



EMERALD STUDIES IN SPORT AND GENDER

# **THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF WOMEN'S SPORT**

*Issues and Debates*

EDITED BY ALI BOWES AND ALEX CULVIN

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## Chapter 14

### The Gendered Effects of Covid-19 on Elite Women's Sport.

**Beth G. Clarkson, Ali Bowes, Lucy Lomax and Jess Piasecki**

#### **Abstract**

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in early 2020 prompted widespread global lockdowns as the world looked to contain and reduce the impact of the virus, including a pause on most sporting competitions (Parnell et al., 2020). Covid-19 has greatly affected the world, exposing stark inequalities, especially across gendered lines, in areas of society such as the labour market, domestic responsibility, and economic hardship (Alon et al., 2020). Sport is a crucial, interwoven aspect of society and like wider societal trends, elite women's sport has been adversely affected by the pandemic, facing an existential threat (Bowes et al., 2020; Clarkson et al., 2020a; Rowe, 2020). The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how the pandemic is negatively impacting a wide variety of elite women's sports. Specifically, we cover sports where women have traditionally existed on the margins of the sport and could be considered as male-dominated labour industries. Centring primarily on the United Kingdom (UK), we present a brief chronology of the impact of the crisis on elite women's sport, across football, rugby, cricket and golf - in many ways different to the men's versions - spanning the eight months since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 until the time of writing in November 2020. Throughout, the chapter utilises qualitative data from elite sportswomen encouraged to share their experiences during the pandemic (see Bowes et al., 2020). Subsequently, this chapter concludes with a summary of the challenges for women operating in (semi-)professional sports environments.

**Keywords:** gender, inequality, women's sport, sportswomen, covid-19, coronavirus

#### **Introduction**

Throughout this collection, academics researching women's sport have presented, and troubled, narratives of progress within elite (i.e., emerging, [semi-]professionalised) women's sport, across a range of sports in different contexts, including American football, basketball, cricket, cycling, golf, ice hockey, tennis and rugby. However, the start of 2020 saw one of the biggest challenges the sports industry – men's or women's - has ever faced. The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in early 2020

prompted widespread global lockdowns as the world looked to contain and reduce the impact of the virus, including a pause on most sporting competitions (Parnell et al., 2020). Covid-19 has greatly affected the world, exposing stark inequalities, especially across gendered lines, in areas of society such as the labour market, domestic responsibility, and economic hardship (Alon et al., 2020).

Sport is a crucial, interwoven aspect of society and like wider societal trends, elite women's sport has been adversely affected by the pandemic, facing an existential threat (Bowes et al., 2020; Clarkson et al., 2020; Rowe, 2020). The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of how the pandemic is negatively impacting a wide variety of elite women's sports. Specifically, we cover sports where women have traditionally existed on the margins of the sport and could be considered as male-dominated labour industries. Centring primarily on the United Kingdom (UK), we present a brief chronology of the impact of the crisis on elite women's sport, across football, rugby, cricket and golf - in many ways different to the men's versions - spanning the eight months since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 until the time of writing in November 2020. Throughout, the chapter utilises qualitative data from elite sportswomen encouraged to share their experiences during the pandemic (see Bowes et al., 2020). Subsequently, this chapter concludes with a summary of the challenges for women operating in (semi-)professional sports environments.

## **Football**

Widely recognised as the most popular watched and played sport across the world, football's global governing body, Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), estimate globally 13 million women play organised football. On average, \$347 million is spent on women's football per year by member associations (i.e. countries; FIFA, 2019a). Prior to the pandemic, elite women's football was heralded as entering a 'new age', with rapid growth in international media coverage and spectators (Petty & Pope, 2019), and emergent professionalisation in multiple contexts (see Culvin and Bowes, forthcoming). Central to this global evolution has arguably been the success of the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup (WWC), with over 1 billion viewers (FIFA, 2019b). Despite decades of inequalities between men and women in the sport, as of 2020 five countries now openly pay their women national team players the same fees as their male counterparts – Australia, Brazil, England, New Zealand, and Norway. Additionally, full professionalisation has occurred in some elite domestic leagues, most notably within the United States of America (USA) and England, with evidence of emerging professionalisation across mainland Europe including Germany, Sweden, France and more recently Spain. While emerging as a strong industry, viable player working conditions are still absent in many

countries where the effects of decades-long underinvestment and exclusion are still felt by players on short-term contracts (Culvin, 2020).

Media commentators (e.g., Wrack, 2020) and academics alike have forecast that the Covid-19 pandemic represents a significant threat to the future of the elite women's game across the world. Clarkson et al. (2020) identified threats relating to the governance and funding of elite women's football in England, and the consequences for player wellbeing. First, with regard to organisational and economic repercussions, the women's game is reliant on the continued financial support of both the national governing body (NGB) the Football Association (FA) as well as their 'parent' clubs (i.e. men's professional football clubs). The FA govern women's football and in-part fund the game to provide top-tier teams with financial support (Wrack, 2018), with Manchester City collecting approximately £145,000 in the 2018 season (Manchester City Women's Football Club Limited, 2019). The FA state that Covid-19 could cost the sport £150 million and as such the organisation need to make cuts (FA, 2020a). Cuts have been confirmed to coach education and the men's and women's national futsal programme (FA, 2020b). In May 2020, the FA indicated that grassroots (i.e., recreational) and the women's game were strategic priorities and therefore not the focus of the cuts (Wilson, 2020). Yet recently a leaked report suggests funding for the grassroots game will drop by £22 million a year for the next four years (Fahey, 2020). These events cause great concern to the women's football community when historically funding to the women's game has been cut by the FA in "financially turbulent times" (Woodhouse et al., 2019, p.2007). As one semi-professional player<sup>1</sup> from the FA Women's Championship stated:

*"Women's funding is the first to be cut when financial issues arise."*

Another economic concern is the way that women's clubs are irrevocably connected to men's 'parent' clubs. As part of the FA's strategic plan for the women's game, women's teams were encouraged to become a secondary side under the umbrella of a men's professional club (Dunn & Welford, 2015). Now reliant on funding and access to resources and facilities, women's clubs are beholden to the financial health and (in)stability of elite men's football (see Hamil & Walters, 2010). Prior to the pandemic, there have been numerous examples (e.g., Charlton, Notts County) where women's teams have been cut adrift from the men's clubs when it is in debt or has been relegated, sometimes leaving women players jobless and even homeless (The Guardian, 2017). One international, semi-professional footballer voiced her concern at this:

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<sup>1</sup> These football players reported being contracted players with a FA Women's Championship club, earning a part time salary, with second occupations

*“Priority is always men’s sport therefore little support for us, and may mean many women’s teams are cut by parent clubs”*

AFC Fylde looked to be the first casualty of Covid-19 when the club announced a restructure in May 2020 and decided to disband their women’s team (Wrack, 2020). However, the decision was reversed four weeks later following significant pressure from the media and women’s football community. This example reinforces the real threat facing elite women’s clubs but also the power that advocacy can have (Comeau & Church, 2010).

Player wellbeing was also emphasised by Clarkson et al. (2020) as significant threat in elite women’s football, due to the unique aspects of the women’s game and the unstable working conditions that women players face (Culvin, 2020). Players felt that these conditions were exaggerated by the Covid-19 lockdown, with two semi-professional footballers explaining:

*“I think we have a lot less access to equipment to be able to keep up with training compared to men in football.”*

*“Men have gone back to training and will be getting paid again whereas the women’s league has been cancelled so the earliest we will play a competitive game again could be late August”*

While players in the top-tier of English women’s football (the FA Women’s Super League) have full time contracts, women footballers in the second-tier (the FA Women’s Championship), as we have seen with other elite sportswomen throughout the collection, operate on short-term contracts with players often juggling their playing careers with other part- or full-time work. Accordingly, anxieties are likely to be felt by these footballers concerning the ongoing viability of jobs that might support their playing career in light of the pandemic, with football redundancies reaching record levels and broad unemployment rates sharply rising (Office for National Statistics, 2020; FIFPro, 2020a). FIFPro (2020a; 2020b) recently reported that 47% of women players have had their wages cut or suspended accounts of depression in footballers has doubled since the start of the pandemic.

More recently conducted research has compared the Covid-19 responses of different national football associations: Australia (Football Federation of Australia: FFA), England (the FA) and the USA (U.S. Soccer Federation: USSF) over the first six months of the pandemic (Clarkson et al., 2021). The authors found a wide range of responses that were deeply rooted in their historical, social and political contexts. First, two different responses emerged in England and USA. In England, there was a two-

month interval between the pandemic and communication about how the 2019-20 season was going to be resolved, whereas in the USA, a new tournament (The Challenge Cup) was launched with Covid-19 measures in place and both commercial and broadcasting partners. Arguably, women's football was prioritised in the USA (it was the first USA professional football league to restart) and dismissed in England where the popular focus was on the resumption of the men's leagues (e.g., the Premier League's Project Restart). In Australia, the W-League's season ended in March 2020 yet by the end of July 2020, there had been no update on its resumption. This is despite the award of the 2023 FIFA WWC (to Australia and New Zealand) and the FFA's 'XI Principles' paper claiming a post-pandemic focus on growing women's football and existing competitions (FFA, 2020).

Consequently, Clarkson et al. (2021) identified ways that other nations could successfully manage the tensions between the economic impact of Covid-19 and their social and ethical responsibilities to women's football. The authors recommended that nations: (1) maintain active communication with the community to allay worries about the future of women's football, (2) gather support from health and government officials, (3) seek out commercial and broadcasting partnerships to drive revenue, and (4) the interests of women's football are best served when responsibility for the elite women's league does not rest (solely) with national football associations. As one semi-professional footballer explained:

*"Maybe [the pandemic] shows how much discrepancy there is between opportunities for men and women following this pandemic and so more people will work harder to ensure we get more equal opportunities."*

## **Rugby**

Like football, and as Snyder and Taylor et al. have highlighted previously, women's rugby on a global level has experienced unprecedented growth with a reported 2.7 million women playing rugby in 2019 – a 28% growth on 2017 (World Rugby, 2019). Further, 2.65 million viewers in the UK tuned in for the Women's Rugby World Cup Final (Rugby World Cup, 2017). International and domestic competitions exist for women in both codes of rugby: rugby union and rugby league. In the UK, emergent professionalisation has been evident through increasing investment from commercial partners in recent years: 2017 saw the first title sponsor (Tyrells) for England's elite women's rugby union domestic competition, The Premier 15's (Bristol Bears, 2017). In 2018 the Scottish women's national team gained their first shirt sponsor (World Rugby, 2018) and Coral's sponsored the Challenge Cup tournament in women's rugby league in 2019 (Gallagher, 2019). Recently England's national team members were awarded full time professional contracts and women players in the Premier 15s were

paid for the first time in the following year (Rowan, 2019). Despite these commercial advances in the UK and globally, both domestic leagues continue to operate on a semi-professional basis where women rugby players balance full- or part- time work with their playing commitments (Taylor et al. 2020).

There has yet to be any academic attention paid to the impact of Covid-19 on women's rugby. As such, we summarise the events during the pandemic, draw on extant literature in women's rugby and evaluate the implications for elite (which incorporates a mixture of amateur, semi-professional and professional) women players. On the international stage, the women's 2020 Six Nation's tournament, suspended in March 2020, was abandoned in November 2020 where, unlike the men's competition, the sports inherent amateur status made it 'impossible' to conclude the tournament (Hodges, 2020). At a domestic level, the England's women's Premier 15s (rugby union) and Super League (rugby league) competitions were paused in March 2020 at the start of the pandemic, as were their male equivalent leagues (RFU, 2020). Two months later, World Rugby published guidelines in May 2020 to assist NGBs with the restart of training and playing (World Rugby, 2020a). It was announced shortly afterwards that the elite men's competition would finish the 2019-20 season with Covid-19 testing in place. In comparison, the women's Premier 15s 2019-20 season was declared null and void, and the competition's 2020-21 season not announced until early October. In rugby league, five months had elapsed since the start of the pandemic before the outcome for the women's league in England was communicated. The NGB, Rugby Football League (RFL), decided in August 2020 not to restart the women's Challenge Cup and cancel the 2020 Super League competition, restricting women players to participating in local friendlies with restricted travel (Rugby League, 2020b). In comparison, the resumption of elite men's rugby league, the Super League, was announced in June and started in a revised format at the start of August (Rugby League, 2020a).

The lack of match action, and the related problems, were concerns for these two international, part time<sup>2</sup> players:

*"People using home workouts to stay fit rather than play rugby, at an elite level the number of injuries will increase from the number of months players won't have been playing for."*

*"Less competition, exposure and ability to play. Especially if people have to take more time off work to allow for any ongoing quarantine measures when travelling for sport."*

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<sup>2</sup> These two international rugby players reported earning a part-time salary from the sport and have second occupations.

Coupled with a lack of communication, there was much uncertainty for women rugby union players, as mentioned by this semi-professional, international player:

*“I think the emphasis is on return to men’s sport to generate money again. So that’s where their priorities lie.”*

Like in men’s football, in rugby the men’s competition was arguably prioritised. To add to the uncertainty, Tyrells ended their sponsorship of elite women’s rugby union in the summer of 2020 (Orchard, 2020c), and the continual struggle of women’s rugby to obtain adequate revenue would have no doubt exacerbated these concerns for players. Moreover, women rugby players are experiencing the transition from amateur to professional status and gendered organisational practices in rugby can disrupt women players mental health and resilience (Taylor et al., 2020).

Indeed, economic repercussions are being felt in English rugby, where the NGB, the Rugby Football Union (RFU), predicting the financial impact of Covid-19 to be £145 million in lost income (Reuters, 2020). Unsurprisingly, in March 2020 the RFU announced pay cuts for staff earning more than £30,000 (Orchard, 2020a). England Women players receive salaries less than this figure, however England Women captain, Sarah Hunter still offered to take a pay cut “to make sure there’s still an RFU and people aren’t having to lose their jobs” (Orchard, 2020a). Later in May, England’s male players took a 25% pay cut, however their match fees prior to the pandemic was approximately equivalent to their women counterparts’ annual salaries (Meagher, 2020). The RFU announced 25% cut in funding to women’s Premier 15s teams (totalling £187,500), yet the £25 million per year to men’s Premiership rugby remained untouched (BBC Sport, 2020). Both competitions restarted in October, although with no funding for testing, the women’s Premier 15s league restarted with reduced playing time and rule adaptations (Orchard, 2020d). This highlights the unequal landscape in both codes of rugby and a key argument that advocates for women’s sport are commonly levelled with: the sport is not economically viable and therefore in times of hardship, men’s competitions should be prioritised. This view positions women’s sport as dependent, unable to be self-sufficient, onerous and therefore expendable (Pape & MacLachlan, 2020). However, there is a continual demand for elite women’s rugby, exemplified by the increasing participation and viewership statistics already highlighted. Sustained investment is required if the sustainability of women’s leagues is likely to be achieved (Allison, 2016), therefore Covid-19 represents a significant threat to the future of elite women’s rugby as NGBs prioritise recovering revenue ahead of gender equality.



While serious threats remain for elite women's rugby, opportunities also exist. Globally, following the pandemic the global governing body World Rugby told the media that women's rugby is among its "top three priorities" (Orchard, 2020b) and have launched the World Rugby Women Coaching Toolkit initiative to increase the number of women coaches in rugby (World Rugby, 2020). With the delay of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and 2021 Rugby World Cup, the two flagship events may be brought closer together and be a catalyst (as seen in elite women's football) for increased interest with regards to participation, fan support, broadcasting, and commercial opportunities.

## **Cricket**

The emerging professional landscape of women's cricket has seen increasing numbers of paid opportunities for women across the globe, as discussed by Parry et al. In England, elite women's cricket has benefitted from significant investment from the NGB, the English Cricket Board (ECB) and has been dependent on the ECB as well as men's cricket for its development and support (Velija, 2015). Since the 1990s amalgamation between the ECB and the women's NGB, the Women's Cricket Association, there has been increased funding focused on improving the success of the England Women's team (Veija et al., 2014). As part of this strategy, in 2014, national team players were given full time central contracts (Wilson, 2014). In 2016, the ECB launched the Women's Cricket Super League with a £3million investment across four years (Burnton, 2015). The competition has recently been superseded by a new competition, the Hundred, which brings men and women cricketers together in city-based franchises. Importantly, this is the first competition in cricket where men and women have equal prize money, although women cricketers receive much lower salaries (averaging £8,000) than the male cricketers (averaging £66,000; Martin, 2020).

Similar to rugby, there has yet to be a scholarly examination of Covid-19 and elite women's cricket. Thus, we draw on the reporting of events as well as academic literature on elite women's cricket and discuss the implications for women cricket players. Cricket, like other sports, has been hit hard by Covid-19 with countries across the world balancing the resumption of elite and recreational cricket, spread of the virus and the economic tensions (Nhamo et al., 2020). Giving evidence at a government committee meeting in May 2020, Tom Harrison, ECB's chief executive officer predicted the economic cost of Covid-19 could total £380 million (Stocks, 2020). Further, the ECB spoke openly about the prioritisation of international men's cricket; Clare Connor (Head of Women's Cricket) stated: "if we have to play less women's cricket this summer to safeguard the longer-term future and investment for a more stable and sustainable women's game then that is probably a hit we might have to take" (Stocks, 2020, para 7). Accordingly, men's English international cricket resumed in July

whereas the women's team restarted at the end of September, confounded by scheduling problems (Gardner, 2020). The views of international, semi-professional cricketers<sup>3</sup> during the lockdown period demonstrated that sportswomen were cognisant of the culture of the game, and their position within it:

*"The focus for returning to playing has been more focused on the men than women, mainly down to where sponsorship money and TV rights"*

*"Even though I think there is genuine support and desire to grow the Women's game, in reality the majority of income comes from the men's game so financially to Women's game may take a hit to its growth in the near future. The men's game will be a financial priority"*

Globally, the 2021 Women's World Cup (WWC) was postponed in August 2020 as a result of Covid-19 to 2022 (ICC, 2020), with the International Cricket Council (ICC) citing a lack of preparation time for women's teams as the reason for the delay. In contrast, the men's 2021 T20 World Cup (originally in 2020) has not been deferred to 2022. Players themselves have issued concerns regarding the delay and how the NGBs would approach women's cricket during the pandemic in light of this news. As ECB Women's captain Heather Knight stated: "Hopefully it's not an excuse for boards to put women's cricket on the back burner for the next 12 months with no WC to prepare for." (The Cricketer, 2020). The delay to the 2021 WWC means that international women cricketers will now participate in three major tournaments within the same year in 2022 (WWC, T20 World Cup, and Commonwealth Games).

Domestically, The Hundred competition was delayed to 2021, with funding reportedly protected (Roller, 2020). Contracts for the 2020 version were cancelled, with only 11.5% of salaries paid, totalling a combined loss to players of £7 million (although this figure was vastly skewed by the men's salaries). For 2021, the women's playing fees and contracts were maintained by the ECB (with the highest at £15,000), however the men will take a 20% pay cut - with contracts not guaranteed - the highest earner receiving £100,000 instead of £125,000 (Roller, 2020). Furthermore, 25 women were placed onto regional retainers (reportedly worth £1,000 per month), part of an adapted version of the pre-Covid-19 £20 million effort to close the gender pay gap in cricket (McElwee, 2020a). Another interim strategy employed by the ECB in August 2020 was the creation of the one-off Rachael Heyhoe

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<sup>3</sup> These international cricket players reported earning either a part-time salary or match fees, but with a second occupation

Flint Trophy, a 50-overs tournament that enabled women domestic cricket players to play in competitive fixtures, in which all women were paid to participate (McElwee, 2020b), recognising the pressures that the pandemic has been placing on sportswomen.

## **Golf**

As Matz and Bowes's contribution notes, golf is one of the most established professional sports for women, with the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) the longest running professional sports organisation for women. Behind tennis, golf is also one of the most lucrative for professionals and the most successful women are able to earn seven figure salaries through tournament income and commercial deals. However, the sport is affected by similar issues seen across other male dominated sports. At the elite level, women are consistently underpaid compared to their male counterparts (Bowes & Kitching, 2020). For example, the 2020 versions of the US Open, the largest prize funds on both the men's and women's professional tours, saw the men's winner take home \$2.25million, compared to the \$1million awarded to the women's winner.

Professional golf was one of the first sports to be impacted by the pandemic. The 2020 Blue Bay LPGA tournament in China was cancelled on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 (LPGA, 2020), and as the virus spread, a total of 15 LPGA events were cancelled and 12 postponed or rearranged (Herrington, 2020). In the UK, golf was the only organised sport that was actively endorsed by the British government during the initial lockdown period. As Skillen (2020, p. 167) notes, "in those critical days in early March when other sports were ceasing to function in any meaningful way, golf continued". However, when the nationwide full lockdown came into force, golf clubs were required to close, something that was impacting golf across the world.

Whilst the pandemic impacted tournament schedules for all elite tours, the men's PGA Tour returned first on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2020 after a 91-day absence (PGA Tour, 2020). The LPGA returned seven weeks later at the end of July, with the Ladies European Tour restarting shortly afterwards. Similarly, the return to play prioritisation was very much with the men's version of the game. In the meantime, in England - with most players reliant on tournaments for income, and women's schedules notably lighter than men's in Europe - a new mini tour was organised. Citing both a lack of recognition and financial return in women's sport, former men's world number 1 Justin Rose and his wife Kate launched the Rose Ladies Series, donating £35,000 and attracting a range of corporate sponsors to provide professional women golfers in England the opportunity to play (Rowan, 2020). The series had started out as a single event on the 18<sup>th</sup> June at Brokenhurst Manor Golf Club, but Rose's involvement added an additional seven events and generated media interest to warrant a highlight show.

The development of the Rose Ladies Series was significant in many ways in highlighting the gendered impact of Covid-19 on women in golf, as well as exaggerating persistent inequalities in the game. As Rose stated:

“It was fairly obvious that women in sport in general and not just in golf but across the board have been having a struggle, as have many people through Covid-19. It is so important for the mental health of the female pros to get back to work and see their colleagues again...Unless we start to speak up things won't change” (Rowan, 2020, para 8)

One golf professional was enthused by the development of the series, stating:

*“It will take a long time for sport sponsorships to get back to the levels they were at. But with potentially greater exposure in the UK with a new series in the UK recently introduced, this can lead to attracting more fans to the women's game and encouraging more juniors to take up the game. If this series is a success it could lead to more events in the UK in the future.”*

### **Fear of the unknown: What is the future for sportswomen?**

From the above discussion, it is clear that there are significant challenges facing elite sportswomen in the midst of Covid-19 that are unique to their gender. Consistent across all four sports examined here was a prioritisation of men's sport. The rationale for this within each sport is deeply rooted in its historical, social and political context, where women have been excluded practically and/or symbolically from all four sports because of, in its simplest form, restrictive gender norms and social structures that have long privileged men. In overcoming the impact of history, NGBs and those connected to sport (including the sport media) have plenty to do to rebalance the scales.

Despite this, there are examples throughout of possible 'breakthroughs' in this regard. There has been much contemporary debate in the media regarding the fears for the future of women's sport following Covid-19, with (often women) journalists, academics and advocacy groups for women's sport bringing these issues to mainstream audiences. That said, although there has been increasing academic attention to the impact of Covid-19 (see, for example, Krieger et al., 2021), there has been limited scholarly work thus far that empirically investigates the effects of Covid-19 on women's sport. Therefore, there are clearly areas of concern within the industry that require greater investigation moving forward if we are to continue to understand and unpick the gendered impact of the crisis on sport. Researchers might wish to extend Bowes et al.'s (2020) survey of elite sportswomen to include sport-specific examinations. Research, linking to the sport's historical, social and political context,

could explore the broad range of working conditions sportswomen face (i.e. professional, semi-professional, amateur) using a variety of qualitative methods to elicit rich, in-depth information about the gendered effects of the pandemic. This vital information can then inform NGBs' future crisis planning. So far, scholarly attention has only focused on the sport of football, and a wider academic understanding of the threats facing other sports is important to develop our understanding of what decisive action is required by NGBs.

It would be naïve to expect women's sport to be financially unaffected by Covid-19 just because the sums of money involved are lower than men's sport. It is this 'fear of the unknown' – often in regard to the impact the crisis will have on emerging professionalisation of women's sports – that resonates for many. It is clear NGBs need to navigate their social and ethical responsibilities to women's sport with the economic and legal repercussions of Covid-19. A precedent, however, has been set by professional sportswomen themselves (e.g., captains Heather Knight – cricket, Sarah Hunter – rugby) who are prepared to make financial sacrifices to ensure the future of their game, regardless of the pay differences between men's and women's sport. But for the professionalisation of women's sport to continue, it must be viewed as integral to core business with any financial cuts spread equitably across both men's and women's competitions.

In light of this chapter's review of events, we also call for greater transparency and communication from NGBs when making decisions for women's sport as common across sports has been a lack of timely communication regarding outcomes. The qualitative data extracts presented in this chapter reveal that elite sportswomen experience training, competition and welfare concerns (Bowes et al., 2020) that can be exacerbated by a lack of communication from their NGB. Poor player well-being is likely to be acutely felt in women's sport due to their often precarious working conditions, and thus we must look to expand our limited understanding of mental health experiences of women working in male-dominated sport environments (see Webb et al., 2020). The path ahead may be unknown, but this chapter demonstrates that the fear of the unknown can be lessened through equitable treatment, greater transparency and clear communication.

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