

Gender Pay Gap and the Women's World Cup

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The gender pay gap debate continues in business as it has for a number of years. Confusion surrounding the topic remains widespread with many conflating it with equal pay and others denying its existence entirely. Companies in the UK are now [publishing their latest gender pay gap figures](#) and the data reveals that men are typically paid more than women in most UK businesses.

But what are the implications in sport? It is no secret that female athletes are paid less than men across most sports. We are told that this is because interest in women's sport is lower and as far as entertainment events go, they generate less money. That said, the disparate compensation, even at large combined tournaments (like golf and tennis) still requires our attention (for example, when [in 2016](#) it was noted that at the Western and Southern Open in Cincinnati Roger Federer received \$731,000 for defending his title while Serena Williams received \$495,000 for defending hers just a few hours later). Fortunately for female professional tennis players, tennis has made huge progress paying women and men the same at Grand Slams and certain combined ATP 1000/WTA Premier Mandatory tournaments. Equal pay for equal play, right?

The conversation about the inequity of pay in men's and women's sport has once again been brought to the fore during this summer's [FIFA Women's World Cup](#). The [US national women's soccer team thrashed Thailand's national team](#) 13-0 on 11 June 2019. In doing so, the players scored more goals than the US men's national soccer team has scored in every World Cup since 2006 combined. The US national women's team, having been the favourites this year and now having been crowned champions for a record fourth time following their [2-0 win](#) against the Netherlands in Lyon on 7 July 2019, have already proved that (at the very least) they put on a good show. Nevertheless, the US Soccer Federation refuses to recognise its women's national team in the same way as it does the men's team. As a result, these women are suing [the US Soccer Federation for gender discrimination](#).

So, what do the numbers say? [According to ESPN](#):

"Among the numbers cited in the EEOC filing are that the women would earn \$99,000 each if they won 20 friendlies, the minimum number they are required to play in a year. But the men would likely earn \$263,320 each for the same feat, and would get \$100,000 even if they lost all 20 games. Additionally, the women get paid nothing for playing more than 20 games, while the men get between \$5,000 and \$17,625 for each game played beyond 20."

This disparity is not only unconscionable, it is embarrassing. Wage discrimination in US soccer appears to be entrenched in historical custom and practice. According to the US Soccer Federation's 2016 budget figures (and notwithstanding either their success or their revenue generation) US women soccer players can earn as little as 40% of what men on the national team take. In 2015, the US Soccer Federation [awarded the women's team \\$1.7 million](#) for winning the World Cup. One year earlier, the same federation awarded the [men's national team a \\$5.4 million bonus](#) for losing in round 16 in the 2014 World Cup. Equally, the US Soccer Federation can no longer argue that the women's team bring in less than the men's team. The [2015 budget figures](#) showed a \$23 million increase in revenue attributed to the women's team's World Cup win and victory tour — more than what the men's team brought in during the same period. If that's not evidence enough – a staggering [25.4 million viewers tuned in](#) to watch the 2015 World Cup final between the US women's team and Japan – the [highest ratings record for soccer in the United States](#), ever. Even England's 2019 World Cup defeat to the women's US team was the [most-watched British television broadcast](#) this year, watched by over 11.5 million Britons.

The sad fact is that the [disparities appear to go further than pay](#): the US women's team claim to experience “purposeful and institutionalised gender discrimination” in every aspect of their work including in relation to the medical treatment and coaching they receive, how they travel to matches and [having to play on artificial grass more often than the men's team](#), which makes them more prone to injury.

The reason that this lack of parity can continue to prevail is if people believe either that (i) the work that women and men do are fundamentally different and should be subject to different remunerative structures or (ii) that women's sport generates significantly less revenue which should be reflected in the compensation package offered. The US soccer women's team would obviously seek to argue against the former. As for the latter, why is that? It doesn't take a rocket scientist, or even a clever PR agent to understand that if you advertise the hell out of hamburgers, you will probably sell a Whopper or two. This is a key aspect of [the lawsuit filed by the US women's soccer team](#) that is often overlooked by the media – the fact that the women's team is not marketed or promoted as much as the men, which leads to lower attendances and fewer merchandise sales. This bias applies to all women's sports; just look at [women's golf](#), a game that could do with some good publicity. The United States Golf Association (golf's largest organisation) should be committed to advocating more openly for its female golfers. If they want to grow the game, they need to show that they value women equally.

In May this year, [the US Soccer Federation said](#) that the women's team generates less revenue from game ticket sales, although they had “invested in marketing and promoting the US women's national team.” Helpfully, US Soccer did not disclose how much it spent on marketing the women in comparison to the men, an important piece of information needed to decipher whether or not they are actually trying to generate real interest in the women's game. Nonetheless, the US Soccer Federation has [tentatively agreed to commence mediation](#) once the 2019 World Cup concluded and now that the US women's soccer team has defended their title as World Cup champions, they must turn their attention to a different kind of battle waiting for them at home.

So perhaps this conversation is not about equal pay but equal promotion. Women's sport and elite female athletes need equal investment (from both governing bodies and sponsors) for these barriers to be brought down. How else can they be expected to develop players, leagues and role models for the next generation of girls? The gender pay gap is a real issue in sport as it is in business and not one that should be ignored but the topic is irrelevant if female athletes do not have the same opportunity to prove their worth before the game has even begun.

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