



# The Problem with Female Representation in Sports: What It Is and What You Can Do

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A few days ago, I decided to google “famous athletes.” I had just finished watching the San Francisco Giants—my ride or die baseball team—compete, rooting for them from my tiny dorm room across the country. I had been curious about whether or not my favorite players (*Buster Posey and Willie Mays in particular, in case you were wondering*) made it on the list. But the results of my search were shocking, and not because they failed to mention any Giants players (*a true tragedy, I think*), but because they revealed a much deeper societal issue: there were no women.

The top five athletes that first popped up on my screen were LeBron James, Tiger Woods, Michael Jordan, Roger Federer, and Cristiano Ronaldo. In a list of 51 athletes, only three women were presented. After seeing these results, I took it upon myself to type “famous sports broadcasters” into the search bar. Al Michaels, Jack Buck, and Marv Albert were the first three journalists to be displayed across my computer’s interface. On the small tracker at the top of the page, only one woman was shown...at the very end of the list. One.

The final google search I made that night was the following: “best sports movies.” *Maybe this will be different*, I had thought to myself. I had grown up watching movies like *She’s the Man* and *Soul Surfer*, so I naively assumed that the film industry might consider female athletes in a higher light than a simple Google search. But, much to my dismay, the top three sports movies of all time were labeled as *The Wrestler*, *Creed*, and *Ford v. Ferrari*, according to [Rotten Tomatoes](#)—all movies about male sportsmen.

I was heartbroken.

Growing up in a fairly athletic environment, sports were introduced to me at a young age; in fact, I attended my first baseball game at two months-old (*just a bit too young to jeer at the opposing team or heckle vendors for a hot dog*). Since then, sports have remained a prominent aspect of my life, a notion amplified by the fact that nearly every member of my family (both immediate and extended) were involved in some sort of athletics throughout their childhood.

Personally, I started playing soccer at age two, competing until I graduated from high school at 18 years old. Most of the time, soccer was my saving grace, providing me an outlet from the stress of school, extracurriculars, jobs, and life itself. Other times, it was my greatest sorrow, causing me a devastating injury that required over a year of recovery—and two surgeries. Yet, through all of these experiences, I received unwavering support from my loved ones. They’ve never questioned my ability to be successful as a female athlete, whether I am contributing to my team on the field or from the sidelines.

But I’ve been lucky.

For the innumerable women and young girls whose only exposure to women’s sports is through the Internet or through popular media, a sense of disheartenment is surely felt. Upon seeing the results of Google searches like those mentioned above, they might be left thinking the worst. *Are sportswomen simply not good enough to make the cut? Not strong enough? Not important enough?*

The answer to all of these questions is a resounding no. Women have continuously earned a spot in every aspect of sports—from production to journalism to competing—and deserve to be recognized for their work.

But the media has historically failed to represent women in sports...and not only through frustrating internet searches. A [study](#) conducted every five years since 1989—and recently updated this March—concluded that 95% of televised sports coverage is focused on men’s athletics. The research also found that 80% of televised sports news services mention zero stories about women’s sports. Zero.

Collegiate athletics are no exception to the unfortunate reality of gender inequality. A [report](#) released last year found that women had 62,236 fewer opportunities for participation than men in National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports. And, in the NCAA’s three divisions, a disproportionately large number of athletic opportunities were awarded to men rather than women when compared to enrollment rate; this sentiment was found in 87% of schools.

Thus, as in most other aspects of women’s lives, we must continue to push and advocate for representation. This task may seem daunting, and it’s certainly not easy (*history has shown us that*)...but it’s worth it.

As we continue this ongoing fight, we must also, however, remember to celebrate the small victories of women who continue to break glass ceilings in sports. To get the ball rolling, here are a few triumphs that you might’ve missed:

The San Francisco Giants hired Alyssa Nakken as the first full-time woman coach just last year, making Major League Baseball (MLB) history (and *making me a very proud fan*). Kim Ng also broke barriers in the MLB when she was hired by the Miami Marlins as the first female General Manager in the sport. At Vanderbilt, kicker Sarah Fuller became the first woman to score in a Power 5 college football game in December. And, at the Tokyo Olympics this summer, female athletes are predicted to reach a record high of [48.8% in Olympic participation](#).

Today, I decided to type the same three phrases I did a few days ago—“famous athletes,” “famous sports broadcasters,” and “best sports movies”—into the Google search bar. Rather than being devastated by what I found, however, a different emotion took hold of me: motivation.

**My childhood role model—talented women’s soccer player Mia Hamm—once said something that I think is particularly pertinent now: “There are always new, grander challenges to confront, and a true winner will embrace each one.”**

It’s likely true that female athletes will always face new, grander challenges, regardless of their level of play. But we can’t allow ourselves to crumble in the face of this reality. Instead, I invite you to do something else: use these obstacles as personal sources of motivation. Embrace them, confront them...and then overcome them.

This, I think, makes a world in which Google searches *always* include female athletes all the more possible.

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