



Facts and figures about women and girls in sport

The under-representation of sportswomen in all forms of media, together with the under-representation of women involved in the production of sport-related media, has long been of concern to those trying to increase the visibility of women's sport. Television, radio and the print media play a central role in informing our knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women and sport. This is achieved through both the amount of coverage and the language used. The media can play an important role in raising the public profile of women's sport.

Visibility – how often do we see our top sportswomen?



•Evidence shows that the visibility of women's sport is far less than men's, and fewer sports are covered. On satellite television the top sport shown by Sky and Eurosport is men's football while on terrestrial television men's football and men's cricket dominate. An evaluation of seven newspapers (national and regional) measuring the number of articles, headlines, female journalists and use of imagery, demonstrated that in 2006 the average space dedicated to women and girls' sports was

4.8%, and 5.2% of all articles were devoted to female sports.

•An athlete's profile may reflect her image rather than her history within a particular sport, paying less attention to her athleticism, skill and achievements. This, in turn, undermines the status of women in sport. A study on the coverage of the 2000 Olympics found that, while male and female athletes received a fairly balanced amount of coverage women were more likely than men to be infantilised and be portrayed in emotive terms.

•The reporting of women's sport that reinforces stereotypes and trivialises women's achievements could be more damaging than no coverage at all. For example, women are often referred to as 'girls' or 'ladies', while men are not referred to as 'boys' or gentlemen.

•Certain forms of referencing within women's sport may serve to reinforce traditional patriarchal notions. These include the identification of the sports as "women's" sports thus implying that the norm is the men's game

and women's sports are apart from the normal.

•The number and diversity of role models for sportswomen and potential sportswomen are fewer.

•Sponsorship of women in sport is lower because women's sport receives less media coverage. However, a recent survey by the Sports Sponsorship Advisory Service reported that sponsors felt that women's sport would attract increasing attention within the next five to 10 years.

Working in sports media



•One of the reasons women receive little media coverage lies in the attitudes of media and sports organisations. Most sports reporting is carried out by men, under male editors. In early 2007

it was estimated that of 610 members of the Sports Journalist Association of Great Britain around 10% are women.

•Increased representation of sportswomen by the media requires increased involvement of women in the production of the media, for example producers, photographers and presenters. Research suggested that if women were more involved in sports journalism this would result in better coverage of women's sport.

Improvements

However, there have been some improvements in the media's representation of women's sports.



•Some media are better than others. In television and radio, for example, female sports reporters regularly appear on our screens. In terms of staff, the BBC estimates that a quarter of the journalists, producers and editorial staff in its sports department are now women. This represents a substantial improvement over the last 20 years.

•In 2006, the number of dedicated sports channels has provided a bigger than ever platform for women's team sports to be showcased. The 2006 Rugby Women's World Cup (where England just missed out on victory) was televised live on Sky Sports 2 and 3, with highlights also being shown.

•England Women's football team's successful qualification for the 2007 World Cup was also fea-

tured on a number of BBC channels.

•Late in 2006, English Netball secured a landmark deal with Sky Sports to show weekly coverage of the Netball Superleague.

A final word: big improvements ... but a long way to go

Women athletes are no different from men athletes in the skill, dedication and courage they bring to their sports. There is no doubt that over the past few years there have been big improvements in the coverage of women's sport and the types of images shown, but we still have a long way to go especially in the sports pages of national newspapers.

Endnotes

1. Women's Sports Foundation, Britain's best kept secret (2003) and Playing Catch-Up (2006)
2. Dianne Jones, Half the Story? Olympic Women on ABC News Online', Media International, Australia, vol. 110, pp 132 -146, 2004
3. Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee (2006), About time! Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia Senate Committee in Australia in 2006
4. Matheson, H and Biscomb, K (2005) Is Appearance More Important than Performance? A Study of Sports Language in Six British National Newspapers a Decade Apart, University of Wales
5. Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee (2006), About time! Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia, Senate Committee in Australia in 2006

Netball images are courtesy of Mark Pritchard

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The Women's Sports Foundation has a vision of a society which celebrates the diversity of women and girls, and enables them to benefit from, excel at and fulfil their potential through the sport of their choice.

Supporting women's sport

The Women's Sports Foundation is the only organisation that works solely to increase opportunities for women and girls. We are a small team of seven people, campaigning for women's sport. These fact files are provided to you free of charge to help raise awareness of the issues – and empower you to advocate for change. However, if you would like to make a contribution to cover admin costs, and to support women's sport, please visit our website and follow the links to the 'make a donation' section.