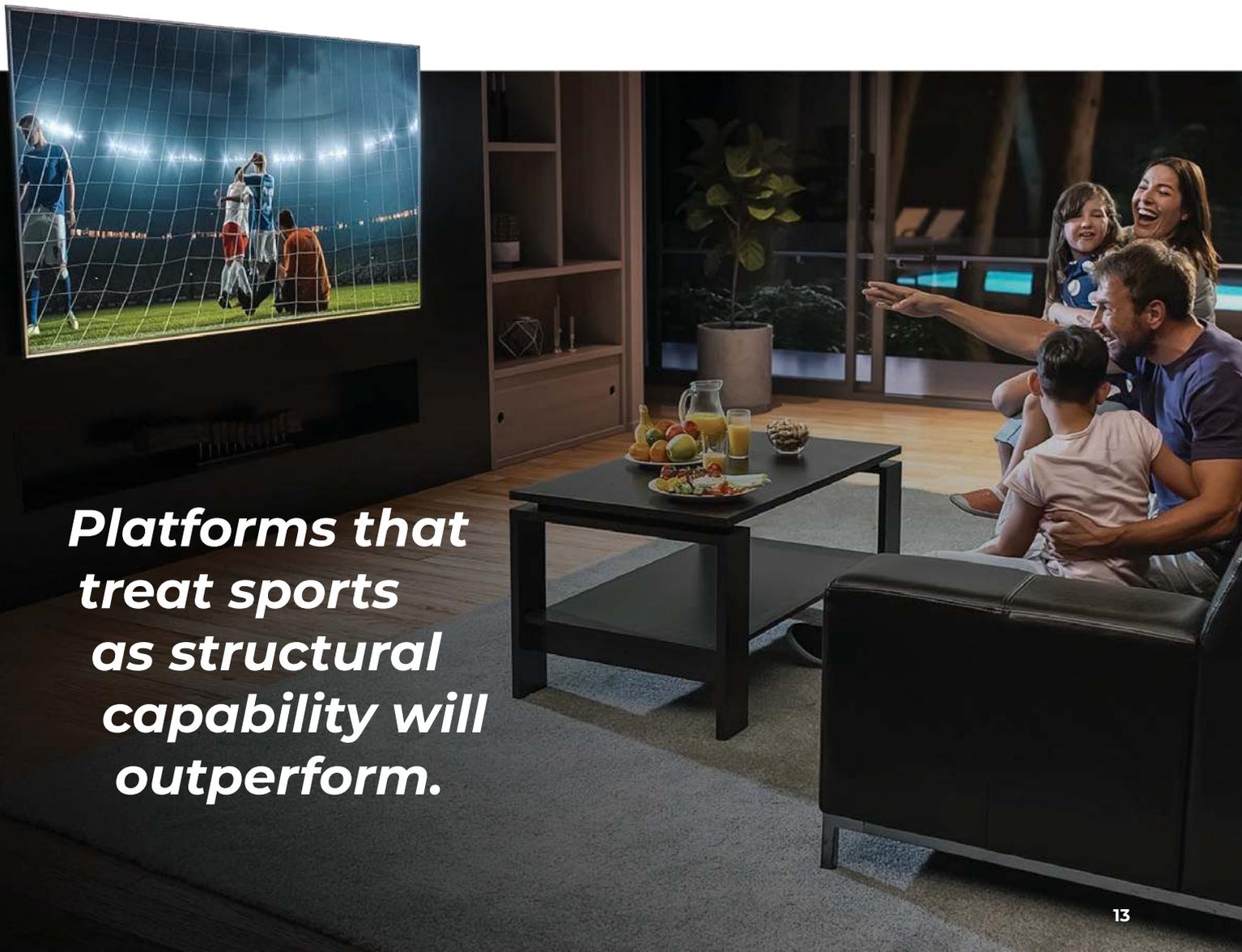
Platforms that treat sports as structural capability will outperform.

HOW IRDETO EXPERIENCE SUPPORTS YOUR PLATFORM EVOLUTION

If you are building or evolving an entertainment streaming platform and want to prepare it for live sports at scale, connecting with the experts behind Irdeto Experience is a practical next step.

Irdeto Experience is a modular, end-to-end video streaming platform trusted by leading media companies to enable secure, scalable delivery, flexible monetization and dynamic user experiences across devices. It helps operators unify broadcast and OTT, manage complex rights, combat piracy and deliver premium, personalized viewing at scale.

By addressing the platform realities outlined in this E-Book, Irdeto Experience helps entertainment providers deliver live sports efficiently and securely while enhancing the overall streaming experience and supporting long-term growth.

Contact an expert