



Background: In 1996, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) was founded to provide female athletes a platform to compete at a professional level. First established as an offshoot of the NBA, the WNBA aimed to boost basketball's overall popularity. The "We Got Next" campaign played a crucial role in promoting the league, quickly attracting attention and support from NBA fans and new audiences.

As of 2024, the WNBA draft garnered 3.09 million viewers globally, the highest in its 28-year history, according to ESPN. The league has 12 teams, each with a maximum of 12 players, playing from May to September. WNBA games are played in four 10-minute quarters, shorter than the NBA's 48-minute games. In 2023, the WNBA generated \$60 million in revenue.

In 2024, the league's highest-paid player earned over \$252,000. The first draft pick and Rookie of the Year, Caitlin Clark, signed a contract worth \$78,000. By comparison, the NBA generated approximately \$4.5 billion (about \$14 per person in the US) in revenue, with its highest-paid player earning \$47.6 million and the top rookie receiving \$10.2 million for the 2023/2024 season. Clark, along with other newcomers like Cameron Brink and Angel Reese, has partnered with brands such as Prada, Skims, Glossier, and Wilson to generate revenue and opportunities for the league.

The recent surge in women's sports is highlighted by events like the Commissioner's Cup and the 2024 Olympics, bringing international attention to the WNBA. Despite this growth, questions remain about the league's ability to sustain social capital and economic stability amid increasing viewership.

Findings: Research by Matthew Walker, Melanie Sartore, and Eric MacIntosh from the University of Florida, East Carolina University, and the University of Ottawa, respectively, outlines key strategies for the WNBA's future sustainability:

1. Deploy social, economic, and cultural capital in a three-part approach to sustain the league's success.

2. Leverage partnerships with the NBA to generate promotional momentum and game-day revenue.
3. Utilize the summer schedule for unique activations with schools and families, enhancing generational support for the sport, and benefiting from lower ticket prices.

Need: The WNBA's success has significant social, economic, and cultural implications for basketball fans and host cities. Strengthening current relationships can create more opportunities, reduce limitations, and shape strategies for women's sports globally. The key question remains: can the WNBA sustain this newfound popularity?