

The Gender Pay Gap in Sports

By Elizabeth Burns

The average salary for a Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) player is \$120,648. A fantastic number, until one observes that the minimum salary for a National Basketball Association (NBA) player is \$898,310. While the WNBA does not make even a fraction of the NBA's revenue, the WNBA pays out only 23% of the league's revenue to players. The NBA pays approximately 50% of the league's total revenue to players. Though critics attempt to explain the gender wage gap away with sexist pronouncements, the chasm between salaries for female and male basketball players is because of long-held prejudices. In the world of sports, women have been at a disadvantage to men since they have been allowed to compete. The salary gap can be attributed to the historic and current discrimination of women in the world of sports and the lack of quality media about women's sports.

Compared to men, women have been at a systemic disadvantage in sports for most of history. Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the first modern Olympic Games, commented that the inclusion of women would be "impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic, and incorrect" (Fitzgerald). The first modern Olympic Games were held in 1896, with women first being allowed to participate in 1900. Out of almost one thousand athletes, there were only twenty-two women competing. In this cycle and other early cycles of the modern Olympic Games, women primarily stuck to disciplines that were viewed as feminine. These disciplines include sports such as tennis, croquet, golf, sailing, and figure skating. It was not until this past year's summer Olympics in Tokyo, that 49% of the athletes competing were female. It took more than a century to level the number of women and men participating, and men's athletic competitions still enjoy an advantage when it comes to both the payroll and in the media.

While many historical barriers to women's participation and success in sports have been removed, current barriers and attitudes persist. During the 2021 March Madness basketball tournament, the quality of the men's and women's facilities was shockingly dissimilar. Many female basketball players and coaches present at the tournament took to social media to shed

light on the injustices present at one of the biggest stages in basketball. Side-by-side comparisons of facilities for men and women reveal the superior weight training facilities, gift bags, and food to which male athletes have access. When discussing the weightlifting facilities at the tournament venue, Sedona Prince of the Oregon Ducks' women's basketball team said, "There's a big misconception women don't need to lift weights" (Kallingal and Martin). It is appalling that an organization committed to the "well-being and lifelong success" of athletes does not have the appropriate equipment for women ("What Is the NCAA?"). When women do win hard-fought battles for increased benefits in sports, the benefits are often not enough. In early 2020, the WNBA and the WNBA Players Association agreed to an eight-year collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The agreement gives players access to fully paid maternity leave, enhanced travel plans including individual hotel rooms and better seating on airplanes while traveling, and a greater share of the league's revenue. When the CBA was announced, the WNBA purported it to be an innovative, revolutionary win for professional female basketball players. But the CBA was earned only after players and their needs were ignored for years. It is contemptible that women are unable to achieve their earning and athletic potential in the highest levels of sports due to flagrant discrimination.

Professional female athletes are subject to the media's limited and abrasive coverage of women's sports. Since 1989, every five years a University of Southern California study concerning men's and women's sports news coverage has been conducted. Each segment of the study has revealed similarly low percentages of airtime focused on women's sports. The 2021 installment of the study was no different, finding that 95% of total television coverage on ESPN in 2019 was on men's sports news (Miller). The study also found that when women's sports are covered, the coverage tends to be both lower in technical and production quality compared to coverage of men's sports. Airtime tends to center around negative elements of women's sports, such as fighting. It ignores not only the impressive athleticism and skill involved in women's sports but also the activism in which these athletes are involved. The amount of coverage, the refinement of that coverage, and the topics presented are troubling. Those who may be interested in women's sports may quit taking heed of developments simply because the content is tedious and dull. Fewer people watching, listening to, and reading content put out by the media lead corporations to believe that there is apathy for women's sports. Women's sports are

not repetitive and lackluster; they simply have never been given a fair chance by the corporations that determine what is worth paying attention to.

The pay gap between male and female athletes is because of bygone and present-day discrimination and the distinct absence of media concerning women's sports. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, squandered his chance to make a positive statement on the presence of women in sports. NCAA and WNBA administrators continue to make decisions that disregard the fact that female and male athletic competitions can be equal in terms of entertainment value. That is, they can be equal when the media begins to document and present women's athletics with the same vigor and enthusiasm that they give men's athletics. When institutions give the same priority to women's sports that they do to men's sports, generations of young girls will be able to pursue their ambitions with confidence.

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