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Title	Forewords: Sport & its female fans
Authors	Crawford, G
Publication title	Sport & Its Female Fans
Publisher	Routledge
Type	Book Section
USIR URL	This version is available at: http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/31986/
Published Date	2012

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Sport and Its Female Fans: Forewords

Jennifer Hargreaves, writing in 1982, observed that sport always has been closely associated with masculinity. A point Dworkin and Messner (2002: 17) reinforced when they wrote: '[organised sport] ...was created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by and for White middle class men to bolster a sagging ideology of 'natural superiority' over women...'. Throughout history, there are few areas of social life, which have been so visibly and strictly divided on the basis of gender as sport. Since antiquity, sport has primarily been seen as a, if not *the*, domain of men, and women's progression into this male enclave has been extremely slow and difficult (Whelehan 2000). To have an interest in sport, either as a participant or a spectator, has always been seen as a primarily masculine activity. While generations of boys have been reared on a diet of sports comics and magazines, such as (in the UK) *Roy of the Rovers* and *Match!*, offering up athletes as icons to be admired and emulated, girls' magazines continue to show sport as incompatible with femininity and heterosexual desirability (Cockburn 1999).

Of course, women have always been present in sport. Archaeologists and historians tell us that some women participated in sporting competitions in ancient Greece; though these were much less common, largely separate, and of much less social significance to those of men (Gosling 2007) — as Giulianotti (2005: 80) wrote 'gender stratification within sport began early'. Similarly, history teaches us that women have always been present as followers of sport. For example, women were often visible in quite large numbers at association football matches in the UK throughout the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (Gosling 2007). However, the presence and legitimacy of women as sport fans has always been, and to a large extent continues to be, questioned by many. For example, as the former (and self-proclaimed) 'football hooligan', Dougie Brimson and his brother Eddie in 1996 wrote, 'women like football, they don't love or worship it' (cited in Woodhouse and Williams 1996: 60).

It is evident that women are making greater inroads into sport fandom. Since the early to mid-1990s many traditional masculine sports, such as association football, rugby and baseball have begun to realise the economic benefits of

attracting a wider audience of men, children *and* women, while many sports have been (re)introduced (or re-booted) to new markets, such as soccer in the US, with a specific focus of attracting a more 'family-based' audience (Crawford 2004). This introduction or re-focusing of many sports beyond their traditionally narrow masculine market, has shown many successes; such as in the US where women make up around half of all audiences at National Football League (NFL) games (Fink, Trail and Anderson 2002). And it certainly seems that the rise in popularity of watching sport at home or in pubs has given women more opportunities to watch and follow sport (see Crawford 2009). However, there still remains a significant under-representation of studies and research on female followers of sport. Of those that have been published, it is evident that most were written in the 1990s and tended to focus on female fans as a consequence and bi-product of the changing nature and commodification of sport, which was seen to be occurring at the time. And of those that do focus directly on female sport fans, their attention has most commonly been on the marginalization and exclusion of women from following sport, and most frequently, association football. Hence, there remains few considerations of the experiences and pleasures of being a sport fan for women, as well as, a minority of studies beyond association football, a lack of up-to-date work, and none that offer the detailed consideration possible in a book like this one. ***Sport and Its Female Fans*** is therefore a long overdue and much needed book.

Though of course it would be wrong to overlook followers of the world's most popular sport (football), it is refreshing to see chapters in ***Sport and Its Female Fans*** that consider other sports, such as ice hockey, rugby and rodeo. The chapters within this book also provide a good balance of empirical data and theoretical innovation, and cover the consumption of sport in a range of settings. The geographical scope of the book and its authors is also impressive, as too are the range of topics covered, which include issues of power, identity, sexuality, consumption, blogging, and of course, sport, gender and fandom. It is therefore hoped that this book will ignite a second wave of scholarship on female sport fandom; but taking the lead from this book, one that has a much greater and stronger scope, and considers in more detail, not just the marginalization of

female sport fans, but what it really means to be a women that follows sport, in what is still largely, a man's world.

Garry Crawford,
Salford, December 2011

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