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[Q: Why are efforts to increase media coverage of women's sports important?](#)

The media shapes the public's perceptions of the accomplishments of women playing sports and whether women in general can be strong, confident and highly skilled. The media also shapes the dreams and aspirations of girls. Boys grow up watching television, bombarded by heroic and confident images of themselves playing sports and being revered for their accomplishments. They know they are expected to play sports and are encouraged to do so by everyone around them. Girls do not receive these same messages.

Television carriage is also a critical ingredient for the success of professional women's sports and competitive professional sport salaries and purses. If women's pro sports cannot tap into big advertising dollars, athlete salaries and purses will continue to be depressed and the financial success of women's pro leagues and tours will be more difficult to achieve.

Currently, television coverage of women's sports is inconsistent at best and non-existent most of the time. While the exposure of female athletes improves during the Olympic Games and World Cup soccer where they demonstrate ratings successes, these are only quadrennial occurrences. And while ESPN does a great job during the NCAA women's basketball Final Four, at other times of the year, girls receive negative or inconsistent messages from sports television. Televised WNBA games are played during a shortened summer season by players making 10-20 times less than their male counterparts. At best, women professional athletes make half as much as male athletes (in tennis), no matter how good they are, and the media continually reinforces these differences.

Girls also see a double standard in covering women's sports. When male athletes receive media attention, such coverage is primarily focused on their skilled performance. When female athletes receive media attention, the media is much more likely to focus on their physical attractiveness or non-sport-related activities. Anna Kournikova, who has yet to win a professional tennis tournament, was one of only six women ranked among the most important people in sports. This double standard devalues the athletic achievements of female athletes compared to their male counterparts.

A great resource for both sport managers and the sports media is [Images and Words](#), a position paper

published by the Women's Sports Foundation. This should be a resource used by every sports information director, communications officer and sports writer who is committed to non-sexist publications and writing.

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Topics

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