



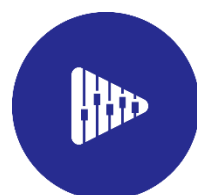
Above: Footballer Erin Cuthbert in 2019.

# The Gendered Coverage of Scottish Sport

The first large scale review of Scottish sports in print journalism, across a year.

Created by the Equal Media & Culture Centre for Scotland.

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**EQUAL MEDIA &  
CULTURE CENTRE  
FOR SCOTLAND**



## Background

Sport plays a pivotal role in Scottish culture and national identity. Football, rugby, and golf dominate, with their clubs and sporting icons deeply engrained in our cultural fabric. An additional 60 plus associations<sup>1</sup> for sports including cricket, shinty, curling, rowing and tennis make up the remainder of a varied and vibrant sporting infrastructure in Scotland. Widespread participation in sport provides benefits for health, wellbeing and social connection.<sup>2</sup> However, stark gender disparities exist.<sup>3</sup> SportScotland research indicates 24% lower participation in sport by women compared to men with even lower rates for disabled women, women of colour, and LGBTQ+ women who face steeper barriers.<sup>4</sup> Transforming attitudes and norms in Scottish society is key to dismantling the gender imbalance in sport and ensuring diverse women and girls feel encouraged to get active.

Media coverage powerfully shapes public perceptions about gender and sport. Equitable, inclusive reporting can help normalize women's sports and showcase inspiring role models to increase participation – not just in sport, but elsewhere in public life. Unfortunately, coverage remains disproportionately focused on men's sport, despite calls for more exposure in the Scottish media.<sup>5</sup> This paper explores how far Scottish print news coverage has a gender bias and examines how addressing this holds potential for participation in Scottish sport, and gender equality more broadly.

## Research context

Recent studies have brought fresh findings on the historic<sup>6</sup> and global<sup>7</sup> underrepresentation and problematic framing of women's sports in the media. An EU report in 2018 examined print and broadcast coverage across two periods, finding women's sport in the UK to be significantly less visible than men's sport. During the peak summer period with live events, women's sports coverage reached 10%, but for the second monitoring period, it dropped to 4%.<sup>8</sup> This mirrors a 2014 analysis of print media from 10 UK outlets over two years which revealed that only 3.6% of sports reporting covered women athletes and women's sport, only marginally increasing during events like the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.<sup>9</sup> A small study carried out for Engender in 2020 found women's sports to be the subject of 9% of all sports stories across newspapers, tv news and social media accounts monitored across three periods.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> EMCC (2023) Diversity At the Top. Available at: <https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/mediandiversity.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Observatory for Sport in Scotland (2019) Sport Participation in Scotland: quantifying the benefits. Available at: <https://www.oss.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Sport-in-Scotland-benefits-Davies.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Health, Social Care and Sport Committee (2023) Female participation in sport and physical activity. Available at: <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdnep.azureedge.net/published/HSCS/2023/10/9/44f3cbcf-b4f5-429b-822d-93fdd1e60353-1/HSCS062023R7.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> SportScotland (2005) Making Women and Girls More Active. Available at: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/documents/resources/makingwomenandgirlsmoreactive.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Glasgow Standard (2023) Calls increasing for more media coverage of women's sport. Available at: <https://glasgowstandard.com/2023/04/26/calls-increasing-for-more-media-coverage-of-womens-sport/>

<sup>6</sup> Higgs, C. T., Weiller, K. H., & Martin, S. B. (2003). Gender bias in the 1996 Olympic Games: A comparative analysis. *Journal of sport and social issues*, 27(1), 52-64.

<sup>7</sup> Cooky, C., Council, L. D., Mears, M. A., & Messner, M. A. (2021). One and done: The long eclipse of women's televised sports, 1989–2019. *Communication & Sport*, 9(3), 347-371.

<sup>8</sup> Erasmus+ Programme, EU (2018) Where Are All the Women? Shining a light on the visibility of women's sport in the media. Available at: <https://womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Where-are-all-the-Women.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Godoy-Pressland, A., & Griggs, G. (2014). The photographic representation of female athletes in the British print media during the London 2012 Olympic Games. *Sport in Society*, 17(6), 808-823.

<sup>10</sup> EMCC (2020) Still a Man's Game? Monitoring the Scottish Sports Media. Available at: <https://emcc.engender.org.uk/news/blog/still-a-mans-game-monitoring-the-scottish-sports-media/>



The nature of this coverage is also gendered, frequently employing gender stereotypes, highlighting appearance over accomplishments, and reinforcing ideals of traditional femininity. Representation of diverse sportswomen is lacking, and there is limited exposure for women across the full range of expressions of gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity and disability. A comprehensive study by Scottish Women In Sport in 2019 of women and girls' representation in news media found that only 11% related to women, and of these, 22% included content which was perceived to sexualise women. In social media content about women in sport, posts by brands focused on knowledge, femininity and brand identity, and included very few representations of minoritized women.<sup>11</sup> Regressive framing of women athletes fuels harmful attitudes that women are less capable, which works to discourage participation by women and girls alike. Inclusive reporting presents an opportunity to shift attitudes in a positive direction and create a more welcoming sporting culture for Scotland's diverse women and girls.

### Methodology

We used the media monitoring tool Meltwater<sup>12</sup> to run searches for articles focusing on Scotland's top three sports: football, rugby and golf, measured for popularity based on spectator interest and attendance and revenue generated. We pulled just over 7000 articles between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2022 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023, to provide a year's worth of news coverage in Scottish newspapers.

Coding every individual article was beyond the scope of this introductory study, so a small number of non-relevant articles will have slipped through the searches. However, to minimise this, we filtered the articles for major themes not specifically relevant to participation in the key sport in Scotland.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board (2019) An evaluation of participation levels and media representation of girls and women in sport and physical activity in Scotland. Available at: <https://emcc.engender.org.uk/files/laird-et-all-2019.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Meltwater: <https://www.meltwater.com/en/role/research>

<sup>13</sup> For football we filtered for references to the lionesses, Lulu, and both world cups (as no Scottish team were competing). For rugby we filtered for Rangers, Nicole Scherzinger, NHS, fire and Graham Norton. For golf we filtered for Donald Trump.

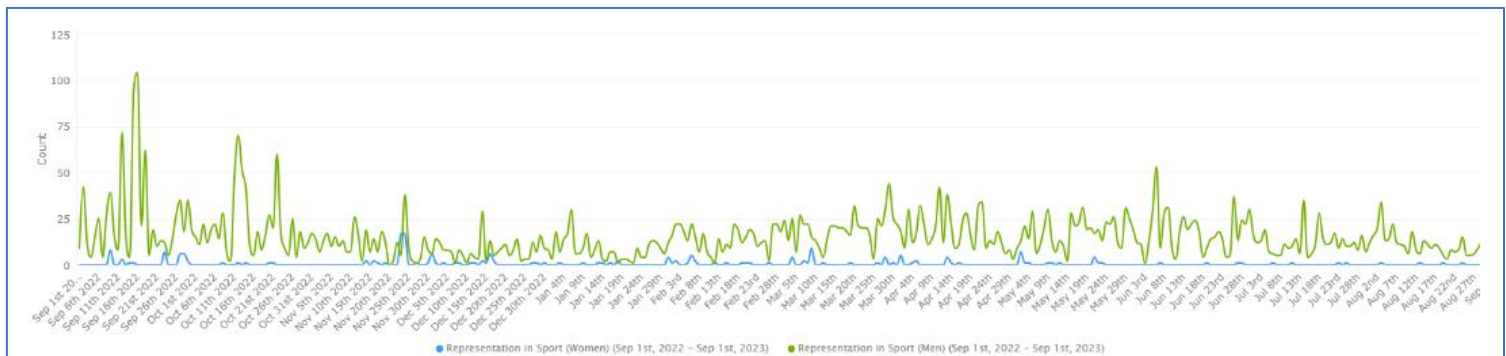


## Findings

### Football

Over the year, articles mentioning men's football in Scotland totalled 5,610, with a daily average of 15 articles. Articles mentioning women's football in Scotland totalled 203 – less than 1 a day. There was 28 times as much coverage of men's football as women's football in Scotland.

When we compare what that looks like over the course of the year, we can see the huge discrepancy between the degree of media exposure men's football (green) versus women's (blue) is receiving.



When we look at how these figures translate to potential reach (the number of potential viewers that have been exposed to a topic based on readership and extension online) the highest peak for men's sports over the year was nearly 250 million people; for women's sports the greatest potential reach was 45 million people.

The impact of this difference in media coverage is considerable, shaping public perceptions about the significance, popularity and merit of women's football in Scotland – despite the reality.<sup>14 15</sup> Football's sphere of influence is substantial, with the potential to lead the way in terms of progressive, gender-inclusive attitudes. An example of the potential this holds can be seen in the case of Celtic football fans who led a successful campaign to mandate free menstrual products in stadiums.<sup>16</sup> While media framing of women's football in the UK does seem to be slowly improving<sup>17</sup> there is still a long way to go before we reach gender-balanced – and gender-neutral – reporting on women's achievements in the sport.

<sup>14</sup> Press and Journal (2023) How girls' and women's football is thriving at all levels in north of Scotland. Available at: <https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/sport/football/womens-football/5185192/long-read-how-girls-and-womens-football-is-thriving-at-all-levels-in-north-of-scotland/>

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Women's Football Noticeboard Advertising for Players. Available at: <https://scotwomensfootball.com/club-noticeboard/>

<sup>16</sup> Big Issue. (2018) Celtic FC becomes the first club in the UK to provide free sanitary products. Available at: <https://www.bigissue.com/news/social-justice/celtic-fc-is-now-the-first-club-in-the-uk-to-provide-free-sanitary-products/>

<sup>17</sup> Parry, K. D., Clarkson, B. G., Bowes, A., Grubb, L., & Rowe, D. (2023). Media Framing of Women's Football During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Communication & Sport*, 11(3), 592-615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21674795211041024>



## Rugby

Across the year, articles focusing on men's rugby totalled 933, covering the Six Nations and Autumn Nations Cup, new contracts, and the inter-district championship.

By comparison, at first analysis the total for women's rugby was 94. Upon further inspection 58 of these articles discussed an ex-rugby player pleading guilty to abusing his girlfriend at the time, leaving just 36 articles. These included coverage of the Women's Six Nations tournament,<sup>18</sup> a review of sexism at Scottish Rugby,<sup>19</sup> and the Falkirk Rugby Club's new project to provide facilities for diverse players.<sup>20</sup>

Although it is entirely possible that not all 933 articles on men's rugby are wholly relevant to the game the difference between this figure and the 36 articles found about women's rugby is stark. Over the course of the year, there was over 26 times as much coverage of men's rugby as women's rugby in Scotland.

Top keywords most likely to appear in articles about men's rugby include: national team, caps, sport, squad, club, captain, coach, and autumn internationals. Top keywords in articles about women's rugby include: game, team, players, concerns, negative experiences, encouragement, funding, and review.

Rugby – both league and union – is traditionally associated with men, and specifically with stereotypical masculine traits like aggression, physicality,<sup>21</sup> and endurance of pain.<sup>22</sup> The findings here indicate that this historically male-dominated sport continues to be represented in the same way. This carries implications for women and girls' participating in the sport and for those who could participate in the future.

As one of the fastest growing sports in the UK, women's involvement in Scotland has flourished, with increased professional contracts for Scotland Women players, and new semi-pro teams launched.<sup>23</sup> Scottish Rugby reports an increase in women and girls' participation from 2,680 to 6,173 since 2012,<sup>24</sup> and have designed a new 2022-2026 strategy to support an increase since the Covid-19 pandemic. At such a crucial stage for the sport, it is imperative that sports editors and journalists are providing representative coverage to reinforce this development.

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<sup>18</sup> The Edinburgh Reporter (2023) Women's rugby – Easson said Scotland were 'relentless'. Available at: <https://theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2023/04/womens-rugby-easson-said-scotland-were-relentless/>

<sup>19</sup> The Scotsman (2023) Sexism in Scottish Rugby uncovered by review into 'allegations of institutionalised discrimination'. Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/sport/rugby-union/sexism-in-scottish-rugby-uncovered-by-review-into-allegations-of-institutionalised-discrimination-4097139>

<sup>20</sup> The Falkirk Herald (2023) Falkirk Council agree sale of Sunnyside Pavilion to Falkirk Rugby Club for £1. Available at: <https://www.falkirkherald.co.uk/news/politics/council/falkirk-council-agree-sale-of-sunnyside-pavilion-to-falkirk-rugby-club-for-ps1-4182897>

<sup>21</sup> Parry, K., White, A. J., Cleland, J., Hardwicke, J., Batten, J., Piggin, J., & Howarth, N. (2022). Masculinities, Media and the Rugby Mind: An Analysis of Stakeholder Views on the Relationship Between Rugby Union, the Media, Masculine-Influenced Views on Injury, and Concussion. Available at: <https://eprints.bournemouth.ac.uk/35573/15/21674795211027292.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Richard Light & David Kirk (2000) High School Rugby, the Body and the Reproduction of Hegemonic Masculinity, Sport, Education and Society, 5:2, 163-176, DOI: [10.1080/713696032](https://doi.org/10.1080/713696032)

<sup>23</sup> The Glasgow Guardian (2022) The Rise of Women's Rugby in Scotland. Available at: <https://glasgowguardian.co.uk/2022/10/16/the-rise-of-womens-rugby-in-scotland/>

<sup>24</sup> Scottish Rugby (2022) Women and Girls' Strategy 2-22-2026 Executive Summary. Available at: [https://scottishrugby.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SR22\\_womengirls\\_strategy\\_summary\\_v6.pdf](https://scottishrugby.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/SR22_womengirls_strategy_summary_v6.pdf)



## Golf

Golf remains a sport overwhelmingly dominated by men, who made up 79% of registered golfers in 2018.<sup>25</sup> Across the year, there were over three times more articles published about men’s golf (215) than about women and golf (63).

Image: Two set of keywords about articles on women’s (left) and men’s (right) golf.



Equally concerning is an analysis of the top keywords included in the two groups of articles. Many of the articles where women and golf were mentioned were in fact discussions about sexism and misogyny, not particularly within the sport itself, but in other sectors - with reference to decisions being made “on the golf course.” Other, less relevant terms like ‘delivery of action’, are also included in the keywords for women. Meanwhile keywords most common in articles on men’s golf are exactly what we would expect to find, including ‘players’, ‘club’, ‘events’, ‘holes’, and ‘members’. This indicates that articles where women are mentioned have a focus other than the game itself, or golf is referenced briefly in an article which summarises multiple topics, creating a weaker direct association in the reader’s mind between women and golf. Articles for men, however, concentrate on the particulars of golf itself, normalising their visibility and participation in the sport.

Some of the phrases used about women golfers were also disappointingly outdated, including ‘strutting her stuff’ and ‘continues to blossom’; gendered phrases not used to describe men golfers. Scottish Golf recorded a slight drop (less than 1%) in women members, but an increase of 18.1% in junior girl memberships.<sup>26</sup> At a time when young women appear to be getting more involved in amateur, and indeed professional golf, it is imperative that the language and context of articles about the sport, as well as the quantity, are as gender-balanced as possible. This shapes positive attitudes towards participation. Sports journalism could also help to interrogate the reasons why golf remains inaccessible to so many in Scotland, allowing it to remain dominated largely by white, economically advantaged, able-bodied people – and excluding the remaining majority of the population in the process.

<sup>25</sup> Whigham, S., Bowes, A., Kitching, N., & Bairner, A. (2021). Selling Scotland? Selling women’s golf? The 2019 Solheim Cup in the ‘home of golf’. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 25(3), 201-216. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/14775085.2021.1883096?needAccess=true>

<sup>26</sup> The Scotsman (2023) Drop in women members at Scottish clubs but girls’ figure jumps by 18 percent. Available at: <https://www.scotsman.com/sport/golf/drop-in-women-members-at-scottish-clubs-but-girls-figure-jumps-by-18-per-cent-4052740>



## Conclusions and recommendations

Women's sport remains secondary to men's sport in multiple ways, including societal status, media exposure, prizes and wages, and sponsorship. This affects gender equality – and wider diversity – within participation in sport at multiple levels, as well as more broadly within society. Across these three sports in Scotland we have identified the continued under-representation – and gendered representation – of sportswomen in Scottish print media.

The wider implications are likely substantial, including an effect on young people's engagement and mental health, our physical health as a nation, and shifting assumptions based on outdated gendered norms. We know that there is a relationship between media exposure of women's sport and equality in the field more generally.<sup>27</sup> Many respondents to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's consideration of *Female participation in sport and physical activity* noted that the comparative lack of coverage contributes to an inequalities in funding and sponsorship.<sup>28</sup> It is therefore likely that increasing the profile of professional sportswomen in quality coverage will "create a foundation for greater commercialisation, professionalisation, and participation."<sup>29</sup>

News coverage can play a key role in highlighting successful role models of all genders, transforming attitudes about who sport is *for*.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore imperative that both print and broadcast sports journalism in Scotland scrutinise topic selection, image, language and editorial, choices, and utilise and follow guidance such as the International Olympic Committee's Portrayal Guidelines for Gender-Balanced Representation<sup>31</sup>. Earlier this year, editor of the Herald, Catherine Salmond, noted the lack of established audience as an obstacle to greater journalistic resources being devoted to women's sports – and suggested a public funding scheme to facilitate increased media exposure.<sup>32</sup> Yet audiences are increasing; domestic women's sport in the UK was watched by 37.6 million viewers in 2022 (up from 32.9 million in 2021), while the average viewer watched 8 hours 44 minutes of women's sport – up 131% from just under 4 hours in 2021.<sup>33</sup> Audience-building tools such as articles on specific athletes, facilities and interviews can help cultivate growing audiences; 59% of the UK population have an active interest in following women's sport.<sup>34</sup>

The EU-funded 2018 paper *Where Are All The Women?* includes specific recommendations for the UK including: (i) retaining a high profile for women's sport in the media regardless of success, as there will always be highs and lows (ii) supporting individual journalists as allies who are persistent in ensuring coverage, and (iii) improving scheduling in the sporting calendar, co-

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<sup>27</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008). Women Sport and the media. Available at: [https://funding4sport.co.uk/downloads/women\\_sport\\_media.pdf](https://funding4sport.co.uk/downloads/women_sport_media.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Health, Social Care and Sport Committee (2023) Female participation in sport and physical activity. Available at: <https://sp-bpr-en-prod-cdn.azureedge.net/published/HSCS/2023/10/9/44f3cbcf-b4f5-429b-822d-93fdd1e60353-1/HSCS062023R7.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> SportsProMedia (2022) "We've got to keep pushing forward": Why greater media coverage of women's sport will provide the platform for equality. Available at: <https://www.sportspromedia.com/broadcast-ott/media-rights/womens-sport-media-tv-equality-dazn-ata-football-togethxr/?zephrossoott=14nrq1>

<sup>30</sup> Midgley, C., DeBues-Stafford, G., Lockwood, P., & Thai, S. (2021). She needs to see it to be it: The importance of same-gender athletic role models. *Sex Roles*, 1-19.

<sup>31</sup> Olympics (2018) Portrayal Guidelines for Gender Balanced Representation. Available at: <https://olympics.com/athlete365/app/uploads/2021/02/Guide-Genders-Balanced-Representation-1.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> Glasgow Standard (2023) Calls increasing for more media coverage of women's sport. Available at: <https://glasgowstandard.com/2023/04/26/calls-increasing-for-more-media-coverage-of-womens-sport/>

<sup>33</sup> SportsProMedia (2023) Study: Women's sport draws record 37.6million UK viewers in 2022. Available at: <https://www.sportspromedia.com/womens-sport/womens-sport-uk-tv-audience-viewership-increase-2022-wsl-euro/>

<sup>34</sup> Nielson Sports (2018) There is a real and growing demand for more women's sport in the UK. Available at: <https://nielsen.com/real-growing-demand-womens-sport-uk/>



ordinating with different sports bodies, and/or collaborating between the women's and men's game.<sup>35</sup>

## Violence

Consistent across all the results for women's sports were articles about gender-based violence in Scotland. Amongst articles on women's football were references to a footballer being signed after having been judged in a civil case to have raped a woman.<sup>36</sup> A significant proportion of the articles regarding a rugby player's domestic violence paid minimal attention to the impact on his girlfriend her unnamed, focused on his future career prospects. News coverage of sports players who have been accused of violence have an opportunity to reach a wide audience, and influence attitudes towards gender-based violence at a societal level. It is crucial that sports journalists are trained in ethical reporting on violence against women and girls alongside newsroom colleagues, and adhere to guidelines available for both print and broadcast media.<sup>37</sup>

## Ladies and Gentlemen?

Gender-marked words like 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' hold stereotypical connotations which uphold sexist – and unequal – associations with behaviour and skill. We included 'ladies' and 'gentlemen' as well as 'women' and 'men' in the search terms to capture as many articles as possible across the different sports. We found a consistent use of 'ladies' and no instances of the term 'gentlemen'. This mirrors research by Cambridge University Press in 2016, which found higher levels of infantilising or traditionalist language for women in sport, including referring to them as 'girls' or 'ladies' - twice as likely compared to 'gentlemen'.<sup>38</sup> Of course, to some extent this reflects the usage of these terms in the sports themselves (e.g. Ladies' Singles). Where possible, however, we would urge sports journalists to use the guidance by the Women's Sports Foundation,<sup>39</sup> and consciously use the more neutral 'men' and 'women'. This has potential to shift associated gender stereotypes (and other biases of race, class, ability and sexual orientation) through language choice.

## Women in Sports Journalism

There is a strong relationship between the quantity and quality of news coverage of women's sport and the number of women in the newsroom. Research examining British media coverage of women's football from 2021 indicates that positive shifts in framing of women's sport was done by women journalists, who wrote about women's football more than men did. The authors, "advocate continued diversification of the sports journalism workforce to dissolve the hegemonic masculine culture that still largely dominates the industry."<sup>40</sup> Women's exclusion from sports journalism in Scotland is seen in the sector's culture<sup>41</sup> and its people. Our *Diversity At the Top*

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<sup>35</sup> Erasmus+ Programme, EU (2018) Where Are All the Women? Shining a light on the visibility of women's sport in the media. Available at: <https://womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2018-Where-are-all-the-Women.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> Daily Record (2022) Pay row player who quit Clyde FC after David Goodwillie signing 'should never have trusted boss'. Available at: <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/footballer-who-quit-clyde-fc-28628900>

<sup>37</sup> Zero Tolerance Guidelines on Responsible Reporting on VAWG: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/work-journalists/>

<sup>38</sup> Cambridge University Press (2016) Aesthetics over athletics when it comes to women in sport. Available at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/aesthetics-over-athletics-when-it-comes-to-women-in-sport>

<sup>39</sup> Women's Sports Foundation (2016) Media – Images and Words in Women's Sports. Available at: <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/media-images-and-words-in-womens-sports-the-foundation-position.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Parry, K. D., Clarkson, B. G., Bowes, A., Grubb, L., & Rowe, D. (2023). Media framing of women's football during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Communication & Sport*, 11(3), 592-615.

<sup>41</sup> The Guardian (2022) Gabriella Bennett: Sports journalism is less sexist than it was – but there's still a long way to go. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2022/may/14/sports-journalism-is-less-sexist-than-it-was-but-theres-still-a-long-way-to-go>





report (2023) found that 100% of sports editors at major Scottish newspapers are white men,<sup>42</sup> while Women In Journalism Scotland's 2022 review of the 95 permanent sports reporters at national and regional print titles in Scotland found that only 3 were women.<sup>43</sup> It is critical that sports journalists in print media are championed from all backgrounds and represent different groups, in order to support more equal and diverse representation in our sports coverage.<sup>44</sup> Women in Journalism Scotland is doing important work on this, with an annual mentoring scheme specifically for sports journalists, an online community for junior and senior sports journalists, mentors and mentees, and a partnership with the University of West of Scotland Foundation course to address a perception, identified in early discussions, that many young women don't consider sports journalism a viable career path. The pilot scheme was delivered to around 120 students and is currently being considered for wider roll-out.

## Gender-balanced Leadership in Sport

Gender-balanced leadership within Scottish sport is another building block towards greater equality – both within the world of sport, and its relationship with media bodies, but also more generally as an expression of gender equality in Scottish society. Our *Diversity At the Top* report found that women make up only 38% of the board positions for thirteen major sports bodies, and only 33% of a further 55 sport-specific associations.<sup>45</sup> Scottish Women In Sport's 2021 study also revealed that attitudes amongst executive leadership and boards of sports bodies in Scotland relied on outdated gender stereotypes about women's abilities.<sup>46</sup> Yet we know that these decision-making spaces can positively affect practices; research in 2022 explored how governance structures within Scottish sporting bodies can be an instrument for change, implementing policies on gender equality with knock on effects on media coverage, investment and participation.<sup>47</sup>

## Shifting Attitudes

Sports journalism has a major opportunity to foreground conversations in Scotland around access, inclusion, wellbeing and sporting aspirations. These conversations desperately need to occur in mainstream sporting coverage, in order to shift the country's attitudes towards who sport is for. A good example of this kind of coverage came from BBC Scotland in 2017, when they independently undertook analysis of 525 elite Scottish athletes – finding that 9 out of 10 went to private schools (22%) or state schools in wealthy areas (68%)<sup>48</sup> and interrogated some of the reasons for this pattern.

Sport, particularly football, plays a huge role in Scotland's cultural identity, providing a framework for how our society organises itself around common ground, values and communication. Our physical, mental and cultural wellbeing depends on access to participation in physical activity. Therefore, masculinisation of Scottish sporting culture, combined with intersecting 'elitism', has a catastrophic exclusionary effect on women, and this is particularly true for women with

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<sup>42</sup> EMCC (2023) *Diversity At the Top*. Available at: <https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/mediandiversity.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Women In Journalism Scotland (2022) *Sexist shame of the beautiful game*. Available at: <https://www.wijscotland.com/news/o2jp4adozpxphwktq0he3032p7i8h3>

<sup>44</sup> Sports Media LGBT+ is a network group and consultancy that advocates for inclusion in both our own industry, and across sport in general: <https://sportsmedialgbt.com>

<sup>45</sup> EMCC, Engender (2023) *Diversity At the Top: Leadership in Scottish Media and Culture*. Available at: <https://emcc.engender.org.uk/publications/mediandiversity.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Observatory for Sport in Scotland & Scottish Women in Sport (2021) *Women Leadership in Scottish Sport*. Available at: <https://www.scottishwomeninsport.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Women-in-LeadershipFull-Report.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> Dennehy, J. (2022), "Romanticising Gender and Governance in Scotland", Velija, P. and Piggott, L. (Ed.) *Gender Equity in UK Sport Leadership and Governance* (Emerald Studies in Sport and Gender), Emerald Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 107-123. <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80043-206-220221007>

<sup>48</sup> BBC Scotland (2017) *Nine in 10 elite Scotland athletes from 'middle class' background*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-38452215>



intersecting identities in Scotland, including – but not limited to – young and older women, Black women, women of colour, LGBTQ+ women, disabled women and women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. In sporting spaces women’s and girls’ bodies are highly objectified and regulated and narrow versions of acceptable femininity are frequently reinforced,<sup>49</sup> compounding exclusion.

News coverage highlighting sportswomen’s achievements can help highlight women’s unrestrained enjoyment of physical activity and challenge normative framing of women’s bodies as physically vulnerable or weak. This can have a knock-on impact on societal attitudes in Scotland towards women’s right to access public space, including sporting arenas, parks and gyms, safely without fear of objectification or violence.<sup>50</sup>

More intersectional analysis of representation across identities and sports is needed. Working with sports editors and journalists to ensure Scottish journalism monitors its gendered coverage; setting targets and supporting more women into sports journalism and leadership spaces could profoundly impact participation, wellbeing and gender equality in Scotland.

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<sup>49</sup> Fisher, C. D., & Dennehy, J. (2015). Body projects: making, remaking, and inhabiting the woman's futebol body in Brazil. *Sport in Society*, 18(8), 995-1008.

<sup>50</sup> Observatory for Sport in Scotland (2020) Gender Diversity in Sport and its impact on governance infrastructure, practice and participation in Scotland. Available at: <https://www.oss.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Gender-Diversity-in-Sport-Paper-Jane-Dennehy-June-2020.pdf>