

# Gender Wage Gap in Sports

by

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## **Abstract**

Differences in wages of male and female athletes has been a common problem that has been debated for years. This paper will answer the question for the gender wage gap in sports. Analyzing data from four main sports: basketball, soccer, tennis, and golf, I look for the empirical evidence of the male/female salary discrepancies and whether they could be attributed to discrimination or to the market outcome. My results for this paper discuss the viewership and ratings of both the female and male sports leagues that are discussed. Basketball and golf both prove that the men earn their money by bringing in more revenue with the help of higher tv viewership and fan attendance. Soccer and tennis both have numbers that are almost equal, but the salaries are higher for the men. The main conclusion for this paper is that salary of athletes mainly depends on their ability to generate the revenue for their team/league.

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## Introduction

The gender wage gap in sports is a very controversial topic that has been seen for years discussing how male athletes make more in yearly wages than their female counterparts. This paper will be focusing on four major sports that include, NBA vs WNBA, Men's and Women's USA National soccer teams, the PGA vs LPGA, and men and women in tennis. When comparing male versus female, we see the numbers that may shock viewers that watch sports. In 2016 the NBA MVP, Stephen Curry earned over \$11 million dollars, whereas the WNBA MVP in 2016 earned just about \$95,000<sup>1</sup>. Basketball shows probably the most drastic difference in wages, but it does not stop there. In 2018, the men's world cup had prize money that totaled \$400 million, and in 2019, the women's world cup had prize money of \$30 million<sup>2</sup>. The US men's national team did not even qualify for the World Cup, but the women's team went on to win their World Cup. Tennis has two of the highest paid athletes on both the male and female side of the sport. Roger Federer earns \$68.9 million more than the highest paid female tennis player, Naomi Osaka<sup>3</sup>. Finally, when referring to golf women make 80% less per shot than their male counterparts<sup>4</sup>. Looking at these numbers really brings attention to the wage gap, and it is amazing to think that people doing the same profession make so much less because of their gender. Why is this, and will it ever change?

Before getting too in depth with sports, I first want to discuss the gender wage gap in general. The gender wage gap is the average difference between the remuneration for men and women who are working. When looking at the gender wage gap we need to understand the difference between adjusted and unadjusted. Unadjusted focuses on raw differences in earnings

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.blackenterprise.com/wnba-salaries-nba-salaries-earn/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-womens-national-team-world-cup-pay-vs-men-2019-7#:~:text=There%20is%20also%20a%20giant,%24400%20million%20in%20prize%20money.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/naomi-osaka-overtakes-serena-williams-as-the-highest-paid-female-athlete-in-the-world-2020-05-29>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/golf/2018/12/17/top-ten-women-golfers-earn-80-per-cent-less-men/>

whereas adjusted looks at some factors such as education, job experience, and number of hours worked. For this paper we will be focusing on an adjusted gap. No matter what job we are looking at there is usually a gender wage gap that sees men getting paid more than women. There was a point in history up until the 1960's that had newspapers posting job opportunities by gender. So, some would say, job hiring-men, and these would be the jobs that pay more. In 1963, the equal pay act was passed, which stated that you could not pay an employee less based on their gender. Employers would work their way around it and cheat the system, by giving false information, when they were asked why the females were still paid less. The equal pay act stated employers cannot change the job titles of women to pay them less, and jobs must be "substantially equal." In 1963, women earned 59% of men's earnings, whereas in 2012, women earned 80.9%. Obviously, we see a closing in the gap, but there is still a pretty good difference in the earnings of men and women in the workplace (Holzer and Neumark ,2000.)

Blau and Kahn (2017) discuss the wage gap and the ups and downs that have been seen throughout history. The strongest period of convergence between male and female wages was in the 1980's, but as time has gone on, we see slower and more uneven progress. Data shows long run trends from the 1955-2014 period based on two series: usual weekly earnings of full-time workers and annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers. After many years with a stable female/male earnings ratio of roughly 60%, women's relative wages began to rise sharply in the 1980s, with a continued, but slower and more uneven rate of increase thereafter. By 2014, women full-time workers earned about 79% of what men did on an annual basis and about 83% on a weekly basis. PSID is the only data source that has information on actual labor market experience. In the case of labor market experience, the story is one of a substantial narrowing of the gender experience gap. In 1981, men had nearly 7 more years of full-time labor market experience on

average than women. By 2011, the gap had fallen markedly to only 1.4 years, with the fastest rate of increase in women's relative experience occurring during the 1980s. Thus, on these two basic measures of human capital—schooling and actual labor market experience—women made important gains during the 1981- 2011 period, reversing the education gap and greatly reducing the experience gap. It shows that from 1981 to 2011 women gained more jobs from 5% to 9%, but they had jobs such as K-12 teachers and nursing that are generally less lucrative than male jobs (Blau and Kahn, 2006).

## **Literature Review**

Brook (2010) discusses the wages between male and female college basketball coaches. When discussing the gap between the coaches, Brook, (2010) talks about how these institutions are trying to make equality between male and female athletes with title IX, but they will not do the same for the coaches. This article is very interesting to me because they are hiring male and female coaches to do the same job, but there is still a difference in the wages. Brook, (2010) discusses that in this situation it seems to be discrimination more than anything related to coaching. This article shows models that discuss why male coaches get paid more. In certain cases, some female coaches are suing the school they work for, because they feel like they are being discriminated against.

Coate (2001) analyzes the careers of tennis players and compares the men and women in terms of being committed. Men and women tennis players for a good amount of time have been competing in the same major tournaments, but there is still a difference in wages between the two. When looking at certain everyday activities, men are seen to be more violent and aggressive. For example, they are more likely to commit crimes and get into a motor vehicle accident. The paper argues that this leads men to being more committed to the athletic mindset. Coate (2001) uses

regression models and analyses to compare the hard work and length of careers between the men and women in tennis. He concentrates on the top 250 players in the world and how long certain players stay in this ranking throughout their careers. The results suggest that women compete and perform at a high level just as much as the men do. People try to say that women do not play at the same level as men and they do not play with the same edge and motivation, but this is all wrong especially in a sport like tennis where you are competing for yourself. Tennis is a big example that shows that these female players work hard, and this might be one argument for narrowing the gender wage gap.

Flake (2013) discusses the main wage gap between men and women in every aspect of life. Annual earnings for women are 19% lower than that of men. The article then goes into the topic of tennis. The reason tennis is easy to look at for the wage gap is because it is an individual competition. Four of the Forbes top five women athletes play tennis. Tennis in general is just one of the most popular women's sports in today's day and age. Flake (2013) analyzes the data from the 2009 season and the four major tournaments. They look at tournaments entered, tournaments won, and prize money earned for both men and women. At the end of this analysis, the difference between prize money was much greater between men and women than it was for tournaments entered and won. We see this in smaller tournaments that are not one of the four major grand slams.

Flake (2013) further discusses why the pay gap is different when the men and women have the same sponsors. They discuss finding evidence for tv ratings and attendance between male and female matches, but after further research no new evidence came out stating who deserved more money. Instead, they found online tickets that gave access to both the male and female matches that day, due to this we would assume that most people would attend both if they could. This is

just another case that looks like discrimination, but it would be interesting to investigate the tv ratings and attendance and try and find out an answer for that.

Zerunyan (2018) starts with the discussion of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. This act intended to break away from wage disparities based upon gender. Even though the act had good intentions of helping women in the United States, it fell well short of its expectations. In 2014, fifty-two NBA players were each paid more individually than the whole WNBA made combined. That same year the PGA (Professional Golf Association) gave the winner five times the amount the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) winner made. The US women's Olympic soccer team won the world cup and still made almost thirty-three million dollars less than the German men's team when they won their world cup tournament.

The numbers are just as drastic when it comes to annual salaries in these respective sports. In basketball the lowest paid NBA player still makes five times as much as the highest paid WNBA player. Just like we talked about before the German men's soccer team made more than the US women when they won the world cup, but the US men made five times as much as the women and they came in eleventh place that year. Tennis has the smallest gap in wage, but the men still make more. For every dollar that the men make, women make eighty cents. The main argument for the wage gap in sports always looks at viewership and ratings. The problem with that is men always get more sponsorship opportunities and the women are already starting lower than the men. Some argue that the men are more exciting to watch, and that they play at a greater pace. Data cannot really help with this argument, so that is something that goes off people's personal opinions.

Garris (2017) talks about the World Cup and the salaries that teams earn. When looking at the prize money of the 2014 and men's World Cup and the 2015 women's World Cup, is a very drastic difference. Winner of the men's World Cup would earn a total of \$35 million, while the



women winner would earn only \$2 million. The runner up for men would get \$25 million, and the runner up for women would get \$1.4 million. This would continue all the way down to the participation and the men even for the participation bonus never earn less than \$1 million. Soccer is a very interesting sport to look at especially when focusing on the men's and women's USA national teams. The women are a much better team than the men and have won the World Cup four times and never finished below third place. On the other hand, the men's team has zero World Cups and at the last World Cup they lost in qualifiers and never even made it. There has been constant pushing from these women to make the pay gap equal and they are seeing slow results such as wages becoming a little closer to the men's, but it will be interesting to see if it ever becomes even.

DiCicco (2020) starts with discussing some numbers that show a difference between the NBA and the WNBA. In 2018, the average salary for the NBA was 6.4 million dollars, whereas the average salary for the WNBA was 71,635 dollars. The reason these numbers are like this is because of the revenue that each league brings in. The more revenue brought in, equals higher wages for players. Another interesting fact from this article is that the WNBA only uses 20% of its revenue to pay its players. The NBA uses 50% of its revenue. Why is it that the WNBA only uses 20 percent? When discussing the topic, it is important to observe wins and viewership for both the NBA and WNBA. This article discusses data that shows win percentages along with the salaries for both the NBA and the WNBA.

Hussain (2020) discusses the discrimination that is seen with the U.S. women's national soccer team. The U.S. men's national team is arguably one of the worst in the world, whereas the U.S. women are probably considered one of, if not the best team in the world. The U.S. women's national team has been under a lot of discrimination since the founding of the team. In this article

it states how important the USWNT (United States Women's National Team) is to the United States Soccer Federation. They bring in all these championships, but they are not paid like champions. The big thing about soccer is these women are fighting for equal pay and in 2017 they filed a lawsuit demanding better pay. Hussain, (2020) discusses the discrimination against the women, and also the incentives to possibly pay the men more than the women.

Shmanske (2000) discusses the difference between the wages of the PGA and the LPGA, and takes a deeper look into the workload these athletes put in. In 1998 the men of the PGA competed in 45 tournaments that had a purse ranging from \$1.5 to 4 million, with an average of \$2,144,444. During that same year the women of the LPGA competed in 36 tournaments that had a purse ranging from \$.5 to 1.5 million, with an average of \$788,500. This article tries to figure out if the LPGA has lower fan attendance and tv ratings because of gender of discrimination, or because men of the PGA have more strength and skill. In golf men usually out perform the women when it comes to teeing it up with a driver. The men outdrive the women by an average of about 35 yards. The problem with the argument that men are bigger and stronger and that is why they outdrive women is a tricky statement, because some of the furthest hitters in the PGA are shorter than average.

## Data

In this section I will discuss the evidence of the gender wage gap in different sports such as basketball, soccer, tennis, and golf.

### *Basketball*

Table I: NBA and WNBA Statistics

Leagues	NBA	WNBA
Revenue	\$7.4 billion	\$60 million
Average Salaries	\$6.4 million	\$71,635
Ticket Price	\$89 USD	\$17.42 USD
Highest Paid Player	Stephen Curry \$40 million	Brittney Griner \$113,500
Average Viewership	2019 NBA Finals: 15.14 million	2018 season: 231,000
Average Attendance	18,000	6,768
Ratings	2019 Finals had an 8.8 rating	2019 season had a 0.6 rating

Source: <https://www.wsn.com/nba/nba-vs-wnba/>

Table 1 shows main indicators for the NBA and the WNBA. The gender wage gap has been persistent in basketball ever since the foundation of the WNBA in 1996. The idea behind the gender wage gap is that if men and women perform the same job then the salaries should be similar. In every category in this table the numbers favor that of the NBA. First, I will compare the earnings of the athletes in the two leagues. In the NBA, a player's average salary is \$6.4 million; in the WNBA, a player's average salary is \$71,635. The difference between the average salaries is \$6,328,365. This number is probably the most drastic among sports leagues. The gap remains for

the highest paid players where Brittney Griner earns \$113,500 which is nowhere near what Stephen Curry makes yearly in the NBA- \$40 million.

Now I will discuss the viewership and ratings for both the leagues. Table I suggests that basketball fans prefer watching NBA to WNBA both live and on television. The average fan attendance in the NBA is 18,000 and, in the WNBA, it is 6,768. Ticket prices for an NBA game average at \$89, and for the WNBA it averages at \$17.42. During the 2019 NBA Finals the NBA had an average viewership of 15.14 million and in the entire 2018 season the WNBA had an average viewership of 231,000. The 2019 NBA Finals had a rating of 8.8 and during the entire 2019 season the WNBA had a rating of 0.6. These statistics favor the NBA, and it gives a clear answer to why NBA players have higher wages than the women of the WNBA. Revenue for the NBA, which is \$7.4 billion, and for the WNBA it is \$60 million. The revenue when looked at further tells us that for every dollar earned by the WNBA, the NBA is earning \$123. This also correlates with average salaries where for every dollar a WNBA player makes, an NBA player will make \$89. Overall, Table I suggests that there is a significant difference between the salaries of the NBA and the WNBA, but this difference, at least to some degree, can be attributed to a difference in demand for NBA and WNBA games.

### ***Soccer***

Table 2 compares statistics from the Men's World Cup in 2018 and Women's in 2019. The US men's and women's national soccer teams have had a lot of controversy throughout the years when it comes to performance, success, and wages. The women's team has won four World Cups in 1991, 1999, 2015, and 2019; whereas the furthest the men's team has made it in a World Cup was the semifinals of the 1930's World Cup. The women's team has even filed lawsuits that argue against the unfair wages. The lawsuit was filed in March of 2019

(<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/sports/u-s-soccer-reaches-settlement-world-cup-women-s-team-n1249603>), and it stated that after their win in the 2015 World Cup the women only got \$1.725 million in bonuses compared to the men who got \$5.375 million. The women's team would lose the lawsuit, because the judge stated that the team's CBA was inferior to a false equivalence.

Table II: World Cup Statistics

<b>World Cup</b>	<b>Viewership</b>	<b>Revenue</b>	<b>Prize Money</b>	<b>Money winning team earns</b>
2018 Men's	11.4 million	\$49.9 million	\$300 million	\$38 million'
2019 Women's	14.3 million	\$50.8 million	\$30 million	\$4 million

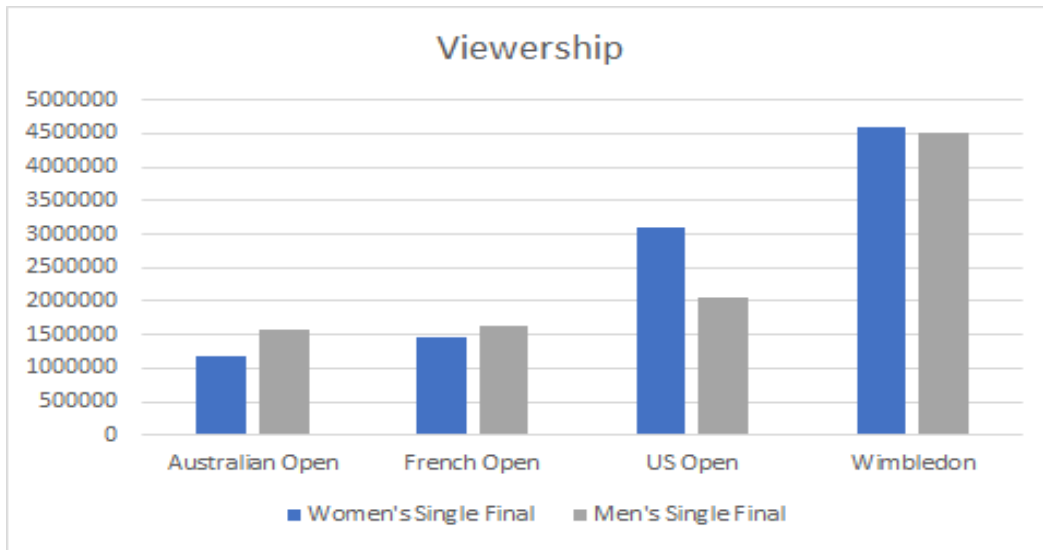
Source: <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/10/us-viewership-of-the-womens-world-cup-final-was-higher-than-the-mens.html>

Table II shows viewership, revenue, prize money, and the amount of money that each winning team earns. Soccer is a rather interesting case because the women perform much better than the men. According to this table not only do the women play better, but they also have a higher viewership. In the case of soccer, the women have much better grounds for equal if not better wages, but still get paid a lot less than the men. Table II shows that the men have a prize money pool of \$300 million and the winner gets \$38 million. On the other side the women have a prize money pool of \$30 million and the winner gets \$4 million. These numbers show that the men's world cup winners make more than the entire pool for the women, but to conclude from these numbers that women are discriminated might be a little premature. The prize money is defined by FIFA and not just the United States. Other countries have much higher ratings and viewership for their male teams which is the reason that FIFA has a much larger prize money for the men. Another piece of data that assists the women is the revenue brought in by each team. The

women earn a little over one million more than the men. The same argument lies in this statistic because the revenue comes from the United States Soccer Federation and not FIFA.

### *Tennis*

Table III: Viewership of Tennis Majors



Source: [https://www.signal-ai.com/blog/gender-media-coverage-in-tennis#:~:text=Gender%20media%20coverage%3A%20Key%20Findings,and%20Simona%20Halep%20\(8th\).](https://www.signal-ai.com/blog/gender-media-coverage-in-tennis#:~:text=Gender%20media%20coverage%3A%20Key%20Findings,and%20Simona%20Halep%20(8th).)

Table III shows the number of viewers for each of the four major championships in tennis. It compares the viewership of the men's single final and the women's single final for the Australian Open, French Open, US Open, and Wimbledon. Out of the four major championships two women's finals, Wimbledon and the US Open are viewed more and two men's finals, Australian Open and French Open are viewed more. According to the numbers the highest viewed major final is the Women's Single for Wimbledon. The second is the Women's Single for the US Open. These numbers show that the women get more viewers in the two most watched major championships rather than the men that have higher viewership at the Australian and French Open. When looking

at the numbers for the viewership of these majors they are all relatively close. Tennis is a sport that has one of the smaller gaps between male and female athletes' wages, but there is still probably further evidence that can point to the men getting paid more. For example, if a player were to win each of the 20 non tournament matches, they compete in the women can earn a maximum of \$99,000 and the men would earn a maximum of \$263,320<sup>5</sup>. The prize money for the grand slam matches for both men and women are equal for each of the four tournaments. Overall, for tennis we see that for the four major tournaments the men and women are now paid equal, but for the non-major tournaments there is still a gap. Tennis is a tough sport to look at because in the four major tournaments the men and women are paid equal, but when it comes to the non-majors' men are paid more again. Women tennis players are the best off from these four sports due to the major tournaments and the fact that even in the non-majors the wage gap is still not as big as sports like basketball and golf.

### *Golf*

Table IV shows the viewership for certain tournaments in the PGA and the LPGA. Golf is a sport like tennis where the athletes compete as individuals, and not as a team. In the tournament style of play they compete for purses, and in most if not all cases the PGA tournaments have the higher purse.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/09/11/despite-equal-grand-slam-tournament-prizes-tennis-still-has-a-pay-gap.html#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20lawsuit%2C%20if,team%20players%20would%20earn%20%24263%2C320>

Table IV: PGA vs LPGA TV Viewership

**LPGA Viewership**

<b>Ricoh British Open</b>	<b>Solheim Cup</b>	<b>KPMG LPGA Championship</b>
1.9 million	1.7 million	840 thousand

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/480139/cable-or-broadcast-tv-networks-lpga-tour-women-s-golf-watched-within-the-last-12-months-usa/>

**PGA Viewership**

<b>The Masters</b>	<b>U.S. Open</b>	<b>PGA Championship</b>	<b>Open Championship</b>
10.8 million	7.3 million	5 million	3.7 million

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/244272/golf-tournaments-viewership-us/>

Just like basketball the men of the PGA have a much higher viewership which gives us a good direction to why their pursues would be higher, and that these athletes would earn more than the women of the LPGA. When looking at both the PGA and LPGA the purses for each tournament come from the various television networks that broadcast the tournaments. After 2012, sixty percent of each tournament's purse came from television rights money. The size and popularity of the tournament will obviously lead to an increase in the price of the purse. As table IV shows we see that the men of the PGA have a higher viewership for their tournaments, showing us why the purses for the PGA tournaments are higher than the LPGA.



Table V: LPGA vs PGA Purses

**PGA Purses**

<b>Purses</b>	<b>Tournaments</b>
\$9,500,000	BMW Championship
\$9,300,000	Arnold Palmer Invitational
\$11,500,000	Masters Tournament
\$9,500,000	The Northern Trust
\$15,000,000	The Players Championship

Source: <https://thegolfnewsnet.com/golfnewsnetteam/2020/01/25/ranking-pga-tour-tournament-purses-from-biggest-to-smallest-for-2019-2020-118036/>

**LPGA Purses**

<b>Purses</b>	<b>Tournaments</b>
\$1,600,000	Honda LPGA Thailand
\$1,800,000	LPGA Mediheal Championship
\$1,500,000	Volunteers of America Classic
\$2,300,000	Dow Great Lakes Bay Invitational
\$4,500,000	AIG Women's Open

Source: [TOURNAMENTS | LPGA | Ladies Professional Golf Association](#)

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper I tried to find the answer to why is there a gender wage gap in sports, and why are the women paid less. As I discussed in our literature review, we saw many examples of female athletes getting paid less than their male counterparts in the four sports: basketball, soccer, tennis, and golf. All the articles stated the same ideas showing how women were paid less, but it was always difficult to understand the reasoning behind these differences. The gender wage gap is a very difficult topic to discuss due to the idea that most people just try to get rid of the talks about discrimination. The topic is much more complicated than that which is why my approach was to look at viewership ratings, revenues, ticket prices, and fan attendance for the different sports.

For basketball and golf there is a clear-cut answer, and that is that the men have much higher ratings and sales. This gives the men the opportunity to have greater revenues which leads to higher wages and earnings. Things get tricky when discussing soccer and tennis. When focusing on the U.S. National Soccer Teams like I did for this paper, it shows that the women have higher ratings and viewership than the men. The problem is the men still get paid more. For both soccer there needs to be a deeper look into the research and look at where the money is coming from and how different games or tournaments pay the winners. The takeaway from this paper is to teach people why wages work the way they do. For basketball and golf there is no discrimination, so the wages make sense to the data was shown. Soccer and tennis need to be discussed further with looks at new and different data. This topic is very important because wage differences between men and women are often portrayed as injustice but sometimes it can just be the market outcome.

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