

Women's Sport Spotlight

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Welcome to the First Edition of "Women's Sport Spotlight"

It is with great excitement that we introduce the inaugural edition of "Women's Sport Spotlight," your new source for the most compelling stories and developments in women's sport. We will bring you a curated selection of the biggest headlines, inspiring achievements, and emerging trends from across the world of women's sport.

The landscape of women's sport is evolving at an unprecedented pace, with athletes breaking barriers, setting new records, and capturing the imagination of fans globally. Our aim is to shine a light on these remarkable moments, and keep you informed about the issues shaping the future of women's sport.

Whether you are a passionate supporter, an industry professional, or simply curious about the latest happenings, "Women's Sport Spotlight" is here to ensure you never miss a beat.

Let's get started with this edition's highlights.

Women's Rugby World Cup Breaks Records and Barriers

The Women's Rugby World Cup has become a landmark event in global sport, not only for the quality of competition but also for the cultural and social impact it has had on women's sport more broadly. The 2025 edition, hosted in England, was the largest and most successful tournament to date, expanding to 16 teams and drawing record-breaking crowds. Over 440,000 tickets were sold, far surpassing expectations, with the final at Twickenham attracting 81,885 spectators—the highest ever attendance for a women's rugby match and one of the largest for any Rugby World Cup final, men's or women's.

The tournament's opening match between England and the USA set the tone, with more than 42,000 fans filling Sunderland's Stadium of Light, a figure that eclipsed previous records. Television audiences also soared, with the final drawing nearly six million viewers on BBC One, outpacing some men's fixtures and highlighting the growing appetite for women's rugby. Commercially, the event attracted new sponsors and media coverage, while local economies in host cities benefited from surges in tourism and hospitality demand.

Beyond the numbers, the World Cup's legacy lies in its role as a catalyst for change. The visibility of elite female athletes competing at the highest level has inspired a new generation of girls to take up rugby, while also challenging outdated stereotypes about women in contact sports. Initiatives such as the RFU's "Impact 25" programme, launched around the tournament, have further invested in grassroots development, ensuring that the momentum translates into long-term growth.

In essence, the Women's Rugby World Cup has transcended sport. It has become a symbol of progress, demonstrating that women's competitions can draw massive audiences, generate economic value, and inspire cultural shifts. Its success has accelerated the broader movement toward equality in sport, leaving a legacy that extends far beyond the pitch.

UEFA's Landmark Deal with Disney

UEFA has struck a groundbreaking five-year agreement with Disney+ to broadcast the UEFA Women's Champions League (UWCL) across Europe, beginning with the 2025/26 season and running through to 2029/30. The deal marks Disney's biggest commitment to live sport on its streaming platform to date, replacing DAZN, which had held global rights since 2021. Under the new arrangement, Disney+ will stream all 75 matches of the competition each season at no additional cost to subscribers, ensuring unprecedented access for fans across the continent.

The timing coincides with a major revamp of the UWCL format. From 2025/26, the tournament will adopt an 18-team league phase, mirroring the men's Champions League structure, followed by playoff rounds. This change increases the number of high-profile fixtures and aims to enhance the competition's appeal to broadcasters and audiences alike. ESPN, Disney's sports division, will produce the coverage, delivering multi-language commentary and expert analysis. From the knockout stages onward, matches will be available in at least five European languages, with additional localised options to connect with diverse fan bases.

Disney+ has assembled a high-profile broadcast team featuring former international players, Champions League winners, and experienced commentators, aiming to elevate the storytelling and visibility of women's football. Free-to-air sublicensing is also expected in key markets, ensuring that marquee fixtures, including the final, remain accessible to wider audiences.

UEFA officials hailed the deal as a milestone in the growth of the women's game, citing record attendances, rising standards, and surging global interest. For Disney, the partnership underscores its ambition to expand beyond entertainment into premium live sport, leveraging its 125 million-plus subscriber base. By securing exclusive pan-European rights, Disney+ positions itself at the heart of women's football's next growth phase, offering fans a comprehensive, high-quality viewing experience that promises to boost the sport's profile across Europe.

Levelling the Playing Field: Addressing the Gender Gap in UK Youth Sport and Unlocking National Benefits

This Sky-commissioned study, undertaken by Public First, exposes the scale, causes and consequences of the gender gap in UK youth sport and sets out an evidence-based blueprint for closing it. Drawing on polling of more than 2,600 adults and adolescents, focus groups, an online community and economic modelling, the report calculates that boys aged 11-18 play, on average, 1.4 hours more organised sport each week than girls. Extrapolated across the cohort, that equates to a 280 million-hour annual participation deficit. The disparity deprives girls of proven pathways to physical health, mental wellbeing, confidence and future leadership; women who played sport as children are 50 per cent more likely to hold senior professional roles, and each inactive 18-year-old woman who takes up sport generates an estimated lifetime economic benefit of £30,000. Nationally, eliminating the gap could unlock £570 million in annual productivity gains and save the NHS £73 million per year.

Three interconnected barriers drive the shortfall. First, pervasive sexist attitudes—experienced by a third of girls—manifest as abuse, body-related comments and peer policing that undermine belonging. Secondly, unequal access means fewer female teams, inferior facilities and higher costs; 340,000 more girls than boys are priced out of participation, and one in five schools offers football only for boys. Thirdly, poorly designed provision – unsafe changing areas and ill-fitting or culturally inappropriate kit – discourages engagement; almost half of girls feel uncomfortable changing for

sport and have collectively skipped at least two million hours of teaching to avoid PE.

The authors advocate decisive, system-wide interventions. Central recommendations include a statutory duty of equality of opportunity in all publicly funded sport (modelled on the landmark federal civil rights law in the United States, Title IX), an annual National Girls and Women in Sport Day, mandatory two-hour weekly PE up to age 16, creation of a trained Girls' Sport Lead in every co-educational school and updated uniform guidance. To amplify role-models and normalise women's sport, the report proposes targeted tax relief on live women's sport production, enabling broadcasters to expand high-quality coverage and accelerate cultural change.

IOC convenes high-level working group to safeguard the competitive integrity of women's sport

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has established a new working group dedicated to safeguarding the female category in sport, fulfilling a key campaign promise made by its recently elected president, Kirsty Coventry. The former Olympic swimming champion from Zimbabwe has consistently prioritised gender eligibility issues, signalling her intention to take a stronger leadership role in shaping global policy. Until now, decisions on eligibility have largely been left to individual federations, resulting in inconsistent and sometimes conflicting rules.

The move follows controversy at the Paris 2024 Olympics, where boxers Imane Khelif and Lin Yu-ting were permitted to compete despite having failed gender verification tests at the International Boxing Association (IBA) World Championships. The IOC's handling of the matter drew criticism and deepened tensions with the IBA, which had already lost its recognition due to governance and financial concerns. Coventry has argued that such disputes highlight the need for a unified, science-based approach to eligibility that ensures fairness for female athletes while maintaining credibility across sports.

The newly created Protection of the Female Category Working Group will include experts and international federations, though the IOC has chosen not to disclose the members' names at this stage to protect the integrity of their work. The initiative forms part of the IOC's broader "Fit For The Future" campaign, which also includes working groups on the Olympic programme, Youth Olympic Games, and commercial partnerships. Coventry has described these groups as essential to strengthening the Olympic Movement and addressing complex challenges.

By launching this panel, Coventry aims to provide clarity, consistency, and leadership on one of the most contentious issues in modern sport. Her presidency is expected to focus heavily on balancing inclusivity with fairness, ensuring that women's sport is protected while the IOC adapts to evolving social and scientific debates.

Electronic Arts secures global licensing rights to UEFA women's competitions

UEFA and Electronic Arts Inc. (EA) have announced a new multi-year global licensing agreement that will see two of women's football's most prestigious competitions – the UEFA Women's Champions League and the UEFA Women's EURO – continue to feature in EA SPORTS FC, one of the world's most popular football video game franchises. The deal ensures that fans can experience these tournaments in the upcoming EA SPORTS FC 26, which is set for release later this month and will include more than 20,000 athletes, 750 clubs and national teams, 120 stadiums, and over 35

leagues.

The partnership builds on the collaboration first established in 2022, when the UEFA Women's Champions League was introduced into the game for the first time. UEFA's executive director of marketing, Guy-Laurent Epstein, described the renewed agreement as an "exciting opportunity" to continue driving the growth of women's football, particularly following the success of the UEFA Women's Champions League season and the UEFA Women's EURO 2025. He emphasised that the inclusion of these competitions in EA SPORTS FC allows fans and gamers worldwide to engage with the sport in new and dynamic ways.

James Taylor, EA SPORTS' Director of Football Partnerships, echoed this sentiment, highlighting the importance of showcasing the UEFA Women's Champions League as the pinnacle of women's club football. He stressed that bringing the competition to life in the game reflects EA's commitment to celebrating and elevating the women's game globally.

The agreement underscores both UEFA and EA's shared ambition to expand the reach and visibility of women's football, using digital platforms to engage younger audiences and celebrate the diversity of the sport. By integrating flagship women's competitions into mainstream gaming, the partnership aims to inspire the next generation of players and fans alike.

Rights holders and brands will be watching closely: digital exposure inside EA Sports FC is increasingly regarded as a gateway for new sponsors to test women's football inventory at scale. The pact therefore signals not merely another licensing coup for EA, but a strategic inflection point in the monetisation and mainstreaming of the women's game across both real and virtual pitches.

Breaking Barriers: Tackling Discrimination in the Beautiful Game

A recent survey by Women in Football has identified a widespread culture of sexism and under-reporting across football. Four in five women working in the sport say they have experienced workplace sexism, with 78% reporting gender-based discrimination and 63.5% encountering sexist jokes or "banter." The survey collected 867 responses (759 women, 100 men, 8 non-binary) and covered a range of roles and seniority, including 14.6% in executive positions and 71% in full-time employment.

Many incidents go unreported: a third of women said they avoided reporting due to mistrust of workplace processes or fear of retaliation, and 56% who did report said no action followed. Male respondents are increasingly aware of inequality, with 69% saying women must work harder than men to gain equal recognition and benefits. Women who succeed often cite personal resilience and determination as contributors to their success, but Women in Football CEO highlights that the industry should not rely on individual grit; change requires cultural commitment and psychological safety.

The findings come amid a period of great success and commercial growth for women's football in England; there have been record audiences and revenue from recent tournaments, with England's semi-final against Italy attracting over 10 million ITV viewers, and their group match with Wales outdrawing the men's Club World Cup final despite being broadcast at the same time.

The problems extend beyond football: Salford Red Devils' COO Claire Bradbury resigned in August, alleging club ownership used "misogynistic, inappropriate language" including a suggestion from a person of seniority to sleep with someone at the Rugby Football League. Claire Bradbury had stayed silent at the time to protect the club. Salford, which is facing financial and operational difficulties,

has said it condemns inappropriate behaviour, will investigate the allegations thoroughly, and will report its findings when the investigation is concluded.

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