

Female Referees in Sports

MKTG 4252- Sports Business Final Written Report

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Introduction:

Refereeing has historically been a profession targeted exclusively for men. In the history of soccer, male opposition to the inclusion of women is well documented. In 1921, the Football Association banned female teams from competing on official Football League pitches. The public reasoning for this move was that the sport was dangerous for women when in reality it was truly because women's soccer was a threat to the idea of the sport being a man's game.

Although this created a rocky initial relationship between females and the soccer community, the Football Association has since revised its restrictions to be more inclusive, however, there is still much work to be had in combating discrimination within the sport. Despite the discriminatory start, more inclusive changes have been implemented in this new era. More women around the world are being appointed as referees for a variety of sporting events.

Over the past two decades, female refereeing has seen a dramatic increase in everyday sports. The first account of female referees in a professional setting was in 1991 when three female referees worked in a tournament organized by the International Federation of Association Football, otherwise known as FIFA. Although they were employed by the organization for this tournament, they were not accredited by the FIFA organization.

In 1994, FIFA appointed four female referees were appointed to the international FIFA list. Since these small initial breakthroughs, there has been quite an increase in the number of female referees in the sporting world, with an increase of 26 female referees in 1995 to a total of approximately 350 today. Although the number of female referees has increased in the past two decades, the percentage of female-to-male referees worldwide is still quite unbalanced.

Trailblazers:

Sarah Thomas was the first woman to officiate a major college football game, the first to officiate a bowl game, and the first to officiate in a Big Ten stadium. On April 8, 2015, Thomas was hired as the first full-time female official in NFL history, and for the 2020 NFL season, she was on the officiating crew headed by referee Shawn Hochuli. She wears uniform number 53. In January 2021, she became the first woman to earn an on-field assignment for an NFL playoff game. In February 2021, she became the first woman to officiate in a Super Bowl.

Ingrid Jonsson (Sweden) and five other female assistant referees were invited to China for the inaugural FIFA Women's World Cup. Jonsson, who started refereeing in 1983, recalls that it was the first competitive international tournament in which women officiated. However, at the time, they could not be appointed to games because there were no women on the 1991 FIFA List of Referees. Jonsson ended up working as a lineswoman in the Final. Her colleague Cláudia Vasconcelos Guedes of Brazil, was the first female referee to take charge in a FIFA tournament. In the third-place playoff game on November 29, 1991, Guedes, and her assistants, China's Zuo Xiudi and New Zealand's Linda Black, also became the first all-female team to officiate in a FIFA tournament.

A few years later, Canadian Sonia Denoncourt became the first woman to be designated as an official FIFA-accredited referee.

In 1999, a pool of 31 referees composed entirely of women were in charge of the third edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup. Subsequently, all match officials for the women's tournament at the 2000 Summer Olympics (the second time there was a women's Olympic football competition) were also female.

Around the same time, women were receiving their first appointments at the top levels of the men's game. According to Football Makes History, "The first female referee in a European

first division in men's football was Nicole Petignat of Switzerland (1999) and the first female assistant referee was Gertrude Gebhard of Germany (1995).” The first female assistant referee at the international level was Nelly Viennot (France) who worked the UEFA European Championship Qualifiers in 1996. The first female lead referee for an international match organized by UEFA was Nicole Petignat (Switzerland) in 2003.

Increased Representation:

More female referees in sports serve as visible role models for aspiring young women who are interested in officiating. When girls see women in these roles, it broadens their perspectives and possibilities within the sports industry. Female referees also bring diverse perspectives to the game. They may offer different insights and approaches compared to male referees, which can enrich the overall officiating experience and contribute to fair play.

Historically, sports officiating has been dominated by men. By increasing the number of female referees, sports challenge traditional gender stereotypes and demonstrate that women can excel in positions of authority and leadership within athletics. Having more female referees can contribute to greater equity and fairness in sports. It helps ensure that women athletes are judged and officiated by individuals who understand their experiences and challenges within the sport. When women see more female referees, it can encourage greater female participation in sports at all levels. Feeling represented and respected within the sporting community can motivate more women and girls to get involved. The rise of female referees prompts sports organizations and institutions to reconsider their recruitment and training practices. This can lead to more inclusive policies and programs aimed at developing female talent in officiating. Increased representation of female referees can attract a broader fan base, including those who identify with and support gender diversity in sports. This can ultimately boost the popularity and appeal of various sports.

Overall, the increase in female referees is a positive step towards fostering inclusivity, diversity, and gender equality in sports. It not only benefits individual women pursuing careers in officiating but also contributes to a more equitable and representative sports culture for everyone involved.

Challenging Perceptions:

Historically, sports officiating has been viewed as a male-dominated field. The rise of female referees challenges the stereotype that certain roles within sports are exclusively for men. It demonstrates that women are capable and qualified to excel in positions of authority and leadership on the field. Female referees challenge traditional gender roles by entering a space that has traditionally been associated with men. Their presence redefines what it means to participate in sports and asserts that gender should not limit opportunities or dictate career paths. The success of female referees emphasizes that officiating ability is based on skill and competence rather than gender. Their performance on the field underscores that women possess the necessary expertise and knowledge to officiate effectively. Increasing the number of female referees promotes diversity within sports officiating. This diversity fosters a more inclusive environment where different perspectives and experiences contribute to the overall quality of officiating and the sport itself. Female referees serve as role models for young girls and women interested in sports. Their visibility inspires future generations to pursue their passions and aspire to positions that were once considered unconventional for women. As more female referees gain prominence, they earn respect and recognition within the sports community. Their accomplishments challenge any lingering biases or doubts about the capabilities of women in officiating roles. The presence of female referees contributes to advancing gender equality in

sports. It reinforces the principle that women should have equal opportunities to participate and lead in all aspects of athletics.

Overall, the increase in female referees challenges perceptions by reshaping cultural norms, confronting biases, and demonstrating that women can thrive in traditionally male-dominated domains. Their impact extends beyond the field of play, inspiring broader conversations about gender equality and representation in sports and society.

Fairness and Equity:

Having female referees in sports enhances representation and provides role models for female athletes and aspiring officials. This representation fosters a more inclusive and welcoming environment, encouraging greater participation and engagement from women and girls in sports.

Female referees help challenge biases and stereotypes related to gender in sports. Their presence contributes to dismantling preconceived notions about the capabilities and roles of women in athletics, promoting a more balanced and equitable perception of gender within the sports industry. Female referees bring diverse perspectives and experiences to officiating, which can lead to fairer judgment and decision-making on the field. This diversity helps ensure that all athletes, regardless of gender, are judged fairly and objectively based on their performance. The presence of female referees can mitigate discriminatory behaviors and attitudes in sports. Their visibility and authority challenge discriminatory practices and promote a culture of respect and equality among players, coaches, and fans. Increasing the number of female referees enhances the overall credibility and integrity of sports officiating. Their inclusion reinforces the principle that officiating roles should be based on competence and skill rather than gender, fostering trust in the fairness of sporting competitions. Female referees serve as examples of

women in leadership positions within sports. Their visibility in officiating roles contributes to breaking down barriers to gender equity in sports leadership and governance, paving the way for more women to pursue careers in sports officiating and administration. The rise of female referees has prompted sports organizations to adopt more inclusive policies and practices aimed at promoting gender equity. This includes initiatives such as gender-sensitive training, recruitment efforts, and mentorship programs to support the development of female officials.

In summary, the increase in female referees in sports has a multifaceted impact on fairness and equity by promoting diversity, challenging stereotypes, improving officiating quality, and advocating for gender equality within the sports community. Their contributions play a vital role in fostering a more inclusive and equitable sports environment for athletes, officials, and stakeholders alike.

Challenges and Barriers:

The increase of female referees in sports has faced several challenges and barriers that have historically limited the representation of women in officiating roles. These obstacles can vary based on cultural, social, and organizational factors.

Sports officiating has traditionally been a male-dominated field, leading to deep-seated gender biases and stereotypes. The perception that officiating is a "man's job" can deter women from pursuing careers in this area. Limited opportunities and clear pathways for women to enter and progress in officiating can be a significant barrier. This includes challenges in accessing training, mentorship, and development programs tailored to female officials. Gender-based discrimination and unequal treatment within sports organizations can hinder the advancement of female referees. This may include biased selection processes, unequal pay, and lack of support for career advancement. Female referees may face hostility, harassment, and gender-based criticism from players, coaches, fans, and colleagues. This hostile work environment can create

significant barriers to entry and retention in officiating roles. The scarcity of visible female referees in sports can limit the ability of aspiring officials to identify with role models and mentors. The absence of representation can perpetuate the perception that women are not suited for officiating. Officiating often involves irregular hours, extensive travel, and time away from home. Balancing these demands with family responsibilities can be particularly challenging for women, affecting their ability to commit to officiating roles. Societal norms and expectations regarding gender roles may discourage women from pursuing careers in officiating. Pressure to conform to traditional gender roles can create additional barriers for women seeking to enter the field. Female referees may lack adequate support and resources compared to their male counterparts. This includes access to training facilities, equipment, professional networks, and support systems within sports organizations. Female referees may encounter skepticism about their competence and credibility based on gender stereotypes. Overcoming these perceptions and gaining acceptance within the sports community can be a significant challenge. The culture and policies of sports organizations can either facilitate or impede the progress of female referees. A lack of inclusive policies, diversity initiatives, and gender-sensitive practices can hinder efforts to increase female representation in officiating.

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from sports organizations, governing bodies, stakeholders, and society as a whole to promote gender equality, diversity, and inclusivity in sports officiating. Initiatives such as targeted recruitment, mentorship programs, gender-sensitive training, and policy reforms are essential for breaking down barriers and fostering a more equitable environment for female referees in sports.