

THE MEDIA AND WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN THE OLYMPICS: THE CASE OF SIDNEY 2000

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INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the 19th century women were considered too weak to participate in any sports events above 800 meters. These were however myths that have since been discordant. According to Munayi and Njororai (2000). The gap between men and women in international competition is becoming less and less. This is most evident in endurance events.

While this is a fact internationally, in Kenya the issue of sports women has been impeded by the social cultural constraints. This has led to less access in opportunities. Kenyan women are denied opportunities in politics, sports amongst others.

Kenya first participated in the Olympics games in 1956. By 1964, the Kenyan men had managed to acquire a medal. It was however in 1996 before Kenyan sports women won a medal. Issues that led to poor development in sports amongst the women are various. One of the tools that might have been used to develop Kenyan women sports is the mass media.

In the developing world, the mass media have a fundamental role to play in the development of sports. Since Kenya participated in the 1956 Olympics, the print media has been used as a tool for passing information, creation of heroes and bringing talent into the limelight.

In Kenya, people believe what the media portrays as authentic. Indeed politicians have been made and destroyed by the mass media. Apparently most media houses in Kenya seem to have a poor or no policy on women sports.

Women have seen little support in all parts of the social-economic packages. Recently, the Kenyan parliament voted to change the law that recommended at least a third of the places in the East African Community parliament should be women.

In health it has been propagated that women would injure themselves if they were to involve themselves in sports. Men complain that grown up women should not show their thighs in public (Were, 1996 and; Njororai et al 1996).

While these myths are fallacious, the print media in Kenya seems to believe in this opting to give sports women a blackout, in reporting.

MEDIA REPORTING OF WOMEN PERFORMANCE

It has been noted that the print media can create through recognition and appreciation the place of women in sports (Munayi and Njororai, 2000). When one appears in newspapers he/she is seen to be making a statement. Appearance in the mass media affords individuals credibility. It acts as a motivation creating in the individual a sense of achievement.

Through the media the potential of sportswomen can be marketed. The media is a powerful public relation tool. However, the Kenyan media has been selective in its reporting while the international press seems to give an almost equal footing to information from both sexes. In Kenya the print media seems to give insufficient coverage to women.

Further, women issues have been trivialized. Only occasionally does a few results seem to appear in the back pages of the newspaper. A reconnaissance of the daily papers seem to have more foreign news items on women than local footages. Based on the above reasons and assumption, the author decided to review the print media coverage on women issues particularly sports. The instrument used was the twin popular print media- The Daily and Sunday Nation newspapers. The author chose these print media because they are the most popular papers having the widest coverage and curriculum among all other dailies in Kenya.

METHOD

The Daily Nation newspaper has the highest circulation of news in Kenya. The general layout of the papers entails about four pages of sports each day, with an occasional editorial. Further, each sports pages has a number of pictures of sports action or personalities.

The Daily Nation and its sister paper the Sunday Nation were analysed for patterns of reporting. This was done for the six months prior to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. All sports articles on track and field were targeted. Each story was read and each word counted. The number of words discussing issues on women in any form were counted.

The choice of the Daily Nation and Sunday Nation was based on the fact that it has by far the largest share on the market in terms of circulation. Hence reaching more people regionally. The six months prior to the Sydney 2000 Olympics was due to the fact that Kenya being a 'super power' in track athletics the highest concentration in sport reporting would revolve around this sport. Further, since medals especially gold ones seem to be a depiction of outstanding achievement. Report on heroism at this time would act as an incentive for the participating team.

RESULTS

Table one indicates the number of words per week and the relevant percentage of new articles about women. The table is derived from counting of all the words on athletics six months prior to the Sydney Olympics. This is then compared to the number of words these articles discuss issues on women. A percentage of these words on the issue of women compared to the total number of words is then given.

Table One

Patterns of Reporting of Daily and Sunday Nation on Athletics.

Month	Week	No. of Words	Words Women on	Percentage
May	1	1,295	331	25.56
	2	867	75	8.65
	3	1,441	84	5.83
	4	1,705	176	10.32
	5	1,703	53	3.11
	Sub Total		7,011	719
June	1	810	190	23.47
	2	1,175	34	2.89
	3	1,740	516	29.66
	4	312	25	8.03
	5	1,901	336	17.67
	Sub Total		5,938	1,101
July	1	597	242	40.54
	2	883	288	32.62
	3	3,211	624	19.43
	4	1,334	242	18.14
	5	1,291	396	30.67
	Sub Total		7,316	1,792
August	1	1,894	211	11.14
	2	1,503	39	2.59
	3	2,552	540	21.33
	4	1,245	462	37.11
	5	4,672	1,093	23.40
	Sub Total		11,846	2,345
September	1	2,728	414	15.18
	2	3,542	101	2.85
	3	2,472	559	22.61
	4	6,390	1,173	18.36
	5	6,564	1,955	29.78
	Sub Total		21,696	4,202
	Grand Total	53,807	10,159	18.18

From table one there are indications that the amount of words increases as the situation nears the Olympics. May caters for about 13 percent of the grand total, while September accounts for 40 percent. This indicates the increased amount of reporting as the months approached the Olympics. Hence the six months prior to the Olympics for the study.

It was noted that there seems to be plenty of reporting in July. This is attributed to the Athletics circuit usually referred to as the Golden league due to its rather rich incentives. It should be noted that most of the articles carried at that time were from the international media, which seems to have a more balanced reporting between the gender. Articles on Marion Jones the United States of American sprint queen seemed to

dominate the international media during this period.

The average amount of words on women during the six months prior to the Olympics is about 18 percent. With the introduction of women's steeplechase event there are as many events in women track and field as men's events. This is an indication that the Daily Nation only thinks women issues should take less than a fifth of their space.

Table two shows the number of pictures appearing on the sports pages during the aforesaid period. The Number of pictures on women is given and the relevant percentage worked out.

*Table Two
Patterns of Pictures appearing on Sports Pages of Daily/Sunday Nation*

Months	Week	No. of Pictures	Pictures on Women	Percentages
May	1	23	5	21.70
	2	22	3	13.64
	3	24	5	20.83
	4	19	4	21.05
	5	21	6	28.57
	Sub Total	109	23	21.10
June	1	23	4	17.39
	2	21	3	14.29
	3	29	7	24.14
	4	32	2	6.25
	5	22	5	22.73
	Sub Total	127	21	16.54
July	1	17	5	29.41
	2	18	3	16.67
	3	26	2	7.69
	4	24	1	4.17
	5	19	4	21.05
	Sub Total	104	15	14.42
August	1	22	2	9.09
	2	24	3	12.50
	3	20	5	25.00
	4	22	3	13.64
	5	24	6	25.00
	Sub Total	112	19	16.96
September	1	21	5	23.81
	2	23	4	17.39
	3	26	3	11.54
	4	25	4	16.00
	5	33	7	21.21
	Sub Total	128	23	17.97
Grand Totals	580	101	17.41	

From table two it was noted that basically, the number of pictures remains the same throughout the six months prior to the Sidney 2000 Olympics. Apart from May, the average percentage of women pictures hangs at about 17 percent. This again is less than a fifth, indicating the significance these media house attribute to female sports issues.

DISCUSSION

In November 2001, the three countries of East Africa were supposed to elect nine members each to sit in a regional government. The laws were set so that at least three of these seats were reserved for women. The Kenya parliament however led by the ruling party Kenya African National Union (KANU) choose to go back to parliament and change the law. So Kenya ended up with only two women instead of three for this regional parliament.

This becomes hot news. For the next few days almost all editorials in the Daily Nation were busy castigating the ruling party. When the regional parliament was inaugurated on 30th November. Affirmative activists demonstrated against the Kenyan president. This was also hot news.

While the Nation media house continues to point a finger at the on-going issues on women issues on the political arena. It seems not to have done much itself. At 18 percent reporting on women sports. Little exposure is given to the plight of women. More so because a lot of articles during this period were from the foreign press.

For women sports to be developed there is need for much more coverage. This low amount of information about women athletes could be due to the fact that the number of women reporters and editors in sports is less the 10 percent. This is however an issue of another study.

CONCLUSION

The plight of Kenyan women has come up for discussion in different forums. For these issues to make sense there is need to tackle

them from the pillars that prop up the development of women. In sports one of these pillars is the mass media. The mass media need to play its role in the development of women sports. To do this there is need for a more significant coverage of sports that appertain to women.

One way of doing this would be to sensitize the sports editorial group about the issues of women. If this group were to compose of at least thirty-percent women, coverage of women sports is bound to increase.

There is disparity between the percentage of information about women at the international level and also at the local level. Even though the trends of participation in athletic events at the national and international level have been significantly positive in the case of Kenyan women are to be developed. Societal stereotypes on women need to be ejected.

References

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