



WASSERMAN
THE COLLECTIVE

UNLEASHING POTENTIAL:

Propelling Women's Football
and WSL to New Heights

In partnership with



Loughborough
University
London

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL: A SPECTACULAR JOURNEY

Women's football has seen a surge in popularity in recent years. Fans in England can vividly recall the iconic photo of Chloe Kelly at the UEFA Women's EURO 2022 after scoring the tournament-winning goal, proceeding to rip off her shirt and tear down the pitch in her sports bra. This moment, witnessed in person by a record breaking 87,192 fans at Wembley Stadium, was followed a year later by the FIFA 2023 Women's World Cup, where a peak audience of 12 million viewers tuned in to watch the finals between England and Spain (BBC, 2023).

Driven by the popularity and success of national teams, professional leagues and clubs have seen an increase in fan support around the world. The UEFA Women's EURO 2022 brought forth a compelling narrative of growth and progress. Notably, the four semi-finalists—England, Germany, France, and Sweden—have seen surges in their domestic league attendances, marking a positive shift in the sport. The Barclays Women's Super League (WSL), for instance, achieved an impressive 267% increase in attendance at the start of the 2022/23 season, and the German Women's Bundesliga witnessed a 261% attendance increase during this same time. There are more WSL matches being played at senior stadiums; for example, Arsenal Women will play at least 5 matches at the Emirates.

While the industry will continue to watch the attendance impact for the 2023/24 season, there is still an opportunity to translate fandom to overarching local club growth in all capacities. The positive narratives, like a 33% commercial revenue increase for all global women's football leagues, and a 22% increase in league broadcast growth (FIFA, 2022) may indicate a turn in growing fan interest and sponsorship support. Despite some of these gains, there still lies disparity. Only 7% of women's football clubs worldwide generated more than €900k in total revenue from matches, broadcasting, and commercial deals. In comparison, the top 20 men's football clubs throughout the world brought in an average of 461m euros per club in 2021-2022, with Manchester City topping the list at €731m (BBC, 2023).

**87,192 fans at
Wembley Stadium**
for UEFA Women's Euro 2022

**267% increase in
attendance**
for WSL teams

**33% increase in
commercial
revenue**

**22% increase in league
broadcast growth in
global league**

TURNING PASSION INTO PROSPERITY

If we are seeing massive growth in fan engagement with national teams, which serve as the nexus for trickled-down fan and sponsor interest, why has this not yet translated to similar growth for global women's professional teams and clubs?

A 2022 study in the U.S. found that a majority of National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) fans cited the United States Women's National Soccer Team (USWNT) as the primary reason for their fandom (Yuksel, 2022), indicating a potential global opportunity for women's professional football. The recent achievements of the Lionesses on the world stage demand our attention. They serve as a catalyst for examining how the WSL and other women's football leagues and clubs worldwide can leverage the fervour of their fans for their national teams. This requires a revaluation of creative investments, as well as a concerted effort to enhance the visibility and exposure of women's leagues and clubs on a global scale. In this op-ed, we dive into potential ideas, paired with case studies from across the globe, shedding light on the path forward for women's football down to the local club level – one that thrives on the power of storytelling and meaningful fan engagement.

OUR METHODOLOGY

The article was inspired by Kritika Naidu, a master's student in the Institute for Sport Business at Loughborough University London.

Loughborough University is a UK-based institutional member of Wasserman's The Collective Think Tank, a global consortium of academic and industry institutions dedicated to advancing the power of women through research. Supported by other industry data sources, the research included 11 semi-structured interviews with a diverse group of WSL stakeholders, including representatives from the governing body, brands, clubs, agencies, and the media.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the researcher's University and interviewees are referred to anonymously to ensure confidentiality. Interviews were analysed using a thematic analysis, which led to the emergence of key themes as a basis for this whitepaper.

THE POSITIVE MARKERS OF GROWTH



IMPACT OF LIONESSES' VICTORY & SUCCESS

In the last half-decade, women's sports have experienced an extraordinary surge. The most recent World Cup stands as a testament to the rising interest, engagement, and financial support garnered by women's sports, particularly women's football. The historic EURO victory by the Lionesses in 2022 played a pivotal role in propelling the WSL to new heights. This triumph alone drew a remarkable 15.8 million new viewers to the WSL in 2022, igniting enthusiasm for women's sports that extends well beyond football.



15.8M new viewers



**19% increase
in female fans
of women's football**



**37% express a
keen interest
in following the WSL**

A joint survey conducted by the BBC and YouGov in August 2022 painted an intriguing picture. The research unveiled a staggering 19% increase in female fans of women's football, with an impressive 37% expressing a keen interest in following the WSL. While this growth can be largely attributed to the Lionesses' success, it is crucial for the WSL to capitalize on this engagement and transform it into enduring support for the league and its clubs throughout the year. This achievement has not only invigorated younger female viewership but also heightened the visibility and backing for women athletes across the UK sports landscape (Women's Sport Trust, 2022). This indicates a strong connection with a coveted fan demographic.

Globally, female sports fans are characterized as younger, highly educated, and more affluent compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, they exhibit a remarkable 54% higher awareness of sponsors and a 45% greater willingness to consider purchasing from sponsors of women's sports than male sports fans (The Collective, 2023).

The Lionesses have initiated momentum, but it is the local investments that will continue to yield dividends for all stakeholders. With the recent appearance in the finals of the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, and the 2022 EUROS win, individual players from the Lionesses remain catalysts for generating interest in the WSL – appealing to both fans and investors alike.

“ There has definitely been an influx of investment across women's sport, and that has been the power of the women's Euro's in 2022.

The awareness that we were starting to win in football. It brought everyone from all over Europe to England to be able to embrace it fully, but the WSL has purely been successful this year because of the Euros win. ”

- FOOTBALL AGENCY EXECUTIVE



STRUCTURED INVESTMENT

Structured investment has helped build today's success

Broadcast distribution and men's club partnerships spur growth. The Football Association (FA) made a substantial upfront investment to lay the groundwork for the WSL, prioritising improvements in on-pitch quality and fan and athlete facilities. In an effort to expand the league's presence and reach, the FA strategically chose to prioritise reach over immediate revenue. This decision led to a broadcast deal brokered between Sky and BBC networks, a significant move considering that 40% of consumers view media exposure as a critical obstacle to watching women's football (YouGov, 2023). The objective was to broaden exposure through various viewing platforms.

To unify or not?

The growth of female football fandom seemingly begins with male football fans, as evidenced by a recent study indicating that 88% of male football fans express an interest in women's football as well (The Collective Think Tank & Gallen, 2021). The WSL recognised this opportunity and leveraged the established brand and fan base of its male counterparts. In fact, 11 out of the 12 WSL clubs share names and affiliations with Premier League men's clubs, a strategic move that significantly heightened the visibility of women's football (Two Circles, 2023). This unified approach tapped into existing rivalries and social media platforms, thereby strengthening the visibility of women's football and its athletes, engaging a broader audience. Furthermore, the utilisation of iconic stadiums by larger clubs has contributed to an enhanced overall match-day experience for fans.

However, despite some significant growth, maintaining fervent local-level fandom has historically been a challenge. The WSL has tapped into existing Premier League fanbases, but the expectation that fans would attend both, or even choose to support the WSL over the Premier League is not likely to occur. Numerous factors contribute to this issue, including the relatively recent establishment of leagues like the WSL and the absence of well-known England athletes who choose to compete professionally in their home countries. A lack of exposure also plays a role, as women's professional games often do not receive the same level of broadcasting and media coverage as men's professional football matches, causing local clubs to struggle in generating sufficient media and social media attention.

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The fact that DAZN has the women's Champions League, and it has been streamed online for free, YouTube actually had the same this season as well, has been fantastic because anyone can watch it. But essentially, the women's Champions League is the most exciting, best international league in the world – should it be for free when you see the men's Champions League rights go for so much money that you have to pay to watch them? The fact that DAZN will be showing some games for free next year and some of them behind the paywall is a good example of growth.”

- U.K. MEDIA EXECUTIVE

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“With particularly the Women's Super League, we have never had as much coverage as we have now. On a weekly basis, we have 3 games that are televised every weekend or during the week with 2 on Sky and 1 on the BBC, so I think we are getting to a stage now of where we are getting close to what we see in the Premier League and it is reaping rewards across the board - the more coverage or promotion you have, the more sponsorships. It all feeds into itself really.”

- U.K. MEDIA EXECUTIVE

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CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN NATIONAL TEAM AND LOCAL TEAM FANDOM

Moving from “why” to “how” to invest in women’s football.

It is clear that the WSL has gained relative success, primarily driven by the Lionesses’ national team accomplishments on the global football stage. However, there is still work to be done. Meanwhile, brands must justify investing in women’s sport through sponsorships, advertising and endorsements despite the lack of media and broadcast coverage (Golden, 2023).

“Once a good product is being shown on television more and more people come on board... sponsorship, essentially in TV rights is what will eventually hopefully fund the league by itself, so the women’s teams, whilst will be part of the bigger Premier League clubs that we see, you would hope will be sustainable within their own rights. But that all starts with coverage on TV, sponsors getting on board, and TV rights money going up as well.”

- U.K. MEDIA EXECUTIVE

Making women’s sports accessible on an ongoing and consistent basis to a diverse audience and ensuring their economic sustainability are two goals that are often at odds. Brands need to value women’s sports appropriately, avoiding undervaluing them and recognising their commercial potential. A sustainable commercial model will support the infrastructure, talent, and resources needed to grow women’s sports. Industry leaders and advocates must shift the conversation from “Why should we invest in the WSL or other women’s sports?” to “What is the best way to invest in and support the WSL or other women’s sports?”.

As the new economy in the industry, women’s sports have the opportunity, and onus, to innovate. It has the room to try new things and fail quickly but requires investment - of time, passion, and money. Reframing the cycle will be critical to its success. We offer some potential innovation ideas driven by interview findings and industry expertise, backed by global case studies, to spur discussion among industry leaders.

The WSL, along with other women’s professional sports organizations worldwide, stands at a pivotal crossroads, poised to harness the momentum generated by national team success. This unique opportunity offers the potential for a mass conversion of fans into fervent supporters of local teams. Beyond the immediate benefits of a dedicated fan base, this shift holds the promise of sustainable revenue streams, heightened brand sponsorship, and increased media exposure.

To seize this moment effectively, successful commercial models for women’s sports must prioritize strategic investments in infrastructure, talent, and resources essential for long-term growth. This includes the development of modern stadiums and top-notch training facilities, as well as substantial investments in coaches, trainers, and front-office personnel. Such commitments are imperative to development and expansion, ensuring its continued rise on the global stage.

1. INNOVATIVE INVESTMENT

In the world of sports sponsorship, where a staggering 90% of sponsorship money is allocated to male athletes (SponsorUnited, 2022), finding innovative investment avenues within the WSL and other women's sport entities may seem like a daunting challenge. However, there exist both short and long-term strategies that can stimulate the much-needed investment critical to club growth, talent retention, and the creation of new marketing channels.

The unprecedented expansion of women's sports offers a distinctive platform for organisations to position themselves as viable investment opportunities. While research does indicate some industry scepticism regarding potential returns (Naidu, 2023), there is growing interest in driving investment for various reasons.

In the realm of sponsorships, authenticity has emerged as a game-changer, surpassing the conventional notion of congruence or fit. Partnerships forged on shared values and a genuine commitment to women's sports not only contribute to long-term success but also have the potential to engage new generations of fans. Younger demographics, in particular, exhibit interest in a wider array of sports compared to their older counterparts (SportsPro, 2022). While many brands have already embraced national team sponsorships, there remains an untapped opportunity for strategic investments, not limited to major national tournaments but extending to year-round impact within local communities.

Currently, the WSL is under the ownership of the FA, and women's clubs are owned and funded by their affiliated men's clubs (e.g., Manchester City Women owned by Manchester City Football Club, part of the City Football Group). Discussions are ongoing about the Premier League potentially assuming ownership of the WSL, but there are avenues for injecting investment within the existing structure. For instance, club owners can commit to maintaining financial resources for women's clubs even in the face of overall revenue fluctuations. Publicly-traded clubs like Manchester United and Arsenal could also explore tailored investment opportunities specifically directed toward their female clubs (e.g., Arsenal Women). While the structural impacts and influences of being tied to men's teams is a consideration, it's time to seize these opportunities and usher in a new era of investment in women's sports.

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“Not all fans of the men's game are going to trickle over to the women's and vice versa where not all women's fans are going to go to the men's games. I think it is about respecting the needs of both and the way that it is growing and therefore curate what is being offered on a match day or how it needs to be marketed differently to how the men's games are marketed.”

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- FOOTBALL AGENCY EXECUTIVE

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“It is key that partners match the club's values, champion the values of the women's team and are a right fit from a brand perspective, while the brand wants to be closely aligned in breaking the glass ceiling and promoting gender equality in sport. Brand awareness and building trust are also key objectives driving the partnership.”

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-WSL CLUB EXECUTIVE

Purpose-Driven Sponsorships



Women's sports reside at the intersection of profit and purpose. Research consistently reveals that fans of women's sports are deeply motivated by social justice. Women's clubs now have an unprecedented opportunity to revolutionise the sponsorship landscape by forging connections between teams and their communities. This innovative approach to investment seeks to yield financial returns while simultaneously creating a positive societal impact. Enter social impact investors, whether individuals or brands, who can invest in women's sports teams as a means to champion gender equity, women's empowerment, and other causes dear to the hearts of leagues and players.

Fan Ownership and Crowdfunding



The concept of fan ownership, where supporters hold a stake in a sports team or pool resources to invest in club initiatives, has thrived in European football clubs and U.S. sport franchises. It's a model brimming with potential for women's sports clubs to explore, enabling fans to deepen their connection with the teams they adore.

Performance-Based Partnerships



The WSL could reimagine sponsorship agreements by structuring deals that link payment to the league and/or teams' growth and performance. Such an approach would incentivise sponsors to commit to the WSL over the long haul, leveraging their reach and resources to foster sustained growth, and could potentially be a viable option for the leagues and clubs to explore.

Community-Centric Partnerships



Sponsors willing to make a tangible commitment to support WSL club communities can set themselves apart in the world of sponsorships. This could entail backing local charities, sponsoring youth sports programs, and empowering the WSL to give back to the communities that fuel its success. By building stronger connections with fans through community engagement, these sponsors can make a lasting impact.

INNOVATIVE INVESTMENT IN ACTION

Royal London Mutual Insurance Society - Social Impact Investing



As the first ever Principal Partner of the Lions Women's Rugby Programme, Royal London was in from the very beginning, starting with funding a feasibility study with The British & Irish Lions looking into the possibility of forming a Lions women's team. Royal London was a member of the Steering Group which had representatives from the Lions, including Chairman Leuan Evans, and the women's sport sector, and resulted in their Principal financial commitment to the Club. "We're working to support the continued success of women's rugby and deliver on our mission to break down barriers in society."

Angel City Football Club – Profit + Purpose



A NWSL club based in Los Angeles, Angel City FC, has turned the traditional sport sponsorship model on its head. The club's sponsorship model of "profit + purpose" set the strategic direction to only partner with brands who share its values and commitment to making a positive impact on the community at large. Under this model, 10% of every Angel City FC sponsorship deal is allocated to a community program in the Los Angeles area, focused on three key areas: equity, essentials, and education. Equity-driven initiatives aim to address the gender pay gap and other forms of discrimination. ACFC also gives 1% of net ticket proceeds back to players who participate in ACFC's optional revenue-sharing program (The Athletic, 2023).

Angel City's sponsorship model has been well-received by brands. In addition to the sponsorship benefits of brand visibility, positive PR, and the opportunity to connect with a passionate fan base, sponsors are able to exercise their support of women's sports AND make a difference in society. This win/win/win model allows the club to differentiate their sponsorship sales approach and increase revenue to operate, provides sponsors the exposure and goodwill which consumers expect, and benefits the Los Angeles community at large.

Angel City FC has partnered with the Women's Sports Foundation to create a scholarship program for female athletes, driving equity and addressing the gender pay gap. Essentials programs provide basic necessities to people in need, evidenced by the club's partnership with Feeding America to provide food to families. Finally, Angel City FC has partnered with the Los Angeles Unified School District to create a STEM program for girls.

2. BUILD HYPER-LOCAL ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CONTENT, COMMUNITY AND MERCHANDISE

Leagues and teams, such as the WSL, have the onus to push for increased broadcast distribution to help grow their game. However, it shouldn't stop here. Building localised and high-touch engagement needs to extend to athlete storytelling, merchandise, and custom events.

We have entered a storytelling renaissance in women's sports, witnessing female athletes, female properties, and brand sponsors use their platforms to dismantle stereotypes and inspire growth. We're seeing personal stories, from Arsenal's Leah Williamson speaking at the United Nations summit challenging gender stereotypes to Megan Rapinoe speaking out against sexism and homophobia. Athletes and women's sports properties are also social storytelling to connect with fans on a deeper level. By sharing behind-the-scenes footage, and prioritising fan interaction, they are creating personal connections, as well as growing tangential fan loyalty and support.

The Lionesses' Instagram account gained 213,720 in a 30-day period during the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. But England's athletes - like Lucy Bronze, who currently has over 741k followers

on Instagram - are also seeing massive growth in their social following. Given women athletes drive 2x the engagement on social media (The Collective, 2023), the WSL can use the recent social following growth to drive tangible impact at the local level, from merchandise sales, to match viewership and in-stadium ticket sales. As fans are clearly interested in athlete-driven content, social platforms can be used to impact commercial efforts for local clubs where these athletes compete. Historically, women's football tickets were often distributed for free or at minimal costs for international matches, aiming to attract audiences and provide them with a taste of the sporting product. However, this approach may have sent the unintended message that women's football is not valuable enough to warrant higher prices.



"I do not like selling tickets for cheap because it comes back to the commitment point of view. If you give them away, people do not necessarily come and then they think it is cheap. People buy expensive handbags because they are expensive, and it makes them look expensive. So, if they go to a game that is cheap, it makes them feel cheap, which is why I feel hospitality in women's football is such an untapped market because, again, it is something else people cannot necessarily afford to go to hospitality at one of the bigger stadiums for the men but can afford to go to hospitality at the same stadia for the women."

- NATIONAL LEAGUE CLUB EXECUTIVE



In this era of storytelling renaissance, the potential to amplify the visibility of women's professional footballers, clubs, and the WSL as a whole is both compelling and vast. It's an opportune moment to leverage the influence of Lionesses players to catalyse tangible fan-building initiatives such as merchandise sales, increased attendance, and the cultivation of an engaged local club community.

Sponsor-Driven Storytelling



In this evolving landscape, brands are not just storytellers but also listeners. They have the chance to nurture and enrich narratives emerging organically from athletes and fans. Partnering with athletes and championing their causes allows brands to align themselves with positive values and forge deeper connections with consumers. Which may differ from stories typically told from the male athlete perspective. Recognising the pivotal role of non-playing earnings in the success and sustainability of women athletes, corporate and brand partnerships become invaluable, especially those that provide a platform to enhance their personal brands (The Collective, 2023).

Athlete-Centric Story and Merchandise Hub



The WSL can spearhead the creation of a dedicated distribution platform, serving as a hub for sharing the stories of their athletes both on and off the pitch. Moreover, this platform can offer avenues for athletes to monetise their personal brands. It should remain open for athletes to share their own narratives and provide accessible means for fans to engage with and support their favourite players.

Dynamic and Responsive Social Media



To foster heightened engagement, the WSL and local clubs can adopt a distinctive, even provocative, approach to their social media platforms' personalities. This includes direct engagement with fans and followers, taking the lead in delivering content that resonates with their audience, and promptly responding to changes and preferences articulated by fans.

FAN ENGAGEMENT IN ACTION

Mary Earps and the Nike Goalkeeper Kit: A Win for Women's Football

Mary Earps, keeper for Manchester United Women and the Lionesses, made waves this past summer with social media as the catalyst. Widely recognised as the #1 keeper in the world, she was recognised for her talent, winning the Golden Glove award for the best goalkeeper at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, following up on the same honour at the 2022 Euros. But there was a problem: her goalkeeper jersey wasn't available for purchase by fans. In a July, 2023 interview Earps said, "On a personal level, it is hugely hurtful. There has been an incredible rise in goalkeeping participation."

Her kit was still not available - that's where her fans came in. They started a social media campaign calling on Nike, Earps's kit supplier, to create a replica goalkeeper kit. The hashtag #MakeTheKitAvailable went viral, and eventually got Nike's attention, who announced in August 2023 the creation of a limited-edition replica goalkeeper kit, available in her personal colour choices of emerald green and pink.

The creation of the replica goalkeeper kit is a positive step for women's football and showcases the power of fan-driven social media. So, next time you see a girl wearing an Earps goalkeeper kit, give her a high five. She's part of a movement that's making women's football more accessible and inclusive.

The WNBA Orange Iconic Hoodie: A Cultural Phenomenon

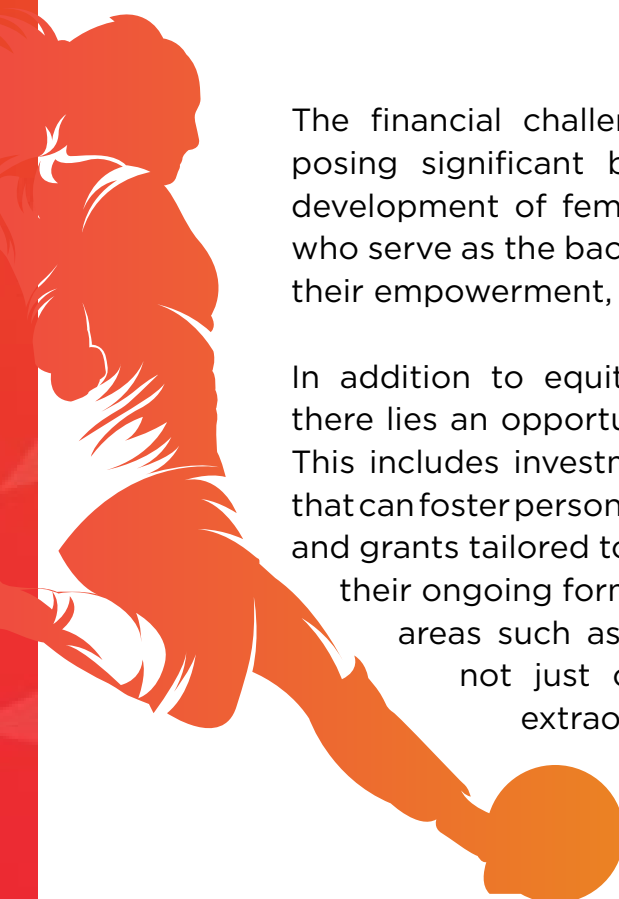


The WNBA orange iconic hoodie is a simple piece of clothing, but it has become a cultural phenomenon. Worn by athletes, celebrities, and fans alike, the hoodie has become a symbol of support for women's basketball and gender equality. The roots are traced back to 2019 when A'ja Wilson of the Las Vegas Aces wore the hoodie on the sideline. WNBA players and their male NBA player allies continued to spark interest via social media images tagged #OrangeHoodie.

Dubbed the "Best Fashion Statement of the Year" by Sports Business Journal in 2020, the Orange Hoodie is not only a way for fans to show their love for the game, but it is a social status symbol which fans continue to share proudly in real life and across social channels.

"It came at a time when people wanted, and needed, merch and wanted something better for the league. If you're wearing the WNBA orange hoodie, it's because you believe in what the league stands for." -EB Jones, Head of WNBA Content and Influencer Strategy.

3. FOCUS REVENUE EFFORTS ON THE REAL HEROES – THE PLAYERS



The financial challenges women's sports face today are undeniable, posing significant barriers to the training, competition, and overall development of female athletes. To support these remarkable athletes who serve as the backbone of women's sports, we must shift our focus to their empowerment, both on and off the pitch.

In addition to equitable compensation for their athletic endeavours, there lies an opportunity for comprehensive off-the-pitch development. This includes investments in education and entrepreneurship programs that can foster personal and professional growth. Initiatives like scholarships and grants tailored to Women's Super League (WSL) athletes, facilitating their ongoing formal education, and customised programs addressing areas such as personal branding and financial management are not just commendable but essential investments in these extraordinary individuals.

WSL clubs, in collaboration with brands, have the opportunity to play a pivotal role in creating mentorship and networking opportunities that revolve around athletes' off-the-pitch passions and pursuits. Organisations like Women in Football, a network of professionals dedicated to supporting and championing women in the football industry, and Venture Studios, the pioneering female-led accelerator focused on women in sports, recognise the urgent need to nurture and empower women in sport.

For instance, Women in Football, in partnership with sponsor Barclays, launched #GetOnside, a powerful initiative calling upon organisations and individuals in the football world to take concrete action to enhance the football landscape for women and girls. By concentrating our revenue efforts on the real heroes of women's sports – the players – we can break down financial barriers and provide the support needed for them to thrive, both within the game and beyond.

To truly level the playing field and foster a more equitable environment for female athletes, we must look beyond their performance in sports. This approach not only promotes individual development but also contributes to the overall expansion and success of women's sports. It's time to address the existing disparities, be it the lack of women's player salaries or the sudden loss of income and traditional endorsement opportunities due to injuries. Supporting the personal and professional growth of women athletes should be a top priority for sports organisations and brands. Moreover, this commitment extends to the global base of young girls who represent the future generation of women football fans and athletes.



Empowering Athletes

Women's football clubs possess a unique opportunity to support their athletes beyond the confines of the pitch. By recognising the pay gap in salary, teams have an opportunity to support players in creating additional revenue potential for themselves. Creating programs and sponsorship opportunities that benefit the players directly can help right-size the pay gap and position these players as the marketing powerhouses they are. Putting women athletes at the center of campaigns and activations in support of the team and league will benefit all.



Bridging the Present and Future

The WSL can take the lead in developing mentorship programs that connect current WSL players with aspiring young girls who demonstrate a keen interest in advancing their skills. An example of this could be the Weetabix Wildcats programme, a non-competitive football for girls 5-11. It is all about having loads of fun and meeting new amazing friends, while boosting confidence and getting active.

ATHLETE FOCUS IN ACTION



Growing the Future Base

The Lionesses have played a prominent role in promoting girls' soccer through their work as ambassadors and role models, showcased by Lioness captain Leah Williamson, a vocal advocate for gender equality in sport and creating opportunities for girls to play soccer. The Lionesses have also engaged brand sponsors to support these efforts on a national scale.

For example, Women's Euro 2022 partner Just Eat launched "101", a grassroots initiative designed to encourage and support more girls and women across the UK to pull on their boots and play. The programme's name, 101, comes 101 years since women's football was banned in the UK, and provides financial support, branded starter packs, kits, and expert advice to local communities. The initiative was driven by Lioness star and Arsenal midfielder Jordan Nobbs.

WNBA Changemakers: A Collaborative Sponsorship Investment in Athletes



Launched in 2020, the WNBA saw the need to bring together value-driven brand sponsors who are leaders in the advancement of women and sports. The Changemakers sponsorship program not only assists the league in transformational league growth in marketing, branding, and the fan experience, but also places a core focus on elevating the player experience.

A founding Changemaker partner, AT&T, prioritised helping WNBA athletes build their own brand using their modern media resources. Through this partnership, all active WNBA players receive a free mobile device and cellular service. In addition, AT&T spearheaded a brand-building education summit, bringing in experts across personal branding, social and digital media, and storytelling, delivered exclusively to WNBA athletes.

Future base investment: NFL and girl's flag football



In a significant and promising development, Nike has recently teamed up with the National Football League (NFL) to launch an initiative aimed at advancing girls' flag football within high school athletic programs across the United States. With a commitment of \$5 million (USD), this initiative is poised to bring about substantial positive change, breaking barriers for girls in the traditionally male-dominated sport of American football.

Furthermore, this endeavour goes beyond mere financial assistance. NFL franchises are actively collaborating with their local communities to spearhead growth in girls' flag football programs. By investing both resources and strategic support into the development of these programs in and around their neighbourhoods, NFL teams are amplifying their commitment to fostering inclusivity and diversity in sports. This localised approach reflects a dedication to nurturing talent at the grassroots level, ensuring that opportunities abound for young girls to excel in flag football.

A GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO WOMEN'S SPORTS SUCCESS

The time has come for us to harness the soaring success of the Lionesses and translate it into a substantial victory for the WSL, and subsequently women's professional clubs of ALL sports throughout the world. This journey requires a collective commitment to the principles of balancing profit with purpose, using communication vehicles to tell the stories that fans want to hear, and foster development of current and future professional female athletes.



For women's sports to thrive, **we must empower** clubs to generate revenue that covers their costs and supports the livelihoods of professional athletes. Equitable and sustainable pay is not a luxury but a necessity for those who dedicate their lives to their craft. This includes working through current structures of commercial teams and unbundling organisational priorities to focus on women's advancement.



We **must ensure that women's sports remain accessible** to people from all walks of life, irrespective of their background or circumstances. It's a path that leads to a more equitable and diverse sports landscape, where every aspiring athlete can chase their dreams.



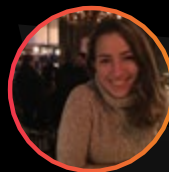
Brands, too, **must step up and recognise the true value of women's sports**. Paying a fair price for sponsorships, media rights, and talent deals is not just a moral obligation; it's an investment in a profitable future. The potential for success is real – and here – evidenced by the rising popularity and growing audiences across women's sports worldwide.

Let's capitalise on this opportune moment, as the triumph of women's sports in all of our local communities holds significance not only for athletes but for the broader collective as well. It's a celebration of progress, equality, and the unwavering spirit of determination. **Together, we can ensure that women's sports ascend to even greater heights, shining bright as beacons of inspiration for generations to come.**

| CONTRIBUTORS



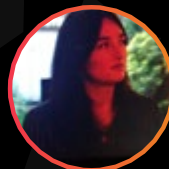
Thayer Lavielle
The Collective EVP



Ania Shefford
Brands Director & The
Collective EMEA Lead



Danielle Smith
Collective Think Tank
Founding Member



Grace Bright
Social Strategist,
Wasserman



Kritika Naidu
Master's Student
& Content Creator



WASSERMAN
THE COLLECTIVE

As a division of Wasserman, the Collective exists to create change in support of equity and fairness for women in sports and entertainment.

As a constantly evolving and complicated target, The Collective distills data regarding women's mindsets, desires, lifestyle, and more into actionable insights and marketing strategies for brands, properties and talent.

In collaboration with a global consortium of today's greatest academic minds and industry leaders, The Collective delivers a holistic and deep understanding of women as consumers, fans, professionals and individuals.