

# Equal pay?

There is a gender pay cap in sport. Robert Oulds examines the evidence and finds financial disparities are market driven, and not entirely due to an innate prejudice

**A**rguments over the inclusion of athletes that identify as women, but were born male, has overshadowed the more traditional inequalities in sport, namely the gender pay gap. The patriarchy, if it exists, and certainly some sports bodies are dominated by men, could not have obscured that issue better if they had tried.

Nevertheless, disparities in earning still exist. Prize money in major international football tournaments [illustrates](#) the difference in winnings.

Change however is coming. In 2019 FIFA [announced](#) that they will be investing a staggering \$1 billion in the women's game in the build up to the year of the Women's World Cup. That tournament, which will be held in 2023, and takes place in Australia and New Zealand, will also see the [winnings pool doubled](#) to \$60 million. Still far from equal. This disparity need not be so; other sports have led the way.

Tennis managed to equalise competition earnings of those winning its male and female major competitions. The prize money for grand slam tennis tournaments has been levelled. Such a change ignored the fact that the women's game has less matches, they play the best of three sets, as opposed to the best of five in the men's branch of the sport.

According to the labour theory of value, female tennis players are earning more than their male counterparts; perhaps that is what they call progress. In the United States, female tennis players earn more than their American [male counterparts](#). This gap between the sexes is due to the market rewarding the dominance of Serena Williams.

Football has a different culture and values its male and female professional participants differently. In England there are twelve teams in the FA Women's Super League.

Many in the media blame any difference in pay between male and female athletes on sexism. However, this does not prove to be the case on closer examination. A good example of this is the [difference in wages](#) of the US men's national soccer team and the US women's national soccer team.

Soccer is the slang term for Association Football. It originated in England's public (private) schools and is used in the English-speaking world, bar Britain and New Zealand. Both teams have different pay structures, while the men's earnings depend heavily on game bonuses women are paid a guaranteed salary with benefits.

*"US Soccer guarantees WNT contracted players receive \$100,000 per year...atop which they can earn from game and tournament bonuses."* There is no similar salary guarantee for the men's team.

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Players on the women's team also receive *"a robust package of benefits that are not provided to the men,"* including *"fully-paid health, dental and vision insurance; severance; a \$401,000 retirement plan; paid maternity leave; guaranteed injury protection; and assistance with childcare."*

According to CBS *"it's a pay structure the women themselves wanted."* When the women's team was asked if they want the same pay structure as the men they reply *"We want the same [bonus] money that the men are making, exactly."*

If the women's team players made the same bonus money as men, this would not be equal pay when added with the *"guaranteed salaries and range of fully paid benefits"* (which men do not receive).

**Table 1. World Cup earnings growth**

	2010 Men's World Cup	2011 Women's World Cup
Prize money	\$420 million, \$30 million winner's share	\$5.8 million, \$1 million winner's share
	2018 Men's World Cup	2019 Women's World Cup
Prize money	\$400 million, \$38 million	\$30 million, \$4 million winner's share

According to an independently reviewed fact sheet (covering the period of 2010-2018) released by the President of the US Soccer Federation (USF), the USF paid the women's team \$34.1 million (salaries and bonuses) while the men's team received only \$26.4 million.

However, even if the men's team earned more than the women's this would not mean that this was the result of sexist discrimination against women. Between 2009 and 2019, the women's team *"brought in \$425,446 of gross revenue per game in comparison to the men's team, which brought over twice that amount (\$972,147 per game.)"*

The difference would be the result of the men's team being more *"commercially successful."* When salaries and benefits paid by the USF are taken into account, the reverse is true women earn more than men.

Back in England, despite the women's game being granted more airtime and rewards given to fans that watch their club's female players, the pay of women outside the USA still lags the largess thrown at their male counterparts. Little more can be afforded. Salaries in the men's game are [unsustainable](#).

Until such time as the demand to see women's football matches that of the men there will be little possibility for a substantial increase in pay for female players. The lion's share of the rewards for partaking in the beautiful game, once known as the working man's ballet, will remain skewed towards the men.

Familial, cultural, and social norms determine what sport one is interested in. Should one be interested in Rugby Football the region where a fan is brought up largely determines which code one subscribes to, namely League or Union, 13 men or 15. The example of the United States shows that the financial disparities are market driven, and not entirely due to an innate prejudice.

England's Lionesses may find that like women's tennis the real rewards will come from sponsorship, where they will be employed, like their male counterparts, by corporations for marketing opportunities promoting brands.

It will take a substantial change in the culture of the country for women's football to be of greater prominence. Both men and women will have to change what sports, if any, excite them.

Such a radical shift is not on the immediate horizon; sporting traditions and heritage are deeply ingrained. However, soccer was once seen as an almost exclusively female game in America, and now the men are muscling in.

Shifts can happen, but in the USA it took the brave and highly rewarding decision by FIFA to award the honour of hosting the 1994 World Cup to America to accelerate male interest in soccer. There has also been substantial and sustained investment in bringing over footballing superstars to play in Major League Soccer. FIFA's investment in women's football is not enough.

For the time being female footballers will have to rely on a deft use of twitter, and other social media, to burn their presence onto the psyche of the paying public, and consumers, for them to accrue benefits that are more than just a fraction of what men are given.

Perhaps then women will reap the rewards of football. Yet, as business guru Chester L Karrass stated, "*...you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.*" ■

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