

Bowes, A. and Kitching, N. (2019) 'Here come the girls': Examining Professional Golf Organisations' Online Media Representations of Female Professional Golfers in a Mixed-Gender Event. *Ethical Space: The International Journal of Communication Ethics*. 16(2/3), pp. 12-20.

## **'Here come the girls': Examining professional golf organisations' online media representations of female professional golfers in a mixed-gender event**

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*It is widely accepted that golf participation is on the decline and that golf clubs are exclusive environments, in response to which the European Tour launched the short golf format GolfSixes. In May 2018, male and female professional golfers competed against each other at the European Tour's GolfSixes event, following the invitation of five female players from the Ladies European Tour. Both organisations used the social networking site Twitter to promote the tournament. Using a neoliberal feminist perspective, this study examines the depiction of the five competing female professional golfers through both golf organisations' Twitter accounts, before, during and after the event. Thematic analysis revealed the way in which the GolfSixes was depicted as a stage to showcase women's golf and promote narratives around gender equality, whilst in some cases still framing women in problematic ways. Results highlight the role that female golfers can play as empowered and entrepreneurial agents of change.*

**Keywords:** women's golf, neoliberal feminism, social media, sport media, media analysis

Research has confirmed the discriminatory environment in which golf takes place for females of all abilities both on and off the golf course (Reis and Correia 2013). While there are exceptions, golf is widely recognised as a male domain, which has led to a persistent struggle for women in terms of equality of access, participation, employment and decision-making (Kitching 2017). In golf settings, women are considered to be slower, less able, less competitive (and more social) and less powerful (in terms of driving distance) players (McGinnis and Gentry 2002; McGinnis et al. 2005). Different tee boxes alter the length of the hole and are often imbued with gender codes such as the shortest 'ladies' tee' (Hundley 2004) which marks women as different or 'other' (McGinnis et al. 2009) and, significantly, inferior. This is translated on to the course, with women reporting feeling ignored, overlooked or unimportant, particularly in their on-course interactions with males (McGinnis et al.

2005; McGinnis and Gentry 2006). To this day, golf participation figures indicate the low visibility of female participants and some golf clubs still obstruct membership by women (Kitching 2017).

When women were historically excluded from full membership and playing rights, they were forced to form female-only sections, initiated by the St. Andrews Ladies' Golf Club in 1867 (George 2009). Subsequently, women's golf developed independently from the men's game, with gender-segregated golf governing bodies forming at amateur level and later at professional level. While competitive professional golf for men started as early as 1860 in the United Kingdom through the Professional Golf Association, the professionalisation of the women's game occurred much later. The Ladies Professional Golfers' Association (LPGA), in America, was formed in 1950, followed by the Ladies European Tour (LET) in 1978. Subsequently, disparities exist between male and female professional golf, in terms of visibility, endorsements and prize money. It has been found that only one third of LPGA players will break even or make a profit in an average tournament once they have accounted for expenses, caddy fees and entry fees (Crosset 1995), and many European based female golfers work part time jobs alongside their professional golf career (Scrivener, 2018).

Ethnographic research on the LPGA tour has highlighted women's status as outsiders within the world of professional golf (Crosset 1995), something that is pertinent today. In April 2019, the European Tour and the LET played concurrent tournaments on different courses in Morocco, hosted at the Royal Golf Dar Es Salam, in Rabat. These tournaments, held at the same time, highlighted stark differences: the winner of the men's tournament, Jorge Campillo, earned €416,660 in comparison to Nuria Iturrios on the LET, earning €67,500 (Cooper 2019). In 2018, when Francesco Molinari earned £3,652,504 on the European Tour, the top earner on the LET (Georgia Hall) accumulated £456,110 (*Golf World* 2019). This was only marginally more than the 75th ranked European Tour player, Ashley Chesters (£450,231), whereas finishing 75th on the LET earned Kelsey MacDonald £14,508 (*ibid*).

Women's subordinate position in golf is perpetuated in the golf media which has been shown to replicate the same exclusionary practices evidenced within the game. However, technological advancements have led to a new media landscape in sport, with athletes and sport organisations using social media sites such as Twitter to engage and interact with fans. Sheffer and Schultz (2013) highlight that the growth in social media more broadly has had a 'profound impact on the way sports are created, delivered and consumed'. Allison (2018) specifically describes the role that Twitter can play as a communication medium in women's sport, most notably as a potential marketing tool. She

highlights how social media use becomes a 'free way of circumventing mainstream media outlets to communicate with and expand the fan base' (ibid: 215). Sports organisations are now taking ownership of their own media and promotion and creating their own content.

This aim of this paper is to investigate how professional golf organisations represented female professional golfers in online media before, during and after a mixed-gender professional golf tournament, the GolfSixes. Examining representations through Twitter should illustrate the lens through which female professional golfers are viewed by golf itself and reveal the intentions of golf governing bodies in their promotion or otherwise of female professional golfers. The GolfSixes tournament presents a unique opportunity to explore the representation of female professional athletes in direct competition with male professionals, and through the Twitter accounts of both the male and female golf organisations. One further goal of the research is to contribute to the growing literature on new and online representations of female athletes.

### **The GolfSixes event**

The GolfSixes, featuring on the men's professional European Tour, was hailed as a 'revolutionary and novel short form of the game' presenting a modern image of golf and illustrating the Tour's desire 'to embrace innovation and originality in professional golf' (European Tour 2017). Data from the inaugural GolfSixes tournament in 2017 found a 42 per cent increase in new golf fans at the event who were, on average, 14 per cent younger than those seen during the rest of the golfing calendar (European Tour 2018a). For 2018's version, four wildcard teams were selected alongside twelve qualifying teams from the European Tour. Within these wildcard teams, European Tour Chief Executive Keith Pelley invited five professional female players from the LET: Carlota Ciganda and Mel Reid formed a European Women's team, Georgia Hall and Charley Hull formed an England Women's team, and Catriona Matthew (2019 European Solheim Cup captain) combined with Thomas Bøjrn (2018 European Ryder Cup captain) in a European Captains team. In the end, 27 European Tour male professionals and five LET female professionals competed. Not only was this the first time the European Tour had included women in a team golf event, the European Captains team became the first male and female professionals to play together in a competitive match play format event worldwide (European Tour 2018b).

### **Traditional media representations of female athletes**

Traditional media outlets such as newspapers and television have been found to privilege male athletes over females in both the quantity and depth of the coverage (Bernstein and Kian 2013).

Sport, including golf, is often constructed as a male domain in the mass media, with gendered practices in the sport media devaluing female athletes and emphasising cultural equivalents of hegemonic masculinity. Women's inclusion within the sports media is, thus, problematic; when women do find themselves on the sports pages of the popular press, they are often represented in ways that restrict our imagination about women's sport and retain the hegemonic position of men in sport (Bruce 2015). While McClearen (2018) suggests that the sports media could potentially be used as a source of empowerment for female athletes, traditional approaches are still adopted in their presentation of women where they are trivialised, sexualised and underrepresented. There is evidence of change, however. Biscomb and Griggs (2013) found a shift towards a greater awareness of, and coverage of, female athletes in the sports media and Petty and Pope (2018) noted a removal of the gender marking of women's sport in the media.

Female golfers in the sports media have an equally ambivalent history. Although Billings et al. (2008: 65) highlight that rising audience interest in women's golf has brought about challenges to golf's 'masculine hegemonic entrenchment', both televised and print media coverage of golf have continued to offer representations that reinforce divisions of gender, class, disability and race (Billings et al. 2006; Billings et al. 2008). In examining televised PGA and LPGA golf, Billings et al. (2005) found a multitude of gender differences in on-air golf announcing. They described how luck was a major factor in how female golfer's success or failure was described, whereas men were more likely to be described in terms of their physicality or personality. There are, however, examples that offer some challenges to the gendered norms and traditional depictions of women in golf media. Research on the media coverage of Annika Sörenstam's involvement in the 2003 PGA Colonial Tournament demonstrated ambivalent representations: on the one hand, commentators were likely to highlight Sörenstam's emotions, but on the other, there were also examples of non-gendered explanations of her successes too, such as failing due to a lack of finesse (Billings et al. 2006). More recently, Bowes and Kitching (2019) described the print media representation of professional female golfers as a 'double-edged sword'. They noted positive outcomes in terms of the quantity of print media coverage of the female athletes playing at the GolfSixes but remained critical of the central role that gender playing in their representations.

### **Female athletes and the rise of online and new sport media**

In the recent emerging dynamic information environment, online media has become central to commentary and presentations of athletes. It has been claimed that social media has given rise to the 'accessible athlete', enabling athletes and organisations to bypass mainstream media outlets and

present their product to the audiences unfiltered (Sheffer and Schultz 2013). Since the advent of Twitter and other social media platforms in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, there has been a surge of interest in the use of social media by both sports organisations and female athletes. Twitter is considered the most influential social-media platform in sport (Gibbs and Haynes 2013). As of April 2019, Serena Williams is the most followed female athlete on Twitter (10.9 million; Twitter, 2019a) and, within golf, Paula Creamer (491k; Twitter, 2019b), Lexi Thompson (463k; Twitter, 2019c) and Michelle Wie (435k; Twitter, 2019d) have the most significant following, with Suzann Pettersen (104.6k; 2019e), the most followed female European golfer.

Given the wealth of studies on print media representations of athletes, Hutchins (2014) has criticised how sports media researchers have neglected the rise, effects and meanings of these new, mobile, online media and communication tools. He posits that a mobile research agenda offers the potential for media sport scholarship to make a sustained contribution to the study of mediatisation processes. Bruce (2015) outlines two new rules in how sportswomen are represented in media, firstly through online media, using their own voices on their own terms and, secondly, through the discourse of 'pretty and powerful' over 'pretty *or* powerful'. While Sanderson (2013) suggests that social media can provide a venue for sexist commentary, several commentators have outlined the potential for social media to challenge prevailing hegemonic representations of female athletes, contesting the discourses that devalue sportswomen and transforming the representation of female athletes (Antunovic and Hardin 2012; Bruce and Hardin 2014).

Online media not only provide opportunities for female athletes to self-represent on their own terms, but also present sportswomen, fans and commentators a space to share, debate and discuss women's sport (Bruce and Hardin 2014; La Voi and Calhoun 2014). Sanderson and Gramlich (2016) suggest that Twitter has the potential to become the catalyst for advocacy in female sport. However, while LaVoi and Calhoun (2014) ask whether or not digital media could 'free female athletes from the tyranny of traditional media' (ibid: 327), they conclude that it does not provide a platform to contest the status quo of gender narratives in sport. Given the recent growth in online and new media technologies, investigations on how female athletes are represented on social media are still emerging. Notably, Thorpe et al. (2017) found that sportswomen often emphasise their personal lives and sexuality, with little focus on broader gender arrangements influencing their sporting femininities.

### **Female golfers, online new media and neoliberal feminism**

Previous work by the authors in golf environments has been framed using a critical feminist stance, highlighting the marginalisation, underrepresentation and exclusion of females and the simultaneous privileging of men and men's activities (Kitching et al. 2017; Kitching 2017; Bowes and Kitching 2019). In this paper, the authors move away from this second wave outlook to employ the perspective of neo-liberal feminism which moves beyond (or even ignores) gender discrimination, to consider women in the economic space, some of whom have become entrepreneurial agents in control of their own destinies. Banet-Weiser (2015) suggests that in 'economies of visibility' not only are women compelled to assume responsibility for finding innovative solutions to gender discrimination but they are encouraged to demonstrate visibly their entrepreneurial abilities. Gender inequality is still recognised within this perspective, but reactions to such inequalities are framed by individual economic and entrepreneurial discourses (Thorpe et al. 2017). Tofolletti and Thorpe (2018) have outlined how professional sportswomen are internalising neoliberal discourses of self-entrepreneurialism through their self-branding and use of social media. Thorpe et al. (2017: 375) suggest that:

... critical engagement with neoliberal feminism requires an understanding of the market forces, and particularly neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurialism ... it also raises concerns about the effects of such actions for women's positions in the sports-media-industry complex and identifies the necessity for challenging such oppressive power relations.

This perspective is suited to the corporate and commercial world of professional golf, where prize money, tournament/career earnings, and athlete endorsements are used as highly prized markers for professionals to strive for. Use of neoliberal feminism in this paper allows the authors an insight into how golf organisations promote, market and commercialise female athletes, which female athletes (if any) are prioritised and who may be excluded.

## **Methodology**

Given the call by sociologists of sport to consider more carefully the role of online and new media in the presentation of female athletes, the paper uses data collected from Twitter during the GolfSixes tournament. The Twitter profiles chosen for analysis are the accounts of the European Tour and the LET, the organising bodies for professional golf in Europe. The @EuropeanTour account has more than 367K followers (Twitter, 2019f), with over 42K following the @LETgolf account (Twitter, 2019g). Using Twitter as the data source allows the capture of tweets, along with associated images, videos and article links. As the 2018 GolfSixes event ran over the weekend of 5-6 May, the data collection

timeframe was from Tuesday 1 May to Wednesday 9 May, to cover communication from the two Twitter accounts before, during and after the event. The authors used the NCapture tool to download tweets from the @EuropeanTour and @LETgolf accounts and import to NVivo for analysis. Each tweet was sometimes accompanied by an image, video or article weblink, and these were also collected through the NCapture process, along with the quantity of retweets, replies and 'likes' associated with each particular tweet, and the tweet type (e.g. retweet or tweet), related hashtag and tweet weblink.

This data collection resulted in harnessing 218 tweets from @EuropeanTour and 92 tweets from the @LETgolf. Primarily, textual data was thematically analysed, as well as a consideration of the types of videos and images also used. The authors used Ryan and Bernard's (2003) triad test, where both authors read the tweets, coded them and explained our codes to each other. The next step was the co-construction of themes, by making conceptual links between codes, choosing those that were prominent and relevant. Following an initial reading of the data set, irrelevant tweets were removed and as such data set was reduced to 183 tweets from @EuropeanTour account, and 81 from the @LETgolf account. The following sections will now present a breakdown of how the two organisations used social media throughout the event, with a specific focus on the involvement of the female players.

## **Results and discussion**

There were some similarities in the types of content posted to the Twitter accounts of both the European Tour and the LET. For both tours, many of their outputs was their own original content, with @EuropeanTour retweeting 19 per cent of their output (34 tweets), and @LETgolf retweeting 23 per cent of their output (19 tweets). Both tours used the Twitter platform to promote the innovative nature of the event (@LETgolf, 12 per cent – 10; @EuropeanTour, 11 per cent – 21), centring on the novel aspects such as the six-hole format and the shot clock. Furthermore, both accounts used their Twitter stream similarly over the course of the event to promote the tournament and the tournament venue, offering information on the course, and ticket sales (@LETgolf, 11 per cent – 9; @EuropeanTour, 9 per cent – 17). During the tournament, the largest volume of tweets from both accounts was sent regarding the performances of the players and outcomes of the matches. Player, and team, performances were tweeted a total of 66 times by @EuropeanTour (36 per cent) and 24 times by @LETgolf (30 per cent).

Despite some similarities in how the organisations used social media throughout the event, there were some notable differences. The @LETgolf account focused on the 'fun' aspects of the 2018 tournament much more regularly than the @EuropeanTour (21 tweets – 25 per cent compared to 20 tweets – 11 per cent). However, the most obvious difference the way the two organisations were using the event for different means, specifically regarding the female players. The pre-tournament focus of @EuropeanTour was very active, tweeting pre-event player content across all the players involved (24 per cent – 44), compared to @LETgolf, whose three pre-event tweets (4 per cent) centred solely on the female players' inclusion. Throughout the tournament, again @LETgolf focused mainly on their own tour players, sending only 7 tweets (9 per cent) exclusively about male players, compared to @EuropeanTour, who tweeted about the female players 28 times (15 per cent). @LETgolf focused on the 'state' of women's golf more broadly in 11 tweets explicitly and in a further 14 tweets as a by-line (31 per cent), compared to only 7 tweets from @EuropeanTour (4 per cent). The @LETgolf account's strong focus on their own players is further emphasised when you consider the first tweet they sent about a male player and their performance in the event was at 4:30pm on the last day of the tournament, following the elimination of all female players.

This significance of the female players' involvement in the GolfSixes is further emphasised in terms of the most popular Twitter content seen in the accounts. In terms of likes and retweets of content from the 2018 GolfSixes, the most popular tweet on the European Tour account was the video of and reaction to Hull's opening tee shot when the England women's team played their male counterparts, with 163 retweets and 931 likes. After Hull hit an excellent shot two feet from the pin, the England men's team pretended to run away, seemingly terrified. This was the most popular event on Twitter through the tournament, as was seen in the LET Twitter account also. Saying: 'This is how you start,' the tweet with the same video attached from the LET received 79 retweets.

Following a more detailed thematic analysis of the Twitter outputs, there were number of significant themes related to the women's involvement in the tournament which featured heavily in both golf organisations' Twitter engagements:

- (1) a stage to showcase women's golf;
- (2) a conversation starter on women's golf and equality.;
- (3) a persistence of gendered language.



These will now be explored in more detail, drawing upon the neoliberal feminist framework to help make sense of the ways in which female professional golfers are represented on social media.

### **A stage to showcase women's golf**

It has transpired that the female players dominated the print media coverage of the event (Bowes and Kitching 2019) and, likewise, the Twitter dataset demonstrated a similar appreciation for the skills, talent and performances of the female players. On the @EuropeanTour account, female players were often featured in short video clips hitting shots: Hull (1 chip shot, 6 full swing shots), Reid (1 drive, 2 iron shots), Ciganda (2 putts, 1 iron shot), Hall (1 long putt) and Matthew (1 long putt). These clips were often accompanied by phrases outlining their physical power, e.g. 'Stripe show' (Reid's drive), or 'Charley doesn't hold back' (Hull's recoil drive). Reid was also captured as the 'first player on the range' on the first morning of the tournament, indicating the seriousness with which she was taking the event. In terms of the distribution of coverage of all the golfers, it was clear that one of the female players dominated coverage on the European Tour Twitter account, with an emphasis on Hull and her portrayal as a physically powerful and strong player.

While patterns emerged in the distribution of the coverage of the women golfers on the @EuropeanTour account, these patterns were not evident through the @LET account where the coverage of the female golfers was distributed more equally amongst the golfers. This account appeared more proactive in promoting the female golfers' own representations during the event. Acknowledging that Ciganda was not active on Twitter for the tournament, for example, @LETgolf retweeted content from Hull (1), Reid (2), Hall (1) and Matthew (2), whereas @EuropeanTour only retweeted 2 tweets from female players (Reid and Matthew). From a neo-liberal feminist perspective, women are increasingly encouraged to become entrepreneurial agents in control of their own destinies and here, @LETgolf has supported the female golfers' opportunity to elevate their profiles.

As noted, one of the most significant events of the tournament in terms of Twitter engagement was the opening shot from Hull on the first hole for the England women's team in their match against the England men. The @LETgolf account phrased it: 'This is how you start GolfSixes @CharleyHull. See you later @PepperellEddie and @MattsjWallace' and the post was retweeted 79 times. The @European Tour account posted 'Pepperell and Wallace have already had enough. Hull into 2 feet with her first shot...', retweeted 163 times. This made it the most popular tweet on both accounts during the tournament. The shot was featured as one of the @EuropeanTour account's 'Six best

shots of the tournament' video. It also resulted in Hull becoming the first woman to win the European Tour's 'shot of the month' award for May (European Tour, 2018c).

### **A conversation starter for women's golf and equality**

Following the success of the female players in the tournament, it was clear that the women had demonstrated their worth as golfers on an international, mediated stage, and this was foregrounded on the @LETgolf Twitter account. @LETgolf termed the female professionals as 'great role models' (5 May 2018) and popular (4 May 2018), and the account called on fans to 'come and support' the women on the final day of the tournament (5 May 2018). Following the tournament, the account posted that 'they showcased the strength of the women's game...' (6 May 2018). At times @LETgolf went further than just promoting women and gender issues, and on a more politicised agenda, when it posted 'exactly what golf needs' in relation to the fun and energetic atmosphere at the tournament (@LETgolf, 6 May 2018). This evidence outlines how the LET used the social media platform to position and promote female golfers and contributors throughout the event, and differs from historical evidence in golf, where women often positioned themselves oppositely to each other (Kitching 2017).

Throughout the week, Reid positioned herself as the spokesperson for women's golf. For example, her European Tour blog took on some sensitive topics such as pay equality and sexism, while many of her interviews during the tournament were forthright and focused on the visibility of women's golf:

...this is a huge opportunity to showcase women's golf. We don't get the coverage, we don't get supported as I feel that we should, and you know an event like this is huge for us... (interview with Ciganda and Reid, @LETgolf, 5 May 2018).

Hopefully we've opened up a few more eyes to women's golf, that we can compete and we're pretty good at what we do and we work very hard at what we do ... it has been really good exposure for women's golf which hopefully helps it, because it needs help (interview with Reid and Ciganda, @LETgolf, 7 May 2018).

Through the week, she was positioned in the media as assuming the responsibility for speaking out around gender discrimination, similar to Banet-Weiser's (2015) definition of economies of visibility. As Thorpe et al. (2017) outline, reactions to gender inequality are framed by female athletes'

individual and entrepreneurial discourses. Reid's comments were retweeted by @LETgolf twice and by @EuropeanTour once. However, in relation to speaking out on women's golf, she was featured four times on @EuropeanTour, and seven times on @LETgolf. Tofolletti and Thorpe (2018) have outlined how professional sportswomen are internalising neoliberal discourses of self-entrepreneurialism through their self-branding and use of social media. While Reid may not be actively pursuing a particular strategy around this, her opinions are recognised by golf's organising bodies. This further demonstrates a neoliberal feminist approach, with the female players taking ownership of their situation, framing themselves as capable and 'letting their golf do their talking'. In this way, the female athletes act as advocates for their sport.

One other interesting aspect of equality as portrayed through the female players was their positioning within a male event, owned and run by the European Tour. At times during the tournament the players spoke about it being an 'opportunity for women's golf', and by the end the players were keen to show their gratitude to the European Tour, with Reid commenting: 'Thank you so much to @EuropeanTour for inviting me to @golfsixes this weekend...' (@melreidgolf, 6 May 2018). Hall also commented that she would 'love to come back' (@LETGolf, 6 May 2018). The LET Twitter account even posted: 'They showcased the strength of the women's game and how good it is to be playing alongside the men' (6 May 2018).

### **A persistence of gendered language**

Despite the positive framing of the female players at the event, there were cases where there is a need to think more critically about the language used to represent the women on both of the tour's Twitter accounts. Bruce (2015) writes about the ways female athletes have been historically presented in the media, with gender marking and infantilisation as two key elements. While there is evidence to prove the contrary, 'othering' women in relation to sport has been widespread in the media discourse, while the practice of describing adult sportswomen as girls or only by their first names is relatively commonplace. This evidence reinforces both points, where the language used to describe the women golfers was archaic, e.g. 'Day 1 at the #GolfSixes belonged to the *ladies*' (@EuropeanTour, 5 May 2018) and 'we all think it's brilliant for the event that the *ladies* are here!' (@EuropeanTour, 4 May 2018).

The second element of gendered language was in differentiating the men's teams from the women's teams, which was visible on both Twitter accounts. For example, 'Team Australia defeat the European Women's Team 2-0' (@LETgolf, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2018), 'Team Denmark and #GolfSixesEURWomen

are tied 2<sup>nd</sup> in their group with 4 points' (@LETgolf, 5 May 2018), 'The England women beat Team Thailand' (@EuropeanTour, 5 May 2018), and 'England v England Women' (@EuropeanTour, 1 May 2018). Unlike the last example, when the England men's and women's team faced each other, the men's team were also gender marked, particularly on the @LETgolf account, for example, 'Will England Women's and Men's teams meet again in the @golfsixes final?' (@LETgolf, 6 May 2018) and "watch highlights from England's Women's Vs Men's match' (@LETgolf, 5 May 2018). In contrast, the European Tour used gender marking less frequently, particularly for the men, referring to their "#GolfSixesEng kit" (5 May 2018). They corrected this the following day when they posted about 'the story behind the #GolfSixesENGMen outfits' (6 May 2018).

The final element of gendered language was the way the women golfers were infantilised on the Twitter accounts. For example, 'Here come the girls' (@EuropeanTour, 2 May 2018), and 'The England girls are still undefeated' (@EuropeanTour, 5 May 2018). However, this was sometimes by the female players themselves:

RT @melreidgolf: Thankyou so much @europeantour for inviting me to @golfsixes this weekend. Had so much fun and hopefully us girls made a statement and put women's golf on the map. As always love playing with @carlotagolf...' (@EuropeanTour, 6 May 2018).

Whilst a neoliberal feminist framework aims to move beyond gender discrimination, it remains important to highlight a persistence of problematic gendered language used to frame the female golfers.

### **Conclusion: Here come the girls - reframing female golfers as advocates?**

This paper aimed to explore the representations of female golfers at the GolfSixes by professional golf organisations, shedding light on the way in which these athletes are used, and for what means, by their employers. As mentioned previously, this event transpired as a direct response to the decline in golf participation and including the women professionals in 2018 certainly contributed to the presentation of the event as modern and inclusive. Given these pressures on the golf market, it is clear that the European Tour invited women along for economic reasons, and to present the tour to a new family-orientated crowd. Conversely, the female players were explicitly used by the LET to advocate for their tour (and women's golf more broadly) to a new audience (notably, fans of men's golf). Indeed, the LET strategy was to 'piggyback' on the popularity of the men's tour to raise issues around the status of women's golf in Europe – although these were raised through the players

themselves. In this way, the players were presented by the LET as empowered and entrepreneurial, capitalising on their increased visibility due to their involvement on the men's European Tour. Additionally, the fact that the female professionals even agreed to participate in the first-place outlines, perhaps, their sense of entrepreneurialism in seizing the opportunity. This aligns with the print media coverage of the event which somewhat positioned the success of the women's teams as a surprise. While this may be seen on the one hand to reinforce ideologies of men's hegemonic positioning within golf cultures, from a neoliberal perspective this can be seen as the women framing themselves in an entrepreneurial way – putting themselves out there against male golfers.

We acknowledge that there are limitations in social media analyses, namely that it is impossible to know the intentions or the editorial decisions made in selecting content for posting by the golf organisations, the market-informed strategies in place, the coordination of posts and press releases by outside social media managers or agents. Despite this, this paper fits in response to Thorpe et al's. (2017) insistence for more theoretically informed, empirical research on sportswomen's own use of social media, and particularly scholarship that provides space for women's own voices on how and why they are using social media. As they note, '... social media has feminist potential to challenge dominant representational regimes by providing avenues for female athletes to enhance their visibility' (Thorpe et al. 2017: 361) – a strategy that was used by the LET, in the shadow of the women's success in a men's event. Subsequently, 'Here come the girls' seems significant in many ways: the female players were important for both organisations in different ways and were central in promoting the unusual nature of the GolfSixes event. These women, then, are not powerless and at the mercy of their employers but empowered women who seized their opportunity to demonstrate their worth as international competitors in a man's world and, in some cases, used their voices to advocate for and demand positive change.

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