

# Women, sport and the media

**The under-representation of sportswomen in all forms of media, together with the under-representation of women involved in the production of sport-related media, has long been of concern to those trying to increase the visibility of women's sport.**

## Visibility – how often do we see coverage of women's sport in the media?

- Most of what we know about sport we learn from the media.
- Television, radio and the print media play a central role in informing our knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women and sport.
- The media can play an important role in raising the public profile of women's sport.
- The major terrestrial and satellite television channels prioritise men's sport over women's sport.
- On satellite television the top sport shown by Sky and Eurosport is men's football while on terrestrial television men's football and men's cricket dominate.
- Television coverage of women's sport makes up only between 0.5% and 6% of all sports coverage (*Sports Council 1993*).
- Coverage of women's sport rarely shows action shots: instead, details of sportswomen's personal lives are often included inappropriately.
- Even at the start of the 21st century it is quite usual to open the sports pages of national newspapers and not find any coverage of any women's sport in the sports sections (which often extend up to 14 pages of coverage).

- Increased representation of sportswomen by the media requires increased involvement of women in the production of the media, for example producers, photographers and presenters.
- Women are under-represented in all aspects of sports news production including sports journalism, sports photography, and sports broadcasting and presenting.

## Visibility – how often do we see our top sportswomen?

- Evidence shows that the visibility of women's sport is far less than men's, and fewer sports are covered.
- Public knowledge, perceptions and attitudes about women and sport are dictated by what is shown in newspapers and other forms of the media.
- An athlete's profile may reflect her image rather than her history within a particular sport, paying less attention to her athleticism, skill and achievements. This, in turn, undermines the status of women in sport.
- The number and diversity of role models for sportswomen and potential sportswomen are fewer.
- Sponsorship associated with women in sport is lower because women's sport receives less media coverage. However, a recent survey by the Sports Sponsorship Advisory Service reported that sponsors felt that women's sport would attract increasing attention within the next five to 10 years.

## Newspaper surveys: research findings

The Women's Sports Foundation monitored five national tabloid newspapers for six weeks between December 2000 and January 2001. The amount of press coverage given to women and men was monitored and compared, and showed the following results:

- 49 issues of various newspapers were reviewed
- the newspapers reviewed had 701 pages of sports reports
- there were 1,564 photographs of men compared to 36 for women
- this accounts for just 2.3% coverage for women.

In addition, research shows that over the period of the 2002 Commonwealth Games women's sport received an average of 32% and 26% coverage in broadsheet and tabloid newspapers respectively.

It should be noted that these two surveys were carried out at different times of the year, with one focusing on a major event hosted by England. These factors will have influenced the findings.

## Frequently asked questions about women, sport and the media

**Question:** What is the harm in portraying female athletes as pretty and feminine?

**Answer:** Images are powerful tools that shape and reflect attitudes and values. By portraying sportswomen either as sex objects or only as 'pretty ladies', the message is that sportswomen are not strong, powerful and highly skilled individuals. Ultimately, images that ignore or trivialise females undermine the importance of women's sport and respect for the abilities of female athletes.

**Question:** So what would you have the media do? What kind of images would make women athletes happy?

**Answer:** The media should simply reflect the reality of women's diverse sports experiences – from grace and beauty to physical strength, endurance and power. A balanced and realistic view is what is absent in the media. Young girls and women of all ages, races and social classes are breaking down historical barriers to their participation – and this deserves to be celebrated.

### A final word: big improvements... but a long way to go

Women athletes are no different from men athletes in the skill, dedication and courage they bring to their sports. There is no doubt that over the past few years there have been big improvements in the coverage of women's sport and the types of images shown, but we still have a long way to go especially in the sports pages of national newspapers.

The Women's Sports Foundation has a vision of a society which celebrates the diversity of women and girls, and enables them to benefit from, excel at and fulfil their potential through the sport of their choice.

### Supporting women's sport

The Women's Sports Foundation is the only organisation that works solely to increase opportunities for women and girls. We are a small team of five people, campaigning for women's sport. These fact files are provided to you free of

charge to help raise awareness of the issues – and empower you to advocate for change. However, if you would like to make a contribution to cover admin costs, and to support women's sport, please visit our website and follow the links to the 'make a donation' section.

### Women's Sports Foundation

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