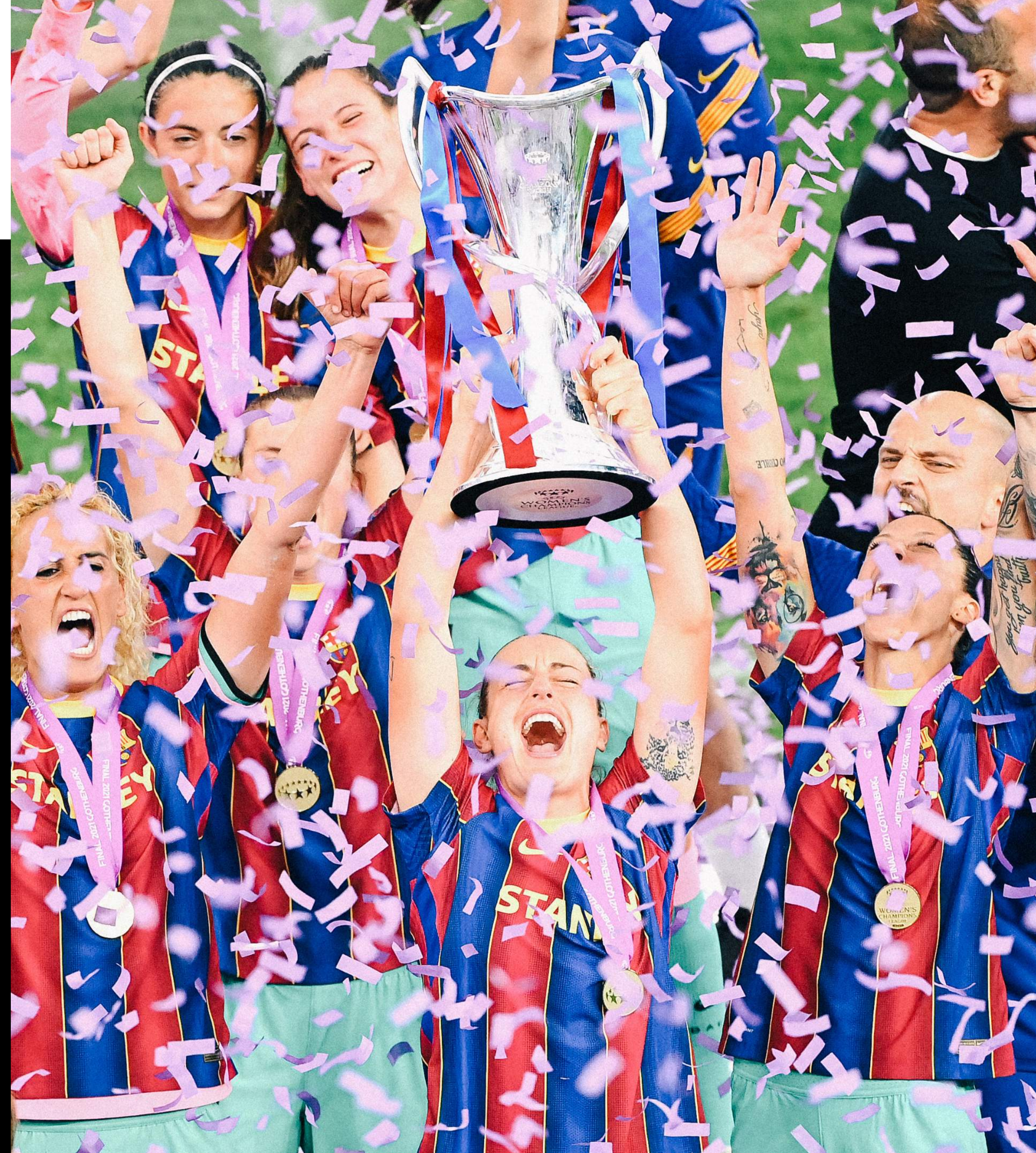


# THE COVERAGE GAP:

A STEP TOWARD LEVELING  
VISIBILITY AND VIEWERSHIP  
DISPARITY IN WOMEN'S SPORTS



OCTOBER 2021

# CAN YOU NAME THE TWO ALL-TIME TOP SCORERS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE HISTORY – MEN'S AND WOMEN'S?

One of them is the captain of the Portugal national team and the most followed individual on Instagram. The other is a Norwegian who is the fastest player to reach 50 Champions League goals and a five-time UEFA Champions League winner.<sup>1</sup>

If you identified Cristiano Ronaldo as one of the two, you're right, and hundreds of millions join you in knowing his name. But odds are you can't name the other one, even though she put up equally impressive stats.



# WHY?

## IN SPITE OF THE INCONTESTABLE EXCELLENCE OF FEMALE ATHLETES THE WORLD OVER, THERE IS STILL A MASSIVE DISPARITY IN THE COVERAGE THEY RECEIVE.

Ada Hegerberg is the name of the Norwegian athlete, and since joining her club Olympique Lyonnais in 2014, she has scored 220 goals in just 182 games and holds the record for most goals of all-time as well as in a single season for the UEFA Women's Champions League, was named BBC Women's Footballer of the Year twice, became the first-ever female recipient of the Ballon d'Or, boycotted the 2019 World Cup in protest of inequality in women's soccer in her home country of Norway... the list goes on and on.

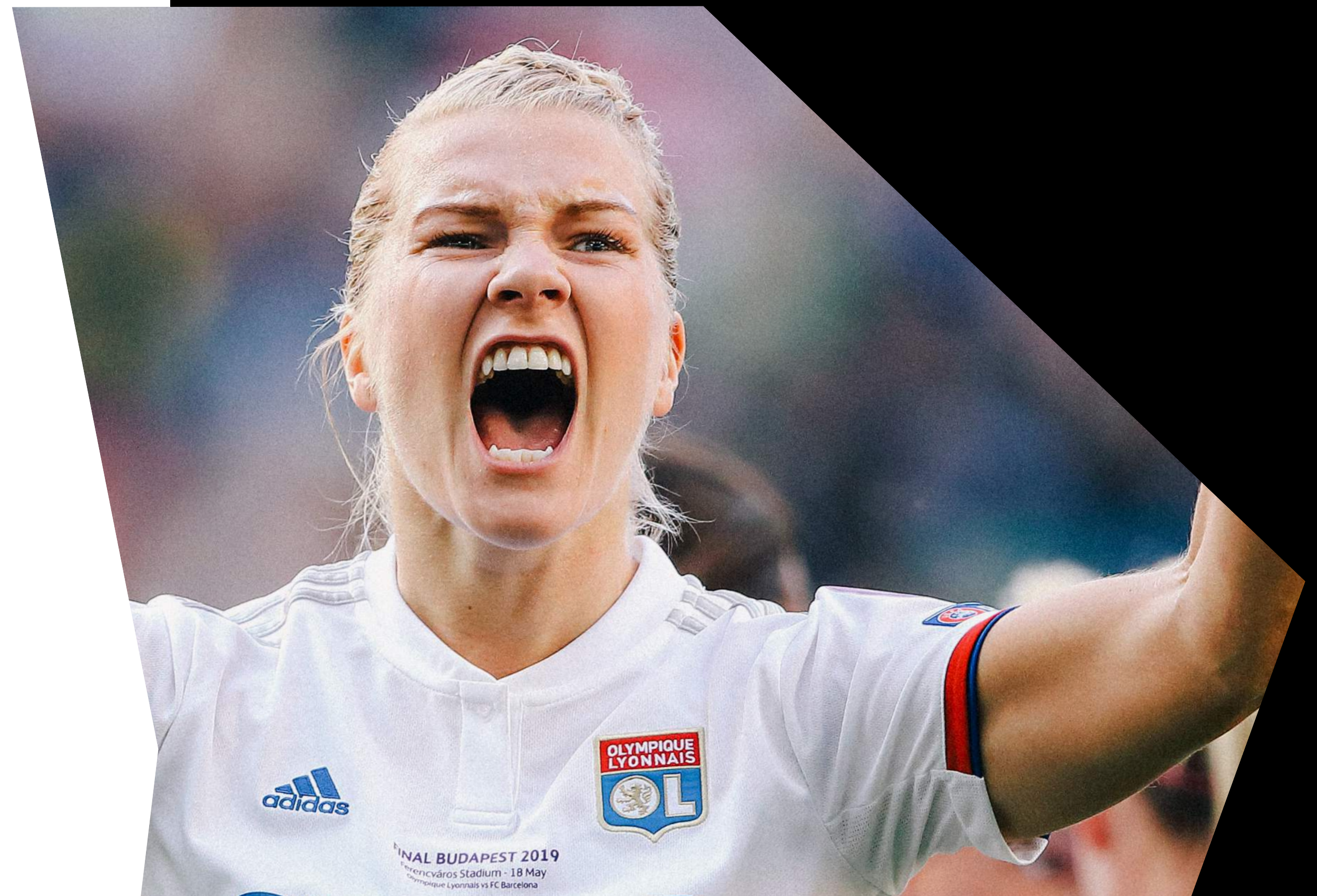
Meanwhile, Cristiano Ronaldo has been the center of attention as part of three of the largest football clubs in the world, featured prominently as a star player in every primetime broadcast, and top followed account on all of Instagram.

And though he's been around just a little bit longer, the coverage disparity between them, and the deeper gender gap that drives it, is why one is a household name and the other is not.

So why don't female and male athletes objectively receive the same level of recognition, especially if they represent the population 50/50? The answer lies within a closer look at the broadcast, news, and social media coverage of women's sports today.

# DISPARITY BY THE NUMBERS

We live in a world where nearly every men's game for every major mainstream sport can be available at our fingertips in an instant, anytime, anywhere (usually primetime!) and with highlights posted within seconds. The same is not true for women's games, and this, rather than lack of fan interest, is one of the reasons why the coverage gap persists.



# 64%

**OF CONSUMERS AROUND THE WORLD SAY THEY DON'T WATCH WOMEN'S SPORTS BECAUSE OF THREE KEY REASONS<sup>2</sup>:**

- 1. DON'T KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT THE ATHLETES AND TEAMS**
- 2. DON'T HAVE AS MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO WATCH**
- 3. OR, AREN'T AWARE ALTOGETHER OF WHERE THEY CAN CATCH THE GAMES THAT ARE AVAILABLE**



**MANY PEOPLE MIGHT SEE A STAT LIKE THAT AND THINK... WELL, IS THE INTEREST THERE? THE ANSWER IS, OVERWHELMING, YES. AUDIENCE AND SPORT FAN INTEREST AND PASSION IS ABSOLUTELY THERE. WE JUST NEED TO FUEL IT. LET'S TAKE A LOOK:**

66% of the total population across 8 key markets (U.S., UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Australia, NZ) say they're interested in at least one women's sport.<sup>3</sup>

But there's a significant gap between people who say they're interested in women's sports and people who actually watch women's sports. Nearly all sports fans (93%) watch men's sports, and yet only just over half (63%) watch women's sports.<sup>4</sup>

For any avoidance of doubt, women are not the only ones interested in watching women's sports. A recent study shows that women's sport viewership is split almost equally between men and women.<sup>5</sup>

And in DAZN and The Female Quotient's new study, across the 8 global markets, women's sport viewership between men and women differed by less than 15% in nearly all countries, with viewership in Italy showing only a 1% gap between men and women.<sup>6</sup>

The potential impact of fueling the total fanbase with better coverage of women's sport could be huge. The UK alone estimates that brand & sponsor investment could triple to 1 billion pounds in annual revenue by 2030 with improved visibility.<sup>7</sup> And, according to a new study from FIFA, leagues that negotiate broadcast rights exclusively for women's leagues generate, on average, 7 times more revenue from broadcast compared to leagues that do not.<sup>8</sup>

**So, if the interest and revenue opportunities are both clearly there... what gives? The difference is that the majority of consumers do not know when and where they can find quality coverage of women's sports. Here's what's contributing to that challenge.**

93%  
VS.  
63%

**SPORTS FANS THAT WATCH MEN'S SPORTS VS. WOMEN'S SPORTS (A 30% VIEWERSHIP GAP)**

# 80%

**OF TOP-RANKED SPORTS NEWS AND HIGHLIGHTS SHOWS IN THE US, STUDIED OVER THREE DECADES, HAD ZERO STORIES ON WOMEN'S SPORTS.**



## **MINIMAL PROMOTION FOR EVENTS & FIXTURES AND A LACK OF QUALITY, IN-DEPTH STORYTELLING**

Consumers frequently take to social media and lament about not knowing that certain women's leagues exist, or if they do, complain about not being aware of when championships are played. Others state confusion about how and where to watch certain women's games or events.<sup>9</sup>

### **WHAT THE FANS SAY:**

1 in 5 consumers surveyed globally say they do not follow or know much about female athletes or sports.<sup>10</sup>

Despite recent strides, what exacerbates this gap in knowledge is a lack of year-round storytelling for women's sporting events compared to nonstop daily storytelling around men's sports and athletes. Social conversation from fans reflects a permanent buzz throughout the year surrounding male athletes and events, but conversation around female athletes

only spikes around select events, like the U.S. Women's National Team's victorious run at the 2019 World Cup<sup>11</sup> or recent U.S. Open women's final.



### **WHAT THE DATA SHOW:**

Mainstream sports media coverage shows the same pattern as fan conversation on social media. News and highlight shows spend significant airtime building an audience for men's sports with ongoing coverage even during the offseason.<sup>12</sup> News coverage of women's sports often

gets bumped for coverage of men's sports, even when the men's sport in question is no longer in season.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, news coverage of men's sports includes both in-depth analysis relevant to the sport and human interest stories, such as male athletes' charitable work in the community, which builds an emotional connection with the audience<sup>14</sup>. Though female athletes often participate in the same amount of charity outside of their sport for example, their contributions are rarely covered in sports media.<sup>15</sup>



# QUALITY OF COVERAGE FALLS SHORT ON ENGAGING FANS THROUGH THE STORIES THEY WANT TO HEAR

While the sports industry as a whole must take strides to improve coverage of women's sport, there is also another way in which progress must be made: providing the robust contextual storytelling that the talent of female athletes deserves.<sup>16</sup>

## WHAT THE FANS SAY:

The news coverage surrounding women's sports does not do justice to the community's passion. Hardcore fan conversation leading up to major women's sporting events is just as intense, technical and anticipatory as commentary around men's sporting events.<sup>17</sup> Yet, media coverage does not come close to reflecting this. The few dedicated women's sport writers have noted how rare it is to see consistent in-depth analysis, behind-the-scenes content, and great stories surrounding women's sports.<sup>18</sup>

In their assessment of how sports media can improve the quality of women's sports coverage, Harvard's Nieman Lab has called for better storytelling, specifically calling out the need for more focus on athletes' backstories, and knowledgeable coverage from announcers as two of the most pressing issues.<sup>19</sup>

## WHAT THE DATA SHOW:

Aside from the lack of overall visibility, the news coverage that does exist of women's sports and female athletes does not build audiences as much as it could.<sup>20</sup> Since the 80s, the quality of broadcasts and on-air commentary of women's sports has changed, but that doesn't mean it has improved. Longitudinal data show that broadcaster commentary has shifted away from using overtly inappropriate language about female athletes and their performances.<sup>21</sup>

In the early 2000s, on-air commentary focused on positioning female athletes as mothers, wives and girlfriends, rather than their technical ability within their sport.<sup>22</sup> But, more recently, in an effort to stop stereotyping female athletes, researchers from USC / Purdue University observed that commentary has been overcorrected and is now in danger of becoming boring.<sup>23</sup>

Data show that broadcasters consistently deliver commentary without the enthusiasm or vocal excitement prevalent in men's sports.<sup>24</sup> To compound the issue, exposure to quality media coverage of women's sports is practically non-existent, appearing only around major events.<sup>25</sup> The lack of engaging on-air commentary combined with the inconsistent quality of contextual storytelling of women's sports broadcast and news coverage leaves little room to build and sustain an audience.





# A GENERAL LACK OF SURROUNDING MEDIA COVERAGE, IN ADDITION TO BROADCAST COVERAGE GAPS

Women's sports receive just 4% of sports media coverage in the U.S.,<sup>26</sup> and it's not much better globally, ranging from 2% in Malta and Greece, to 4% in Sweden and 7% in the UK, to a "high" of 15% in France.<sup>27</sup>

In 2019, researchers in the U.S. further reported that 95% of surrounding coverage, including highlight shows, centered on men's sports.<sup>28</sup> It's just as bleak online, where women's sports make up only 9% of online newsletter content and 10% of Twitter posts.<sup>29</sup>

## WHAT THE FANS SAY:

Social listening data show that fans complain about the lack of broadcast coverage, as well as the poor time slots given to women's sporting events. They often seek guidance through social media about how to access specific games on their streaming services and express frustration if a game isn't available.<sup>30</sup> In fact, consumers in all 8 countries surveyed in DAZN and The Female Quotient's recent study cite the fact that there "aren't as many women's sports to watch on TV, online or via streaming apps as men's sports" as among the top barriers to viewership.<sup>31</sup>

## WHAT THE DATA SHOW:

Overwhelmingly, fan perception of coverage reflects reality. A stunning 80% of top-ranked sports news and highlights shows in the U.S., studied over three decades, had zero stories on women's sports.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, a longitudinal study out of USC / Purdue University made the somber discovery that the amount of women's sports coverage on TV has barely changed in 30 years, and this pattern holds true for online media coverage.<sup>33</sup>



# HOW WE CAN MEANINGFULLY ADDRESS THE COVERAGE GAP AT ITS CORE

The standard set by men's coverage is far ahead of the investment in women's coverage, yet there's as much opportunity as ever to invest in female athletes and the quality of coverage that surrounds them – broadcast, news, and social media coverage.

To close the gap between fans who say they are interested in women's sports and fans who are actually actively watching women's sports, it's imperative to invest in storytelling that increases visibility and builds dedicated interest in matchups, rivalries, fan stories, the profiles of the athletes themselves, and more – in equal, consistent volumes and with the similar breadth and depth in which men's sports are covered. This, paired with quality and increased broadcast and media coverage – all working together to muster the time, enthusiasm and diligence women's sports deserve.

It's way past the time when women's sport should be the subject of this kind of unresolved discourse around inequity and imbalance. For starters, that's why DAZN has made a long-term investment in the Women's Champions League, partnering with UEFA and YouTube to remove viewership barriers and – as the first global broadcaster – making the competition live and free for fans to watch, all around the world, for the very first time, over the next four seasons.



**314 MILLION**

**PEOPLE WORLD-WIDE ARE INTERESTED IN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TODAY — THAT'S 16% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.<sup>34</sup>**

And yet, despite its global reach, the true growth potential of women's football is still unrealized. The numbers speak for themselves – the interest is there, the viewership is not. We need to close the coverage gap.

As a global broadcaster and media company, DAZN is committed to improving the visibility of women's sports and female athletes by bringing fans the coverage to fuel their passion. Since 2019, DAZN has increased coverage of women's sports on its owned channels by +175% and is doubling down on its mission to continue providing easier access, surround-sound content and more behind-the-scenes storytelling.

And, once again, for any avoidance of doubt, DAZN wants to grow the women's competition not because they are female and it's visibility long overdue – though admittedly, there is also the responsibility to do just that – but because they literally represent 50% of the sheer athleticism, unrivaled personalities, and inspiring stories in sport, period. Put another way, not tapping into the unrealized potential of the women's game is essentially dismissing and missing out on half the opportunity to captivate and delight fans around the world.

**DAZN HAS A TRACK RECORD OF BUILDING AUDIENCES AND AMPLIFYING MEN'S SPORT, BUT IT'S TIME TO TREAT FOOTBALL AS ONE SPORT, NOT MEN'S FOOTBALL OR WOMEN'S FOOTBALL. DAZN IS PROUD TO COVER BOTH VIA ONE SINGLE SOCIAL HANDLE ON @DAZNFOOTBALL, AND WILL INCREASE VISIBILITY AND GROW WOMEN'S FOOTBALL GLOBALLY, COMMITTING TO:**

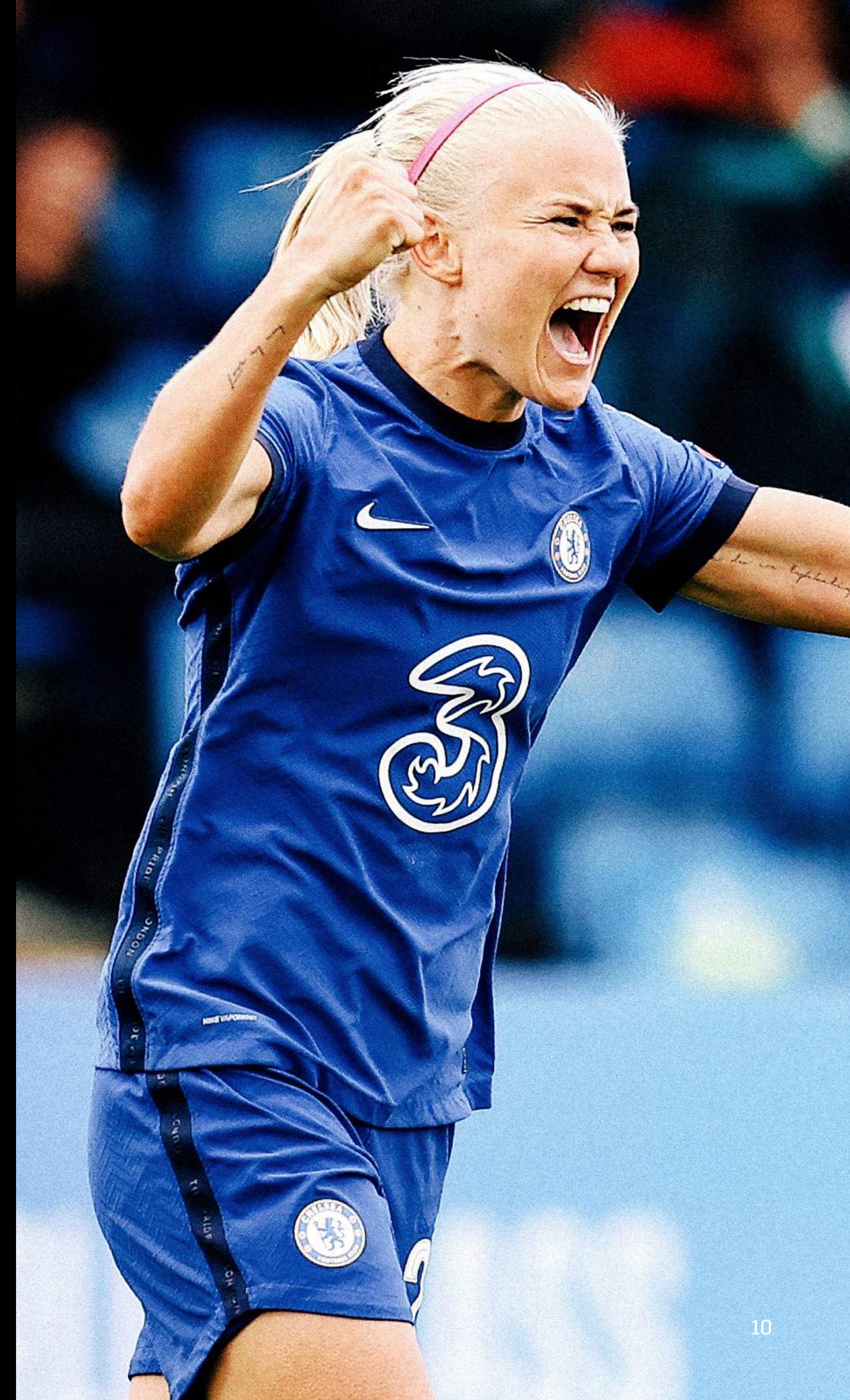
ELEVATING WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE TO THE #1 WOMEN'S FOOTBALL COMPETITION GLOBALLY

—  
PROVIDING EASY ACCESS TO ALL MATCHES – BOTH ON DAZN AND FREE FOR THE WORLD TO SEE ON YOUTUBE

TURNING PLAYERS AND TEAMS INTO HOUSEHOLD NAMES

—  
INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF YOUNG FOOTBALLERS

—  
FAST-TRACKING COMMERCIAL AND MONETIZATION GROWTH



Through more live action, more broadcast availability, and more storytelling, DAZN is aspiring to set a new standard for high quality coverage of women's sports, and further facilitating affinity for women's sports in a new generation of fans by making it easier than ever for fans around the world to know when, where, and how to watch.

Yes, there are notable female athletes – such as Simone Biles, Megan Rapinoe, and Naomi Osaka - who are celebrated around the world as role models, paving the way for young women everywhere, often generating more conversation than their male counterparts for the respect and admiration they inspire.<sup>35</sup> But, these examples are few

and far between. There are nowhere as close to as many female athletes who have become household names as male athletes. The future Ada Hegerbergs of the world warrant a much wider and equitable field for their talents, including the coverage they deserve.

## **DAZN IS ASPIRING TO SET A NEW STANDARD FOR HIGH QUALITY COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S SPORTS**



# HOW CAN YOU NARROW THE COVERAGE AND VIEWERSHIP GAP IN WOMEN'S SPORTS?



## IF YOU'RE A BROADCASTER...

It's our responsibility to collectively lay the groundwork for ever-increasing visibility, including making women's sports more easily accessible, investing in high quality broadcast coverage and on-air talent, and delivering compelling and consistent storytelling – year-round, not just around select moments.

## IF YOU'RE A FAN NOT YET WATCHING...

Ask yourself – how come? In particular, if you consider yourself a supporter and advocate for women's sport. More proactively seek out events that interest you, especially as it becomes increasingly easier as broadcasters step it up and make the most popular sports – such as women's football – more accessible. Your actual viewership is critical to the overall growth equation.

## IF YOU'RE A JOURNALIST...

The playing field must be leveled via firm commitments towards increased women's sports coverage. Actively auditing existing frequency of reporting around female athletes, teams, leagues, and events and lead to clear benchmarks, and uptick must come in terms of not just quantity but quality of coverage, too.

As with any sporting event, viewership can span from hosting a viewing party at home to watching on second screen at a bar, but we all must tune in much, much more. And, challenge yourself to follow five new female athletes on Instagram, Twitter, and/or TikTok literally right now! Not only will that give you more reason and excitement to tune in personally, more follows and more likes also leads to more growth.

### IF YOU'RE AN AVID VIEWER...

Keep it up! Consistently watching women's sports makes you an indispensable part in the equity and equality battle. Your unwavering interest and viewership is essential towards the consistent and exponential growth we all know is possible and long overdue.

### IF YOU'RE PART OF A VENUE...

Challenge those at the top to add more female-led sporting events and provide more opportunities for the stories of athletes to be seen not just through a screen but across more events and activations.

### IF YOU'RE A PLAYER...

Keep playing (we are rooting for you!) and if you're not already, it's imperative to use your platform to drive visibility for both sides of your sport, no matter what gender you identify with and what level you're playing at. ALL parts of the game deserve to be hyped so expand who and what you're following and use your incredible voice to drive change.

### IF YOU'RE A BRAND...

How is your company's track record when it comes to investment and sponsorship in women's sports and athletes, and women in the wider sports and entertainment space? How does that compare to what your brand is doing on the men's side of the game? Brands must strive to continuously reflect the diversity of their entire audience wherever possible, and for many brands, that means better and ever-increasing investment in women in sport as well as women's sports.



- <sup>1</sup> UEFA.com. Union of European Football Associations. <sup>16</sup> March <sup>2021</sup>.
- <sup>2</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Women’s Executive Summary”, (2021): 20.
- <sup>3</sup> Nielsen, “Rise of Women’s Sports,” (2018)
- <sup>4</sup> Nielsen, “Rise of Women’s Sports,” (2018)
- <sup>5</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Women’s Research Master List”, (2021)
- <sup>6</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Women’s Executive Summary”, <sup>17</sup>, <sup>22</sup>, <sup>27</sup>, <sup>32</sup>, <sup>37</sup>, <sup>42</sup>, <sup>47</sup>, <sup>52</sup>
- <sup>7</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “FQ Data Takeaways” (2021): <sup>1</sup>
- <sup>8</sup> “FIFA publishes first-ever comprehensive analysis of the elite women’s football landscape”
- <sup>9</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient “Social Listening Analysis,” 4-6
- <sup>10</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Quantitative Research Executive Summary,” 12-14
- <sup>11</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient “Social Listening Analysis,” 11
- <sup>12</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” 20.
- <sup>13</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” 20.
- <sup>14</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” 20.
- <sup>15</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” 20.
- <sup>16</sup> Shira Springer, “7 Ways to Improve Coverage of Women’s Sports”, Nieman Reports, accessed on 5/28/21 <https://niemanreports.org/articles/covering-womens-sports/>
- <sup>17</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient “Social Listening Analysis,” 4
- <sup>18</sup> Shira Springer, “7 Ways to Improve Coverage of Women’s Sports”, Nieman Reports, accessed on 5/28/21 <https://niemanreports.org/articles/covering-womens-sports/>
- <sup>19</sup> Shira Springer, “7 Ways to Improve Coverage of Women’s Sports”, Nieman Reports, accessed on 5/28/21 <https://niemanreports.org/articles/covering-womens-sports/>
- <sup>20</sup> Shira Springer, “7 Ways to Improve Coverage of Women’s Sports”, Nieman Reports, accessed on 5/28/21 <https://niemanreports.org/articles/covering-womens-sports/>
- <sup>21</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” pg. <sup>13</sup>.
- <sup>22</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” <sup>12-13</sup>.
- <sup>23</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” <sup>13</sup>.
- <sup>24</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” <sup>12-13</sup>.
- <sup>25</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” <sup>12-13</sup>.
- <sup>26</sup> Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport (2020)
- <sup>27</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Quantitative Research Executive Summary” (2021): <sup>2</sup>
- <sup>28</sup> Jenesse Miller, “News media still pressing the mute button on women’s sports”, USC News (2021), accessed on 5/28/21, <https://news.usc.edu/183765/womens-sports-tv-news-coverage-sportscenter-online-usc-study/>
- <sup>29</sup> Jenesse Miller, “News media still pressing the mute button on women’s sports”, USC News (2021), accessed on 5/28/21, <https://news.usc.edu/183765/womens-sports-tv-news-coverage-sportscenter-online-usc-study/>
- <sup>30</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient “Social Listening Analysis” (2021): <sup>5-6</sup>
- <sup>31</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient, “Quantitative Research Executive Summary,” <sup>12-14</sup>
- <sup>32</sup> Cooky, et al., “One and Done,” <sup>2</sup>.
- <sup>33</sup> Cheryl Cooky et al., “One and Done: The Long Eclipse of Women’s Televised Sports, 1989-2019”, *Communication & Sport*, no. <sup>9</sup> (2021): <sup>5</sup>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/21674795211003524>
- <sup>34</sup> Nielsen, “Women’s Football” (2019)
- <sup>35</sup> DAZN and Female Quotient “Social Listening Analysis,” <sup>4</sup>



*the* **FQ**  
FEMALE QUOTIENT