

University of Wisconsin-Madison

The Role of Social Media Opportunities in Women's Sports for Gen Z Engagement:

How Women's Sports Teams Can Use Social Media Marketing to Connect Authentically With Gen Z Audiences While Still Monetizing Them

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Marketing 410: Sports Marketing

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November 18, 2025

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Social Media as an Emerging Platform for Women's Sports Consumption

Women's sports is an emerging market that appeals to people of all ages, offering significant opportunities to monetize digital media for the next generation of athletes and fans. Viewership is steadily increasing due to fans with exceptional brand loyalty and standout athletes like Caitlin Clark. This excitement extends into social media, where fans actively engage with women's teams and athletes. A recent survey found that social media has become the primary platform fans use to follow women's sports and athletes (Rain the Growth Agency). Women's sports audiences are inspired by athletes, correlating to soaring attendance and engagement. For example, the "Caitlin Clark effect" helped the Indiana Fever become the first Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) team to surpass a million followers on any social media platform (Sports Business Journal).

Furthermore, women's sports fans show significantly greater brand engagement than men's sports fans (Rain the Growth Agency). The value is evident in recent media distribution developments: the WNBA has secured a \$2.2 billion media deal with Disney, Amazon, and NBC, making viewership more accessible to fans through platforms like ESPN+ and Peacock (Phillipou). At the collegiate level, this past March Madness set a viewership record with 8.5 billion minutes of content consumed (Just Women's Sports). While college basketball and the WNBA are the two most significant contributors to growth, other sports are also contributing. The strong personal connection between athletes and their fans has created unique NIL opportunities for more niche sports like gymnastics and track and field. Olivia Dunne's TikTok features her promoting her ownership stake in W, a personal care brand. Emily Cole, who runs track and field at Duke, recently wrote and published her book, "The Players' Plate," on sports nutrition (On3).

As women's sports continue to grow, teams face the challenge of balancing authentic fan engagement with financial sustainability. Gen Z and younger audiences value genuine connection more than traditional marketing. They have uniquely grown up in a world of digital marketing that is oversaturated with ads and influencers, so it's easy for this generation to recognize insincere content. Instead, Gen Z responds more positively to brands, teams, and athletes who share real stories, align with their values, and authentically represent themselves. For women's sports, finding the right balance between genuine fan connection and revenue generation requires teams to implement thoughtful social media strategies that drive results while remaining sincere to audiences. Through authentic engagement, effective use of social media platforms, clear and educational content, as well as community events, women's sports teams can connect with younger audiences, growing both the fan base and sport participation while capturing value through the monetization of the media produced.

Recommendation 1 - Build Star-Driven, Personality-Led Brands

Staying authentic on social media while encouraging players to engage more meaningfully with fans beyond the court is crucial to generating revenue. In a March 2025 survey of 800 women's sports consumers, 62% of respondents followed a particular female athlete for their personal content, proving that having a personality off the court is crucial for fan acquisition and retention (Rain the Growth Agency). Women's

teams and athletes must leverage storytelling, merchandise, and digital platforms to cultivate emotional connections and long-term loyalty among Gen Z fans.

Professional teams often identify a star player to market to Gen Z consumers and choose to embrace their “off-the-court” personality. Star players are synonymous with the team they play for, allowing Gen Z fans to easily project their fandom for their favorite player onto the entire organization. Napheesa Collier is the prominent star of the Minnesota Lynx. Drafted by the Lynx after a successful college career at the University of Connecticut, she is a key part of their recent success. Thus, she is consistently featured on the Lynx's social media and is a standout on the team website, with her face on many of the most popular merchandise items. Additionally, Napheesa has a large following on her own social media accounts, featuring many pictures of her in the Lynx uniform and in her pre-game outfits. This personalized approach allows followers to build a parasocial relationship with her and engage with her gameday experience.

Similarly, the Minnesota Lynx also uses the personalities of Courtney Williams and Natisha Hiedemann. While both are less popular nationwide than Napheesa, their pink hair and podcast, “StudBudz,” make for a unique and attractive opportunity for the Lynx. During the 2024-2025 Lynx season, each fan was given a pink wig for the final home game as part of a fan appreciation initiative. Ben Risseeuw, a former Lynx account executive, cited this giveaway as one of many efforts to enhance the Gen Z fan experience. While the Lynx uses in-game events and plays popular Gen Z songs, the way they focus on players' unique personalities is ultimately most effective. While the Lynx have no direct association with the podcast or influence over the players' pink hair, fans can engage with them through natural conversation that offers a behind-the-scenes look at the WNBA. This approach feels far different from any team-sponsored event. Furthermore, this authentic connection to Gen Z created by players leads to higher engagement and monetization.

Athlete storytelling is also effective in sports other than basketball. In soccer, the Houston Dash have embraced storytelling to humanize players and strengthen their connection with fans. Bianca Verar, Social Media Manager for the Houston Dash, has worked with both the men's and women's teams. She identified a key difference in audience behavior: fans of the men's teams tend to be more invested in the sport itself, while fans of the women's teams are more interested in the individual athletes and their stories. For example, Michelle Alozie is often featured for her plans to attend medical school and her advocacy for cancer research. Goalkeeper Jane Campbell is also prominently featured for her outreach work with veterans, a cause personally meaningful to her because both her parents are United States Veterans (Houston Dynamo FC). During the team's Veterans Appreciation game, her story was highlighted to create a stronger emotional connection with fans. More recently, a video featuring Paige Nielsen for Breast Cancer Awareness Month became one of the team's best-performing pieces of content in October 2025. The video, which appeared on Instagram and in a longer format on YouTube, resonated with audiences as Nielsen shared her experience of her mother's battle with lymphoma (Houston Dash; Paige Nielsen shares her mother's journey with cancer). These examples have historically been among Houston Dash's most successful posts, highlighting players whose lives and passions extend beyond soccer, proving the effectiveness of authentic, emotionally driven storytelling in promoting women's sports.

While professional teams like the Houston Dash rely heavily on social media storytelling, emerging organizations such as the Madison Night Mares are finding creative ways to apply the same principles locally. Interviews with Kyle Chrisholm and Brent Bartels of the Madison Mallards (baseball) and the new Madison Night Mares (softball) proved the drastic difference in marketing strategy between the men's and women's teams. While the Mallards' marketing focuses on family-friendly entertainment, fun gameday promotions, and theme nights, the Night Mares' marketing is player-driven and authenticity-focused. When the team first launched in 2024, they initially tried to mirror the Mallards' approach. Through trial and error, they discovered that their younger, primarily female audience engages most with content showcasing players' personalities, such as behind-the-scenes clips, post-game reactions, and exciting moments like home runs (Bartels). When fans care deeply about the players themselves, they actively support the team's success. The Night Mares' initiatives demonstrate that storytelling and relatability outperform traditional promotions in appealing to women's sports fans.

Bartels noted that the Night Mares' marketing success can be measured by social engagement, which often correlates with game attendance and community interest. Bartels and his team analyze impressions and post-performance to refine content strategies. They then share these insights with sponsors to encourage collaboration and team visibility. Looking ahead, the Night Mares aim to reach 10,000 social media followers and surpass 10 million impressions next season. By collaborating closely with their players from top collegiate programs and maintaining a focus on connection and authenticity, the organization hopes to expand its fan base, strengthen sponsorships, and continue growing its presence alongside the already well-established Madison Mallards.

This player-centered approach is not limited to professional sports. Collegiate programs are also recognizing the value of athlete branding, particularly through Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) partnerships that highlight individuality and humor. Logan Ball, a Social Content Specialist for Learfield Sports at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, discussed a recent NIL partnership between Olympic swimmer Phoebe Bacon and Jones Dairy Farm. The campaign, which promoted the company's bacon products, cleverly used the athlete's last name to create humor and relatability. The result was a highly successful collaboration that generated significant engagement and strengthened the relationship between the athlete, the brand, and the fan community.

Beyond individual campaigns, the growing visibility of athletes across sports demonstrates that personality and authenticity are becoming universal drivers of women's sports marketing. Rachel Bergstein of Learfield Sports at the University of West Virginia discussed the importance of building brands around players, not necessarily teams, with relevance to women's sports. She explained that the rise in popularity of women's sports won't plateau anytime soon, but will continue to grow, stating that it is crucial to continue enhancing the images of specific players through social media platforms. Rachel also discussed the likeness of Ilona Maher, a United States Olympian and rugby star. On the heels of a successful Olympics outing in Paris in 2024, she attracted a global fanbase and grew a substantial presence on social media. As a result of her influence, she has appeared on "Dancing With The Stars" and

is scheduled to have a Barbie Doll made in her likeness. Her media opportunities capitalized on the digital presence she gained from the Olympics.

Rachel Bergstein furthered these claims when discussing the recent rise in popularity of women's gymnastics, both worldwide and at the University of West Virginia. She said that the team has seen an increase in the number of brand deals they have done with female gymnasts in recent years. She attributes this to the sport's level of personality. Floor routines are very engaging for audiences, and athletes can express their emotions and personalities in ways not possible in many other sports. This opportunity for athletes to build a brand around their unique personality allows fans to connect with athletes more strongly.

Ultimately, athlete storytelling is transforming how women's sports are marketed. By spotlighting players' personalities, experiences, and passions, teams can cultivate genuine emotional bonds with fans and stand out in a crowded entertainment landscape. A documentary-style content series would be a natural next step, offering an intimate, ongoing look into athletes' lives while deepening audience investment. Deloitte's research supports this approach, noting that "consumers, especially younger ones, are interested in this behind-the-scenes view: Forty percent of Gen Zs and millennials surveyed say they'd like more documentary-style content about sports and players in the offseason" (Auxier et al.). This growing demand for authenticity underscores the importance of humanizing athletes beyond competition. In a media environment where attention is fleeting, women's sports have a unique opportunity to lead the industry in human-centered storytelling, while creating lifelong fandoms, loyalty, and commercial growth through genuine connection.

Recommendation 2 - Bring Fans In From Everywhere

Additionally, women's sports programs can maximize revenue and fan engagement by attracting and monetizing audiences outside their current reach. Successful teams do this through strategies such as celebrity endorsements, leveraging male athlete personalities, and aligning athletes with brand sponsorships to help raise awareness of sports. These are all significant components of monetizing efforts and engaging new fans.

In recent years, it has become a trend for celebrities to endorse their favorite teams and show their pride on various social media channels. One of the most notable celebrity-team partnerships is between Lil Wayne and the Green Bay Packers. Not only has Lil Wayne created a song about the Packers, but he is also regularly seen at games and has even led the team out of the tunnel. The free publicity Green Bay receives from Lil Wayne's fandom is extremely valuable and has given the Packers, one of the smallest markets in the National Football League (NFL), a larger fanbase that extends into other parts of the music industry. Similarly, Drake, a Toronto native who grew up as a Toronto Raptors fan, was named the official global ambassador of the team in 2013, the first role of its kind in the NBA. The role included him sitting courtside at games and promoting the team through his large following on social media, as well as a merchandise and jersey collaboration with the team through his OVO Sound music label.

Alongside endorsement strategies, leveraging men's sports connections has also proven beneficial for attracting new fans externally. Carly Johnson, Fan Development

and Group Sales Coordinator with the Professional Women's Hockey League's (PWHL) Seattle Torrent, explained that some of the most significant opportunities for the newly built league come from men's teams. As an employee of the new women's hockey team based in Seattle, she recognizes that there is already a huge following. In addition to becoming a women's hockey market, Seattle already has the Kraken, Seahawks, and Mariners, all professional sports teams with loyal fan bases. These existing audiences represent a massive opportunity for growth if women's teams strategically partner and align themselves with these established brands. As Carly pointed out, by leveraging these local connections, the PWHL can tap into individuals who are already dedicated sports fans and are more likely to cheer on another team in their hometown.

Social media can amplify this potential for cross-team collaboration even further. Carly explained that these joint efforts boost visibility and, more importantly, create a sense of unity among fanbases. For example, posting short videos highlighting PWHL players attending Kraken games and vice versa can attract Kraken fans and convert them into fans of women's hockey as well. These quick videos resonate especially with younger demographics who consume most of their sports content online rather than through traditional broadcasts. When other initiatives, such as day-in-the-life takeovers, joint community outreach, and contests, are posted on social media, that relationship is further solidified.

In recent years, leagues as a whole have latched onto cross-collaboration between women's and men's sports. At the 2024 National Basketball Association (NBA) All-Star Game, Stephen Curry faced off against WNBA star Sabrina Ionescu in a 3-point shooting competition. This was the first cross-league collaboration involving competition between the two leagues, and it was a massive event. Curry edged out Ionescu 29-26 in the competition; however, the event brought attention to both leagues and demonstrated parity in skill level. There were additional talks of a repeat event in 2025, featuring other stars, Klay Thompson and Caitlin Clark, although the event never occurred. The competition underscores the NBA's commitment to popularizing the WNBA through its massive platform. It also proved to many fans skeptical of the WNBA that there is genuine talent comparable to that of the men's league.

Another example of collaboration between global celebrities and women's sports is the recent investment by Patrick and Brittany Mahomes in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) team, the Kansas City Current. As a founding member of the team, Mahomes diversified his investment portfolio while also supporting his local community and boosting the popularity of women's sports. The headlines from this large investment not only brought Kansas City football fans into the Current's target market but also brought football fans across the country into the NWSL as a whole. As an investor and co-owner/founder, Mahomes attached his name and image to the franchise, demonstrating his trust and confidence that the league will flourish.

Kyle Chrisholm explained that a player-first strategy is central to how the Night Mares build partnerships and foster community engagement. Several Night Mares athletes also play for the UW-Madison softball team, creating natural connections with local fans. Many of the Night Mares' sponsors also support other women's athletic programs, such as Badger Volleyball and Hockey. This strengthens a collective commitment to growing women's sports in Wisconsin. Allowing the unique voices of individual players to shine both on and off the field connects the organization with

audiences who crave authenticity, inclusivity, and purpose. Sponsors are eager to collaborate with players through creative promotions, such as Bubbl'r's bobblehead giveaways. This highlighted individual athletes while promoting the Bubbl'r brand in games and on social media in a way that feels organic and engaging. The approach reflects broader marketing trends in women's sports, where fan interest is increasingly driven by athletes' stories and values beyond competition, thereby fostering deeper, more meaningful connections with the team.

Ryan Beck's insights from TPC Wisconsin highlighted the ability to drive social media growth through cross-branded posts, using TPC Wisconsin and the PGA Championship Tour as examples. The local course can reach a national audience by leveraging cross-branded media tailored to a specific market, optimizing media consumption and reach. Ultimately, expanding the reach of women's sports on social media requires tapping into external communities that already hold influence and loyal fans. Celebrity endorsements can instantly amplify visibility, partnerships with men's programs provide cross-team visibility, and collaborations with external brands allow teams to reach new but already established customer bases. Together, these outside sources help women's sports to authentically expand their reach, attract new fans, and unlock new revenue streams.

Recommendation 3 - Educate the Fan Experience

Building on strategies to attract new fans through celebrity endorsements and cross-branded collaborations, women's sports teams must also focus on educating audiences to deepen their engagement with the game. Women gained the privilege of playing sports in the late 1800s, but it wasn't until 1900 that they were allowed to participate in any Olympic events (Bell; International Olympic Committee). Title IX, established in 1972, dramatically increased access to sports for women and girls, yet the reality is that women's sports have been historically underfunded and undervalued for decades (U.S. Department of Education). Meanwhile, men's leagues like the NFL, founded in 1920, have had over a century to build brand legacies, fan education, and cultural familiarity (Pro Football Hall of Fame). Because of this gap, women's sports teams face the challenge of not only attracting and engaging fans but also educating them. This disparity emphasizes the importance of continuous education and engaging content to increase brand awareness and deepen understanding of the game. Social media managers should focus on campaigns that teach the sport's fundamentals while building a distinctive brand legacy.

One effective way to do this is through educational yet relatable content that simplifies complex aspects of the sport for new audiences. This strategy resonates strongly with Gen Z, who value authenticity, humor, and accessibility in the content they consume. For example, influencer Kylan Darnell creatively explained NFL offenses using makeup products, making the sport more approachable for an audience that might not typically follow football. Similarly, Los Angeles-based creator Callia Cheung has gained traction by comparing player positions across hockey, football, and basketball to archetypes within a female friend group, translating the nuances of sports into familiar, digestible metaphors. These examples show how sports education can be both engaging and culturally relevant, a model that women's sports can adapt to attract new fans and foster a more profound understanding.

A team could, for instance, launch a recurring TikTok or Instagram Reels series in which a player explains a complex play or game concept using a relatable scenario, such as comparing a set play in basketball to coordinating outfits with friends for an event, or explaining soccer formations through morning routines. These analogies make sports strategy less intimidating and more personal, allowing Gen Z viewers to feel included in the culture rather than alienated by technical jargon. Educational storytelling not only builds knowledge but also strengthens fan identification and loyalty.

To further this idea, Madi Mortensen, Social Content Specialist with Learfield at the University of Connecticut, emphasizes the value of educating fans about a team's history, beyond the game itself. At UConn, for example, the school's women's sports have historically outperformed the men's teams. Her social media content leverages this legacy to educate new fans while honoring the fans who have supported the program for years. In the same way, women's sports all over can leverage unique points in their history to their advantage to strengthen connections with both long-time and brand new audiences.

Beyond educational content, building a recognizable and consistent brand identity is essential for sustaining engagement. Branding is more than just a logo or color scheme; it's about establishing a personality and voice that reflects the team's culture and resonates with its audience. MaryKate Walling, a Social and Content Specialist for Iowa State University, emphasized that Iowa State Athletics focuses on highlighting the five-star culture—a term coined by head football coach Matt Campbell that emphasizes a team's character, work ethic, and player development over individual talent (ISU 5-star Culture). Rooted in Iowa's humble, hardworking spirit, this philosophy shapes how the program presents itself both on and off the field, and has been adopted across Iowa State's sports. A brand voice that feels conversational, empowering, and aligned with its players' identities makes it easier for fans to connect emotionally. A consistent tone across platforms helps the brand feel authentic and human. This authenticity is critical when marketing to Gen Z, who can easily detect performative or insincere messaging.

Individual athlete branding is equally vital, especially in women's sports, where athletes often have to do more personal storytelling to supplement limited media exposure. Alex Styrt, CEO and Founder of Premier Athlete Agency, expanded his mainly football-represented firm to include a women's division just over a year ago, and discussed the ways he makes branding more personal with his female athletes. He talked about the importance of branded content being genuine rather than forced. He discussed the difficulties of working with some brands, as they have guidelines for how they want athletes to endorse their deals through filmed content, but he always encourages his clients to show their unique selves when they're not in uniform. This creates a unique, distinguishable personality that they can use to create a personal brand. He said the best way athletes can brand themselves and show authenticity is through video content, like TikTok and Instagram Reels, as still pictures without a voice do not resonate as much with fans or capture the same amount of engagement. These videos not only build personal brands but also educate fans about the athlete's training routines, preparation, and the realities of their sport, helping audiences develop a deeper appreciation for the game itself. He also stated that he is excited about the future of women's sports as they gain popularity. This personal branding allows fans to

see the individual behind the uniform and deepens emotional investment for both the player and team. Olivia Dunne is a perfect example of an athlete who has used her personal brand to help spur the growth of women's sports. She has gained millions of followers on Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat by creating content about more than just her sport. She shares her meet day routines, fashion, and daily college activities, giving followers an uncut and raw glimpse into her actual life. By doing so, she has attracted major sponsorship with companies like Nautica and Invisalign more recently (Invisalign; Nautica). Her strategic content gains an audience that becomes emotionally invested in the athlete and the team.

By combining educational storytelling with intentional brand building, women's sports teams can grow their fan base while cultivating long-term loyalty. As audiences become more informed and emotionally connected, new monetization opportunities, from merchandise and digital subscriptions to sponsored content, emerge naturally, grounded in genuine education and connection rather than transactional marketing.

Recommendation 4 - Build Communities that Show Up

Women's sports teams emphasize their commitment to the community through community events and team-sponsored leagues. The Kansas City Current of the National Women's Soccer League reflects this in their operations. Founded in 2020, KC Current's ownership group features Patrick and Brittany Mahomes. Although their popularity was crucial for developing the fanbase, the team needed a sustainability strategy to attract and retain fans (CPKC Stadium). Nate Yates, ticket operations coordinator, explained that the Current deliberately focuses on community events and youth leagues to establish and attract a fanbase and new fans. On its social media accounts, the team features community event posts, such as players volunteering in the Kansas City community and events in partnership with United Way, its shirt sponsor.

A key piece of this strategy is that the Current's official supporters group, the "Blue Crew," is crucial to developing community amongst fans. The Blue Crew has an active following on social media and posts watch party information for away games and after-game parties. The social aspect is key for Gen Z fans, as they can develop meaningful relationships with other fans while cheering on the Current. Since their friendships are tied to the team, they are more likely to engage with the team, making it easier for the club to monetize Gen Z fans.

Partnering with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) of Greater Kansas City, the Current supports the "bitty soccer" and YMCA youth soccer teams. According to a press release on the team's website, these programs offer children from the age of three to seventh grade the opportunity to learn the basics of soccer, develop teamwork and sportsmanship skills, and establish friendships with teammates (Kansas City Current). People aged 4-30 with physical, developmental, and intellectual disabilities can also participate in the KC Current YMCA Challenger soccer league. Posts on social media show smiling children playing and taking photos with KC Current players. Showing players off the pitch volunteering further enhances the positive personal brand a female athlete can build. Once a player establishes a positive personal brand, the team can leverage it to increase monetization of Gen Z fans. It is also beneficial for a brand or team to create a desire to be a part of the community. For example, participants in the KC Current youth programs receive exclusive KC Current

jerseys featured in social media posts, which creates a sense of fear of missing out among Gen Z consumers who are not part of the programs. Nate acknowledged that the club's reputation within the community makes it easier to market group tickets, which is critical for developing the team's fanbase. Furthermore, having an official supporter group active on social media and a strong connection with YMCA youth teams makes it even easier. This is important for all women's sports teams, especially given that most teams like the KC Current are relatively new. Women's sports teams lack the established, multigenerational fanbase that their male counterparts have; therefore, they must build one quickly. This is crucial for them to attract sponsors and the attention of Gen Z consumers.

Gen Z consumers place high importance on an organization's social involvement. The Kansas City community sees the club as a voice for positive changes and a means to support those who need help, according to Nate. KC Current emphasizes this through the events it sponsors and its merchandise. KC Current supports the LGBTQIA+ community in Kansas City by sponsoring KC Pridefest and hosting a Pride Night each year. KC Current actively markets the event throughout their social media accounts. KC Current also has a product line of merchandise featuring the LGBTQIA+ color scheme available on their online team store. The club posts players wearing the merchandise, along with links to each product. The team also donates \$1,000 per regular-season goal to Kansas University Hospital and highlights non-profit organizations in its "Impact Tour" campaign, according to its social media account. KC Current's emphasis on social involvement attracts a Gen Z audience that may not otherwise be interested in soccer but appreciates the team's social impact.

Community building and involvement are central to both the Madison Mallards and the Madison Night Mares, with each team strengthening these efforts through its social media marketing strategies. The Mallards have enjoyed success for twenty-five years by focusing on community connections through local partnerships, themed game nights, and youth participation, all of which are amplified through their online presence. The Night Mares are now adopting this approach. In the last two years, the Night Mares have aimed to create a team that resonates with Madison both on the field and across their digital platforms, using social media to highlight women in sports while reflecting the community's energy and pride.

The Night Mares' participation in local events, like hosting youth softball tournaments at Warner Park and making appearances at the Madison Farmers Market and Night Market, translates directly into social media content that strengthens their brand. By posting behind-the-scenes videos, photos with young athletes, player spotlights, and real-time engagement from events, the Night Mares turn these in-person interactions into stories that can be shared throughout the community. These posts not only raise awareness but also help to establish the team's identity online, making their social channels feel like an extension of the Madison community. Youth tournaments, for example, create authentic content by showing kids playing on the same field as their favorite athletes and meeting the players afterward. These moments inspire the next generation of athletes, and often generate earned media as families share posts and photos online. Overall, these events give local families and young athletes meaningful opportunities to connect directly with the players and the sport.

Additionally, sponsor-driven activities like the Bubbl'r player bobblehead giveaways and Sing for Your Supper karaoke promotion between innings become even more impactful when promoted through social platforms, giving local businesses visibility while creating fun, interactive content for fans. By keeping these events personal and centered on players, the Night Mares have made their athletes relatable and approachable figures in Madison. This focus on local identity and relatable players helps the Night Mares build an emotional bond with their fans, who may see the team as a reflection of their own identity rather than just a source of entertainment. As the organization continues to grow, this approach to engagement, grounded in authenticity, storytelling, and shared community values, has become a key factor in the team's growing popularity and long-term fan loyalty.

The Wisconsin women's basketball team also leverages social media to create a sense of community that drives ticket sales. Tom Mathwich, Assistant Director of Ticketing for Women's basketball, states that the average attendance per game over the past two years, based on scanned tickets, is around 1,500. During the 24-25 season, the women's team hosted its annual National Girls & Women in Sports Day event as part of a promotion for a game. Women's sports have often been overshadowed by their male counterparts; however, fans view female athletes as role models who create positive social change (New/Day Studio). Before the event, the team and the athletics department marketed it across their social media accounts. Featuring prominent UW female athletes such as Phoebe Bacon and Sarah Franklin, the posts inspired Gen Z consumers and drove higher attendance for the Gen Z segment than at a typical game. According to Tom, 2,700 tickets were scanned. This further proves that teams can attract a larger Gen Z audience by posting content tied to social change on social media.

Conclusion

Women's sports teams find themselves at a pivotal moment. While progress has been fueled by exceptional brand loyalty, the inspiration created by female athletes, and deep personal connections with supporters, teams have yet to establish a clear blueprint for effectively marketing and monetizing the Gen Z population. Teams must implement thoughtful social media strategies that drive results while remaining authentic to audiences.

One such approach is to emphasize athletes' personalities off the court or field. Teams must identify a star player who will grab the attention of the Gen Z audience. The Minnesota Lynx uses star player Napheesa Collier to accomplish this through fashionable merchandising, including baby suits and slippers. Further, players' podcasts and off-field inspirations are other ways to provide fans with behind-the-scenes content and spotlight an athlete's personality. WNBA Players like Courtney Williams and Natisha Hiedemann highlight this in their "StudBudz" podcast. The Houston Dynamo follows this approach by highlighting Jane Campbell's outreach to veterans and Michelle Alozie's plans to attend medical school. These personal details and life off the field create the much-needed connection to authenticity and storytelling that Gen Z values.

Once women's sports teams capture the attention of Gen Z fans, they must retain it by leveraging celebrity endorsements and ambassadors. Similar to the partnership between Lil-Wayne and the Green Bay Packers, women's sports teams need to

establish themselves in other pop culture sectors. References to women's sports teams in different sectors spark curiosity and encourage Gen Z fans to learn more. Endorsers and ambassadors influence Gen Z fans, build a reputation, and thereby drive team engagement.

Teams must also establish themselves with other teams in the same city or state. This effectively leverages fans' passion for their city. The connection to established teams in the same city or state, with their already loyal fan bases, helps create a sense of prestige for women's sports teams. Further, women's sports teams can connect to form natural bonds.

Another way to retain Gen Z fans is to create educational yet relatable content that simplifies complex aspects of the sport for new audiences. By leveraging Gen Z's existing interest in TikTok, women's sports teams can use influencers like Kylan Darnell to explain complex or detailed aspects of the game that most fans don't understand. Also, using players in these videos can make the sports seem less intimidating and more personal. Individual athlete branding is essential in this regard as well and has proven to be beneficial.

Not only is education important, but women's sports teams must use social media to communicate their commitment to the community. Teams must partner with official fan groups to create a sense of community. This creates an energy around their brand, focused on building personal connections with fellow fans. Also, sponsoring the YMCA or youth leagues is a great way to highlight a player's personality off the field or court.

Lastly, women's sports teams should develop a sense of social responsibility within their community. Sponsoring and posting events in their community can help women's sports teams attract an audience that may not otherwise attend games or engage with the team's brand. This can also develop an audience who become fans in ways unrelated to watching a big game. Teams should be encouraged by the fact that social events are often the highest attended games.

With this in mind, women's sports teams have a wide range of opportunities to engage Gen Z fans and strengthen monetization. To be effective, teams should apply these strategies holistically rather than relying on any single approach, all while maintaining financial sustainability.

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