

Women's sport: The conversation needs to shift from equal pay, to equal marketing

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When we talk about women's sport, the focus is usually on equal pay. But that's only part of the conversation and part of the challenge that needs to be addressed. [The Guardian](#) highlights systemic sexism in sports is leading to pay inequality, starting with how women are marketed and promoted by their own leagues.

Key points:

- When the focus of discussion is always that women get paid less than men, we miss all the smaller things that enables a system to hurt women's advancement in sports, and their ability to generate equal revenue, and in return warrant equal pay.
- The size of the WNBA's marketing budget (compared to the NBA) makes it difficult to build a fanbase – and therefore revenue – to support its athletes.
- As Washington Mystics player, Elena Delle Donne, said in 2018: “We absolutely do not get promoted as our male counterparts do. When you put millions of dollars into marketing athletes and allowing fans to get to know a player they develop a connection... How is anyone going to get to know me or any of my colleagues if we aren't marketed as much?”
- US Soccer has not disclosed how much it spent on marketing the women in comparison to the men, an important piece of information necessary to decipher whether they are trying to generate any real interest in the women's game.
- Women's sports receive only a tiny fraction of total sponsorships (0.4 per cent, [according to a study of the market](#) conducted between 2011-13)

My Takeout

Growing up playing sport, on a few occasions I was lucky enough to have been judged on my ability rather than my gender. I was selected to play baseball in the boys team because a girls team was non-existent. I trained in mixed martial arts with male opponents that were of an equal standard, and when playing at my local tennis club in social competitions the club coach graded everyone on ability, not gender (sadly this is not the same at my current club, which has led me to stop playing the game I grew up loving).

Kate Palmer, former CEO of Sport Australia put it brilliantly when she said: “It's time to rewrite the language of Australian sport. We need to drop the unnecessary, divisive labels, and erase the gender bias that has become accepted and ingrained. There is no longer a place for the sub-category known as 'women's sport'. There is just sport. It belongs to all. It's what everyone plays.”

Last year was a pivotal year in 'women's sport' and for female athletes' recognition of pay – from the history making equal pay deal of the Matildas, and Cricket Australia's announcement of equal pay for female and male cricketers in Twenty20 World Cup.

However, there's still a long way to go in recognising that the issue is beyond equal pay and more about equality in every aspect of the game, from the platforms we give our female athletes, to even the way we refer to all sportspeople.

But right now, brands have the opportunity to continue the momentum of last year; to think not only about the reach that previous channels have delivered, but the opportunity to align to a moment in time that is redefining sport and could in turn redefine a brand.

Brands have the opportunity to embed themselves with some of the most passionate and creative individuals, whose stories and authentic content capture our nation, and are actively searched out by audiences that brands are increasingly finding hard to speak to.

While as marketers we might not hold all the power, we are at the forefront of being able to do more and start shifting the conversation. A recent example of this is Procter & Gamble's Pantene partnering with the Matildas, creating a platform to encourage more women and girls to participate in sports.

Female athletes and teams should be considered like any other sports team or platform for partnerships, endorsements, ambassadorships and influencers; judged on their ability to deliver to a brief and objectives.

Brands that recognise this opportunity quickly will be the ones to reap the rewards as they help to diminish the divide, and place themselves front and centre of this change.

Australia has cultivated some of the best and most brilliant female athletes in the world. What will truly change the game is when we all begin to back them; when brands begin to recognise the potential in 'women's sport', and when we truly give them the platform to show just how much they are worth.

**Bianca Wallis, National Director of Content
Publicis Media ANZ**

<https://www.mi-3.com.au/23-01-2020/womens-sport-conversation-needs-shift-equal-pay-equal-marketing>

