

The Gender Equality Debate; A Boost for Women in Sport

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I am a big believer in gender equality and passionate about equal rights, equal pay and equal recognition, not only when it comes to our female athletes, but for women in general.

I have a very young daughter and I hope that one day she will love sports as much as I do. She will certainly be encouraged to play, learn and get involved in a variety of sports as a kid. And if she chooses to take sport further one day, like most parents, I hope that she will have the same opportunities as her male counterparts.

Gender equality in sports has always been a controversial topic. Even the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, said in 1896, “No matter how toughened a sportswoman may be, her organism is not cut out to sustain certain shocks.”.

Although gender equality has come a long way, including UNESCO recognizing sports and physical activity as a human right in 1978, it still hasn’t come far enough.

Gender Equality – the stats!

In America 40% of sportspeople are women, however only 6-8% of the total sports media coverage is devoted to them. And women-only sports stories add up to just 3.5% of all sports stories in the four major US newspapers.

According to the Women’s Sports Foundation, male athletes get \$179 million more in athletic scholarships each year than females do. Additionally, collegiate institutions spend just 24% of their athletic operating budgets on female sports, as well as just 16% of recruiting budgets and 33% of scholarship budgets on female athletes.

Some people have the argument that “women’s sport isn’t interesting enough”. And even though over the years the popularity of women’s sports is growing, unfortunately the media coverage and sponsorship dollars haven’t necessarily followed through and gender equality remains an issue. Take last July’s Women’s World Cup soccer final for example. It was the most watched soccer match—men’s or women’s—EVER in the US with nearly 25.4 million viewers. Yet the players were far less compensated than their male counterparts.

“We are the best in the world, have three World Cup championships, four Olympic championships, and the men get paid more to just show up than we get paid to win major championships,”
Hope Solo, American Goalkeeper.

The gender equality debate was reignited recently when former South African tennis professional Raymond Moore made a number of comments that were degrading to women in the sport. This was met with backlash from both female and male players including World Number 1 Serena Williams who was vocal in expressing her views on the subject.

What it boils down to is that we, collectively, men and women, need to do more about gender equality. We need to pave the way for our daughters, just as we do our sons. There should be no disparity in sports, nor in the workplace, nor in life. Women and men should be seen as, and treated as, equals in all respects. Gender should not be the thing that defines us or separates us from our fellow athletes. Let's show our daughters that they can be whatever they want to be, and get paid well for it too!

Fast Facts:

- 1) 70% of sports now offer the same amount of prize money for men and women. But in the 30% that don't, the difference runs into the millions.
- 2) There are 2million more men than women taking part in sport at least once per week.
- 3) 0.4% of the total commercial investment in sport goes into women's sport.
- 4) Only half of the governing bodies in sport currently meet the government target to have women making up one quarter of the people sitting around the boardroom table.
- 5) Men's professional soccer clubs in Europe are the world's wealthiest sports entities and at least 10 European soccer players earn more than \$14 million per year.
- 6) When it comes to women, tennis is by far the most lucrative sport for female athletes.
- 7) Coaches in women's team sports at college level earn 63 cents for every dollar earned by head Coaches of men's teams.