

PANORAMIC

SPORTS LAW

China



 LEXOLOGY

Sports Law

Contributing Editors

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REGULATORY

Governance structure

What is the regulatory governance structure in professional sport in your jurisdiction?

China adopts a 'government-led, associations-administered, clubs-operated' model.

The General Administration of Sport of China (GASC), a ministry-level agency under the State Council, oversees all sport nationwide, setting strategy, drafting policy and supervising disciplinary issues.

Key associations, such as the Chinese Football Association (CFA) and Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), are non-profit organisations registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and operate under GASC supervision. They run the leagues, register athletes and enforce disciplinary codes.

Professional clubs are commercial entities that enjoy day-to-day autonomy but must comply with GASC's policies and relevant association's rules on finance, registration and disciplinary protocols. Entry to and continued participation in any league requires formal registration and ongoing certification of compliance.

Law stated - 19  2025

Protection from liability

To what extent are participants protected from liability for their on-field actions under civil and criminal law?

Chinese law grants limited immunity to participants for on-field actions, principally grounded in the voluntary assumption of risk doctrine under the Civil Code. Civil liability is generally precluded where conduct: (1) occurs within the sport's reasonable scope of engagement; (2) exhibits no intentional or grossly negligent misconduct; and (3) involves risks knowingly accepted by the injured party.

Immunity is not available under two circumstances: first, when the act is clearly intended to harm, such as a targeted strike to a vulnerable anatomical area. Second, when it constitutes a flagrant breach of safety rules amounting to gross negligence.

Criminal liability may arise if the conduct causes death or serious injury and is shown to have departed entirely from the spirit and rules of the sport, coupled with malicious intent.

Law stated - 19  2025

Doping regulation

What is the regulatory framework for doping matters in your jurisdiction? Is there also potential secondary liability for doping offences under civil or criminal law?

China operates a centralised, state-led anti-doping regime managed by the China Anti-Doping Agency (CHINADA), an agency of the GASC. The legal architecture merges the Sports Law, the World Anti-Doping Code, China's own Anti-Doping Regulations and sport-specific rules issued by national associations.

Violations trigger a two-track process: CHINADA investigates and imposes provisional suspensions, while national sports associations issue final sanctions, if applicable, ranging from two-year bans for unintentional first offences to lifetime suspensions for aggravated violations. Athletes and support personnel may appeal to CHINADA's internal review panel within 14 days, and ultimately, to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Beyond sporting sanctions, secondary civil liability may arise under tort law: coaches, medical staff or suppliers who cause health damage may face compensation claims under the Civil Code. The Criminal Law Amendment has also established the specific offence of 'impeding anti-doping management', punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment for non-athletes who provide banned substances or manipulate tests. This integrated approach shows China's strict stance: doping violations can end not only in disqualification but also in criminal prosecution of enablers and civil redress for victims.

Law stated - 19  2025

Financial controls

What financial controls exist for participant organisations within professional sport?

Financial controls of professional sports in China rests chiefly with the national sporting associations. In football and basketball, for example:

- CBA imposes an annual salary cap for 2025-2026: domestic players aggregate ceiling of 42 million yuan and floor of 14 million yuan (non-compulsory); domestic players capped at 6 million yuan each (compulsory); foreign players limited to US\$ 4.25 million in aggregate (non-compulsory);
- liquidity: CBA clubs must keep 20 million yuan in operating reserves and CFA clubs must keep 30 million yuan under 2024 rules; and
- leverage: CBA clubs cannot exceed a 70 per cent debt-to-asset ratio. CFA can place a club under administration if it posts losses above 250 million yuan over three straight seasons.

Equivalent frameworks, with sport-specific parameters, have been adopted by other national associations (eg, volleyball, table tennis).

Law stated - 19  2025

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Jurisdiction

Who has jurisdiction over the resolution of professional sport disputes in your jurisdiction, and how is this determined?

China's professional sport dispute resolution architecture encompassing internal association mechanisms and the China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS), involving strict jurisdictional hierarchy as is laid out below.

The Chinese Football Association (CFA) Dispute Resolution Committee has exclusive jurisdiction over salary defaults, contract breaches and transfer violations; sanctions (point deductions, registration bans) are enforced within the CFA ecosystem.

The Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) Dispute Resolution Committee hears all regulatory disputes involving active, registered parties and may impose fines or suspensions. Judicial recourse is statutorily deferred until internal remedies are exhausted.

Other national associations have instituted equivalent dispute-resolution frameworks.

The CCAS hears:

- appeals against disciplinary decisions (for example, doping bans, result annulments);
- athlete registration and eligibility disputes; and
- other non-commercial, non-labour disputes arising from competitive sports.

Appeals from association-level rulings must be lodged within 21 days. Labour or purely commercial matters remain outside CCAS jurisdiction and are fall to the courts or labour arbitration panels.

The jurisdictional hierarchy is:

- active entities are subject to mandatory internal resolution, followed by an optional appeal to the CCAS;
- dissolved entities (eg, bankrupt clubs) have direct recourse to the courts once the internal mechanisms lapse; and
- cross-border disputes fall under FIFA, CAS or other international bodies unless the parties contractually submit to Chinese jurisdiction.

Law stated - 19  2025

Enforcement

How are decisions of domestic professional sports regulatory bodies enforced?

Decisions rendered by domestic sports associations such as the CFA or the CBA are enforced through the associations' own disciplinary sanctions when a party refuses to comply voluntarily. For example, the CFA may levy fines, deduct league points, revoke registration eligibility, or impose transfer bans on disobedient clubs to uphold its regulatory authority within the sporting ecosystem.

Arbitral awards issued by the CCAS are legally binding awards. Prevailing parties may apply to the courts for compulsory enforcement under the Sports Law and the Arbitration Law of China.

Law stated - 19  2025

Court enforcement

Can the decisions of professional sports regulatory bodies be challenged or enforced in the national courts?

A party aggrieved by a decision of a sports association internal body must file an application for sports arbitration with the CCAS within 21 days of receiving the decisions pursuant to the Sports Law.

CCAS awards are final and binding. If a party fails to comply voluntarily, the prevailing party may seek compulsory enforcement from the court at the domicile or where its assets are located. The court may order asset seizure, account freezing or other measures to enforce the award.

A party may apply to set aside the award by the court within thirty days of receipt on any of the following statutory grounds:

- the dispute falls outside the scope of sports arbitration;
- serious procedural irregularities;
- fraudulent or concealed evidence;
- arbitrator misconduct; or
- violation of public policy.

Law stated - 19  2025

SPONSORSHIP AND IMAGE RIGHTS

Concept of image rights

Is the concept of an individual's image right legally recognised in your jurisdiction?

In China, individual's image right receives comprehensive protection through personality rights and intellectual property rights, provided the image is identifiable and its use is authorised.

Natural persons automatically acquire personality rights – without registration – over identifiable features such as facial characteristics, physique or name. Unauthorised commercial use of these attributes constitutes a personality right infringement, entitling the right-holder to seek injunctive relief and damages under tort rules.

Separately, identifiable image elements may enjoy IP protection: photographic portraits can be protected by copyright if they meet the originality threshold, and celebrity names can be registered as trademarks, conferring exclusive rights once the public reliably associates them with a specific individual.

Law stated - 19  2025

Commercialisation and protection

What are the key legal considerations for the commercialisation and protection of individuals' image rights?

Under Chinese law, the commercial use of recognisable personal attributes – portraits, names or signature gestures – requires prior, explicit consent and reasonable compensation. Absent consent, such use constitutes a personality-right infringement under the Civil Code. Licences must be in writing, detailing scope, term and revenue sharing. Individual athletes (eg, tennis players) may contract directly or through agents, team sport athletes (eg, football or basketball players) typically vest collective image-right management in their league or national association, which monetises bundled rights while guaranteeing athletes access to information and an equitable revenue share.

Unauthorised use entitles right-holders to sue for infringement under the Civil Code and obtain:

- immediate cessation of the infringing activities;
- withdrawal and deletion of all infringing materials;
- a public statement correcting any reputational harm; and
- damages for both economic loss and moral harm, calculated by reference to the infringer's unjust enrichment, the right-holder's market value (eg, prevailing endorsement fees) or statutory damages.

Law stated - 19  2025

Commercialisation and protection

How are image rights used commercially by professional organisations within sport?

Organisations enter collective licensing agreements with sponsors for the use of multiple athletes' images. For example, the CFA model contract allows clubs and league committees to use athletes' portraits either free of charge or for a fee, subject to agreed terms.

Law stated - 19  2025

Morality clauses

How can morality clauses be drafted, and are they enforceable?

In China, morality clauses are drafted and enforced under a three-tier framework anchored by the Sports Law's fair-competition mandate, the GASC's Catalogue of Violations under the Sports Competition Discipline Management Measures, and industry self-regulation.

Such clauses typically prohibit athlete misconduct including, but not limited to, fraudulent misrepresentation of age or identity, match-fixing, manipulation of results, field violence, and dissemination of inappropriate statements, with contractual obligations requiring quantifiable prohibitions and liquidated damages provisions.

Enforcement mechanisms are structured hierarchically as follows:

- industry associations impose disciplinary sanctions – for instance, the Discipline and Ethics Committee of the CBA may issue public censures, competition suspensions or lifetime bans pursuant to its Disciplinary Guidelines;
- administrative penalties apply where provincial or national sports authorities levy fines ranging from 50,000 to 500,000 yuan, confiscate illegal gains or revoke event organisation licences for one to three years, targeting moral breaches by event organisers; and
- judicial remedies are available whereby injured parties may claim reputational damages through public apologies, elimination of adverse effects and monetary compensation under the Civil Code, while criminal acts such as gambling or assault trigger investigations by public security authorities under the Criminal Law.

Law stated - 19  2025

Restrictions

Are there any restrictions on sponsorship, advertising or marketing in professional sport?

All gambling-related advertising is comprehensively prohibited under the Advertising Law; violators face fines from 0.2 to 1 million yuan and possible business licence revocation.

Tobacco sponsorship faces stringent controls. Pursuant to the Management Measures for Marathon and Related Sports Events in China and the Provisional Regulations on Strengthening Sports Advertising Management by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, tobacco title sponsorship of any sports event is strictly prohibited, while alcoholic products exceeding 20 per cent alcohol content are barred as title sponsors. Tobacco advertisements may only display corporate names on specific carriers such as event banners and scoreboards without product imagery, and are prohibited from using gifts as covert promotion channels.

Children under 10 years old can not endorse advertisement, and alcohol advertisements are banned in media targeting minors. Endorsements by minor athletes require written guardian consent and must exclude promotion of tobacco, alcohol, high-risk products or age-inappropriate services.

Sports organisations impose additional limitations, including prohibitions by the CBA and other associations on sponsorship conflicting with anti-doping regulations, for example, functional beverages containing banned substances. The Sports Law also prohibits unauthorised use of event insignia to prevent ambush marketing, and the GASC explicitly bans endorsements by artists violating laws or ethical standards.

Law stated - 19  2025

BRAND MANAGEMENT

Protecting brands

How can sports organisations protect their brand value?

Pursuant to the Trademark Law, sports organisations could apply for comprehensive multi-class registration for core identifiers such as event names, team emblems, and slogans, with critical domains including sports equipment, education and training, and entertainment services. Regular monitoring of trademark status is also essential.

If infringed, sports organisations may pursue remedies through three primary channels:

- administrative relief enables rights holders to submit infringement evidence to local intellectual property bureau or market regulators, invoking the Trademark Law to invalidate maliciously squatted trademarks and impose penalties;
- judicial redress permits initiating civil litigation under the Anti-Unfair Competition Law to demand cessation of infringement and compensation, while large-scale counterfeiting may trigger criminal investigations under the Criminal Law; and
- statutory enhanced protections under the Sports Law expressly cover event insignia, empowering rights holders to claim punitive damages for deliberate violations.

Law stated - 19  2025

Protecting brands

How can individuals protect their brands?

Individuals primarily rely on the Trademark Law and the Anti-Unfair Competition Law for safeguarding their brands. Individuals' brands protection methods are basically consistent with those of the above-mentioned sports organisations.

Law stated - 19  2025

Cybersquatting

How can sports brands and individuals prevent cybersquatting?

Sports brands and individuals may preemptively register core domain names and derivative variants – such as common spellings of personal or brand names – covering relevant goods and service classes, thereby establishing trademark rights over identifiers such as personal names and brand logos under the Trademark Law.

Pursuant to the Supreme People's Court's Judicial Interpretation on Computer Network Domain Name Disputes, cybersquatting requires simultaneous fulfilment of the following elements:

- valid rights: the rights holder possesses legitimate trademark or name rights;
- domain similarity: the disputed domain is identical or confusingly similar to the rights holder's mark, likely causing public confusion;
- no legitimate interest: the squatter lacks justifiable rights or usage intent; and
- subjective bad faith: includes registering well-known marks for commercial gain, demanding excessive resale prices or obstructing the rights holder's legitimate use.

Victims of cybersquatting may pursue civil litigation in intermediate courts to demand domain cancellation and damages under the Anti-Unfair Competition Law and the Civil Code, with compensation capped at 5 million yuan. For large-scale commercial squatting, criminal liability under the Criminal Law applies if illegal gains exceed 30,000 yuan or cause losses over 50,000 yuan, potentially resulting in imprisonment.

Law stated - 19  2025

Media coverage

How can individuals and organisations protect against adverse media coverage?

Incident response: Immediately preserve infringement evidence via notarial attestation or blockchain time-stamping. Issue factual clarifications through official channels. Request takedowns of defamatory content from online platforms under platform policies, or report violations to the Cyberspace Administration via formal complaints.

Post-factotum remedies: Initiate civil claims under the Civil Code for cessation of infringement, public apologies and damages. Pursue criminal private prosecutions or administrative complaints against commercial defamation under the Anti-Unfair Competition Law. Require platforms to fulfil statutory obligations per the Regulation on Governance of Online Violence Information.

Law stated - 19  2025

BROADCASTING

Regulations

Which broadcasting regulations are particularly relevant to professional sports?

The National Radio and Television Administration and the Central Propaganda Department of the Communist Party of China enforce content review under the Regulations on Broadcasting and Television, requiring pre-approval for overseas events and prohibiting unlawful advertising.

Technical safeguards mandated by the Regulations on the Administration of Safe Broadcasting and Television oblige broadcasters to implement disaster recovery systems and signal interruption protocols during key guarantee periods.

Law stated - 19  2025

Restriction of illegal broadcasting

What means are available to restrict illegal broadcasting of professional sports events?

Civil liability arises under the Copyright Law for unauthorised dissemination of sports programmes without statutory defences such as fair use. Rights holders may also invoke the Sports Law against commercial exploitation of event footage without organiser authorisation, requiring proof that the infringer intends to profit from it.

Administrative penalties are imposed by the National Copyright Administration under the Copyright Law for public-interest-harmful acts like unlicensed streaming with over 50,000 views, entailing confiscation of illegal gains and fines up to five-fold the illicit revenue. Broadcasting regulators may further penalise unlicensed operators under the Internet Audiovisual Programme Transmission Management Measures, including service suspension and fines of up to 30,000 yuan.

Criminal liability under the Criminal Law (copyright infringement crime) requires proof of profit-seeking intent, unauthorised reproduction/distribution of audiovisual works, and either illegal gains exceeding 30,000 yuan or dissemination to over 50,000 viewers, carrying imprisonment up to seven years. Unlicensed operations disrupt market order, and under the Criminal Law (illegal business operation crime) may be punished with sentences up to 15 years' imprisonment.

Law stated - 19  2025

EVENT ORGANISATION

Regulation

What are the key regulatory issues for venue hire and event organisation?

Under the Regulations on Public Cultural and Sports Facilities, main sports areas must not be used for non-sporting purposes, except for short-term leases (maximum 10 days) for public-welfare or large-scale cultural events. Professional events must contractually limit usage scope and duration. Additionally, the Chinese Football Association (CFA) mandates pitch dimensions of 105x68 metres with certain natural turf rated under FIFA evaluation, and prohibits other activities on the pitch seven days before a match.

Organisers must file emergency plans and are strictly liable – civilly and, if negligent, criminally – for casualties. High-risk events require advance permits and pre-event inspections.

Law stated - 19  2025

Ambush marketing

What protections exist against ambush marketing for events?

Legally, the Anti-Unfair Competition Law prohibits confusing acts or false publicity, with violators subject to injunctions and fines; the Trademark Law protects event logos against unauthorised similar use; and the Advertising Law mandates sponsor disclosure and bars unauthorised event exploitation. Practically, rights holders may contractually limit sponsorship, control venue ads, monitor infringement and pursue administrative complaints or litigation for damages if infringed.

Ticket sale and resale

Can restrictions be imposed on ticket sale and resale?

The sale and resale of event tickets in China are subject to stringent restrictions, with core measures including:

- real-name requirements: purchasers must bind tickets to the spectator's identity information at the point of sale; admission requires verification that the ticket holder's identity matches the registered information (person-ID-ticket consistency). Resale or transfer of tickets is strictly prohibited;
- prohibition against profiteering: the Public Security Administration Punishments Law explicitly bans scalping activities such as reselling sports event admission tickets above face value. Violators face administrative detention and fines; severe cases involving ticket forgery or illicit profiteering may constitute criminal offences under the Criminal Law; and
- technical countermeasures: public sports venues in certain regions integrate with government-operated real-name booking platforms, deploying algorithmic controls to block bulk purchases by virtual accounts and restrict scalper bots.

Law stated - 19 2025

IMMIGRATION

Work permits and visas

What is the process for clubs to obtain work permits or visas for foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff?

The club must apply for a work permit notification for Foreigners for foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff. Specifically, the application materials shall be submitted through the National Online Service System for Foreigners Working in China, including the application form for foreigners working in China, the labour contract, the applicant's passport and supporting documentation.

Upon obtaining the work permit notification, the aforementioned individuals may apply for a z-type visa at the Chinese embassy or consulate abroad by presenting the notification. Subject to approval, the embassy or consulate will issue a z-type visa. When entering China, foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff shall present their z-type visas and cooperate with immigration inspection. Within 30 days of entry, they shall apply for a residence permit from the entry-exit administration authority of the public security organs.

Law stated - 19 2025

Work permits and visas

What is the position regarding work permits or visas for foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, temporarily competing in your jurisdiction?

According to Chinese laws and regulations, foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff temporarily entering China to participate in sports events shall apply for an m-type visa, unless exempt under special circumstances, such as being approved by Chinese authorities and holding an international sports organisation registration card for the competition.

To apply for an m-type visa, applicants must visit the Chinese embassy or consulate in their location and submit the following materials: a formal invitation letter from the event organising committee, information about the inviting party, personal details of the invitee, athletic performance records, professional qualification certifications and supporting documentation. Generally, the duration of stay for foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff holding an m-type visa shall not exceed 90 days.

Law stated - 19  2025

Residency requirements

What residency requirements must foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, satisfy to remain in your jurisdiction long term or permanently?

Foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff seeking long-term or permanent residency in China may apply for permanent residency with the public security authorities. According to Measures for the Administration of Examination and Approval of Foreigners' Permanent Residence in China, the public security authorities may approve applications from applicants who meet the following conditions:

- they comply with Chinese laws, be in good health and have no criminal record; and
- they have made significant and outstanding contributions to China or are specially needed by the state.

As of now, the number of foreign athletes who have obtained permanent residency in China is very limited. The Foreign Permanent Resident ID Card is valid for five or 10 years. Once granted permanent residence status, foreigners may reside in China without time restrictions and may enter or exit the country using their valid passport and Foreign Permanent Resident ID Card.

Law stated - 19  2025

Residency requirements

Do the family members of foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff, legally resident in your jurisdiction have the same residency rights?

In China, family members of legally residing foreign professional athletes, coaching and administrative staff may apply for s1/s2 visas or family reunion residence permits. However, family members do not automatically obtain the same long-term or permanent residence rights as the principal applicants.

Foreign professional athletes, and coaching and administrative staff holding work visas may have their immediate family members apply for s1/s2 visas or residence permits, allowing them to accompany and reside in China for the duration of the visa's validity. However, family members are only permitted to reside and are not allowed to work.

Law stated - 19  2025

SPORTS UNIONS

Incorporation and regulation

How are professional sporting unions incorporated and regulated?

In China, professional sporting unions are incorporated and regulated under the unified framework of the Trade Union Law and the Constitution of Chinese Trade Unions, overseen by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU). No sport-specific unions exist for individual disciplines. Practitioners are integrated into the China Education, Science, Culture, Medical and Sports Trade Union, managed by its health and sports division for rights protection and industry coordination.

In the absence of legal unions, entities like the CBA establish functional alternatives such as athletes' committees, which operate under association control and lack independent union status. These committees partially emulate union roles by mediating labour disputes such as wage arrears and promoting insurance schemes but cannot initiate strikes under the Labour Law or challenge club authority autonomously. Similarly, football associations rely on committee mechanisms despite encouraging club-level unions, reflecting a state-endorsed model for collective consultation within regulatory constraints.

Law stated - 19  2025

Membership

Can professional sports bodies and clubs restrict union membership?

Professional sports clubs cannot legally restrict athletes from joining trade unions. The Trade Union Law guarantees all wage-earning workers, including professional athletes, the right to form and join unions without obstruction. However, no sport-specific unions exist in football or basketball; athletes must join their club's general union or the education-science-culture-medical-sports industrial union under the ACFTU framework. Clubs violating the prohibition on union restrictions may face complaints to local trade unions or labour authorities.

Law stated - 19  2025

Strike action

Are there any restrictions on professional sports unions taking strike action?

Professional sports unions in China face strict limitations on strike actions despite no explicit legal prohibition. Strikes must not disrupt public order or occupational safety, or organisers risk criminal charges under the Criminal Code with up to seven years' imprisonment. Actions violating the Trade Union Law – which requires unions to negotiate and resolve reasonable demands – may incur administrative detention (five to 15 days) under the Public Security Administration Law. Strikes are confined to economic grievances such as wage arrears, and political strikes or excessive actions such as site blockades. In practice, strikes in professional sports are extremely rare.

Law stated - 19  2025

EMPLOYMENT

Transfers

What is the legal framework for individual transfers? What restrictions can be placed on individuals moving between clubs?

In China, different sports associations have varying transfer regulations. When players transfer between clubs, they must comply with the respective association's rules.

According to the Chinese Football Association (CFA), player transfers must be conducted during the registration period. Outside this period, transfers are not permitted unless the player's current club agrees. If a player transfers without justifiable cause, both the player and the new club will be jointly liable for compensation.

According to the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), the transfer of foreign players is subject to the club's priority right to renew the contract. When a player's contract expires, if the original club offers a 10 per cent salary increase during the renewal period, it retains the priority right to renew, meaning the player must re-sign with the original club.

Law stated - 19  2025

Ending contractual obligations

Can individuals buy their way out of their contractual obligations to professional sports clubs?

Both the CFA and the CBA stipulate that employment contracts between players and clubs must adhere to the principles of voluntariness and mutual agreement. Once signed, all parties are strictly bound by the contract, and termination is only permitted upon contract expiration or through mutual consent. Therefore, professional athletes, coaches, or other individuals generally cannot unilaterally terminate their contractual obligations with a club by directly buying out the contract.

If a player and a new club wish to terminate the contract early by paying a breach penalty, they must first reach an agreement with the original club. If a player signs with a new club without the original club's consent, it will be deemed a breach of contract.

Law stated - 19  2025

Welfare obligations

What are the key athlete welfare obligations for employers?

Under the legal framework of China, professional football players are recognised as labourers and are entitled to the labour rights and protections stipulated in the Labour Law. For example, football clubs, as employers, are legally required to enter into written labour contracts with players, provide them with remuneration, arrange insurance coverage, supply living conditions and offer training facilities.

If players sustain an injury in the course of work, the medical treatment expenses shall be borne by the club.

Law stated - 19  2025

Young athletes

Are there restrictions on the employment and transfer of young athletes?

The regulatory framework of the CFA imposes clear restrictions on the employment and transfer of youth football players, designed to balance the protection of youth training and the needs of professional development.

Regarding employment, players under the age of 16 are not allowed to sign employment contracts. Players aged 16 or above but under 18 may sign employment contracts if they can earn income through their own labour and sustain a standard of living comparable to that of the general local public. Additionally, employment contracts must be signed jointly by the player and their guardian.

Regarding transfers, for players transferred between the ages of eight and 21, the clubs that trained the player may claim domestic training compensation from the receiving club.

Law stated - 19  2025

Young athletes

What are the key child protection rules and safeguarding considerations?

The CFA has formulated the Child Safeguarding Handbook based on FIFA's child safeguarding guidelines to ensure that youth football activities are conducted in a safe and healthy environment. The CFA requires all coaches and staff involved in youth football to undergo rigorous background checks to confirm they have no criminal record, and strictly prohibits any form of child abuse, corporal punishment or violation of children's legitimate rights and interests.

Furthermore, clubs must ensure the safety of facilities during training and matches and establish medical emergency response plans. The CFA has also established reporting channels to safeguard children's legal rights and interests in football activities.

Law stated - 19  2025

Club and country representation

What employment relationship issues arise when athletes represent both club and country?

Generally, football players are obligated to accept call-ups from their national associations and represent their national teams in matches. If a player is called up by the national association of their country of nationality to participate in national team competitions, their affiliated club must release the player.

In cases where the club's continental matches conflict with national team fixtures, the player shall, in principle, prioritise participation in national team competitions. During the call-up period, the club is responsible for providing the player with comprehensive injury and accident insurance coverage. When the release period is up, the player must return to the club within 24 hours.

Law stated - 19  2025

Selection and eligibility

How are selection and eligibility disputes dealt with by national bodies?

The General Administration of Sport of China selects and determines the eligibility of Chinese athletes for international competitions. Specifically, the selection process follows these steps:

- the head coach and coaching staff of each national football team consult and propose a preliminary list of players;
- the administrative department reviews the list;
- the selection leadership group and team committee conduct a further review;
- the final list is approved by the centre's leadership; and
- the list is published on the official website.

If an athlete or a club disagrees with the selection outcome, it may file an appeal with the Arbitration Commission of the Chinese Football Association. The arbitral award issued by the Commission is final and binding.

Law stated - 19  2025

TAXATION

Key issues

What are the key taxation issues for foreign athletes competing in your jurisdiction to be aware of?

Taxable scope covers all China-sourced income, for example competition prizes and endorsements, though international organisations' sports bonuses are exempt.

Foreign athletes enjoy a 4 per cent special adjustment rate for league bonuses such as CBA and CFA Super League plus urban maintenance and education surcharges. If resident (≥ 183 days), progressive rates of 3 per cent to 45 per cent apply, while Chinese athletes face standard rates.

China has tax treaties with multiple countries that may provide reduced rates or exemptions. Clubs or organisers are responsible for tax withholding and compliance.

Law stated - 19  2025

UPDATE AND TRENDS

Key developments of the past year

Are there any emerging trends or hot topics in your jurisdiction?

The China Commission of Arbitration for Sport (CCAS) established its dedicated Sports Arbitration Centre on 31 December 2024 to enhance operational capacity. As China's sole statutory sports arbitration body, CCAS fills a critical gap in independent dispute resolution, reflecting the revised Sports Law's emphasis on rule of law. According to the CCAS 2024 annual report, by the end of 2024, CCAS had handled over 100 cases, with football disputes dominating; innovations include consolidated arbitration, online hearings and a 24-hour emergency procedure for competition disputes. The strong arbitrator panel and dedicated centre structure further boost efficiency and credibility in 2025.

Law stated - 19  2025