

Sponsorship of Women's Sport – The Time is Now

Article By:

Sports & Entertainment - Squire Patton Boggs

Last month, in recognition of International Women's Day, [Sports Shorts celebrated recent successes in women's sport](#) (apologies to Dina Asher Smith who wasn't mentioned... there were too many examples to choose from!). While we celebrated the achievements of women in sport, we also recognised that work still needs to be done to improve the overall image of women in sport and increase engagement from spectators.

One area where there is growing momentum is sponsorship. [Visa](#) and [Adidas](#) have made ground breaking commitments regarding the FIFA Women's World Cup this summer and recently sponsorship in women's sport took another leap forward when Barclays announced that it will be the [new title partner of the FA Women's Super League](#). The sponsorship will take effect from the 2019/2020 season and is due to be in place until July 2022. Barclays is currently the Official Banking Partner of the men's Premier League and used to be the League's title sponsor so it is exciting to see its support for both the women's and the men's game.

The presence of such well-known brands in women's sport is encouraging and we hope other companies will follow suit. We can offer some inspiration to any companies considering making an investment into women's sport.

Reach a wide audience

Sponsorship of women's sport exposes brands to a wide range of viewers at a potentially discounted price. This year both women's FA Cup semi-finals will be shown on terrestrial TV by the BBC, on the [red button and BBC iPlayer](#), and so have the potential to be viewed by millions of people. The 2018 Commonwealth Games netball final, which saw [England win their first-ever gold medal](#) against the tournament hosts Australia, was watched by 1.8 million people, either live or on the BBC's re-run the following day. Sports fans are interested in watching women's sport. [Research from 2018 showed that 84%](#) of general sports fans (more than half of whom were men) were interested in women's sport. Earlier this month a record crowd of [nearly 70,000 watched Barcelona Women's team beat Atletico Madrid](#) Women's team and [a record number attended the England Women's Six Nations fixture against Italy in Exeter](#). The increasing popularity of women's sport brings with it huge potential for sponsors looking for a good return on their investment.

Fill a gap in the market

As Joanna Adams, CEO of England Netball pointed out at a recent event, certain brands and industries that would seem to be obvious partners for women's sports do not sponsor any female teams or athletes. Adams highlighted that, with some notable exceptions, beauty brands are largely absent from women's sport. Yet a number of them have invested heavily in men's sports. Appearing alongside Adams at the same event, Nick Read (Managing Director of the Vitality Programme, sponsors of netball's Superleague) noted that putting marketing budget into women's sport is conventionally understood to be more risky, as "the business case hasn't necessarily been proven". However, as the momentum continues to gather pace and the number of success stories increase, it seems like the optimal time for brands in all sectors to be *brave* and get involved.

Show your fans you care

Not only is association with women's sport good for the profile of women in sport, it can also be a positive move for the brands themselves. It can prove to their existing followers that they care about women's sports and are doing something to make a difference, by investing in women's sport and helping to raise its profile. Yet brands should be mindful of Joanna Adams' comments in her recent appearance alongside netball sponsors Vitality; sponsoring women's sport should not be part of a CSR initiative or a box-ticking exercise. It was clear to her that Vitality's support was genuine and this helped close the brand's sponsorship deal with England Netball.

An opportunity for smaller companies

Most companies mentioned in this blog so far are multinational corporations. Another benefit of sponsoring women's sport is that prices have not (yet) caught up to those seen in men's sport and so can create opportunities for smaller brands to get wide exposure. For example, kit sponsors in the FA Women's Super League include Yeo Valley (Bristol City) and Maple from Canada (Birmingham City).

Sponsorship Regulations

Any companies considering investing in women's sports should think about the rules that would apply to any sponsorship arrangements they may enter into with sportswomen and/or teams. Conveniently, the FA Women's Super League adopts the same FA Handbook as the men's game. Within it, the [Kit and Advertising Regulations](#) (the "Regulations") outline the rules on kit sponsorship.

Within the Regulations, advertising is defined as "any designation, message, logo, trademark, name or emblem of any nature". Advertising designated to sponsors is permitted only on certain areas of the player's kit, jackets/tracksuits and clothing worn in the technical area.

On a player's kit, sponsors' advertising is permitted on:

- *One single area not exceeding 250 square centimetres on the front of the shirt;*
- *One single area not exceeding 100 square centimetres on the back of the shirt;*
- *One single area not exceeding 100 square centimetres on each sleeve of the shirt, between the shoulder seam and the elbow...;*
- *One single area not exceeding 100 square centimetres on the back of the shorts; and*
- *Once only on each sock tie-up providing it does not exceed an area of 100 square centimetres.*

Note that no advertising is permitted on players' boots.

The Regulations allow one or more than one company to advertise on the kit. If only one company wants to advertise they can advertise more than one product.

However, under the Regulations no club in the FA Women's Super League, the FA Women's Championship or the FA's Women's National League "*may include the name of a sponsor in its Club playing name unless in the sole opinion of The Association the Club's playing name arises from a historical association with that Club such as a works sports and social club*". This restriction does not exist in other sports such as netball, where, for example, Benecos, the organic skincare and makeup brand, sponsored the Mavericks who became the benecosMavericks in 2017. The Vitality Netball Superleague team then became the Saracens Mavericks following a [joint venture between Saracens rugby club and the netball team](#).

The men's game may have paved the way in the development of the Regulations but with the profile of women's football increasing all the time, now is the time for the women's game to take advantage of the range of available sponsorship opportunities. Given the current momentum, brands should be considering whether to invest in women's sport now, before they lose out or prices increase.

This article was written by Isabelle Sadler and Imogen West.

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