



THE WOMEN'S SPORTS FOUNDATION® REPORT:

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF FEMALE PROFESSIONAL AND AMATEUR ATHLETES





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About the Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation® is a national nonprofit, member-based organization dedicated to increasing opportunities for girls and women in sports and fitness through education, advocacy, recognition, and grants. Established in 1974 by Billie Jean King, its founder, Donna de Varona, a founding member and its first president, and many other champion athletes, the Foundation seeks to create an educated public that encourages females' participation and supports gender equality in sports. The Foundation serves as a center for collecting and sharing information on girls and women in sports. The Women's Sports Foundation also produces quality academic research on the psychological, social, and physiological dimensions of sport and fitness in the lives of girls and women.

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Executive Summary

This study fills a major gap in the development of the dialogue around women's sports, a report that for the first time articulates female athletes' sense of the most pressing issues they face as competitors today. The results show that while many improvements have been made in U.S. women's sports, especially since the 1996 Olympic Games, there remains a consistent cluster of issues that needs to be addressed. This report outlines those issues and serves as the basis for policy recommendations and to facilitate communication about athletes' needs.

Because of the growing popularity of women's sports, many people in the general population believe that the major needs of female athletes, from compensation to adequate training facilities, are being met in much the same way as those of male athletes. Because the major women's sports have recently received a good deal of national media attention and produced so many powerful role models for millions of young girls and boys, many observers believe that sports are thriving and lucrative for the participants. The glow of magazine ads and television commercials that depict women athletes seems to say that sport organizations are meeting their athletes' needs.

The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Addressing the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes shows that this is not always the case. Underfunded female athletes often find they have to work two jobs as well as trying to maintain peak physical condition in order to stay at the top of their games. Our results show that when their day-to-day needs are not being met, this creates a demoralizing effect that limits individual athletes' development as well as progress in the sport overall. This limitation is at least partially due to the fact that issues of gender equity are still prevalent in sports governance organizations. At the same time female athletes are receiving inadequate financial aid to support themselves, some sport organizations are limiting athletes' ability to market themselves. In order to take women's sports seriously, this study gave greater attention to athletes' most basic needs for training and competition and the conditions of their daily lives than has been considered previously.

The findings and conclusions in this report were derived from the analyses of two different sources of data: (1) nine focus group sessions were conducted with an average of 6-9 primarily U.S. female athletes representing basketball, ice hockey, rowing, speedskating, soccer, softball, track and field, volleyball and weightlifting; and (2) survey responses of 37 representatives of national sports governing bodies (NGBs) or women's professional leagues. The findings presented provide insights into many common concerns of women athletes in professional and amateur sports.

Some specific findings documented by this study include:

1. Women's Sports and Women Athletes are Underfunded.

Many female athletes believe that current funding levels make it very difficult to maintain physical conditioning and competitive excellence. Although many of the NGBs and leagues offered some form of health insurance, focus group results made clear that the coverage seldom meets the basic needs of female athletes. Both survey and focus group results suggest many athletes are not adequately funded, which places a severe limitation on potential opportunities for development.

2. Communication Between Athletes and Their National Governing Bodies and Leagues Needs to be Improved.

Every sport that participated in the focus groups mentioned that there is a need for better communication between athletes and their governing bodies and leagues. Athletes feel policies often change arbitrarily and without consulting them, that they are sometimes not provided with basic information such as when competitions and training camps will be, and that they do not have adequate forums in which they can voice their concerns.

3. Gender Inequity Remains a Problem.

Counter to the public image and hype, actual conditions for female athletes are not as good as most people assume. While female athletes recognize and appreciate the improvements that have been made in women's sports, gender inequities in funding, compensation, and overall support remain a reality in many sports.

4. Women Athletes and Women's Sports are not Receiving Adequate Publicity and Promotion.

Athletes in many sports feel there is a lack of exposure, and that NGBs and leagues are often not making efficient use of print and visual media to promote women's events and teams. While basketball and soccer are achieving some widespread exposure, this could keep improving, and other sports have a long way to go.

5. More Female Coaches are Needed.

Many female athletes feel that the low number of female coaches sends the message that women are not taken as seriously as authority figures as men are. While women athletes are functioning as role models for younger girls, they are lacking role models for themselves. There was also some consensus that communication between athletes and coaches would improve if there were more women coaches.

6. Greater Representation by Women Athletes is Needed in Governance Organizations.

Many female athletes agreed that more input from athletes is needed in decision making by governing boards. They reported not having access to their athlete representatives, that their voices are not being heard by leadership, and that the decisions most affecting their lives are sometimes made without consulting them.

7. Progress Has Been Made.

Despite their sense of the need for improved conditions, athletes on many teams expressed a positive sense of change in terms of their opportunities in sport, and the overall support for and acceptance of female athletes. Most felt old stereotypes had been dispelled, and at least one sport thought that they received even more support and attention than their male counterparts.

Our results, which will first be presented at the Women's Sports Foundation/USOC Athletes' Summit in July 1999, suggest that the media attention recently given to women's sports and the prestige the general public assumes the athletes are receiving are not actually substantiated by financial and other support from the governing bodies and leagues in a number of cases. In order to address these issues, the Women's Sports Foundation and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes has drawn up a list of guidelines included in the "Policy Recommendations" section.

Introduction

Women's sports have had a long and not always affirmative history. Earlier generations of female athletes lacked opportunities to play the games they loved, social censure if they did so, and lack of recognition for their achievements. Therefore, up until the current day, the main goal of women's sports advocates has been to advance opportunities for women to play, and to further the social acceptance of the female athlete.

Media images often serve as a barometer of social acceptance since the media teach us who to look up to and admire. For most of the 20th century the lack of representation of female athletes both reflected and created the lack of public support. But by the mid-'90s, with increasing corporate endorsement, conditions for the female athlete began to change. "The Year of the Woman" at the 1996 Olympic Games turned out to be just that, generating gold-medal performances for U.S. women in basketball, gymnastics, soccer, softball, synchronized swimming, swimming and track and field, garnering enough interest to support successful professional leagues and make female athletes hot prospects for advertisements and media appearances.

This positive change in the female athlete's status has been accompanied by a shift in the goals of women's sports advocates. While women's sports advocates clearly recognize that the battles for greater participation and opportunity are far from won, *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Addressing the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes* takes as its point of departure the assumption that women athletes have indeed arrived, and it is time to take a serious look at the actual conditions they face in their daily lives as women in sport and sport organizations.

While conditions have improved considerably for women in sports, the general public may be surprised to learn that its new role models still play under conditions sometimes less than desirable. Issues like inadequate funding, pay inequity, and less than ideal communication between national sport governing bodies and leagues and the athletes are part of most athletes' everyday experiences.

With the increasing cultural centrality of women's sports, after years of exclusion, athletes are beginning to articulate their perspectives and concerns. *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Addressing the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes* is the first national vehicle through which women athletes from across the country and throughout women's sports have articulated their overarching concerns. What follows are policy recommendations that are intended to foster positive changes.

The report was conceived when, in the mid-'90s, the Women's Sports Foundation began to receive an increasing number of telephone calls from athletes asking for assistance in negotiating with their governing bodies and leagues, finding or dealing with agents, and learning about their legal rights. Legal questions included their personal right to use of their image, compensation for sport governing bodies' and leagues' use of that image, and conflicts with governing bodies and leagues in terms of outside endorsement contracts. Donna Lopiano, the Executive Director of the Foundation, fielded and ran with many of these requests for information or action and began a dialogue with representatives of NGBs and leagues.

In response to these inquiries, in 1997 the Foundation formed the Ad Hoc Committee on the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes, chaired by Suja Thomas. The committee included athletes, representatives of the USOC, national governing bodies and corporations, and lawyers and labor experts. Led by the committee and Yolanda Jackson, Director of Athlete Services, the Foundation embarked upon a fact-finding mission. Focus group interviews were designed and conducted with women athletes from nine different professional and amateur sports in order to determine the most pressing issues they face in their daily lives. In addition, a survey was developed to obtain data from the NGBs and professional leagues regarding their levels of athlete support.

This report presents the results of the focus group sessions and surveys. We make some conclusions based on issues raised in the interviews, and present information generated by the survey that serve as a comparative basis for the benefits offered by the U.S. national governing bodies and professional women's sports leagues. Moreover, this report presents specific policy recommendations based on the results of the focus group interviews and the sports organization surveys.

Focus Group Results

The focus group sessions showed that athletes had many different concerns, which can be summarized as follows:

The Need for Effective Communication Between NGBs and Athletes

Boards

In many sports, focus group participants thought that having the required 20% representation by athletes on USOC and NGB committees and boards would help facilitate better communication. Some groups stated that the lack of turnover on the NGB board and with athlete representatives created a climate where open communication was difficult, and that the selection of athlete representatives was sometimes not by election but rather appointment. This meant that athletes particularly favored by NGBs were often selected. Some athletes reported conflicts of interest on the board. In fact, one focus group flatly stated that “our governing body gives preferential treatment to who they like. There are no standards.” Many groups thought that having more women on the governing boards is an important goal. They felt that the lack of women on boards created a situation where it was difficult to make their voices heard.

The Need for More Female Coaches

Several focus groups felt that the low numbers of women coaches was a problem because it affected communication and morale. In the words of one athlete, “I think it’s important that we have female role models, and sometimes the communication is better between females.” There are differences in motivating men and women, they said, that would likely make women coaches more effective. Furthermore, the lack of women coaches sometimes made female athletes feel that they are still not taken seriously, and that there will be little opportunity for them to remain in their sport upon retirement.

The Problem of Inconsistent Scheduling

Several sports reported the need for better communication between the governing body and athletes regarding scheduling and what is expected of athletes. They emphasized the need for governing bodies to communicate with athletes regarding selection processes, advance notice of camps, and planning of travel itineraries. Two sports thought better internal organization was needed for establishing timetables and scheduling. Several teams reported that they were expected to travel and/or report to training camp at the last minute, which sometimes created financial problems or led them to compromise their jobs—jobs that they needed to support themselves and their training. In the words of one team, “They don’t even tell us [what our schedules will be]. Other people hear it before we do.”

Better Coach-Athlete Communication

Some athletes reported a problem in communication between athletes and their coaching staff. They indicated that athletes were discouraged from voicing their concerns because doing so was often interpreted as insubordination. Players felt reluctant to voice their views: “Regarding the coaching staff,” said one athlete, “you feel at times there is a lack of communication because there is a fear that what we say will be held against us.” Issues of importance then remain unarticulated. Another sport reported, for instance, that their federation seemed to value physical appearance and body image over performance in order to try to popularize the sport, and that the views of athletes about issues like unnecessarily skimpy uniforms were not taken into consideration: “That’s what they think is going to get crowds there, showing more skin.” This led the athletes to believe that their federation valued their physical appearance over their performance, and therefore that they were not being taken seriously as athletes. They reported that this has a very negative effect on team morale.

Inconsistent Standards and Lack of Athlete Input

Several sports reported a lack of organizational communication in terms of unclear qualification rules and standards, and a lack of voice in decisions that affect athletes directly. Furthermore, some sports reported that executives on their boards and in their leagues often do not know the athletes, make no effort to get to know the athletes, and see athletes' issues as a waste of their time.

The Need for More Support, Publicity, and Marketing

Lack of Funding

Except for a few sports, most groups reported problems with basic funding in terms of travel, accommodations, and training expenses. In the words of one team, "I think as a team we all did our part—maybe we could get a little something back. Like room and board for a week."

Insurance Coverage

Many sports cited the need for full medical and dental insurance coverage, and for insurance to be offered year-round. Currently insurance coverage ranges from full benefits for some athletes to nothing at all for others.

Pension

Participants across all the sports cited a need for some kind of pension plan.

Contracts

Many of the focus groups discussed the need for better contracts, especially with regard to financial support for training and competition.

Outside Ventures

Several sports cited conflict with their NGBs and leagues over issues of support for outside ventures and endorsements; e.g., books, documentaries, and advertising. Athletes want the legal rights to their own names and the ability to negotiate contract endorsements outside of league sponsors. In the words of one athlete, "This is my name. I made it myself. And they're telling me I can't go out [and accept sponsors]." According to another group, their NGB is "unwilling to support outside ventures to supplement income."

Inadequate Training Facilities

Several sports reported a lack of appropriate equipment at training camp and problems with access to adequate facilities to play or practice during the off-season. Some cited a need for a place to train together for more than a week before major competitions so that they will be able to maintain team chemistry and optimum conditioning.

Marketing the Sport

Some athletes felt their organizations did not have the kind of sophisticated marketing staff it takes to successfully launch a sport at the turn of the century. They felt that the amount of time and money devoted to public relations was inadequate to facilitate successful outcomes. Many thought their sports suffered from lack of exposure, and some believed there was inadequate staff for marketing the sport. Others, primarily in less widely known sports, connected the exposure problem to the fact that sponsors rarely feature their particular sport in ads. Similarly, athletes in two sports pointed to the fact that the public has a lack of awareness of certain events within their sports since media exposure is given to some events and not others.

Professional Leagues

Many of the focus group participants expressed a need for the development of a professional league. Although they felt the time is right for such development, they reported that their NGBs were not capitalizing on opportunities to do so.

Image

Athletes in one sport cited visibility and negative public image as problematic. They indicated that the public still thinks of them as too “masculine,” so that they are not seen as athletes but as oddities. One team referred to “an article which was written, we think, with good intentions, but the writer [presented us as] freaks of nature.” They recognized that many sports have overcome this stigma, and they felt that better media campaigns could help remedy the situation.

Inequities Within Sport Organizations

The Need for Developmental Programs

Having more developmental programs for girls at early levels was cited as a major concern within many of the focus groups. Inequity was reported in terms of the number of dollars put into the development of boys’ and girls’ divisions of the same sport, and in the number and quality of programs offered. According to one athlete, “the board of directors is run by older men that don’t support the women’s program ... the 12-year-old boy is getting five times the amount of funding that the girl is getting.”

Compensation Inequities

Pay inequities were cited between women’s and men’s national team bonuses and overall budgets. In soccer, for example, the men’s team qualified for the World Cup and was given \$800,000. But for winning the World Cup, the women were originally promised only \$250,000. Another obvious case is the inequities in salary and benefits between athletes in the NBA and WNBA. Other sports reported that the men’s teams were better funded and had much better connections to and support from private donors: “The men’s teams have a lot more money through [a private foundation]. And a lot more connections.”

Inequities of Representation

With the exception of basketball, the athletes were concerned with the amount of media exposure they were getting. Especially the more individual sports reported a general lack of recognition for all but a few women. Media coverage, for example, may focus on one star athlete and ignore the rest. Most felt that despite improvements, publicity in sports is still focused on male athletes. “As far as women go,” reported one group, “we don’t by far get any of the publicity we should. They focus on men—top names—and maybe one, two females.”

Summary of Focus Group Results

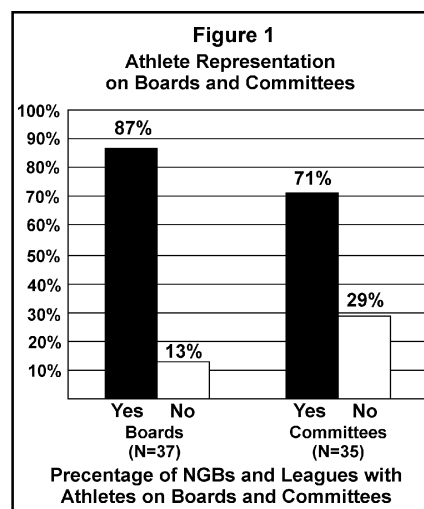
The issues that clustered around the theme “Need for Communication” suggest that athletes’ perspectives need to be integrated more fully into their respective governing bodies and leagues, and athletes need to have more input into decisions and conditions that affect their daily lives. The issues centered on theme of “Support, Publicity, and Marketing” suggest that more attention needs to be paid to marketing and fund raising in order to provide broad-based financial support for female athletes. Greater financial incentives and compensation are crucial to the continuing development of women’s sports. Concerns about the theme of “Equity” described unequal compensation, inequities in boys’ and girls’ developmental programs, and much less media coverage than their male counterparts. Taken together, these results suggest that while athletes in most sports felt conditions were improving, there is a definite need for faster and continued improvement.

Survey Results

The survey portion of this evaluation project was geared to gathering basic information on the provision of services and resources to athletes by NGBs and women's professional leagues. The results presented below reflect existing conditions for both women and men athletes; i.e., no comparison between the sexes was done for this initial study.

Decision-Making Role

The survey data indicated that athletes were represented on most NGB and league boards and committees. Most of the NGBs were in compliance with the mandate that athletes comprise 20% of board and committee representation. As Figure 1 shows, athletes were represented on 87% (N = 32) of the 37 boards and 71% (N = 25) of the committees in the 35 reporting organizations.

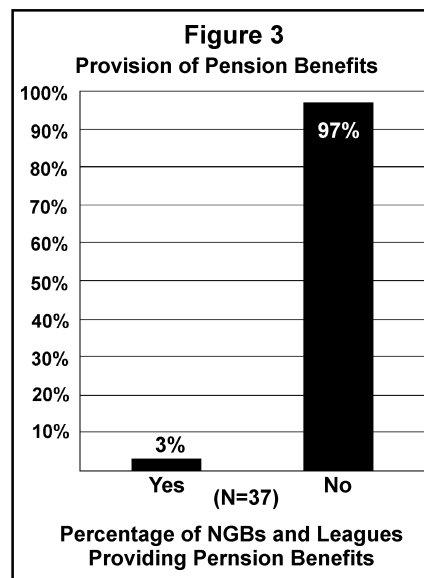
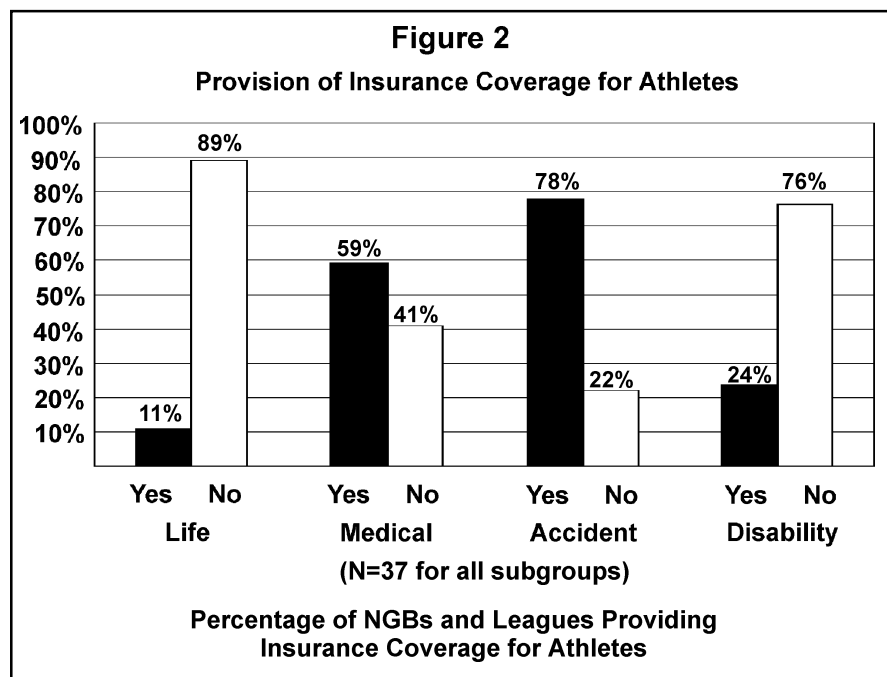


Insurance Coverage

Figure 2 depicts the type and frequency of insurance coverage provided athletes for the 37 reporting NGBs and leagues. The results show that athletes were most likely to be covered for accident insurance (78% of the NGBs and leagues provided coverage, N = 29) and medical insurance (59% of the NGBs and leagues provided coverage, N = 22). In contrast, 24% (N = 9) supplied coverage for disability insurance, while only 11% (N = 4) provided life insurance coverage.

Pension Benefits

Very few NGBs and leagues provided pension programs. Figure 3 shows that only one (3%) of the 37 NGBs and leagues reporting offered pension benefits to their athletes.



Information on Agents

Figure 4 shows that athletes were rarely provided information on agents. Nineteen percent (N = 7) of the NGBs and leagues gave information on agents to their athletes, and 81% (N = 30) did not do so.

Compensation for Appearances and Use of Image

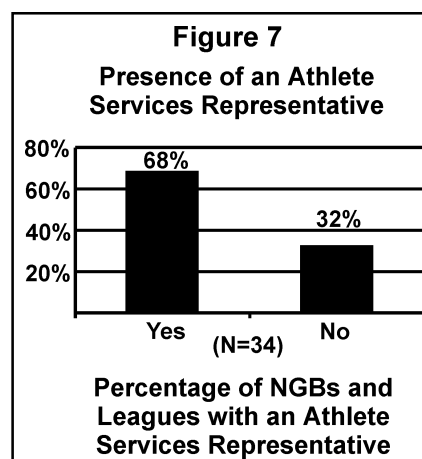
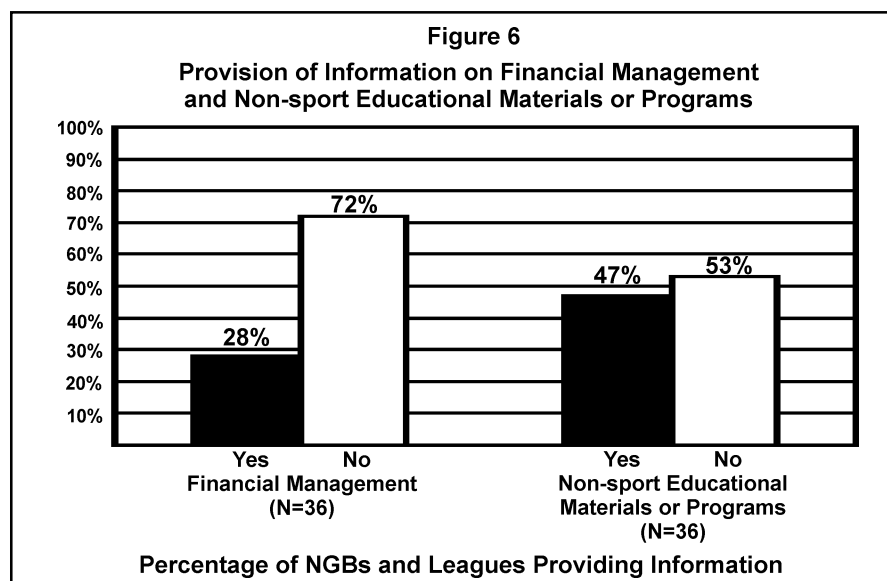
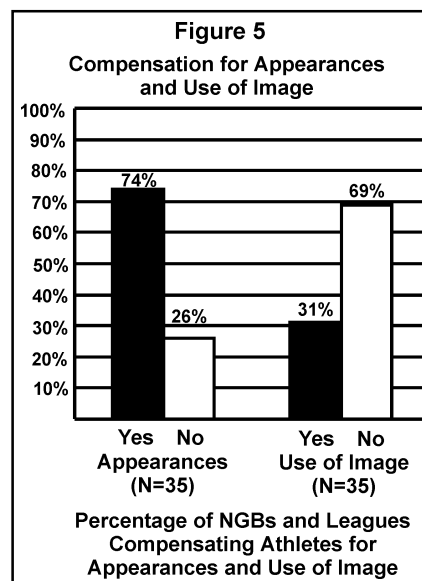
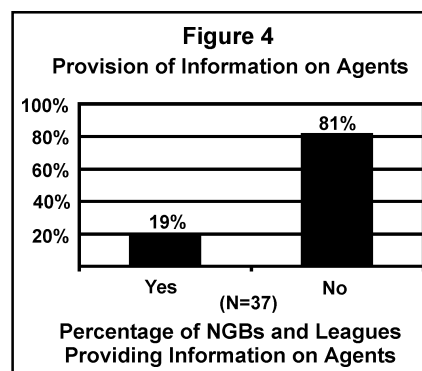
Figure 5 shows the extent to which athletes were compensated for appearances and use of their image across all the NGBs and leagues reporting. While nearly three-quarters of the 35 NGBs and leagues reporting compensated athletes for appearances (74%, N = 26), 26% (N = 9) did not. Only 31% (N = 11) of the 35 reporting NGBs and leagues indicated they compensated athletes for use of their image, while 69% (N = 24) provided no compensation.

Information on Financial Management and Non-sport Education

The respondents were asked whether they provided athletes with information on financial management. They were also asked to indicate whether athletes were provided with educational materials and programs “other than those associated with sport skills.” Figure 6 reveals that only 28% (N = 10) of the 36 reporting organizations supplied information on financial management, while 47% (N = 17) provided non-sport educational materials or programs.

Athlete Services Representative

Two-thirds (N = 23) of the 34 organizations responding said that they had an athlete services representative on staff, compared with 32% (N = 11) that did not. See Figure 7.



Comparison Analysis of Focus Group and Survey Results

The survey data indicated that many of the NGBs and leagues offered some form of health insurance, but the focus group results made clear that the coverage seldom meets the basic needs of women athletes. In order to maintain peak condition, athletes must train year-round, regularly facing injury and needing medical attention. Yet, most are insured only for the competitive season. Moreover, accident insurance and medical insurance were the most prevalent form of coverage, and these forms deal with the short-term needs of athletes, teams, and sport organizations. Insurance coverage that meets the longer-range needs of athletes was much less likely to be offered; i.e., disability and life insurance.

Both the survey and focus group results suggest that in some sports, many athletes are not adequately funded, making it difficult for the athletes and their sports to develop. Both sets of data reveal that the issue of compensation for the use of an athlete's image and individual sponsorship and other market endeavors, as well as the role of athlete agents, deserves more attention. Seventy-one percent of NGBs and leagues surveyed did not compensate athletes for the use of their image, and 81% offered no information regarding agents. Successful marketing of individual athletes has become much more a part of women's sports, but some of governing bodies and leagues currently inhibit athletes' abilities to make the most of opportunities available to them.

There was some divergence between views expressed in the focus groups and data compiled from the surveys. The respondents were not asked to report the extent that resources were allocated to women athletes and men athletes. We don't know, for example, whether men athletes and women athletes were represented equally on boards and committees or if women athletes received comparable rates of compensation for appearances as men athletes. The focus group results, however, clearly indicated that many female athletes perceive inequities in relation to services, compensation, and resources allocated to men and women athletes. A comparison of survey and focus group results suggests a general pattern of participation on paper rather than in reality. Similarly, although 74% of the responding organizations provided compensation to their athletes for appearances, the discussions in focus groups indicated that compensation was often meager or that men athletes received higher rates than women athletes.

A similar disparity exists with regard to matters of representation in the governance process. On paper, surveys show that representation of athletes on boards and committees is meeting USOC requirements. However, many of the athletes participating in the focus groups felt that women had very little voice in the governance process despite representation on paper. For instance, while 68% of the surveyed organizations could point to an athlete services representative being on staff, the focus group participants often felt that their interests and needs were not being attended to by the designated representative. Such disparities highlight the need for better communication between governing bodies and leagues and their athletes, and greater institutional attention devoted to the realities of athletes' daily experiences.

Conclusion

The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Addressing the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes has gathered information which shows that female athletes feel they have gained ground in their chosen activity, and that, for the first time, most have a sense of real social acceptance of and opportunities in women's sports. They expressed feeling part of a very positive cultural development for women and girls, and optimism that conditions will continue to improve in the future.

Despite much positive change, however, the results showed that there is a pattern of miscommunication and misunderstanding between athletes and their governing boards and leagues. The findings indicate that athletes want better communication with the governing bodies and leagues on a wide spectrum of issues, from funding to scheduling to knowing their rights and benefits and knowing who to talk to about their concerns.

Governing bodies and leagues need to pay more attention to the daily details of athletes' lives, from funds for training and travel to basic insurance benefits. In order to play their sport, many of the athletes put their professional lives on hold, thereby lowering their potential to make money. The media attention recently given to women's sports and the prestige the general public assumes the athletes have has not always been substantiated by financial support. And in many cases, athletes' basic needs for adequate insurance, medical care, training facilities and travel funds have not been met. These are issues essential to progress in women's sports.

The development of women's competitive sports marks positive historical change, a real progress in opportunity for girls and women to partake in all the benefits of sport. Yet the data suggest it is time to move beyond a simple avocation of opportunity to a focus on the actual conditions athletes face once they do have the opportunity to play. While the focus on creating opportunities for girls and women to play is still crucial, as much attention needs to be focused on the conditions faced when female athletes are competing. Increasing professionalization and commercial opportunities are paving the way for more opportunities for girls at lower levels, and attention should be paid to every level of participation.

The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Addressing the Needs of Female Professional and Amateur Athletes is the first study of its kind to focus on the experiences of elite-level female athletes and the conditions they face. The consistency with which the same issues came up in each sport suggests that there is consensus about the issues that need to be addressed. It is our hope that this report will help to make those issues part of an ongoing dialogue in the development of women's sports, and facilitate better communications between those athletes and their national governing bodies and leagues, resulting in improved conditions.

Policy Recommendations

General

1. Communication of Findings

The results of the survey and recommendations should be sent to each member of the Boards of Directors of NGBs, the USOC and professional sports leagues. In addition, the Foundation should attend as many board meetings of the NGBs and leagues as possible in the coming year to present the findings of this report, to inform them about the services of the Foundation, thereby encouraging implementation of the recommended policies of the report and the development of ongoing relationships between NGBs, leagues and the Foundation. The Foundation also should make a presentation regarding this report at the NGB group council meeting at the USOC Board of Directors meeting.

2. Equal Funding and Compensation

The NGBs and leagues are encouraged to look closely at the funding and compensation of female and male athletes, including in all national and international competitions with which the NGBs and leagues have any relationship. The NGBs and leagues are encouraged to make every reasonable effort to establish equal funding and compensation immediately.

3. Athletes' Advisory Committees

Each NGB and league is encouraged to set up an athletes advisory committee (AAC), if it does not already have one. The NGB or league AAC would advise the NGB or league regarding issues affecting athletes. Each NGB and league AAC should include equal representation of men and women if both genders are represented in the sport.

4. Female Coaches

NGBs and leagues are encouraged to hire more female coaches.

5. Involvement of Former Athletes

The NGBs and leagues are encouraged to hire more qualified former athletes for positions within the organizations to enhance the organization's communication with its present athletes.

6. Players' Associations

Players should consider forming a players association within each sport in which they can collectively seek certain compensation, rights and benefits from NGBs and leagues.

National Sport Governing Bodies

7. Female Representation

The NGBs should encourage the participation of women (athlete representatives and nonathlete representatives) in the governance of the NGBs. NGBs should include equal representation of men and women athletes on governance boards and committees, where both genders are represented in the sport.

8. Annual Monitoring of Gender Representation and Support

The NGBs should systematically evaluate and monitor matters of gender representation in leadership positions, compensation and resource allocation, and provision of services. Annual reports should be published and distributed to members and appropriate organizations. The Foundation respectfully requests of the USOC that the compliance reviews being conducted by the Membership Committee require minimal data on the participation of women on administrative staffs, governance boards, and committees.

9. Congressional Oversight of Amateur Sports Act Requirements

Congress is encouraged to monitor NGB compliance with the gender equity provisions of the Amateur Sports Act (ASA) on a regular basis.

10. NGB Ombudsmen

Each NGB is encouraged to employ a person to perform duties comparable to the USOC ombudsman/mediator dedicated to dealing with and responding to athletes needs within the NGB.

11. USOC Ombudsman

NGBs should inform their athletes of the identity of the USOC ombudsman and how athletes can reach this advocate. The ombudsman should be encouraged to develop relationships with the athletes serving on the NGB boards. The ombudsman should keep athletes informed of current issues relevant to the athletes' sports and develop a greater awareness of the needs and concerns of female athletes. The ombudsman also should be encouraged to compile decisions affecting athletes (i.e., American Arbitration Association decisions affecting athletes). Additionally, the ombudsman should compile questions and answers posed in his/her daily interaction with athletes and, if possible, publish such questions and answers in an accessible forum.

Athletes

12. Athlete Education

Athletes should educate themselves regarding the benefits and services currently provided by their NGB or league.

13. Leadership Responsibilities

Athletes should make themselves available for selection to and training for boards, committees or other governance structures within their governing bodies or leagues.

14. Women's Sports Foundation Resource

Athletes should look to the Women's Sports Foundation as a resource for information and as a possible intermediary agent between their NGB, International Federation, the USOC and leagues if and when appropriate, and should keep the Foundation updated on issues they feel need to be addressed.

15. Coaching Opportunities

Athletes should consider coaching as a possible career option to address the need for more female coaches.

Appendix: Methods And Analysis

Focus group method was used to provide clear insights into what really matters in the lives of contemporary elite women athletes. Focus groups gave the athletes a forum to voice the issues and concerns they rarely have the opportunity to express. A total of 59 women athletes representing nine sports participated in the focus groups. The participants were encouraged to speak freely and completely, and conditions of confidentiality were established by the researchers in order to facilitate open communication. The typical focus group was comprised of an average of 6-9 athletes and facilitated by Yolanda Jackson. The discussions were audiotaped and transcribed for subsequent analysis. Athletes were assured anonymity, and encouraged to articulate the issues of most concern to them. The athletes were asked to bring up any concerns they might have, and the facilitator used a list of potential issues generated by the committee to suggest general topics that the athletes could address if they wanted to.

The survey data for the report are based on the responses of national governing bodies that include female athletes, and women's professional leagues. Surveys were mailed to representatives of the 55 leading organizations that oversee the activities of professional and amateur women athletes. Thirty-seven surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 67 percent. Responses were coded and tallied in order to generate basic descriptive statistics and figures.

The contents of the survey were based on issues raised by female athletes and the committee in the last few years. The following issues and concerns were identified and integrated into the survey: decision making in their league/NGB; representation of female athletes on boards and committees; matters of salary and/or compensation for professionals and amateurs; availability and types of insurance provided to athletes; access to a pension plan; funds for housing, food, travel, and other needs while competing; provision of adequate training facilities; access to information about agents; compensation for use of the athlete's name or image for promotion and marketing; compensation for appearances; availability of educational materials; the need for an athletes services representative; concerns about equity of benefits and services offered to women athletes and men athletes. Survey and focus group data were then evaluated for patterns and divergence.



For more information, please contact:

The Women's Sports Foundation®
Eisenhower Park
East Meadow, NY 11554
1-800-227-3988
wosport@aol.com
www.WomensSportsFoundation.org