

## **Free-to-air Events Review**

### **The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation Consultation Response**

**July 2009**

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The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF) is the charity that campaigns to make physical activity an integral part of life for women and girls in the UK.

Our Mission is to increase the fitness, health and wellbeing of women and girls by making physical activity an integral part of their lives.

Our Vision is of a society which encourages, enables and celebrates active and healthy women and girls.

Through an industry-wide consultation held in 2008, we identified three strategic imperatives that we believe need to work together if we are to achieve our Mission and Vision. These are:

- Ensure sport and fitness deliverers give the customer what she wants (improving the quality of the supply of sport and fitness)
- Foster a culture in which active is attractive (stimulating more demand among women to want to be active)
- Persuade policy-makers to use their influence and resources to help achieve our mission (using our voice to make this a priority for those with power and influence)

These strategic imperatives are also now the long-term goals for WSFF and structure how we work.

WSFF is funded by government, through Sport England and by sponsorship and donations.

[www.wsff.org.uk](http://www.wsff.org.uk)

The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We believe that there are many benefits to protecting a list of sporting events which are considered to be of major importance to UK society and therefore should be widely available.

Please find our responses to the particular consultation questions below.

**1. Do you think that the UK should continue to protect certain major events through live or deferred coverage on free-to-air television?**

The WSFF would like the UK to continue to protect certain major events through live or deferred coverage on free-to-air television.

**2. Do you think that events other than sporting events should be listed?**

WSFF does not have a view on this.

**3. Do you agree that the essential criterion test should remain as *'the event has a national resonance, not just a significance to those who ordinarily follow the sport concerned; it is an event which serves to unite the nation, a shared point on the national calendar'* ?**

WSFF believes that the essential criterion test should be expanded. The arguments that we lay out here will be developed further in this paper. The reasons we feel that the essential criterion test should be expanded are as follows:

- a) We believe that women's sport is a hugely under exploited market. Some women's sporting events – such as women's cricket and football - are on the cusp of becoming events that attract a mass audience, but would benefit hugely from the showcasing and protection that being included on the Free-to-air List would provide. Therefore, WSFF believes that the equivalent women's event for a given sport should be explicitly included on the list.
- b) Physically active women deserve female role models. And arguably we will encourage more women to take up sport if we champion female athletes. Therefore, we would also like to see sports included on the free-to-air list because they will encourage more people, but in particular women, to be physically active.
- c) WSFF is also calling for a third tier of this free-to-air list to be created, which would showcase minority sports that could become 'crown jewel sports' if they were broadcast.

*a) The case for women's sport to be included on the free-to-air list*

67 per cent of women in 2007 said they were interested in following competitive sport.<sup>1</sup> Yet currently, only 2 per cent of print media coverage of sport features female athletes or women's sports teams and the amount of women's sport

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<sup>1</sup> BMRB, TGI (2007)

broadcast is minimal.<sup>2</sup> WSFF believes that to encourage more women to be interested in sport and physically active the profile of female sport stars needs to be raised. Including at least the highlights of the women's version of the events that are on the Free-to-air List would arguably elevate the profile of women's sport. This should also be explicitly mentioned rather than simply implied, as is currently the case with women's finals at Wimbledon, for example.

WSFF believe that this would in turn make participation in sport more of a cultural norm for women and girls. Currently 32 per cent of women feel under more pressure to be thin than healthy.<sup>3</sup> We need to make sport a part of women's every-day lives.

*b) The case for including sports on the free-to-air list because they will encourage more women to be physically active*

Many sports, particularly those on the current free-to-air list such as football and rugby, are dominated by male role models. We need to do more to showcase women's sports and female athletes, who should be championed as role models for women and girls. And the evidence shows women are receptive to this approach; the Olympics, where there is little difference in the depiction of male and female events by the media, command a larger female than male audience.<sup>4</sup>

We believe sporting events that attract mass participation, especially when this is participation from men and women in almost equal numbers and is alongside elite performances – such as the London Marathon – should be included on the Free-to-air List. Such events successfully bring communities together, and this should be celebrated.

Mass participation events also have the added benefit of encouraging more people into sport, which can have positive effects on public health. With obesity on the increase (in England the proportion of men classed as obese rose from 13.2% in 1993 to 23.1% in 2005 and from 16.4% to 24.8% for women during the same period<sup>5</sup>) and around four in five women are not doing enough exercise to benefit their health<sup>6</sup>. And there is not only a public health imperative, but a clear market for participation in sport to grow: 76 per cent of people in the UK are very or fairly interested in sports in general, but of that group, just 50 per cent of those who are 18-54 often or occasionally participate in sport.<sup>7</sup> This is an issue for women in particular. Worldwide, men are 62 per cent more likely to participate than women and participation is far more impacted by demographics than general interest.<sup>8</sup>

*c) The case for creating a 'C' section of the free-to-air list*

WSFF believes that both an A and B list should be maintained. We would also call for a C list to be created. This would provide the opportunity to showcase sports that could become a 'crown jewel event' if they were given more exposure. These

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<sup>2</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation *Women in sport audit. Backing a winner: unlocking the potential in women's sport* (2008) pp. 7-8

<sup>3</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation/ICM Research Omnibus Survey (October 2007)

<sup>4</sup> BMRB, TGI (2007); WPP SportZ (2006)

<sup>5</sup> Department for Health, *Health Survey for England 2005: latest trends*, (2006) p. 4

<sup>6</sup> Sport England, *Active People Survey* (2006)

<sup>7</sup> FDS International, *Supporting sport: an international study of attitudes to sport and sports sponsorship* (2008), p10

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p11

sports could be shown at off peak times, covered by free to access digital channels or websites or just the highlights could be broadcast. WSFF would suggest the inclusion of the world championships of sports such as netball, badminton and hockey. These are sports that are enjoyed by both men and women and are enjoyed by a significant proportion of the population: combined, these sports have a membership base of approximately 231,000 people<sup>9</sup>, this does not include those people who are not club members and play informally.

**4. If your answer to Q2 was that non-sporting events should also be considered for listing, what might an essential criterion be?**

This question is not applicable to our response.

**5. The current particular characteristics are**

- **The sport is likely to command a large television audience**
- **The sport has a history of being broadcast live on free-to air television.**

**Do you consider that these characteristics remain appropriate? If you do not, or consider that additional characteristics should be included, please explain why.**

WSFF believes that the list of particular characteristics reinforces the popularity of the sports that are currently on the Free-to-air List, and prevents other sports that may have a considerable participation base and success on the international stage, whose following and profile could grow significantly if the sport was given more exposure. WSFF believes there should be scope within the Free-to-air List to show highlights, delayed coverage at off-peak times or to be covered by free to access digital channels or websites to allow sports to be showcased to a wider audience.

The second current characteristic, that the sport has a history of being broadcast live on free-to air television, inadvertently excludes women's versions of sporting events that are shown live. For example, since the Rugby Union World Cup Final is on the list, WSFF would like to see the women's Rugby Union World Cup to also explicitly be included on the list.

We accept, however that broadcasters should be able to differentiate between the finals and other games in the tournament. WSFF understand that tournament matches in both the men's and women's versions of the sporting events included on the list are likely to command a smaller television audience, which is why we would accept the highlights being shown, made available online or delayed live coverage at off peak times. We believe, however, that the finals of both the men's and women's game of all sporting events on the list should be shown on live free-to-air television.

WSFF therefore believes that the particular characteristics need to be more flexible and expanded to reflect the essential criterion that we have proposed. WSFF would like to suggest that the following particular characteristics be added:

- Showcasing female athletes and women's sport will be championed
- The sport encourages more people, but in particular women, to be active
- The sporting event has the potential to become a major national event if given more exposure

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<sup>9</sup> Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, unpublished data, (2009)

WSFF would also suggest that the more characteristics a sporting event meets the higher up the free-to-air list it should be, e.g. either on the A, B or C section.

**6. Are these the appropriate other factors that the Secretary of State should take into account when considering whether or not to list an event?**

Current factors include:

- Whether it is practical to offer full live coverage on a general channel
- The impact of listing in reducing the income or potential income of the sport and consequences of that reduction for its investment in increasing participation and / or improving levels of performance and / or in creating safe facilities.
- The likely impact of listing on the broadcasting market, including future investment in sports broadcasting, the level of competition and the position of public service broadcasters.
- Whether there are arrangements to ensure that access to the event is available to all viewers by means of highlights, delayed coverage and / or radio commentary.

WSFF accepts the above factors. We understand that the practicalities of screening whole tournaments when not all viewers of free-to-air television are sports fans may prove difficult. We also accept that the income of sport and the wider broadcasting market should be considered, as well as whether potential viewers can access coverage of the sport via other media sources such as radio coverage.

WSFF see the digital switchover as a fantastic opportunity to showcase more sport, particularly women's sport and minority sports that have the potential to be 'crown jewel' events if they were championed. Digital channels that can be accessed through a Freeview aerial without a subscription fee could be utilised in this way. We feel that a balance needs to be struck between ensuring that channels 1-5 are not over run with coverage of sport, but that more sport is showcased and more media air time is dedicated to women's sport. We would therefore suggest that digital channels are used to show live coverage of sport where only highlights would be shown on channels 1-5 and digital is used to showcase sport that would not normally command a large enough audience to receive coverage on channels 1-5.

Therefore, WSFF believes that the current factors are too narrow and others should be added to take into account the expanded essential criterion we have suggested. These are:

- Whether there is a women's equivalent event that could also be broadcast, or the highlights of the game could be screened.
- Whether screening the event could encourage more people – in particular women - to become active.
- Whether there is already a significant number of followers and / or players of the sport that could be grown so the sporting event becomes a 'crown jewel event' with increased exposure of the game.

**7. Do you agree that both an A and B list should be maintained?**

WSFF does believe that both an A and B list should be maintained, but we would also call for a C list to be created. This would provide the opportunity to showcase sports that could become a 'crown jewel event' if they were given more exposure.

8. **Are there any issues that you would wish to bring to our attention in regard to the way in which the listing arrangements are given practical effect by Ofcom?**

No.

9. **Do you think that the Secretary of State should:**
- **Leave the current arrangements unchanged?**
  - **Move existing events between the A and B lists**
  - **Add any entirely new events**
  - **Remove any events that are currently listed?**

WSFF believes that the The London Marathon should be added to Group A. We also believe that the Cricket World Cup should be promoted from Group B to A. We think that the Great North Run should be added to Group B. WSFF is also calling for all sports on all sections of the list to explicitly state that they will show some level of coverage to both the male and female versions of the sporting event.

As previously mentioned, we believe a 'C' list should be created. This isn't a comprehensive list of all the events that we feel should be on the list but these are amongst the most deserving and therefore we would like to suggest that the following be included:

- Netball World Championships
- England's Women's football international qualifying games for major tournaments
- Volleyball World Championships (men and women's events)
- Hockey World Championships (men and women's events)
- Rowing World Championships (men and women's events)
- Sailing World Championships (men and women's events)
- Badminton World Championships (men and women's events)
- Women's Rugby League World Cup
- Gymnastics World Championships (men and women's events)
- Finals of senior World Championship events in which there is a GB representative where that sport is in receipt of funding from UK Sport.

WSFF believes that the above sports should receive better media coverage and deserve inclusion on the Free-to-air List, although we do not expect them to receive the same peak time slots as established sporting events. These sports currently have a considerable number of participants in the UK, and arguably their following and participation levels could be grown if they were showcased on free-to-air television. These sports are also not dominated by men as much as the sporting events that are currently included on the Free-to-air List, there are many successful female elite athletes and amateur competitors and we believe that the list should do more to champion women's sport and showcase female athletes.

10. **If you have suggested that live coverage of any such tournaments should be listed do you think that:**
- **The entire tournament should be listed or**
  - **Only selected stages, events or matches involving national teams or representatives?**

In the case of the events mentioned above, we would suggest that events / stages featuring GB teams or representatives be aired and tournament finals.

**11. Please suggest which non-sporting events you would like to see listed and why.**

WSFF have no suggestions regarding including non-sporting events on the free-to-air list.

**12. Do you have any other issues that you would like the Panel to take into account in considering what its recommendations should be?**

We believe that re-examining the Free-to-air List is a fantastic opportunity for the government to grow a new market of sport participants and enthusiasts – women. There is also an opportunity to grow the popularity of both women's sport and current minority sports that could become crown jewel events given the right support that public service broadcasting should provide via a free-to-air list.