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## [Efforts to Increase Media Cove...](#)

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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 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

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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.

### **Implications for Sports Managers:**

- **Commitment to Non-Sexist Communications.** 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.
- **TV Contract Negotiations.** Exposure of all men's and women's sports programs should be a goal, even if the carrier or third party broker is only interested in the most popular sport program. TV carriage of events represents free advertising for the university and the athletics program. When so-called "minor" sports are covered, this sport promotion is an investment in developing the value of other sports in the athletics department portfolio.
- **Coaches Shows.** Encourage coaches with TV or radio shows to "share the wealth" by commenting regularly on other teams, including women's sports.
- **Publications.** The communications director needs to play careful attention to photos and words in all organization communications. Sexist language and image stereotyping may not be intentional but a reflection of culturally ingrained habits.
- **Media Cultivation.** The issue of increased exposure for women's sports is a great conversation between the athletics director and the sports editor or reporters. Remember that newspaper circulation is declining and the sports pages represent an important circulation anchor. Covering all high school boys' and girls' sports teams in the community has been a key strategy for local papers. Parents buy newspapers. Research also shows that what gets into a newspaper has little to do with "public interest" and is more about what interests the sports editor.
- **Media Training.** All athletes and coaches should be media trained with regard to sexist language and proper professional dress.
- **Public Interest Stories.** All print and electronic media are interested in public interest stories. Sports information and communications directors should constantly remind coaches to share story angles about student-athletes.

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