



IT'S TIME



**From
Milestone
Moments
to Market
Permanence**



IT'S TIME



CANADIAN
WOMEN & SPORT
FEMMES ET
SPORT AU CANADA

From Milestone Moments to Market Permanence

Visibility and the Path to Sustainable Growth for
Professional Women's Sport



PHOTOS (LEFT TO RIGHT): GETTY IMAGES, PWHL, NSL

Presented By





PHOTOS (TOP TO BOTTOM): GOLF CANADA, TORONTO TEMPO, NSL, PWHL

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Land Acknowledgement

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral, unceded, and unsundered territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples that call this land home. We also acknowledge the deep-rooted grief, trauma, and loss caused by Canada's colonial systems and policies. As we engage in sport and physical activity across Turtle Island, we recognize the caretakers of the land where we live, work, and play. Above all, we recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' connection and kinship to the land.

To deepen your relationship with the land where you live, work, and play, we invite you to learn more about the Indigenous territories, languages, and treaties connected to your area by visiting Native-Land.ca.

IT'S TIME TO SECURE THE FUTURE OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SPORT

CANADA HAS PROVEN THE DEMAND FOR PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SPORT. NOW COLLECTIVE ACTION IS REQUIRED TO CLOSE THE VISIBILITY GAP AND SECURE ITS FUTURE.

Over the last four years, Canadian Women & Sport's *It's Time* report series, in partnership with Canadian Tire Corporation, has charted the evolution of the professional women's sport market in Canada. The progress is real: more Canadians than ever are identifying as fans, leagues are expanding, and professional women's sport is embedding itself into Canadian culture. Investment is accelerating, opportunities for women are increasing, and momentum is building across the professional women's sport ecosystem.

This progress reflects the leadership and commitment of leagues, teams, broadcasters, media, brands, investors, governments, athletes, and advocates who have helped build the foundation of this emerging market.

But momentum alone does not guarantee enduring success.

Now we ask: What conditions are required to sustain this growth?



PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES



In this report, we explore visibility as a catalyst for sustained growth. Visibility is the engine that can turn passive interest into active fandom and ultimately drive long-term value across the professional women's sport ecosystem. This ecosystem's long-term viability requires visibility that is consistent, accessible, and systemic.

Developed in partnership with Canadian Tire Corporation and IMI International, this report provides industry leaders with actionable insights to strengthen visibility across professional women's sport. We examine why visibility is not yet consistently leading to fandom and enterprise value, and how closing this gap is essential to unlocking the full commercial and social potential of professional women's sport. Achieving this will require coordinated action across an evolving sport and media landscape. If we are successful, we will not only accelerate the growth of professional women's sport, but will help shape a stronger, more inclusive, more sustainable future for girls' and women's sport in Canada.



PHOTO: NSL

KEY INSIGHTS

01

Awareness is established.

75% of Canadians now identify as fans of professional women's sport, up from 67% in 2024. The challenge now is sustaining and converting this interest into active fandom.

02

Fans can't find what they're looking for.

While Canadian fans know professional women's sport exists, **62% of fans say that they don't know where to find the sport they want to watch**. Systemic gaps in visibility are actively holding back market growth.

03

Visibility is a catalyst of sustainable growth.

Broadcasters, media, leagues, teams, brands, investors, and governments must act in unison to address this system-wide challenge and pull the levers that will lead to lasting change.

CHARTING THE PROGRESS OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN'S SPORT IN CANADA

THIS REPORT BUILDS ON FOUR YEARS OF DEMAND-SIDE RESEARCH.



2023

Is there a market for professional women's sport in Canada?

Yes. The Canadian professional women's sport market of 2023 is an underdeveloped opportunity, with a total market size valued at approximately \$150–200M.¹

2024

Who are the fans and why do they matter?

Fans are the foundation of future growth. 2 in 3 Canadians are fans of professional women's sport, representing a large, diverse, educated, and affluent audience.²

2025

Why should brands and investors invest now?

The business case is strengthening. Canada's professional women's sport market has surged to an estimated \$380–400M, and brands that invest are seeing measurable gains in awareness, sentiment, and purchase consideration.³

2026

What conditions are required to sustain growth?

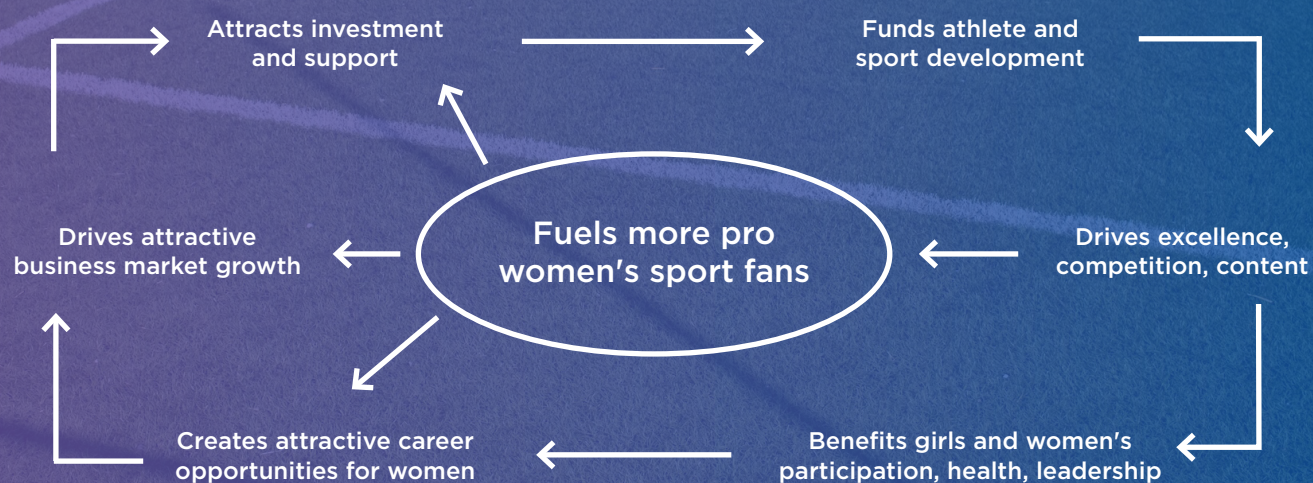
Demand alone is not enough. Sustained growth depends on the visibility, access, and coordination that will convert interest into lasting fandom, commercial value, and broader opportunities for women and girls in sport.



In the first report, we introduced the concept of the Professional Women's Sport Flywheel,¹ which demonstrates how professional women's sport generates both commercial and societal benefits. It answered questions about how the professional women's sport landscape in Canada can grow sustainably, with the two types of benefits (commercial and societal) fuelling one another and ultimately creating the conditions for long-term value.

The Flywheel Effect: Driving Commercial and Societal Value

Professional Women's Sport Flywheel Generates Both Commercial and Societal Benefits



We left off in 2025 demonstrating that the business opportunity for investing in professional women's sport is real. Investment, viewership, and mainstream attention were all genuinely on the rise, and the market was entering "a new era of visibility."³

With demand well established, this year's research shifts from validation to conversion: **what happens after interest is formed, and what will it take for interest to translate into sustained engagement?**

Drawing on national fan survey data from 2,043 Canadians, this research examines visibility across three key dimensions: awareness, discoverability, and accessibility. Rather than offering a traditional growth strategy, we pinpoint where visibility is breaking down and outline the collective levers industry leaders can pull to drive the next phase of growth.

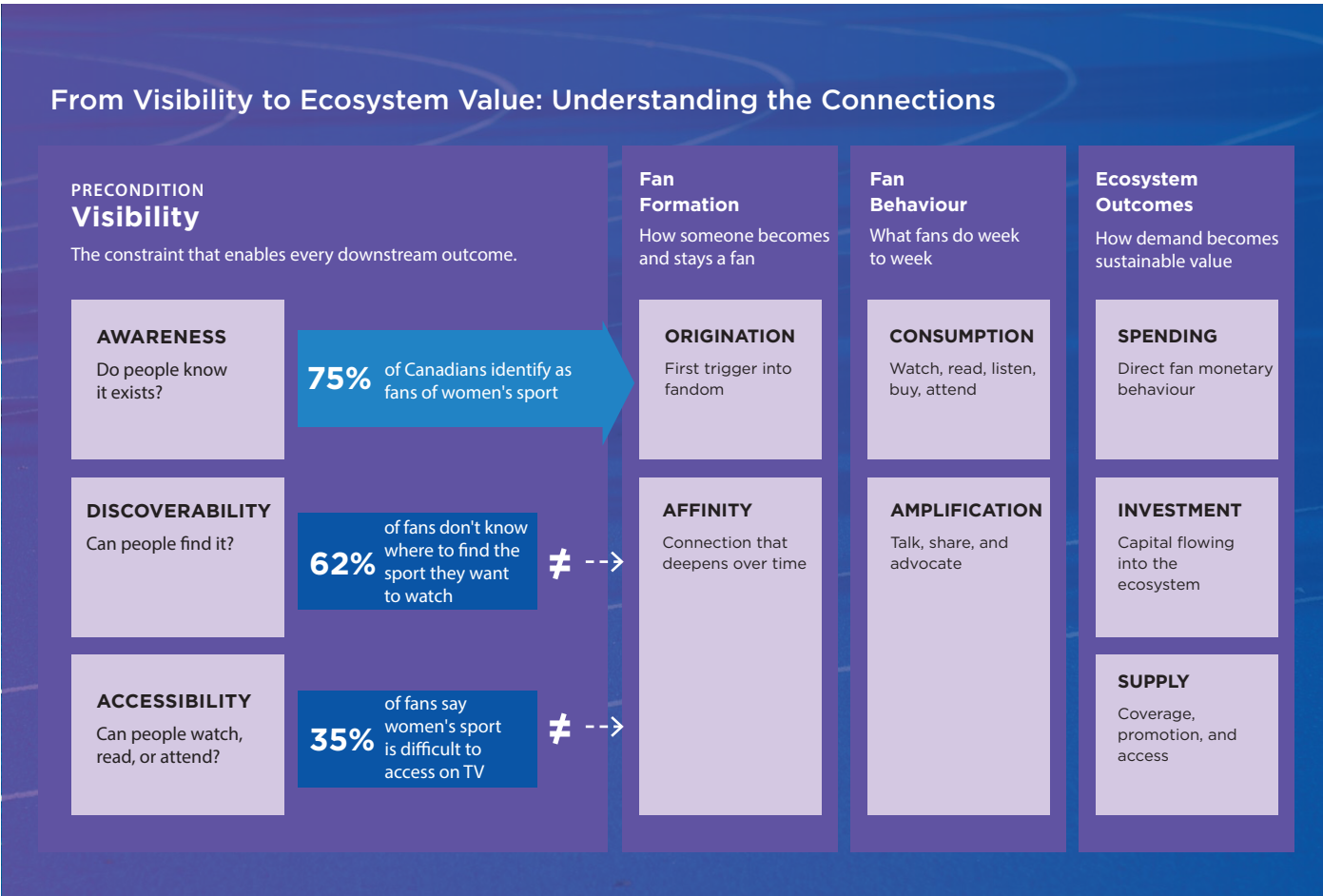
VISIBILITY: DRIVING THE NEXT PHASE OF GROWTH

Where We Are Today: The Pathway to Fandom Stalls at Visibility

While awareness of professional women’s sport is high, discoverability and accessibility continue to create barriers to fandom. **When fans cannot consistently find and engage with professional women’s sport, the pathway to fandom stalls, limiting fan behaviour and system outcomes.**

The challenge is not a lack of interest. The challenge is converting interest into sustained engagement.

Visibility is the precondition for discovering, engaging with, and ultimately becoming a fan of a sport. It includes awareness, discoverability, and accessibility.





How Perceived Risks Impact Visibility

When the emerging professional women's sport industry is compared to the existing sport market, a market enriched by over a century of dedicated capital and infrastructure, it creates a misleading perception of underperformance rather than a true measure of potential.

This comparison distorts actual demand, making investment appear unnecessarily risky and stalling momentum. As a result, lower levels of investment can limit promotion, storytelling, and media coverage, making professional women's sport harder to discover and engage with. This reduced visibility then reinforces the perception of limited demand, creating a cycle that can be difficult for emerging properties to break.

Coordinated action across the sport ecosystem can help break this cycle by increasing investment, visibility, and the conditions for sustainable growth in professional women's sport. The impact extends beyond the professional game. When women's sport is visible, valued, and supported, it expands what girls can imagine for themselves and helps create a sport system where they have greater opportunities to participate, lead, compete, and thrive.

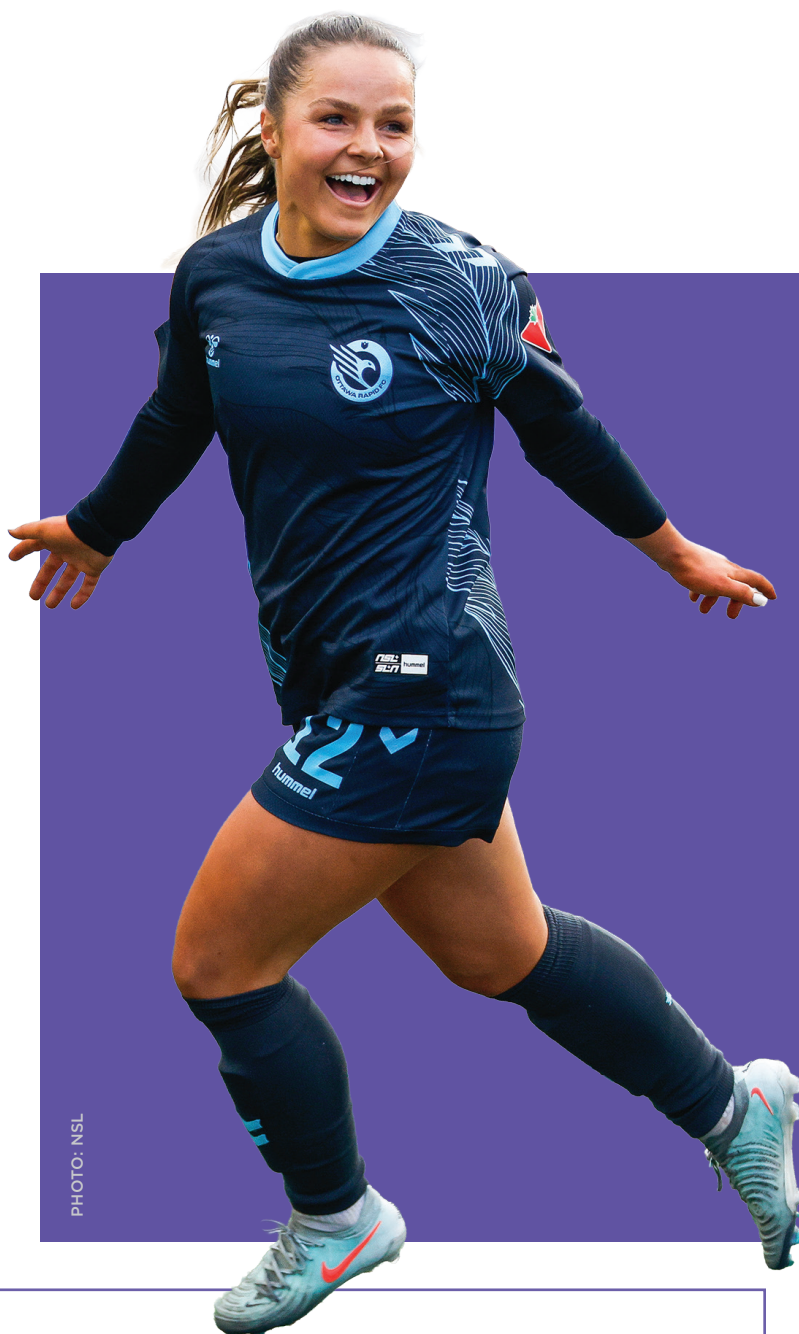


PHOTO: NSL

Professional women's sport is not alone in visibility struggles.

Professional women's sport is emerging within a broader sport and media ecosystem that is itself in transition. Established traditional sport properties are also grappling with increasing fragmentation and inconsistent engagement. In fact, a US study of sport fans conducted by Hub Entertainment Research found that "most sports fans (87%) surveyed say it's at least somewhat frustrating to figure out where to watch the sports they follow today, and almost a quarter saying they feel "very frustrated."⁴

Fan Formation: How Someone Becomes And Stays A Fan

Fan Origination

Awareness, discoverability, and accessibility aren't abstract ideas. They're structural dimensions that impact if and how fandom exists. Without visibility, fan formation is not possible. If fans are unaware of professional women's sport or unable to discover or access it, fandom cannot thrive.

Nearly 1 in 3 fans of professional women's sport report that news, online, or social media coverage was key in sparking their fandom.

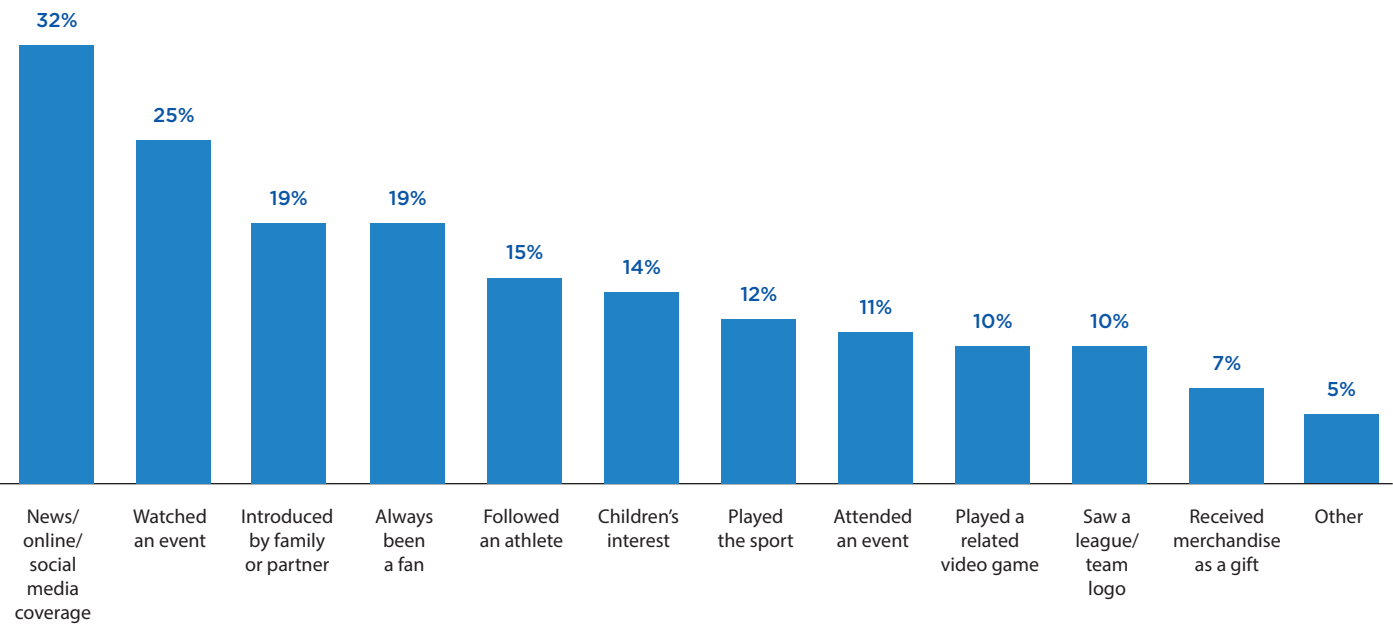
Top Three Ways Canadians Become Fans of Professional Women's Sport

19%
of fans **get introduced through a significant other or a family member**

25%
of fans **watch an event**

32%
of fans **see media coverage**

How Canadians Become Fans Of Professional Women's Sport

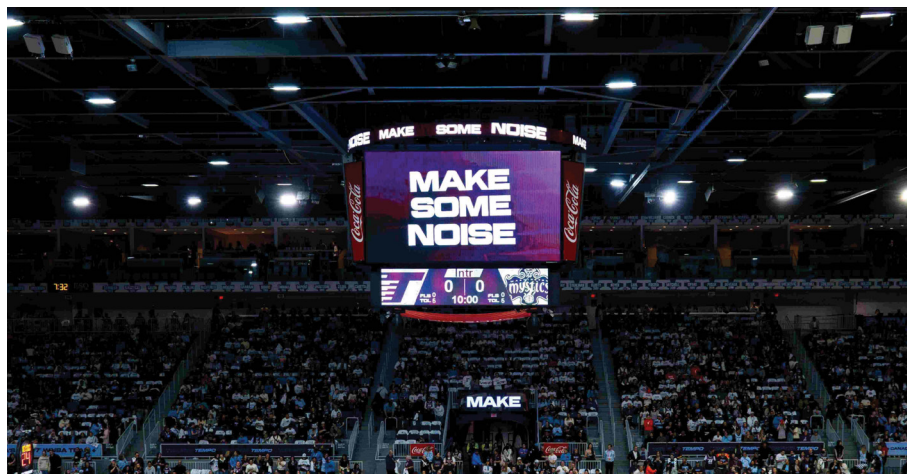


THE INSIGHT

Visibility drives fan acquisition. Audiences cannot follow a sport they never see. And, because fan origination relies on multiple touchpoints rather than a single touchpoint, every ecosystem player has a role to play in creating new fans.

THE PLAY

Making coverage and live events easy to discover and access is a top priority. Brands, media companies, and investors alike can treat games and other key moments like fan acquisition tools, increasing content before, during, and after events. Content can be designed to introduce new audiences to professional women's sport while engaging existing fans. Also, by identifying and distributing content in the places where non-fans already spend their time, fandom is more likely to grow. Governments, leagues, and brands can also work together to bring more marquee events to Canada, paired with coverage that carries the moment beyond the arena.



The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) and Toronto Tempo demonstrate how a successful market-entry strategy can support fan origination. Before Toronto secured a franchise, the WNBA had spent years building awareness and affinity across the country through their WNBA Canada Games. The Tempo built on that foundation by following through on their positioning as "Canada's Team". They brought games and activations to communities across the country, told stories that resonate with Canadian audiences, and created opportunities for fans to see themselves in the team. This approach helped turn awareness into engagement, contributing to the Tempo becoming the team with the highest following among fans of professional women's sport in Canada (47%).

PHOTO: TORONTO TEMPO

The Role Of Sport Participation In Fan Formation

The importance of women and girls' sport participation extends beyond the obvious health and societal benefits: it also creates fans who power the sport economy in Canada. In fact, 78% of fans of professional women's sport report being involved in sport.



Fan Affinity

Visibility doesn't just help people discover professional women's sport. It also helps them build a deeper connection to it. While fan origination is about first exposure, fan affinity is about what gives people a reason to keep coming back.

Fans Engage With Professional Women's Sport For Three Main Reasons:

01 **The excitement of the game**

02 **A sense of local connection**

03 **The desire to actively invest in women**

In fact, 55% of fans say that empowerment and inspiring the next generation of kids are the best things about professional women's sport.

The Role of Athletes in Developing Fan Affinity

Individual athletes play a big role in developing fan affinity. Our 2025 *It's Time* report found that 2 in 3 fans of women's sport already follow or engage with women athletes, while 49% wish there was more content about women athletes.

When asked to recall Canadian professional women's sport icons, fans named athletes including Christine Sinclair, Marie-Philip Poulin, Summer McIntosh, Hayley Wickenheiser, Sarah Nurse, Leylah Fernandez, Brooke Henderson, and Kia Nurse.

Then, when asked what women's sports or leagues they follow, hockey, basketball, soccer, and tennis were the four most popular. Within each sport, Canada has at least one athlete who is part of the cultural conversation.

Visibility also allows fans to build connections with athletes over time. It turns standout performers into household names. Without leagues like the Professional Women's Hockey League (PWHL), for example, Canadians would only see athletes such as Marie-Philip Poulin compete on a major stage every four years during the Olympic Games.



How Iconic Moments and Strong Storytelling Drive Fan Affinity

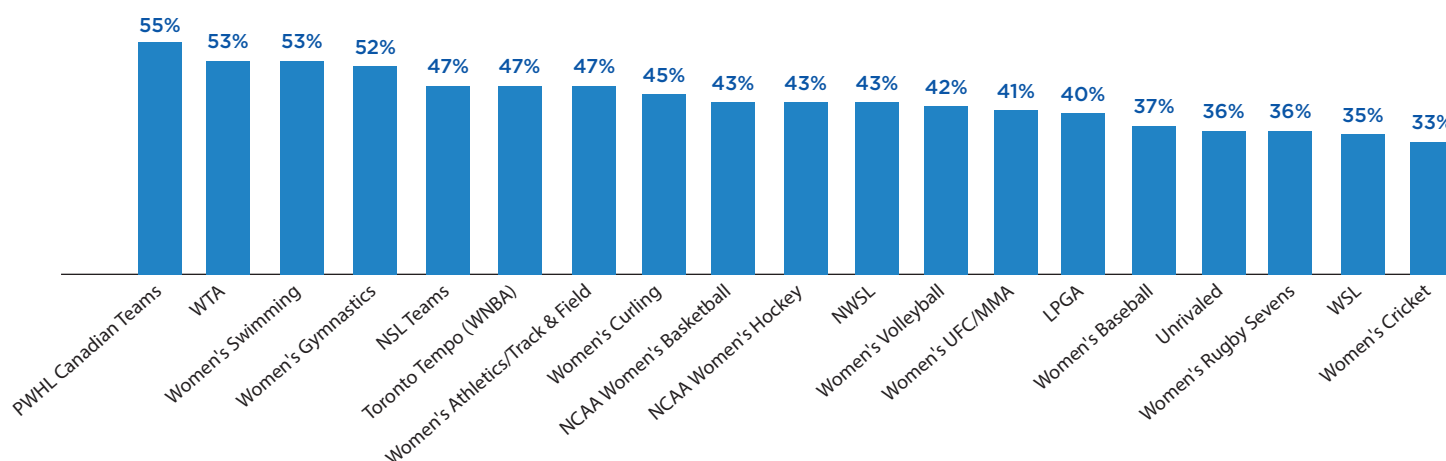
Athlete-centred storytelling helps create icons who transcend sport. These stories can carry fandom through the four-year cycles between international tournaments such as the Olympic Games.

The top professional women's sports that fans engage with use storytelling as a key growth strategy. Major events, including the Olympic Games, introduce

athletes to wider audiences, helping build recognition and affinity for Team Canada athletes.

Professional women's sport leagues and teams play a critical role in sustaining fan affinity between marquee events. By giving fans regular opportunities to follow athletes and their stories throughout the season, leagues like the Northern Super League (NSL), can turn the interest sparked by major events into ongoing engagement.

Fan Engagement with Women's Sport Teams, Leagues, and Events



THE INSIGHT

Major events help introduce athletes to new audiences, while ongoing visibility through leagues and teams, combined with strong storytelling, help turn initial interest into fan affinity. When consistent, athlete visibility and storytelling build loyalty.

THE PLAY

Give fans a reason to follow athletes—and their teams—between the big moments. Carrying momentum forward from major events, such as the Olympic Games or championship series, is a collective effort. Leagues and teams can build on the star power of national team athletes by developing storylines that connect fans to them throughout the season. Brands can reinforce these connections through athlete-centred campaigns and initiatives that reflect the values fans care about, like empowerment and inspiring the next generation.

Fan Behaviour: How Fans Consume and Amplify Professional Women's Sport

Fan Consumption

Whether fans attend a game in person or engage with content before, during, or after competition, consumption reflects how fans experience professional women's sport. However, consumption cannot happen if fans don't know where to watch. **Visibility is the fundamental prerequisite for fans to consume professional women's sport content.**

When it comes to the type and amount of professional women's sport that fans are consuming:

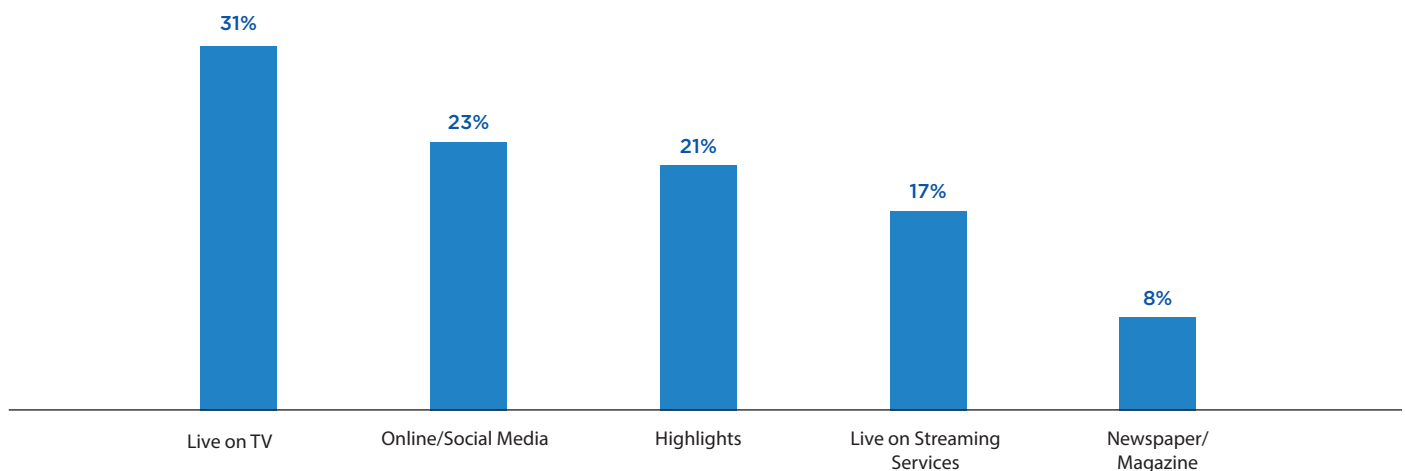
- Nearly half (**48%**) of fan engagement comes from **watching sport live** (on TV or streaming)
- **1 in 4 fans** report **watching live or streaming** at least weekly
- **2 in 5 fans** **attend a game or event in person** yearly



Live Events Are Queen

Nearly half of all engagement for fans of professional women's sport happens around live viewing. Creating more opportunities outside live games could help unlock sustained growth.

How Fans Consume Professional Women's Sport Content Overall

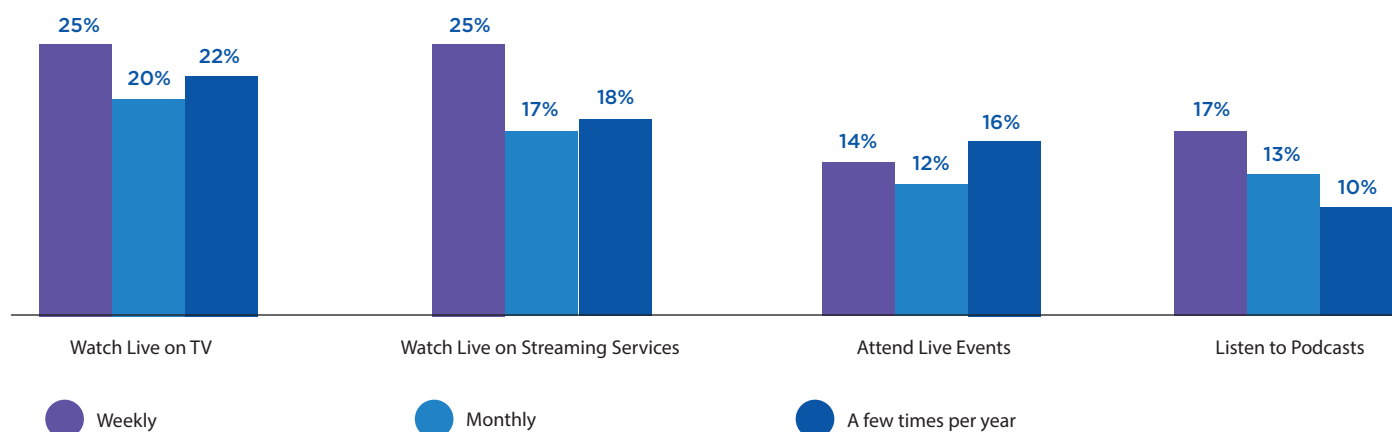




A Clear Opportunity to Convert Fans into Weekly Viewers

With only 25% of fans currently watching live games weekly, there is an opportunity to create more regular viewers. Increasing live game visibility is one way to make this happen.

How Often Fans Engage With Professional Women's Sport Content



Fans Are Showing Us Where They Spend Their Time and Money

When we look beyond live games, a clear pattern emerges: fans of professional women’s sport are consuming content across a variety of platforms.

How Canadians Use Sport Platforms

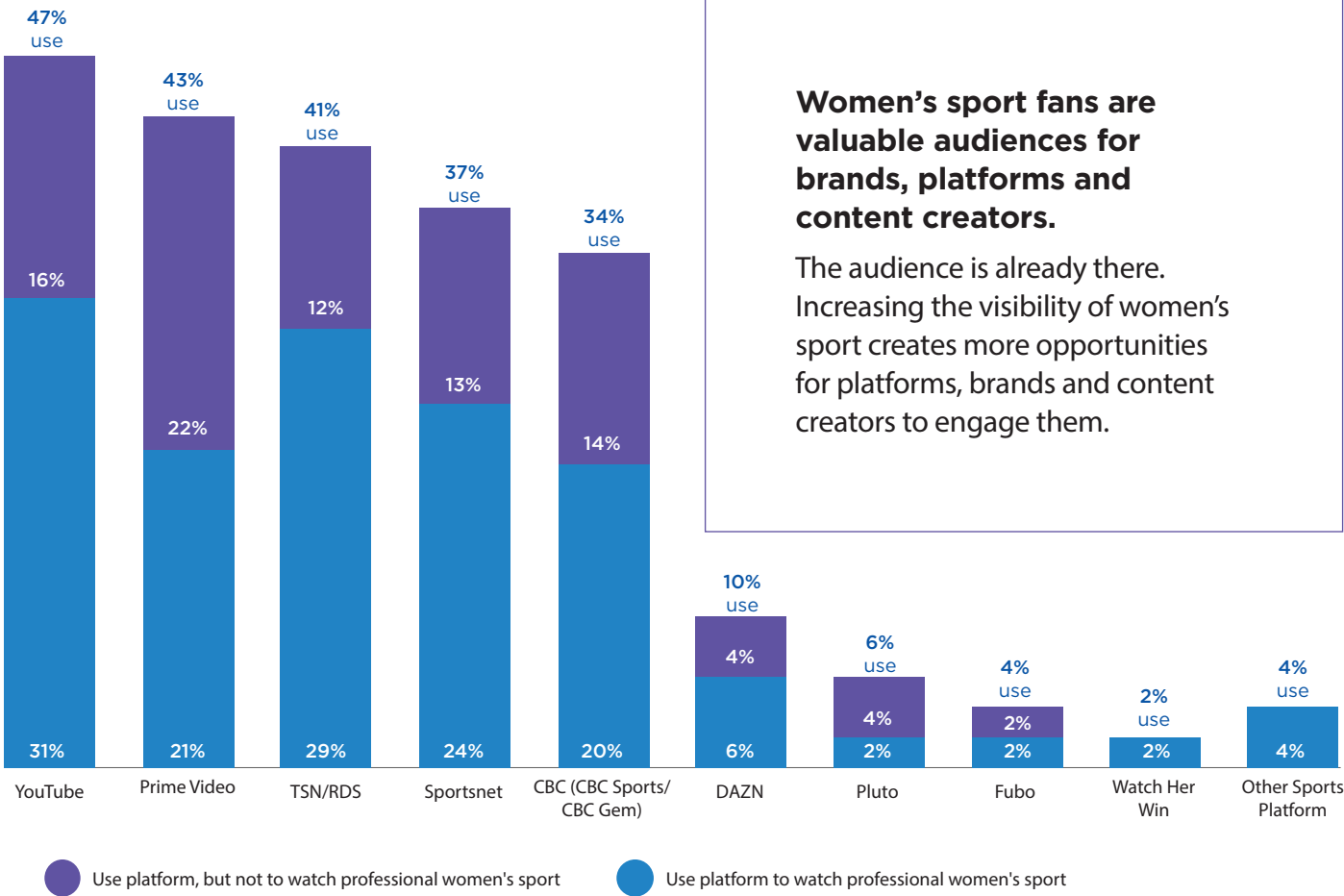
	General Population	Fans of Women's Sport
YouTube	41%	47%
Prime Video	39%	43%
TSN/RDS	35%	41%
Sportsnet	33%	37%
CBC	28%	34%

Fans of professional women’s sport use major streaming and subscription platforms more than the general population.

High engagement extends beyond sport-specific platforms, with **Prime Video (43%)** and **YouTube (47%)** among the platforms contributing to this broader reach.

YouTube is the platform of choice for fans of professional women’s sport, both in terms of overall media consumption and professional women’s sport consumption. 47% of fans use YouTube as a media platform, while 31% use the platform specifically to watch professional women’s sport.

How Fans Use Sport Platforms





THE INSIGHT

Live games anchor consumption. With viewing spread across **sport platforms**, various content formats remain underdeveloped. The opportunity isn't **just** to build new habits but to show up reliably where fans' existing habits already are.



THE PLAY

By meeting audiences on their preferred channels, we can make the question of "where to watch professional women's sport" a challenge of the past. Alongside scheduled events, brands, media, leagues, and teams can also invest in multi-channel content that showcases athlete stories, rivalries, and championship runs. Creators, athletes, and brands also have an open lane to build regular audio and video formats between games.

Content Opportunity: The Podcast Gap

Only 30% of Canadian fans report listening to professional women's sport podcasts at least monthly. US research reveals an encouraging sign: fans with similar interests spend an average of 6 hours and 45 minutes each week consuming other sports audio.⁵ This does not guarantee that Canadian audiences will behave the same way, but it suggests that the appetite for sports audio may already exist. Producing accessible, dedicated professional women's sport podcasts could test that potential—expanding storytelling, deepening fan connections, and giving audiences more reasons to engage between games and seasons.



PHOTO: PWHL

Fan Amplification

Greater visibility creates opportunities for fans to discover and engage with professional women’s sport, and fans themselves help extend that visibility. As fans share what they watch, talk about athletes and teams, and gather with friends and family to catch the game, they can help reach new audiences, build cultural relevance, and strengthen demand beyond those who already follow the sport.

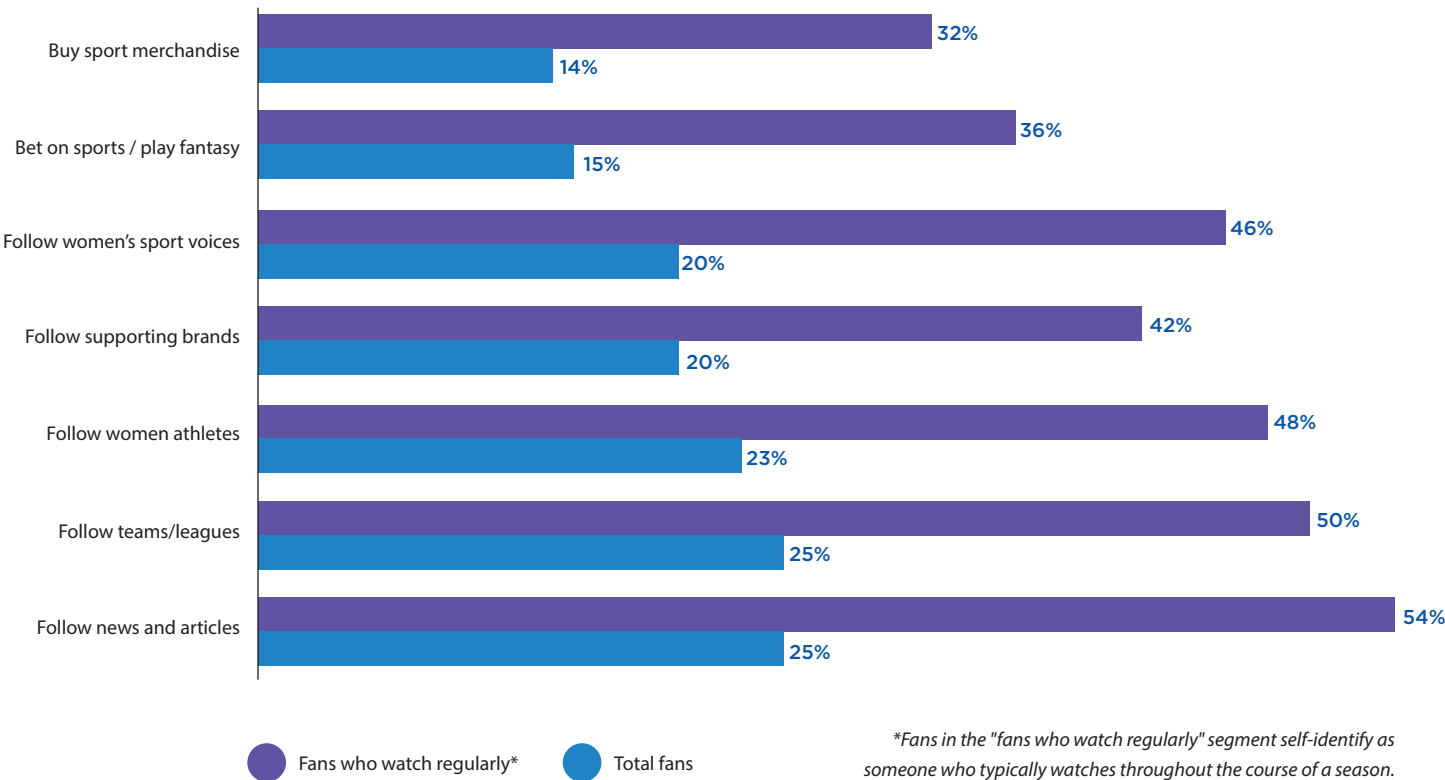
When we look at fan amplification, key patterns stand out:

- Fans who regularly view professional women’s sport are roughly **2x as likely** as the total fanbase to **follow, share, and post** about professional women’s sport online.
- **Fans aged 19–29** show especially **high social media engagement** with professional women’s sport.
- **50% of fans** talk about professional women’s sport **with their kids at least monthly**.

Online Amplification

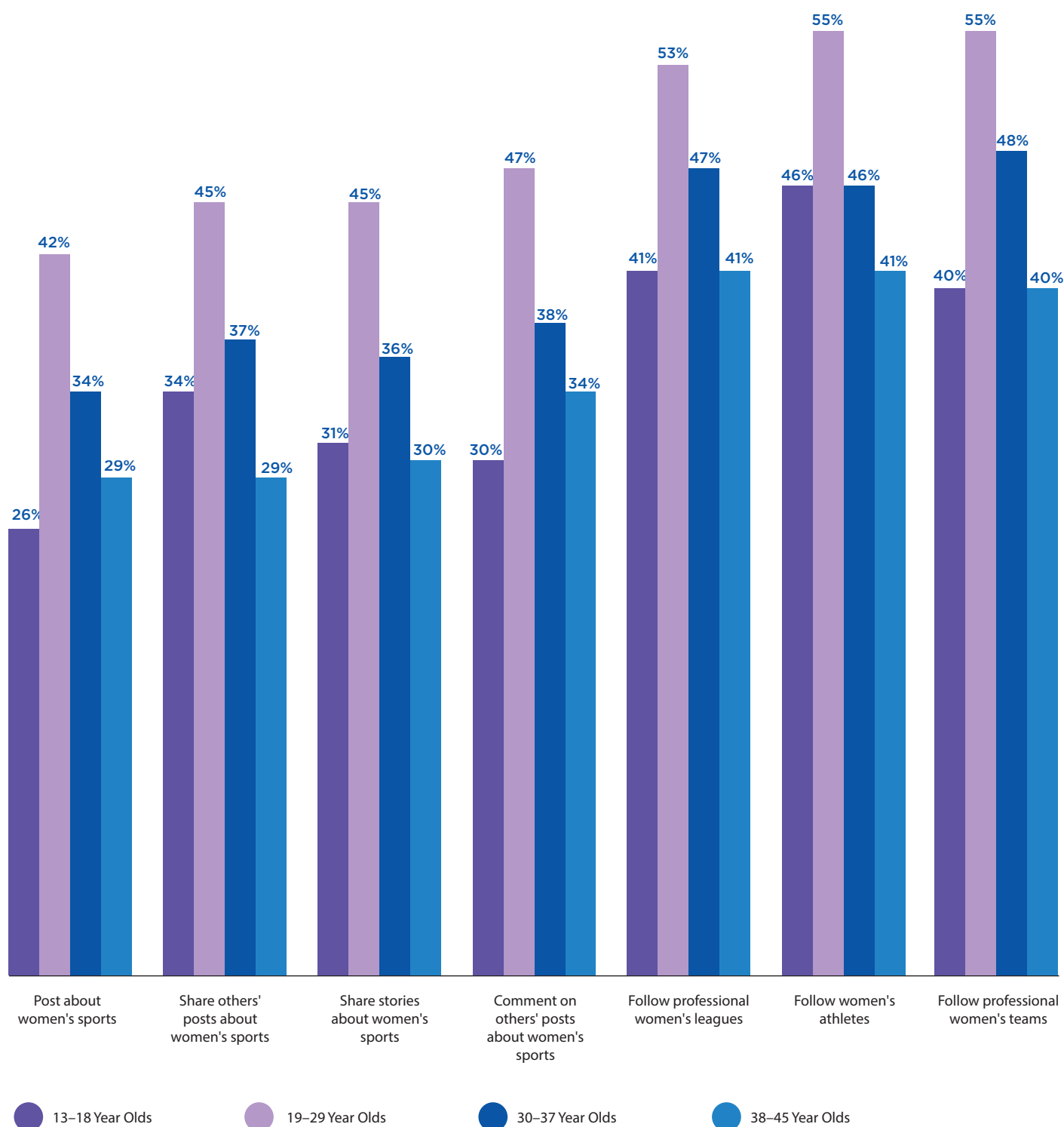
Online amplification reflects how fans actively champion professional women’s sport through their digital behaviours. By sharing content, following athletes and teams, and participating in online conversations, fans help strengthen the sport’s relevance and momentum.

How Fans Engage Online





Fan Social Media Behaviour by Age



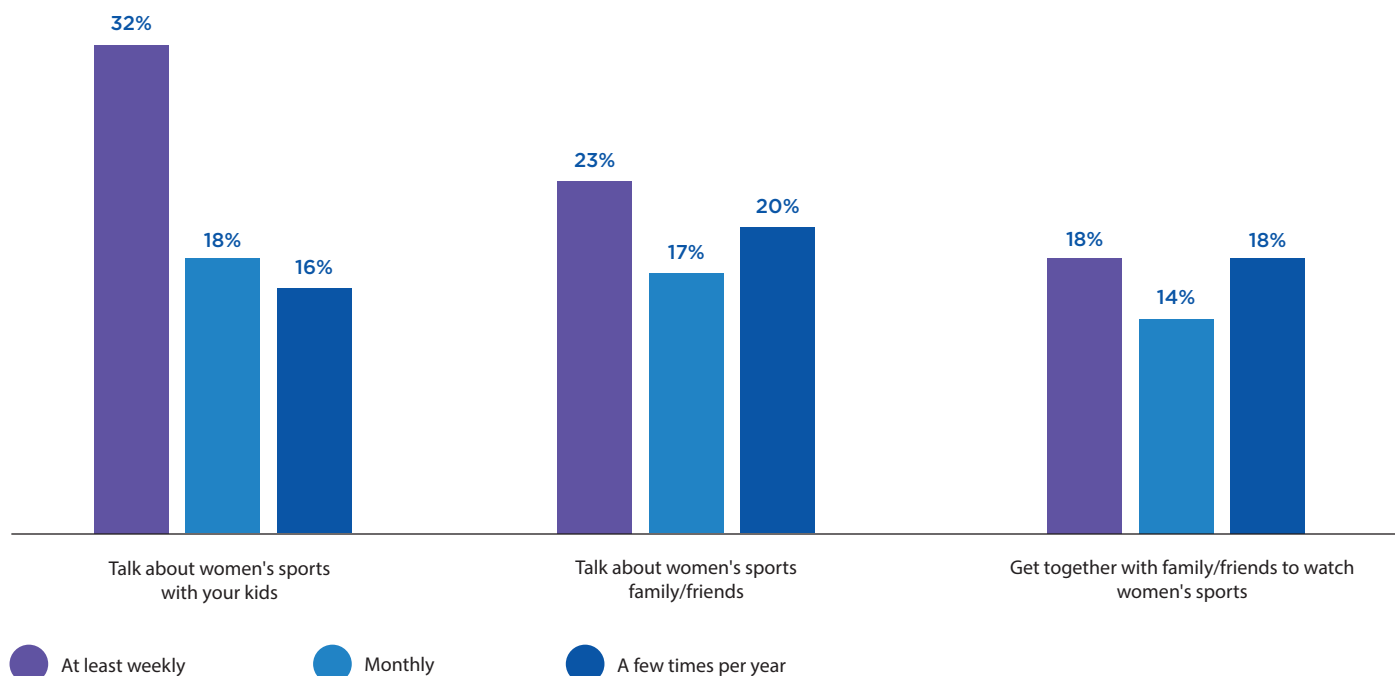
Offline Amplification

Amplification doesn't only happen online. In fact, on a monthly basis 50% of fans talk about professional women's sport with their kids, and 40% discuss it with their friends. Nearly 1 in 3 gather socially at least monthly to watch professional women's sport.



PHOTO: GOLF CANADA

How Fans Amplify Professional Women's Sport Offline



THE INSIGHT

Every fan who moves from occasional to regular viewing becomes a potential pathway to the not-yet-fans around them. These fans are key to increasing both online and offline amplification of professional women's sport.

THE PLAY

Leagues, teams, and brands can design sharable content and encourage fans to capture, create, and share their own content, even when it carries league intellectual property. Clear, creator-friendly guidelines can empower fans to become key amplifiers of professional women's sport. These same industry players can also invest in physical and digital spaces that bring fans together and encourage fan amplification.



“As both an athlete and someone who works in sports media, I’ve seen the conversation shift from proving there’s an audience for professional women’s sport to how we build on that momentum and sustain its growth. We’ve come a long way, and now it’s about making sure that progress lasts”.

Kia Nurse, Toronto Tempo Guard



Ecosystem Outcomes: How Demand Becomes Sustained Value



PHOTO: PWHL

Fan Spending

Merchandise

When we asked fans about their merchandise purchases:

- 40% say they have bought merchandise related to professional women’s sport at least a few times a year, if not more.
- More than half (56%) of fans anticipate buying professional women’s sport merchandise in the next year.

Paid Access to Content

Fans also show interest in paying for professional women’s sport content.

- More than half (52%) of fans say they intend to purchase a sports subscription in the next year to watch professional women’s sport.
- 1 in 4 fans say they’d be willing to pay \$10/month for behind-the-scenes content.
- 1 in 5 say they’d pay \$10/month for athlete-driven social impact stories.

Fan Appetite for Women’s Sport Stories

	Behind the scenes access to athletes’ lives	Underdog and breakthrough success stories	Athlete-driven social impact stories (advocacy, giving back)	Rivalries, historic moments, and championship narratives	Documentary-style deep dives into women’s sport
Extremely/Very Interested in women’s sport stories	47%	52%	48%	48%	47%
Very likely to pay \$10/month to access	24%	16%	20%	18%	18%
Very likely to pay \$25/month to access	20%	15%	17%	14%	17%



Beyond spending on merchandise and content, 61% of fans say they want to see more professional women's sport events in Canada, which indicates both interest in viewership and an opportunity for ticket sales.

Nearly half (47%) of fans of professional women's sport report that they're more likely to consider buying from brands who invest in professional women's sport, and 57% say they feel better about brands who sponsor professional women's sport.



THE INSIGHT

Current professional women's sport fans represent high-value early adopters who monetize through merchandise, subscriptions, and brand support. While crucial for early revenue and proof-of-concept, this passionate core cannot be the sole revenue engine. The growth mandate is twofold: deepen engagement with this dedicated base while increasing visibility to expand fandom.



THE PLAY

Leagues, teams, and brands can reward the existing fanbase by building loyalty and membership experiences. These strategies reward early adopters, drive repeat spending, and give brands and properties a built-in feedback loop. When developing content, experimenting with types of content fans want to see (including behind-the-scenes access and athlete-driven stories) can help leagues, teams, and creators discover what resonates best with audiences and explore viable opportunities for collaboration and monetization.

Content Fans Want to See

Nearly half (47–52%) of fans say they are extremely or very interested in behind-the-scenes content, underdog and breakthrough stories, athlete-driven social impact stories, rivalries, historic moments, championship narratives, and documentary-style deep dives into professional women's sport.



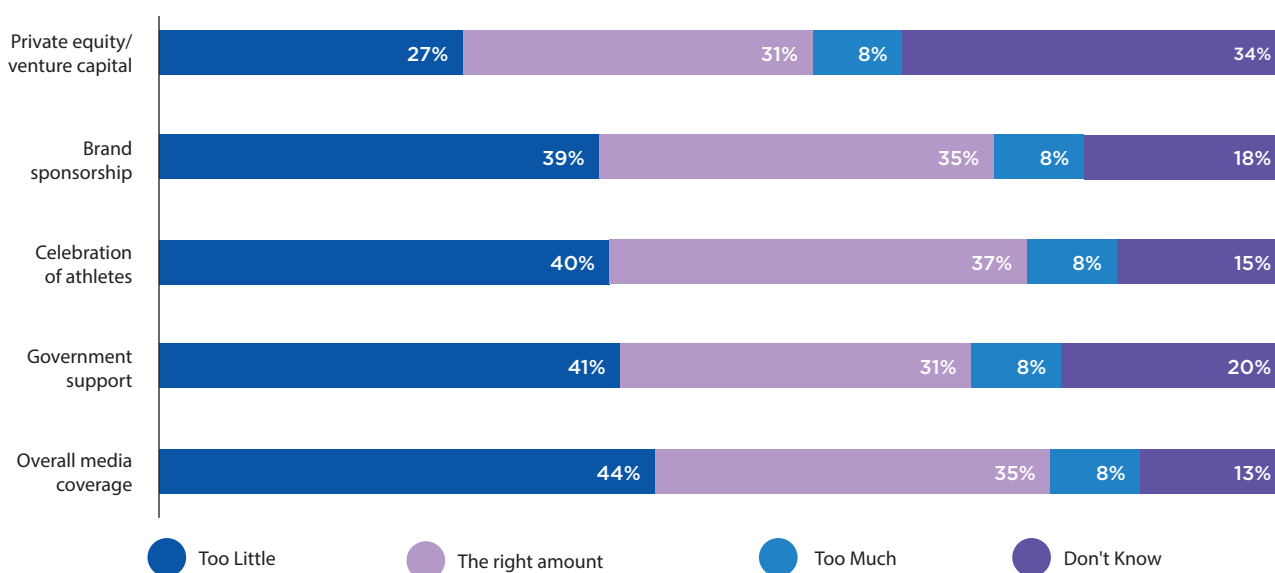
Fan Perceptions of Investment

Investment in professional women's sport is not just about private equity or venture capital. Brands, broadcasters, media, content creators, and governments all have a role to play in investing in the future of professional women's sport.

When asked about their thoughts on investment in professional women's sport:

- **44%** of fans think there is **too little overall media coverage**
- **41%** of fans think there is **too little government support**
- **39%** of fans think there is **too little brand sponsorship**

Fan Perceptions of investment in Professional women's sport



The Critical Role of Brands

When asked about the role that brands should play in the future of professional women's sport, fans vary in their perspectives. 31% of fans say financial support/investment, while 24% say promotion and visibility. One survey respondent said, "Brands must act as ecosystem builders by using their financial leverage to solve visibility and structural issues."



THE INSIGHT

Passive, short-term logo placement isn't enough anymore. Professional women's sport fans want to see all industry players invest in ways that increase visibility, coverage, access, and storytelling—the kind of investment that also fuels the industry's sustainable growth.



THE PLAY

Invest beyond logos and one-off sponsorship. By creating opportunities for fans to connect with professional women's sport and each other, brands can demonstrate meaningful commitment to the sport and build lasting brand loyalty. Building something that lasts requires commitment and investment that extends beyond a single season.

Fan Perceptions of Supply

In the context of this report, supply is the number of opportunities to play, watch, attend, and engage with professional women's sport. Coverage is a key component of supply.

When asked what would make them follow more professional women's sport, fans point to supply:

31% want better access and coverage.

The good news is that the rapid expansion of professional women's sport in Canada, including the launch of new leagues and teams, has significantly increased the supply of games, opportunities to watch, athletes to follow, and stories to engage with. The next phase of growth will depend less on new properties entering the market and more on increasing the visibility, coverage, and accessibility of the opportunities that already exist.



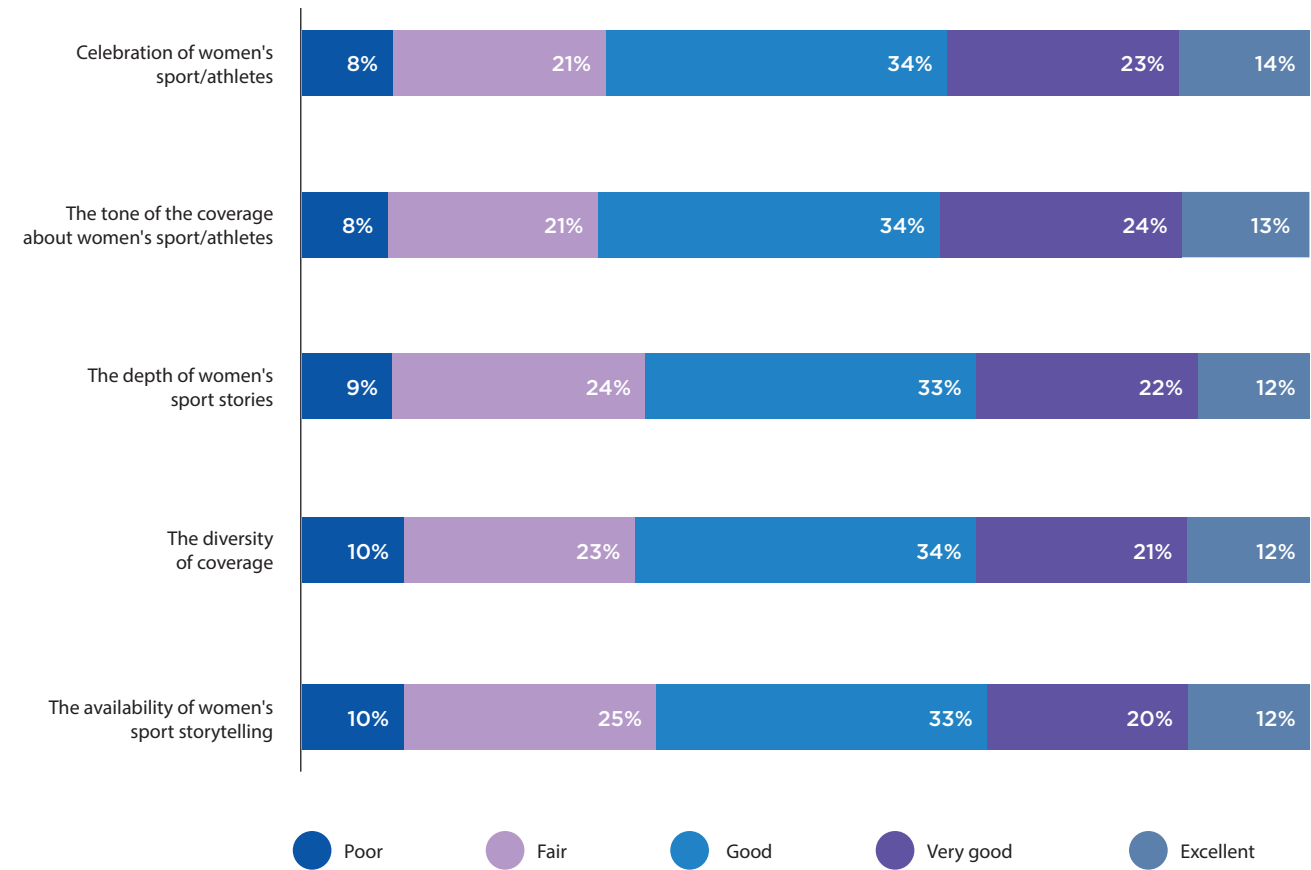
Supply also includes opportunities for girls to participate in sport today so that they can be the next generation of athletes, leaders, and fans. Governments, brands, and sport organizations all have an opportunity to invest in girls' participation now to create more equitable opportunities for them to play, lead, and thrive in the future.

Fan Perception of Coverage

Over the last two years, nearly half of fans say the amount, quality, and accessibility of professional women’s sport coverage have improved—a sign that Canadian broadcasters and media are moving in the right direction. Fans estimate that professional women’s sport represents roughly 30% of broadcast and online coverage. While this is a perception rather than a measured Canadian share, it’s notable that it is almost 3x the 9.2% share of TV coverage reported by US sports networks, excluding those focused on women’s sport.⁶ The difference between perceived and measured coverage suggests that increases in visibility may have an outsized impact on fan awareness and perception.

Though the coverage itself has room to improve, the overall sentiment is strong. Across tone, celebration, diversity, depth, and availability of storytelling, roughly 65%–71% of fans rated coverage as “excellent,” “very good,” or “good.” The comparison suggests that Canadian audiences are noticing progress, and it provides encouraging momentum for broadcasters to expand with more consistent, visible, and accessible coverage.

Fans of professional women’s sport perceptions of coverage





Increasing Supply: Media Leaders Are Making Big Moves

Canadian broadcasters and sports media organizations are making meaningful commitments to increase the visibility of professional women's sport:

- **Bell Media** became the official media partner of the Toronto Tempo and secured Canadian media rights for the WNBA, bringing games and league events to audiences across **TSN**, **CTV**, and **Crave**. Canadian viewership of the 2026 WNBA Draft increased by 172% compared to the previous year.⁷
- **CBC/Radio-Canada** has committed to equal coverage of women's and men's sports across its platforms. Beginning in December 2026, Hockey Night in Canada will also feature PWHL games in Saturday primetime.^{8,9}
- **Sportsnet** continues to expand access to professional women's sport through its coverage of the PWHL, helping make women's hockey available across multiple major sports platforms in Canada.¹⁰
- **The GIST** is building a more inclusive sports media community through fan-first, accessible storytelling that gives equal coverage to women's and men's sports and welcomes fans beyond the traditional avid-sports-fan mould.¹¹

Collectively, these commitments are expanding access, increasing discoverability, and creating more opportunities for fans to engage with professional women's sport.



THE INSIGHT

To support the sustainable growth of professional women's sport, coverage needs to be plentiful, higher quality, and easier to find.



THE PLAY

Brands, media, leagues, and teams all have an opportunity to redefine what "excellent" coverage looks like in professional women's sport. Investing in audience research and fan focus groups can reveal what viewers truly want—unlocking new content types, formats, and channels to attract and engage professional women's sport fans. The industry also needs a Canadian coverage baseline for professional women's sport that would give all players access to a shared and accurate benchmark.



THE ROADMAP: FROM CONSTRAINTS TO COORDINATION

The findings in this report point to a clear conclusion. Professional women's sport in Canada is not constrained by a lack of demand, but by a key condition required to convert that demand into sustained engagement and value: visibility.

Addressing current challenges requires more than increasing exposure or producing additional content.

It requires coordinated action across the sport ecosystem to strengthen the conditions through which professional women's sport is discovered, experienced, and valued.

When each player contributes to a shared purpose, the professional women's sport ecosystem can become stronger, more sustainable, and better positioned to deliver both commercial value and lasting opportunities for women and girls.

Sustainable Growth Requires Coordinated Action Across the Professional Women's Sport Ecosystem

COLLECTIVE ACTION					
Coordinate investment, resources and expertise		Align efforts to address systemic barriers		Share responsibilities, risk, and accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Bring together capital, knowledge, and networks across the ecosystem		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Remove obstacles and create enabling conditions for growth		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Build long-term commitment and ensure sustainable progress	
	Governments	Brands & Sponsors	Broadcasters & Media	Leagues & Teams	Investors
Contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Funding and policy supportInfrastructure investmentPublic-sector leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sponsorship and investmentIntegrated marketing and activationPromotional reach and amplification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Visibility and storytellingCoverage and distributionContent creation and amplification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Athlete access and storiesGames and event platformsFan engagement and visibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Capital and financial supportStrategic guidance and expertiseLong-term commitment and networks
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Healthier, more active CanadiansDomestic economic growthGreater gender equity and public value	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sales and customer acquisitionBrand loyalty and reputationRelevance with engaged, growing audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Compelling, distinctive contentExpanded and diverse audiencesBrand partnerships and revenue h	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fan growth and engagementRevenue generationStronger brands and long-term sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Financial returnsBrand and reputational valueMeaningful impact and legacy



The Structural Barriers and Where We Can Act

Three interconnected barriers explain why visibility is not consistently converting demand into sustained engagement and value. Together, they reveal where current approaches fall short and where industry leaders can act to strengthen visibility and support growth.

01
**Exclusivity No
Longer Rules
Discoverability**

02
**Waiting for
Proof of Market
Demand**

03
**Measurement
Systems That
Undervalue
Modern Fandom**

The following sections explore each barrier, the levers available to address them, and the plays industry stakeholders can make to help the professional women's sport industry realize its potential.

Barrier 01

Exclusivity No Longer Rules Discoverability

“How do we make finding professional women’s sport as automatic as finding any other content fans already consume, regardless of what platform they’re on?”



LEVER: Distribution Channels

Awareness of professional women's sport is high, but fans are still struggling to find it. Traditional broadcast models relied on exclusive distribution and scheduled viewing, creating clear pathways for audiences to follow sport. In today's fragmented media landscape, fans encounter sport across multiple platforms and channels, making discoverability increasingly important.



THE PLAY

Rebuild discoverability to reflect how attention works today—distributed, digital, and habit-driven.

The PWHL has a multi-pronged broadcast distribution approach, combining traditional platforms, such as TSN/RDS, Sportsnet, and CBC, with streaming platforms such as Prime Video and YouTube. This multi-platform approach meets audiences where they already consume content and increases the likelihood of discoverability by the not-yet-fans.

“The PWHL’s broadcast strategy isn’t about exclusivity—it’s about accessibility,” says Amy Scheer, the PWHL Executive Vice President of Business Operations. “By working with an incredible mix of broadcast and digital partners across North America, we’re ensuring fans everywhere can experience the speed, skill, and intensity of PWHL hockey. This approach allows us to continue expanding our audience, strengthen local connections, and showcase our world-class athletes on the biggest possible stage.”¹⁰

Barrier 02

Waiting for Proof of Market Demand

“How can we come together to share risk to unlock industry-wide growth?”

**LEVER:****Shared Investment and Risk**

Broadcasters need audiences to justify the cost of rights, brands need scale to justify spending, and leagues need investment to build scale. This creates a cycle where no single actor can move first without taking on risk, and growth is constrained.

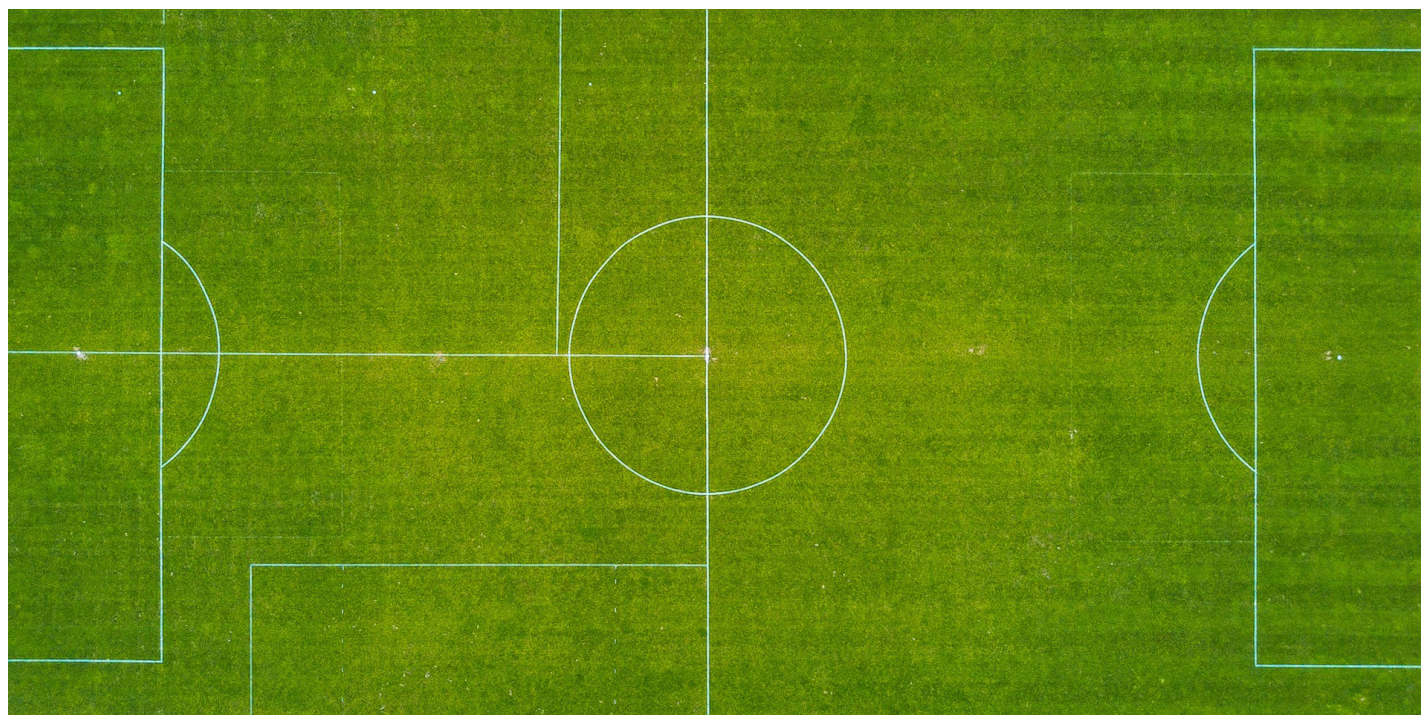
**THE PLAY**

Align around long-term value creation, not short-term returns. Share early-stage risk across capital, rights, sponsorship, and public funding so investment can build the visibility, audience engagement, and evidence of market demand needed to unlock further growth.

The NSL's partnership with Apex Capital illustrates how private investment can bring more than capital alone.

Following government investment and a broadcast deal with the CBC, Apex Capital's investment builds on public-sector support and increased broadcast visibility, demonstrating how different industry players can contribute complementary resources to help an emerging league grow. By strengthening the conditions for audience growth and commercial opportunity, this type of coordinated investment can help reduce risk for investors and build a stronger foundation for long-term returns.

“The NSL delivered in season one,” says Antonio Cacorino, Apex Capital's Chief Executive Officer. “Now we are excited to help enable the next phase of growth. Women's football has the players, the fans, and the competitive quality. With the right capital and commercial infrastructure behind it, the sport has the opportunity to unlock significant long-term value globally.”¹²



Barrier 03

Measurement Systems That Undervalue Modern Fandom

“How can we better measure how fans engage with professional women’s sport across platforms and over time, so today’s decisions aren’t being made with yesterday’s measuring stick?”



LEVER:

Shared measurement standards

Success is still defined by linear viewership and reach-based metrics that do not reflect how professional women’s sport fans engage across platforms, how fandom develops, and how value accumulates over time. As a result, the market underestimates both current and future potential.



THE PLAY

Develop shared measurement standards that reflect modern fan behaviour, capture engagement across platforms over time, and provide a complete picture of the value and growth potential of professional women’s sport.

The WNBA is leading the charge with WNBA ID. This global account program is designed to simplify the fan experience. With a WNBA ID, fans can personalize the WNBA App to include favourite team and player content, purchase a WNBA League Pass subscription, receive discounts on merchandise and unlock other VIP benefits. This allows the league to provide highly customized experiences to fans and understand the different behaviours of those fans across content, purchases, and other activities. As a result, the league can look beyond reach and views to better understand engagement, repeat interactions, and how fans connect with the WNBA over time. This illustrates how more comprehensive measurement can provide a richer picture of fan behaviour and value—an important step toward shared standards that better reflect how professional women’s sport audiences engage today.

“With WNBA ID, we’re giving fans the power to personalize how they connect with the league, engage more deeply with the players and teams they love, and access the stories that define the WNBA,” says Dev Ward, Head of Digital at the WNBA. “It’s a step toward building a more connected, immersive, and authentic ecosystem for every fan.”¹³

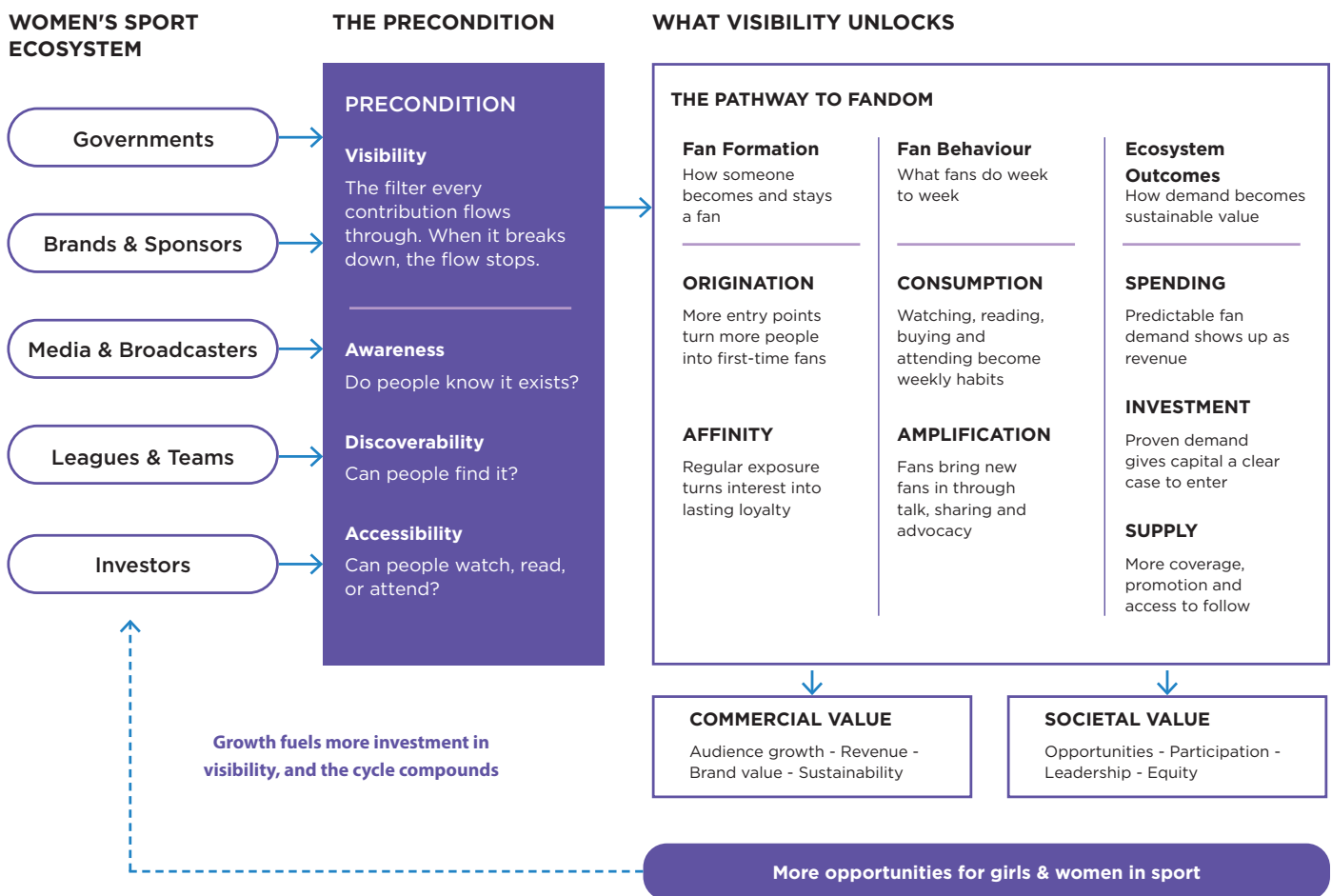


PHOTO: WNBA

From Milestone Moments to Market Permanence: What Happens When We Solve For Visibility

Solve for visibility, the whole system compounds.

When these levers (distribution channels, shared investment and risk, and shared measurement standards) are activated together: discoverability becomes intuitive, engagement becomes repeatable, investment becomes justifiable, and growth becomes sustainable.





Through coordinated action across industry leaders, Canada can establish a strong professional women's sport industry where commercial growth, long-term viability, and societal benefits are fully realized. In doing so, we will build a more resilient, equitable sport ecosystem that benefits all Canadian girls and women for generations to come.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 2022, Canadian Women & Sport launched the Commercial Women's Sport Initiative with Presenting Partner Canadian Tire Corporation.

The initiative seeks to support the growth and development of professional sport opportunities for women in Canada as an essential component of an equitable and inclusive sport system. Through this initiative, Canadian Women & Sport and its partners provide evidence, thought leadership, and connection to inform investment decisions by sport properties, media, brands, and other leaders across the ecosystem.

This work is designed to complement the work being done by others in this space, including current and prospective investors. The initiative is guided by advisors who share a passion for advancing women's sport in Canada, including leaders representing media, corporate brands, sport properties, athletes, and more.

We are especially grateful to Canadian Tire Corporation for its foundational support of this work since day one. We also recognize Canadian Tire's leadership through its commitment to dedicate 50% of its sponsorship investments to women's sport by 2026, an important signal of what sustained, intentional investment can make possible across the professional women's sport ecosystem.¹⁴

Advisors

Stacey Allaster C.C.

It's Time Advisory Chair

Dr. Cheri Bradish, PhD

Initiative Research Chair,
Canadian Women & Sport
Director, Future of Sport Lab
and Sport Initiatives,
Toronto Metropolitan
University

Marianne Brooks

Senior Vice President,
Partnerships, Northern
Super League

Heather Cameron

Vice President, Brand &
Creative, Fullscript

Irene Daley

Vice President, Marketing,
Canadian Tire Corporation

Deidra Dionne

Vice President, Canada,
DAZN

Jayna Hefford

Executive Vice President,
Hockey Operations,
Professional Women's
Hockey League

Ellen Hyslop

Co-Founder & CEO, The GIST

Ashton Lawrence

Communications Director,
National Basketball
Association (NBA)

Fan Engagement & Marketing
Lead, WNBA Canada

Christina Litz

President, Northern Super
League

Tanya Mruck

Sport For Development
Advocate

Kia Nurse

3x Olympian, Toronto Tempo
Guard, and Basketball
Analyst, TSN

Nithya Ramachandran

Co-President & Chief Strategy
Officer, T1 Agency

Teresa Resch

President, Toronto Tempo

Tiffany Shiu

Sports Strategy &
Partnerships, TSN

Camille Wallace

Director, Partnerships,
FanDuel

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PHOTO: PWHL



Canadian Women & Sport is a national nonprofit and has been a leading voice and authority on women and sport for more than 40 years. Sport wasn't designed for women and girls. We're changing that. Through research that shifts thinking, advocacy that shifts policy, and guidance that shifts practice, we challenge barriers and move belief into action so every woman and girl can participate, lead and thrive in and through sport. Learn more at [Canadian Women & Sport](#).



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PHOTO: MARK BLINCH FOR TENNIS CANADA

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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In collaboration with global research agency IMI International, we conducted a study in August 2026 with a representative sample of over 2,000 Canadians aged 13 to 65 with no critical industry affiliations. This sample is reflective of the Canadian population by major demographics and geographics.

The analysis presented in this report is based on self-reported survey data, reflecting the current absence of a unified, observable dataset for professional women's sport audiences in Canada. While this presents limitations, it is critical for understanding how fans perceive, discover, and engage with the sport, particularly within a fragmented and evolving media landscape. This research is the fourth study in an ongoing commitment to better understand the commercial opportunities of the professional women's sport space in Canada.

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