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What does it take to make them rate?

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"I gotta be me" says our next Governor General

EYEWITNESS EVIDENCE
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THIS WEEK’S COVER: photograph by Jane Ueberth

VOLUME 110 No 2385 ISSN 0110-6788

NZ LISTENER, JUNE 15, 1985
Bad track record

by Eileen O'Leary
Qualified teacher with an MA in recreation administration
and Nigel S Roberts
Director of Continuing Education at Victoria University

There are many women playing sport, but they're not turning up on our screens. A study of the 6.30pm news broadcasts shows that TVNZ isn't doing a proper job in its reporting of women's sport.

SPORT, a powerful means of education, teaches individuals self-expression and self-understanding and prepares them for recreational time in later life. "Through sport," writes Jay Cockley in her book Sport in Society, "people learn the general ways of thinking, feeling and acting that make them contributing members of society."

Sport is thus an important area in which women can strive for equality, status and achievement. But this is not made easy. "Sexist attitudes and practices," continues Cockley, "have shaped the sports participation of women throughout the history of Western society."

The values inherent in sport are also the values traditionally associated with the male sex-role stereotype. "Sport," says Jack Scott in The Athletic Revolution, "is our 'civilised' society's most prominent masculinity rite." The dilemma facing women in sport was recently epitomised by L Hunter, who noted that "a guy who competed and won proved his masculinity, a woman who did the same thing had to prove her femininity."

The presentation of sport in the media reflects this bias. Research in America and Britain led K F Dyer to conclude: "Men's events are referred to as 'the major event', the 'big one' or, less emotionally but even more inaccurately, as 'the open championship' or 'the national title', when women are not allowed to enter. Sports such as netball which are largely women's sports are hardly covered at all, despite the fact that their level of participation may be almost as great as that of the most popular men's sports."

Closer to home, an Australian study found that women received only five minutes' coverage out of a total television sports presentation time of 200 hours and 39 minutes. Less than two percent of the sports pages in newspapers were devoted to women's sports,
A New Zealand study several years ago monitored Wellington's two newspapers, discovering a "severe inequality in the coverage of male and female athletes" which led to the impression that successful female athletes are "virtually all male".

To find out if New Zealand television portrays reality, we studied the treatment of sport on TVNZ's 6.30pm news broadcasts.

Television was chosen because it is the paramount news medium. The prime-time evening news bulletin was chosen because of its reputation as an important, authoritative summary of the news of the day and associated sports events. BCNZ figures consistently show that the peak audience time for television viewing in New Zealand is from 6.30pm to 7.30pm, when about 1.5 million people watch TV.

Audience research shows that a large proportion of these viewers tune in to the news on TV.

A six-week period of news broadcasts, randomly drawn from a three-month period last year, was taped and extensively analysed. Overseas studies concluded that random samples of 12 days' newspapers or 14 days' television news bulletins are sufficiently representative of a year's output. Our sample covered 18 days in May, 13 days in June and 14 days in July; a time when winter sports are being played nationally, and immediately prior to the Los Angeles Olympics.

The data, selected by scientific random sampling techniques for this study, undoubtedly constitute an accurate picture of sport as depicted on New Zealand's main news bulletins.

During the survey period, news items relating to 41 different sports were broadcast. Twenty-five were men's sports, 10 women's sports, and six mixed. Items about the administration and organisation of the Commonwealth, Paralympic, and Olympic Games, and all horse and greyhound racing, were recorded as mixed sports because they involved members of both sexes.

A total of 204 items were recorded; 89 percent men's sport, 13 percent women's sport, and 8 percent mixed sport. This disparity is illustrated in Figure 1.

Many sports are played on Saturdays, and the 6.30pm news programmes feature a large number of sports items.

The timing of our survey meant that we expected a high proportion of sports news time devoted to winter sports. The amount of coverage given to seven sports featured on the 6.30pm news is shown (right) in minutes and seconds, with the organisation's 1985 membership figures in brackets:

- Men's sports
  - Rugby (200,000): 64 minutes
  - Cricket (88,437): 26 minutes
  - Rugby League (24,600): 21 minutes
  - Soccer (18,436): 19 minutes
- Women's sports
  - Tennis (940): 9 minutes
  - Netball (11,840): 17 minutes

Proportion of total time devoted to men's and women's sports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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The proportion of news items devoted to women's sports is a reflection of the total for both men's and women's sports news items.

The duration of each item of sports news in our sample was also measured and examined. The total, men's sports were given 3 hours, 24 minutes and 25 seconds of OWE news time, while women's sports were allocated only 26 minutes and 37 seconds coverage (Figure 2).

Sports items were divided into four groups: 15 seconds or less in length; 16 to 51 seconds; 52 to 97 seconds; and 98 to 115 seconds (Figure 3). The proportion of items on women's sport declines, without exception, as the length of sports items increases.

The timing of our survey meant that we expected a high proportion of sports news time devoted to winter sports. The amount of coverage given to seven sports featured on the 6.30pm news is shown (right) in minutes and seconds, with the organisation's 1985 membership figures in brackets:
The high proportion of rugby news that is disproportionate to other sports membership, but the imbalance is extreme in the comparison between rugby and netball, or rugby and any other women's sport. The Rugby Union is one of the two major sports organisations in New Zealand with over 100,000 members. The other is the Netball Association. Rugby received 237 times the length of coverage that netball received. Men's cricket had 174 times more coverage than netball. Rugby league had 141 times netball's coverage, and men's soccer had 152 times the coverage. Like netball, women's golf fared badly, though the New Zealand Ladies Golf Union is the second largest women's sports organisation in the country. The highest-scoring women's sport was tennis, which totally dominated Wimbledon coverage. Though men's tennis coverage also featured Wimbledon, it contained other news, including items on New Zealand players. The argument that male New Zealand tennis players are of a higher standard than their female counterparts holds little weight when both Brenda Perry and Belinda Cordwell have higher world rankings than our top three male players.

ITEMS OF special interest or importance are sometimes mentioned during previews to the main news or the preview to the sports news segment. Women's sports were never mentioned in the main news previews, or anywhere in the main news. On the other hand, seven men's sports news items were reviewed on the main news (with one — on men's yachting — shown during the main news). Of the sports news previews, four were for women's sports, and one for men's sport. The four women's sports items reviewed were all of non-New Zealand athletes competing internationally; two about Wimbeldon, and two about Zola Budd. Rugby was previewed most often — in fact, 29 percent of previews spotlighted rugby. All women's sports together accounted for only 10 percent of one's news previews.

The leading item in any news broadcast has a significant impact. During our survey, women's sport was shown first on the sports news segment of one's evening news only four times (three items on Wimbeldon; one about Zola Budd). Items on men's sport led the sports news 27 times, with mixed sports accounting for the remaining 11 lead stories. Significantly, rugby accounted for 43 percent of the lead stories. Visually, the most appealing and interesting television in action film, rather than newsreaders or static displays (scoreboards and still photographs). When it comes to sport on one's 6:00pm news, 50 percent of the action film segment of the survey was of men's sport, 14 percent women's sport, and six percent mixed sport. (These statistics exclude items relating to sports administration and racing.) Over half the film for women's sport was of tennis at Wimbeldon, while the most popular women's winter sport — netball — had no film provided. This is not the case all during the survey. Twenty-three percent of the action film was of rugby, with men's cricket receiving second at 12 percent.

At this stage, it is worth noting that men's cricket received the largest amount of sports news coverage in our predominantly winter-time survey that over 50 percent of all sports news coverage was more than an hour for rugby, and slightly more than 280 minutes for all women's sports combined. A large proportion of the cricket coverage was of non-New Zealand games, with extensive footage of the West Indies playing England. Women's cricket did not have any action film coverage, and received a total of only 27 seconds coverage, even though the national women's cricket team was on tour during the survey time.

The imbalance between men's and women's sports is heightened when the mixed news category is analysed in more detail. In most of these items, information about male competitors predominates. For example, one athletics item, classified as "mixed", showed a photograph of Anne Ashdale yet gave more details about Rod Dixon. A "mixed" tennis item talked about the administration of tennis, but showed film only of men playing tennis. Similarly, an item about "mixed" swimming discussed both sexes but only featured film of male swimmers.

THE IMBALANCE in the presentation of sports news items about men and women for example, the larger numbers of males participating in sport. It perpetuates the stereotype of masculinity and active sports participation, and feminism and passive spectatorship. The mass media have a fundamental role in moulding social reality. In a major review for Unesco, Margaret Gallagher stressed that "the mass media as a cultural force do not simply reflect but subtly and indirectly help to shape social reality".

As a result, television is in a uniquely influential position to enhance the role of female athletes, by drawing attention to the fact that many women are also sportspersons and that many also achieve a newsworthy standard of excellence in their own class and field. Indeed, the Broadcasting Act requires the BCNZ to "provide and produce programmes which inform, educate, and entertain", as well as to "cater in a balanced way for the varied interests of different sections of the community" (our italics).

We have emphasised these sections of the act because we believe that this study of the presentation of sport on one's flagship news programme establishes beyond doubt that the corporation is failing to achieve its set functions and stated responsibilities. A ratio of 85:15 between men and women in sports coverage does not constitute "balance". In no way can the BBC claim that nine seconds of netball coverage "inform" or "educate" fairly. There is no doubt that television news coverage of only 10 female sports (compared, for example, with 26 male sports) is not catering for "the varied interests of different sections of the community".

The time is well overdue for television to represent accurately the social reality of sport in New Zealand.