



MEETING IN A BOX: 2023 Women's History Month



Every March, we celebrate Women's History Month to recognize the strength, tenacity and resilience of women around the globe. It's also a month to celebrate the contributions women have made to society throughout history. This month, we'll give all women of different backgrounds, sexual orientations and abilities the credit they deserve while also addressing the obstacles that still lie ahead for women in society.

Use this Meeting in a Box as a tool to continue your employees' cultural competence education, open conversations about identity and gender equality, and spotlight women's accomplishments.

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR WOMEN IN SPORTS

2022 was a pivotal year for women's sports.

The Women's Sports Network debuted with 24/7 streaming content, the first network ever focusing on female athletes. The first all-female team referee team made history at the World in a match between Germany and Costa Rica.

Fans broke attendance records at games across the globe and viewership numbers soared. Three out of 10 sports fans in the U.S. say they're watching more women's sports now than five years ago because the games are easier to find on television.

The National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) championship game was broadcast for the first time in a primetime slot on CBS. Last year was also the first time since 2016 that ESPN moved the NCAA women's basketball championship to primetime.

“Women’s sports shouldn’t be viewed as a cause, it should be viewed as a good business decision,” says Jay Kaufman, Executive Vice President, Head of Sports at the National Research Group.

“Numbers back it and ESPN has known this for a while now. While they want to do the right thing, they’re not putting women’s NCAA basketball or volleyball or softball on in primetime or in key windows as a charity. They’re doing it because the numbers that women’s sports generate are giant.”

Globally, broadcasters were willing to pay more for the rights to women’s games last year than they were in the past, with the biggest increase happening in Spain. From youth to professional levels, girls and women have enjoyed improved access to sports opportunities. Despite the progress, women still face an uneven playing field.



Investment Gap

It’s a fight as old as the Olympics — female sports athletes still struggle to achieve the same rights and recognition as their male counterparts.

U.S. broadcast networks spend just **0.2%** of their rights budgets on women’s-only sporting events. This doesn’t include broadcast packages like the Olympics, with both men and women competing.

“Who is the next generation of women’s sports fans? Figure out who that is and make sure you’re engaging them.” says Mary Moczula, Communications Director at the National Research Group. “Look at the next generation of female athletes and leagues. Make sure you’re engaging them and thinking of strategic ways to put your money in so you can get the most money out.”

There is also a discrepancy in how fans approach men’s and women’s sports. Viewership of women’s sports lags behind men’s events. People view men’s sports as more exciting and competitive than women’s. Fans are also less willing to pay for the experience like spending money to watch women’s games or purchasing memorabilia.

Moczula says increasing fan engagement can involve building narratives and branding around women’s leagues and players.

“Looking at what happens around game moments is important,” she says. “Some of the storytelling you see happening in men’s sports — you see documentaries on men’s teams and you get that emotional investment. Even if it’s not on my screen automatically, I’m going to make that extra step to find the game because now I’m emotionally invested.”

Pay Disparities

The U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) made history in 2022 by announcing that players for the men’s and women’s teams would get paid equally. But the USSF is the exception, not the rule.

Professional female athletes are paid much less than their male counterparts and the pay gap has been increasing yearly. While tennis has the lowest pay gap in sports, women still earn 34% less than men.

!!
The average male NBA player earns \$5.3 million a year, while a WNBA player earns an average of \$130,000.

This has forced some WNBA players to play overseas during the off-season to supplement their incomes, as was seen with WNBA star Brittney Griner traveling to Russia.

“The fact that players need to do that is a problem,” says Kaufman. “There has to be a better fix, whether that’s salary, sponsorship opportunities or other things related to basketball or whatever sport they are playing.”

Kaufman notes that eliminating pay disparities in sports does not have a simple solution.

“There are differences between FIFA and leagues where there are collectively bargained agreements,” he says. “There are restrictions to what the pie can be based on, like rights deals. But it’s all intertwined. The more networks invest in primetime slots for women’s sports, the better the rights deals will be. The more they are featured in primetime, the sponsorship should start to get more equal.”

Diversity and Fairness Challenges

2022 marked the 50th anniversary of Title IX, the federal law signed in 1972 that prohibits gender discrimination in educational programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance.

Women are more likely than men to say the legislation needs to go further to increase opportunities for women in sports. Female athletes and their sports programs still have fewer teams, fewer scholarships and lower budgets than their male counterparts.

Gender bias is a stark reality. !!

National Research Group's study found that while **34%** of U.S. sports fans believe that men are naturally better at sports than women, only **19%** believe men deserve to be paid more than their female counterparts.



Diversifying the ranks of women in sports remains a challenge, with intersectionality bringing factors like gender identity, ableism and race to the forefront.

Sporting organizations like the International Olympic Committee and NCAA have different regulations on how transgender athletes can compete in sports. More than a dozen states have laws preventing transgender girls from participating in sports with other girls.

The Fairness in Women's Sports Act states an athletic team or sport designated for females, women or girls may not be open to students, boys and men based on their assigned sex at birth. !!

Female athletes with disabilities often face societal impediments and limited sports access. Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous and other girls and women of color have more significant barriers to participation, participate in sports at lower levels and are historically underrepresented in sport leadership.

When Title IX was passed, women's college teams were coached almost exclusively by women. Since 1972, the number of women coaching women steadily declined. By the late 1980s, there were more male head coaches of women's teams than female head coaches, a trend that has continued.

Kaufman says that increasing the diversity of women in sports at all levels makes business sense and is the right thing to do. "Whether it's advertising, games, cameras, talent or leadership – it's not a sports thing, it's a world thing," says Kaufman. "There needs to be better representation worldwide and sports is no exception."

