

## PURSE EQUITY IN PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

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It is the position of the Women's Sports Foundation that professional male and female athletes should receive equal purses when they are participating in the same competition (i.e., Wimbledon, X Games, a professional rodeo championship) that includes both male and female athletes participating in the same or comparable events. When men's and women's leagues are separate events in the commercial marketplace and operate solely on the dollars they earn, salaries of players may rightfully differ among leagues, whether male or female athletes are involved. But when men and women compete in the same sport venue for which a single ticket is offered and television advertising and rights fees are generated, any reason used to justify higher pay or purses for one sex over the other should be questioned.

How would the public react if there were higher purses for white athletes than athletes of color? Sex discrimination is no different than race discrimination.

- **MISCONCEPTION #1:** Men should get larger purses than women because the women's events or competitions are not as exciting and/or the skills displayed by female athletes are not as high as the men (men jump higher, perform more risky tricks, hit a tennis ball harder).

Women athletes should be evaluated in their own right, not in comparison to men. Just as a heavyweight boxer and a lightweight boxer are not compared to each other when deciding prize money and the value of a boxer's skills and ability are not based on weight class and size, we cannot do this to classes of male and female athletes who are not competing against each other.

We also know that because of physiological differences between the sexes, men's events and women's events in the same sports may be different. Women generally have lower centers of gravity and superior balance but less upper body strength. Women compete in the balance beam in gymnastics and men do not; does that lessen the ability or perceptions about male gymnasts? Men compete in the rings in gymnastics and women do not; does that lessen the ability or perceptions about female gymnasts?

So, we should not be surprised if men and women don't perform the same types of tricks or stunts in competitions like the X Games. "Different" does not mean "better;" it just means "different."

It is also important to ask, in sports such as the X Games, whether differences in the size of the purses for male and female competitors affect the difficulty of tricks being attempted when difficult tricks create a significant risk of injury. Does a \$100,000 pay differential make an athlete more or less willing to pull a risky stunt? How many more people would risk injury for a windfall than would do so for a pittance? As one female skateboarder said, "You pay me \$5,000, I'll show you a trick that's good enough to win; you pay me \$50,000, and I'll show you a trick that's on a whole new level."

- **MISCONCEPTION #2:** Because female athletes do not bring in as much money in terms of sponsorship or television viewers as men, they shouldn't receive the same prize money.

Television ratings and promotion go hand in hand. We know that television ratings are a function of (1) how much the event is advertised and promoted, (2) whether the event is scheduled to be aired in prime time and (3) whether the event is aired in the same time slot and day (predictability, such as Monday Night Football). Thus, if a television network runs 100 ads promoting a televised game on Thursday night in prime time, it will yield a higher rating than a non-promoted event in that same time slot or a different time slot. Just as a non-promoted men's baseball game should not be compared with a promoted men's baseball game, men's and women's events shouldn't be compared if they are not promoted equally. In most cases, women's sports are not promoted and are not given prime time or predictable time slots. For example, in the X Games, where there are fewer women's events and the women's events are not included in the telecast, it is misleading to argue that men's events receive higher ratings.

- **MISCONCEPTION #3:** Male athletes' competitions are longer than the women's competitions; their matches are longer, include more games and, therefore, the men should receive more money.

The length of the competition does not matter; it is the top celebrity athlete at the competition, male or female, who fascinates and draws the viewers and ticket buyers. For example, a celebrity musician, like Elton John, gets paid top dollar whether he performs a 45-minute set or a two-hour set. An athlete doesn't get paid less for defeating an opponent in straight sets in 50 minutes. Male volleyball players use a volleyball net that is higher than the women's volleyball net. Should they get paid more?

The nature, length and characteristics of the sporting event are appropriate to male and female athletes and their differences should not justify valuing one over the other.

The impact of unequal purses goes beyond the issue of money. Sport is too potent a force in society and our media culture to ignore. The implications of unequal pay extend beyond the playing field. When our sons and daughters watch a national network telecast and see the most celebrated female athletes valued less than their male counterparts, they are learning to believe that it is okay that females are less respected and less rewarded in our society. We are promulgating values for generations to come; we must be sure that the accepted values are acceptable ones.