



# Different Types of Sports Disputes in Korea

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In January 2025, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism announced that the sports industry's revenue surpassed KRW 81 trillion as of 2023. The Ministry also unveiled a plan to reach 70% public sports participation, become one of the world's top 7 sports powers, and grow the domestic sports market to KRW 105 trillion KRW by 2028.

As the Korean sports industry continues to grow, a wide range of disputes related to sports have emerged, becoming increasingly important issues. The following provides an overview of the major types of sports-related disputes in Korea.

## I . Types of Sports Disputes

### 1. Disputes related to Disciplinary Decisions

Athletes, coaches, referees, and officials in the sports sector may be subject to disciplinary action if they violate the regulations of the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee (KSOC) or the regulations of their respective sport-specific organizations. The disciplinary procedure typically involves (i) a request for disciplinary action or a complaint, (ii) investigation or audit by the relevant member organization under the KSOC (there are 64 organizations as of January 2025), or the regional or provincial sports councils (there are 17 sports councils in total), or the Sports Ethics Center under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, (iii) disciplinary decision by the Sport Fairness Committee of the relevant organization or council (in cases where jurisdiction is unclear, the KSOC makes the decision). Parties subject to disciplinary action may request a review of the decision by the KSOC's Sport Fairness Committee. If they remain dissatisfied after the review, they may file a lawsuit in court.

### 2. Contractual Disputes Involving Athletes, Management, and Clubs

In the sports industry, a wide range of contracts exist. Athletes typically sign contracts with clubs to receive a salary and participate in league competitions. They may also enter into agreements with management companies for support outside of training and competition, and sign sponsorship deals with brands for financial backing or endorsements. These varied contractual relationships often give rise to a variety of disputes.

Volleyball player Jo Song-hwa filed a lawsuit to invalidate the termination of her contract after her club unilaterally ended the agreement due to her unauthorized departure from the team.

In football, Son Heung-min, notified his former management company of contract termination, citing a breakdown of trust after the agency pursued entertainment activities on his behalf without consent. He then signed with a new management company. In response, the former agency filed a lawsuit against the new agency, claiming that their exclusive contract with Son was still valid.

Figure skating icon Kim Yuna also pursued legal action against her former management company, filing a claim for unpaid sponsorship and advertising revenue, alleging that the agency failed to properly settle the earnings.

To promote fair contracting practices and protect the rights and interests of parties involved in the sports industry, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism established and announced the Standard Contract for Professional Sports in 2021. Shin & Kim was directly involved in drafting the standard contract and worked to develop balanced and reasonable contract terms.

### **3. Disputes over Broadcasting Rights**

Broadcasting companies have a significant interest in major sports events like the World Cup, the Olympics, and professional baseball, as these events have a tremendous ability to attract and retain viewers due to strong fan loyalty. Organizations that host these sports events sell broadcasting rights, and broadcasting companies engage in fierce competition to secure these rights. This competition has driven up the cost of sports broadcasting rights, which, in turn, has led to increased disputes among broadcasting companies, sports organizations, and marketing firms.

A terrestrial broadcaster (Broadcaster A) acquired exclusive broadcasting rights from FIFA for the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Other broadcasters (B and C) filed a complaint with the Korea Communications Commission, claiming A violated broadcasting laws by failing to offer the rights at fair market prices and unjustly refused or delayed the sale. The Commission ordered A to engage in good-faith negotiations with B and C. When A failed to comply, a fine was imposed. A then filed a lawsuit seeking to overturn the order and the fine.

### **4. Disputes over Elections Within Sports Organizations**

The National Sports Promotion Act mandates the establishment of the KSOC and other sports organizations to promote sports development, including hosting sports events, international exchanges, athlete training, performance enhancement, and the welfare of sportspeople. Sports organizations elect executives according to their bylaws. In the past, business leaders or politicians often served as presidents of sports organizations due to funding or other reasons. However, as Korea's sports system has shifted focus from elite sports to public participation, and as athletes themselves have become more involved in the management of these organizations, the elections for executives in sports organizations have become increasingly competitive, leading to more disputes.

In the election for the 55th President of the Korea Football Association (KFA), candidate Hur Jung-moo filed for a court

injunction to suspend the election, citing issues such as the lack of transparency in the formation of the election committee, inadequate public notice of the schedule and procedures, the formation of an electoral body smaller than required by the by-laws, and the exclusion of coaches and athletes participating in off-site training due to the election being conducted solely through in-person voting. The court accepted the injunction, stating that “there were serious procedural violations that significantly undermined the fairness of the election and were likely to have influenced the outcome,” leading to a postponement of the election.

In another case, during the 2022 Gwangju City Sports Council presidential election (in Gyeonggi Province), a losing candidate (Candidate A) filed a lawsuit to invalidate the election, alleging that the winner had falsified academic credentials on the candidate registration form. The court ruled in favor of the Candidate A, resulting in the disqualification of the elected president.

## II . Conclusion

As illustrated by the cases above, sports-related disputes are steadily increasing across a wide range of areas. As the sports industry continues to grow, the scale of these disputes is expanding and the nature of the conflicts is becoming more complex. Therefore, when a sports-related dispute arises, it is essential to consult with a legal expert who has a deep understanding of the sports industry from the early stages of the case, in order to develop an effective response strategy.

**The Content & Entertainment Team at Shin&Kim LLC consists of leading experts with extensive experience and outstanding capabilities in the fields of sports, entertainment, and media content. We are committed to providing optimal legal advice tailored to each client’s needs. Please contact our specialists for any inquiries.**

[\[Korean version\]](#) 스포츠 관련 분쟁의 유형별 분석

## Key Contacts

**Woo-Gyun Kim**

Partner

+82-2-316-4083

wgkim@shinkim.com

**Ja-Rim Choi**

Partner

+82-2-316-1729

jrchoi@shinkim.com

## **Jiwon Hwang**

Partner

+82-2-316-1799

jwhwang@shinkim.com

## **Sangyoun Lee**

Partner

+82-2-316-4636

syounlee@shinkim.com

## **Da Yoon Shin**

Senior Foreign Attorney

+82-2-316-1749

dyshin@shinkim.com