

England captain Stokes seeks edge with launch of venture fund

Ben Stokes, the England Test cricket captain, and former teammate Stuart Broad are among a group of leading sportsmen backing a new venture capital fund targeting a distinctive position in the crowded arena of early-stage investments.

Sky News can reveal that two of the pivotal figures in England's recent Ashes series recovery to draw the series with Australia are participating in The Players Fund, a new vehicle that will unite existing athlete investment platforms.

Other figures involved in The Players Fund will be Jos Buttler, the England white-ball cricket star, Indian cricketer KL Rahul and footballers including Chris Smalling, Serge Gnabry and Hector Bellerin, all of whom have plied their trade in the Premier League.

The venture will be officially launched on Monday.

Its objective is to bring together prominent sportspeople with a track record of investing in start-ups and seasoned venture capitalists.

The Players Fund will comprise existing athlete-founded collectives such as 4CAST, which counts Mr Stokes, Mr Broad and the England fast-bowler Jofra Archer among its members; ForGood, which is headed by former Manchester United defender Mr Smalling; and B-Engaged, which is led by Mr Bellerin and Mr Gnabry.

A US-based group headed by the former Wimbledon forward Robbie Earle, and which features prominent athletes including the NBA All-Star Carlos Boozer, is also involved.

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“Since starting 4CAST we have seen huge benefits of athletes and public figures coming together in business and we strongly believe athletes investing together cannot be underestimated,” Mr Stokes, a partner in The Players Fund, said.

“By combining our resources, networks and experience, we can achieve so much more collectively than as individuals.

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“The Players Fund provides a structured way for athletes to confidently step into early stage investing and to do so alongside teammates and fellow athletes.”

The new vehicle’s launch comes amid a surge in the level of investment activity taking place involving leading sportspeople, with the Formula One driver Sir Lewis Hamilton and former world tennis number one Serena Williams having explored an investment in Chelsea during the Premier League club’s sale last year.

More recently, the former NFL star Tom Brady was part of a consortium which invested in Birmingham City FC.

The Players Fund’s participating athletes will play a significant role in the sourcing and structuring of deals and access to funding funds, according to an announcement to be issued on Monday.

A number of figures from the VC industry have agreed to invest £40m into companies across four sectors: technologies that power the future of human performance, media, digital communities, and smart commerce.

Fergus and Ruari Bell, two brothers and former athletes, are behind the venture and will act as managing partners.

“We’re entering a new phase of athlete involvement in enterprise,” they said.

“As athletes seek to better leverage the power of their profile and go beyond endorsement into ownership, the athlete community has been crying out for a trusted destination to invest together into best in class startups.

“By uniting the leading athlete investors and athlete collectives from the UK, EU and India under one roof, we now have that outlet in The Players Fund.

“We founded The Players Fund to bring athletes together as a

collective force for good in venture capital,” they added.

“By investing collaboratively, sharing knowledge and leveraging our combined networks, we can have an exponentially greater impact.”