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Advanced Composition

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Talent Over Gender: The Inequities the United States Women's National Team Faces

The inequities that the women's national team face compared to the men's national team range from the huge pay gap to the playing surfaces and further on to broadcasting shortcomings.



The 23 women on the USWNT and their coaches celebrating their World Cup victory in 2015 in Canada.

The first Sunday of my 2016 Spring Break, I travelled from Knoxville, Tennessee to Nashville, Tennessee to see the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) play against France in the SheBelieves Cup. The game was played in the Tennessee Titan's arena, Nissan Stadium. There were over 25,000 fans there to cheer on the USWNT, which broke the record for attendance at a U.S. Soccer event in the state of Tennessee. The stands were filled with fans chanting, banners, and flags waving in favor of a United States win.

The women's national team has been popular the United States since their first game in 1985, but coming off a 2015 World Cup win in Canada the team's popularity is soaring with old and new fans supporting them. After their World Cup victory, the U.S. Soccer Federation (USSF) held a parade for the team in New York City and set up a ten game victory tour around the country that featured ten different cities. The tour lasted five months in 2015 – August through December.

Following this victory tour, the women's national team held the SheBelieves Cup on their home soil. The USSF decided that the tournament should be named the SheBelieves Cup to encourage women – young girls in particular – around the world that they should dream big. The tournament brought together four of the world's top five teams – the United States, Germany, England, and France. It was created to bring together top teams before they meet again in Rio, Brazil at the Olympics summer. This tournament stood as a test to the USWNT, because there are many players missing from the roster that won the World Cup. Three of the 2015 players have retired, two are pregnant, and one player is out with a torn ACL.

The games were played on March 3rd, March 6th, and March 9th of 2016. The team with the most wins throughout the tournament would win the SheBelieves Cup. Throughout the tournament, the women's national team went undefeated – proving that they have earned their number one world rank among their competitors.

The popularity and talent that the United States Women's National Team has not given them favorability over the United States Men's National Team (USMNT). In fact, it has not even given them equality. The USWNT are currently the world-champions of women's soccer, giving them a number one rank over their competitors, while the men's national team currently ranks 27th in the world. The women also hold four Olympic gold medals and three World Cup

champion titles. The inequities that the women's national team face compared to the men's national team range from the huge pay gap to the playing surfaces that they get to play on in games and further on to broadcasting shortcomings.

Artificial Turf Wars

People that have played or watched much soccer know that natural grass is preferred over artificial turf, but the understanding that turf is the inferior playing surface does not change the fact that almost every game that the USWNT team plays is on artificial turf. The 2015 Women's World Cup games were all played on artificial turf, whereas the 2014 Men's World Cup was played completely on natural grass. The men's national team has never played a large tournament – like the World Cup or the Olympics – on artificial turf. The majority of the women's national team games in 2016 have been on artificial turf, while the men's national team games have all been on natural grass this year. The men's national team has never played in a major international game – like a World Cup or an Olympic game – where there was not natural grass as a playing surface.



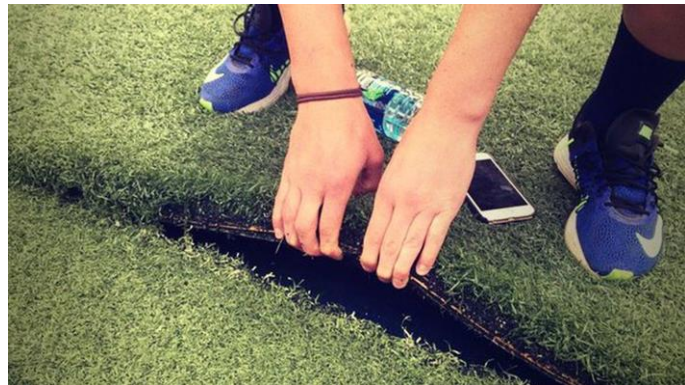
USWNT forward, Sydney Leroux's, turf burns that she posted on twitter in April 2013.

This surface affects the quality of soccer the women are capable of playing, but it also puts their bodies at risk to injury. Lambert Bert McCarty, a professor of Turfgrass Science and Management at Clemson University, did a study on synthetic turf that determined that synthetic turf heats up easier than real grass. In McCarty's study, when the temperature of air was at 94 degrees Fahrenheit, natural grass measured at 104 degrees, while artificial turf was 165 degrees. Turf burns are a regular occurrence on these fields. These burns can develop anytime a

player slides or falls while playing. Turf burns most often come in the form of bruises and deep scratches.

In an interview with Vice Sports in June of 2015, USWNT forward Sydney Leroux commented on the inadequacies of artificial turf. Beyond the surface wounds – like bruises and scratches – players face long lasting turmoil to their bodies. Leroux compared playing on artificial turf to running on cement. In her interview, she also referenced how turf affects the quality of play in soccer. Leroux stated that, “the game is completely different, it’s fake, you don’t know how [the ball] is going to bounce, you don’t know how the ball is going to run.”

The public became more aware of the inadequacies of artificial turf and the frequency at which the team has to play on the surface during the USWNT’s victory tour. Eight out of the ten games in the tour were to be played on turf. The women’s national team travelled to Honolulu, Hawaii to play their seventh game at Aloha Stadium against Trinidad and Tobago. *ESPNW* reported that players realized that the artificial turf at Aloha Stadium had sharp rocks imbedded in it throughout the entire pitch while practicing before the upcoming match. The players also noted that the turf was pulling up from the pitch in multiple places. The sidelines at Aloha Stadium had old sewer plates and plastic coverings laid across them. The artificial turf was in poor enough condition that one of the USWNT’s top players, Megan



A photo that goalkeeper, Hope Solo, tweeted of the turf pulling up from the ground in front of the goal in Honolulu, Hawaii on December 6, 2015.

Rapinoe, tore her ACL while practicing. The injury was non-contact and occurred because of the low-quality turf. The injury puts Rapinoe at risk of missing the 2016 Olympics in Rio. The loss

would hit the women's national team hard; Rapinoe has appeared in 113 national team games and scored 31 goals. The turf was so severely damaged that the team deemed it unplayable and the women's national team cancelled the game in Honolulu.

Wage Gap between the USMNT & the USWNT

Not only do the women have worse playing conditions; they are also paid severely less than the men's team. In 2014, The United States Men's National Team played in the Men's World Cup and lost in the first round of the Round of 16. This knocked them out of the competition very soon, but this low rank still secured the team 9 million dollars toward their federation. When a team wins a World Cup, FIFA awards the prize money to the national team's federation, in this case the United States Soccer Federation (USSF), and they decide how much money the players actually receive. In contrast, the Women's National Team won the 2015 Women's World Cup and only received 2 million dollars. Germany, the team that won the Men's World Cup in 2014, received 35 million dollars. Mary Pilon, a writer for *Politico*, reported that the total payout for all the women's teams combined in the 2015 World Cup was around \$15 million, while the total payout from the men's teams was nearing \$576 million.

FIFA is not the only federation known for wage discrimination; the USSF contributes to the unequal pay the women's national team faces. On March 31, 2016, five USWNT players filed action with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) accusing the USSF of wage discrimination. These five players include five of the most high profile players on the team – Carli Lloyd, Alex Morgan, Megan Rapinoe, Becky Sauerbrunn, and Hope Solo – but they filed the complaint on behalf of the entire team. During an interview with *Women's Soccer Zone*, Jeffery Kessler, the team's lawyer, reported that the women's team is paid almost four times less than the men's national team, despite producing \$16 million in revenues for the USSF in 2015.

This number seems especially large when Kessler adds that the men's team caused a \$2 million loss for the federation in that same year.

Payment Situation	USWNT	USMNT
Friendlies (per player, vs. teams not in FIFA's top 25, excluding Mexico)	\$1,350 for a win; No compensation for a tie or a loss	\$9,375 for a win; \$6,250 for a tie; \$5,000 for a loss
Friendlies (per player, vs. teams ranked 11-25, excluding Mexico)	\$1,350 for a win; No compensation for a tie or a loss	\$12,500 for a win; \$6,250 for a tie; \$5,000 for a loss
Friendlies (per player, vs. teams ranked 1-10 and Mexico)	\$1,350 for a win; No compensation for a tie or a loss	\$17,625 for a win; \$8,125 for a tie; \$5,000 for a loss

Information provided by Grant Wahl from *Sports Illustrated*.

<http://www.si.com/planet-futbol/2016/03/31/uswnt-eeoc-wage-discrimination-equal-pay>

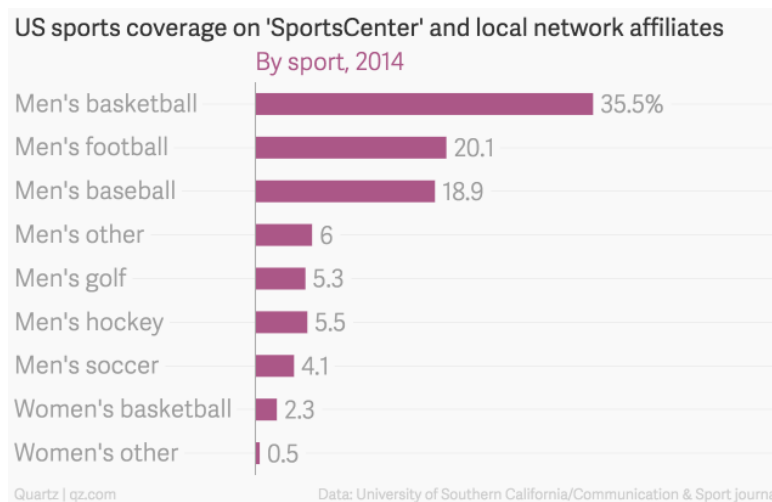
Media Coverage of USWNT Games

The 2015 Women's World Cup was played in Canada on multiple different fields. *The Atlantic* reported that one field the women's national team played on was 32 years old, and of course had artificial turf. This stadium was not the only lacking piece in the World Cup. One of the stadiums that the women played in held only 10,000 fans – limiting the attendance to an incredibly low number for a worldwide sporting event. In contrast, *The Atlantic* reported that the men playing in the Men's World Cup in 2014 did not see a stadium that held less than 37,634 people. FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), the head of men's and women's World Cups, is able of supplying a stadium with a small number of seats, because many people weren't even aware that there was a Women's World Cup happening. This all reverts to sports media and their lack of covering women's sports. In 2014, *The Atlantic* found that ESPN's *SportsCenter* dedicated only two percent of their on-air time to women's sports.

The Atlantic interviewed Cheryl Cooky, a professor at Purdue who focuses on women's studies, on the issue of women's sports on television. She focused on the bias that women's sports receives from media outlets. In the interview, Cooky pointed out that much of the public's view on women's sports comes from the way they are presented by sport's media. Cooky states that:

“Men's sports are going to seem more exciting,” she says. “They have higher production values, higher-quality coverage, and higher-quality commentary ... When you watch women's sports, and there are fewer camera angles, fewer cuts to shot, fewer instant replays, yeah, it's going to seem to be a slower game, [and] it's going to seem to be less exciting.”

Whether it is fair or not, some of the popularity of all sports teams and their players relies on media coverage and not necessarily the talent of the team itself.



A chart showing the small percentage of time women's sports airs on network channels and on ESPN's *SportsCenter*. Statistics gathered by the University of Southern California/Communications and Sports Journal in 2014.

<http://qz.com/428680/there-is-less-womens-sports-coverage-on-tv-today-than-there-was-in-1989/>

The coverage for the USWNT's games in the United States during the 2015 World Cup was limited to *Fox Sports One*, a secondary channel that many viewers don't have available, while the Men's World Cup in 2014 was broadcasted on *ESPN*, *ESPN2*, and *ABC*. This coverage of the 2014 World Cup spanned all 64 World Cup games – it was not only limited to the USMNT's games. For fans to watch the USWNT games, the availability has to be there.

Ending the Inequities in National League Soccer

The team's recognition has been higher since their 2015 World Cup win, and the news they are generating with their success and inequities is creating more acknowledgement with sports fans around the United States. Lately the team has been selling out of tickets for their international friendlies. The support the women have received now extends beyond people interested in sports. Their filing with the EEOC has brought their inequalities to the attention of people with power. In April of 2016, 110 members of the U. S. House Representatives signed a letter to Jenny Yang, chair of the EEOC, urging her towards "prompt consideration" of the WNT's complaint against US Soccer on the basis of wage discrimination. This support is furthering the respect the team has, but for the inequities that the USWNT faces to end completely, the team has to receive the credit that they deserve for their natural ability and hard work.

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