

# Sporting giants

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## Women's sport is now a massive opportunity for brands. Misha Sher, Vice President of Sport & Entertainment at MediaCom, explores its power

Women's sport is attracting attention like never before. It's being admired by men and women as simply a great contest and it's gaining more media coverage than ever. Increasingly, it's simply regarded as sport that happens to be played by women. Successes will be celebrated by fans both male and female just as failures will be raked over.

According to a recent study by MediaCom Real World Insights, just 36% of women's football fans are women, while nearly two-thirds are male. This debunks a longheld notion that women's sport is predominantly watched by women. In fact, among all women's sport, only cycling, swimming and tennis have a higher proportion of female fans than male fans.

This increase in male interest is one of the key drivers of women's sport. When France played Brazil at the 2019 Women's World Cup, for instance, more than 35 million people watched the game on TV in Brazil, while 10.6 million switched on in France. These numbers would be unthinkable just a few years ago.

The amount of press coverage around women's sport has also gone up. In 2019, during the Women's World Cup and Wimbledon (arguably the biggest tournament in tennis), women's sport was featured on The Guardian Sport home page every day. Meanwhile, they were featured in nearly a third (28.3%) of the top 12 stories in The Telegraph's sport section during the same period. This is a direct reflection of the investment many of the leading media organisations have made in women's sports journalists.

### Reaching Gen Z and Gen Y

For brands, increased levels of interest mark more than just a reach opportunity. It's a chance to be part of a movement that appeals directly to Gen Z and Gen Y consumers. In an increasingly commoditised world, these groups, in particular, expect brands to stand for something, and to provide more than just functional benefits. They want companies to have values that align with their own and they reward these companies with their business.

These values are typically more inclusive, fairer and more environmentally friendly than those of older generations. For these consumers, the brands that support women's sport are making a statement that commits them to the world. The ability to demonstrate purpose, increased coverage, and the relatively uncluttered environment make women's sport a compelling proposition for brands targeting sought-after young consumers, but the key to winning is all in execution.

### Fresh stories.

Women's sport is an unknown for many fans. That's a huge advantage for brands who can narrate the stories behind the athletes and their struggles to make it to the top. Brands can play a part in making the stars into household names alongside the likes of Serena Williams. One brand that has embraced the women's game is Head & Shoulders. In its #JustWatchMe campaign, released in 2019, it showed both male and female England footballers coaching young players, giving equal exposure to both, and blurring the lines between genders.

### Mean it.

Investment in women's sport cannot be a PR exercise unless it's going to have a genuine impact on consumers and employees alike. Brands have to think about how they execute in a way that demonstrates authenticity and commitment to the sport. Never before have brands been under as much scrutiny to walk the walk, so the investment has to be backed by action.

P&G is a great example of this, championing gender equality in its campaigns by telling audiences #WeSeeEqual, while quietly working to achieve a 50/50 representation in all parts of its own company.

### Truly engage.

This is a chance to connect with a very engaged audience, bringing new stars and new triumphs to the public for the first time. The opportunity is to win hearts and minds by adding value to the sport. The power of that cannot simply be calculated by noting the media reach that comes with these opportunities to build much stronger bonds. One brand that has already done this is Boots.

Ahead of the start of the 2019 Women's World Cup, it secured takeovers of Heathrow and Edinburgh airports to send the squads off as they left for France. Boots used its UK social media channels to encourage fans to share their goal celebrations to be in with a chance of winning extra points on their customer loyalty card. The beauty for brands is that the

barriers of entry are still relatively low. Women's sport is still affordable to far more brands than men's while offering an opportunity to truly stand out in an uncluttered environment.

If your brand has been waiting for the right time to get involved, then that time is now. Championing strong female role models is a move that can only reflect positively on a brand. Combine that with record attendances and viewership, as well as greater coverage and interest from both sexes, and it's an opportunity that can't be missed.

## OPINION