

# Research on Gender Treatment and Discrimination of World Mainstream of World Mainstream Sports Events

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**Abstract.** Sports exist in various different ways. People could play sports for fun, for the school team, and professionally. As sports may differ from one to another: different playing styles, different rules, different environments, but there had always been one characteristic that is stuck in every single version of sports possible, men>women. And for those who chose to play sports in a professional manner, gender turns into control on how different players are treated regardless of the sports they play. This paper dives deep into the reasons on why in the magnificent realm of sports tends to display characteristics of sexism where male athletes tend to earn more income than female athletes across different types of sports and possible reasons why this phenomenon exists. Lastly, through analyzing these reasons, attempt to find possible solutions to try and equalize the gender pay gap that currently is favoring men over women athletes. Therefore, creating a realm of equal opportunities and future for every single human being trying to make it into the professional sporting leagues.

**Keywords:** Gender Treatment; Sport event; Discrimination.

## 1. Introduction

In a world where sports are heavily dominated by men, women athletes seem to be having a hard time making a quality living out of sports where they do similar if not the same things as men on a daily basis: training hard and playing hard. As we all know, gender equality has been one of the most central and discussed topic these days, whether it is educational, political, violence, and pay gap are all evidence of proof that we live in a world where gender inequality thrives among us. If examined closely, all of these categories on which inequality lie have some sort of a common ground: women are always described as being inferior to men, thus the existence of gender inequality. Gender inequality exists in most aspects of society, including the realm of sports. One of the problems that have been brought on stage under the lights of the people is the gender pay gap in sports, where women is working just as hard as men are, but they never get the same treatment as men due to the long history dated back to the origin of sports and its influenced on the current world full of advertisements and sponsor ships that’s also a determining factor of why women athletes are getting paid less than their male counterparts. In order to find possible and tangible solutions regarding the equality of these women athletes, finding evidence is essential. By comparing and contrasting these following articles, graphs and data, a middle ground in which society could all stand on shouldn’t be that hard to find. Just so we can gain a perspective on the situation, here are some statistics that shows the significancy of this subject in the modern sports world.

## 2. Gender Issues in Sports

**Table 1.** The pay gap between male and female athletes [1].

	2010	2019
<b>Men</b>	1. Tiger Woods, \$105 million	1. Lionel Messi, \$127 million
	2. Floyd Mayweather, \$65 million	2. Cristiano Ronaldo, \$109 Million
	3. Kobe Bryant, \$48 million	3. Neymar, \$105 million
	4. Phil Mickelson, \$46 million	4. Canelo Alvarez, \$94million
	5. David Beckham, \$43.7 million	5. Roger Federer, \$93.4 million

<b>Women</b>	1.	Maria Sharapova, \$24.5 million	1.	Serena Williams, \$29.2 million
	2.	Serena Williams, \$20.2 million	2.	Naomi Osaka, \$24.3 million
	3.	Venus Williams, \$15.4 million	3.	Angelique Kerber, \$11.8 million
	4.	Danica Patrick, \$12 million	4.	Simona Halep, \$10.2 million
	5.	Kim Yu-Na, \$9.7 million	5.	Sloane Stephens, \$9.6 million

From 2010 to 2019, top tier male athletes had a significant increase in their highest salaries, from an average of 61 million to 105 million, a huge 44 million increase. Women athletes on the other end only went from about 18 million to 17 million, not only did it increase 1 penny, but it dropped about 1 million.

**Table 2.** The pay gap between NBA and WNBA athletes [1].

	1997-1998 Season	2010-2011 Season	2019-2020 Season
<b>NBA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum rookie salary: \$242,000</li> <li>• Salary cap: \$26,900,00</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rookie salary: \$473,604</li> <li>• Up to six years: \$13,603,750</li> <li>• 7-9 years: \$16,324,500</li> <li>• 10+ years: \$19,045,250</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rookie salary: \$898,310</li> <li>• Up to six years: \$27,285,000</li> <li>• 7-9 years: \$32,742,000</li> <li>• 10 years or more: \$38,199,000</li> </ul>
<b>WNBA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum salary: \$15,000</li> <li>• Salary cap: \$50,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rookie salary: \$35,190</li> <li>• Three years: \$51,000</li> <li>• Six years: \$97,000</li> <li>• Salary cap: \$99,500</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rookie salary: \$41,965</li> <li>• Three years: \$56,375</li> <li>• Six years: \$115,000</li> <li>• Salary cap: \$117,500</li> </ul>

Within 3 decades the men’s rookie salary went from 242,000 dollars to 898,310 dollars, for women on the other side, rookie salary went from 15,000 dollars to 41,965 dollars. This data shows two things the huge difference in increase in salaries between the two leagues at the start and the end and the horrifying comparison between the numbers at the start, middle and end.

The first major reason, and the most important one is the influence of history and preference. For example, women weren’t allowed to play in the 1896 Olympics because the founder did not think that women were strong enough to be certain events.[2] This not only showed how the influence started almost 120 years ago, but it also showed how heavy biases and stereotypes plays into the cause of the current gender pay gap. Historically, men were known to play sports and women weren’t, it took about a shocking 116 years to have women have ALMOST the same number of events in the Olympics as men in 2018. [2] As we can see from this article. People didn’t prefer women playing in sports due to the historical perception that women are genetically and inherently not to be thought of having an athletic side, and this is what lead to the long neglect of having women participating in world sporting events like the Olympics. Not only does this phenomenon date back to the 1950s, women in sports nowadays also receive unequal treatment compared to their male counterparts. In 2014, 52 NBA players were paid more as an individual than the total amount of every single WNBA player added together. [3] This is crazy to think about because there’s about 144 players in the WNBA and even all of their salaries added up together isn’t as much as 1 player in the NBA, and not only that 1 player fits in this situation, 52 of them. This seems like an exaggeration but it’s not. Johnson also states that the reason for this pay gap is that many argue women sports are less popular and not as good to watch. [4] This shows that the reason why NBA players are paid so much more than WNBA players is simply because of people’s preferences, and that’s why women are being treated with inequality. Another example would be in the 2021 article written by the operating team at sportandev on reasons why gender pay gap in sports exist, wherein professional tennis, men play and extra of 2 sets than women, but while women advocated to play the same as men, the decision makers who were mostly comprised of men rejected the request simply because they’re stuck in this bias that women are not “stronger” than men.[4] Bias and history are two factors that interact with each other here, due to the fact that men have played sports longer than women, the decision makers are mostly

men, and because historically men dominated sports, men today don't think that women are strong enough to play, therefore eliciting bias towards women. Lastly according to Winslow, an example of men gaining a historical advantage towards women would be in one of the most major and popular leagues of all time, the NBA. Winslow stated the fact that the National Basketball Association (NBA) was founded about 50 years before the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA).[2] This means that the NBA had a head start trying to gain their popularity, which had an influence on most fans' perception of basketball being a guy sport. Because of this, more money and sponsorship and media influence go more towards the guys, causing the NBA to earn way more revenue than the WNBA, causing the WNBA to have less revenue when compared to the NBA and therefore causing pay inequality between the athletes. Therefore, leads us to the next reason why women athletes are not earning as much as the male athletes: revenue generation.

Due to the fact that the majority of sports league separate men from women, means that they also earn revenue separately. And because of the historical biases mentioned in the previous paragraph, men tend to earn more revenue compared to women because they are known to be more athletic and therefore would provide more thrill and entertainment effects to the audience. Revenue generation could be from multiple aspects: ticket revenue, media revenue, sponsorships and partnerships, etc. In a 2023 article by Radhya Comar titled "Gender Pay Gap in Sports" mentioned that in 2022, the WNBA generated a total revenue of 60 million dollars, while the men earned a titanic amount of 10 billion dollars. [5] Comar also stated that a large influence how much revenue a league generates is with their ticket prices. The NBA average ticket price is 94 USD, while the WNBA average ticket price is at 42 USD. [5] Since the earnings of players are largely dependent on revenue. Therefore, WNBA athletes earn way less than NBA athletes. Comar also turned to the percentage of revenue that goes into a player's pockets also has influence on the amount of pay a male/female athlete gets. NBA players receive 50 percent of total revenue with an average salary of 9 million USD while WNBA players only take home 20 percent with an average salary of 103,000 USD of the total revenue. [5] This decision also contributes to this enormous gap between salaries of men and women in the 2 National Basketball Leagues. Lastly, Comar mentioned that WNBA makes less profit and have been incurring losses, and because of this, it is hard for them to achieve this concept of equal pay with men when they can hardly keep the league running. [5] This shows that because of the combination of ticket price revenue and rules on the distribution of total revenue, women athletes are shown to be in a place of disadvantage in earning the same amount as men. Another reason that is crucial to any sports earnings is media coverage. This includes TV deals, Podcasts, and anything that goes on the internet. In Carrie Perras' article "Moving Towards Equal Pay For Professional Female Athletes: What We Can Learn From Equal Pay Legislation In Iceland", she says that in European sports media, over 88% of posts are about men sports.[6] In the United States, there's only 4% on social media that is dedicated to posting women athletic content.[6] This is another mind blowing evidence that shows how women athletes are barely getting any attention from the outside world because social media has decided to "hide" them from society. Media coverage means exposure, the more exposure the more fans, the more fans the more popularity, and popularity finally turns into a rise in ticket sales, sponsorships, endorsements. Therefore, revenue is generated. So far, it seems like male athletes are dominating this area by a very large margin. Another evidence that puts this into perspective is by comparing tv revenue of the NBA and the WNBA. In 2018, the tv revenue generated by the NBA reached a monstrous number of 970 million dollars, while the WNBA fails to even generate 1 percent of the NBA tv revenue. [7] And if we combine the effects of media coverage in the previous articles, a crystal clear perspective can be shown that the possibility of women athletes making the same amount of money is nearly an impossible mission.

Even though it seems like mission impossible, there are things people can do that can make the pay gap smaller? For example, through athletes advocating, it could possibly lead to the change of previous policies or the creation of new ones. Following the footsteps of Billie Jean King, we can see this solution being a possibility. In 1972, Billie Jean King won the U.S Open and found out that she received 15,000 dollars less than the men's champion.[8] So she decided to use her influence as one

of the best female tennis player in the world and promised that she would not set foot on the US Open court unless the prize money wasn't equalized between the genders.[8] And so with success, the year after, the US Open became the first major tournament that offers the same amount of prize money for both genders. Looking at this example, we can see how influence celebrities can bring to the equal pay issue. Media is way more complex now, even the smallest comments made can make it to the other side of the world, with celebrities' influence, possible changes could be made, it might've been hard in the 1970s through the lack of media for King, but she made it work, so theoretically it should only be easier by the present days. And evidence shows, it is indeed easier. About a year ago, the United States Soccer Federation had agreed that they would equalize salary for the men's and women's national soccer team when the women's team had sued the organization for gender discrimination. [9] After this event, many players from the other major leagues of different sports also went to the national football team members in search for assistant on equity treatment in salary. Another way is to increase media coverage, ever since the phone was invented, the development of apps such as twitter, Instagram have risen faster than ever. The wherever the major events go, the media goes, with recent bursting trends on advocating for gender equality, plus the creation of the Women's Sports Network having partnerships with major tv channels and brand partnerships, it has been reported that the WNBA post season has seen a 22% growth in overall views over year. Also, the women athletes in the NIL are also taking deals with NIKE making sure that they are getting more pay for their name and achievements. [10] It has been reported that 39% of people born after the 2000s are watching more women's sports than they were a year ago and that 29% millennials doing the same thing. By looking at this trend, it seems that the more media coverage there is, the more viewership can be gained. Therefore, connecting back to the logic of viewership leading to revenue increase, a possibility of women athletes earning more income isn't intangible.

### 3. Conclusion

Overall, it has been difficult for women athletes to live the same quality of life as their male counterparts, with history and preferences unfairly shifting the balance towards the men's side, there is still a very long way to go. Even with successes like Billie Jean King and the women's soccer team, statistics have shown that the situation is still there, and the gap is still relatively big for it to be labeled the word "equal". Additionally, just by looking at the comment section under some of the media account posts about women's sports on major accounts such as bleachers report and ESPN in Instagram or Twitter, most comments have shown the disinterest and carelessness of the women's leagues. But despite these mean and hateful comments, phrases such as "Love it" and "Full support" still exists under these posts, and these are the voices we need to hear more of. The future holds many uncertainties, but one thing's not going to be surprising, it's that mentality for women athletes and those who support them to fight and advocate for what they deserve. Equality is just a word, just like what Kelsey Plum said to the media: "I don't think I should make as much as Lebron." Equal pay is about making the athletes feel like their hard work is being returned in such a way that they feel like it was worth it to put in all that effort into doing the things they enjoy. So far, a positive trend has been made from advocating for equal payment in major sports, there's no doubt that these voices would stop in the future of the sports world where there will be expansions in media, perspective changes as more and more people turn their attention to women's sports, the group of women athletes now and in the future holds great potential of reaching the goad of closing the gender pay gap of men and women athletes. The road is going to be long and full of obstacles, but believe that in the end, they will pay her equal, and pay her right.

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