

Study: Higher profile, better broadcasts a key to increasing interest in women's sports

FANS OF women's sports say it is too difficult to consistently find the games or events they are looking for on TV, and when they do, those telecasts are usually on a less-prominent channel that delivers a broadcast experience that is well below the typical quality of a men's event, according to a series of studies conducted recently by Tigris and the Samford University Center for Sports Analytics.

BY DAVID BROUGHTON

An inconsistent presence on TV is the top barrier to watching women's sports, according to the first wave of Tigris' three-part study, as 29% of the 780 respondents who took part in the July 2020 survey said that the biggest reason why they hadn't watched women's sports in the past year was because such an offering was not available on radio, TV or played live in their area.

The issue of media accessibility was brought up in a slightly different way in January's follow-up survey, with similar results. Only 40% of that study's 1,486 respondents said it was "easy to find" women's sports on TV, compared to more than 60% for men's sports. That 20 percentage-points lower difference was the biggest such gap in the survey.

Further, when fans do find women's sports telecasts, they are not satisfied with the quality of the broadcast and the commentators. Just 35% of respondents said that women's sportscasts "have high-quality TV broadcasts and commentators that I like," 17 percentage points lower than men's sportscasts.

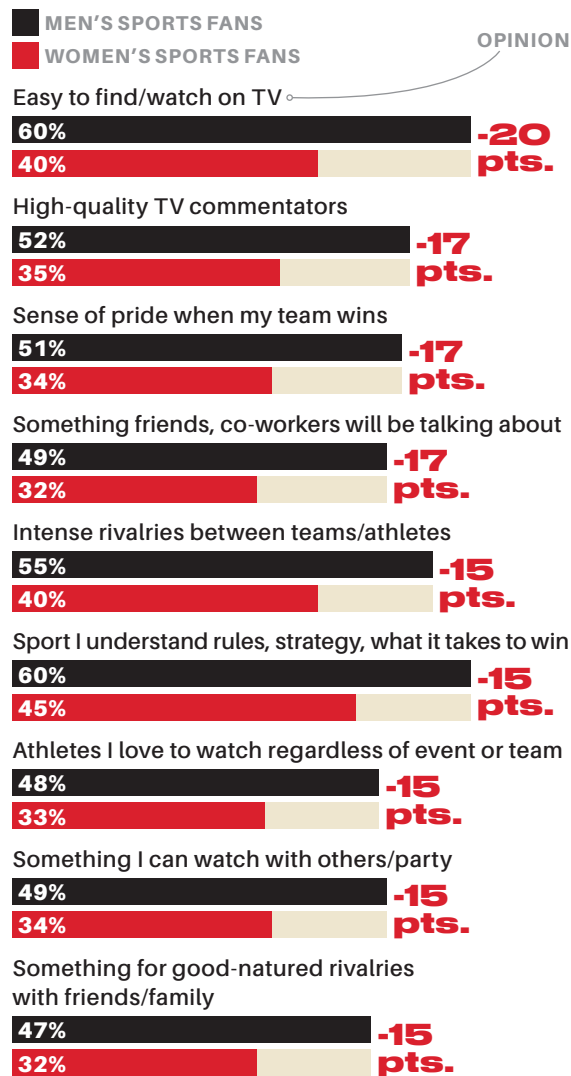
"What if broadcasters provided consistent desirable time slots for women's sports and committed to bringing in top broadcast talent for women's premier events?" asked Matt Yonan, Tigris' president and founder. "What if someone like Jim Nantz was enlisted to call the Women's Final Four, or a network ran double-headers with back-to-back men's and women's NCAA games, called by the same broadcast teams?"

The study polled fans of the ATP, LPGA, MLB, MLS, NBA, NFL, NWSL, PGA Tour, WNBA and WTA.

In between the two surveys, Tigris in November hosted a daylong roundtable with a number of women's sports stakeholders to discuss real-life context to the survey's findings and what steps the industry should take to drive interest in women's sports, and to help craft Phase 2 of the study.

The panel consisted of Lindsay Barenz, president of business operations, NWSL Washington Spirit; Catherine Carlson, senior vice president of revenue and strategy, Philadelphia Eagles; Dina Gerson, former director of Olympic partnership marketing at Coca-Cola/current Atlanta Sports Council Board of Directors chairwoman; Jill Gregory, executive vice president and general manager, Sonoma Raceway; Kathy Kayse, chair of the Women's Sports Foundation board of directors/chief media strategy and partnerships officer, Ad Council; Jessica Knadle, vice president of client services and insights, Tigris; John Mount, vice president of sports marketing and region assets, Coca Cola; Mallika Pereira, vice president of partnership marketing, MLS/SUM; Neal Pilson, founder and president, Pilson Communications; Alisha Valavanis, CEO and team president, Seattle Storm

Stakeholders need to maximize the exposure for teams and athletes to attract more casual sports fans, according to studies by Tigris and the Samford University Center for Sports Analytics.



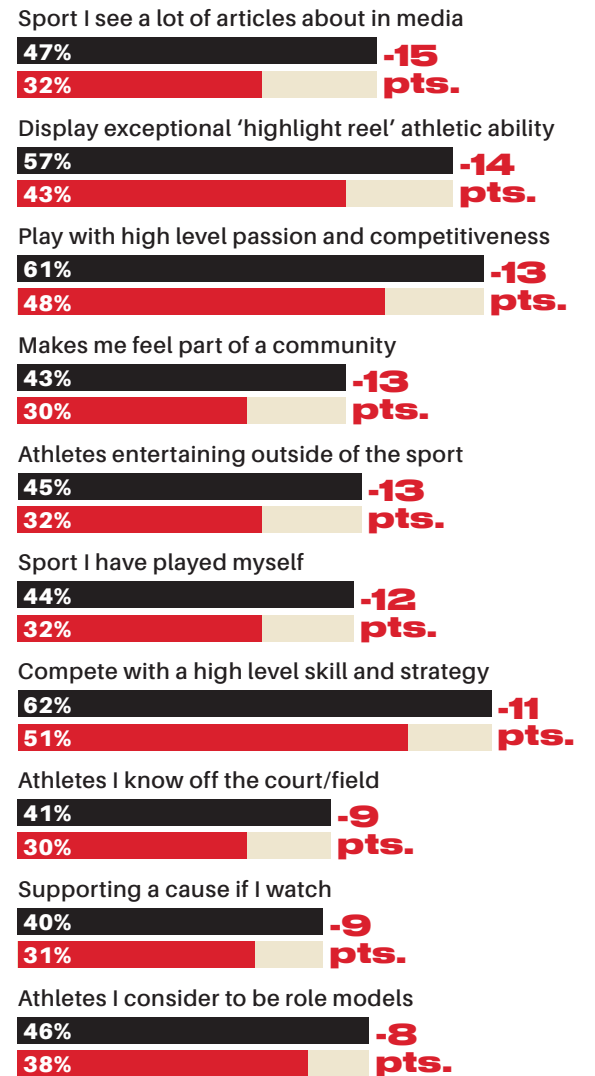
and Force 10 Sports Management; and Abraham Madkour, publisher and executive editor, Sports Business Journal.

The study shows followers of women's sports are among the most die-hard in sports, a finding that should be a selling point to potential marketing partners, said Darin White, executive director of Samford's Center for Sports Analytics, and co-author of the study.

"Almost a decade before the NBA allowed jersey patch sponsorship, the Phoenix Mercury's uniforms featured LifeLock patches," White said. "Such innovation is necessary to compete on limited budgets, but it also presents an advantage when approaching sponsors. Women's leagues and teams are smaller, so they can often operate more nimbly and with more flexibility with their sponsors to create unique and customized exposure opportunities."

Other findings from the study and the roundtable:

► **SELL THE PRODUCT, NOT THE "CAUSE:"** Just 31% of respondents said they watch a women's event because it makes them feel like they are "supporting a cause." Over the years, many women's leagues have presented themselves to corporate partners as somewhat of a cause, whether it be social justice, diversity/equity/inclusion or something else. "We know that this po-



sitioning is not a long-term sustainable business model. Brands are looking to enter partnerships that will deliver a solid return on their investment, not to form sponsorship alliances just because "it's the right thing to do," Yonan said.

► **CASUAL FANS MUST BE GIVEN A REASON TO CARE:** More than three-quarters of fans who watch women's sports say athletes "play with high level of passion and competitiveness" and "compete with high level skill/strategy." Just 42%-45% of non-watchers feel the same.

► **ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE RIVALRIES:** 72% of respondents who watch women's sports do so because of rivalries, almost the same level as those who watch men's sports. Tennis is currently the best-performing women's sport in terms of rivalries.

► **ENGAGE FEMALE ENDORSERS AND FEATURE WOMEN IN AD CAMPAIGNS:** In just the first two months of the NASCAR season, for example, driver Hailie Deegan generated \$623,000 in media value for Monster Energy and \$581,000 for Ford, making them the sport's most valuable driver-brand partnerships, according to MVPindex.

To download the full study: <https://tigris-marketing.com/tigris-samford-university-womens-sports-white-paper/>