

Climate-themed FAQs for Team Scotland Athletes

How can we speak out on climate when we fly around the world to get to major sporting events?

We find ourselves in a world in which, to compete in our sports, we need to fly around the globe. We are well-aware of this. One of things we would like to do is to use our platform to push for low-carbon or zero-carbon aviation fuel.

If that doesn't come to pass, Mother Nature will likely force us to curtail global, mega-sports events in favor of smaller, more local contests. No one wants to see this become reality so that's why we need to make a big effort on low-carbon and zero-carbon aviation fuel.

What are the best ways for athletes to bring up climate change to media during the Commonwealth Games and other events?

Certainly, if the weather is extreme during the Commonwealth Games, talk about its impact on your events. If that isn't the case, then athletes can still bring climate into the discussion with reporters in a variety of ways:

- After answering reporters' questions about the event/game, the athlete can pivot by saying "today's win was certainly important...what's even more important is that we win the climate game". A similar approach goes for a loss (i.e. "we can't afford to lose the climate game")
- The athlete can bring up a climate-related cause he/she is working on ("I appreciate you asking about the game; now I'd like to talk briefly about my work on [X Climate Initiative]")
- Ask the interviewer what he/she thinks we should do to make a difference on climate change
- The athlete can use Birmingham 2022's greening programs as a starting point, not a destination ("You know, Birmingham 2022 has to be commended for making these the greenest Commonwealth Games to date. But the thing is, that is not good enough. We need to do more. Much more.") Then the athlete can speak about any climate solutions he/she prefers.

What can athletes do during the Games to show that they are leading on climate?

Post videos on social media that show athletes walking or riding a bike to-from events rather than taking buses, eating plant-based meals, turning off the A/C, etc. Also brainstorming on how to make Commonwealth Games 2026 in Melbourne even greener. Use hashtags like #ClimateComeback and #ActOnClimate

How can we push politicians and other leaders in Commonwealth Games countries to take climate action?

Politicians love to talk with athletes. They understand the social capital and popularity that athletes have.

To take advantage of this, once the Commonwealth Games are over, athletes can join organizations that talk to politicians about climate change. These include Citizens' Climate Lobby, and the Climate Reality Project as well as EcoAthletes.²

What can we do as athletes to make a difference on climate change? Because it's such a massive issue, sometimes athletes may believe that their impact would be so small, it wouldn't be worth it to try?

The best ways are to talk the climate talk and walk the climate walk as best you can. Both are important. Talking about climate action, whether in interviews, on social media, and more, is crucial.

Your platform is your power and activating that platform by talking about climate is perhaps the best thing you can do. Walking the climate walk gives your talk credibility. Examples of walking the walk include reducing meat intake dramatically or even going plant based, riding a bicycle to work, donating unused clothes, etc.

What makes climate change more pressing than other issues facing humanity? Why should we prioritise climate action over other actions?

There are, of course, a myriad of existential issues that bedevil humanity. Poverty, racism, sexism, war, and more. The climate crisis makes all of them worse.

- Climate change leads to more drought which negatively impacts agriculture and many other sectors of the economy, which leads to more poverty.
- More poverty leads to more scapegoating of 'others' as the competition for goods and services intensifies. Women and racial minorities are often those scapegoats.
- More poverty also leads to more mass migration which leads to more conflict and war.
- And more poverty leads to public health crises, which means pandemics, shorter lifespans for the world's poorest/least able to adapt.

Where is there no poverty, no racism, no violence against women, no war? Mars. Why? Because it doesn't have a climate that's habitable for humans. We need to keep our climate habitable for humans to have a chance at solving those other intractable problems. And that is why the #ClimateComeback is the greatest opportunity facing humanity today.

How can we push the sports teams or organizations that we are a part of to ensure that the jerseys we wear, equipment we need, and the transportation we use are as sustainable as possible?

There is strength in numbers so the first thing to do is to get as many team-mates and/or competitors together behind the idea that having more climate-friendly products and services is important. The next step: Reach out to the organization's management in a positive, solutions-oriented fashion to seek out ways to make improvements.

Greening the locker room or team transportation or the team training table can be complicated — there are of course incumbent sponsors and relationships to navigate — however complicated does not at all mean impossible.

With that in mind, athletes can encourage their organizations to work with their kit/uniform sponsors to provide more climate-friendly options. They can also suggest a clothing swap event that would involve/engage fans. Equipment and other locker room supplies may not be sponsored — that becomes an opportunity for a new, green sponsorship/supplier. Lauren ‘Lu’ Barnes, captain of the NWSL’s OL Reign (Seattle), did just that, finding a group of environmentally friendly brands to supply products to the locker room.

On transportation, there are an increasing number of options, from encouraging players to cycle to work to providing EVs to players and staff, from electric buses (will grow in availability starting in 2023) to urging airline sponsors to increase investments in low carbon or zero carbon aviation fuel.

What makes you feel qualified to speak about climate change? After all, you’re not a climate scientist.

I don’t need to be a climate scientist to talk about climate change just like I don’t need to be an oncologist to urge my supporters to fund cancer research. What I know is that extreme weather is getting more extreme, storms and floods are getting more intense, droughts are getting more severe, intense heat is getting more intense. All aspects of life are being impacted now, including sports.

I want to do what I can to ensure that athletes and fans can enjoy sports the way I did when I was growing up. This is the least I can do.

Climate change, rightly or wrongly, is seen as a political issue. How do you feel about wading into the politics of climate change?

Climate change shouldn’t be in the political realm — after all, it is as elementary a truth as gravity – but it is. And tell you the truth, that doesn’t scare me at all. Politics is not a dirty word in my book, even if the practice of it can sometimes be...disgusting.

Because the definition of political is ‘of or relating to citizens’. I’m a citizen and so are my teammates and so are my fans. So, I am actually excited about sharing my thoughts on what policies we can enact in Scotland and globally. I am happy to support politicians who advocate for climate action. And I like to have respectful discussions about different climate policy options.

How do you deal with critics who basically say you should, to use a basketball term, ‘shut up and dribble’?

My experience is that when people try to shut an athlete down from talking about anything to do with politics — no matter the issue — they’re basically not against the athlete making a political statement, they against his or her politics. That led to the realization ‘shut up and dribble’ is, in itself, a political statement, trying to shut down an opposing view. All that does is lead me to want to speak out more.