

Summer 2019  
#WorldAtHerFeet

THE BEAUTIFUL  
GAME BY THE WOMEN  
WHO PLAY IT

# WORLD AT HER FEET



My amazing first  
season at Juventus  
by Eniola Aluko



Tessa Wullaert:  
I fight for what I  
believe in

Just don't call us  
favourites says  
France's Eugénie  
Le Sommer

burson cohn & wolfe  
**bcw**

Inside: Honey Thaljieh, Line Røddik Hansen, Nadine Kessler, Caroline Jönsson, Thalia Mitsi, Moya Dodd, Rebecca Smith, Pedro Malabia, Marino Faccioli, Tatjana Haenni & Misha Sher



04

### WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IS CHANGING THE GAME

Karen Massin

### 05 KEY FINDINGS



### 06 A TURNING POINT FOR U.S. WOMEN

Chris Console

### THE FUTURE IS FEMININE

Lars Haue-Pedersen

07



### STRONG GROWTH CAN BRING TRANSFORMATIONAL BENEFITS

Dominic Grainger



08

### THIS WORLD CUP WILL BE FANTASTIC, ON AND OFF THE PITCH

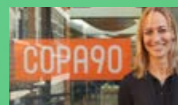
Eugénie Le Sommer



10

### WE'VE RAISED THE BAR – AND THERE'S MORE TO COME

Eniola Aluko



12

### BORN IN THE USA, MADE IN EUROPE AND PROUD TO BE A KIWI!

Rebecca Smith

14



### IN THE GAME – WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE HAVE TO BE

Moya Dodd

16



### MY GOAL IS TO WIN MORE TROPHIES – AND A BETTER DEAL FOR WOMEN

Tessa Wullaert

18



### SHOOT FOR THE MOON AND LAND IN THE STARS

Honey Thaljih

22



### I KNOW HOW IT SHOULD BE AND CAN BE. CHANGE HAS BEEN SLOW

Line Røddik Hansen

24



### WE'RE GROWING THE GAME AND INSPIRING MORE GIRLS TO PLAY

Nadine Kessler



28

### HOW WE BECAME A POWERHOUSE AMONG THE ELITE

Marino Faccioli



30

### OUR MISSION: TO TRANSFORM A ROUGH DIAMOND INTO A GEM

Pedro Malabia



33

### FOOTBALL 'CONSERVATIVES' GET THE RED CARD FROM TOP REFEREE

Thalia Mitsi



36

### THINK INVESTMENT, NOT COST, TO MOVE UP TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Tatjana Haenni



38

### WE MUST PROTECT PLAYERS' RIGHTS TO PROGRESS

Caroline Jönsson



40

### GAME IS FINALLY REAPING THE COMMERCIAL SUCCESS IT DESERVES

Misha Sher

42



### FAN.TASTIC FEMALES SAY YES TO PASSION, NO TO SEXISM

46



### WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IS A PURE JOY TO WATCH

Sebastian Szlenkier

48



### ESPORTS BRINGS GAME TO A NEW AUDIENCE

Lillie Klefvelt and Liza Lind

50





**WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IS CHANGING THE GAME**

Welcome to this BCW special report on the future of women's football, launched to coincide with the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup in France. These are exciting times for women's football – the fastest-growing sport globally in the past decade.

According to FIFA, 26 million women play regularly in 180 countries worldwide. In Europe, there are more than 3,500 professional or semi-professional female players, 20,000 qualified female coaches and nearly 13,000 female match officials. More than 50 European countries have their own women's league and national women's national team.

The exponential growth of women's football, attracting an ever-increasing worldwide fan-base, is a potential game changer for the industry.

BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), one of the world's largest full-service global communications agencies, invited players, former players, officials, administrators, commercial experts and fans to give their views on the current state of play and future of women's football for this report. Through their own personal sporting stories and different experiences of the game, they offer insights into how the sport can seize opportunities to develop and overcome the obstacles that still stand in the way of progress and equality.

Women have played the beautiful game for as long as it has existed. The British Ladies Football Club, founded in 1894, is an early example. Despite such breakthroughs, the women's game was held back, as in many other parts of society, due to gender discrimination. In football this led to a lack of investment for many years.

One of the consequences of this power imbalance was that women's football was banned until the mid-20th century in several countries and by major football associations including England, Germany, the Netherlands and Brazil.

The international breakthrough was a long time coming. UEFA organised the first European Women's Championship in 1984 and FIFA staged the first official Women's World Cup in 1991. Understanding the history is essential as the industry develops a vision for the game, aimed at bringing greater strategic investments to both the grassroots and professional sport.

The key questions are: how to maintain the increase in female participation, how to build competitive and commercially attractive structures for competitions, and how to better integrate women in the governance and leadership of men's and women's football.

These are big challenges but there is an unmistakable mood of optimism around the sport. Rising levels of participation and growing attendances at major tournaments are giving a new impetus to the game. FIFA has doubled the prize money for the winners of this summer's World Cup and women's football is starting to win increasing levels of sponsorship too with several recent deals in the headlines including VISA's seven-year partnership with UEFA, as well as national deals involving Barclays and Boots.

The game is also attracting widespread attention on social media. The hugely successful #WhatIf campaign championed by Women in Football received over 70 million global impressions in 2018 and close to 200 pledges of support from governing bodies, clubs, companies and individuals.

We hope that this report will highlight BCW's commitment to working with those in women's football and women's sport who share our ambition for the game to reach its full potential, on and off the pitch. Above all, we want to encourage everyone involved to do their bit to ensure that the many millions of girls and women who love football have the same opportunities as their male peers to enjoy the game and fulfil their sporting dreams.

**Karen Massin**  
CEO, BCW Brussels

**10 KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT**

- The professional game is becoming more competitive and more talent is coming through. More women than ever before are playing football – 26 million in 180 countries according to FIFA
- Women are making their way into football boardrooms and management, but it's hardly a stampede. Less than 1% of presidents of national associations are female
- With the exception of the very top clubs, player salaries are often low – 90% of female professional players say they might quit the sport for financial, family or career reasons
- Female referees earn less than men in top tournaments
- The game's fan base is rapidly expanding with record attendances in several countries including Spain, Italy and Mexico, as well as rocketing ticket sales for the Champions League and World Cup, but gate receipts in national leagues still remain too low for most clubs to be self-sustainable
- Investment in infrastructure, pitch quality, academies and the grassroots game is still relatively weak in most cases
- Big-brand sponsorship is on the increase – sponsors believe that investing in a world that produces healthy, confident and empowered women is good for business
- Media coverage is increasing, but women's sport continues to receive less than 10% of sports coverage overall
- Change is being driven by the top clubs. Olympique Lyonnais is seen as the role model, with its "exceptional focus" on professionalism and player development
- While attitudes are changing for the better, examples of sexism, conservatism and bias still persist



**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Better financial and lifestyle support for players will help avoid a potential talent drain
- Today's players should do more to promote the game and support the development of the players who come after them
- Investment should focus on clubs and infrastructure, from physical and psychological training environments to marketing, league structures and good governance
- Minimum employment conditions and legal standards must be applied across women's international competitions and professional leagues
- Brand partners should leverage key talent to boost awareness and fan engagement
- Better calendar synchronization with men's events, as well as between national and club matches, will result in more exposure for the game
- International alliances between leagues and federations will support the global development of the sport
- Capitalising on links with esports can bring the game to new audiences.



**A TURNING POINT FOR U.S. WOMEN**

Since the U.S. women’s soccer team won the World Cup in 1996, the sports world has seen the emergence of determined and confident U.S. female athletes. Stars like Mia Hamm, Brandi Chastain, Kristine Lilly and Michelle Akers became icons to American girls and inspired future stars such as Carli Lloyd, Julie Ertz and Tobin Heath.

These trailblazing women delivered more than pride to a nation of admiring fans – they were at the forefront of a gender equality battle that continues today. The U.S. Women’s National Team embraced a mission to inspire female athletes, and in doing so, attracted new fans among women and men, young and old.

This momentum reimagined soccer in the U.S. in profound ways. Beyond helping women across the U.S. advance one step closer to gender equality, the 1996 women’s World Cup team encouraged waves of young women to take up the sport and, more importantly, instilled a sense of confidence and pride among a generation of women that they can achieve their dreams in sports or business.

Now, it’s time for the next group of U.S. soccer stars, including Crystal Dunn and Mallory Pugh, to become inspiring role models for a new generation of fans, whether they are athletes or simply young women ready to conquer the world.

**Chris Console**  
Senior Vice President,  
BCW Entertainment & Sports, New York



**TIME FOR THE OTHER HALF TO SHINE: THE FUTURE IS FEMININE**

Football is by far the world’s most popular sport – right? Well, only if we look at one half of the population – the male part of our planet. When it comes to the other (female) half, sports like gymnastics, volleyball, athletics, tennis and swimming are by far more popular among girls and women. And this applies both when it comes to practising the sport and watching it on television.

So it should not take much gap analysis or strategising for the football world to identify where the most interesting potential lies by far. Still, the football world seems to be only gradually recognising this potential. Just the often-used terminology of “football” (for the men’s game) vs “women’s football” kind of demonstrates that we still have some way to go.

In recent years we have, however, experienced steady progress in – well, I guess I have to use the term – women’s football and hopefully this is something which will only increase. A former FIFA president was often – and rightly so – criticised for many things during his term, but he did nail it when during his final year in office he declared that “the future is feminine”.

I trust that this publication will accelerate the development of the other half of the football world!

**Lars Haue-Pedersen**  
Managing Director,  
BCW Sports Practice, Lausanne



**STRONG GROWTH CAN BRING TRANSFORMATIONAL BENEFITS**

Hello and welcome. The WPP Sports Practice is delighted to be associated with BCW’s World At Her Feet report on the future of women’s football. The recent growth in visibility, popularity and participation of women’s football has raised interesting questions about its continued development. The success of any sport has long depended on its ability to strike the correct balance between consumer, media and commercial brand appeal. Decades of slow but steady development in men’s football built the solid foundations that allowed rapid expansion in these three key areas over the last 20 years. Women’s football has not generally enjoyed those same advantages and is now tasked with building each pillar simultaneously in an era when the competition for consumers’ time and attention has never been so intense.

The initial signs are very positive. The English FA is already close to achieving its bold ambition of doubling the number of women’s teams by 2020. That growth is rooted in a continued increase in participation at youth and children’s level. Strong viewership and attendance of recent major finals (FA Cup, UEFA Champions League, Euros) is underpinned by an awakening of the public consciousness: over 50% of the public view women’s sport as something exciting they would want to watch, according to a recent survey by the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation.

This groundswell of participation and viewership at grassroots and elite levels points to the huge commercial potential that exists at the heart of the game. Recent major brand entries to the space are a boon for administrators hungry for investment; Barclays, Boots, VISA, Adidas, Budweiser and Lucozade Sport have all recently committed to sponsoring some element of the women’s game. They see what we see: an opportunity to engage with a large, underserved female and family audience that men’s football doesn’t always cater to. A modest improvement in the level of media coverage major women’s sporting events achieve is also a welcome development.

As the top and the bottom of the game continue to grow, the key challenge for administrators remains building a more profitable middle ground. Despite promising growth signs, regular game-day audiences at Women’s Super League (WSL) games in England remain too small for most clubs to be financially self-sustainable. Many clubs lack the commercial support of well subsidised teams such as Arsenal and Manchester City and some matches can be tricky to access for fans. At its worst, this can lead to notable teams like Sunderland being abandoned by their parent clubs and losing their place in the WSL.

Thankfully such incidents are rare and the game is well placed to overcome these operational hurdles. Lessons from across the sports industry point the way to success. Better calendar synchronisation with men’s events will give the women’s game greater exposure to a wider audience. Fan engagement can be improved by capitalising on greater access to top talent. Pushing corporate and brand executives to start viewing women’s football as a long-term commercial opportunity rather than short-term philanthropy will build stronger commercial foundations as increased investment drives improvement in facilities, player salaries and club operations. Better financial and lifestyle support for players will help avoid a potential talent drain and committed brand partners can leverage key talent to boost awareness and engagement amongst fans.

It is a hugely exciting moment in women’s football, with strong growth prospects and potentially transformational benefits for sport and wider society. This report brings together perspectives from across the women’s game and seeks to help illustrate the way forward. I hope you find it valuable.

**Dominic Grainger**  
CEO, WPP Sports Practice, London

# THIS WORLD CUP WILL BE FANTASTIC, ON AND OFF THE PITCH

HOSTS WON'T BE THE FAVOURITES IN THE MOST COMPETITIVE TOURNAMENT WOMEN'S FOOTBALL HAS EVER SEEN, SAYS LYON AND FRANCE GOAL-MACHINE EUGÉNIE LE SOMMER



Picture: FFF

**It's a World Cup year and it's going to be the best World Cup we have ever seen, unmatched both in terms of the games and the atmosphere.**

Everyone is progressing, everyone has stepped up, every nation is getting better. The global level of the game has really taken off. From a sport point of view, it's fantastic. Every match is going to be a battle. When you win, you will have earned it.

In June, there will be five or six favourites. Ten years ago, it would have been two. The improvement in the level of the game means the tournament will be more competitive and unpredictable. So it's no surprise that it's caught the public imagination. Almost every single ticket has been sold and TV rights have sky-rocketed.

Women's football has undergone a transformation in the past four years. The change since the beginning of my career is incredible.

Football's been my passion since I could barely walk. From the age of two, I always had a football under my arm. I played everywhere, anytime. As I grew up, the idea of making the game my job one day was hidden away inside me, but, deep down, it was always there.

Football was what brought me alive. It was the reason I got out of bed in the morning. There was school and there was football. School was mandatory, but football was a choice. I would play for hours and hours. I was mad about it!

We had mixed teams until the age of 14, so I played with boys for a long time before joining a girls' team. Physically, it was the right moment. Until 14, boys and girls are still more or less at the same level, you fight the same way. The physical abilities of the boys are not as developed as they will be.

However, this non-gender divide was never a problem for me. What bothered me more was the absence of girls, or insufficient number of them, which made forming a girls' team impossible. To play football you had to play with the boys. Today it is a bit different, but I still recommend that girls play with boys. It keeps you focused, you learn a lot, the slope is steeper, and it pushes you on. Stay as long as you can with the boys. It is also important for your life-balance, outside of football!

It was way later that I realised I could become a pro. In France, before 2005 or 2006, as a woman you couldn't imagine that you would be paid to play. They would give us jobs at the club, you would work for them and then you would get to play. That was the kind of deal on offer then.

Professional contracts in France arrived in 2009, only 10 years ago. I was 20 and it was already late for me, for my career. When I was younger, my dream was to become professional but in reality, the opportunity didn't exist. Everything arrived later, always later.

Today, girls can dream and believe. If they work hard, they can make it. We could work as hard as anyone, but it wasn't easy to break through. Now it's a potential job. As a young woman in France, you can imagine yourself playing football as a living.

That said, changes still have to happen.

We need a fully professional club championship. That's the next goal for me at national level. At the moment we have a mix of pros, amateurs, semi-pros.

At the same time, to raise the bar at elite level, we need to improve the system around the academies and the grassroots clubs. We

need clubs that are as capable of nurturing young girls as much as the boys. That's when we'll see progress in the game. They need to have a good infrastructure around them and to play on quality pitches. They should not come second to the boys and dressing rooms should be divided. We need to be more welcoming to the girls, to make them happy, to allow them to play in a safe and fun environment. Coaches and trainers need to work with girls' teams to pave the way for the next generation. If more players start playing football, the global structure needs to be ready.

The recent games we've seen in Madrid and Turin, with full stadia, are encouraging signs for the future of the sport at European level. The media is key. It pushes people to go to matches. The game needs to become sustainable. Free tickets were distributed for the record-breaking Atlético and Juventus games, but now we need to convince fans to pay. Playing in a huge modern stadium also helps. In France, we sometimes have to play on cow-fields, so people don't want to watch the game, and that reflects what TV decides to cover. The context, the environment around the game is key. We need to keep talking about the game. Talking about it is central to making it sustainable.

The names of the teams involved are also very important. We've seen that with this year's Champions League. When the women's team is associated with a well-known men's team, it helps. It makes people talk, they compare, they see a big team, they connect the dots, it makes them attend the games. As well as Olympique Lyonnais, we had Bayern, Barcelona and Chelsea in the Champions League semi-finals, so the level of media coverage was like nothing we've seen before.

Seeing the biggest clubs on the big stage is good for the competition and good for the sport. It's good for the athletes. To play for a big club, on a nice pitch, in a nice stadium is amazing. Ten years ago, it would have just been a dream.

At Lyon, our President, Jean Michel Aulas, has always focused on the well-being of his players. He saw this as the way to improve the team. He had a strong will, but he also put his money where his mouth is, to reach his goal. The more money there is, the more we improve. That's the reality of things.

Some women ask themselves if they should stop playing football and look for "a real job". At Lyon, we are lucky in that respect, but elsewhere in France it's complicated for many clubs and for many players. There is a lack of recognition in women's football.

But look at the clubs in the Champions League; they are the ones that invested in their players, and it pays off. Women's football is an investment for the future.

The World Cup will be a success because nations have invested both manpower and money, and now we will be able to see what the world of football does best.

Australia, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Germany and England will be the favourites. France is not. We have never won anything. Yes, we are at home, but we have never reached the final. We need to keep our cool because we are outsiders. Like Brazil or Spain.

The level of this tournament will be crazy high. Now we just need to enjoy it!

**EUGÉNIE LE SOMMER** has been capped more than 150 times for France and scored more than 250 goals for club and country since her professional debut. She is on track to overtake Marinette Pichon as the leading all-time French goal scorer.

# WE'VE RAISED THE BAR – AND THERE'S MORE TO COME



Picture: James Boyes / CC

SKY'S THE LIMIT FOR CLUBS THAT ACHIEVE FINANCIAL AND BRAND SUSTAINABILITY SAYS JUVENTUS STAR ENIOLA ALUKO

**My decision to join Juventus last year was a game-changer for me, both on and off the pitch. It was a huge thrill to win the Coppa Italia and the championship. I was proud to be on the score-sheet in our decisive title win against Verona, which meant we finished just ahead of Fiorentina.**

It was a double celebration for the club, with the men's team also claiming the Serie A title on the same day. This was all and more than I had hoped for when I made the decision to move to Italy last summer.

I'd had a great period at Chelsea. We'd just won the double but I thought it was maybe time for a change and a new adventure. Juventus were interested in me and it was the opportunity to play for a team that was in the Champions League, a huge club and a global brand, and, most importantly, it was a great way of continuing my career.

There have been a lot of highlights this season. One of the most special moments for me was witnessing the Juventus Allianz stadium full of supporters for our top-of-the-table match against Fiorentina on 24

March. The tickets were free, but over 39,000 fans decided to come – easily smashing the previous 14,000 record attendance for women's football in Italy. They could have gone somewhere else. It's amazing. 39,000 people said, "ok I am going to spend 90 minutes to watch Juventus women". Five years ago that wouldn't have happened. It's a measure of just how much the game has grown.

Off the pitch, we've also seen a lot of changes which are helping to transform women's football. We see big global

brands teaming up with the likes of Chelsea, Liverpool and the Manchester clubs when they have a women's team. It's the same at Juventus. Fans see the teams as an extension of the brand, and that raises expectations. If I watch Juventus, I expect a Juventus level of football.

Everything now is brand oriented. When it comes to women's clubs as part of a global brand, you access a global fanbase. Straight away, you expect a certain level of quality because that is the brand. Juventus cannot put out a women's team and not have international players.

I think that is the model that needs to be referenced around the world. But you need a big club in the first place. It is very difficult to build a club from the ground up. It isn't impossible, of course. A very wealthy donor who is a fan of women's football can pull a team together out of nowhere, but to grow a fan-base that is big enough to compete with other clubs is almost impossible. You need the solid basis of a well-established institution.

The reason 39,000 people turned up for our game is because it was Juventus-Fiorentina. That would have been impossible with a newly created team. But the challenge now is how do we repeat this five times next season and not just once.

This is about both marketing and winning, but it's also about making women's football a sustainable brand so that other brands want to be part of it, not just for one or two years but for the next 10 or 15 years. It is always a matter of sustainability.

In the men's game, brands such as Nike and Adidas sign 15-year deals with clubs because they know what these clubs are about and want to be affiliated. For the women's game, we need to create a brand that can attract 2,000 fans every week and, step by step, build up to 10,000. Building

sustainability requires constant marketing and winning on the pitch, which means recruiting and producing top quality players. We are nearly there. When you get 39,000 coming to the game and you win, you spark something in people's minds, so the next time they get that option they are more likely to come. It is about constantly building that sustainability.

There is more to come, I'm sure of that. We are now seeing multi-million-pound sponsorships, record attendances in different countries, and brands making specially designed kits for women's teams. We are just starting what has been the norm in men's sport for years. The difference is that for men's sports they have probably reached the ceiling, with elite players already commanding astronomical amounts in salaries and endorsements.

The sky's the limit for the women's sport, provided we achieve and maintain financial sustainability, brand sustainability and fan sustainability. You can already see some of that in the Champions League, which is more and more competitive.

In Europe, Lyon has been the dominant force for more than a decade now. It will be interesting to see who will be able to challenge their dominance in Europe. I hope that will happen – it will be good for the game. Teams that are investing in the game are changing it.

Throughout my career I have seen the game evolve, change, and adapt to new dynamics. But it's happening very quickly now.

It was very different when I was growing up. I actually wanted to be a boy because I thought only boys played football! At school, there were other girls like me, who also enjoyed playing football, but it basically took me 10 years to realise that.

At 14, I got called up for the England youth

team which meant I was in the system with the national team. It was exciting, but a career in the game wasn't obvious at that point.

I sat my A levels and enrolled on a law degree course in London. I played semi-professional for several teams while I was training to become a lawyer, juggling my two passions. It was only after completing my studies that I had the opportunity to play professionally, in the United States at Saint Louis Athletica. It was at that point that I realised I wanted football to be a job.

I was lucky because the law firm I worked for was very understanding. They allowed me to play professionally and continue my legal career in parallel. It was difficult sometimes to maintain a balance though.

The transformation we've seen in the game in recent years means that more young women will see a brighter future in the game and not have to juggle careers.

What's next for the game? I'm sure we're going to see more progress. The World Cup this summer can really set the bar – the standards of the game have never been higher.

There's huge anticipation around the tournament. Who will win? I can't call it but I expect to see the U.S. and France, as the home nation, to be near the finals. I'd also look out for Australia. They've really grown in recent years and will definitely make their presence felt.

**ENIOLA ALUKO** has been capped more than 100 times for England and represented Great Britain at the 2012 London Olympics. Her former clubs include Chelsea, Birmingham City, Saint Louis Athletica, Atlanta Beat, Sky Blue FC and Charlton Athletic.

# BORN IN THE USA, MADE IN EUROPE AND PROUD TO BE A KIWI!



Picture: COPA90

**REBECCA SMITH RECALLS A GLOBE-TROTTING CAREER THAT TOOK HER TO THREE CONTINENTS – AND LOOKS AHEAD TO AN EXCITING WORLD CUP**

**I come from a Kiwi family but I grew up in the United States, which is where I discovered soccer. The playing culture in the U.S. was very different from Europe and the rest of the world. It was fairer and more professional, right from the earliest stage.**

We played on the same pitches as the boys and there were never a lack of teams to play for or places to play, with different divisions

and different levels in every city. In college, we had amazing sports and health facilities. The coaching was first-rate.

I knew it wasn't the same in Europe, but it was still a bit of a shock when I signed my first pro contract for FFC Frankfurt in 2005. Back then, we didn't even know where we would be training each day – someone would just text us in the morning, telling us where to be.

We would train on half pitches or artificial turf. If we couldn't even get that we would have to practise inside a gym or in hallways. This team had just won the UEFA Women's Cup but it was still being shuffled around. That was normal then.

Looking back to my childhood in LA, I was always destined to be involved in sport. My relationship with football started when I was five, playing in the AYSO [American Youth Soccer Organization]. Football was just one sport of many that I loved.

As a teenager, you never heard anything about women playing football. You never saw them play on a weekly basis, so I saw football as a dead-end career.

But I enjoyed the game and at high school I played for Ajax America Women, a semi-professional team named after the famous club in Amsterdam. We were paying to play, and our team was one of the best in the country. I played with a couple of the U.S. national team players when they came into town. If they visited LA, they would always play with our team. We played against the Mexican national team which was a highlight, but even so it was still just kind of fun to me and I never really thought I'd make a career out of the game.

At college I got a few scholarship offers and looked at Yale, Princeton, Duke and Stanford. My focus was education, not football. I ended up choosing Duke because they had a good economics program and I really wanted to start my own company.

I was in the last semester of a double degree in Economics and Spanish when I got the call from the New Zealand national team to play in the World Cup qualifiers in 2003. I took six weeks off my final semester, which is when most college kids have wild fun.

The environment was completely different. It wasn't as professional as when I later played

in Europe and we didn't have a lot of funding. But I really enjoyed being with the girls and I was proud to play for my country. I debuted as captain against Samoa in April 2003 but a loss to Australia meant we didn't qualify for the World Cup, so I finished college and then went back to LA to work in sales and marketing. I wasn't really thinking about football anymore.

A couple of years later, the Australian Football Federation left the Oceania Football Confederation to join the Asian Football Confederation, which opened up the possibility for New Zealand to qualify for the Olympics and World Cup. I was still captain of the team, but we hadn't played together in over a year. I decided to really go for qualifying. I assumed that the best place to sign a pro contract and play was in Europe. So I quit my job and tried to figure out a way to do so. I searched the leagues on Google and sent over a thousand emails to clubs. I didn't have an agent, had no idea what to expect and didn't know anyone who had played over there. It definitely wasn't about the money, it was to be able to play and put football first. It was the only option.

I paid my own way, did some trials, and ended up getting an offer to play for FFC Frankfurt. I packed up my whole life and took the next flight to Germany. It was basically a baptism by fire. I didn't know anybody, didn't speak the language and didn't know anything about the league, where I found myself playing with the best players in the world.

From there I went to Sunnanå SK in Sweden for three seasons and then to Newcastle Jets in Australia, where we made it to the finals of the league, before moving to what was to be my last club, VfL Wolfsburg.

When I arrived in 2009, we were ninth in the league and when I left in 2013 we won the treble: Champions League, national league and the Cup. I played with and against the best Europe could

offer, but a series of injuries meant I had to call it a day. When I look at the game now, it's clear that the clubs that have invested in the women's game are the ones who are reaping the benefit. Everyone knows about Olympique Lyonnais. They wanted the best team in the world and they put the money behind it.

When I first played at Wolfsburg, it was still pretty unprofessional. We didn't even have a strength training coach, but between 2009 and 2013 a lot of investment started to arrive.

Even as things progressed during my career, I never ceased to be struck by the difference in approach at a young age between European and U.S. football.

At grassroots level, the U.S. has a regulation (Title IX) that states that every dollar spent on a men's team in college must also be spent on a women's team. This revolutionised sport in America. If you look at how well the U.S. does in general, in the Olympics and internationally, it isn't surprising how dominant women's teams are because they invest so much more into the sport.

They invest in their athletes and recruit the best, and there is a lot more commercialization in sports at a young age.

In Europe, the main issue at a young age is access to the sport. It's not easy for girls to start. Boys get better coaching, better facilities, and a lot more time is invested in them to grow as athletes.

Particularly in football, communities, cities and clubs need to look at their policies and how they treat girls versus boys at a young age. Once you stack the deck against girls, it has a domino effect along the spectrum up until the professional level.

When you reach that level and you hear "oh the women aren't as good as men," well that's

obvious – how are you going to expect the same outcome when girls start and develop in a completely different way?

Changes have to be made, even in the States. I left the U.S. because there was no professional league. You could play in the WPSL [Women's Premier Soccer League] but you wouldn't get paid to play – you had to pay to play. Even now, the NWSL doesn't have the same amount of coverage as the MLS, the same TV rights and broadcasting abilities. The structure around it is still lacking.

It is fair to say that the women's game was not as attractive to watch 10 years ago, but that argument certainly doesn't hold anymore. The standard of the game has improved a lot but it's also suffered from a lack of visibility. Without visibility you are not going to get the same amount of investment into the game.

The future is digital, but a lot of the money still comes from TV broadcasting. The broadcast channels need to show more women's football and it'd be good to see pay-per-view channels and other channels picking up the sport because it is so enjoyable to watch. At COPA90, we're doing our bit by providing more visibility to the game and offering insights into the game's technicalities.

There is still unfortunately a bias against women's football in some quarters. The World Cup this summer can really help change attitudes.

**REBECCA SMITH** is COPA90's Global Executive Director of the Women's Game. As well as representing New Zealand from 2003-2013, she played for VfL Wolfsburg, Newcastle Jets, Sunnanå SK, FFC Frankfurt and Ajax America Women.

# IN THE GAME – WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE HAVE TO BE

**We've come a long way since women first entered the field in a FIFA tournament under the hot Chinese sun in June 1988. There had been many tournaments before, of course. But when FIFA, and later the IOC, held competitions, the national federations, their governments and sponsors had to pay attention.**

Since then, it's been a slow, sometimes painful journey to overcome decades of discrimination and systemic neglect. Today, women represent the single biggest growth opportunity in football.

**OFF THE FIELD:** Women are making their way into boardrooms and management teams – but it's hardly a stampede. FIFA has a new goal: "to promote the development of women's football and the full participation of women at all levels of football governance" (Article 2f, FIFA Statutes) and its members and confederations are required to have legislative bodies that take into account "the importance of gender equality in football" (Art 15j).

These partial reforms are trickling their way to reality, yet the population of national presidents – those with voting power in the international hierarchy – is still less than 1% female. It's zero at Confederation level. The benefits of gender diversity have not yet arrived in football boardrooms.

**ON-FIELD PRODUCT:** Women's football is a product that's proven on the field, and increasingly in the grandstands and on the screen. The last Women's World Cup Final set the ratings record for football in the United States. Club football has progressed spectacularly with relatively modest investment, especially in traditional football countries.

The 2018 Mexican club final attracted a crowd of 51,211 in just its second year. The 2018 English FA Cup Final packed 45,423 fans into Wembley and 43,264 attended the 2019 final. Just recently, a crowd of 60,739 saw Atlético Madrid take on Barcelona at the Wanda Metropolitano – a record for a domestic women's game in Europe.

Spain and Columbia are making rapid progress in their leagues, while China and Italy are investing significantly, looking to re-assert their past dominance. Giants like AC Milan and Manchester United are finally joining the party.

**CREATING A MOVEMENT:** Increasingly, the women of football are acting collectively. When Brazil's first woman coach, Emily Lima, was fired, eight retired internationals (including Sissi and Formiga) signed a joint letter of protest, gaining worldwide coverage. Players around the globe have used strike action and collective bargains for better

conditions. UK's Women in Football ran an impressive #whatif campaign, urging people to imagine how inclusive football could be, and commit to an action to achieve it.

But it's been a bumpy, awkward road. What are the boundaries in the treatment of women? When Patrice Evra failed to navigate the line between appreciation and patronization of Eni Aluko's World Cup analysis, the backlash was immediate. Yet women pioneers in the media continue to suffer the online misogyny of those who are threatened by the sound of a woman's voice on air.

Coaches of women must also learn to adapt in a #metoo world of rapidly changing standards around power-imbalanced professional relationships – all in the fishbowl of social media.

In this promising yet challenging world, what can be done to hasten progress?

First, the commercial opportunity must be grasped. Women's sport is the new frontier, and those with the foresight to invest will make key early gains. Crowds are growing and need to be commercialized. For national team competitions, FIFA has pledged to create a women's football-specific commercial programme to spur private investment and to bring the women's game into the mainstream (FIFA2.0 pp36-38).

For club football, there is to date no globally watched competition – surely a major opportunity in a sport where Europe is not the global landlord, as it is in men's club football? Governing bodies must optimize the rights not as a piece in some other puzzle, but as a picture in its own right.

How many rights-holders are developing dedicated, specialist expertise in the commercialization of women's football and the female market? With women making most of the spending decisions, surely that's a prize to be hotly contested.



Picture: William Yang

**WOMEN'S SPORT IS THE NEW FRONTIER AND THE COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITY MUST BE GRASPED, WRITES FORMER AUSTRALIA INTERNATIONAL AND FIFA EXECUTIVE MOYNA DODD**

Second, clubs and leagues will be key actors. If they invest well, they can transform the quality and reach of the women's game, and position it as modern, athletic and aspirational. But cringe-worthy coverage or clichéd promotions (and there are plenty of examples) will have a chilling effect. The transformation must be well-executed and aligned with the values of those who live the game.

Third, institutions within the football hierarchy must continue with serious efforts towards gender balance – not only in the optics, but also in the substance. Sport is where male supremacy comes out to play. Freshen up your board, management or coaching staff with female talent. Ensure you have a deep

understanding of the challenges, needs and sensitivities of the women's game. Don't be complicit in harassment or disrespect – call it out under the standards of tomorrow. Remember, they are the standards by which your legacy will be judged.

From the top of world football, FIFA has said it will "fully commit itself to ensuring that its policies, community and cultural attitudes will drive transformative change at multiple levels" and "will ensure that gender equality initiatives ... will be implemented ... within the entire football ecosystem." Let's see that happen!

Football's biggest growth opportunity – the full inclusion of women – has been hiding in plain sight. Now's the time to take it.

**MOYNA DODD** is a partner with law firm Gilbert + Tobin. She played in the Australian national team from 1986-95 and served as a FIFA Executive Committee member from 2013-16.



# MY GOAL IS TO WIN MORE TROPHIES – AND A BETTER DEAL FOR WOMEN

**MANCHESTER CITY AND BELGIUM STRIKER TESSA WULLAERT TALKS ABOUT HER FOOTBALL JOURNEY AND DETERMINATION TO STAND UP FOR WHAT SHE BELIEVES IN**



Picture: Manchester City

**I first started kicking a ball around when I was five years old. I remember sitting on the table as my grandad would lace up my trainers. I first played with boys' teams – KFC Wakken, near my home, then Ingelmunster and Harelbeke. I also used to dance, but I found myself enjoying football more. My mum thought it was a bit weird, even though she'd always been into football herself – her dad coached my dad's football team and that is how they met.**

But 20 years ago, women's football wasn't popular in Belgium so it was still a big deal to give up my dancing for the game. If you'd asked me then who my favourite player was, I wouldn't have been able to name any – I didn't even know there was a Belgian national team.

I didn't dream of playing professionally. I was just playing for fun with the other children, and having fun was the most important thing for me. There was just one other girl with me in the boys' teams I played with, the rest were lads. I am glad I had her – it was nice to have someone to share a changing room with and we never felt alone.

It wasn't until I was 15 that my mum told me about the comments she was hearing from other parents on the touchline. They

would say things like "why is my son on the bench for a girl, there is no future in women's soccer". But we were a good team. I was even selected for the level just below the national teams, alongside boys, which was kind of crazy. I just wanted to play, to be the best and give the best of myself.

When I was 15 I switched to the women's game and went directly into the first team at Zulte Waregem. I still have friends from that team, who witnessed the start of my career and how it's grown. Everything moved fast – I played with them until I received my first call-up to the Belgian national A team, when I was 17.

I started playing for Anderlecht when I was still at high school. My parents would always drive me to games, until I got my driver's licence. At 20, I signed for Standard Liège. It was a great period for me. I won player of the season in the BeNe League – that means the best player in both Belgium and the Netherlands – and I was top scorer the year after that, at the age of 21.

Finding a balance between studies and football was hard. I wouldn't get home until 10 or 11 at night after matches or training. I realised I couldn't commit 100% so I decided to gain my diploma in tourism management first, and then pursue football. A month after graduating, I accepted an offer to play for VfL Wolfsburg.

It was tough to go straight into the top league. I had never had to sit on the bench until then and I was competing with a lot of great players. I have to admit that I cried a lot because it was my first time away from home. But I wouldn't have done it any other way – it made me the player I am now.

I used to say Germany was the only place I wanted to go to, and that Wolfsburg was the only club I wanted to play for. But after three years there and winning many titles, I decided to pursue a new challenge in England.

I knew I wanted to go to Manchester City. They're a big club with a winning mentality. It's been a great first season for me, winning both the FA Cup and the Continental League Cup.

City are a role model for how women should be treated alongside the men's team. Our academies and stadiums are next to each other, and they show a big image of the women's team at the Etihad Stadium during the men's games.

I know of only two countries where male and female players in the national teams are paid equally – Norway and New Zealand. At Manchester City, the men's team is world class whilst we are improving so I understand there is a difference. But the difference shouldn't be so big. Sometimes I am frustrated but I try not to let it get to me.

It is great to share the same grounds, but when both teams are preparing for a match the women's team are often side-lined. The men's team also live luxurious lives due to their bigger pay, which can be irritating as they can head back home, however they want. They don't have to think about how much their flight tickets will cost!

Although I receive good pay and I do what I love, I feel the need to speak out about this. Some say, "just be happy with what you have, we already have a lot of opportunities and more than we used to," but I will stand up and fight for what I believe in.

For now, Lyon remains the top side in the UEFA Women's Champions League. They will no doubt remain the best until another team can beat the amount of money they have at their disposal. Their stadium is not as impressive as ours but they travel to games on a nice plane and enjoy other perks. And, of course, money buys players. It is a bit annoying because more teams could better compete with them if they had as much money. But I am happy at City and I have a good relationship with everyone here.

I hope to see more fans at women's games. We have seen some amazing attendance figures in Spain recently – more than 48,000 at the Athletic Bilbao-Atlético Madrid cup quarter-final in January, then nearly 61,000 at the Atlético Madrid-Barcelona Liga Femenina game in March. It will be great to see bigger crowds at our weekend matches in England.

People who think they wouldn't like women's football end up surprised by our level of technique and often come up to me full of praise after a game. I think more sponsorship would bring more people to our games – we have a lot of passion and play great football. You just have to watch it for yourself!

We need to keep moving forwards with women's football. It is growing massively and we can use our voice to demand improvements and gain more support from fans, even a Panini Sticker album for the World Cup! For now, my teammates and I just want to win lots of trophies for Manchester City.

**TESSA WULLAERT** plays as a striker for Manchester City and the Belgian national team. Her previous clubs include Zulte Waregem, Anderlecht, Standard Liège and VfL Wolfsburg.





**FIFA EXECUTIVE HONEY THALJIEH TELLS NEVENA VUKAŠINOVIĆ AND KELSEY PHARIS HOW THE SPORT CHANGED HER LIFE, TAKING HER FROM PALESTINE TO THE BIG TIME**

**Growing up in Palestine wasn't exactly a walk in the park for Honey Thalijeh. She was just five during the first "Intifada" uprising against the Israeli occupation. "I remember the soldiers raiding our house in Bethlehem," she recalls. "I thought tomorrow would never come, that we had no hope and no future."**

Living in a state of constant fear, surrounded by soldiers, walls and checkpoints, is what Thalijeh remembers most about her childhood. It was a hand-to-mouth existence, with five members of the family crammed together in one room, with barely enough money to buy food.

Football would provide her with an escape from the harsh realities of her existence – as well as offering a release valve for the anger she felt inside. "I used to watch the boys playing football outside our home and I'd say to myself, "Why can't I join them?" she says. That wasn't as easy as it sounds. Growing up in a patriarchal society, Thalijeh was aware that most people frowned upon the idea of a girl playing a "male" sport. But at seven years of age, she was already showing the signs of an iron will and decided that, whatever anyone said, nothing was going to stop her joining in with the boys.

The "pitch" was a narrow street made of concrete and, often as not, it was strewn with pieces of glass and stone.

Despite the unusual playing surface, she loved football from the start. This didn't go down well with her father. "We fought nearly every day about it," Thalijeh recalls. "My mum would tell him, "Don't worry, by the time she's 15 she will have other interests."

But at 15, instead of discovering the other interests predicted by her mother, Thalijeh realised that football had become more than just a game for her; it was central to her identity, a source of self-esteem, confidence and a way of bringing people together. There was no way she was going to give up playing.

Two years later, at the age 17, after the second Intifada, Thalijeh started her studies at Bethlehem University. One day she spotted a poster asking if any women were interested in playing football. "I literally ran to the sports department, as fast as I could," she laughs. The teacher was surprised when she turned up, explaining that no other female students had expressed an interest. But Thalijeh was not to be put off.

She asked the coach of the men's team to come and watch what she could do. He was so impressed by her skill that he became equally determined to help her create a women's football team.

"We started by approaching girls from the basketball and volleyball teams, then every team. We told them that football would open doors," Thalijeh remembers. Many were nervous about getting involved at first, fearing that the sport could somehow conflict with perceptions (both male and female) about the place of women in their communities and detract from their femininity.

For Thalijeh, if a girl or woman wants to play football, this should not give rise to such questions – in Palestine or anywhere else in the world.

The team started with five girls, no money, no equipment and no facilities, but that wasn't going to hold them back. As well as enjoying the sport, the students had a shared belief that the power of football could change the world around them. Their determination was inspiring. More and more girls started to join the team, then the local media started to take notice and eventually they became a proper team.

Thalijeh looks back with pride at how the team took off. At the time, other than at the university, the game wasn't played anywhere else in the country. "We were the pioneers of female football in Palestine," she recalls.

"One newspaper even called us the dream team, not because we were the best but because we could see a light at the end of the tunnel," she says. By now, football had grown into more than just a hobby for Thalijeh. It had changed her life for the better and she wanted others to feel the same sense of empowerment.

The team started traveling to Jerusalem, the surrounding villages, and Gaza. They would talk to girls in the refugee camps, making them believe that football could change their lives too. "I see many girls now in Palestine who are willing to travel and have such confidence in themselves – they are the driving force for the national team and the next generation."

Today, Palestine has four national women's teams: under 14, 19, 21 and the national team. They play in tournaments at home and abroad, and have an impact on their society. Although the set-up could benefit from better infrastructure and education, the obstacles they face will be nothing more than a bump in the road, according to Thalijeh.

She feels a sense of satisfaction when she views the progress that the women's national team has made in the past few years. "Looking back, I can see that football was one more way of putting Palestine on the world map," she says.

Thalijeh went on to join FIFA in 2012 and is now the corporate communications manager at the sport's global governing body. The job gives her a platform to inspire even more girls around the world to play football.

She is still involved with Palestine football, where she has developed a football club as a safe space where women can be themselves. Now they are players, coaches, referees and fans, with many active in local and international organisations, determined

to drive change. Thalijeh visits the team whenever she is home and plays with the side when they are in Europe.

"If we empower women, we also empower society and future role models," says Thalijeh. For her, football was never just about the game, it was always a road to equality for women. "Let them dream big and they will make it happen" is her mantra. She especially wants parents to hear this message: "Encourage your daughters to play. Empower them to shoot for the moon and land among the stars!"

For Thalijeh, the beauty of football is its ability to touch everyone, regardless of gender, nationality, race or creed. It shouldn't be the 'women's game' or the 'men's game', just the game. "Football belongs to all of us," she says.

**HONEY THALJIEH** was co-founder and first captain of the national women's team in Palestine, and the first Arab woman to obtain a FIFA master's degree. She is now Corporate Communications Manager at FIFA.

# I KNOW HOW IT SHOULD BE AND CAN BE. CHANGE HAS BEEN SLOW



INSPIRED BY HER EXPERIENCES IN A LONG INTERNATIONAL CAREER, LINE RØDDIK HANSEN SAYS IMPROVED CONDITIONS AND RESPECT MUST BE THE PRIORITY

**I started playing football and handball at the same time, when I was five. In football I was the only girl in a team of boys. I saw no reason to join a girls' team – it didn't cross my mind. Playing with the boys was my life then. Being one of the boys was normal for me.**

I played for fun and never thought "I need to go and play with the national team". I'd never even heard of the women's national team when I was growing up. That all changed when I turned 15 and I was called up for the regional team. I started getting contacted by big girls' clubs and said to myself: "Hey, I am good at football. I should try this out."

From then everything happened quickly and three years later I was playing in the Danish national team.

But I'll never forget how it all started for me. My big brother, Mads, played football. So did all our friends, all the time. It just felt natural to join in. I never thought "you shouldn't be doing this".

My parents were supportive. Their attitude was that if I wanted to play football, I should play football. I was always playing football, at school, in the garden. Always.

A local girls' team was launched and people wanted me to play with them, but I was happy as I was. My parents never pushed me in a direction I didn't want to go. So yes, my big

brother was a big factor. Funnily enough, none of my brothers care about football now. I'm the one obsessed with playing the game. Or to be more precise, it's always been me, my mum and my grandma. Football is very much a women's thing in my family. If you came to our home, it's us you'd see on the couch watching matches.

As a child, I never had the kind of sporting heroes youngsters usually have. It was all about playing. I didn't even watch that much football. Even today, I always prefer playing. I continued to play handball – at one point I was playing a lot more handball than football. I was just about having fun and winning. It was all about the game.

Then I went pro. It changed everything.

I'm now playing at Ajax in Amsterdam. I arrived last summer after a 10-year adventure that's taken me to some of the biggest European clubs. I'd struggled with injuries during the last year at my previous club [FC Barcelona], so when I got to Ajax I just had one thing on my mind, to get back in shape and on the field playing football. It's always about that.

At the time of writing this, we have a few games to go before the end of the season and it's very tight between the leading pack. It's not going to be easy because we have to win every game, but that is our goal. I am a terrible loser.

Ajax have a policy to promote women's football. They have been growing the game and the infrastructures. This year the club added a talent team. For the first time they now have two teams in the girls' categories.

Slowly but surely a lot of clubs in the game are catching up. I saw this happening first when I was at Olympique Lyonnais. Ajax isn't there yet, it isn't as big a club as OL in terms of women's football, but the club is working and progressing. I really believe great things can

happen here if they want to go all in. During my pro career it's been amazing to see how much the game has changed in the last 10 years.

I am now in my 30s, so I've had the chance to witness the transformation close-up. Doing my career I always had the feeling that everything was moving too slowly. Now I'm a bit older, with more experience, I have a better sense of how it is supposed to be.

I understood what it should be for the first time at OL. You really got the feeling that they wanted a successful women's team. They are 100% committed to professionalism. With someone like [OL President] Jean-Michel Aulas, you really feel his passion for the women's game, his will to establish it on a European level. They pushed in a certain direction and others across the continent followed.

In some clubs you can still see it's all about the men's teams. They're always the priority and, in some ways, I understand that. However, many clubs could do more for the women. They need to show how much they want it. OL set the standard. Everyone respects the women and what they offer the club. They're central to its reputation and prestige. I liked that feeling of being respected as a player. Things are changing because more clubs can see how women's football is growing these days and they want to follow the trend.

I know there's a lot of debate about fair pay for women players, but I don't think you can expect that the first step will be for clubs to give us the same money as the men.

What's more important for me as the first steps are the playing conditions for women. Why shouldn't the women have the same conditions as men? Football is football no matter if you are a girl or boy and the expectations and demands are the same. Most of the men's clubs are able to provide the women with good training grounds;

they shouldn't prioritize other teams over the women. Small things can make a big difference.

When I was a younger player I put up with some really bad playing conditions. I gradually realised how it should be and how it can be – and how slow change has been coming. How can we aim for bigger and better things if we can't play in decent conditions?

Yes, we need to change things, but the fights are different all over the world. I was recently invited to meet a Liberian girls' team who are fighting to be allowed to just play the game. We need to fight for young girls' rights to play. The first priority for me will always be the fight to gain respect for women playing football. It is not just about what we can change in Europe or the U.S., but all over the world.

My hope is that in future girls won't always have the feeling that they need to earn respect as a football player. We shouldn't see women's football as the little sister of the men's game. It stands on its own because, in the end, football is football.

We need to look at things in a different way. The men's game has grown over 150 years. We should find our rhythm, our own sponsors, our own teams to grow the women's game. That said, we're not yet ready to be independent of the men's game. Men's clubs are putting money and effort into the women's game and we should all welcome that.

Let's build on the foundations. Then we can think of changing the game our way.

**LINE RØDDIK HANSEN** plays as a defender for Ajax and the Danish national team. Her previous clubs include Olympique Lyonnais, Barcelona, Tyresö FF, Rosengård and Brøndby.

**WE'RE GROWING  
THE GAME AND  
INSPIRING MORE  
GIRLS TO PLAY**



THROUGH INITIATIVES LIKE #WEPLAYSTRONG, UEFA IS DETERMINED TO ENSURE TEENAGE GIRLS STAY IN FOOTBALL. SAYS FORMER GERMANY INTERNATIONAL NADINE KESSLER



**It has been a prosperous period for women's football with the UEFA Women's EURO 2017 recording a 50% increase in cumulative audience, totalling 259 million globally, and UEFA launching its pan-European campaign, Together #WePlayStrong, designed to accelerate female participation in the sport.**

In 2017, UEFA reported a 7.5% increase in the number of registered girls and women participating across its 55 member associations, with further growth expected in the coming years. The 2018 UEFA Women's Champions League Final in Kiev was also the last time the event would be tagged onto the men's final; the governing body's commitment to growing participation, visibility and engagement in the game has prompted this change.

UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin believes the exponential growth of women's football across Europe will ensure that UEFA Women's Champions League finals become a centre-piece of the calendar in their own right. This will give the women's game a platform of its own, to continue to grow and to become an unmissable event and television spectacle in its own right.

Speaking at the UEFA Congress in Rome, he said: "Contrary to what some people say, women's football is not the football of tomorrow. Women's football is the football of today, of now".

To further reinforce the distinctiveness of women's football, UEFA has unbundled its sponsorship rights from the men's game to appeal to a wider audience and VISA

has become the first ever UEFA sponsor dedicated to women's football. This is only the start and you can expect more announcements soon.

When it comes to participation, UEFA identified a big challenge to the growth of the game. Most girls who play football quit when they hit their teens and research showed this comes about because suddenly other people's judgements matter; if their friends don't think football is cool, girls simply gravitate towards other activities that do hold social currency.

But UEFA is determined to change this and keep teenage girls in the game and get more to play. It created a campaign that made teenage girls both the message and the messenger.

Together #WePlayStrong aims to grow the number of girls playing football and is a campaign designed around how girls use social media, starring over 750 teen footballers from across Europe. The campaign highlights the skill, confidence and friendships that come with playing the game, making football relevant to teen girls, wherever they might be, from Instagram to YouTube, Giphy and TikTok and across the worlds of fashion, music, arts and health and fitness.

Under the campaign, a YouTube Channel was launched, giving fans a unique insight into the daily lives of six professional players and a freestyle world champion. To date, the channel has amassed over 10 million views.

Global pop star Rita Ora signed up as official

supporter of Together #WePlayStrong, with UEFA sponsoring her European Girls Tour.

Without traditional media spend, Together #WePlayStrong has had over 1 billion campaign impressions, over 300 million campaign engagements and generated 100,000 fans on social media. And 73% of teenage girls who have seen the campaign say they'd want to play football.

It is all part of UEFA's concerted effort to raise awareness of women's football.

I was thrilled when I was appointed as head of UEFA's women's football unit. The continued growth of women's football is a strategic priority for UEFA. This is a long-term project but it's heartening to see that our rate of growth is going in the right

direction and gathering pace, as all the while the game is becoming more professional across Europe. With that comes increased opportunity, exposure and affinity.

I'm proud that we have given the UEFA Women's Champions League final its own space to flourish and its own identity. At the current rate of progress, it's a journey that will inspire more people than ever before.

**NADINE KESSLER**  
is Head of Women's Football at UEFA. A Germany international from 2010-2016, she played for Saarbrücken, Turbine Potsdam and captained VfL Wolfsburg. In 2014, she was voted FIFA Women's World Player of the Year.

# HOW WE BECAME A POWERHOUSE AMONG THE ELITE



Picture: Olympique Lyonnais

**OLYMPIQUE LYONNAIS FÉMININ HAD A VISION FROM THE START TO JOIN EUROPE'S TOP CLUBS, BUT THE JOURNEY FOR WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IN FRANCE STILL HAS A WAY TO GO WRITES MARINO FACCIOLI**

**The Olympique Lyonnais women's team, Olympique Lyonnais Féminin, was created at the request of the Mayor of Lyon in 2004, following a merger with FC Lyon Féminin, four-time champions of France. The President of Olympique Lyonnais, Jean-Michel Aulas, had a very clear vision for the future of the OL women's team from the beginning: it had to become a part of the European women's football elite as soon as possible, to be among the best.**

At that time, I was the club's deputy director-general for sport, and the president put me in charge of OL Féminin. I can still hear his words today: "Marino, I'm giving you carte blanche, we're moving forward!"

I needed to understand the world of women's football right away. It was a case of learning while moving ahead and bringing OL up to the highest standards. After three years, in 2007, OL Féminin became champions of France. At the time there was still no European Champions League. In France, the pioneering club in women's football was Montpellier, so we decided to recruit players there while there was still no federation status for girls.

Among those recruits was Sonia Bompastor, capped 158 times for the French national team, and now director of the OL Féminin Training Centre. She also spent a season in the United States in 2009-10 with Washington Freedom. OL took a close interest in U.S. players early on, when American women's football was setting the standard worldwide. Hope Solo, Aly Wagner, Megan Rapinoe and later Alex Morgan marked the first heyday of OL Féminin.

OL reached the quarter-finals of the Women's Champions Cup (predecessor of the Champions League) in 2008-09, losing to future champions Duisburg. We made the final the following year at the first Champions League and lost against Turbine Potsdam in Getafe after an epic shoot-out. Five successes in the Champions League followed. OL Féminin now reigns in Europe!

Such success is also due to an exceptional focus on player development and training, starting in 2007 with the creation of women's sections in every age category, from the under-7s all the way up to the seniors. Martinique-born Wendie Renard, a 28-year-old with 100 French caps, is a prime example of the excellence of the OL training centre which she joined at 15. In 2016, we opened a new training centre with accommodation for girls and boys.

At first, it was hard for families to accept the idea of women's football and the fact that their daughters were attending a training centre instead of following a traditional school education. Today, good results and success are helping to get families on board. The fact that we have signed agreements for academic support with schools in the city has helped a lot. Families know that their daughters will have an excellent academic education that they can pursue at university.

When we conduct a talent screening session in the 7-8 age group, it's not uncommon to see more than 50 girls show up with their

parents. OL has scouts throughout France, although we scrupulously respect regulations which prohibit the recruitment of under-18 players beyond a 100km radius around the club. There is also the "Pôle Espoirs" for girls aged 15-19 in every region of France, managed by the French Football Federation's national technical department. The nearest Pôle Espoir to Lyon is in Vaulx-en-Velin, and we send many of our young players there as per the Federation's regulations.

However, to date, training in France is still far from providing enough world-class players to the best French clubs, especially OL and PSG. These clubs must therefore bring in foreign players. A large gap still remains between under-19s and professional players. There is little fresh talent because only OL, PSG, Montpellier and, to a lesser extent, Paris FC, have truly professional structures.

Ligue 1 is unbalanced, with big differences in skill levels which are often reflected in the scorelines in the championship. Annual budgets go from €300,000 for semi-professional clubs to €8 million for the top teams. The budgets of women's football are obviously constrained by the resources set aside for the men's sections.

Our best players tend to spend 10 to 12 years at OL. Wendie Renard, Sarah Bouhaddi, Eugénie Le Sommer and Camille Abily have all followed this trend. There are few competitive opportunities in other French clubs. President Aulas has a very egalitarian policy in terms of recruitment and training: "we do with girls what we do with boys". There is no gender discrimination in the way teams operate.

Even in terms of wages, although far from the highest salaries seen in men's L1, many OL girls earn significantly more than the boys in L2, the best earning up to €400,000 a year. The imbalances of the championship mean that for some matches against weaker teams, there are few spectators at the stadium, between 1,500 and 2,000.

However, big games can draw 25,000 spectators.

Of course, despite the rapid growth in recent years, everything is not rosy in European women's football. Among federations and leagues, there is still a lack of will to professionalise at every level, economic, structural and infrastructural. Only LaLiga in Spain and the English Super League have started to break away from this trend, but it is a very new phenomenon.

In France, there are three international level clubs, far too few to make women's football autonomous. A lack of political impetus remains, leaving everything up to the goodwill of football clubs.

**MARINO FACCIOLI**  
is President of Olympique  
Lyonnais Féminin.

# OUR MISSION: TO TRANSFORM A ROUGH DIAMOND INTO A GEM

PROFESSIONALISM AND INCREASED VISIBILITY ARE KEY TO LALIGA'S STRATEGY TO TAKE SPANISH FOOTBALL TO THE FOREFRONT OF THE WOMEN'S GAME, WRITES PEDRO MALABIA

The development of women's football in Spain has experienced a marked disequilibrium. On one hand, there were clubs that, year after year, worked and invested in the growth of their women's football projects. These clubs, many of them belonging to entities from the men's professional game, dreamed of advancing the role of women as elite footballers.

On the other hand, this ambition was not matched in the industry, particularly in a domestic competition to which almost no attention was being paid: a competition without resources, without visibility, without stability at the audio-visual level, and without a commercial strategy that could attract the interest of brands. All in all, a completely amateur competition that lacked any kind of growth and clashed with the hope and ambition of the clubs and players.

In the meantime, women's football around the world was growing at an unstoppable pace. Leagues in Germany, France, England and Sweden were making huge strides, season after season, while women's football in Spain was slowly dying.

As tends to happen many times in life, there are certain milestones that change the course of events. For Spanish women's football, this happened in the summer of 2015, when some clubs knocked on the door of the men's professional league, LaLiga, to ask for help and see how it could assist them in boosting the women's competition.

Although LaLiga is responsible for the 1st and 2nd division men and does not run the women's game (it's the Federation), the answer was way better than they expected. Javier Tebas, President of LaLiga, reached out immediately and decided to get to work. How? By launching a project to boost women's football through the creation of a specific women's football department within the LaLiga organisation which, with resources and assisted by all the other departments, would develop a strategic plan. The objective would be to establish Spanish football at the forefront of the women's game.

LaLiga hosted a congress on women's football on 30 September 2015 in which it publicly launched its project.

The reasons that inspired LaLiga to create and implement the project were multiple: Firstly, a historical debt from men's to women's professional football, as the women's game had never been given the attention it deserved and needed. LaLiga, as the strongest sports organisation in the



Picture: LaLiga

country, could not continue to turn its back on the development of women's football. LaLiga was motivated because it firmly believes in the capacity of women's football to grow within the Spanish football industry, as a priceless asset for its clubs.

Secondly, LaLiga understood that it should offer an additional service to its clubs, not only to those that already had women's teams, but also those who wanted to develop their own projects but did not have enough know-how. In this way, LaLiga would become, without being the organiser, the first and only professional men's league actively involved in the development of women's football, something that will surely evolve into common practice in other leagues such as the Premier League, Serie A or the Bundesliga.

The LaLiga women's football project is based on four pillars that share the same theme: women's empowerment in the football industry. These pillars are: professionalisation, increased visibility, product development and increased brand value, and internationalisation.

Clubs have played and will continue to play a fundamental role in the development of the project, particularly through the Association of Clubs created in November 2015 and currently linking 70 clubs nationally. Its creation was another milestone that has changed the sport. The Association has become a key actor in developing and implementing strategies and actions that have substantially contributed to the growth of women's football in Spain.

For LaLiga, the concept of "professionalisation" related to a competition is understood in a broad sense, not only in that women players have contracts and play football as their way of life. Professionalism also means up-to-date infrastructure, sponsors, a stable presence on TV and catering for the audio-visual product. To make this happen, it's not only a strategy that's required; we need clubs with adequate structures and the readiness to face the challenges of professionalisation.

Therefore, LaLiga focused on providing clubs with the resources and training to develop management structures covering

the essential areas that will ensure growth.

Thanks to the support of LaLiga, the Association of Clubs has been implementing an assistance programme which provides clubs with financial support to hire staff in four areas: management, marketing and commercial, finance, and communication/digital. Clubs can also benefit from further assistance to boost promotion and diffusion activities, such as visits to schools, hospitals or fan zones, or the development of their own digital identity.

Two other elements are fundamental for professionalisation: a financial control system, with an emphasis on complying with payment obligations to the players, as well as a programme of regular training on different management issues for directors, with the objective of transforming them into better managers.

With regards to the increase in visibility, LaLiga is committed to increasing awareness of women's football in society, knowing that this lack of visibility was one of biggest hurdles facing women's

**I'd like you to think about three images: a rough diamond, a blank canvas and a watering-can sprinkling over a small plant. I know this might seem a rather odd way to kick off, and that, quite possibly, you will be wondering what these images have to do with women's football. In my view, these three pictures are a perfect symbol of the vision and the project that LaLiga has been implementing since 2015, and they will for sure make more sense at the end of the article.**



football. In this way, LaLiga has used all its communication channels (website, social media, app and other media) to empower women's football through content generation and easy access to information such as fixture lists, the league table or players' information.

Two campaigns have been launched: #HablamosDeLoMismo ("we speak the same game") and #SoyFutbolista ("I play football") which aim to make the growth of women's football visible as well as championing the image of women players as elite athletes.

The third pillar is particularly important. To attract the interest of commercial brands, fans and other stakeholders, it is fundamental to create a quality product and brand. All actions and strategies have to be directed towards creating concrete value, in image and audio-visual perception, which are key for the competition's growth.

LaLiga has made a significant investment in TV broadcasting technology to increase the value of its audio-visual product. It has also promoted the best infrastructure possible, with some games being played in the biggest stadia of men's professional football, with impressive attendances. Growth and development can only be achieved by taking good care of the product.

Last but not least, the fourth pillar has to be internationalisation. LaLiga firmly believes in establishing international alliances between leagues, federations and other institutions that can jointly collaborate in the global development of women's football. LaLiga has multiple collaboration agreements in different countries. These partnerships are mainly based on knowledge exchange, training for coaches, joint promotional actions and friendly games with the goal of boosting women's football worldwide.

I could not end this article without stressing what surely has been the main transformative element in Spanish women's football: Iberdrola's arrival as the main sponsor of the league. One of Spain's biggest electrical companies, Iberdrola decided to focus its sponsorship campaign on the empowerment of women in sport. Since then, it has supported more than 15 federations in different sports, all of them focused on the women's component, and football is its flagship.

Iberdrola particularly deserves credit as, when it entered the business, women's football was not a promising project. It was a rough diamond with great opportunities, but far from what it has become today. By making a commitment to a potential, rather than a finished product, Iberdrola became a partner on a journey rather than simply a sponsor.

All in all, this is a decisive time for women's football. Society's evolution, together with the support of numerous institutions, means that women's sport, and particularly football, is starting to grow in the way it deserves.

Women's football is a unique product, with enormous potential, and with an incalculable value to society. But it also needs a strategy that will enable it to develop as an attractive, quality-based product, which can position itself in an ever more competitive sports industry.

Women's football has a big advantage, in that it can grow without the constraints that exist in the men's game, which are very much narrowed by interests, rights and contracts. I like to compare women's football with a big blank canvas where everything can be painted. And, finally, for this to happen one needs to understand that without investment, there is no growth.

In this sense, it is fundamental to understand the role and vision of football's decision-

makers: the league presidents, clubs and other partners are key. We need to talk about investment, not expenditure. For a tree to bear fruit, we must water it so that it grows.

Spain is the only country in the world that has the opportunity to develop a joint project between the federation, the clubs, the men's professional league, government and players, and this is undoubtedly a massive added value. LaLiga will continue in committing itself to women and football, because, in the end, it is not about men or women's football. It is about football as #WeSpeakTheSameGame.

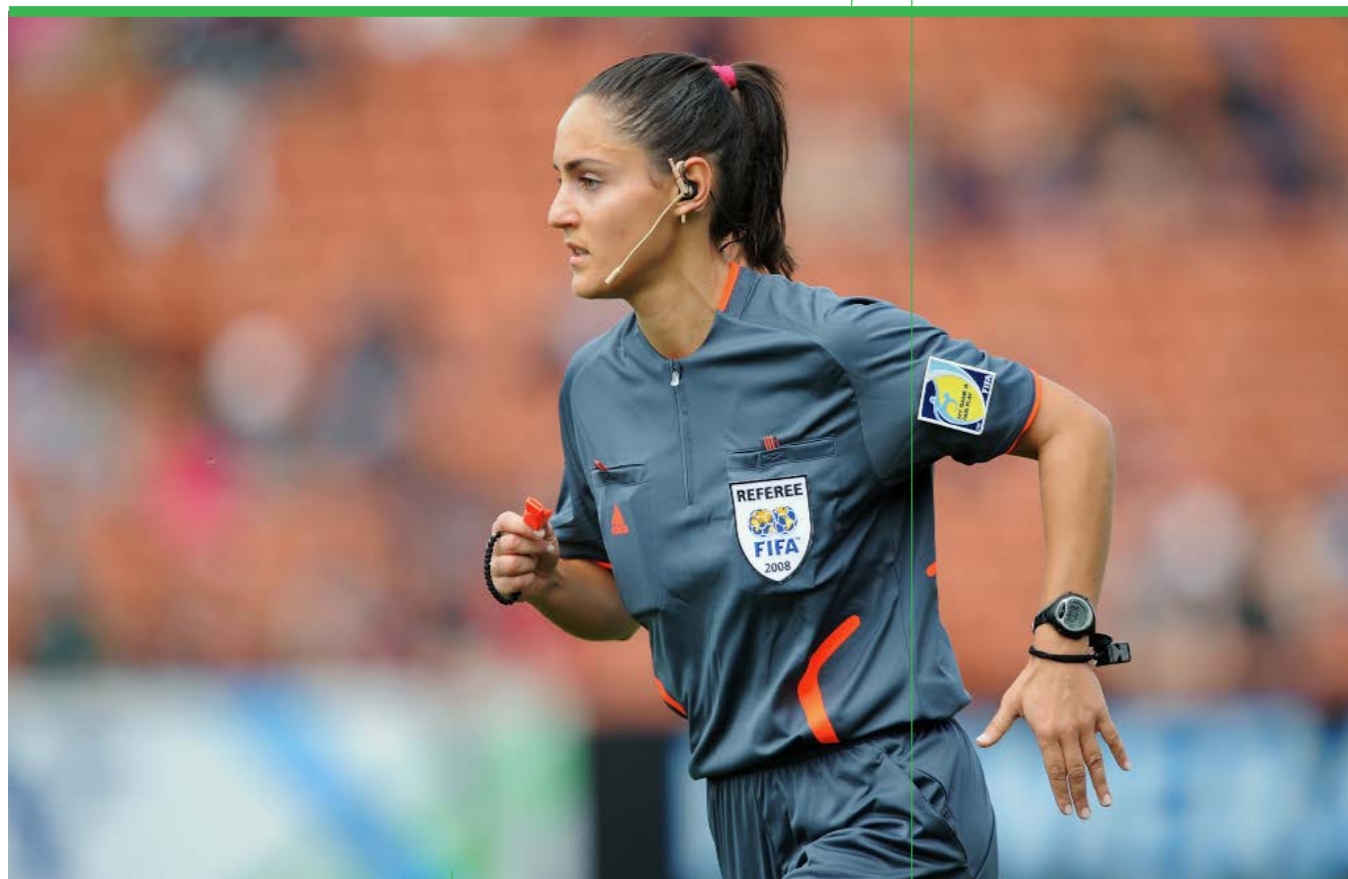
#### PEDRO MALABIA

is Women's Football Director  
at LaLiga.



**FOOTBALL  
'CONSERVATIVES'  
GET THE RED  
CARD FROM TOP  
REFEREE**

**'OLD BOYS' CLUB' MADE IT TOUGH FOR ME TO BREAK THROUGH AND INEQUALITIES REMAIN AT INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, WITH A SIGNIFICANT PAY GAP BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE OFFICIALS SAYS THALIA MITSI**



**As a girl growing up in Greece in the 1980s I did not get the opportunity to play organised football. I had to be content with playing with my brothers and other boys from the neighbourhood.**

When I went to university in Athens in 1997 I enrolled in the physical education and sports science department where I was offered the opportunity to join a course in the refereeing school of the local football association. Of around 500 physical education students, 150 joined that course but I ended up being the only one who actually took up refereeing.

This was 20 years ago and I must confess that the Greek FA did not welcome me with much enthusiasm. They first objected to the

fact that I was not yet 18 when I signed up for the course, which made me ineligible according to their rules. However, they finally decided to waive the age requirement (a special favour they said, although another referee under 18 had already graduated from the course a year before) but I still had the feeling that they were not comfortable with having a young, university-educated woman in their ranks. They were definitely afraid to lose control over refereeing if they began to accept "unorthodox" profiles.

In 1999, I was on an Erasmus grant in Rome and I began refereeing there in a boys' youth league. The lads were quite surprised at first to see a woman referee but they respected me. The year after I was back in Greece and

I continued refereeing men's games, as there was very little women's football in the country at that time. I got my bachelor's degree in 2001 and began to teach while continuing to practise sport.

I was appointed as a referee in the men's amateur fourth division and in 2004 I was promoted to the semi-professional third division. I became a FIFA women's referee in 2005 and the Greek FA finally decided to let me referee in the professional second division in 2008. I was actually ranked third by the refereeing observers in the second division but in spite of my high ranking and a lot of media exposure through television, I was never offered a refereeing position in the Greek Super League. I just never got

the personal recommendations and the connections that were needed in order to get promoted in what was definitely an "old boys' club".

Altogether, when I reflect about it, the refereeing committee of the Greek FA probably decided that my unusual profile made me rather "uncontrollable" and therefore "unsafe" as far as the football establishment was concerned. I also noticed that the physical fitness tests were becoming tougher every year and significantly more demanding than the requirements in similar football leagues abroad. Nevertheless, I was still training very hard.

Although my career in Greece was stunted, my international career prospered. I refereed in the women's under-19 EURO finals in 2007 and 2009, in the women's under-17 World Cups in 2008 and 2010, then subsequently in the Women's World Cup in Germany in 2011. I went on to referee at the London Olympics and at the 2015 World Cup in Canada. I was also able to officiate in three UEFA Women's Champions League semi-finals as the main referee. Unfortunately, I will not referee in World Cup 2019 in France because the Greek FA has scandalously neglected to propose me as a referee to FIFA.

Greek football is terribly conservative. Resistance to change and reform is extremely strong. Everyone involved seems to be driven by their own personal interests. Women's football in Greece is very weak and is not given serious attention and funds. The men's triumph in EURO 2004 in Portugal did not spur new dynamics in the game, although many women wanted to play football following Greece's victory.

Today, 15 years on, there are three women's leagues at the amateur level and most of the country's big clubs are conspicuously absent from the women's game. Only the

two Thessaloniki clubs, PAOK and Aris, are participating in the women's top league. As a result, there are no Greek professional players and the standards of the game are still quite low. Greek refereeing is progressively getting worse and the costs involved in joining the refereeing school and starting to referee are too steep for most young Greek women.

The dire state of women's football is an obvious reflection of the deep crisis in Greek football in general. It is a sign of the difficult times that derbies in the men's Greek Super League are now being refereed by foreign officials. Public scepticism about Greek football is huge. I am still part of the women's First Division referees although the Referees Committee, for no apparent reason, has not included me in the list of the men's divisions.

In Europe, women referees, unlike many of the men, are still amateurs. The job is very demanding in terms of time and training, the rewards are few and far between and it is increasingly difficult to reconcile refereeing and a full-time job. Pay inequality is still the rule in Europe; in the Champions League women are paid 900 euros per game, while the men are paid 5000 euros per game and 6000 as from the quarter-finals. Very little is also being done to develop women's refereeing at the grassroots level.

I never experienced sexism in refereeing men and I always got a lot of respect from them. I really enjoy it. Sometimes I feel it might be harder to referee women, because things tend to be subtler. Women have learned how to compensate for their relative physical weakness in terms of speed and power; their game as a result is more skilful and the plays more surprising, less expected. You need to be extremely attentive both in the men's and women's game.

I regret the fact that so much emphasis today is being put on physical training for referees instead of emphasizing the

skills involved in understanding the game, anticipating, reading and interpreting the actions. I get the feeling sometimes that, perhaps, refereeing is going in the wrong direction and that the physical is taking over the intellectual.

You can run like Usain Bolt but if you do not feel the game, the running is really pointless. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, when reflecting on my career, I do feel proud to be the most successful Greek referee in football history.

**THALIA MITS!**  
has been refereeing  
for 20 years.

# THINK INVESTMENT, NOT COST, TO MOVE UP TO THE NEXT LEVEL

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S  
GAME MUST NOT BE LEFT TO  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS ALONE  
WRITES TATJANA HAENNI



Picture: FC Zürich

**More and more people in the industry are beginning to see the potential of women's football. The top clubs are starting to invest in it. It's also clear that some fans are getting a bit tired of men's football and looking to the women's game for a different, exciting and unpredictable match-day experience.**

Some national associations, however, are lagging behind when it comes to providing a proper platform for the women's game to expand. Resources are lacking and some associations can stage only a limited number of national team matches – or none at all. Many don't have a proper national or youth league in place.

Since a talented girl will train and play like a boy of the same age across all age categories, the system and its structural support should be the same, regardless of gender. While a boy can focus 100% on his professional football career, the girl has to make sure she has completed her school and university education to cover her living costs, etc.

So it's no wonder girls stop playing football at a young age and don't stay in the game as coaches, referees or officials. What's also very worrying is the number and sort of injuries occurring in women's football. I would like to see more research on this.

Clubs are currently the main factor in the worldwide growth of women's football. National team players come from, let's say, 10 clubs in a country composed of the 200 best players. Clubs are also in charge of the youth teams, so it's quite usual to see 100-200 girls belonging to one club.

Developing women's football requires meaningful and commercially attractive club competitions. The women's game cannot flourish by relying on national team competitions alone. Therefore, any support and investment right now should focus

on women's professional clubs and their development.

The worldwide elite and professional women's club football must be strengthened and the less developed countries encouraged to play more international matches. A balance between the number of national team matches and the club matches is the key to the future. The club matches should be of good quality and, ideally, there would be a women's club world cup.

—Tatjana Haenni



As things stand today, with FIFA, the confederations and many football associations in some parts of the world being slow in their transformation to modernize their organisations, I believe that change will continue to come through the top clubs.

Female players must also do their bit. Through their power today, they can promote the game, act as role models, stand up and support the development of the players who come after them. Together with a change in the culture within football associations, they will become modern, transparent, professional and business-driven organisations where women and women's football can be involved in a fair and equal way.

Developing women's football as a platform for today's modern young women is a sound business case and should be seen as an investment and not as a cost.

**TATJANA HAENNI**

is a global women's football expert and President of FC Zurich women's team until summer 2019.

The paradox is that until better commercial deals are in place, women's football needs the resources that only men's football can provide, but at the same time, for the good of the women's game, it must have autonomous elements which make it different. A systematic structure and set-up is needed for the men's and women's game, providing both with their own decision-making tools and the ability to defend their interests.

In the modern era, both are needed to meet the expectations of society and fans. This means men's football must allow women to be part of their game, supporting them, including financially, and women's football must play its part in making the men's game a modern, diverse and inclusive sport for all.



Picture: Artem Korzhimirov / GC

**INNOVATION, INVESTMENT, DECENT PAY AND CONDITIONS ARE ALL ESSENTIAL TO REALISE THE FULL POTENTIAL OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL, SAYS CAROLINE JÖNSSON**

**Women's football around the world is currently enjoying strong and consistent growth. The career of a professional footballer is finally starting to become a viable option for women. The delay in these opportunities is the result of the unjust suppression of the women's game for much of the last century. While progress is being made, stable and secure jobs remain rare, and major challenges persist.**

At both club and national team level, many female players continue to face substandard working conditions. To advance the women's game, football stakeholders must take innovative and specifically tailored approaches. And these approaches are going to require intervention: the women's game has been inhibited and stunted not only by a lack of investment, but also divestment too long for us to be able to now count on the free market to set it in motion.

# WE MUST PROTECT PLAYERS' RIGHTS TO PROGRESS

Decent jobs, proper training environments, and meaningful competitions are essential for female players and the healthy growth of the game from a sporting and economic perspective. Ninety per cent of players in the 2017 FIFPro Global Employment Report on the Working Conditions in Women's Professional Football said they might quit football early for reasons including starting a family or financial and career motives. Unless these changes are met, the game will lose the stars around which it needs to grow. Cultivating these conditions means:

- Investing in professional infrastructure, from the physical and psychological training environments to marketing, league structures and good governance
- Innovating with unique models for contracts, payments, prize money, sponsorship and competitions, recognising the unique context of elite female players today
- Ensuring minimum employment conditions and legal standards are rolled out across women's international competitions and professional leagues worldwide
- Responsibility for all stakeholders in international football to intervene along these core actions for the positive development of the women's game.

In concrete terms, one specific area that FIFPro believes can have the most urgent and positive ripple effect on the development and professionalization of women's football is the creation of one global set of standard playing conditions for the FIFA World Cup tournament. In acknowledging respect for human rights and labour standards in accordance with the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, FIFPro strongly believes that there must be the same set of playing standards for the men's and women's FIFA World Cups and that the world's leading players should receive optimum conditions for training and competition, regardless of gender.

While many stakeholders in the international football community have important roles to play in strengthening the foundations of the women's game in this regard, FIFA has the authority and responsibility to establish such a global standard for its World Cup. This is not only about ensuring that the players and audiences will enjoy the highest and equal standards at a FIFA World Cup, but it would set a precedent, send an important message, and have key material implications for everyone in the international football community who are driving the advancement of the women's game.

This top-down move on the part of FIFA would also undoubtedly contribute to important shifts in mindsets that have long viewed women's football as a poor relation to men's football.

At the same time, as we embark on actions and policies towards gender equality in football, we must remain wary of blindly seeking equality with a commercial football model that fails to put the rights of players at its core. As the women's game grows, it should recognize and aim to preserve the many positive aspects it currently has, including strong levels of solidarity, its ability to blend careers with education, and its recognition that women footballers are more than just players.

We must pave the way for decent and secure jobs for women as professional footballers. This career path for women is only now becoming a viable option. The fact that this opportunity has arrived so late is unacceptable.

It shows how football has fallen far behind other sectors of society when it comes to gender equality. Today, much of the potential for the future growth of our game is in women's football — the evolution of women's football might even be used to guide the men's game. But that growth will remain potential and stay unrealised if players are not given their rights and protections.

**CAROLINE JÖNSSON** played in goal for Sweden from 1999-2009. Her clubs included Malmö, Chicago Red Stars and Umeå IK. She is chair of the FIFPro Women's Football Committee.

# GAME IS FINALLY REAPING THE COMMERCIAL SUCCESS IT DESERVES

— Misha Sher with Juventus striker Eniola Aluko



BRANDS UNDERSTAND THAT INVESTING IN A WORLD THAT PRODUCES MORE FIT, HEALTHY, CONFIDENT AND EMPOWERED WOMEN IS GOOD FOR THEIR BUSINESS WRITES MISHA SHER

**With just days to go before the Women's World Cup kicks off in Paris, there is talk about the tournament reaching a billion viewers and being the biggest sporting event in 2019. That's bigger than the Cricket and Rugby World Cups as well as bigger than Wimbledon and the Tour de France. Far-fetched? I think not.**

Women's football is finally getting the attention it rightly deserves. So much has been said in the past about a lack of genuine interest from spectators, sponsors and the media. No more! Atlético Madrid and Barcelona recently drew a world-record crowd of 60,739 for a women's football match, followed a week later by another record, this time in Italy, where Juventus ladies welcomed 39,000 for their match against Fiorentina. While this hasn't changed women's football overnight, it was a clear demonstration of the appetite which exists for the sport.

It's crazy to think that it wasn't that long ago when the English FA banned women from using its facilities and only 15 years since the former president of FIFA, Sepp Blatter, suggested that the best way to make the game more popular was for the women to wear tighter shorts. You couldn't make this stuff up.

Brands and media owners, the two stakeholders without which it's impossible to grow the sport, are finally getting involved in a truly transformative way. VISA has taken advantage of UEFA's decision to unbundle the rights to women's football (another important move) to sign a ground-breaking

seven-year deal to become the first ever sponsor of UEFA women's football. The significance of this cannot be over-stated.

When one of the world's biggest blue-chip companies makes a long term and substantial financial commitment to something, it sends a message of where they see the space going. It's no surprise that this was followed by a similar move by Nike and more recently by Barclays and Boots in the UK, to invest in the game across all levels.

In a world where everything is becoming commoditized and people are inundated with advertising, brands understand that standing out is about communicating more than product and price. It's about what you believe and how you influence culture because increasingly people's consumption is a statement of their beliefs.

All things being equal, they want to know that a brand they engage with and buy from is active in making their world a better place. VISA, Nike, Barclays and Boots understand that investing in a world that produces more fit, healthy, confident and empowered women is good for their business. Consumers will relate to that narrative and employees will feel more attracted to being part of those organizations.

Growing up in the United States, I had a unique opportunity to witness the power of women's football on wider culture and particularly on young girls. I've seen first-hand what happens when girls can compete all through their childhood, adolescence and university while having role models like Mia Hamm, Abby Wambach, Alex Morgan and Megan Rapinoe, to name a few. When they watch these women perform at the highest level, they see reflections of themselves and can believe that achieving those or other heights is within their reach. They grow up more confident and better equipped to take on any of life's personal and professional challenges.

The U.S. women's national team is more than an excellent women's team – their ability transcends gender. I've seen bars packed with men wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the names of players from the women's national team. If that's not a sign of the sport's appeal, I don't know what is. The World Cup final in 2015, in which the USA beat Japan, had the highest TV audience of all time for any soccer game in the U.S. No, not just the highest audience for a women's game – any football game, ever!

The challenge, until recently, was to use those opportunities to create ongoing media coverage and attract sponsorship to provide the sport with the platform to grow. At MediaCom, we felt strongly about the potential that women's sport offered to society and wanted to use our position at the cross-section of media, advertising and talent to drive meaningful change. After all, so much of our agency's success can be attributed to diversity and gender equality at all levels of our organization.

We started by signing England international Eniola Aluko, with the aim of telling her incredible story through brand partnerships, media and philanthropy. Here was a young woman from an immigrant family whose only path to the top of her sport was to play with boys while enduring constant ridicule. Not only did she go on to represent her country over 100 times at some of the biggest competitions in the world, including the Olympics and World Cup, she did so while finishing first in her law class and building a successful media career.

We worked with Eni to develop ground breaking partnerships with Under Armour, UN Women and Sally Hansen, where she featured in the brand's first global campaign challenging stereotypes and encouraging female diversity. Her elevated profile led to a book deal with Yellow Jersey, a sport division of the world's biggest publisher, Penguin Random House. Eni will also soon feature in a global documentary about women footballers who played a major role in growing the sport.

More recently, we were fortunate to take Boots on this exciting journey into women's football by developing a partnership with all the UK's home nations and the Irish FA. It has been described as a watershed moment for women's football and rightly so. Having one of Britain's leading retailers get behind the sport is going to be transformational in further elevating the profile and access to the game at all levels.

And finally, in line with our ambition to help drive meaningful and tangible contributions to women's sport, we worked with Coca-Cola to develop a first of its kind partnership with Channel 4 to commission a TV programme 100% dedicated to covering highlights of women's football from around the globe's top leagues. We are working with another client to address the fact that women's sport currently receives less than 10% of sports media coverage while creating a shop window for the incredible talents and personalities in women's football.

There is still work to be done but it's undeniable that women's football has finally been legitimized in the eyes of the media, the fans and the sponsors. I expect more media owners to invest in coverage, as we've already seen with many top news organizations employing dedicated journalists and editors.

We can also expect a continuation of investment from sponsors as rights holders unbundle their rights and begin to treat women's football as a unique and appealing proposition in its own right. What this will do is elevate the sport and its players to the level where it starts to rival the men's game. When that happens, and the game becomes a closer reflection of the diverse society in which we live, everyone will benefit.

**MISHA SHER** is Vice-President Sport & Entertainment for MediaCom Worldwide, part of the WPP group.

# FAN.TASTIC FEMALES SAY YES TO PASSION, NO TO SEXISM



**ANTJE GRABENHORST AND GRETA RINAST EXPLAIN THE AIMS OF AN EXHIBITION THAT CELEBRATES WOMEN FOOTBALLERS AND FANS**



Picture: Sabrina Adeline Nagel / Fan.Tastic Females

The initial idea for the exhibition came out of the 2010 European Football Fans Congress in Barcelona. During discussions about sexism in football, rather than pointing fingers, people wanted to instead showcase that women love the game just as much as male fans.

After a six-year hiatus, members of the project team started raising funds and recruited women from various backgrounds to be involved in the initiative. The process was not without its challenges. From the start, we did a huge amount of networking and lobbying with potential sponsors to explain why the project mattered.

Arranging interviews with the women featured in the exhibition required a lot of international travel, but clubs weren't

always welcoming. Sometimes we weren't allowed in the stadiums to film interviews, or we couldn't get hold of licensed footage. As it is an exhibition by fans for fans, we had to make sacrifices – missing matches and special events at our home clubs, as well as being with our friends. Despite this, the experience was empowering for all the women involved, increasing their self-confidence and connecting many who previously had felt isolated.

The final result was worth it all: a travelling, accessible, multimedia exhibition that can be easily set up in any location. More than 90 women from 21 countries have shared their inspiring stories about their own personal fan identity.

One of the women featured, for example, is

80-year-old Maria Petri, a die-hard Arsenal fan who has been going to men's, women's, and youngsters' matches, both home and away, since the 1950s. Another is Karen Espelund, who wanted to play football when it was still banned for women and who is now in the highest ranks of the Norwegian association and UEFA. And there is Magareta Lindgren, a grandmother and Göteborg supporter, who is one of the most committed and noisiest spectators in the stadium. All the women featured reflect that football is for all – young, old, straight, gay, trans, cis, abled or disabled, and every nationality. It's great that men as well have become involved in and supportive of the project.

Fan.Tastic Females helps women realise that it is not abnormal to be football fans. It helps women say: "I am where I am and it



— Ada Hegerberg, the first female Ballon d'Or winner

Picture: Mark Hawkins / Alamy

is right for me to be here." Journalist Simon Volpers, who also tours with the exhibition from time to time, said: "The paradox of the exhibition is that it focuses on women to one day have no focus on women [as an anomaly in football] anymore."

Whilst Fan.Tastic Females celebrates women's passion for football, we can't ignore the fact that sexism still abounds in the sport. We all remember when VfL Wolfsburg's female players were not allowed to celebrate winning the championship and German Cup whilst the male team were still at risk of relegation. Last year Lazio Ultras published a statement that women should not be allowed to sit in the first 10 rows of the Olympic stadium. Iranian women are fighting for the right to be allowed in stadiums. Many female fans are regularly

challenged to defend their fandom – by proving their detailed knowledge of their team, or the game. Even professional players are not exempt from sexism.

Who can forget the cringing moment when Ada Hegerberg, the first female Ballon d'Or winner, was asked to twerk on stage by the male host, DJ Martin Solveig, as she received the prestigious award in Paris.

The Fan.Tastic Females exhibition is part of a growing movement to celebrate and promote women as fans and players. We have already witnessed many firsts – and hopefully there will be many more to come: the first female commentator for a large tournament (Claudia Neumann at EURO 2016); the first female referee in the Bundesliga (Bibiana Steinhaus); the

first female referee in France's Ligue 1 (Stéphanie Frappart); the first female coaches of a top men's team (Corinne Diacre, Clermont, and Imke Wübbenhorst, BV Cloppenburg); the first ever recipient of the Ballon d'Or Féminin (Ada Hegerberg); the first female club president (Diana Langes, WSG Swarovski Wattens); the first woman to chair a nationwide fan initiative (Katrien van der Borgh, Belgium); and the first woman to chair a national executive committee (Karen Espelund, Norway).

In 2019, the total sum of the trophy money for the women's World Cup in France will be around 50 million US dollars, an increase of more than 100% from the World Cup in 2015. There are nation-wide networks of female fans in Brazil, Sweden and Germany. The #DeixaElaTrabalhar ("Let her do her job") campaign in Brazil is fighting back against the sexual harassment of female sports journalists. In stadiums, up to 30% of attendance is female, and stewards are trained for female-oriented needs.

Women have been present in football for years. Now, they are finally and firmly in the spotlight.

**THE FAN.TASTIC FEMALES**  
travelling exhibition is supported  
by Football Supporters Europe.

# WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IS A PURE JOY TO WATCH



Picture: FC Zürich

**THIS IS THE GAME AT ITS BEST, BRIMMING WITH TALENT AND UNTAINTED BY A LACK OF FAIR PLAY WRITES SEBASTIAN SZLENKIER**

**As a fan, what I find best about women's pro football is its accessibility. It is an entirely different sport to the men's game for several reasons. The sport is much more affordable. This means you have an opportunity to watch good football without having to pay an exorbitant sum for the privilege. Women's football is no longer viewed in comparison to the men's game, but is instead recognised on its own merits. There is so much about women's football that is appealing for fans.**

Increasing media coverage means the sport is more accessible than ever before. But despite having so much to offer, the audience for the women's game in terms of spectators and viewers is still nowhere near as high as it could or should be. Even if the level of media coverage is expanding, a lot more can be done. I'm convinced that women's football will gain more recognition as it receives greater exposure and more resources are invested in advancing the sport.

I first got interested in the sport after watching the FA Women's Cup in England and seeing Arsenal dominate the competition for successive years. It's great to see how the game has developed and the healthy competition within the sport as more clubs take an active interest in promoting their women's teams. With the rise of Chelsea and Manchester City in the last few years, it is refreshing to see Arsenal being given a run for their money after bossing the league and competitions in the past.

Many teams have started to take women's football very seriously and are reaping the rewards. Manchester City and Chelsea are

marketing their women's teams in a way which would have been unheard of even five years ago. For me, the FA Women's Cup has always been a great spectacle and, as a fan, the fact that the final of the competition has moved to Wembley is a testament to the respect that women's football is increasingly now given.



**SEBASTIAN SZLENKIER**  
is based in London.

of progress has been made already. The sport is hugely exciting and I'm sure that will continue to be the case, especially as more girls take up the game.

The offer for fans has improved immeasurably too. There is now more opportunity to watch your team, more news is reported and more information is available, especially via social media. The sport has a fantastic foundation from which it can increase its popularity and appeal to an even more mainstream audience.

One particularly important factor for me is that women's sport epitomizes fair play. It is not tainted by the simulation and theatrics which spoil men's football. The women are focused on playing football and not deceiving the referee. It is so refreshing to be able to watch the game at its purest form. It's about playing for the shirt and giving your all. I hope this aspect of the sport doesn't change as it grows.

One thing people often fail to take into account is the quality of the football. There are some truly incredible players out there. U.S. star Abby Wambach was an amazing trail-blazer. The 184 goals she scored for the U.S. between 2001-15 is a record unsurpassed by any player, male or female. While the women players may not have the physical strength of their male pro peers, they ooze talent and skill. I was totally gripped watching the last World Cup in Canada – there was so much entertainment on offer. I'm looking forward to seeing it reach new heights in this summer's tournament in France.

The possibilities for the future of the sport are endless. The women's game has had much less time to grow than the men's, but it's making up for that lost time. A lot



# ESPORTS BRINGS GAME TO NEW AUDIENCE

— Lillie Klefelt and Liza Lind



**The explosion of interest in women's football on the pitch – has been matched by a boom in sport-related computer video games. Esports football is attracting a massive audience, especially among millennials.**

In its 2019 Global Esports Market Report, market analytics firm Newzoo predicts that esports will generate more than \$1 billion in global revenue this year, a year-on-year growth of nearly 27%, and almost double its audience to nearly 600 million people by 2020. The highest-grossing individual esports revenue stream worldwide is sponsorship, generating more than \$450 million in 2019.

The findings are echoed by the US Video Advertising Bureau which forecasts that

esports sponsorship, advertising and media rights revenues will reach \$1.5 billion by 2022, a 67 percent increase on 2019 projections.

Leading men's and women's football clubs have been quick to seize on the esports phenomenon by creating their own teams. Gamers wear their team's shirts and represent them in FIFA or Pro Evolution Soccer games, as well as non-football related competitions.

France's Ligue 1, for example, has its esports equivalent, and this year's finals saw players representing Monaco, SM Caen and PSG. Lyon were the winners of the 2018 E-Ligue 1 Orange title.

UEFA has launched a new esports Champions

League, in association with the EA SPORTS™ FIFA 19 Global Series, which follows the launch of a similar ePremier League tournament in January. "We see the eChampions League competition as an important step in connecting with existing and new fans of the UEFA Champions League," says Guy-Laurent Epstein, UEFA marketing director.

California-based EA (Electrical Arts) is one of the biggest global players in esports. It features a dozen national women's teams (Germany, USA, France, Sweden, England, Brazil, Canada, Australia, Spain, China, Italy, Mexico) in its FIFA 16 competition. Today's top players can be icons on the pitch and on-screen at the same time. High-tech animations recreate the real movements and playing styles of star players such as the USA's Alex Morgan, Canada's Christine Sinclair and England's Steph Houghton.

In an interview published on the EA website, Houghton comments: "Anybody who has a love for football has to have grown-up playing FIFA. Featuring on FIFA ... raises the profile for women players but also raises awareness of the game to a new audience."

Stepping on freshly-cut grass or turning on a console is not a matter of gender, it's a matter of passion for the game in whatever form it takes.

The Planet Football website recently published the results of a survey among 1,000 male and female fans which found that 72% actually prefer playing football video games to the real thing. Most also regard esports as a genuine sport.

Lillie Klefelt and Liza Lind typify the new generation of esports football fans. The Swedish friends are both fans of League of Legends, one of the largest esports which runs tournaments worldwide. The first Season 1 Championship took place at DreamHack in Malung, Sweden, in 2011.

WITH GLOBAL REVENUES SET TO TOP \$1 BILLION IN 2019, IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT FOOTBALL IS CHAMPIONING ESPORTS TOURNAMENTS WRITE LILLIE KLEFELT AND ALESSANDRO GAILLARD



For Lillie, DreamHack is "the coolest gaming experience ever". She has been a regular since her teens.

She sees a natural link between esports and more traditional sports. "We have coaches, training facilities, camps, players and fans. This means we also need the same structure and funding as other sports. Liza and I have been working with the Sweden Sport Federation to gain national recognition and increase our funding."

The pair developed their passion for esports when they worked as coaches at a League of Legends camp in 2016. The organisers worked hard to ensure an equal ratio of girls to boys but when the time came for the tournament, many of the girls tended to take a back seat and asked the boys to take the lead.

"They were questioning their own abilities as female gamers against the men and that obviously bothered us. We saw ourselves in these girls and knew there was something more we could be doing," says Lillie.

This feeling of not being good enough to play reflects what happens too often in the real football community. For Lillie, it's about discrimination and lack of support. Just like girls who want to grow up and play football like Nilla Fischer or Caroline Seger, girls who play esports tend to not be supported by their parents or told they will grow out of the game.

"That's why we started a Facebook group called Female Legends. It was a space for girls and non-binaries to come together and learn how to play within a safe space of like-minded individuals. We started in 2016 with 80 members, which seemed huge at the time. Three years on, we now have around 2,500 members.

"Our objective is to demonstrate that female Esport athletes are a force to be reckoned with and that they are confident in themselves in the wider world too.

"We emphasise the importance of staying physically active because you need stamina to be a strong team player and a winner. We

work on team building games and sometimes play real football to stay in shape and devise strategies to win which relate back to the esports videogames we then play."

Lillie and Liza are currently working on creating a women's European esports league for girls playing Legends. Their objective is to help mentor girls interested in esports, so they can improve their skills and host their own events.

Whilst part of Female Legends is training-based, it is also a support for women in the online esports community. "Sadly, even in large Facebook groups, we still see sexist comments being posted. It's just like the real game, unfortunately. Our message to female players is don't take any abuse or bullying. Speak up against what is wrong," says Lillie.

**LILLIE KLEFELT and LIZA LIND**  
are esports football fans based in Sweden.



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The specialised sport practice of BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe) is headquartered in Lausanne, Switzerland. The BCW sports practice was created by fully integrating international sports consultancy TSE Consulting into BCW and has developed strong expertise in all aspects of event bidding and hosting as well as the development of sports policies and strategies for national and international sports organisations. By combining expert insights, trusted relationships and global resources, the sports practice of BCW empowers clients worldwide and ensure their long-term success.

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