

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL REPORT 2021

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The World Association
of Professional
Football Leagues



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Women's Football Report WORLD LEAGUES FORUM

Schützengasse 4
8001 Zürich
Switzerland

GENERAL SECRETARY

Jerome Perlemuter
jperlemuter@worldleaguesforum.com

CONSULTANT – WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PROJECT

Moya Dodd
moyadodd@gmail.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Alexander García Ramirez
alexgarcia2000@icloud.com

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ALGERIA



ARGENTINA



AUSTRALIA



BELGIUM



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



ECUADOR



ENGLAND



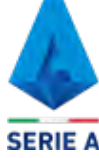
FRANCE



ISRAEL



ITALY



JAPAN



MALAYSIA



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POLAND



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QATAR



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The background of the image is a blurred photograph of a football stadium. In the foreground, a green football pitch is visible, with white markings. In the middle ground, there are blurred figures of people, possibly players or spectators. In the background, a large red flag or banner is visible, along with other stadium structures. The overall scene is out of focus, emphasizing the text in the foreground.



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Foreword

In many ways, football is a mere reflection of society. With its strengths and its flaws. During the last decades, women's football has been wrongfully neglected as a social activity and as a business. As a social activity, it has simply not been recognized as a way of personal accomplishment for women. And as a business, its potential, which is huge, has been completely disregarded. The way in which women's football has been considered – and still is – says plenty about the society we live in and how women are looked over in a world mainly ruled by men.

But things are changing. And it is about time. Now, it is everyone's responsibility to make them change.

During the last pre-Covid World Leagues Forum's annual meeting, by the end of 2019, professional football leagues have decided to engage in a process of sharing knowledge and exchanging best practices on women's football. At this stage, it must be emphasized that most of WLF's members do not actually run women's football at the national level. In most cases, it is under the umbrella of the federations. But still, the need was felt to identify how professional leagues could – or should – be involved in the development of women's football.

Governance, regulation, business development... there are numerous areas to explore.

The idea of this exchange was not to have a quantitative approach by collecting data and developing statistics, but to develop a qualitative approach, investigate structures and initiatives that could serve as best practices for others, as well as to understand and share the dynamics and early learnings from professionalised women's football leagues.

To have a structured and independent approach, we decided to engage Moya Dodd, ex-Australia international, lawyer, and former member of the FIFA Council, whose expertise, reputation, and integrity is undisputed. Moya has been entrusted with the difficult task of developing this "knowledge sharing report".

By no means, was the idea to identify a magic recipe or a one-size-fits all approach to develop women's football, nor to determine who does well and who does wrong. No, the purpose of the project is to shed light on some good practices, concrete cases, and tailored solutions that may be of interest.

The idea of this report is to trigger discussions and lead to other reports and initiatives.

As an organization of leagues, the WLF also recognizes the potential of women's football and wishes to draw everyone's attention on our duty to proactively engage in its development. Not only it is the right thing to do, but we owe it to our daughters and to society.

We hope that you will have a good time reading.

Sincerely,



*Jerome Perlemuter
General Secretary*

The women's game stands on the threshold of a new era.

Ever since FIFA began organising women's competitions in 1988, national teams and international competitions have been the main vehicles for elite performance.

Now we are entering the next phase, where leading leagues around the world can showcase increasingly professionalised talent in entertaining contests, week-in and week-out.

The impact of this growing professionalism is profound, just as it was in men's football. Training environments and game standards are rising. Media coverage has grown exponentially, via both broadcast and streaming, enabling digital-savvy fans to watch

and connect like never before. Elite women's football is televised not only at periodic international competitions, but as year-round entertainment. Sponsorship and media revenues are growing. Supporters are showing their distinctly inclusive and accessible culture: rarely do we see violent conduct, referee abuse, racism or homophobia.

What's not to love? With these characteristics, the women's leagues are becoming the driving force for the elite women's game. To do so with the benefit of shared learnings and best practice – the purpose of this report - will make them even stronger.

We are pleased to offer these insights and learnings, which we trust will mark the start of new conversations and new journeys.



Moya Dodd
Consultant – Women's Football Project

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Introduction

Purpose and approach

The purpose of this report is to:

- facilitate the sharing of information between interested members, and
- understand and share the dynamics and early learnings from professionalised women's football leagues through a qualitative analysis, rather than a quantitative approach.

We gathered information via a qualitative survey (see Interview Guide at Attachment A) and interviews with members who volunteered to share their experiences operating, or collaborating with, women's leagues. Because only a few members themselves operate women's leagues, we also connected with a number of women's leagues that are run by federations, or independently, to extend the qualitative survey and look for learnings and patterns that could inform our work. Thus, we were able to speak with a strong selection of women's leagues in a variety of situations and stages of progress. We also drew on other surveys and material available in the public domain, including from FIFA, UEFA and CIES.

While the information gathered is by no means comprehensive, common issues and themes emerge. We have been able to gather observations and insights around the patterns of development, to identify best practices and practical options as professionalised women's leagues are gathering momentum around the world.

Structure of this report

In section A, we introduce six dynamic women's leagues operating under a range of

governance structures. Two are operated by WLF members, and four others are developing rapidly, in already highly-ranked women's football countries.

In section B, we explore the key themes that emerge from the broader set of interviews and research conducted among WLF members, federations, independent leagues and public information sources:

- governance
- league operations
- audience: fan engagement and media
- sponsorship and commercial revenues
- regulatory and player issues, and
- culture and social purpose.

In Section C, we explore a framework that enables mapping of the situation, and we discuss practical options in women's football from the perspective of a league operator.

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The story of six:

women's football league case studies

Historically, the default structure has been for women's leagues to be run by the national federation. Most of top-level national leagues globally are still run this way, often as a department within the federation structure.

Only a few women's leagues in the world are run by the men's pro league in that country. We introduce two of them below, in Mexico and Colombia.

We then look at four other women's leagues in Spain, England, USA and Japan to illustrate a range of other models, all showing significant or innovative developments within highly-ranked countries.

Below, we set out some basic data, indicating the dimensions of women's participation; then we highlight some key features of the leagues.

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A.1 Mexico



League LIGA MX FEMENIL	Run by LIGA MX	FIFA Ranking 27
Players* 50,000 Approx 490 play in Liga MX Femenil.	Referees** 26 / 660	Coaches** 60 / 4,421
Launched 2017-18		Global gender gap ranking 25
Divisions 1	Teams, overlap Liga MX 18 100% overlap	Format 17 games x 2 rounds, plus finals
Sponsor BBVA (bank)	Broadcast Decentralised	OTT Decentralised
Record attendance 51,211	Average attendance 3,000 [2019]	Average club revenue USD 259,000

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

Key strategies:

01

FULL INTEGRATION BETWEEN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LEAGUES

There is 100% overlap between men's and women's clubs and competitions at the top level. This leverages the strength of the traditional club brands, fan base, sponsors and established infrastructure and operations. Sixteen of the 18 clubs will play out of the same large stadiums in the coming season. Fixtures are co-ordinated. Some huge crowds resulted from these synergies – the record is over 51,000 fans.

However, around half the teams have different kit designs; some have different logos and name variations (e.g. Rayados / Rayadas); and all teams have separate social media accounts with different content. A few clubs are building women-specific facilities, or defining separate spaces within existing facilities.

02

INVESTING IN TRAINING PLAYERS

Liga MX Femenil has developed local talent through regulatory measures e.g. no foreign players initially, raised to a limit of 2 from 2021; and mandatory minutes for youth players. This aligns with the Federation's emphasis and builds on the junior Women's National Teams (WNT) success in reaching the u17 Women's World Cup final in 2018. Four clubs have their own women's director.

An under-17 competition is planned for launch, with the 18 teams divided into 2 regional groups.



03

DIGITAL MEDIA

The league has created homegrown stars, especially through **use of digital media** (since the broadcast rights are not centralised) building the profile of the players. The league has hundreds of thousands of followers on each of Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Accumulative social media reach hit 128M (pre-COVID); over 5 M TV viewers, and 2.5M cumulative attendance. Clubs have successfully cross-promoted to their women's teams on social media.

04

BUILD CULTURE

The league has **challenged “machismo” culture** to build acceptance of women's football. This is central to the growth of the league. The league uses hashtags like #VamosPorEllas and sees women's football as a means of breaking barriers and developing new leaders.



League LIGA BETPLAY FEMENINA	Run by DIMAYOR	FIFA Ranking 28
Players* 12,732	Referees** 35 / 1,360	Coaches unknown
Launched 2017	Global gender gap ranking 22	
Divisions 1	Teams, overlap 18 100% overlap with Dimayor teams	Format 3 groups of 6 teams playing 2 rounds Then knockouts of top 8
Sponsor Betplay, Aguila	Broadcast Centralised; schedules co-ordinated with men's; 1 women's match / week Remaining matches on YouTube (free)	
Record attendance 32,000 for 2017 final (Santa Fe)	Average attendance unknown	Average club revenue USD 65,000

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

Key strategies:

01

FULL INTEGRATION BETWEEN MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LEAGUES

Liga Betplay Femenina pursues **integration synergies** with Dimayor. The clubs are all Dimayor clubs (18/36 had women's teams, reducing to 13 teams due to COVID). Governance and management are highly integrated. Major sponsors are the same, although some additional sponsors for women's football are keenly interested (delayed by COVID).

As a result, **growth has been significant and quite rapid.**

² See infographic and video <https://clios.com/sports/winner/direct/abinbev-aguila-beer/half-fans-79906>

02

BUILDING CULTURE

A campaign by sponsor Aguila Beer² had a huge impact in driving fan support. It keyed off fans' commitment to their clubs, challenging them with the message that their favourite team is now two teams (male and female): if they support only one, they are only half the fan they think they are. This was provocatively illustrated by cutting the club logo in half, and playing matches with half the logo on the men's shirt, and the other half on the women's. Half of the match ball was blank white. All teams in the league joined in, and it became a big talking point in the media. Spectator numbers for the women's games increased 633%, and a record 55,000 fans attended the finals.



03

REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS

Dimayor's commitment to a women's league arose partly to meet **regulatory requirements**: licensing conditions in CONMEBOL require that, to be eligible for confederation competitions, a club must have a pro women's team (although it need not necessarily be in the top league). In practice, this was only enforced on clubs who qualified to confederation level; but nonetheless, clubs looked to build or acquire women's teams quickly. In some cases, existing women's teams signed onto pro clubs, taking players and administration with them.

While not every fan was supportive of women's teams, the vocal support of the **leadership** was important in setting the standard of support for women's football and dealing with negative comments about women's football.

A.3 Spain



League LA LIGA DE FUTBOL FEMENINO (PRIMERA IBERDROLA)	Run by RFEF WITH LA LIGA. FROM 2021-22, TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE.	FIFA Ranking 13
Players* 58,372	Referees** 74 / 9,751	Coaches** 1,991 / 11,142
Launched 2016 Liga Iberdrola 2021 "professional" status	UEFA Club co-efficient 4	Global gender gap ranking 8
Divisions 1, with relegation	Teams, overlap 18 Overlap is growing – 32/42 la Liga teams, up from 19/42 since 2015	Format 2 rounds H&A
Sponsor Iberdrola (energy co)	Broadcast MediaPro, RTVE	Digital reach Club's followers in social networks: 5.094,541 (2019-20)
Record attendance 60,739 (world record)	Average attendance 749 (2019) La Liga stadia: 15,694 (2019-20)	Average club revenue USD 628,000

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

Key strategies:

01

PROFESSIONALISING STRUCTURES

While the RFEF by law had responsibility for the women's league, in 2016 **La Liga became involved** in creating a professionalised league which grew rapidly, assisting with a media deal (MediaPro), support for dedicated resources in clubs, and co-ordinated fixturing which enabled fans to see both first-teams play. This professionalisation helped improve game quality and attract players to the league (including foreign players).

governance structure is anticipated to be less cumbersome and can create conditions for even greater acceleration of the professional women's game in Spain.

Recently, the Spanish government ruled that **the women's league can be "professional"**, enabling it to transition to be self-run, independently of RFEF and La Liga. This new



02

LEVERAGE INTEGRATION SYNERGIES

These **league synergies** helped existing La Liga fans to discover women's football (the Primera Iberdrola audience is around 70% male), growing attendances and TV audiences. Many **clubs also created synergy benefits** leveraging strong club brands and selectively using large stadia for showcase matches (e.g. a record 60,739 at Wanda Metropolitano, with an average attendance of 15,694 for Primera Iberdrola matches held in La Liga stadia compared to only 749 in small stadia).

03

LANDMARK COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS

Media distribution has been a key factor in the league's growth, with La Liga's assistance for a founding deal with MediaPro making the games immediately visible and providing early revenues. Public broadcaster RTVE added its support in the most recent season (covering 5 clubs), bringing the av. matches broadcast per matchday to 5 matches in 2019-20. The average audience per matchday rose to 82,453 (from 45,283 in 2016-17). The record highest audience is 330,053 watching Atletico v Barca.

A CBA was also secured with the players union to stabilise the economic base.

A.4 + England



League FA Women's Super League & Women's Championship	Run by Football Association	FIFA Ranking 6
Players* 120,557	Referees** 1,136 / 26,853	Coaches** 3,520 / 65,421
Launched 2011 Fully pro since 2018	UEFA Club Co-efficient 3	Global gender gap ranking 21
Divisions 2 (WSL and WC) with pro/rel	Teams, overlap 12 WSL, 11 WC 9 / 12 in WSL are also in EPL	Format 2 rounds, H&A
Sponsor Barclays bank	Broadcast Centralised: Sky Sports & BBC Plus online	
Record attendance North London derby 38,262 Manchester derby 31,213	Average attendance Approx 3,000 (pre COVID) In 2018, av 833³.	Average club revenue USD 996,000

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

³ <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/47871431>

Key strategies:

01

PROFESSIONALISING STRUCTURES

The FA has given increasing focus to professionalising women's football in recent times. **Governance** of the top two divisions was devolved to a separate strategic Board including club representatives and independent members (including the independent chair).

02

REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS

Professional standards were imposed by the FA through **club licensing requirements**, including contact time and elite support standards which helped to attract talent. Facilities and media operations are also subject to rising standards to support professionalism.



03

LEVERAGE SYNERGIES

Leveraging the **synergies of global club brands**, together with smart **fixturing** of big WSL matches during men's international breaks has generated big crowds (especially in derbies – the record is 38,262) and grown the league's reach around the world.

04

LANDMARK COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS

Landmark **sponsorship** (Barclays, GBP 20M, 3 years) and **broadcast** (Sky Sports, BBC – GBP 8M p.a. until 2024) deals will fund continuing investment, with the league looking to be self-sustaining within a decade.



League NWSL	Run by NWSL	FIFA Ranking 1
Players* 9.5M	Referees** 32,880 / 139,246	Coaches** 21,065 / 172,070
Launched 2012	Global gender gap ranking 53	
Divisions 1 No pro/rel	Teams, overlap 10 in 2021, 11 in 2022. 3 / 10 are MLS teams, and a further 2 are in the ULS. One is part of the OL (Lyon) group.	Format 24 rounds plus top 6 finals
Sponsor Ally bank, Budweiser beer, Nationwide insurance, Verizon, Google.	Broadcast Centralised: CBS Online via Amazon Twitch globally	
Record attendance 25,218 (Portland Thorns)	Average attendance 7,383 (2019) 20,098 – Portland Thorns	Average club revenue unknown

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

Key strategies:

01

PROFESSIONALISING STRUCTURES

NWSL was the 3rd attempt in 20 years at creating a sustainable pro women’s league, and the first to be funded by (rather than merely sanctioned) by US Soccer. In its early years, it was a combined initiative with the Canadian and Mexican federations also involved (allocating national team players of three nations). NWSL has now become **independent of US Soccer**, governed by a Board comprising club representatives. It is also independent of MLS (noting that the MLS Commissioner and the NWSL Commissioner sit on the board of US Soccer representing the professional game). The NWSL is negotiating with the NWSL Players Association for a collective bargaining agreement.

02

DIFFERENTIATION VS SYNERGY

There is only partial overlap between NWSL clubs and MLS / USL clubs. A very significant trend is emerging with **increased investment in clubs, notably at non-MLS clubs**. Examples: 2022 entrant Angel City FC is funded by A-listers Serena Williams, Natalie Portman and ex US WNT players such as Mia Hamm and Julie Foudy; Washington Spirit is backed by presidential offspring Chelsea Clinton and Jenna Bush; Naomi Osaka has backed North Carolina Courage, and the Seattle team was acquired by Jean-Michel Aulas’ OL Groupe, to become OL Reign.

The MLS clubs in the NWSL are able to pursue significant brand and operational synergies, with



03

SOCIAL MEDIA

Athlete presence on **social media and digital platforms** to speak out on social issues is very much a feature of US women's football in the US. The biggest national team stars command large followings: e.g. Alex Morgan: 9.2M Instagram, 6.1M Facebook, 3.9M Twitter; and Megan Rapinoe Twitter 925K, Instagram 2.2M Facebook 743K. The reach of these athletes extends beyond what many clubs can command, and they are active and outspoken on social issues (including taking a knee, Black Lives Matter, gender equality especially equal pay, LGBTI+ rights and same-sex marriage).

04

LANDMARK COMMERCIAL CONTRACTS

Despite COVID suspending then re-shaping the competition during 2020, the NWSL signed major **media distribution** deals (CBS Sports in USA/Canada, and Amazon Twitch for global streaming) as well as new **corporate sponsorships** (e.g. Nationwide insurance, Ally bank, Google) to join existing deals (e.g. Nike, Budweiser).

the option of differentiating some aspects of their men's and women's teams. Portland provides a fascinating case study. The Timbers (men) and Thorns (women) are co-owned, and each are independently successful (both draw 20K home crowds). There is a deliberate choice to provide **differentiated teams**, while pursuing synergies in facilities and "back office". Portland Thorns are regarded as women's football's 'gold standard' in fan engagement; their marketing approach goes beyond simply chasing cross-promotion and synergies so that women's football can "hitch a ride" with the men's team. Rather, it truly recognises two separate and successful "first teams", each marketed optimally to their fans.

League WE LEAGUE	Run by JFA, WITH APPOINTED BOARD	FIFA Ranking 11
Players* 390,000	Referees** 15,956 / 298,832	Coaches** 2,732 / 83,834
Launched September 2021	Global gender gap ranking 121	
Divisions 1	Teams, overlap 11 teams 8 are J-League clubs	Format 22 rounds
Sponsor Yogibo (title partner), Daihatsu, Plenus, Asahi Kasei Home Products, MediQtto and X-girl (official supplier)	Broadcast Centralised DAZN signed an 8 year deal for global streaming	
Record attendance Nadeshiko league 24,546	Average attendance Nadeshiko league: 1,340 Goal = 5,000	Average club revenue USD 1.65M

* Total players in country

** Number of women / total number in country

Key strategies:

01

PROFESSIONALISING STRUCTURES

Launched in Sept 2021, the new “**Women Empowerment**” (**WE**) **League** will sit above the 40+ year old Nadeshiko league. The foundation funding comes from JFA.

The new league will be professionalised - fifteen players per team must be fully professional (currently there are only a handful in total).

02

DIFFERENTIATION VS SYNERGY

Most WE clubs are also in the J-League, and the existing Nadeshiko league fan base is male-skewed and middle-aged. **Extending the fan base** will be a key priority of the WE League, with a focus on attracting new female and younger fans, including young players. Plans include food trucks and a festival atmosphere at matches.

Anime fans will also be targeted through a collaboration with a popular soccer comic and TV show *Farewell, My Dear Cramer*, with exclusive products only available in the stadium.



04

FOUNDATION CONTRACTS

The WE League has announced an 8 year deal with host broadcaster DAZN, which will stream matches live and free. (DAZN's portfolio also includes the UEFA Women's Champions League and the J-League.) The league's inaugural title sponsor will be furniture / lifestyle brand Yogibo until 2022-23. Daihatsu, Plenus, Asahi Kasei Home Products, MediQtto and X-girl (official supplier) have also been announced.

03

BUILD CULTURE

The league will be themed around **women's empowerment**, with women's leadership training, networking and coaching opportunities, including targets for women's involvement at club level (50% of the club office staff, and at least one women coach on staff).

Diversity and LGBT inclusion will also be a focus.

SOURCE NOTES:

UEFA Women's Association Club Co-efficient: <https://www.uefa.com/memberassociations/uefarankings/womenscountry/#/yr/2021>

FIFA Women's Rankings: <https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-ranking/ranking-table/women/> 16 April 2021

Number of players, referees and coaches, global gender gap ranking: from 2019 FIFA Women's Football Member Associations Survey Report <https://img.fifa.com/image/upload/nq3ensohyxpuxovcovj0.pdf>

Average club revenues and some crowd figures from Setting the Pace: FIFA Benchmarking Report Women's Football <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-benchmarking-report-women-s-football.pdf?cloudid=dzm2o61buenfox51qjot>



B

Key themes and insights

In this section, we look across these and other leagues that were interviewed, to examine the key themes and insights that arise.

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B.1 Governance

Men's football shows us that football governance can be complex and varied. Historically, in most cases professional men's leagues have separated from the federations, seeking more independence, better investment incentives, more commerciality in decision-making (including a different appetite for risk). National associations at least theoretically govern all football activities in their country, and leagues are sanctioned by them to operate a professional competition with varying degrees of independence. In practice, there is significant variety in how men's pro leagues are governed, and how their relationship with the national governing bodies are structured.⁴

In most cases for men's competitions, economic independence drove political independence. It remains to be seen whether the pattern will be replicated for women's football.

Women's pro leagues are overlaid onto this landscape, creating even more possible governance structures. The top women's league may be run by:

- (a) federations, which both govern and operate most top-level women's football leagues,
- (b) men's pro leagues that operate women's leagues, such as Liga MX Femenil (Mexico) and Liga Betplay Femenina (Colombia) where the league and clubs are integrated across men's and women's football,
- (c) independent operators of women's leagues, under sanction from the federation. Two of the leading leagues – the NWSL (USA) and the Damallsvenskan (Sweden) – operate this way, and Primera Iberdrola (Spain) is transitioning to newly government-

- authorised professional women's league, or
- (d) some combinations of the above.

Men's pro leagues can have a partial role in women's leagues. Increasingly professional clubs participate in both men's and women's football. The men's pro league may also participate in the women's league in some way even if the federation runs it. Sometimes, the men's pro league will perform or assist with a subset of operating functions. In many countries, there is co-operation over fixturing (e.g. for double-headers); in Spain and Belgium, the men's pro leagues assisted with media rights deals; in Germany, COVID return-to-play in the Frauen-Bundesliga was supported by solidarity from the Bundesliga; in Costa Rica, Unafut advises on the running of the women's league; and in England, the EPL supported the FAWSL by funding GBP 1M in COVID testing.

Moreover, in Germany, the DFL and DFB have worked together in an interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral task force on the Future of Professional Football, which among other things, recommended DFL's involvement in promoting women's football. The DFL and DFB are now (together with the clubs of the Frauen-Bundesliga and the Bundesliga) working on measures to professionalise the women's league, and improve its attractiveness and visibility.

The Governance Triangle (Diagram 1) illustrates the range of entities that may run the top women's league, and maps various leagues onto that triangle.

⁴ See CIES, *Governance Models Across Football Associations and Leagues*, 2014, at https://www.cies.ch/fileadmin/documents/CIES/Governance_I_-_Models_across_football_associations_and_leagues.pdf

WHO GOVERNS THE WOMEN'S LEAGUE?

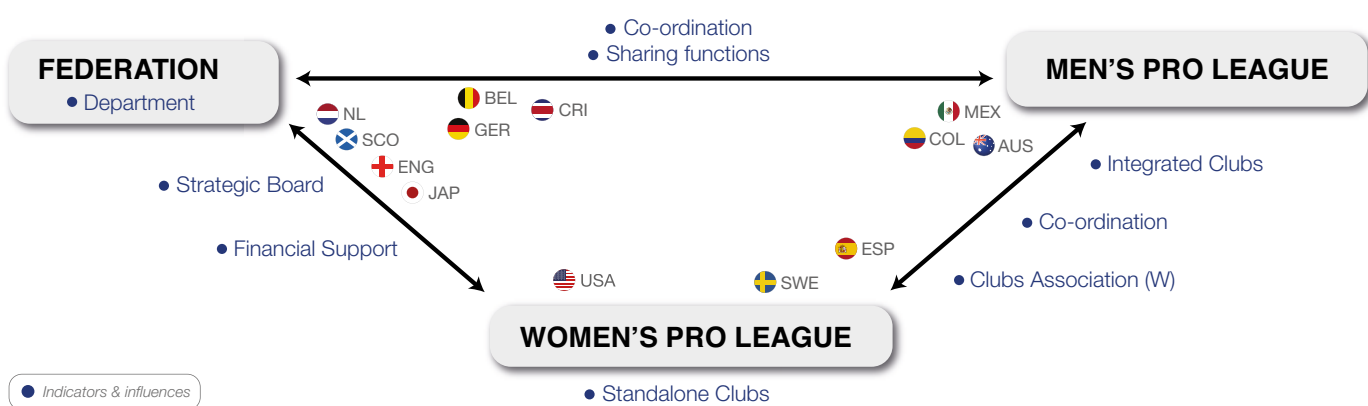


Diagram 1: GOVERNANCE TRIANGLE

At the outside edge, the diagram shows some practical indicators and influences regarding how it is run e.g.

- in England and Japan, the leagues are governed by the federation but have separate boards which focus on the interests of the women’s league and drive their own strategy. As a result, their governance models are best understood as shifting towards a more independent approach (even while they remain under the federation’s control); and
- in the US, the NWSL was financially supported by the federation, while having its own independent governance under the club owners.

Evidently, models can vary within federations, too - from fully integrating the league within the federation, to separate, dedicated staff within a separate department, to an independently-chaired strategic board.

To appreciate the variety of governance models, it is also necessary to understand the degree and nature of integration at both league and club level.

League integration (i.e. the same entity runs both the top men’s and women’s leagues) is quite rare. It can take two forms: if all the clubs in the league have both women’s and men’s teams, we refer to it as a fully integrated model; if some of the teams are ‘stand-alone’ (i.e. women-only clubs with no men’s teams) the we refer to this as a hybrid integrated model. Diagram 2 illustrates.

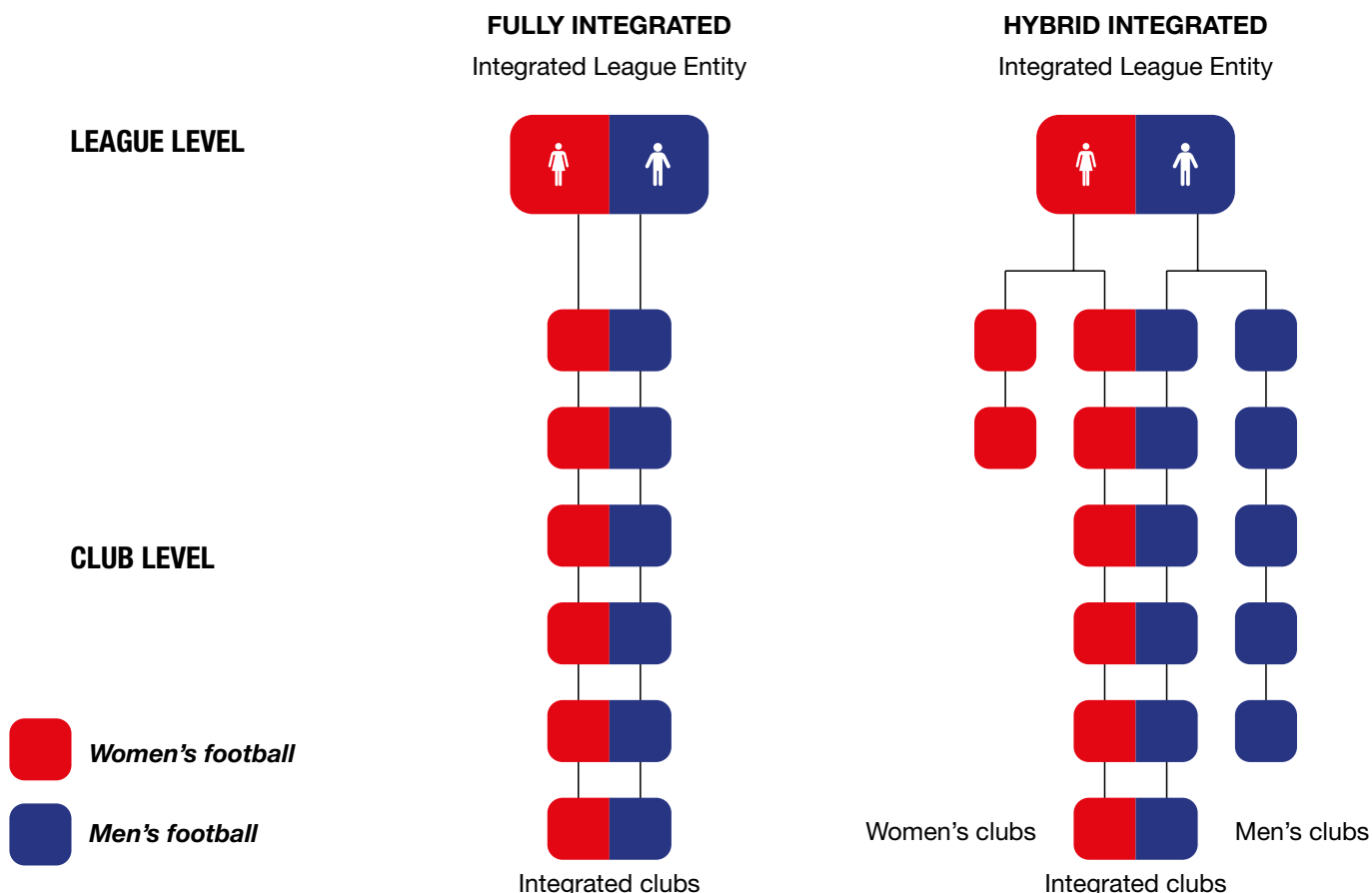


Diagram 2: FULL AND PARTIAL INTEGRATION

Club integration, on the other hand, is almost always present to some degree. Many of the top clubs have both women’s and men’s teams, inevitably creating a bridge between the two leagues (even if separately governed). Significant benefits can be achieved through club integration, including brand leveraging, co-ordination of fixturing and facilities usage, double-headers, media operations, events (such as season launches), marketing campaigns, cross-promotion, and medical protocols (such as COVID). According to FIFA’s benchmarking⁵, two-thirds of clubs in the top 30 women’s leagues are integrated; the remainder are stand-alone women’s teams. If all of the teams in a women’s league also have men’s teams, we refer to the league as fully club-integrated; if only some clubs do, we refer to this as partially club-integrated. This is illustrated in Diagram 3 below.

⁵ Setting the Pace: FIFA Benchmarking Report Women’s Football, <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-benchmarking-report-women-s-football.pdf?cloudid=dzm2o61buenfox51qjot>

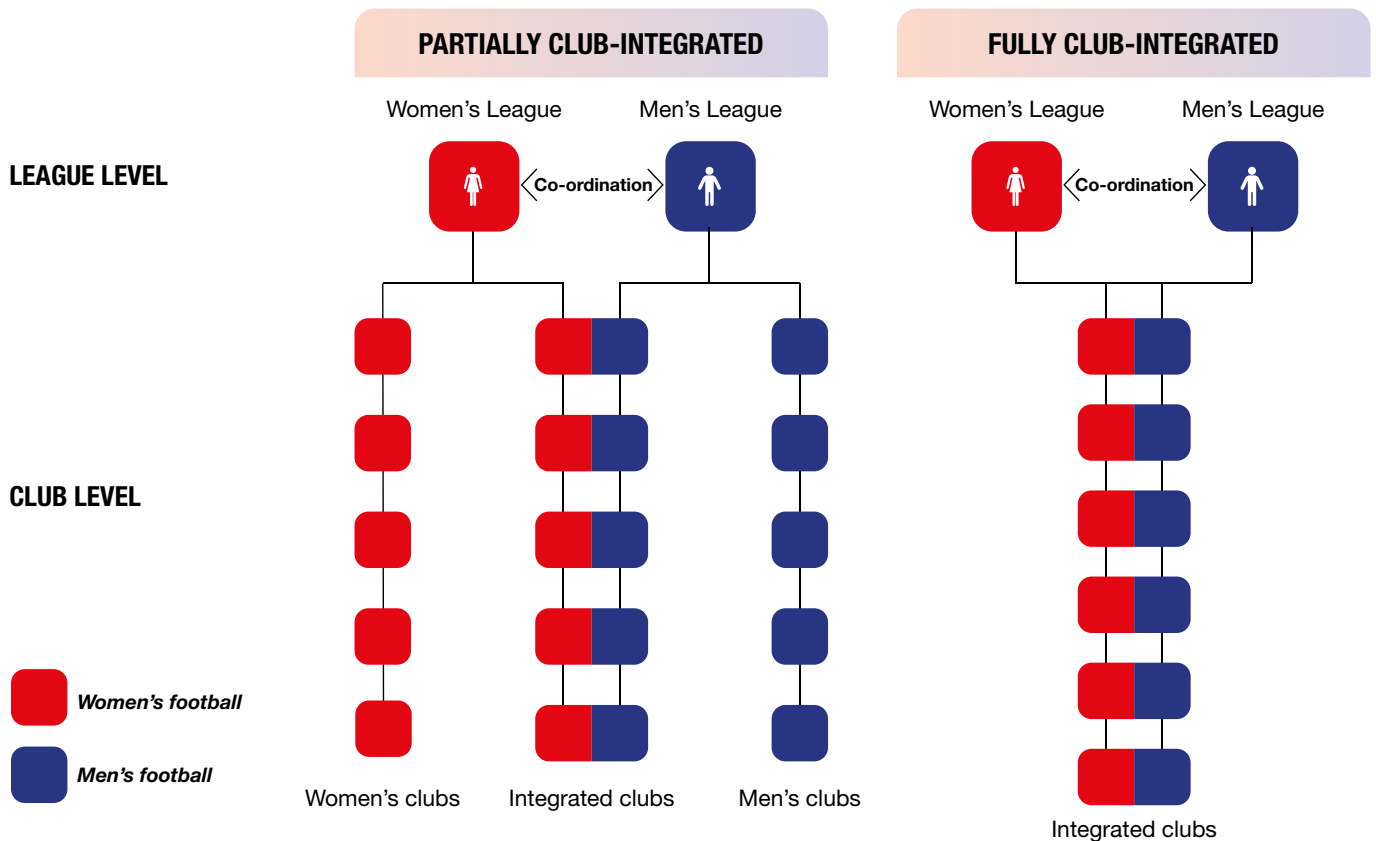


Diagram 3: FULL AND PARTIAL CLUB-INTEGRATION

The Integration Model (Diagram 4) maps these patterns of integration on a graph. There are very few professionalised women's leagues under integrated governance; most have different governing bodies to the men's league, but most are partially club-integrated (bottom centre) and some are fully club-integrated (bottom right).

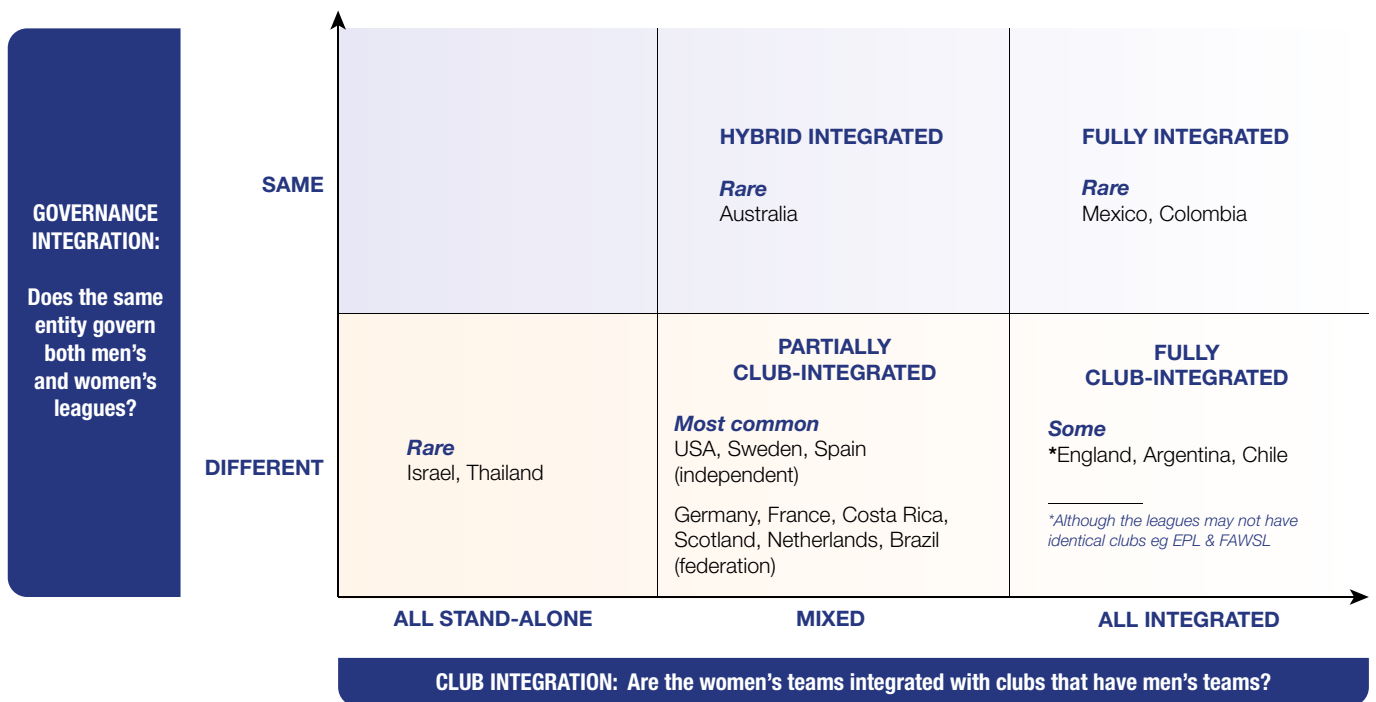


Diagram 4

There is no single “best” or “right” governance structure. Each structure offers certain advantages, and the success of the league depends on how effectively they are pursued. Different governance structures can work (or not) depending on local circumstances and personnel. For example, these three different fast-growing leagues are all differently governed:

- in Mexico an integrated structure across men's and women's football has enabled the women's league to leverage the strong support base and organisational infrastructure of established pro clubs,
 - in the US, an independent league and separate women's clubs have attracted new, high-profile investors who are specific to women's football, and
 - in Spain, La Liga's involvement delivered a media rights deal to the women's league and supported clubs with grants, thus building the case for the Primera Iberdrola to be declared by government to be a professionalised league (and hence able to be governed independently from the federation).
- What are the limits of the independent model? In Japan, the WE League has its own Board and Chair; in England, the WSL benefits from a Board that provides focus; in Spain, Primera Iberdrola is becoming a recognised professional league, meaning it can be run independently from the federation; and the US and Sweden continue with independence from both the federation and the men's league.

Certainly, investors appear to be keenly interested in women's football as an independent product, differentiated from men's football. We observe:

- a swathe of new investors in non-MLS clubs in the NWSL (OL Reign, LA City, Washington Spirit, North Carolina Courage), and
- interest from private equity in the WSL.⁷

Two things are crucial: focus and expertise. The most successful leagues have governance structures that deliver both.

(a) focus on the interests of the women's league - not as a piece in some other jigsaw, but as a picture in its own right - enables the women's game to move beyond secondary status and benefit from decisions can be made in the league's first-best interests;

(b) people with women's football expertise bring important knowledge to decision-making. Women's football differs from men's in many ways, and it is crucial to have this understanding (see also B.5 and B.6 below).

The industry is dynamic, and new lessons will emerge as structures evolve. Many developments are new, and more are on the horizon. They will soon yield more learnings. For example:

- What are the limits of the integration model? In Australia, the A-League (men's) and W-League (women's) have separated from the federation, together. All but one of the W-League teams are part of an A-League club, and the leagues are under a single management team. This presents almost unmatched opportunities to exploit synergies across the men's and women's games (for example, a new 'Club Championship' has been launched, awarded to the club with the most combined points)⁶. We can expect to observe the extent of the synergies, the point at which product differentiation adds more value, and the degree to which both can be successfully pursued.

Observing these developments will provide learnings on how to exploit synergies, and when to instead (or in parallel) differentiate to capture value. In all likelihood, a "cut and paste" copy of how men's football is managed will be less successful than a thoughtful approach where men's and women's football can efficiently share facilities and back-end resources, while developing differentiated and optimised fan-facing experiences with "two first teams".

⁶ <https://www.w-league.com.au/news/expansion-leads-raft-plans-drive-womens-football-forward>

⁷ See <https://www.sportspromedia.com/opinion/womens-sport-fa-wsl-bridgepoint-private-equity-investment> and <https://news.sky.com/story/fa-chiefs-hire-bankers-to-kick-off-talks-on-womens-super-league-future-12285456>



B.2

League Operations

A) Financing: seeking subsidies, then sustainability

Investment in women's football is increasing in line with greater confidence in its popularity, higher expectations from players and fans (and in some cases, club licensing obligations), and a move towards gender rebalancing of sponsorship and media coverage.

*There is increasing investment by leading women's leagues e.g. FA WSL reportedly spends approximately 8M Euros p.a.; and UEFA has recently announced a re-vamped champions league with greatly increased payments to participating teams, centralised rights from the group stage onwards, and new solidarity payments to all top division clubs in participating countries*⁸.

These outlays largely still represent subsidies, because the women's leagues are yet to be fully monetised. Many are caught in the unhappy cycle of small crowds, little broadcast coverage, and low sponsorship. But there is growing evidence that leagues can break even and be sustainable e.g. FA WSL recent sponsorships and broadcast deals

At the club level, investment is also increasing, but significant gaps are emerging between leading clubs and others.

- Large (usually men's) clubs can easily outspend smaller clubs. Of course, this is also true in men's football, but in women's football this dynamic is overlaid with uncertainty about (a) how much men's clubs are willing to invest in women's football; and (b) the survival of women-only clubs, which can be under threat.
- Very big clubs may spend est 5-8M Euros p.a. Many more will fall in 1M-3M range, offering a stable semi-professional environment. But many leagues operate on a semi-pro basis with club budgets of 1M or less.
- Greater investment is required to continue improving playing standards (e.g. full-time player wages, medical staff, quality coaching, training facilities, etc), yet this also means that the break-even date is pushed further out.

*Interestingly, FIFA's recent benchmarking suggests that stand-alone women's clubs outperform integrated clubs in revenue and profitability*⁹. These clubs represent about one-third of those surveyed

across the top 30 leagues. Perhaps this is due to their singular focus on their women's team, or their more specialised expertise in women's football, or both; and whether it is sustainable as more top-tier men's clubs compete is uncertain.

In the US, these stand-alone and non-MLS clubs are attracting considerable investment funding. Investors are expressly motivated by the desire to support women's sports and promote gender equality (see section B.6 below). Without a leading men's club to subsidise them, financial sustainability is a necessity to make standalone operations viable.

In Germany, where 75% of the Frauen-Bundesliga clubs are integrated with men's teams, the recent DFL Task Force on the Future of Professional Football¹⁰ noted the importance of protecting long-established clubs in women's football as part of its recommendations for the promotion of women's football.

⁸ <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/about-uefa/news/0268-1224105e2fa9-56cd49889447-1000--how-the-new-uwcl-financial-model-works/>

⁹ Page 26, *Setting the Pace: FIFA Benchmarking Report Women's Football*, <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-benchmarking-report-women-s-football.pdf?cloudid=dzm2o61buenfox51qjot>

¹⁰ <https://www.dfl.de/en/news/summary-report-task-force-future-of-professional-football/> DFL, *Summary Report of the Task Force "Future of Professional Football"*.



B) Expenditure – seeking synergies

L leagues are incentivised to derive maximum synergies for their expenditure. This has been explored in various ways:

- Co-ordinating scheduling can be very valuable e.g. to avoid clashes with ‘big games’ or to schedule complementary games (e.g. men play at home when women play away; or women play during the men’s international breaks). For example, in Sweden the independently governed Damallsvenskan informally co-ordinates fixtures with the Allsvenskan.
- Scheduling men’s and women’s matches as double-headers can also create positive synergies in cross-marketing, ticketing, broadcast operations, and travelling fans. However, there are also limits to these benefits, since the fixtures begin to “crowd out” each other¹¹. UEFA has ceased scheduling the champions league finals in the same city just prior to the men’s final; the women’s final is now an event in its own right. Experience suggests that seemingly obvious synergies are not always realised – it is not unusual for sales channels or printed tickets to promote only the men’s game, because the

systems and processes were set up that way. That said, double-headers have substantially increased crowd figures and exposure in some women’s leagues (e.g. the W-League in Australia).

- Broadcast operations and stadium deals can also be a source of synergy (e.g. for doubleheaders or any internal production such as livestream feeds).
- Shared back office functions can add synergies, although experience suggests that it is important to have some dedicated resources for the women’s league.

At club level, synergies can be very substantial, across training facilities, ticketing, club memberships, medical support, kit, merchandising, back of house, stadia, etc. One of the greatest potential synergies is using the existing club brand to launch a women’s team. “Big brand” clubs can instantly create a nationally or globally recognised women’s team, attracting fans and sponsors to invest more in their brand.

¹¹ There are other drawbacks – fans do not always want to stay for two games; kick-off times are separated by approx. 3 hours; and fans of the women’s team may resent the increased prices.



B.3

Audience:

fan engagement and media



Until COVID struck, crowd growth reflected a spectacular increase in fan interest, especially in markets where football is the dominant sport. Record crowds appeared at club matches in Spain (Atletico-Barca, 60K), Mexico (Tigres - Monterrey, 51K), Colombia (32K) and England (38K). While attendance figures were spiky, the leagues that invested consistently showed strong underlying growth e.g. Costa Rica, England.

However, paradoxically, even some well-established leagues (like the Frauen-Bundesliga and the Nadeshiko League) have shown slow growth in attendances. Perhaps their earlier success, with Germany and Japan having dominated the World Cup for over a decade, has made it more difficult to present women's football as a new exciting product. Both are hatching new plans for progress.

Existing club rivalries and fan bases are becoming engaged in women's football. Big derbies are being replicated in the women's game, and attract large crowds (pre COVID) when well promoted and held in the main stadia. In the FAWSL, the Manchester derby attracted 31,213 fans and the North London derby 38,262; in Liga MX Femenil, the rivalry of the Clasico Regio came to women's football in the 2018 final between Tigres and Monterrey, with a record crowd of 51,211 fans.

COVID, while devastating to sports and especially women's sport, did create some opportunities to re-set viewer habits. For example, low crowd figures – which women's football has grappled with for years – no longer signalled an inferior viewing product,

because even the most popular men's matches were being played without crowds. Once this prejudgement was removed, audiences could see women's football through fresh eyes.

Perhaps this was one factor behind the astonishing audience growth in the US. The NWSL took advantage of its early return to play in mid 2020 with a 'bubble' tournament in empty stadia. The TV audience grew almost 500% on the previous year.¹²

As well as adjusting viewer expectations, COVID led broadcasters and rightsholders to create numerous production solutions – from pitchside screens, to cardboard cutouts, to optional soundtracks of cheering. No longer is the lack of a stadium crowd a bar to getting a broadcast deal, or having the game regarded as highly watchable.

The women's game also extends the appeal of football beyond the traditional fanbase, and has a different fan culture. Typically, the fanbase is younger, more female (although in many countries it still retains a male skew, especially in TV audiences), and more family and LGBTI-friendly. The fans often connect with the higher purposes of equality and inclusion, and create a visible and unique culture.

Women's football fan culture is an opportunity to reflect on and improve fan culture more broadly. Often this fan culture is deliberately inclusive and prides itself on social purpose (as do some leading players) and keeping the game free of discrimination such as racism, sexism and homophobia. In Australia, various fan groups of the W-League maintain a network of collective friendships, encourage each other, offer homestays for travelling fans and come together to support the national team or hold watch parties for big games.

In one instance, when fans of the A-League team attended a derby match and caused a crowd incident, a debate was triggered. One W-League fan said:¹³

¹² <https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/nwsl-2020-us-tv-ratings-cbs-twitch-social-media-growth>

¹³ <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-01-21/male-supporters-need-to-show-respect-for-w-league-culture/13078948>



The women's game has a diverse supporter community ... our focus is on supporting our team positively, with no room for derogatory behaviour that makes that community feel unsafe. Those supporters started verbally abusing the opposition before it escalated, and this kind of aggressive posturing and intimidation is not something we want to see replicated at women's games.

Another A-League fan group leader reflected on the debate:

So when The Cove [Sydney FC's active support group] decides to bring more organised support to these games we do talk and take leadership from people that are regulars within the W-League community, about the best way to respect the atmosphere that is there already. It's not our place to go and trample on what's already there, because it's really important to the people already attending.

I don't think people always have the intention to offend or be nasty, they just don't understand the different settings... But when we do make members of that community feel unsafe, we take responsibility for it and pass on that feedback to those people to let them know it wasn't on.

As the game battles fan abuse and discrimination,

these are surely best-practice sentiments to be captured and parlayed into the game more broadly.

Moreover, as a recent Nielsen survey showed, fans of women's football are an attractive demographic - being more likely to have disposable income, have families and be key decision-makers in household purchasing - than fans of men's football.¹⁴

Broadcast values have been historically low. Broadcast partners can be the same (Spain) or different (England) to the men's pro league, but with few exceptions, broadcast values were quite low. In some cases, leagues have had to contribute to production costs in order to gain exposure (Australia).

The low valuation placed on women's football is not unique to leagues - it is also reflected in the treatment of rights for the biggest and most lucrative women's tournament, the FIFA Women's World Cup.¹⁵ Historically, FIFA has reported the revenue of the women's showcase together with the men's World Cup revenues, as the rights were typically sold as a bundle - with all of the revenue being attributed to the men's tournament. Even though

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/50510983>

¹⁵ *What Is the Women's World Cup Worth? Not Even FIFA Knows*, WSJ 24 September 2019 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-is-the-womens-world-cup-worth-not-even-fifa-knows-11569335578>

France 2019 tournament attracted around a quarter of the audience of the Russia 2018 tournament, FIFA's accounts gave it no value. Had there been a pro-rata allocation of revenue purely based on TV audience size, the Women's World Cup could have been valued at over \$1B.

The lack of effort to build and commercialise women's sport audience over many decades underlies this lack of monetisation currently – which directly feeds into debates about prizemoney, pay and professionalism. To a large extent, this can be seen as part of a wider societal acceptance – now under challenge - of women doing unpaid work, while men do remunerated work.

However, recent deals have suggested that this is at a tipping point, with both dollars and exposure improving. The FAWSL have completed deals for both domestic (GBP 8M p.a.) and international distribution (six-figure sum). In Spain, the first deal

reached 3M Euros. Public reporting indicates European leagues earning 0.5 – 3M Euros p.a. in broadcast income.¹⁶ In Belgium, women's Super League programming has gained TV ratings similar to those for the men's second division.

Digital and social media continue to be very important for women's football, given the lack of coverage in mainstream media.

- Digital platforms deliver considerable reach, including globally. In Mexico, where Liga MXF do not have centralised broadcast rights, the league is building its own audience digitally, reaching both domestic and overseas audiences. The NWSL are on Amazon Twitch and the FAWSL has significant reach on digital platforms (e.g. the FA Player in the UK, Optus in Australia, and via Atalanta Media).

¹⁶ See https://fifpro.org/media/vd1pbtbj/fifpro-womens-report_eng-lowres.pdf at p 40.



- Social media has always been important to the women's football community. In the Primera Iberdrola, the clubs have an aggregate social media audience of over 5M, while the players' reach over 10M. Most players use online presence as a way of connecting with fans and promoting the game.
- Increasingly, the digital reach of leading players is an important asset. One consequence of lower wages in the women's game is that sponsorship is a relatively more important income source. Many players have therefore cultivated their online profile, and monetise it through sponsorships and paid messages.
- In some instances, the online profile of top female players are far bigger than that of their entire club – or even their league. When USWNT striker Alex Morgan played in England, her Twitter reach (3.9M followers) dwarfed that of her club Tottenham (52K) and the FASWL itself (150K). Most players are motivated to promote the game as well as their personal brand, which provides clubs and leagues a valuable channel to build the presence of the professional game.
- As sports media evolves into a data business with ever more targeted content and offerings, these assets will gain in value.
- Finally, niche women's football media are often the most trusted sources of information for the fan community. Their specialist women's football writers are more knowledgeable than mainstream football press, even though they have less reach. They are an undervalued asset in delivering credible and respected commentary.



B.4

Sponsorship and commercial



Sponsors see a distinctive value proposition in women's football. Many women's football sponsors (whether they only support women or support both) are attracted to the women's game for its higher growth potential, and its character as more accessible, pure, and connected to social purpose. These characteristics are evocative of (men's) football of old, before it was as commercialised. They are also forward-looking in supporting progressive social change, illustrated in Colombia by beer sponsor Aguila (elaborated in B.6 below).

New and incremental revenues are available to women's leagues.

- While existing sponsors may extend their coverage to support women's football, some are switching to focus on the women's game (eg Barclays now sponsors the FAWSL, having been an EPL partner for years) and significant new
- sponsors are signing up for the women's game.
- These may be in new categories (e.g. personal grooming, nutrition) but even direct competitors can be persuaded to sponsor the men's and women's competitions, as seen in UEFA's champions leagues (Mastercard for men, Visa for women).
- At the league level, the title sponsors can differ, even if those leagues are managed by the same entity e.g. in Australia, the Westfield W-League (shopping centres) and Hyundai A-League ran in parallel for many years (although some other sponsorships were common).
- While the quantum of sponsorship deals is usually confidential, a recent FIFPro women's football report *Raising Our Game*¹⁷ cited a number of league naming rights sponsorships in Europe in the range of 700K Euros to 3.9M Euros.

¹⁷ See https://fifpro.org/media/vd1pbtbj/fifpro-womens-report_eng-lowres.pdf at p 44

There are commercial synergies available across men's and women's football, but value should be attributed. At league level, the same channel can sell both leagues (provided the sales team understand both products); and do shared equipment deals (eg balls, referees kit). But even where deals are bundled, the women's component should be attributed.¹⁸ Without proper valuation, funding of women's football will continue to be regarded as a cross-subsidy rather than a viable investment.

Sponsorship and licensing are crucial and growing sources of revenue in women's sports, which are well placed to capitalise on them through their digital footprint.

- Having historically missed out on lucrative broadcast revenues and mainstream media coverage, players and fans moved early to build a women's football community based on digital consumption and engagement.
- Increasingly, the digital reach of leading players is an important asset. One consequence of lower wages in the women's game is that sponsorship is a relatively more important income source. Many

players have therefore cultivated their online profile, and monetise it through sponsorships and paid messages.

Some experts say that women's sport is poised to lead the sports industry into a direct-to-consumer future where sponsorship and licensing fees will outgrow broadcast money.¹⁹ A recent report, The Fan Project, from the Sports Innovation Lab has suggested that women's sports should transition away from traditional business models (rights payments, ratings, attendances, etc) and accelerate toward a community-based monetisation model based on always-on content production, digital storytelling, and more accessibility options.

If this is correct, then investment by leagues and clubs in women's football is not just an opportunity to build a new product line – it is a compelling complementary investment that can “hedge” against risk to the existing revenues as the sports business model changes.

¹⁸ This point was strongly made by FIFPro in *Raising Our Game*, p 46.

¹⁹ *The Fan Project: How Women's Sports Will Lead The Sports Industry Into The Future*, <https://www.thefanproject.co/>



B.5

Players and regulatory

Girls experience football differently to boys, from the outset: nobody thinks they can make a career of it, family may disapprove, and they may struggle to find anywhere to play, despite their talent and enthusiasm. The bans that applied to women's football widely across the world for decades invalidated the game and defined women footballers as rebels. Therefore, playing was not for the meek or compliant. Only those prepared to defy social norms and challenge the status quo found their way onto the field.

This is the heritage that has brought the women's game to where it is today.

This defiance, and commitment to cultural progress, shines through in big moments. After winning the Champions League as Barcelona captain, Vicky Losada was quoted as saying:²⁰

This is even bigger than a gigantic step forward, it's opening doors for women and for girls, that's what makes me happiest.

While at first glance the game might look similar to that played by boys and men, the reality for women and girls is that everything off the field is different. Understanding this perspective is crucial to understanding the culture of players, fans and the women's football community, and gaining the expertise to manage it well.

Players are mostly semi-professional, balancing tensions between football and career. None of today's generation have chosen to play for the money. Players often pursue study or parallel careers, because they do not expect to retire from football wealthy, and may not even earn enough to live on while they play.

The regulatory system is less evolved than in men's football, but steps are being made to advance it. Female players were introduced into the FIFA Transfer Matching System in 2018. There is increasing agent activity and transfer spend²¹, but women's mobility is still less than men's (for football and socio-economic reasons). Among other things, training compensation does not apply under FIFA regulations (although it is under consideration). In Belgium the Pro League is looking to enable winter transfers for women's football, equalising the transfer rules, and is exploring the possibility of training compensation to encourage player development in a more professionalised environment. In other developments, FIFA and UEFA have recently introduced measures to address the rights of players around pregnancy.

Regulatory factors sometimes motivate or accelerate the participation of clubs in women's leagues. In particular, club licensing regulations in some jurisdictions stipulated that a club must have a women's team as a condition of participation; or that women's teams must meet minimum criteria. For example, CONMEBOL requires that clubs must have a women's team if they are to participate in the Copa Libertadores.²² In Colombia, this energised many clubs to create or recruit women's teams,



Catalan News
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🏆 | "This is even bigger than a gigantic step forward, it's opening doors for women and for girls, that's what makes me happiest"

- Barça captain Vicky Losada on the importance of her team's first ever Champions League title

Traducit Tweet



Barça Femení 'open doors' for future generations with historic first European title
Blaugrana hammer Chelsea 4-0 in Champions League final to set up unprecedented treble in record-breaking season

catalannews.com

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/catalannews/status/1394335673700831232>

²¹ The 2021 January transfer window recorded \$310K in international transfer fees, up from 194K in 2020. See <https://www.fifa.com/who-we-are/news/women-s-transfer-spending-on-the-rise-bucking-global-trend>

²² CONMEBOL Reglamento de Licencia de Clubes, 2018 at D.04 "The applicant club must have a main women's team or a joint agreement with a club that owns one. In addition, the club must have at least one female youth category or join a club that has it. In both cases, the applicant must provide technical support and all the equipment and infrastructure (playing field for the dispute of matches and training) needed for the development of both teams in adequate conditions. Finally, both female teams are required to participate in official national and / or regional competitions authorized by the respective Member Association." <https://www.conmebol.com/es/reglamento-de-licencia-de-clubes-2018>



sometime adopting an existing women’s club in its entirety. In England, club licensing is set by the FA to raise standards and professionalised conditions at club level.

However, in some instances, the regulatory structure positively inhibits women’s football. In Italy, there was a long struggle to enable female players to be categorised as professional²³; in the Netherlands, the classification of women’s clubs as “amateur” also hinders their integration with professional structures in men’s football.

Over the last five years, players in top leagues have become more internationally mobile, and on average older ²⁴. Patterns are emerging, with early indications of destination leagues vs development leagues:

- some leagues have significantly younger players (in Netherlands and Norway) and others with older players (in USA, England and Spain),
- some leagues have more expatriate players: in England, Sweden and Norway over 40% of

playing minutes are played by expatriates; in the Netherlands the figure is only 8%, and

- some clubs (Arsenal, Atletico Madrid) have more than 70% expatriate minutes; at the other extreme, Chicago Red Stars have 0% and AFC Ajax 1%.
- the biggest source country of expatriate players, by some margin, is the USA.

Some of these patterns mimic those we see in men’s football e.g the English league importing many players as a destination league. These parallels can persist even where the fortunes of the WNT differs from the men e.g. in the Netherlands, the league appears focussed on development (young players, few foreigners), even though the WNT, as WEURO Champions 2017 and WWC finalists 2019, are far more successful than the men in recent times. It remains to be seen whether the global patterns of the leagues will eventually be similar to that in men’s – perhaps as a function of integrated clubs pursuing similar strategies for both men and women - or whether they will follow the less Eurocentric

²³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/soccer/2020/06/25/womens-soccer-to-be-professional-in-italy-by-2022/112011682/>. For a broader discussion, see <https://www.worldsoccer.com/features/times-changing-italian-womens-football-408833>
²⁴ See CIES Football Observatory Monthly Report No 66, June 2021 at <https://football-observatory.com/IMG/sites/mr/mr66/en/>



patterns of success seen in national team football.

So far, there appears to be no articulated consensus on the global vision or roadmap towards professional women's football leagues, that can guide the setting of regulatory requirements and assist stakeholders to each play their role. What industry structure do we want, and think is sustainable and fair for women's football? Can such as a system be engineered via regulatory settings, before incumbent interests cement the existing system? Will training compensation, if implemented, be enough to support the development pathways? Should we anticipate a scenario similar to men's football, with several major destination leagues, global talent catchment, and highly divergent revenue levels among various leagues and clubs – or should we aspire to something different? These are important

stakeholder conversations.

FIFPro and national player unions are taking an increasing role and interest in women's football²⁵, leading to an increase in collective bargaining and stronger calls for minimum labour standards. Additionally:

- Minimum wages apply in many leagues (Australia AUD \$17,055²⁶; the WE League (Japan) plans for a USD \$27K minimum salary).
- Salary caps apply in some leagues eg Australia, AUD \$450K per squad²⁷.

However, union structures are not consistent or universal - some unions still decline to accept women as members, and one of the most strident

²⁵ See FIFPro's 2020 report, *Raising Our Game: Women's Football Report* https://fifpro.org/media/vd1pbtbj/fifpro-womens-report_eng-lowres.pdf

²⁶ <http://pfa.net.au/news/lifting-standards-is-massive-grace-maher-on-the-cba/>

²⁷ <https://www.aap.com.au/pay-boost-for-w-league-a-league-players/>



unions – the USWNT Players Association – is not affiliated to FIFPro (one member per country).

One area of immense concern has been safeguarding and human rights, after complaints (later findings) of egregious sexual abuse by federation officials against women players. Clearly leagues need to implement suitable policies and safeguards for women players (as well as men).

In many other areas, women's football is different to men's, and must be managed accordingly. It is a mistake to assume that knowledge of men's football can be simply cut and pasted on to the women's game. For example:

- There are many medical and physiological differences to be aware of in women's football: menstruation and pregnancy issues, concussion, ACL injuries, and eating disorders are more prominent in the women's game. Strength and

conditioning trainers cannot train women the same way they train men without risking injury.

- Technical and tactical issues also differ from men's football. The dimensions of speed, height and strength are different between women and men, so the game evolves differently from a tactical perspective. Female players are less likely to have had intensive academy-style coaching, simply because it is less available to girls (who are not developed for the transfer market in the way boys are).

The many on and off field differences mean that women's football benefits from the knowledge of women's football experts. Successful leagues ensure that such experts are involved in every significant decision, and are retained in roles where organisational knowledge is important.

Culture and social purpose

The history of bans, exclusion and neglect meant that the women who played football were stigmatised as social transgressors. This may have reduced over time, but every player in the game has at some point felt the sharp edge of inequality in football. (Indeed, women's sport is often on the cutting edge of social justice movements, notably the WNBA players in the US playing a major role in the outcome of the Senate elections.²⁸)

To play football is to push back these barriers, and promote equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Leading players are often vocal in using the platforms they have through sport to advocate for social purposes. Notably:

- Ada Hegerberg (Olympique Lyonnais): says "it's impossible to be in football and not fight for equality".
- Alex Morgan (USWNT, Orlando Pride): sued US Soccer for equal pay; supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals by committing 1% of her salary to Common Goal.
- Megan Rapinoe (USWNT, OL Reign): took a knee; sued US Soccer for equal pay; supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals by committing 1% of her salary to Common Goal, supports LGBTI+ and Black Lives Matter
- Pernille Harder (Denmark, Chelsea) & Magda Eriksson (Sweden, Chelsea): out as a couple; support LGBTI+ community through their Common Goal project and other advocacy.

EDI is crucial to the environment in which women's football develops. Many interviewees expressed social purpose to be part of their organisation's character.

- The FA's head of the women's professional game, Kelly Simmons, said in an interview:

We talk a lot about higher purpose – the empowerment of girls and women in society. Anything visible as a big sport was not deemed suitable for girls. Visibility now sends a powerful message that girls can do anything; they can be healthy, strong, athletic, confident, and have leadership skills. We know that's been given to so many more boys than girls over the years.

- In Scotland, the league agreed on a set of values around 'football for good'. Among other things, they agreed that they would not accept sponsorship from gambling or alcohol companies, due to the impact it would have on impressionable young players. One team, Glasgow City, identifies as proud and self-described feminists – and even carried Ruth Bader Ginsburg's name on their shirt sleeve.
- Japan's soon to be launched WE league is named after a social movement - women's empowerment - and is centred around equality for marginalised groups such as LGBTI+ fans. Targets have been set for the inclusion of women in management and leadership roles.²⁹ The league also hopes to attract top international players and female coaches.³⁰
- In Germany, the review of the Future of Professional Football released a summary of its report, setting a vision that includes sustainability, social responsibility, respect for human dignity and gender equality.³¹ This is a positive opportunity for continued dialogue and progress about how to incorporate social purpose into football across the board, as well as pursue the professionalisation of women's football at the top level.
- In the NWSL a freshly rebranded club, NJ/NY Gotham FC, has purpose as the core of its identity:³²

"We have constantly been asking ourselves, 'Who are we?' 'What do we stand for? What do we want to be?'"

²⁸ See <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2021/jan/06/wnba-kelly-loeffler-raphael-warnock> and <https://time.com/5927075/atlanta-dream-war-nock-loeffler/>

²⁹ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2020/10/15/soccer/japan-womens-we-league-11-clubs/>

³⁰ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/sports/2020/07/28/soccer/we-league-women-soccer-kikuko-okajima/>

³¹ <https://media.dfl.de/sites/3/2021/02/2021-02-03-Summary-report-of-the-task-force-Future-of-Professional-Football.pdf>

³² <https://www.newyorker.com/sports/sporting-scene/the-transformation-of-a-soccer-club-and-the-ways-we-value-womens-sports>

In prioritising social purpose, women's football can help set the best practice standard for football generally. Embracing women's football is an opportunity to cultivate and nurture EDI within the football world.

- One (male) women's league boss said: "the men would like to be more like us".
- Another male CEO (of a large European club) indicated that when he went to his club's women's match, there was no diving, normalised respect for referees, no racism or hostile chants, little bad language, and one player introduced him to her wife. "Basically," he observed, "all of my problems in men's football are already solved in women's football."

- In England, Barclays Bank were drawn to the WSL, having previously sponsored the EPL.
- In Colombia, Aguila beer ran an extraordinary campaign to challenge football supporters to support both halves of their club, thus changing the narrative around women's football in Colombia. Clip and infographic available ³³
- In the US, new investment into clubs is flowing in with a women's empowerment / social purpose motive.

³³ <https://clio.com/winner/direct/abinbev-aguila-beer/half-fans-79906>

Sponsors and investors are embracing the purpose-driven nature of women's football.

HALF FANS

AGUILA

BACKGROUND:
Football is the sport that moves Colombia, it's capable of generating the greatest passion we know. The problem is, **women's football doesn't receive the same support from the fans.** The 2019 women's football league almost wasn't played because of the lack of support coming from fans and businesses. The matches played had limited assistance in terms of fans, as well as a lack of media coverage, and finding statistics of the tournament was almost impossible.

IDEA:
The love of football is incredible, from a young age we have fallen in love with a badge and some colors, and we'll do anything for that badge, good or bad. That's how we found the way to change a behavior, that team we love is one, two teams (male and female) and it wouldn't support one of the teams, **we are half the fans we say we are.**

On August fourth of 2019, for the first time in international football history, we made the Junior of Barranquilla male team go out to play with only half the badge on their jersey, shortly after the Junior of Barranquilla female team play a match with the other half of the badge. We created a movement that proved to fans that if they didn't support both teams they were only half fans, and to be complete fans they would have to support the two teams equally because they are only one badge.

RESULTS:

- We created a movement that 100% of the national league teams joined.
- 60 million impressions.
- 500% more conversations compared to the 2018 tournament.
- 1.4M USD in free press.
- We raised the spectator number by 633% bringing 55,000 fans to the tournament finals, making the whole world talk, players, teams, brands, the federation, the vice-president of Colombia and FFA itself.
- We managed to create a culture of watching female football making it a viable tournament for years to come.



Where to next?

In this section, we consider “where to” for WLF members. What does women’s football mean for your league, your clubs, and your opportunities?

Governance (i.e. who can run a women’s football league) is a threshold issue. WLF members don’t have a unilateral right to run a women’s league, since leagues require the sanction of the federation or (in some cases) government.

However, as more of the top clubs have women’s teams (whether by choice, under regulatory requirements, or in response to public expectations) WLF members will become more proximate to women’s football and have opportunities to engage (or not) and influence how it develops.

Naturally these opportunities will differ greatly by country context.

**WORLD
LEAGUES
FORUM**

C.1 Framework

As a starting point, the following framework is helpful to map the situation and anticipate logical developments, using two variables described below. (Note that these are qualitative rather than quantitative criteria, suggested here for indicative self-assessment.)

VERTICAL AXIS

Football dominance: How dominant is football in the sporting and cultural landscape? Is it overwhelmingly the most popular sport, or is it marginal? Indicators include: share of sports revenue, share of media coverage, ratings / attendances, stadium access, and degree of influence in corporate & government sectors.

HORIZONTAL AXIS

Women’s empowerment (WE) in football - How easy it is for girls and women to participate and progress in football? Indicators include: the availability of grassroots programs and development pathways; WNT success / rankings (relative to the MNT); women’s participation rate as players, coaches and referees; whether women are included in administration and governance; level of media coverage of women’s football; share of funding for women’s football; and the existence of players’ union that women can join. Societal factors may also be indicators e.g. if rates of gender-based violence and child marriage are high, women’s education & employment levels are low, and the global gender gap indicators are high, then access to football is also likely to be low.

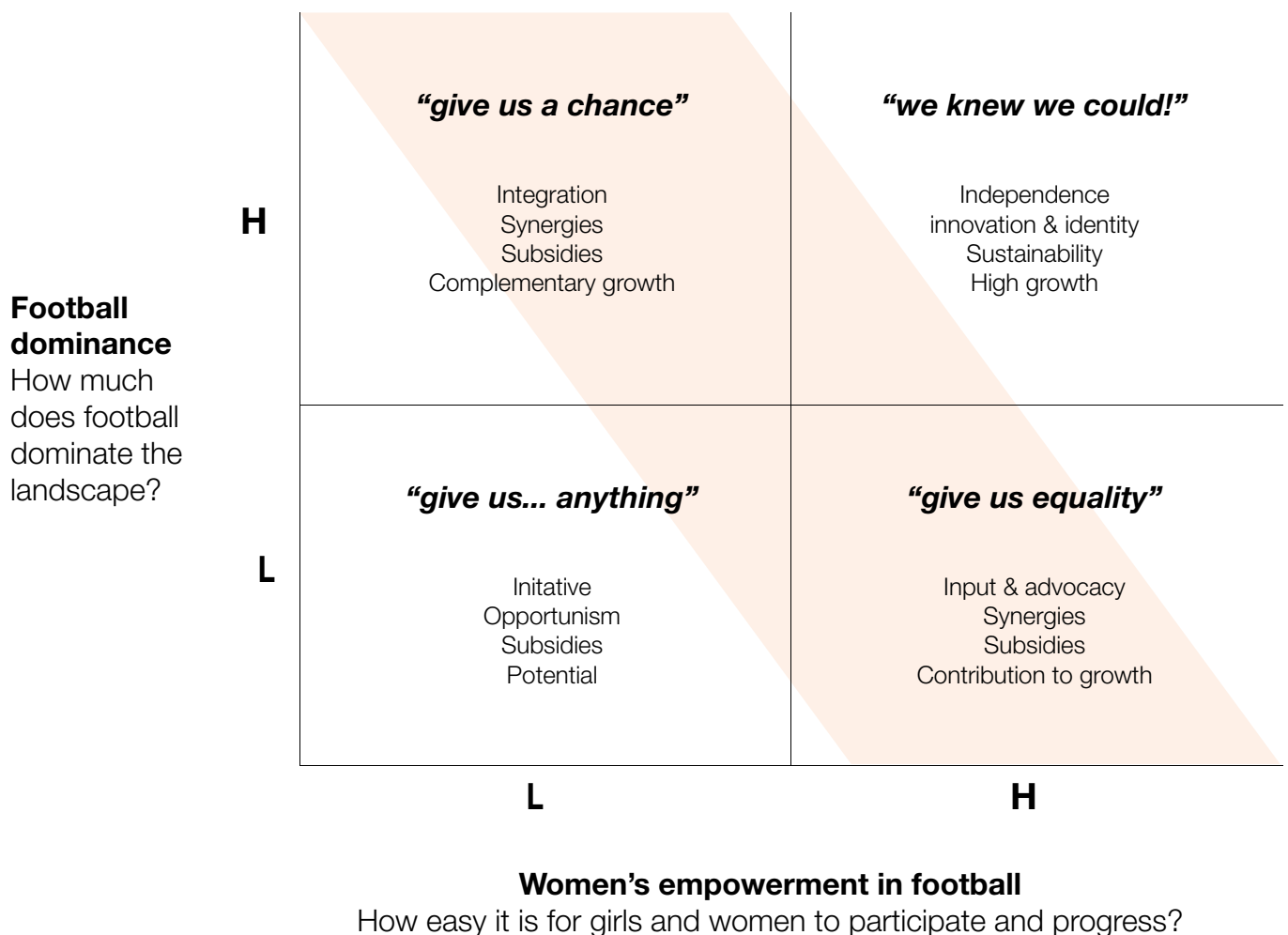


Diagram 5: MAPPING FRAMEWORK

Once mapped against these two variables, the situation and options for a women's league become clearer.

It seems likely that most pro or semi-pro leagues will start in the yellow shaded area: the top left or bottom right.

- The top left quadrant represents **sleeping giants**—places where football thrives, but women do not easily thrive in football. Once the game awakens and invests, women's football can progress very rapidly – usually by gaining synergies with existing structures (e.g. a big men's club starts a women's team). By attaching itself to the juggernaut of men's football, the women's game can grow very quickly. However, it lives in the long shadow of men's football, and can easily suffer from inconsistent attention or changes in regime unless solid structures are put in place.

Their catchcry: *"give us a chance"*. Their methods: integration, synergies, taking cross-subsidies, and delivering complementary growth.

- The bottom right quadrant represents **football's new world**, in places where football is still shaded by more popular games. However, women at least have a reasonable opportunity to play and progress. Men's and women's football struggle alongside each other; the women's game may start as the 'poor relation' but as advocates seek more equal resourcing, it quickly becomes the growth story of the game.

Their catchcry: *"give us equality"*. Their methods: input and advocacy; synergies, cross-subsidies, contribution to growth.

- The bottom left quadrant is **the most difficult** place to be. Football is small, and women barely have a place in it. But even here, there will be champions and advocates who are resourceful, opportunistic and show great initiative to bootstrap the sport into a better position. However, professional women's leagues are

unlikely to develop there.

Their catchcry: *"give us... anything!"* Their methods: initiative, opportunism, cross subsidies, persuade stakeholders of potential.

- The top right quadrant is **nirvana**: where football is dominant, and women have good access to participate. The fastest progressing leagues are moving towards this quadrant, with a clear focus on women's football, dedicated management, good governance, knowledgeable and committed leaders, and decisions made in the first-best interests of the women's league. This is where the greatest value will be created.

It seems likely – if not inevitable – that women's leagues will press towards the top right over time. Some have already moved – arguably England, Sweden and Spain from top left to top right, and USA from bottom right upwards.

Their catchcry: *"we knew we could"*. Their methods: independence, innovation, sustainability (not subsidy) and high growth.

Ascertaining where your situation falls on this chart can provide some insights into the likely needs and situation of women's football in your context, and the opportunities you will have as league entities.

For example, where synergies are the best solution (e.g. top left), the role of clubs and leagues in men's football becomes crucial. Not only will women's teams progress through co-operating with men's football institutions, but the men's clubs have the opportunity to absorb the positive aspects of the women's game into their club and internal culture.

Similarly where women's leagues pursue innovation or independence (for example, the NWSL in the USA) then men's pro leagues and clubs could consider how they might also benefit from the differentiated product and high growth environment. (e.g. as the Portland Timbers/Thorns do).



Practical steps

For WLF members who are interested to engage in women's football, there are a range of practical options – from looking to operate a league, to supporting clubs to move into women's football, to promoting EDI initiatives to improve the football culture around gender equality and inclusion.

It is beyond the scope of this project to recommend whether or not WLF members should themselves operate a women's league – a question that would depend on weighty local circumstances.

However, it is clear that professionalised women's club football is an immediate growth frontier. There is no need to wait-and-see if it emerges, or is viable, or is popular. It is here, and it will only grow bigger:

- Women's football is synchronous with a broader movement for gender equality in the world. Women's sport is a symbol of that movement, and women's football can ride the wave as the movement grows. Football can be the sport that is in the vanguard.
- Football can become the primary global force in women's sport, just as it is in men's sport i.e. the most watched, most played, most loved sport on the planet. The women's game is a force in many parts of the "new world" where men's football has not reached #1 e.g. USA, Japan, Canada, Australia, China and Korea are all ranked in the women's top 20, and can drive complementary growth for football overall.

Leagues can take a number of practical steps that will create value by enhancing their options, and leaving them better placed to exercise them in future :

1. Governance: prioritise focus and expertise

The best governance structures enable *focus* on the women's game, and empower decision-makers with *expertise* in women's football. Whether the leagues are separate or under one entity, these two factors will underpin the league's success.

(a) Focus: Ensure women's league governance that enables decision-making in the 'first-best' interests of the women's league.

It was the need for economic independence that drove political independence for men's professional leagues. In the same vein, women's leagues will never reach their potential if they are governed as a piece in some other jigsaw, rather than a picture in their own right. Governance structures should set up key decision-makers to be free of other duties or priorities that would prevent them from having a clear-eyed vision of their own success. This could be a separate entity and board (e.g. NWSL, Damallsvenskan), or an independently chaired board within the responsible entity (e.g. FAWSL), or a separate division and budget within a federation with dedicated personnel whose sole focus is the women's game. The key issue is to cease regarding the league as secondary, but treat it as equal first and enable the day-to-day decision-makers to give the women's league their full attention and priority.

As FIFA noted in its recent benchmarking study³⁴, clubs where women's football reports directly to the CEO, and where rights and sponsorship for women's football were not bundled with the men's rights, but separately negotiated, got more revenue than those that did not.

(b) Expertise: Ensure that the best women's football expertise is involved in all decisions about women's football.

Ideally, advisers or decision-makers should, individually or as a group, have both experience of women's football, and a high level of professional experience. Having only one without the other can create the appearance of expertise, but also creates risks of less-than-optimal decisions.

Expertise and focus at club level are similarly important. La Liga, for example, funded clubs to have dedicated staff for women's football. As one European women's league CEO said: "To build a sustainable league, you need sustainable clubs."

2. Synergies: leverage, but innovate to optimise

The synergy benefits that can be leveraged from men's football are obvious and significant: brand, fan engagement, channels for sales and distribution, facilities and support staff.

However, there should be no complacency about converting these opportunities to reality – it takes *focus and expertise* (as above) to execute them. This may be why stand-alone women's clubs have actually outperformed integrated clubs in revenue and profitability³⁵. While it seems logical to assume that integrated clubs will be able to outspend others over time, there are helpful lessons to be learned from the focus and expertise applied to achieve outsized success at stand-alone clubs (Canberra United, Glasgow City).

It is also important to move beyond a "copy and paste" model. Integrated clubs such as Portland Thorns/Timbers and Lewes FC have had exceptional success in attracting fans while growing commercial dimensions and sustaining on-field performance. They have created two first teams – each managed and marketed optimally – within one club.

Innovating to optimise can go beyond management practices, to apply to attracting investment. Cumulative investment in the women's game is decades behind men's. It may make sense to look beyond the same pockets that invest in the men's game, and find new investors specific to women's football. Women-only clubs (e.g. Angel City FC, OL Reign) are an obvious destination for these investors, but integrated clubs might explore how to attract such investors to their clubs e.g. creating ownership shares in the women's team through a partial "de-merger"; sublicensing the women's team, or creating synthetic equity in a virtual stand-alone women's team. Where existing owners do not wish to invest in women's football, such models may offer a viable path to funding. At a league level, opening a funding pathway for cash-strapped clubs could potentially make the league itself far more competitive by closing the gap between the top and bottom teams.

34 *Setting the Pace: FIFA Benchmarking Report Women's Football*, <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-benchmarking-report-women-s-football.pdf?cloudid=dzm2o61buenfox51qjot>

35 *Setting the Pace: FIFA Benchmarking Report Women's Football*, <https://resources.fifa.com/image/upload/fifa-benchmarking-report-women-s-football.pdf?cloudid=dzm2o61buenfox51qjot> pp 26-27

3. Promote a healthy culture

Promoting a healthy cultural environment for women players is not only good for the women's team – it is also good for the men's team and the club as a whole.

- A culture that values gender equality, diversity and inclusion is one where women players are likely to feel welcome, and flourish. Cultivating these values (e.g. by encouraging diversity and gender inclusion in management, team staff and governance roles) is an important part of preparing to launch a women's team or run a women's league.
 - In turn, the culture in women's football – promoting gender equality and social purpose, as discussed in B.6 above – can help combat and offset the more difficult elements in fan culture (such as racism, sexism and homophobia).
 - Increasingly, sustainability, responsibility, and “football for purpose” are seen as important to embed into league culture. The DFL Task Force's summary report³⁶ presents an outstanding example of a vision of sustainability and responsibility, including the promotion of women's football and women in football. Gender inclusion is thus very much a part of the new thinking for the future of professional football.
 - Leaders are the custodians of the culture³⁷. As football recovers from COVID, its leaders can choose to rebuild with purpose, refresh culture, and embed gender equality and inclusion.
- Invest in quality coaches and referees with expertise in the women's game – especially women, who typically have a longer 'life cycle' in the women's game (since they are rarely 'head-hunted' to men's football),
 - Build digital capability and fan engagement, anticipating a future direct-to-consumer media and marketing, and
 - Look to attract sponsors and partners who value relationships and share a 5 – 7 year vision for the future.

4. Be future-focussed

Football of the future will be different to pre-COVID football. The decisions made now will be judged not by the standards of the past, but by those of the future, which increasingly include social values such as equality.

Clubs and leagues should be encouraged to look beyond the short term and consider a time horizon of 5-7 years to build the women's game.

- Invest in player development e.g. create competition structures for players to gain match minutes (appropriate to their age and stage); and professionalised training environments,



³⁶ For example, see DFL's Summary Report of the Task Force "Future of Professional Football" <https://www.dfl.de/en/news/summary-report-task-force-future-of-professional-football/>

³⁷ A saying attributed to psychologist Dr Pippa Grange – see <https://omny.fm/shows/leader-manager-coach/133-lmc>

C.3

Summary

Women’s football has arrived, is growing, and is here to stay. It offers fans an evocative “retro” connection to a time when football was more accessible and less commercialised. It is also key to a cultural forward movement in football, as a symbol of gender equality, a more inclusive fan culture, and high digital fan engagement. At this point in time, it provides a perfect link to football’s fondly remembered past, and its progressive future.

With some notable exceptions, men’s pro leagues sit at the edge of the women’s game. Clubs increasingly have women’s teams, which creates a bridge to the women’s league. The men’s leagues may liaise and coordinate, and sometimes have a larger role.

In considering how the leagues can engage in growing football through the women’s game, we identified four practical approaches:



Diagram 6: PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Whatever the governance structure, ensure that both focus and expertise is applied to the women’s league. Just as men’s pro leagues sought independence from federations, the women’s leagues must have governance structures that enable them to “have their own mind”, and provide the focus to prioritise and pursue their own interests. Because women’s football has many differences to men’s, expertise in women’s football should be involved in all key decisions.

Leverage synergies with men’s football assets (like facilities, brand, staff, distribution deals, commercial relationships and the fan-base) **but recognise when differentiation and innovation is required to optimise women’s football** (like different product marketing, player safeguarding & well-being management, and fan engagement).

Protect and expand the positive culture that has grown around women’s football. It is different, and some aspects may be challenging, but **it has precious qualities and a sense of purpose** that football needs e.g. a willingness to speak for equality and against discrimination of all kinds, a fan culture that is inclusive and non-violent, accessibility of players, and early digital adoption. Seek to understand and **nurture these qualities, and migrate them to football more broadly.** Football with a healthy culture and purpose will be far more commercially and institutionally resilient. This is an opportunity that converts to the good of the whole game.

Be future-focussed. Cumulative investment in women’s football lags decades behind men’s. Returns may not be immediate, but over a reasonable period (est. 5-7 years) there is real opportunity for major gains. Investments in football development (players, coaches and referees) and digital capability take time, but create core assets.



Thank you for participating in the World Leagues Forum's Women's Football Project!

This interview guide is intended to provide a roadmap for our discussion. It is not exhaustive, but is intended to be a set of prompts to draw out facts, perspectives and insights. Below are the core questions we are seeking to understand, together with talking points that may shed light on each question. In all questions, we are interested in hearing your thoughts on [a] trends [b] reasons for these trends, and [c] lessons and learnings that arise.

1. GOVERNANCE



1.1 Governing body: Who runs the women's league?

Talking points: body running the league, Federation, League.

1.2 Prospects: Any recent or future reform?

Talking points: What are the views on the current governance? Are there any plans to change the governance or decision-making?

2. LEAGUE OPERATIONS



2.1 Competition: What are the basic dimensions of the women's league?

Talking points: Number of teams, format, how old, number of divisions, youth league, promotion/relegation professional/amateur. Prospects?

2.2 Financial: What are the approximate turnover/costs of the league?

Talking points: Overall annual turnover and costs, major cost categories, sustainability of women's football.

2.3 Integration: How integrated or separate is it from top-level men's football?

Talking points: Are clubs obliged to have a women's teams (club licensing obligations, pressure from public opinion, belief in growth), what about ownership, name, colours.

2.4 Synergies: Are there operational synergies across men's and women's football?

Talking points: club's perspective (training facilities, stadium, technical resources, back-office, ticket sales); league's perspective (double-headers, others).

3. MEDIA AND FANS



3.1 Media deals and coverage: how are deal negotiated and what is women's football reach?

Talking points: centralized/individual; selling team; value of deals [domestic / international]; extent of coverage; viewership [pay/free to air], trends in viewership.

3.2 Media integration and synergies: are women's media deals independent from men's?

Talking points: Bundled deals or separate to men's; same/different media partner and channels; other important factors.

3.3 Fan engagement: How successful is women's football with fans?

Talking points: stadium attendance; social media followers [league itself, top clubs, top players]; trends.

3.4 Fan integration and synergies: what are the synergies with men's football?

Talking points: Cross-promotion with / from men's football. Overlap with fan base for men's football; attracting new or returning fans via women's football.

4. SPONSORSHIP AND COMMERCIAL



4.1 Sponsorship deals: how is women's league attractive to sponsors?

Talking points: type and value of centralized league sponsors; importance of club sponsorships and/or personal player sponsorships.

4.2 Integration and synergies: what are the synergies with men's football?

Talking points: Sponsor synergies with the men's game (e.g. same or different/new); incremental value of women's football; bundled sales v separate sales by same staff or agency v sales by different channel. Are sponsor activations different to those in men's football. Any interesting or experimental examples or success stories.

4.3 Notable enablers and differences to men's football: what are the key success factors?

Talking points: Any incentive (government or consumer pressure); interesting commercial deal types, sponsor categories in women's football.

5. PLAYER MATTERS AND REGULATION



5.1 Professionalisation: how professionalised are the players?

Talking points: Professional / amateur status. Full-time v part-time; approximate average wage or range. Approximate age / range.

5.2 Pay and labor conditions: How are their pay & conditions determined?

Talking points: Collective bargaining agreement or minimum conditions.

6. ANYTHING ELSE



6.1 Particular success stories: Is there anything else peculiar / interesting / memorable about your league that holds lessons you can share?

6.2 Quotas: inclusion of women in men's (and women's) football governance
Are there gender quotas or targets promoting women's involvement in leadership, at league or club level?

6.3 Social purpose: in your opinion, does women's football change the sense of social purpose in football?
If so, can you describe the change or give examples?

6.4 I wish I'd known What do you know now, that you wish you knew a few years ago?

IMAGES:

- Pgs. 6-7: Tijuana, Mexico. 22nd Mar, 2021. Renae Cuellar (#10 Tijuana) in action during the LIGA MX Femenil game between Tijuana and Monterrey at Estadio Caliente in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Credit: SPP Sport Press Photo. /Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 13: LINKÖPING 20210604 Friday's match in the Damallsvenskan between Linköping's FC-Hammarby at Linköping arena. Photo Jeppe Gustafsson
- Pgs. 14-15: Barcelona, Spain. 01st Mar, 2020. Hamraoui of FC Barcelona ladies in action during Primera Iberdrola match between FC Barcelona and CFF Madrid at Johan Cruyff Stadium on March 01, 2020 in Barcelona, Spain. Credit: DAX/ESPA/Alamy Live News
- Pg. 17: Tijuana, Mexico. 22nd Mar, 2021. Itzel Gonzalez (#23 Tijuana) in action during the LIGA MX Femenil game between Tijuana and Monterrey at Estadio Caliente in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Credit: SPP Sport Press Photo. /Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 19: June 4, 2019: Diana Celis of Independiente Santa Fe fights the ball against Sindy Angel of Millonarios Credit: Daniel Garzon Herazo/ZUMA Wire/Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 21: Barcelona, Spain. 27th June, 2021. Vicky Losada tribute after the Primera Iberdrola match between FC Barcelona and SD Eibar at Johan Cruyff Stadium in Barcelona, Spain. Credit: David Ramirez/DAX/ZUMA Wire/Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 23: Ji So-Yun of Chelsea Ladies signs autographs for supporters during the FAWSL match between Arsenal Ladies and Chelsea Ladies at Meadow Park, Borehamwo.
- Pg. 25: Portland, USA. 20th June, 2021. during the Portland Thorns win over Kansas City NWSL in Portland Providence Park on June 20, 2021 in Portland, OR> (Photo by Jeff Wong/Sipa USA) Credit: Sipa USA/Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 27: Sakiko Ikeda (Reds Ladies), August 23, 2020 - Football / Soccer : 2020 Plenus Nadeshiko League Match between INAC Kobe Leonessa 0-1 Urawa Reds Ladies at Noevir Stadium Kobe in Kobe, Japan. (Photo by SportsPressJP/AFLO).
- Pgs. 28-29: Hoffenheim, Germany. 07th Mar, 2021. 19. Spieltag TSG Hoffenheim gegen Eintracht Frankfurt Credit: SPP Sport Press Photo. /Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 33: Linda Motlhalo (11 Djurgarden) controls the ball during the OBOS Damallsvenskan game between Djurgardens IF and Pitea IF at Stockholm Stadion in Stockholm, Sweden Credit: SPP Sport Press Photo. /Alamy Live News.
- Pg. 34: Hope Powell manager of Brighton and Hove Albion WFC during Vitality Women's FA Cup match between Brighton and Hove Albion Women and Birmingham City Women at Broadfield Stadium on September 27, 2020 in Crawley, England
- Pg. 35: 15th August 2021; Penny Cars stadium, Airdrie, North Lanarkshire, Scotland; Scottish Womens Premier League football, Celtic Women versus Hearts Women; Goalkeeper Charlotte Parker Smith of Hearts rises to punch the ball clear
- Pg. 36: Wanda Metropolitano Stadium recovered from https://as.com/futbol/2019/03/17/mas_futbol/1552824189_030333.html.
- Pg. 37: Shutterstock / Keeton Gale - Portland Thorns Riveters Flags at Providence Park in Portland Oregon USA - August.
- Pg. 38: Shutterstock / Jason Llagan - Falmer Brighton East Sussex United Kingdom April crowd watches on during the match.
- Pg. 39: London, UK. 29th Sep, 2019. a General view of the crowd inside the London stadium during the game. Barclay's FA Women's super league match, West Ham Utd women v Tottenham Hotspur women at the London Stadium, Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park in London on Sunday 29th September 2019.
- Pg. 40: Shutterstock / Jason Llagan - Borehamwood United Kingdom Sunday August Barclays FA Women's Super league signage seen.
- Pg. 41: Women German Soccer League, Munich, 6th September, 2020. Season 2019/2020, match day 1, FCB, Munich, FC Bayern Campus © Peter Schatz / Alamy Live News
- Pg. 42: <https://twitter.com/catalannews/status/1394335673700831232>
- Pg. 43: Shutterstock / Christian Bertrand - Barcelona Jan Alexia Putellas plays at the spanish women league match between FC Barcelona.
- Pg. 44: Sydney, Australia. 31st Oct, 2016. Westfield W-League Soccer 2016/2017 season launched in Sydney with players from each of the nine Westfield W-League clubs. Credit: mijmediabox/Alamy Live News
- Pg. 45: March 21, 2021. City of Buenos Aires, Argentina.- Ferroviaria's players (Brazil) celebrate winning the final match 2-1 against America de Cali (Colombia) at the final soccer female CONMEBOL Copa Libertadores, at Jose Amalfitani stadium in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Sunday, March 21, 2021. Credit: Julieta Ferrario/ZUMA Wire/Alamy Live News
- Pg. 47: <https://clics.com/sports/winner/direct/abinbev-aguila-beer/half-fans-79906>
- Pgs. 48-49: 03-11-2019: Voetbal: Vrouwen ExcelsiorBarendrecht v Ajax: Rotterdam Doelpunt Marjolijn van den Bighelaar
- Pg. 51: Tubize, Belgium. 18th Dec, 2020. in Tubize, Belgium . PHOTO SPORTPIX.BE | SPP | David Catry | Sportpix.be | SPP Credit: SPP Sport Press Photo. /Alamy Live News
- Pg. 54: Duisburg, Germany. 20th May, 2017. Referee Bibiana Steinhaus oversees the game between MSV Duisburg and FSV Zwickau in the Schauinsland Reisen Arena.

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Alex Eckhout
Mathieu Moreuil
Kelly Simmons
Victor Guevara
Mariana Gutierrez
Mats Enquist
Tomas Hoszek
Serge Rossmeisl
Charles Altchek
Adrienne Barber
Lisa Baird
Marc Lenz
Timo Kessler
Pia Hess
Keita Takeushi
Kikko Okajima
Junko Egawa
Raquel Hernandez
Daniel Cardona*

*Questions or comments may be directed to:
Jerome Perlemuter | CEO | World Leagues Forum
Moya Dodd | Project Consultant, Women's Football Project | moyadodd@gmail.com*

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