

**WOMEN BALL TOO: “REDEFYNING” THE
PROFESSIONAL WOMEN’S SPORTS NARRATIVE
THROUGH FEMALE ATHLETES AND THE WOMEN’S
SPORTS MARKET**

by

CORINNE TOGIA’I

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Approved: Dr. Courtney Cox
Primary Thesis Advisor

This thesis explores how women have consistently found themselves on the margins of sport, whether as fans, athletes, or entrepreneurs. Whereas previous literature has situated the treatment of women in comparison with their male counterparts, this project illuminates how women receive less – media coverage, financial compensation, and tailored merchandise – than they deserve. It centers two U.S.-based professional women’s leagues, the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) and the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA), along with a new business venture, Women Ball Too, to consider how the current sporting landscape offers new problems and possibilities for disparities in sport. Using survey data, interviews and field observations, this research stresses the importance of creating a narrative for professional women in sports. Thus, this paper finds a suggested model that emphasizes the narrative of women in professional sports, by centralizing the intangibles of “why.” This includes uplifting the voices of professional women in sports, and investing in their market to ultimately “redefine” sports through challenging, creating and cultivating.

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Chapter 1| Playing “Like a Girl”: An Introduction to Gender Inequity in Sport

In the United States, sports have shifted from the sole embodiment of primarily entertainment, to sports as a constructed industry for cultural building and politics coining the term “professional sports,” and in turn, surfaced as an occupation.

Professional sports are sports in which athletes receive payment for their performance (Merriam-Webster). Through extensive literature-reviews and anthropological ethnography regarding the history built around and within sports, I took both definitions of “professional” and “sports,” and combined them to grasp a comprehensive understanding as to what “professional sports” is defined as in this research. Thus, the re-worked definition for professional sports follows as: an engagement in a specific activity, involving physical exertion and skill, in which an individual or team is paid as one’s main occupation for entertainment. The importance of narrowing the scope to professional sports is to exonerate and expose the field and industry from the highest level of sports. Ultimately, unveiling the current reality of expectations, and dissecting the future of where amateur and collegiate athletes who aspire to continue to pursue sports as a profession will enter.

By clearly defining, and understanding in its entirety what the definition of “professional sports” is comprised of, we can then explore the impact of how professional sports in the United States has gained its direction and cultural space of influence. The United States has established and set forth a continuum of neglecting women in sports, and overcompensating for men in sports. Thus, this means that to

understand the discrepancies between men and women in sports, it is imperative to default our understandings and questions around the deeply rooted sports history and corrupt politics regarding ownership and branding within the United States professional sports industry. In turn, the definition breakdown of professional sports is fundamental in understanding the lack of credit/recognition given between men and women in sports, and how women are significantly underserved in this area.

Therefore, this paper will not focus primarily on how women in sports are underserved *compared* to men; instead, illuminate how women are underserved considering what they *deserve*. This will be done by **creating** and centralizing the voice for women in sports to deconstruct and reconstruct the purpose of sports and its market: to serve and **cultivate** a space and platform for the next generation of future athletes and fans to grow and build from, and to use these voices and spaces to **challenge** the authorities of the United States societal viewership of sports and the construction of ownership in professional sports to “redefine” what exists.

Additionally, this paper will expose the ubiquitous perspectives of trivial information, and marginalization that revolve around women in sports. This will bring to light a model in solving the lack of deserving overdue credit to women in the field of professional sports. Hence, by **centralizing** the voices of women and **investing** to unpack and consolidate the past, current, and future narrative around the women’s sports market, bridges the traditional and untraditional aspects to rebuild the professional sports market for women. Thus, the multidimensional aspect women bring to sports defies the one-dimensional mindframe of sports fans. In other words, women emphasize and bring other attributes to sports that are not the traditional sports fans

mindset of sports seen through the lens of men, regarding: strength, aggression, and statistics. In turn, this mind frame is created by the league cultivating spaces to inhibit the growth of professional sports for women. Thus, the main approach to this issue is to: “redefyne” the professional women’s sports narrative via the voice of female athlete and the women’s sports market.

From a cultural historical perspective, and an understanding of the development of sports in the United States primarily seen through the lens of men’s sports being statistically driven, it is essential to realize that women in professional sports redefyne the sports industry in that, “stats are futile to the whole telling of illuminating what this new world of women in sports looks like and how it operates on the ground” (Hanis-Martin 267). With that said, professional women in sports so naturally hones in on what the essence of sports is all about: a space of entertainment for everyone. Furthermore, women in sports have the potential to “bridge social differences” bringing in a variety of members from various “socioeconomic racial, and ethnic backgrounds together in cooperative endeavor” (Gatz et al., 2002). Thus, by centralizing the voices of professional women in sports establishes the women in sports purpose. Hence, their voices uncover their need for basic necessities in their profession: the need for recognition and the need for overdue deserving credit given where it is due. These basic needs are familial topics that are relatable to all. Given this, the angle to sell the professional women’s sports market is to edify the declaration of the voices of professional female athletes to target not only their strong athletic abilities on the court, but to personify their strength of versatility as citizens and athletes seen through their off the court actions in relationship to how they play. In the same, the voices of female

athletes and the “more than an athlete” presence they highlight in sports, gives them an upper hand to create a space to brand the identity of professional women in sports, rather than their identities being driven and shaped by the media and teams and leagues.

A Snapshot into United States Women’s Sports History

Before we can delve into redefining women’s sports, we must first understand who has come before, and what has been done before for women in sports. Thus, I have gathered a culmination of relevant basketball and soccer historical sports facts which denotes overlooked pivotal points in United States sports history. With that said, these this historical sports information are supposed to be an educational outline used to fill in the gaps around conversational sports history, either unknown knowledge or common misconceptions about professional women in sports.

The first major professional sports league in the United States revolved around baseball. In 1871, the “National Association of Professional Base Ball Players” was established as the first sports major league (History 2019) that only included men. Although women were also playing baseball in their own unrecognized leagues, at the time, they did not have their own established professional league until 80 years later in 1943. The league was called the “All-American Girls Professional Baseball League” (Discover 2018). With that said, baseball history should not be explained without including the woman who redefned part the beginning narrative of professional women in sports, and professional sports as a whole. Her name is Vince Beatrice “Jackie Mitchell” Mitchell Gilbert.

Jackie Mitchell was a 17-year-old baseball player, not softball player. She one of the first female pitchers to play in a men’s professional baseball league behind Lizzie

Arlington. Mitchell first played for a woman's team in Tennessee, upon being recruited to play for the local minor league baseball team, the Chattanooga Lookouts (Cronin 2011). In April 1931, the Chattanooga Lookouts played an exhibition game against the major league professional baseball team, The New York Yankees. Thus, in the first inning of the game, Mitchell was summoned to pitch. Her first batters were Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig (Cronin 2011). Needless to say, Mitchell struck out both Ruth and Gehrig that lead to several lash back from the players including Ruth who stated after he was struck out by Mitchell:

“I don't know what's going to happen if they begin to let women in baseball. Of course, they will never make good. Why? Because they are too delicate. It would kill them to play ball every day.”

It should go to question whether Ruth's comment was out of spite for a 17-year-old striking him out and puncturing his reputation, or was Ruth's comment because Mitchell was a **woman** he felt threatened by if she were to continue to compete in the men's professional league.

Along with Ruth's comment, Mitchell's monumental strike outs also stirred up repercussions for women playing baseball. Days after Mitchell's strike outs, baseball commissioner Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis voided her contract and declared women as “unfit” to play baseball due to the game being “too strenuous” which may have been reason from Ruth's comment (Aubrecht 2003). Furthermore, in 1952, Landis

formally banned women from signing contracts in the Major League Baseball (MLB) league (Aubrecht 2003).

Mitchell's story is indicative of the epitome of what the sports industry in the United States still resembles: **ownership** lead by ignorant owners, and close-minded individuals.

Years later, following in the footsteps of Mitchell's courage in sports, basketball was invented in 1891, and women played it weeks after its invention. However, women did not compete at the Olympic level until the 1970s. Why might this be? Similarly, to Mitchell's fascinating, apparently upsetting and mind bending story from owners and traditional sports fans that a woman struck out a man, women's basketball was seen inferior to men's basketball and did not receive the respect that they deserved by the audience, nor owners and sports industry. Given that men's basketball is dominated by statistics and strength, WNBA pioneer and United States Olympic Hall of Famer, Lisa Leslie redefned the way women in basketball were perceived when she became the first woman to dunk in a WNBA game in 2002 (Messener 2003). Additionally, from an international level, in 1999 the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) won their second World Cup in overtime in an intense penalty shoot-out. Therefore, like Mitchell where she went against the grain playing in a men's professional league, Olympic Gold Medalist and FIFA World Cup winner, Brandi Chastain became a monumental figure in redefyning the outward perception of female athletes. The perception of women seen not only as the normalized conception of beauty seen through being dainty, soft, and light-hearted, but to redefyne beauty as strong. Chastain did this by scoring the final penalty that determined the USWNT fate to win the 1999

World Cup, and immediately after ripping off her jersey with only a sports bra on celebrating the victory through her strong beauty.

Debunking the Myths in Professional Women's Sports

Given the previous background information about professional women in sports, through interviews and conversations with consumers (including fans, parents, etc.) and athletes, I compiled common presumptions made by these groups about women in sports.

Furthermore, the following will debunk and further explain general misconceptions in-depth. These questions and comments reflect the first steps towards approaching the reasons as to why women in sports are still underserved in the United States.

Athlete Misconceptions

The first common misconception about women in professional sports entails the statement that women in sports have never had a dedicated “Women’s Sports Magazine.” In 1999, Sports Illustrated created a separate magazine called “Sports Illustrated Women,” that covered “real athletes, real stories, real scoop of women in sports” (Giampetro-Meyer 2000).

The second misconception is the false belief that women have never been “paid the same” as men in professional sports. After the USWNT won the 1999 FIFA World Cup, the USWNT were granted a 5-year contract with the US Soccer Federation to establish a professional league for women’s soccer. Therefore, starting salary for players would be equivalent to their counterpart, men (Times 2002).

Consumer Misconceptions

The third misconception debunked is the conversation around whether there has ever been a “women’s signature shoe” in sports. After Michael Jordan became the first athlete for Nike to hold his own signature shoe, WNBA and US Women’s Basketball Olympic star Sheryl Swoopes was signed her own signature shoe by Nike. The “Air Swoopes,” becoming the first woman’s signature shoe ever made, and the second Nike athlete to have a shoe in her name (Banet-Weiser 1999).

Lastly, the fourth misconception discusses whether there was ever a women’s professional league that lasted “more than 10 years.” Although the first and second United States professional women’s soccer leagues both folded, and are currently growing the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) that has lasted 6 years and counting, the WNBA holds the record for the most season in professional women’s sports. The WNBA has been around for 23 years and is still ongoing (Banet-Weiser 1999).

Debunking these 4 commonly talked about women in sports misunderstandings, as well as having the knowledge of previous sports history through the time capsule created, are supposed to answer the lingering professional women in sports questions and presumptions with historical facts.

Although these monumental moments were its first in women’s sports history, the stature of each did not hold its place in overtime. For instance, the “Sports Illustrated Women’s” magazine came to an end in 2002. The President of Sports Illustrated Women’s Magazine, President Ann S. Moor stated the downturn of the magazine was due to a need for a “significant investment to reach its potential,” as well

as mentioning that the “investment climate was simply not on our [women in sports] side” (Times 2002). In addition, Sheryl Swoopes signature shoe was discontinued due to Nike’s designer Marni Gerber who designed the shoe stating that, “At Nike, we do things in pretty big ways,” insinuating that the numbers must make sense for the company to invest in a product as big as a signature shoe (Hernandez LA Times). Similarly, the equal pay for professional women’s soccer faltered overtime as the first women’s soccer league known as Women’s United Soccer Association (WUSA) only lasted from 2000 to 2003. This was due to the cumulative loss of around \$100 million US dollars (King 2009). However, the fourth misconception about long withstanding women’s professional leagues have stood the test of time as the WNBA is still striving.

Literature Review: Gender Disparities

Along with these professional women in sports myths, it is essential to note and lay out the gender disparities in sports that exist. When discussing sports, especially women in sports, one of the long-lasting trends in research on gender in sports is the lack of coverage women receive, especially the lack of respectful and serious coverage of women’s sports (Cooky 2013). Therefore, the lack of women’s sports coverage is one of the largest and apparent gender disparities between women’s and men’s sports. In Cheryl Cooky et al.’s article, “Women Play Sport, But Not on TV: A Longitudinal Study of Televised News Media,” they carefully scrutinize the assumptions that media provide fans with in regards to what they “want to see.” This is done by a 6-week examination of televised news media coverage on local and national broadcasted sports news and highlight shows including ESPN, and various Los Angeles networks (KABC, KNBC, and KCBS).

Cooky et al's results demonstrated that women's sports coverage is the lowest ever. This is interesting, because although women's sports participation of girls and women are at its highest and on a tremendous increase, Cooky's longitudinal study conveys that the message to audiences who watch sports "continues to be by, for, and about men" (Cooky 2013). Moreover, respectful representation of women in sports media is typically found in smaller media markets/niche markets where the primary focus centers on women's sports. Although these specialized outlets allow the centralization of women in sports without worrying about interfering with men's sports coverage, the regulation of covering women in sports in specialized markets allows the "institutional center of sport to remain intact" (Messner 2002), completely ignoring any changes to the current structure ran by most white men, and resilient to any challenges women's presence may post to the gender order of sport (Messner 2002).

In addition, according to Lapchick's Racial and Gender Report Card of "Associated Press Sports Editors," the majority of people in the position to write about, frame and edit coverage of sports are men. To build from this trend of sports coverage being predominantly covered by men, Lapchick's (2008) study reports that: 94% of sports editors, 89% of assistant sports editors, 88% of columnists, 87% of sports reporters, and 89% of copy editors/designers in the United States are male, and of these positions majority are white. Given Lapchick's study summarizing that the lens in which sports coverage is reported to the public, heavily influences the impact on how sports is perceived from the audience, and how athletes are represented. Similarly, to Cooky's findings regarding the lack of quality of women's sports in which the news media builds, Lapchick found that female sports writers were more likely to frame

female athletes in terms of their athletic prowess; whereas, male reports framed female athletes in lieu of their physical attraction/features.

With both Cooky's findings illustrating the lack of coverage of women's sports which build audiences for men's sports while "silencing and marginalizing women's sports," and Lapchick's deeper findings as to why women's sports coverage is at an all-time low exposing the people behind the reports, and sports news: men. Altogether Cooky's and Lapchick's studies are an indication of the lack of respect women receive in sports coverage from news and media, highlighting the one of many gender discrepancies that still need to be unpack and explored further in sports, especially at a professional level. Thus, to do so, Cooky's conclusion suggests that in order to reverse the trend of women's sports coverage declining, power relations and perceptions of gender will have to change within sports organizations from commercial sports who promote and advertise sports, to mass media. This shift in perception will indeed need changes and pressures from several directions (Cooky 2013).

Media and Economic Future Affects

Media History Affects the Future

Moreover, the discontinuation of past women's sports moments should not be dismissed; instead, these moments should be learned from and examined further into as a marker to see the progress of women in sports in what is currently established and what needs improvement. Although the SI Women's magazine was discontinued, this was one of the first platforms that truly centralized women in sports, and may be a part of a larger legacy for women in sports. As the SI Women's magazine helped influence media platforms today such as espnW.

In addition, the lack thereof of publicizing women's professional sports through media and broadcasting, are essential platforms to publicize, spread awareness, educate, and begin action. Given this, I have conducted a brief research project through medial platforms of the NWSL and WNBA websites and social medias to identify relevant pieces that need to be addressed regarding structure, image, and more which reflect the part of the current narrative of professional women in sports.

Furthermore, the qualitative research data I have collected between the NWSL and WNBA websites, showcases pros and cons between each website, where both these growing leagues can learn from each other to expand the professional women's sports market as a whole. First starting with having both websites equipped with providing merchandise to fans, because once fans buy into watching games, they want to feel a sense of ownership and pride in representing their team. Therefore, accessibility to purchase merchandise does exactly this. Secondly, each professional women's sports website should not only have team photos, and action shots of the game, rather, there needs to be individual photos for each player. These individual photos attached to the players' names is one easy tweak that can help fans be more educated and involved with the sport and the market. Lastly, both websites need to offer not only individual and group tickets, but season tickets as well which creates more room for sports fans to hold themselves accountable to watch a professional women's sports league game.

Economic History Affects the Future

Likewise, from an economical growth standpoint, Sheryl Swoopes signature shoe has opened the door for many other professional female athletes to design their own shoe. For example, WNBA Rookie of the Year on the Dallas Wings, Arike

Ogunbowale has recently announced her own customized Nike shoe released for purchase online. However, often, basketball superstar professional female athletes are deemed “customized” shoes through the partnership of other established NBA athlete’s signature shoes. Thus, although Ogunbowale’s shoe is personally customized, it is still in the shadow of NBA international star Giannis Antetokounmpo’s signature shoe the “Zoom Freak,” because Ogunbowale’s shoe is structured and in partnership with Antetokounmpo’s signature shoe. Moreover, when marketing professional women’s athletes’ shoes, it should be noted that there is a difference between “customized” and “signature” shoes. Signature shoes are the honor and induction of a player owning all portions of a shoe creation. Whereas, customized is the outward appearance of a shoe that can be altered and normally has the contingences of the signature shoe’s name on it. In addition to the economics around women in professional sports, although the reformation of women’s professional soccer leagues failed twice, these were learning moments and a part of building the pallet of sports fans in the United States to enjoy the entertainment of soccer. Additionally, the push to form the previous collapsed leagues showed resiliency in the women’s soccer industry, which, on top of the USWNT being the winningest national team, has slowly but surely lead to an increase in individual salary and team salary cap for the NWSL players and league.

Professional Sports Leagues in the United States

With that said, in this research paper, professional sports will be examined further through the scope of culture and politics in relationship to the United States professional soccer leagues and professional basketball leagues. Furthermore, the professional soccer leagues that will be examined include the National Women’s Soccer

League (NWSL), and the Major League Soccer (MLS). Additionally, the professional basketball leagues are: The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and the National Basketball Association (NBA). These 4 leagues were selected to contrast two sports which: 1. Provides a rich history of culture regarding diversification, fan ship and generational passion for teams, 2. Exemplifies hidden miniature models such as rules that provide some sort of equity, 3. Provides examples and understandings circumferencing independent leagues versus dependent leagues, and 4. Presents the stereotypes of athletes for men and women and how this is deeply rooted in sports history. Ultimately, these 4 select professional leagues were chosen to learn from their past of what has and has not been done to provide guidance in framing the blueprint towards redefining the women's sports market.

Soccer: MLS and NWSL

The two dominant United States professional soccer teams are: The Major League Soccer (MLS) for men, and the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) for women. Professional soccer in the United States did not exist until 1993 when the MLS formed, and it was not until 7 years later in 2000, after the USWNT won the World Cup in 1999, did the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) professional soccer league form. However, the WUSA league folded 3 years later in 2003 due to low attendance, and cumulative losses of around \$100 million (*Chastain More Than a Bra*). Similarly, in 2009 the Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) league was formed in place of the WUSA, but collapsed 3 years later in 2012 due to "lack of resources invested into the league" (*Chastain More Than a Bra*). The luck of establishing a solid professional women's soccer league in the United States has had its problems with already two failed

leagues. Yet, within the same year the WPS league closed in 2012, the NWSL formed and is still running strong 7 years later.

With the introduction of soccer only recently being integrated in the United States sports culture, in comparison to the “Big 4” (Anthony 2012) sports: National Football League (NFL), Major League Baseball (MLB), National Basketball Association (NBA), and National Hockey League (NHL), professional women’s soccer players not only need to advocate for respect for women in sports, but also the sport of soccer as a whole. For soccer matches on prime sports networks¹ (ESPN, Sports Center, and FOX) are broadcasted 12% (Andrews 2001) compared to their other sports counterparts included in the “Big 4.” Of this 12% of broadcasting time, through prime sports networks, women’s professional soccer is only aired 2% (Andrews 2001) or less only broadcasting the NWSL playoff games which in total equates to 3 games out of the 24 games played by during the season per team.

Basketball: WNBA and NBA

On the other hand, the two dominant United States professional basketball teams are: The National Basketball Association (NBA), and the Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA). The first professional basketball league in the United States, did not exist until 1937, called the National Basketball League (NBL) which was a men’s league. Nine years later, in 1946, another men’s professional league formed called the Basketball Association of America (BAA). Months after the BAA was formed, the BAA merged with the NBL and was renamed the National Basketball Association (NBA). However, it is important to note that during the establishment of these

¹ These listed channels are the top sports broadcasting networks in the United States, and does not include other streaming sources.

professional men's basketball leagues, women were also playing basketball but not given the recognition. Yet, in 1985 when the United States Basketball League (USBL) was formed as a men's spring basketball league (Cronin 2011), Nancy Lieberman became the first and only woman to compete in a men's basketball professional league. Lieberman also played on the Washington Generals men's team who was the Harlem Globetrotters frequent competitors. Thus, Lieberman was a significant pioneer for women's basketball, and role model before the league formation of professional women's basketball in the United States.

In 1996, 50 years after the NBA was established, two professional women's basketball leagues in the United States were formed: the American Basketball League (ABL) and the Women National Basketball League (WNBA). The difference between the two leagues differed in ownership. The ABL was an independent professional basketball league which was played during the winter that attracted and signed most the 1996 USA Women's National Team, and offered higher salaries (Kleindienst-Cachay 2008). However, in 1998 the ABL closed and declared bankruptcy due to being underfinanced and no sponsorships (Williams 1999). Players and managers from the ABL then decided to merge with the WNBA, for the WNBA was bankrolled through its counterpart the NBA (Williams 1999). Moreover, the existence of 3 ABL cities, Chicago, Seattle, and Atlanta are still represented through WNBA teams.

With the formation of the WNBA and its contingencies to the NBA, the WNBA is still dealing with equitable pay being the longest established professional basketball league and most broadcasted for women's basketball. The maximum salary for WNBA players is capped at around \$113,500, and the minimum is \$50,000 (Lamonier 2018).

However, many WNBA players find themselves playing overseas in other leagues, due to higher pay. Thus, the WNBA salary in comparison to their international women's professional basketball leagues (Euro League, Women's Chinese Basketball –WCBA, Belgian Women's Basketball League – BWBL, etc.) is significantly lower. For the average starting salary for international play ranges between \$90,000 to \$100,000 which is a definite incentive for WNBA players to play overseas on their off season, especially since the WNBA is played in the summer from May to September. For example, one of the WNBA's top player who has a maximum salary, Brittney Griner, played for the Zhejiang Golden Bulls of the Women's Chinese Basketball Association and earned \$600,000 for a four month season (Steven 2014).

It is obvious that the NWSL and the WNBA are both fighting for basic needs for professional women in sports from media including coverage to economic disparities including equitable pay, and just simply being heard. Therefore, it is apparent that it takes a collective of voices to cement a unified voice for the professional women's sports narrative. The mission to unify and project the voices of professional female athletes with undoubtable conviction, begins with these athletes taking the initiative to create and consolidate the voice. Thus, currently, WNBA and NWSL have taken initiative in creating their own leagues player associations.

The NWSL has the “NWSL Players Association” (NWSLPA) which continues to “honor the vision and progress of those before us,” commit to doing all in their power to foster the betterment of the NWSL members so that they can contribute to a common goal: “a world class product on the field, and to be role models and inspire the next generation off the field” (NWSLPA 2019).

Similarly, the WNBA too has a “WNBA Players Association” (WNBPA) formed in 1998 and was the first labor union for professional women athletes, created to protect the rights of players and assist them in achieving their full potential on and off the court” (WNBPA 2019). The WNBPA is comprised of all WNBA players governed by an executive committee and player representatives from each WNBA team. The WNBAPA’s mission statement is to “unite, in one labor organization, all WNBA players eligible for membership in a manner that not only promotes a high sense of loyalty among all members but is also diverse, inclusive and a direct reflection of our [WNBA] core principles” (WNBPA 2019).

Furthermore, through content analysis research observing both the NWSLPA and WNBPA, there were several similarities between both player associations. From both league player association websites, the members on the board were all advocates for serving women in sports, acting as a voice to rightly represent women in their respective sports, and both touched on an overarching theme of rightly representing professional women athletes on and off the court. Although the WNBPA was has been well-established and the NWSLPA is just starting, both player associations should seek to come together to help one another in advocating and supporting each other’s leagues and collective needs being a professional female athlete. This in turn would develop a stronger communal and familial relationship between professional women in sports, but also curate a strong emergence of versatility amongst sports that go beyond statistics and strength. Meaning that sports does not mean an individual must stick to watching one sport, instead appreciate multiple sports. Therefore, to advance the voice of professional women in sports there needs to be a sense of comradery found outside of

the court between mixes of professional women in sports from different sports areas. In addition, the accumulation of various female athlete's voices from different sports unifying, will in turn bring their outside of the court work inside of the court to address their overall and specific needs as a professional athlete.

Chapter 2| The Formation of Sports in the United States

In the definition of sports, there is no direct correlation or words that specify gender; however, throughout the growth of sports in the United States we must look at what sports were first built around: men. From media coverage, conversation, participants and fans, men and sports were all that people saw which lead to an automatic association with relating sports to men. Yet, when women began to enter the sports scene, the terms equality and equity were introduced into conversations of sports. However, these two terms have been long-lasting buzzwords in sports, that intend to minimize the discrepancies we have seen between men and women in sports, but are often emptily used. Withal, what if equity and equality are not the words we should be using to solve this dilemma between men and women in sports; instead, the word we are looking to use is one that I created: “redefyne.”

The term “redefyne” was created through personal experience and literature review that will be repeatedly used throughout the paper. “Redefyne” combines the word defy and redefine meaning: *to simultaneously define differently for purposeful change through the actions of: creating, cultivating and challenging.* Thus, the sole purpose of this paper is to take a different approach in addressing the conversation between men’s and women’s sports, by first moving away from the empty usage of “equity” or “equality” as a full explanation about how to address the prominent issues that lie within sports. Furthermore, the empty usage of “equity” and “equality” should be replaced with the word: “redefyne.” Therefore, how we redefyne the professional women’s sports narrative, is to follow the 3 C pillars: **create**, **cultivate**, and **challenge**.

The following subsections will go into depth about what will be discussed in this paper regarding the 3 pillar “C’s” in redefining the professional women’s sports sphere:

1. *Creating*

The first step in redefining the professional women’s sports sphere is to create with the power of voice, in this instance, the voice of the professional female athletes. By doing so this grabs the individual attention of the target audience for them to listen. Therefore, the audience, whoever it may be in the professional women’s sports sphere, is quintessential for change and to create. In addition, it should be understood that to create, we do not need to completely scrap everything that sports have or has not given women. Rather than doing an entire 180, we should work in a way where we work on enhancing and tweaking the existing professional women’s sports culture and the pieces that are being added to it. Thusly, there are fundamental ways in which the professional women’s sports sphere can combine the voices of the female professional athletes with the sports market to create and redefyne:

- i. *Create* more teams for each professional women’s sports league.

Consequently, more teams, develops a broader scope of fans to acquire a taste for women’s sports, and to feel more attached to follow.

- ii. *Create* more coverage for women in professional sports. From newspapers, media (social media and websites), television, season games for fans to watch in person, to magazine articles, women in professional sports deserve more coverage in all aspects of

broadcasting. One way is to create a separate channel that only shows live women's sports, and other aspects of women in sports.

- iii. *Create* more women's sports platforms to build the women's sports market off the court. Meaning more women's sports brands, more women's sports merchandise, and more women's season games. With that said, creating and redefining the narrative for women in sports may take time, and may not be readily available for fans, owners, or even players to see, but in time will.

2. *Cultivate*

The next step in redefining the professional women's sports sphere is to cultivate. After women in sports create their voice to form the narrative around women in professional sports, and then develop a method to create a space that caters to their wants and needs, then we cultivate. Cultivate in this paper has a simple mission to: endure, persist, and grow. This step is **critical**, and is the missing piece as to why there is a plateau in some areas of the women's sports sphere. Cultivating is so crucial to professional women's sports, because as seen later in the paper, myths of professional women's sports is debunked and leaves us to question why possible pivotal points that happened in sports history could have catapulted professional women in sports as a whole.

3. *Challenge*

The last step in redefining the professional women's sports sphere is to challenge; in other words, to push the boundaries. Thus, to continue to create enduring change, this will be seen through challenging authorities and history by

asking central questions, learning, and going against the grain. Specifically, by challenging the professional sports market. Challenging the sports market through fans and viewers challenging these groups to think differently, and to go beyond the surface of what information is accessible to us about professional sports to discover the right questions to ask and to move forward. This paper will also go on to challenge preconceived notions of what exists in the deeply rooted sports industry by shifting the current mind frame behind why United States fans of professional sports watch sports, and re-evaluates and redefines the constitution of ownership in sports. In all, by challenging the authority and power of the leagues and fans, this force professional women in sports to use their voice, so future generations may have a voice that is heard even clearer over time.

Thus, the greatest debacle in professional sports is the conversation and action between men and women in professional athletes. **Therefore, the catch-22 of sports is the imbalance of the placement of value in sports. Thus, this imbalance does not stem from men versus women in sports, it stems from what these professional sports leagues, teams, and athletes are foundationally built on: a cyclical cycle based on the fetishization of business, ownership, and agency (power) in conflict with morality and giving credit where it is due.** Hence, this paper's research points out that it is imperative to not only change the industry of sports culture and politics, but to redefine it.

Overall, the initial push back women in sports need to challenge is the stagnant United States sports battle between business and morality by centralizing the

intangibles. The intangibles being, the voices of women in sports to edify the creation of their narration to **inspire** younger female athletes to **aspire** to play professional sports as an occupational option or outlet. Secondly, along with centralizing the intangibles of professional women athlete's voices, it is necessary to invest in building and growing the women's sports market. But by first centralizing the voices of women in sports, especially as a motivating and focal point of building the women's sports market around, will then add purposeful value to the money and investments behind building the women in sports market and narrative.

The purpose of redefining is to have a word that truly encompasses with directionality what the league, owners, fans, and athletes involved in women's professional sports need to fall back on. Ultimately, in this paper, to redefyne is to consolidate the women's sports narrative and serve women in professional sports to reach a point of being rightly valued.

Chapter 3| Creating the Narrative

In this paper “creating the narrative,” spotlights the professional women’s sports narrative as an anomaly in the past and current sports realm. The development of the professional women’s sports narrative in this paper deviates from the standard narrative because it forces the audience to think differently, think differently in a sense that defies the automated sports narrative revolving around men: statistics, investments, money, and business. Rather than the professional women’s sports narrative being founded upon the things listed above, the professional women’s sports narrative will be held together by emphasizing and centralizing the intangibles of sports. The intangibles revolving around the voices of female athletes and engaging and educating the audience and owners around the sports leagues to first listen, invest and buy into the voices and narration of professional women in sports *before*, business, statistics and money that help elevate and put in motion the intangibles.

Although business and money are essential pieces towards the survival of all professional women’s sports leagues, creating the professional women’s sports narrative will redefyne this by not overemphasizing the perspective of the need for money and business to keep the women’s sports leagues afloat as the focal point; instead, to underscore the importance of leading the women’s sports narrative by establishing the intangibles that make up the “why” portion of women’s sports. Thusly, solidifying the “why” of the professional women’s sports narrative, will in turn bring in money and investments, providing the audience and owners an incentive to buy into a story that truly represents women in sports that cannot fully be captured through statistics.

In all, the final missing piece towards justly encapsulating professional women's sports is not money, although it is a factor, rather, what needs to be the focus point is truly deconstructing women's sports, and understanding its entirety from a non-financial perspective.

The following section will highlight one methodological approach in understanding how best to construct the professional women's sports narrative through the approach of a close-ended survey.

Method 1: Quantitative Sports Survey

Summary

The goal of this survey aims to capture the average consumers (sports fans) knowledge about professional sports from both men and women, to grasp a fundamental thought of where consumer's knowledge is currently.

Participants

Quantitative data was collected from 178 participants. Participants were primarily college students, sports fans from around the country, and professionals specializing in sports or women's sports. The participants were completely randomized as the survey put out was sent out to the public via social media.

Survey

The survey begins with asking participants about what is their favorite sport. Depending on what sport they chose they were prompted with a question that asked whether the participant knew "both sides of the sports (men and women)." If the participant selected yes, they were then prompted with 10 multiple choice questions (statistics of players, the history of the league, and rules) regarding each sport

professional league (ex: basketball qualified as the NBA and WNBA leagues). To break down the 10 questions asked, 5 questions were asked around the men's professional league of the specific sport, and the other 5 questions asked regarded the women's professional league of the specific sport the participant chose.

Questions

The 10 multiple choice questions that were asked, divided up by 5 questions around professional men's leagues and 5 questions around professional women's league, were dependent on the sport the participant chose in the first question. The most answered questions revolved around soccer and basketball (See Appendix I).

Data

The data revealed that the top 2 "favorite sports" from the participants were basketball and soccer. When participants were asked if they knew "both sides of the sport," the overall median score was 5/10. 95% of the participants who took the 10 multiple choice questions regarding their specific sport selection, answered the professional men's sports league information correct with a median score of 4.75/5. Whereas, the 5 questions regarding the women's professional leagues, 98% of participants answered the women's professional sports league questions incorrectly with the median score of 2 /5, and 3 /5 was the highest score.

Results

In sports, there are a multitude of possibilities an individual can learn about sports, and feel justified to talk about the sport in its entirety. The results of the data collected is an indication through a sample size of sports fans, viewers, and athletes of what they lack regarding "knowing the sport." Therefore, "to know the sport," one

should know both sides of the ball, both men and women's league rules, players, teams, etc. Additionally, this lack of knowledge about women's professional sports leagues is an area that will be pinpointed and discussed further in this paper, meaning that the void of knowledge amongst "sports fans" needs to be filled through methodological approaches of engagement and education used in this paper.

Creating the Narrative for Professional Women's Sports

Moreover, creating the narrative for professional women in sports takes a collective to create and cultivate. Given this, as important as it is to highlight the voice of the athlete, the fans outlook and participation in sports is just as important. Thus, by educating the audience of sports fans and non-sports fans about both information regarding men and women in sports professional leagues from rules, recruitment, and/or players is the first step towards creating a narrative for women in sports.

With that said, it is essential to recognize and be aware that these perspectives altogether affect the outcomes of sports. However, currently, there is an overpowering voice/perspective. This overpowering voice is dictating much of the directionality of sports that leagues and athletes must abide by, which may be inhibiting the professional women's sports leagues and athletes from finding and creating their own narrative.

Overtime, there has been no solid narration that has stuck to the realm of professional women in sports. Meaning, there has been no overarching, clear direction for either the fans/the sports audience, nor the owners and female athletes to cling onto that has been communicated clearly. But there have been sparks of sports agencies, companies and/or advertisers who promote professional female athletes, and professional female athletes who have tried to define who they are individually to help

pronounce and move the women's sports narrative forward with reverence. Therefore, for the present state of professional women in sports, it is their job to create the narrative, the story, for professional women in sports. Not as individual athletes, but as a team, a unified team, with a unified voice to create change and cultivate to endure throughout time.

Chapter 4| Centralizing the Voices of Women in Sports

Just as important as it is to grasp and build from the history of sports and women's professional sports history, it is just as important to move forward with this in mind: to create the power of voice.

For women in professional sports, female athlete's voices are often drowned out by media coverage, power trips, and/or falsely portrayed and marginalized broadcasting. Thus, centralizing professional female athlete's voices over others first, will bring to light problems within the current sports industry and possible solutions. However, before creating and centralizing the professional female athletes voice, it is important to note what other voices make up the industry of professional sports.

The voices that matter in the sports industry

The Athlete

One avenue that sports is talked through is through the voice of the athlete (amateur or professional) who has played the sport. The athletes approach speaks on sports from: understanding the logistics of the game, being a participant of the game, fully understanding the psychological and mental emotions one goes through, as well as the physical wear it takes to be an athlete in a sport.

The Coaches

In relation to the athletes' perspective, there is also the coach's perspective on sports. The coach's perspective on sports brings attention to converse around the sphere of game tactics and strategy, interpersonal relationships between the athletes, current and future goals of the team, and/or opinions on the league/team.

The Consumers/Fans

Another avenue that sports is conversed through is from the consumers and/or fan perspective. This lens contributes to the sports conversation by taking what we see on television/media at face value to sculpt an opinion on the athlete, team and/or sport, commentating on subjective topics that revolve around the entertainment aspect, and the feeling of how to engage with sports outside of playing sports.

The Agents and The Owners

Additionally, agents contribute to the conversation of sports by adding discussion about contracts and player branding. Lastly, a perspective that is often overlooked that contributes to the topic of sports conversation, but has a large impact on the way sports is perceived, is through the owners of the teams and/or leagues. Therefore, the owners bring to sports conversation the financial investments and/or losses orbiting sports, and businesses ventures in sports. Altogether, the culmination of these voices make up the sports industry business narrative, but do not do its part in representing in full the professional women's sports narrative, and therefore it is quintessential to centralize professional female athlete's voices.

A look into the voices of previous and current professional women in sports

In Sarah Banet-Weiser's literature review about basketball and the politics of race and gender, she talks about the narrative of the WNBA in comparison to the NBA, and how the WNBA athletes were personified to the public. Thus, when the WNBA joined the league of professional sports in 1996, the media and fans spoke of the women's professional basketball game on the court as "wholesome, grateful, and respectable" (Banet-Weiser 1999). As well as proclaiming the WNBA as a "purer" form

of the game [basketball] (Banet-Weiser 1999). The WNBA athletes were often associated with meek, domesticated, and dainty words to describe them. In addition, during the opening time of the WNBA and the 1990's, women's professional sports were judged through the lens of "talent versus glamour" (Banet-Weiser 1999). The "talent versus glamour" addition to women's sports narratives encompassed the emphasis of focusing more on the female athletes work off the court rather than on the court. For instance, WNBA superstars, Rebecca Lobos, Lisa Leslie, and Sheryl Swoopes were known as the "ideal elements" for the image of women in sports (Banet-Weiser 1999). Ideal in that these three women captured "every possible combination of woman in America" (Banet-Weiser 1999). Where Leslie provided the glamour and beauty as a part-time model, Lobo was the "all-American girl next door," and Swoopes was the "down-home ethereal everywoman" (Banet-Weiser 1999).

On the other hand, another pivotal moment in sports history that dictated the narrative of women in professional sports was seen through the victorious 1999 World Cup Champion USWNT. After the USWNT won their first World Cup they were instantaneously the most popular celebrities for the time being. Appearing on late night talk shows and opening doors to an abundance of endorsements. Yet, most of the talk shows focused on the '99ers (nickname for the athletes on the winning 1999 World Cup team) social life outside of soccer, family directed questions and comments, and what they plan on doing after soccer, with little focus on their play or perspective of being an athlete. However, considering these punitive narrations made by the media and sports audience, Brandi Chastain, who scored the winning goal for the 1999 World Cup, and who iconically took off her jersey to celebrate the victory was seen as a groundbreaking

figure for women in sports. Chastain's celebration was a sign of empowerment for women to be confident in themselves, and to embrace the strength within each woman (Chastain *It's Not About the Bra*).

Together, in relationship with Banet-Weiser's research on the appearance and framing of WNBA players, and literature review on the USWNT's image, the intersectionality of these two leagues regarding appearances and cultures around these leagues should be noted. Intersectionality in terms of basketball being historically framed as a black, urban sport, while soccer in the United States has been situated as a pre-dominantly white, suburban sport. Thus, given these two culturally different backgrounds that the WNBA and NWSL are founded upon, plays a significant role in recreating a large market for women in sports, and challenging how womanhood, women's sports and the women's marketing are perceived and cultivated. To redefine the "American-girl" and "supermodel" media coverage stereotypes of professional women in sports, and to redefine the accessibility to professional female athlete merchandise so everyone can embody the strength within each woman Brandi Chastain exuded when she tore her jersey off.

Professional Women's Sports: Individual versus team perspective

"The American public's fascination with female athletes has almost always centered on individual athletes... These sports demonstrate the agility and elegance 'natural' to women..." (Chisholm, 1999).

Given this statement seen through the lens of both women's professional soccer and basketball, defies the statement Chisholm makes. Which challenges the sports audience to see women in professional sports through a different lens, centralizing

comradery rather than individualism. Both professional women's sports basketball and soccer defy what women are usually categorized under and where they acclaim more reverence in, which are the individual female sports. Individual female sports such as tennis, figure skating, golf, etc. that are known for more "feminine" attribute of self-sacrifice, glamor, and grace (Banet-Weiser 1999).

Therefore, circling the importance of using women's professional basketball and soccer as focal points in this paper to redefyne the narrative around women in sports, is one avenue to change and recreate the professional women's sports narrative, past and current, seen as "flex appeal traded for sex appeal" (Banet-Weiser 1999) and/or "talent versus glamour." Thus, the previous players and teams who have come before professional women in sports, have certainly paved the way and contributed in major ways for women in sports to be at the place it is, in the sense of accepting that women play sports too. This is exemplified through individual infamous female athlete pioneers like Brandi Chastain, Lisa Leslie, and Sheryl Swoopes, and teams like the USWNT World Cup 99ers who have contributed to the women's game in doing their share to open the gates for an increase in representation for women in sports, especially in a professional sense.

Although, these bits and pieces of stories and grand sports moments are trying to contribute to the professional women's sports narrative, there has not truly been a foundational narration that has lasted; thus, this creates so much room for women to narrate more than just a space for women in sports, but for all athletes in sports (voice about needing time off, "more than an athlete", etc.). Therefore, for the present state of professional women in sports, it is their job to create the narrative for professional

women in sports. Not as individual athletes, but as a team, a unified team, with a unified voice to create change and cultivate to endure throughout the testament of time.

The “Why” Behind the Centralized Voices of Professional Women in Sports

Once there is a basic basis understanding of who and what came before the current time from a historical sports lens, the skeletal of the professional women’s sports narrative begins to formulate, beginning with forming the voice of women in sports.

The focus of professional women in sports voice should revolve a collection of voices of women in sports that curtail to the financial, social, and athletic needs that cover the basics of what needs to be addressed in professional women’s sports. Thus, this will be approached by creating a platform that allows female professional athletes to be heard, for them to make testimonies in front of audiences and media. The following research data collected in this chapter is important because there is little research that offers the actual voices of female athletes themselves (or athletes in general), because athlete interviews are often too mediated or regurgitated from somewhere else.

Therefore, to move forward, female professional athlete’s testimonies should aim towards targeting two audiences: women who will empathize with other women based on similar personal experiences, and men, who need not only a story, but a story backed up by statistics with return. However, before the voices are put into motion there needs to be a plan. A plan to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of what the professional women in sports not only bring to the game inside the court, but what they

bring to the game outside the court through their own personal lens, and not the medias outlook.

Method 2: Qualitative Survey

Summary

The following data is an assembled list of strengths of the professional women's sports sphere, collected through an open-ended survey from athletes and sports fans of basketball and soccer from youth, collegiate, and professional sports in the United States.

Participants

Participants ranged from collegiate athletes mainly from the west coast, local youth athletes and sports fans of basketball and soccer from around the country. 150 participants participated, and ranged from ages as low as 10 years old to as high as 50 years old.

Survey

The open-ended survey was configured to be short and simple, only consisting of one question. Followed by answering the question with 4 answers.

Question

What are the strengths of professional women in sports?

Data

Through data collection, I gathered the top 4 commonly answered words from each participant's response, and formulated it into a shortly written phrase. The top 4 words were: "comradery," "sportsmanship," "consistency," "involvement." Below is short phrased list of professional women's sports strengths put together:

Strengths:

1. Comradery on and off the court
2. Sportsmanship conduct, during and after the game
3. Consistency and more of staying in lane
4. Off the court involvement with community and entertainment interaction

Results

Given these few and not all women in sports strengths, these strengths provided by participants helped create an outline in what needs to be emphasized in detail in the professional women's sports narrative. Also, these strengths help in adding how the women's sports market can market to their audience better, but first the centralization of raw and uncut female athlete's voices need to be at the forefront.

What do you want?

Along with highlighting the strengths of professional women in sports, another important ingredient to add to the creation of building the female athletes voice is to ask the question: "what do professional female athletes want?" This question is *vital* in creating a voice for professional women in sports, and just as important for fans to understand their narration too. Thus, to perform this and unravel some of the female athletes "wants," I have collected qualitative testimonies and data through my own personal collection of interviews speaking with athletes, and collecting interview testimonies from literature reviews.

Method 3: Interviews

Summary

Through interviews with current and former collegiate and professional athletes revolving around the question of “what do professional female athletes want?” as well as literature reviews that included testimonies from professional female athlete, a cohesive list of commonly answered answers of what professional female athletes want and why was collected.

Participants

Participants that I interviewed wanted to be kept anonymous for personal reasons, and contingences regarding their league and individual contracts. However, the athletes were still willing to answer honestly and give some testimonies. Thus, the participants for the interviews I conducted were stars on who play for the WNBA team Phoenix Mercury, and stars who play for the NWSL team Portland Thorns.

Other athletes outside the realm of the above description mentioned were supplemented as an emphasis on key points. Therefore, the supplemental testimonies were properly quoted and collected from literature reviews.

Interview Questions

The following interviews were collected in informal settings to make the interview natural and more open. I interviewed players on Phoenix Mercury briefly after their game asking questions regarding:

1. “What is the culture like for women’s basketball in Phoenix, especially in regards to the fan base around Phoenix Mercury?”
2. “What is the merchandise for your team like? Do you like it?”
3. “What is media attention like being a WNBA player?”

When interviewing the Portland Thorns, I met with some of the players after their practices and spoke with them through a phone call. The questions I asked these players included:

1. “What are your thoughts on the current pay for NWSL players?”
2. “What are practice and game facilities like for you, and/or other NWSL players you know?”
3. “What is the fan base like for you, and the NWSL as a whole?”

Therefore, these questions were intended to spotlight and provide a platform for the real voices of professional women’s athletes to shine.

Interviews

I have organized the following interviews in sections of: **media, culture, and economic.**

Media

In an interview with current WNBA stars on the Phoenix Mercury, we talked about how the WNBA is “rarely broadcasted on television either through ESPN, ABC or FOX Sports.” Although, the athletes expressed that the Phoenix Mercury has a great in person home fan base, with almost every game filled with “loyal dedicated Mercury fans,” they would like to see more aired WNBA matches not just for their team but for the league to educate people about women’s basketball, and defy the negative assumptions that follow women’s basketball. One Mercury player mentioned that she tried to watch one of her friends WNBA match who plays on the New York Liberty team, but her WNBA League Pass was not airing the game, and when she tried to google how to watch the game the results falsely popped up as, “broadcasted: ESPN

and FOX.” By broadcasting more women’s basketball games, this gives the audience the platform to watch women’s basketball for themselves and make judgments based on their own opinions, untainted by the masses or media. Thus, more media coverage for women’s sports would be ideal, because by frequently televising and/or streaming professional women’s sports may allow for a greater audience and fan base.

Culture

The voice helps build the why/ purpose and mentality. Thus, from the voices gathered through interviews and literature reviews, of past and present professional female athletes, it was seen that the mentality that has blocked women in professional sports from using their voice is stuck within the stagnant and overdue mentality of: “grateful to be here.” USWNT World Cup Champion and two-time Olympic gold medalist goalkeeper Hope Solo phrased it best, “The ‘grateful to be here’ mentality... needs to stop, and its persistence among female players is why things aren’t getting better at a more immediate pace” (Allen and Ayala 2018). Instead, female athletes need to not empathize with past, but empathize with the present and future of professional women’s sports by truly taking on the voice of building the base for professional women in sports beginning with their needs. First, solidifying the professional female athletes voice will be the primary step towards igniting a culture within professional women in sports amongst athletes, fans, and owners that will redefine to resonate.

Another topic discussed was the WNBA team travel conditions. In sports, especially professional sports, wellness is essential which entails balancing sleep and stress (Brar 2019). Thus, many WNBA teams are constantly traveling across the country for multiple games, full of jet-lag and headaches after tough matches, only to be

put into traveling commercial. In Rajpal Brar’s article about WNBA travel, he points out a telling example of dysfunctional WNBA travel regarding the Las Vegas Aces experience. This year, during the 2019 WNBA season, the Las Vegas Aces endured a “25-hour trip from Washington to Vegas” due to plane delays and cancellations (Brar 2019). On top of this, by the time the team landed in Vegas, they only had 4 hours until their next match and collectively forgone playing. Many of the Phoenix Mercury players I spoke with agreed that these unprofessional travel conditions for professional female athletes should “not go unnoticed,” and is something that is detrimentally affects player’s performance.

Economic and Political

On the other hand, I also had the opportunity to speak with NWSL stars on the Portland Thorns who shared their thoughts on what their needs are as female athletes. While speaking with some of the Thorns players, the majority of them spoke on the point of facilities and pay. One Thorns player speaking about facilities confessed, “There are still NWSL teams, and let me remind you that these are still ‘professional teams,’ who practice and play on high school turf fields.” In addition, along with some NWSL teams not having a solid field of their own to play season matches and practice, some teams do not even have an outdoor field facility to practice such as New Jersey Sky Blue FC, the longest operating women’s professional soccer club (Allen and Ayala 2018), who only have an indoor facility with no airflow, sagged roof, and no shower facilities remotely convenient to get to nor hygienic (Allen and Ayala 2018). This is an indication of the level of respect and resources that women in professional sports still are fighting for.

What also stood out to me was our conversations about NWSL teams like Sky Blue FC again, who are poorly understaffed which affects how athletes are treated and served. That with understaffed members for a 23 to 25 player roster is hard to “tailor to every player’s physical needs, especially towards recovery” which is essential to the longevity and health of an athletes play” Thorns players agreed upon. Also, many of the players interviewed clamored over the housing situations of NWSL players. Although the Thorns have stable and nice living conditions, some of the players still need 5 or 6 other teammates to live with them to make rent. Additionally, the Sky Blue FC team is in constant conversations about NWSL players living conditions, that many of the Sky Blue FC players share apartments that one would not “let their dogs sleep in,” and that they had to cover their windows with “cardboard and plastic bags” (Allen and Ayala 2018). Overall, the lack thereof in the NWSL illuminates the professional female athletes needs of proper facilities, properly staffed team workers, and proper housing.

Results

With these interviews I had with current WNBA and NWSL players, it was apparent that their voices needed to be heard not as professional women in sports categorized by their individual sport, rather, their voices needed to connect and be on the same page because they all shared commonalities in what they were fighting for in the professional women’s sports realm: increased television broadcasting, proper facilities, properly staffed athletic trainers and team workers for treatment and recovery, proper housing, and travel. What these WNBA and NWSL professional athletes described were not wants, rather, they were basic needs to properly perform and carry out their profession.

On the other hand, there will always be room for adjustments, but by professional women in sports prioritizing first to focus on their collective needs as an industry of women in professional sports, before honing in on the wants the industry and their specific leagues want such as signature shoes, jerseys, and even fans, will lay down the professional women in sports outline of basic needs as a foundation for aspiring female athlete generations to thrive from. In turn, the professional female voices of today are past fighting for the opportunity for women to just be allowed to play sports, but are focused on the job at hand to fight for better conditions and respect for professional women in sports as a whole.

Thus, to cultivate a culture around women in professional sports, understanding the strengths of women in professional sports complemented by narrowing down the specifics of what female professional athlete's needs are, creates directionality towards redefining the why behind the voice of the narrative of professional women in sports.

Chapter 5| WOMEN BALL TOO: Investing in the Women’s Sports Market

It was near spring time towards the end of May 2019, and I was suddenly woken up by my business partner, Donovan. I was startled, worrisome and confused at first by the look on his face of disbelief, but as he turned his phone screen towards me I suddenly understood why.

After the official start of our company and brand in January, named “Women Ball Too,” business had a slow start of independent orders, future project ideas, and developing our business plan still. However, the turning point for Women Ball Too occurred on May 20, 2019. On this date was the Game 4 NBA Western Conference Playoffs, between the Golden State Warriors and the Portland Trailblazers. Additionally, months before the NBA Playoff Game, Jordan Bell who plays for the Golden State Warriors² and a former University of Oregon duck alumni men’s basketball player, reached out to us for a customized white and black “Woman Ball Too” hoodie.

Furthermore, when Donovan excitedly, but in shock silently turned his phone screen towards me, it was an image of Jordan Bell wearing our Women Ball Too hoodie before the big playoff game walking into the arena (See Appendix III). The photo was blasted all over social media³ posted by famously notorious sports accounts followed by thousands and millions of people such as: “Bleacher Report,”⁴ “WSLAM,” “League Fits,” “WNBA,” and “Warriors.” This came as an unwarned surprised to both Donovan and I, which instantly sky rocketed our online orders to around 300 orders, acquired

² Jordan Bell recently was traded to play for the Minnesota Timberwolves.

³ Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook

⁴

over 200 more followers, and most importantly revitalized life into Women Ball Too reminding both Donovan and I that our company for sure has a promising future in the sports business market.

However, after our recent success and kick-start into our Women Ball Too venture, other people and companies began to rip off our Woman Ball Too logo from us, and print similar merchandise to sell. This became quite apparent, and more of a concern to both Donovan and I when we were notified through our social media account that the WNBA shouted our business account out on their social media. But the image that the WNBA accounted shouted us out on was them commenting on a WNBA fans post of them wearing a shirt that used our logo as our Women Ball Too merchandise (See Appendix III). Although we were excited to be recognized by the WNBA, there was discomfort because we both knew the shirt the fan was wearing was not a shirt we printed or shipped out. We could tell because the logo was too oversized, and wrongly centered on the shirt. Yes, this was upsetting to have imposters easily recreate our merchandise, because it felt like people were stealing “our idea,” and that the people receiving the “knock-off” Women Ball Too merchandise were not given the same quality print that we create. Yet, on the other hand, a part of us wanted to say that it was okay. It was okay that people sought out to print shirts that copied our logo “Women Ball Too,” because the way we viewed it, this was a step towards the right direction by getting people more involved with women’s sports, and not being afraid to represent Women Ball Too whether a man or woman.

What is “Women Ball Too”

As previously stated, Women Ball Too was officially founded in January 2019. It is quintessential to point out that Women Ball Too is ran by two people, both a woman and a man. This is important to note, because both myself and Donovan's cooperation and willingness to work through anything together are a testament to what this business is about: fostering equity and giving credit where it is due by understanding that it takes both women and men to do so. Sports does not see gender, race, or class, but we as humans can. Thus, we need systems and leaders that use their platform to advocate for the true values of sports. Being former athletes, we have seen the game through the lens of both a woman's and a man's perspective. Our experiences, similarities, and differences make this brand so special because we can complement one another to deliver a brand that is inclusive to all, while still focusing on women's sports.

Our brand started by selling our statement "Women Ball Too" on shirts and hoodies to create greater attendance and recognition for women in sports. We soon found ourselves putting on tournaments and watch parties that built and **engaged** peoples interest around women in sports. Then came **educating** the community about the discrepancies that lie within sports through research and data collection. Though we experiment with different methods aimed towards developing change, we are set on one principle, that is: it takes both voice and action of leaders to create change. To create change, to **empower and endure**. This is why our brand has made a huge investment identifying difference makers that use their platform to help us make a statement.

When Jordan Bell on the Golden State Warriors wore his hoodie to the Western Conference Finals Game 4 close out, he made a statement. When Hayley Raso (Appendix III) and the Portland Thorns players wore their shirts to the game, they made

a statement. When Jeremy Ebobisse and Bill Tuiloma (Appendix III) on the Portland Timbers wore their shirts before their game, they made a statement. When the MVP of the WNBA wore her shirt to a benefit dinner with Snoop Dogg, she made a statement on ESPN (Appendix III). This is the beginning of reaching equity for us: by making a statement together, because it takes unity to create change.

Moreover, Women Ball Too's mission is to simply create value in the women's sports market through the means of products, programs, and perspectives aimed to empower, educate, and engage the community. Figure 1 is Women Ball Too's creating value pyramid that uses Women Ball Too as a platform: to engage people with our sports products that illicit a statement for women in sports, to educate people about our work in the brand working towards solving the inequities and discrepancies that lie within the sports industry, and to empower the community to join the movement and to take action.

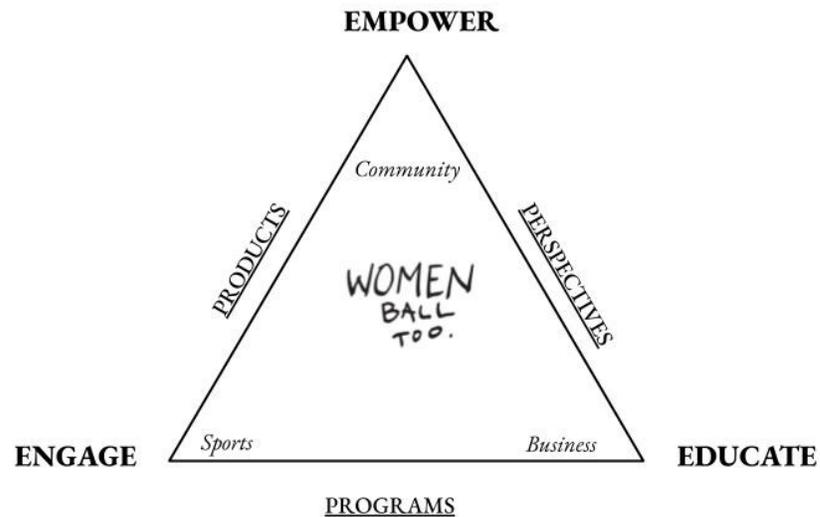


Figure 1. Creating value in the women’s sports market through Women Ball Too.

Furthermore, creating value in the women’s sports market entails building around women’s sports itself, the investments and business of the industry, and the community relationships in and around the market. We do this to engage, educate, and empower through our products, programs and perspectives.

Motivations for Women Ball Too

Moreover, the point of where women in sports are currently, there is an enormous opportunity to unpack and redefyne what “sports entertainment” means and looks like in conjunction to professional women’s sports. In other words, professional women in sports can rebrand and redefyne the culture of the professional women’s sports market to fit their needs. As of now, I have conducted research sifting through 30 literature review articles and journals within the past 5 years regarding professional women in sports, and out of these 30 articles/journals I chose the top 3 frequently used

words to describe women in sports. The top 3 words were: *empowerment*, *generations*, and *equality*. These words showed an indication as to how the professional women's sports market and industry is being portrayed. Although these top 3 words are not discouraging nor false representative words to describe the current position women in sports are facing, they are words that are stagnant that hold no active value.

Method 3: Quantitative Survey

Therefore, upon the formation of Women Ball Too, Donovan and I posted a huge "Women Ball Too Sports Survey" on all of Women Ball Too's media accounts including our personal accounts.

Survey

This survey included both closed and opened ended questions to collect a basic understanding of the knowledge and thoughts our consumers had about women in sports.

Participants

The survey included 156 participants, that included randomized participants ranging between the ages of 12 to 50 years old. Participants were all from the United States, where 75% were female, 23% were male, and 2% were other. Regarding race, White and African-American participants were heavily represented. Additionally, participants included both non- athletes and athletes (See Appendix I).

Survey Questions

There was a total of 8 survey questions each participant was asked. The following outline what the questions entailed:

1. “Do you know what professional women’s basketball and soccer players make annually?”
2. “How much would you be willing to pay for a women’s sports jersey?”
3. “Can you name a significant and influential brand that puts women in sports first?”
4. “What is the most influential sports platform?”
5. “Who is your favorite professional athlete?”
6. “Who is your favorite professional sports team?”
7. “Do you own a professional women’s jersey and/or women’s sports merchandise?”
8. “What is your favorite sport to watch?”

Data

The data was very telling but not surprising. Thus, the most interesting data collected revolved around question 3 that 47% of participants answered yes, and 53% answered no (See Appendix I). Thus, in regards to question 5, out of the 130 participants, 90 answered that their favorite professional athlete was a male, while the other 40 participants answered that their favorite professional athlete was a woman (See Appendix I). In addition, participants answered question 7 as predicted. In other words, 37% of participants answered yes, while a large group of 63% of participants answered no they did not own a professional women’s team and/or player’s merchandise (See Appendix I).

Results

Given this data and research, therefore my business partner and I have created a company and brand that represents women in sports by redefining and creating value in the women's sports market. Women Ball Too thinks differently, in that we use our platform to engage with fans and athletes to produce pieces that represent the voices of professional women in sports. For example, through Women Ball Too our apparel speaks to all sports but makes a statement with our simple shirts that read "Women Ball Too," meaning that women play sports too and they should be given credit, because it is due. The saying "Women Ball Too" acts more of a declaration that gives recognition. With that said, by developing Women Ball Too as an independent company that provides a new addition to the women's sports merchandise market, as well as a platform to educate communities about professional women in sports, the women's sports market can expand their scope and support and develop more brands and/or companies that support women in sports, and/or make more women in sports apparel for both men and women to wear.

Women Ball Too, So Can You?

From the start of establishing Women Ball Too, there have been many challenges and successes. Each challenge, and most certainly successes have been experienced together with myself and Donovan. However, there have been other challenges that have been experienced separately, especially for myself.

Being a part-owner and founder of a company called Women Ball Too is already empowering enough. Thus, you would think that given half of the company is owned by a woman, people in the business room would be more open eared and willing to listen and hear what I have to say. However, this is not the case.

Thinking about the company and brand keeps me up late at night, but eager to wake up the next day to start working towards our goal of redefining and creating value in the women's sports market. Thus, being an owner in business as a woman, more specifically a woman in business and sports, has been some of the most rewarding and discouraging moments I have experienced.

The Wall Street Journal states that only 1% of the workforce make up the C-suite of business which is at a low of 18% compared to men with a whopping 81% of representation in the C-suite of business (Stauffer 2019). With that said, running Women Ball Too with my partner Donovan who is a male, many times when we go out to events to speak with various people I am often looked down upon or dismissed. For example, I have had comments directed towards me from both women and men in disbelief that I too run the business, such as "I don't believe you own this business," "You're kidding, right?" or "prove it." I have also noticed that when speaking owner to owner with other businesses, all the questions and comments are often directed to my partner with little to no acknowledgement of me in the same room speaking about the business as well. However, when I do speak, the other person on the other end either disengages or interrupts me. Additionally, often when Donovan and I are in conversations with consumers or other business owners, Donovan has to blatantly remind the person/people we are speaking to that I too run the business. This is so that I can be addressed and acknowledged in the conversation as well, because for some reason it is not in many consumers and business owner's nature to acknowledge both the man and the woman; instead, everything is automatically defaulted to the man.

The New York Times Business Journal recently concluded a study that “being interrupted, talked over, shut down or penalized for speaking out is nearly a universal experience for women when they are outnumbered by men” (Chira 2017). Therefore, my experiences as a business woman and owner, I find it that it is my duty to start somewhere to represent and stand-up for women, and the area of underrepresented women I chose to focus on is the professional sports realm. This is why my work in Women Ball Too is important regarding advocating for women in sports to be treated justly in all aspects, and to be given credit – because it is **due**. Additionally, focusing my work on uplifting professional women in sports has a greater purpose that it is fighting for, in which its current momentum and future results can act as a marker/ first step towards redefining the position of women in history.

Creating My Sports Narrative

Given my experiences as a business woman. Entering the field of business as not only a woman in sports business, but a young, colored woman in sports business often makes me feel excluded, and seen as the minority of the minorities. However, this sense of feeling like the minority of the minorities was not something newly discovered.

When I moved from San Francisco to Oregon at a young age, I wanted to participate in something outside of school other than piano, something active. Thus, given all the sports I could choose from, I chose to play soccer because it was the only sport one of my cousin did not play.

Given that soccer in the United States is overpowered by a pre-dominantly white, middle and upper class suburban group, I was again faced with being the minority of the minority. When I first started soccer, I showed up to try-outs wearing

running shoes, shorts, a pink panda yoga shirt, and a semi pumped up soccer ball. Thus, as I looked around, I noticed other people at tryouts wearing some sort of armor around their shins, that is when someone from the coaching staff walked up to me and asked: “Where are your cleats and shin guards kid?” I had no clue what either of those were or even looked like. Therefore, being Samoan, growing up playing soccer was not the traditional sport Polynesian people play, nor were there any female Polynesian soccer players I had to look up to.

However, the values and friendships soccer brought to me on and off the field is what kept me in the game, and what grew me closer to loving “the beautiful game.”⁵ Yet, I would be remised if I did not mention how soccer has also cultivated a powerful sense of strength and resilience within me to push through the challenges that molded me to who I am today.

Moreover, as I became more serious playing soccer I joined the top club soccer team in Oregon, played for my High School soccer team where we won 2 back to back state championships and where I was named Oregon State Player of the Year, partially played collegiate soccer on the University of Oregon Women’s Soccer team, and was invited to play in the Olympic Development Program (ODP). Given my 12 years of soccer experience, working my way through several tiers of the soccer pyramid in aspiring to play professional soccer and/or the for the USWNT, there were challenges I faced. One of the most memorable challenges I faced was also the most enjoyable moment I had playing soccer. I was one of the youngest players on the Oregon ODP team, and we were amid a game against another team. Towards the end of the game, I tried one of the most skilled tricks in soccer called the “bicycle kick” or “scissors kick,”

⁵ Famous Brazilian soccer legend Pele reference referring to “soccer.”

and scored (Appendix III). After I scored the bicycle kick I felt a sense of shock due to excitement, but also a sense of discomfort. When I walked back to the bench, I overheard the head coach who was a male speaking to the assistant coach: “Never seen that before [referring to the bicycle kick], and definitely not going to see it again in women’s soccer because they’re not as skilled. It’s more of a men’s soccer game thing, they’re more consistently entertaining.” In that moment, it motivated me to continue practicing my bicycle kicks not because it was cool, but to prove to myself, that coach, and to women’s sports fans that women in soccer have just as much or even more flair, skill, and entertainment than their counterpart men.

Therefore, my experiences from being a female athlete has been valuable in one of the many reasons why I wanted to help build Women Ball Too. I had my own sports narrative that needed to be heard and added as one of the puzzle pieces to the overarching professional women in sports narrative. My sports narrative centered around my “*why I play sports*” to prove to men, like my previous Oregon ODP coach, and others alike that women *play soccer* too, that women *ball* too. It also centered around my realization of there never being a stable United States Women’s professional soccer league that I could consistently go out to support, purchase merchandise from, or aspire to play for. Thus, this part of my sports narrative motivated me to find a way to contribute towards the women’s sports market to improve it for little soccer girls like I once was to look forward to, which is why I began to help in developing Women Ball Too.

Given this, in similar light, I challenge professional female athletes to reflect on their purpose/ reason as to why they continue to play and advocate for professional women in sports, when so many things such as: lower pay, lower quality of facilities,

bad travel, and more are against them. Once their *why* is defined, I then continue to challenge professional female athletes to go out and voice their stories to push for action in bettering the women's sports sphere. Therefore, professional female athletes are the **agents of change** to truly redefyne the women's sports sphere.

Women Ball Too, So Can You!

Moreover, these experiences being a business woman and former athlete illuminated a part of Women Ball Too that needed to be added: "So Can You." Thus, a part of Women Ball Too's catch phrase reads as: "Women Ball Too. So Can You." While trying to come up with a slogan/catch phrase for Women Ball Too, I came up with the second part "So Can You." At first, this was used because it was catchy and easy to say; yet, as time flew by the So Can You portion become more relevant and defined to me. So Can You is to provide inclusion for all, which is what our brand is about. In addition, So Can You is the final piece in our Women Ball Too mission, a sort of call to action and sense of empowerment to drive others to join us in creating value in the women's sports market. Moreover, on a more personal note, So Can You is a part of Women Ball Too so for whoever is a part of the brand and overall mission, does not have to and should not have to feel what I felt being the minority of the minorities in soccer and business. That no one is left out or feeling discouraged, because Women Ball Too has a broader purpose that engages everyone in the community to uplift and encourage one another to create purposeful change.

Motions to Redefyne the Professional Women's Sports Market

From a sports fan and professional female athlete's perspective, redefying the women's sports market takes engaging, educating and empowering. More specifically,

these principles need to be put into action to uplift the women's sports market through more media coverage, greater merchandise accessibility, and reconstructed leagues.

Traditional target market for professional women in sports

“With increasing women entering this sphere of social life, it is important to investigate and understand the world they are entering and helping” (Hanis-Martin 1998).

Hanis-Martin's quote elicits the first step when beginning to redefyne the women's sports market, which is to first “understand the world they are entering.” Therefore, it is wise to understand the past and current market of women in sports.

In the NBA and WNBA owners both market primarily to white, middle-class family audiences, because this target group is the most “readily business model available to owners” (Hanis-Martin 2019). However, professional women in sports, as they are still finding their target market, may not have to be limited to one target audience; instead, it could be a multitude that differs their game from others. Therefore, professional women in sports can redefyne the culture that has been deeply rooted in professional sports, by not always thinking in the mind frame of or taking what is readily available. Rather, the women's professional sports market can begin with starting in curtailing to an audience rather than pinpointing a singular target market. How does the professional women's sports market begin to appease such a broad audience then? By first, educating whoever and whomever is readily available by the masses to learn about professional women in sports.

Although it is a good start to acquire a large fan base without targeting specific groups for the professional women in sports audience, there are certain groups that

should be supporting and should be fans of professional women in sports. One vital component to the women's sports fan base is women supporting women. This does not go to say that women are the focal point of professional women in sports fans base, but it does go to say that women need to support women to defy the contradiction that weighs heavily on women's sports regarding women not supporting women in sports. By women not supporting women in sports, is an indication of how meaningful the women's professional sports league is, because it is not only to change the culture in sports, but it is to act as a monument in women's history to learn from: to create and to cultivate change in other areas where women are undermined.

Broadcasting coverage and media

Today, broadcasting coverage and media are quintessential to the professional women's sports Market. The upside of broadcast coverage and the media is that they can grab the attention of the masses. However, the downfall is that broadcast coverage and media can take its own direction in representing women in sports in whichever which way. In addition, media's differential coverage of men and women's sports continues to serve as an institutional and cultural site for reproduction of overcompensating for men and undeserving women in sports. Thus, by redefining the professional women's sports market, broadcast coverage and media will be used as one of the main tools to truly build a growing culture inside and outside the stadium.

First, to move forward in redefining and creating a new space for the women's professional sports market, the preconceived notions and occasions of representing women inside the frame of sports coverage must be squandered and rebuilt. Meaning the 4 most common themes representing women in conjunction with sports coverage: 1.

Rare moments of respectful coverage of women; 2. Sexualized gag stories; 3. Fights, assaults, and scandals; and 4. Women as wives, girlfriends and mothers (Cooky 2018). These will be rebuilt by hearing and be led by the voices of professional female athletes in how they want to be portrayed. Thus, it should be noted that there are 3 streams of media: sports broadcasting, tv news and highlights. By understanding these 3 outlet channels of media, one outlet to redefyne women in sports would be to create and dedicate a channel(s) for the sole purpose of covering professional women in sports in every aspect. Every aspect including live game coverage, post-game interviews and conversations, sports segments highlighting specific current and veteran professional female athletes, and highlight videos of professional women in sports. Another option, is for women’s professional leagues like the NWSL and WNBA to gain broadcasting partners such as ESPN. However, the only caveat in partnering with an already established predominantly male dominated sports channel, is that there are minimal spaces to cover women in sports. For the NWSL’s first partnership with Fox Sports only promised 9 games to be aired out of the entire season, and the latest and newest partnership between the NWSL and ESPN promised 19 games and the rest of the season to be shown through streaming on Yahoo Live Sports (Cooky 2019).

With all this said, it is hard for the audience to grow a pallet for women’s sports if the public is not given a chance to see it, not just once or twice, but on a frequent and constant basis.

Yet, the current decisions of professional women's sports coverage are again dictated on an overpowering business cycle where decisions for media and broadcast coverage are decided on making sure coverage businesses “reach the greatest number of

viewers” which means that “some areas don’t get much regular coverage” (Edgar 2010).

Although this may be true, to grow the women’s sports, market the goal should not be to prioritize gaining money to keep the league afloat. It is to acquire an audience through engagement and education, and using the power of the professional female athlete’s voices to push the needle forward. Which will gain viewership, bring attention to league owner’s about investing and/or donating to a growing market that will guarantee returns.

On the other hand, if the mission is to redefyne the women’s sports market and broadcasting coverage and media is one of the main platforms to do this, why do professional women in sports not look to create an all-women’s professional sports channel. This channel would broadcast all professional women’s sports games that are in season, provide personal segments on players to educate the fans about player’s background stories, and show post and pre-game highlights and interviews. Although, ESPN created ESPNW to provide an informational platform for fans wondering about women in sports, it is nowhere near to gaining the attention of a women’s sports network.

Furthermore, if sports are all about business and bringing in money for the industry and to pay players and staff, then it should also be understood at great lengths that the fans/audience see professional sports as a paid entertainment that not only exist on the court but outside as well. Fans, and people not only buy into great players and teams, but they also buy into the story behind it as well. Thus, since women are already creating milestone achievements statistically on paper, their missing piece is to

intertwine their achievements in creating a narrative that will make people buy into them that everyone can relate to.

Merchandise

The commercialization of sports operates on 3 principal levels: the establishment of sport products, goods, and services (Brohm 1976). Therefore, if the commercialization of sports is running through one main stream of acquiring revenue for the sports market, producing one professional sports product is not enough.

Producing a limited selection of hard to find professional WNBA or NWSL jersey's is not enough.

In addition, one youth soccer camp for aspiring young females is not enough.

Given my soccer experience, I was also lucky enough to grow up and catch a few women's professional soccer match. during the birth of the Women's Professional Soccer League (which later folded after 4 seasons), the only way to own a WPSL jersey was to go to the game and purchase it off a corner store seller, or attend a game where the stadium may or may not be selling jerseys. It always bothered me that I was unable to easily walk into a sports store and request a Mia Hamm jersey to wear to practice or train in; instead, I had an overfilled closet full of professional men's jerseys of Messi, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, and David Beckham. However, through attending games and collecting qualitative research through comparing the WNBA and NWSL website I noticed certain changes that show the progression in growing the professional women's sports market, but I also noticed digression. Given all the momentum women's soccer has had recently in media after the USWNT won the 2019 World Cup, I found a clear

majority of changes in the NWSL's website. When entering the website, I was automatically prompted with news about the recently added team to the league. Additionally, what surprised me the most was the addition of a "shop" tab. This tab had every NWSL team's merchandise available which included several sports products including jersey's; yet, the only team without merchandise was the Houston Dash. The website also had positives in its layout which included: current league standings between the teams, featured player information tab, and featured news. The website also had a statistics page which highlighted specific leaders in certain categories, that also had the corresponding player's image to add a face to the stat. Which is great, so it makes these professional women's soccer players more recognizable to the public.

On the other hand, when researching the WNBA website, what first stood out to me were the great color choices and amazing graphics. In comparison to the NWSL website, both websites had almost the same layout, but the content and how it was displayed within each tab is where websites differed. For instance, the WNBA stats page, opened into a big list of numbers and names sectioned into category leaders with no images or flare added to excited website visitors. Another observation to note was the "ticket" tab. For each team, there were always options for "individual tickets" and "group tickets," however, there was an inconsistency between each WNBA team that offered season tickets. Also, when clicking through the various WNBA teams through the "teams" tab, each team tab I clicked on, opened a different team tab that all varied in what information was displayed. Some team tabs had current news about the team, and others just showed me a list of the players on the team with no photos. The WNBA website has a great cohesive look, but still needs to find cohesiveness in the content it is

displaying so that all the teams, and the league as one are on the same page. On the upside, the WNBA website offer a WNBA League Pass which allows access to watch all the WNBA games all season long. This is one step in the right direction to gain more viewers, and keeps fans more accountable to buy into watching the professional women's basketball league.

Therefore, the sports merchandise market to provide specific professional women's sports league and team merchandise is necessary; yet, if these specific NWSL or WNBA teams want to sell team merchandise off their website there is a contingency to invest in production and guarantee some type of return. However, what if the professional women's sports market can think beyond the confinements of selling team merchandise through only the NWSL and WNBA websites, and instead, redefine how professional women's sports merchandise is made, and where professional women's sports merchandise is sold.

Leagues and Teams

To enhance the professional women's sports leagues in America, there needs to be time spent in dissecting the leagues and how they can be improved.

Currently, the top 2 professional women's sports leagues are the WNBA and NWSL. The WNBA has 12 teams and the NWSL has 9 plus 1 extra team that will be added in 2021, with a combined score of 22 professional women's sports teams amongst 2 leagues. The combined total of teams between the top two professional women's sports leagues who have the most women's professional teams is less than one of the top 4 professional men's leagues. The NBA has 30 teams, the MLS has 24 teams and the

NFL has 32 teams. Thus, the lack of teams for professional women's sports is already cutting women in sports short. Cutting professional women in sports short by limiting the number of potential fans professional women in sports could have.

When researching the WNBA and NWSL leagues, there was one major difference between the two leagues, the WNBA is dependent on the NBA as it is the woman's counterpart to the NBA; whereas, the NWSL is owned by the teams and under management contract with the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) and not contingent to its counterpart men's soccer league the MLS. This is huge in terms of ownership and authority to enact change, and whose voice is centralized in making decisions.

Thus, it is important to ask the questions of why professional women's sports teams are selected in certain cities, instead of introducing professional women's sports teams in cities where there are already fan bases for their sport. For example, the MLS team, Portland Timbers have a corresponding professional women's soccer team the Portland Thorns, where they share the same owner, stadium and support staff. Hence why in 2019, the Portland Thorns owned one-third of the total league attendance (Conerly 2019). Also, by the Portland Timbers and Thorns sharing the same stadium and support staff means that neither team should pay extra for stadiums or support staff (Conerly 2019). Currently there are 4 NWSL teams who follow shared stadium and support staff with their counterparts (Portland Thorns, Houston Dash, Orlando Pride, and Utah Royals).

Given this case study between MLS and NWSL, the women's sports market can drastically change by implementing more professional women's sports teams. The

WNBA and NWSL can start by adding women's professional sports teams in the same city as their counterparts. Meaning that each city that has a NBA team should have a WNBA team, and each city that has a MLS team should have a NWSL team. Therefore, a greater number of professional women's sports teams equates to more broadcasting coverage, larger fan base since the selected cities already have a fan base for the selected sport, and production for more sports merchandise, specifically, women's professional sports teams and players. In addition, most importantly, by placing professional women's sports teams in cities that already have established professional men's sports teams, this will educate and build the entirety of sports knowledge since sports fans will now understand both sides of the sport: men and women.

Women (Ignite a Culture) Too. So Can You!

The professional women in sports market sphere has one of the greatest potentials to be a model for not only creating greater opportunities for women in sports to look forward to, but it also has the greatest potential to be a model for solving social injustices. Thus, redefining the women's sports market not only begins with the voices of pioneer female athletes to truly paint a narration and identity for professional women in sports, but it begins with the right mind frame. The mind frame that goes beyond "grateful to be here" as Hope Solo mentioned. The mind frame that thinks "big league thinking, to break out of minor league thinking" (Conerly Forbes 2019). The mind frame that creates action to change and cultivate. To redefyne to create and to cultivate the women's sports market by increasing broadcasting and media coverage, accessibility to professional women's merchandise, and an increase in professional women's league teams.

Moreover, when creating and redefining the women's sports market, it is imperative to use its platform through action to elevate the voices of female professional athletes that will in turn result into investments and belief in realizing the need to keep professional women in sports heard and satisfied.

Chapter 6| Consolidating the Narrative of Professional Women in Sports

To tie it all back together, it should be reminded that this paper took on the challenge to illuminate how women are underserved considering what they deserve; rather than under the light of being compared to men. From this paper, this is done by redefining. First by **creating** and centralizing the voices of professional female athletes in sports used to deconstruct the league and professional sports industry to reconstruct the purpose of sports and its market from professional women in sports: to serve and to **cultivate** a narrative and platform for the next generations of athletes and fans to grow and build from. Lastly, is to **challenge** the mindset of authorities and fans within the professional sports sphere presenting them with historical cultural sports facts, that have left women in sports at an automatic disadvantage.

Therefore redefining the professional women's sports sphere can be encapsulated by consolidating the professional women's sports narrative (*what is your why?*) which entails centralizing the voices of professional female athletes, and rebranding and investing time, money and belief in the women's sports market through the "3C pillar principles" that was formed through the integration of Women Ball Too principles and research collected in this paper: *create* to educate, *cultivate* to engage and empower, and *challenge* to engage (Figure 2).

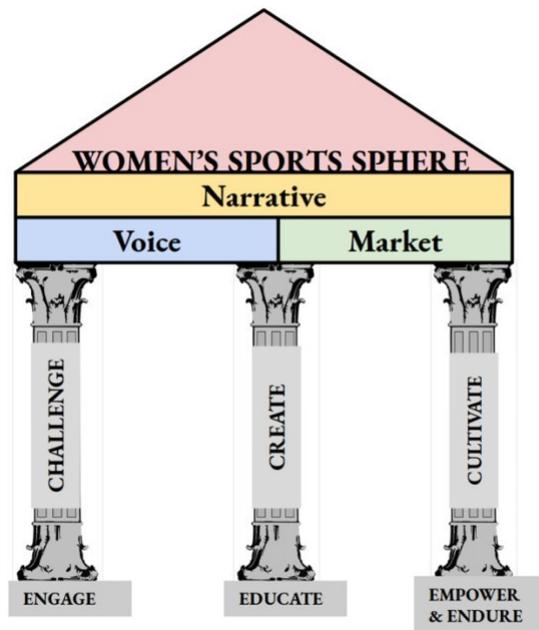


Figure 2. Women Ball Too structure of Redefining the Women’s Sports Sphere

If the diagram of the Women Ball Too structure of redefining (Figure 2) is implemented and enacted in the professional women’s sports sphere, this will create the opportunity not only for growth in the professional women’s sports market from more fan attendance, more participation of women in sports, and more teams in professional women’s sports leagues, but is also an opportunity to “reproduce a pattern of domination and endurance” (Hanis-Martin 1998).

Chapter 7| Conclusion: Redefining the Women's Sports Narrative

Where women in professional sports are today, is at one of the most critical tick marks on professional women in sports history timeline. The time of women in professional sports right now is all about consolidating and cultivating the narrative. Without the narrative, nothing else can follow. The narrative is the purpose and the story of why professional women in sports play sports, and why fans of sports should watch women play. On the other hand, it is inevitable that business and money will always play a role in sports, but does not need to be the defining nor end all be all point of professional women in sports leagues and teams.

Both women and men from all aspects in sports need to buy into redefining the professional women's sports sphere. This paper was about creating an outline regarding how this can be achieved, but what still needs to be answered and understood is what future end goals for women in sports look like. By answering this question, leaves space for the establishment of comfort in women's professional sports to not worry about the discrepancies and injustices that fall outside of sports entertainment, which can be a distraction to fans; rather for once, just focus on the sport and the players dedicated to the game.

Together, as a community, we can all take part in building the infrastructure that allows women's sports culture to strive and endure: by both sides learning how to listen with empathy for one another, because for meaningful change, both men and women are integral parts towards forward thinking of redefining and enduring as seen through Women Ball Too. Taking time to prioritize the intangibles, which foundationally build the women in sports narrative, that exists in professional sports such as regularly

spotlighting women professional athletes, and athletes in general, voices this will bring truth to the misconceptions about women's professional sports and create an outline of the needs that still need to be addressed. Additionally, being willing to invest in the women's sports market to help it grow for future generations of female athletes, by being open-minded to the redefining of the sports market through women's multifaceted personalities and cultural interplay on and off the court. Together, by understanding the voices that make up sports, and grasping the direction and what is needed in the women's sports market, creates and cultivates the women's sports narrative, but most importantly will at first challenge current traditional sports business owners and fans that add depth to redefining and polishing the narrative of professional women in sports to endure and grow from.

The professional women's sports sphere was in part used to pinpoint a large field centered around gender and pay inequity. Therefore, while still utilizing the same approach of redefining, in larger discussions and movements outside of women's sports, women in other fields of work and careers face the same challenges and struggles of professional female athletes. For example, we all want to get paid an equitable amount given the same hours and time and we put in as our counterpart; however, women in the workforce are still underpaid for the same work as their counterpart men. In the recently updated Pay Scale gathering data on the gender pay gap in 2019, it was found that women earn 79 cents for every \$1 earned by men. To be even more specific, within the same study by Pay Scale, the median salary for men and women with the same job and qualifications displayed that women still earned less than men summing together that women earn 98 cents for every \$1 earned by men. In

addition, regarding my own personal experiences being a woman business owner, in relationship to other women in business we all want to work in places where we are valued, and not fear rejection, harassment, or belittlement. Sadly, 64% of women face microaggressions at work, with most these microaggressions being mistaken for more of junior employees including having their judgement questioned in their area of expertise (Forbes 2018). In all, these experiences add up, and women who experience these slight aggressions are three times more likely to consider quitting on a regular basis (Forbes 2018). With that said, the female professional athletes I interviewed, the research data collected through survey's, and personal experiences I have seen through Women Ball Too, goes to say that women in professional sports, at large, represent greater labor issues, and the lack of consideration for what women want and need globally.

With that said, to redefyne such a huge market that is contingent upon what sports in the United States has already cultivated takes a mindset and a plan that needs to think outside of the box to force sports fans to buy into the newly defined sports market. Below are 3 principles of redefying the women's sports market that stem from Women Ball Too's belief of how to create value in the women's sports market:

1. The first step in redefying the professional women's sports market is to **engage** the audience.

Therefore, the job of engaging the audience falls into the laps of the athlete and the sports business owners/market owners. Engaging the audience may range anywhere from attending more professional women's sports games, to playing the EA Sports video game "FIFA 2019" as the women's professional team.

Therefore, the largest form of engagement in professional women's sports right now is via attending games, and broadcasting games on television. Given this, this narrows down the spaces in which the women's sports market should focus their energy on in fostering greater engagement with the audience. For example, creating more pre- and post-game interviews with female athletes, and/or creating more tailgates or pre-game and during game activities for sports fans to engage in while attending women's professional matches. Another concept to engage the audience may be through creating more access to bracket play for professional women in sports. Meaning when playoffs happen for women's sports leagues, the women's professional sports leagues should create brackets for fans to fill out to feel more connected to players.

2. The second step to redefining the women's sports market is **educating**.

The one key to educating sports fans besides first engaging them, is to develop consistency in educating. Thus, this step of educating weighs heavily on the institutions/entities of various media outlet platforms that display or communicate sports news and highlights. Through a survey, I created testing the basic sports knowledge of professional women in sports, the results revealed that less than 20% of participants knew the fundamental rules and logistics of the WNBA; whereas, 80% knew the fundamental rules of the NWSL. This in itself is educational, because the results from the survey are telling in that there is an interesting dynamic played between professional men's and women's basketball and professional men's and women's soccer. For if comparing the WNBA and NBA rules there are major differences in 3-point line distance, the size of the ball, and regulation time.

Whereas, in MLS and NWSL soccer all rules and regulations are kept the same. These little differences, that make a huge difference in understanding professional women in sports are detrimental for the audience to understand, because it discredits the argument that “men are better at sports.” How could this be possible in basketball if professional men and women's basketball are not even the same in rules. Moreover, by presenting sports fans with more statistics, information about players, through media and broadcasting coverage will in turn show an increase in sports conversations involving women in sports and immersing sports fans investments in women in sports as well.

3. The last step in redefining the women’s sports market is to **empower and endure**.

As mentioned before, after engaging and educating the sports fans, it is key to continually empower and uplift women in professional sports as well as their market. Thus, the responsibility of empowering lies between every sports fan, sports reporter/broadcaster, business owner, agent, and coach. Empowerment can be seen through the lens of investment, attendance, greater broadcasting coverage, and/or on a day to day basis having more conversations with people about women in sports to get the word out. Therefore, to *empower* is to *endure*.

Given this, the only thing stopping the professional women’s sports narrative from being established is the challenge that lies within challenging. That challenge being the current dilemma female athletes, fans, and sports owners are all dealing with: lack of faith and action in relationship to balancing morality and business. Henceforth, when creating and redefining the women’s sports market, it is

imperative to use its platform through action to elevate the voices of female professional athletes that will in turn result into investments and belief in realizing the need to keep professional women in sports heard and satisfied.

Therefore, when redefining the women's sports narrative, it should be noted that this paper started with recognizing and understanding where professional women in sports came from. Hence, we cannot forget where we ourselves came from which is a huge part in identifying what is needed in the women's professional sports narrative, and any narrative created to cultivate and challenge.

Thus, from the grandmother who taught us, the mother who nurtured us, to the sister who loved us: gentle, patient, comforting, and compassionate. However, we cannot forget she is also the grandmother who protected us, the mother who strengthened us, and the sister who pushed us. The willingness to sacrifice in order to take risks to break barriers to bring recognition and conversation together that matters morally and in turn reaps financially as well, not only empowers women, but empowers each other to redefine by: creating, cultivating and challenging.

Women Ball Too. So Can You

Appendix I | Survey Questions and Data

A. Quantitative Sports Survey Questions

Soccer Questions

(5 questions for men's soccer)

1. What is the name of the professional men's soccer league in the United States?
2. When did the men's professional soccer league start?
3. How many teams are in the men's professional soccer league?
4. Which player plays in the United States men's professional soccer league? (options: a. Cristiano Ronald b. Xavi Iniesta c. Lionel Messi d. Michael Bradley)
5. Who is the all-time leading scorer for professional men's soccer in the United States professional league?

(5 questions for women's soccer)

6. What is the name of the current professional women's soccer league in the United States?
7. When did the women's professional soccer league start?
8. How many teams are in the women's professional soccer league?
9. When does the United States professional soccer league start?
10. What team does Alex Morgan play for in the United States professional soccer league?

Basketball Questions

(5 questions for men's basketball)

1. What is the name of the men's professional basketball league in the United States?
2. When did the current men's professional basketball league in the United States form?
3. What team won this past year in the United States men's professional basketball league?
4. Who is the highest paid United States men's professional basketball league player?
5. Who possessed the first signature shoe in the United States men's professional basketball league?

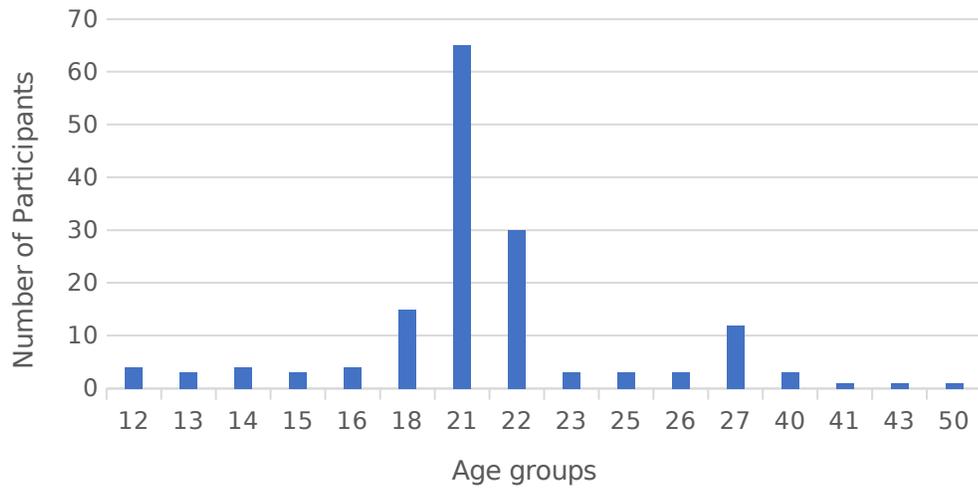
(5 questions for women's basketball)

1. What is the name of the women's professional basketball league in the United States?
2. When did the current women's professional basketball league in the United States form?
3. What team won this past year in the United States women's professional basketball league?
4. Who is the highest paid United States women's professional basketball league player?
5. Who possessed the first signature shoe in the United States women's professional basketball league?

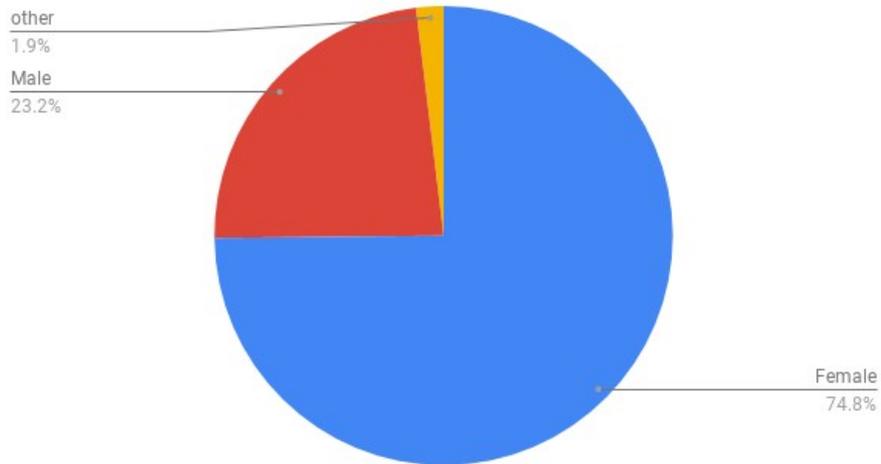
B. Quantitative Sports Survey Data

1. Demographics Data

Age of Participants



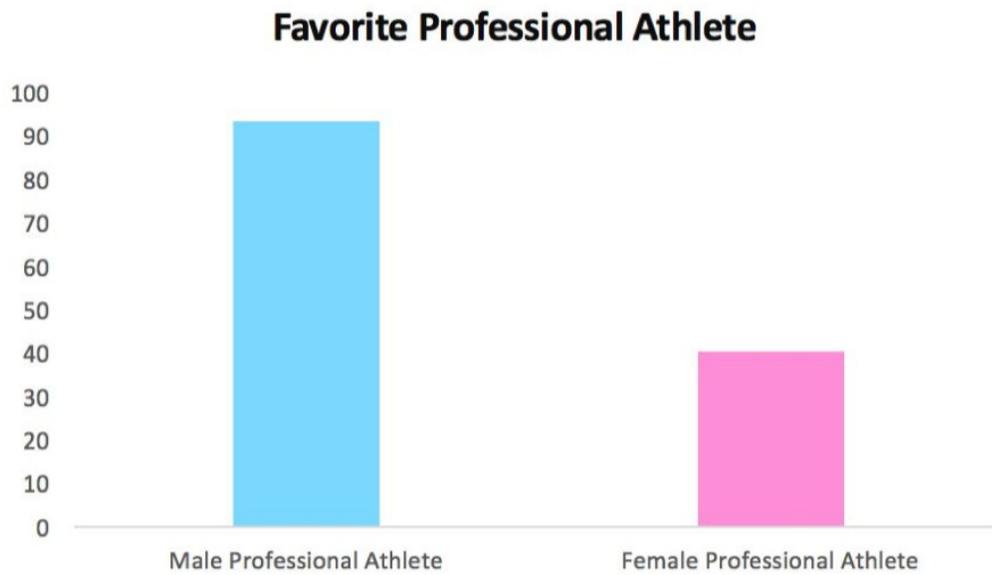
Gender Demographic



2. Question 3 Data



3. Question 5 Data



4. Question 7 Data



Appendix II | Interviews

A. Portland Thorns Players:



Tyler Lussi (left) and Maddie Pogarch (right)



Tyler Lussi (left), Hayley Raso (middle), Maddie Pogarch (right)

B. Portland Timbers



Jeremy Ebobisse



Bill Tuiloma

C. WNBA



Breanna Stewart (middle-left)



Breanna Stewart

Appendix III | Women Ball Too Social Media

A. Women Ball Too Media Outlet Handles

1. Women Ball Too website: www.womenballtoo.com
2. Women Ball Too media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook): @womenballtoo

B. Jordan Bell



C. Bicycle Kick



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