

Press Release

#WorldAtHerFeet: Women's Football Shatters Records but Obstacles Still Stand in Way of Progress, says BCW report



LONDON, 29 May, 2019 -- 2019 is shaping up to be a year of transformation for women's football with record-breaking crowds, major sponsorship deals and increasing levels of coverage. The women's World Cup (7 June-7 July) could reach a billion viewers and eclipse the Cricket and Rugby World Cups. But obstacles still stand in the way of progress and equality in the female game, according to the #WorldAtHerFeet report unveiled today by BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe).

The 50-page report takes stock of the current state of play and future of women's football, gathering views from those who know the game best including star players such as Eugénie Le Sommer (Lyon and France), Eniola Aluko (Juventus and England) and Tessa Wullaert (Manchester City and Belgium), a top referee, officials from the sport's governing bodies, commercial experts and fans. The authors share insights into how the women's game can seize opportunities to build on its breakthrough, as well as recounting their own personal stories of success – and frustration.

Overall, a positive story emerges from the report, but it spotlights the major challenges that women's football continues to face.

10 Key Findings from the Report

- The professional game is becoming more competitive and more talent is coming through. More women than ever before are playing football – 26 million in 180 countries according to FIFA
- Women are making their way into football boardrooms and management, but it's hardly a stampede. Less than 1% of presidents of national associations are female

- With the exception of the very top clubs, player salaries are often low – 90% of female professional players say they might quit the sport for financial, family or career reasons
- Female referees earn less than men in top tournaments
- The game's fan base is rapidly expanding with record attendances in several countries including Spain, Italy and Mexico, as well as rocketing ticket sales for the Champions League and World Cup, but gate receipts in national leagues still remain too low for most clubs to be self-sustainable
- Investment in infrastructure, pitch quality, academies and the grassroots game is still relatively weak
- Big-brand sponsorship is on the increase – sponsors believe that investing in a world that produces healthy, confident and empowered women is good for business
- Media coverage is increasing, but women's sport continues to receive less than 10% of sports coverage overall
- Change is being driven by the top clubs. Olympique Lyonnais is seen as the role model, with its "exceptional focus" on professionalism and player development
- While attitudes are changing for the better, examples of sexism, conservatism and bias still persist.

Recommendations

- Better financial and lifestyle support for players will help avoid a potential talent drain
- Today's players should do more to promote the game and support the development of the players who come after them
- Investment should focus on clubs and infrastructure, from physical and psychological training environments to marketing, league structures and good governance
- Minimum employment conditions and legal standards must be applied across women's international competitions and professional leagues
- Brand partners should leverage key talent to boost awareness and fan engagement
- Better calendar synchronization with men's events, as well as between national and club matches, will result in more exposure for the game
- International alliances between leagues and federations will support the global development of the sport
- Capitalising on links with esports can bring the game to new audiences.

Karen Massin, CEO of BCW Brussels, whose team compiled the #WorldAtHerFeet report, commented: "This is an exciting time for women's football. Rising levels of participation and growing attendance are giving a new impetus to the game. While challenges remain, there is an unmistakable mood of optimism around the sport. As a company committed to diversity, equality and empowerment, we are proud to support women's football and women's sport."

The #WorldAtHerFeet report was unveiled at a debate with football stakeholders and media in London today. Invited speakers included Jane Purdon, CEO, Women in Football; Tessa Wullaert, Manchester City and Belgium; and Kat Craig, CEO, Athlead.



About BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe)

BCW (Burson Cohn & Wolfe), one of the world's largest full-service global communications agencies, is in the business of moving people on behalf of clients. Founded by the merger of Burson-Marsteller and Cohn & Wolfe, BCW delivers digitally and data-driven creative content and integrated communications programs grounded in earned media and scaled across all channels for clients in the B2B, consumer, corporate, crisis management, CSR, healthcare, public affairs and technology sectors. BCW is a part of WPP (NYSE: WPP), a creative transformation company. For more information, visit www.bcw-global.com.

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