



10. Women's sport



Background

Historically, women's sport has trailed men's sport in all aspects from participation, through attendance, to media coverage and revenue, but in the last 10 to 15 years these gaps have begun to close.

Since 2010 there have been notable moments which have catapulted women's sport into the mainstream such as:-

The 2012 London Olympics were the first Olympics where women competed in all events. Saudi Arabia, Brunei and Qatar sent female athletes to an Olympics for the first time. The USA and Canada sent more female athletes than male for the first time at any Olympics. No wonder it was dubbed 'The Women's Games' by the press.

The Women's Boat Race in 2015 took place on the same stretch of The Thames as the men's race for the first time ever, expedited by the sponsor at the time, Newton Asset Management, signalling a new equity in one of the most traditional sports

GB Hockey win Gold at Rio 2016 Olympics, which went to a penalty shoot-out after a 3-3 draw at full time. The BBC delayed the start of News at 10 in order to continue their coverage and so over 10 million people watched GB women win the first ever Olympic hockey gold. Sport England research showed a huge increase in grassroots women's hockey participation from 4,500 to 92,700 following this win.





Background continued

England women winning the Cricket World Cup in 2017 was in front of a sell-out crowd at Lord's, coupled with record-breaking media coverage, enabling 50 million people to see the tournament globally

At the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018, England's women won Netball Gold in an exciting final against Australia. This prompted a huge resurgence of women picking the sport back up across the UK

The FIFA Women's World Cup in 2019 showed a real mainstream appetite for women's sport with 1.2 billion watching on TV globally. UK coverage on TV and other media

England winning the UEFA Women's Euros in summer 2022 seemed to herald the arrival of women's sport in mainstream consciousness. With the largest attendance (87,192) of any Euros match in history – men or women, this was a game-changing moment for women's sport

The Red Roses narrowly losing out to New Zealand in the final of the 2021 Women's Rugby World Cup, played in 2022 due to a COVID-delay, saw the largest ever crowd for a women's rugby international





Current context

Interest in and awareness of women's sports continues to grow and this is being reflected (and supported) by increased media coverage – A report from Women in Sport in 2018 showed that women's sports coverage was 10% of the total of UK sports coverage. The following year blew that out of the water, with BBC Sport reporting that coverage of women's sport articles comprised 45.7% of total coverage on their homepage.

However the issues of pay parity and lack of professional contracts in women's sport continue largely as they have been – that is languishing behind men's sports.

Ticket sales for the Women's Six Nations is already (in January 2023) double that of sales for the 2022 tournament. This is one example of where you can capitalise on the increased public interest in women's sport, by sharing these snippets through your comms channels, and using as a call to action for your fans to support the women's game.

It is important to ensure women's sport has the same coverage across the club website and social media channels.

Only with support from all sides will we be able to maximise the benefits of increased interest, new audiences and new revenue being brought into sport.





New Audiences, New Opportunities

One of the most exciting aspects of women's sport particularly for clubs is that the audiences are brand new – 80% of ticket buyers for the Lionesses in 2022 were unknown to the FA or UEFA. These new fans at international tournament level then converted into fans of the domestic game with a 70% increase in viewership of the Barclays Women's Super League on Sky. This was also reflected in matchday attendances which increased by 200%

The new audiences brought into women's sport are open to new concepts and formats, so it's a good opportunity to try something new in terms of your content delivery for example. There aren't so many restrictions and traditions associated with women's sport, which has been a barrier to innovation

Consider how you could improve the visibility of women's sport through your website and social media feeds





Be on the front foot of the movement

In case there is any doubt, these are the reasons your club should commit to a clear focus on women's rugby:

Access to new audiences and new revenue streams which will support the growth and sustainability of your club in the future

Social responsibility – offering women and girls equal access to play rugby as men/boys is of high importance to the future of the sport – this is also of high importance to brands who can connect their ESG (environmental, social, governance) goals to activity in this area

Club image – clubs are seeing the positive benefits of actively supporting women's rugby from their fans and wider society





The benefits of unbundling women's sponsorship rights

Unbundling women's team rights from men's rights can unlock revenue growth for your club. Manchester City recently announced a standalone deal with a formalwear partner for their women's team.

By unbundling these rights, the club can benefit from

Increased revenue – women's rights should no longer be seen as a 'free' add-on to men's team rights

Access to new audiences through sponsor activation

Wider offering to sponsors, who have better access to the sponsorship rights which will work best for their objectives

Greater understanding of the value of your women's teams, and understanding of what drives brands to partner with them

Clearer marketing of your women's team and the values they offer to brand partners

Teams who have begun to unbundle women's team rights have seen interest from sponsors of the men's teams, and also interest from completely new brand partners who have been enticed in by a new sponsorship offering.

Consider if unbundling would be right for your club, and if you have the resources to support such a move.

Chapter takeaways and top tips

Now is the time to demonstrate support of your women's team in order to:

Capitalise on the huge new interest in women's sport and importantly the new audiences and revenue streams	Promote gender equity and access for girls to enter the sport , helping to sustain it for years to come
Benefit the image of your club	Actively plan so that your club comms (website, social media, PR) are focusing on the women's game as much as the men's
Consider whether unbundling your women's team rights from the men's would be beneficial	Begin to develop a separate target list of companies who would consider supporting your women's team

