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Ally Bank Pledges Equal Opportunity Ad Spend for Men's and Women's Sports

The online-only financial app is seeking brand partners to correct a marketing imbalance

By [Rafael Canton](#) | June 23, 2022



Ally is calling on brands to even out ad spend among men's and women's sports.

Credit: Ally

While the gender gap in average wages has been steadily closing, a wide chasm still exists when it comes to men's and women's sports and advertising spend.

Ally Bank is trying to address that disparity in its own way. And the online-only financial institution, which specializes in home and auto lending, aims to influence others to join its solution.

Ally put forth an initiative at last month's espnW summit to reach equal spending in paid advertising across women's and men's sports programming over the next five years.

The bank has had its hand in sports for some time now, including sponsoring Nascar and the PGA Champions Tour. Now, on the 50th anniversary of Title IX, which banned sex discrimination for federally funded education programs, Ally is trying to live up to its name by shifting some of that ad spend attention to women's sports.

"We really saw that there was this huge opportunity for us to diversify our portfolio and push into women's sports," chief marketing and public relations officer Andrea Brimmer told Adweek. "As a former college athlete, it was near and dear to my heart."

Paying down a debt to women's sports

While working to reflect its brand identity, Ally is calling on other companies to also place more emphasis on supporting women's sports.

The brand created a 60-second spot titled "Watch the Game, Change the Game" starring several women athletes and actresses. Created with its AOR Anomaly NY and Activista LA, the ad began airing on Thursday, exactly 50 years to the day Title IX was signed into law.

The spot will run on linear, cable, digital and connected TV.

A slow march toward parity

Progress will continue to take time. Brimmer noted the initiative is based on a five-year plan because there isn't much available media to buy for brands.

A [2019 Purdue study](https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2021/Q1/overlooking-her-shot-womens-sports-need-an-assist-as-coverage-remains-the-same-as-30-years-ago.html) (<https://www.purdue.edu/newsroom/releases/2021/Q1/overlooking-her-shot-womens-sports-need-an-assist-as-coverage-remains-the-same-as-30-years-ago.html>) found that women's sports coverage is the same as it was 30 years ago. Coverage of women athletes on televised news and highlight shows totaled only 5.4% of all airtime, a small increase from 5% in 1989. According to Unesco, [only 4% of sports media content](https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-calls-fairer-media-coverage-sportswomen) (<https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-calls-fairer-media-coverage-sportswomen>) is dedicated to women's sport.

Brimmer calls it a vicious cycle that leaves women's sports out of potential marketing dollars. "The networks aren't running women's sports on primetime programming because the sponsor dollars aren't there," she said. "The sponsor dollars aren't there because they're not seeing the audiences because the networks aren't giving women's sports primetime programming."

As part of its 50/50 pledge, Brimmer said its effort will cut out some of its men's sports investments to even things out. "The way we're looking at this, if we're buying five spots in the World Series, instead of buying five, we'll buy three and re-invest the money from the other two into women's sports," she said.

Nontraditional marketing alternatives

Though traditional media spend is an important factor, there are also other meaningful venues outside of game sponsorships that brands can use to reach consumers while supporting the rise of women's sports.

“The way that many companies can still celebrate and promote opportunities for girls or women in sport is not just advertising during women's sports,” said Ketra Armstrong, professor of sport management and director of diversity, equity and inclusion for the University of Michigan School of Kinesiology. “But it's advertising during those men's sports, in movies and other ways that can attract women and that whole market.”

Armstrong pointed to the rise of name, image and likeness (NIL) <https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/nils-freshman-year-whos-really-profitng-from-the-marketing-of-college-sports-stars/> deals as a game-changer in allowing female athletes to reach consumers through online or social media-based marketing strategies.

Several female student-athletes such as Paige Bueckers, Aliyah Boston and the Cavinder twins, Haley and Hanna, have signed lucrative NIL deals.

Ally to the fans

Ally's work in women's sports started with its sponsorship of the National Women's Soccer League. Ally helped underwrite the cost of expanding the league's playoff tournaments from four games to six and hosted a pre-championship block party during the playoffs.

“The whole idea was not to just slap on our logo and call it a day,” Brimmer said. “The notion was, how could we be a true partner and figure out ways to grow the relevancy, engagement and viewership across the league?”



Building a One-Stop Women's Sports Marketing Empire

And grow it did. According to Brimmer, the NWSL experienced viewership record growth of 300% in 2020 and that last year's championship match was the league's most watched event.

Many women's sports have set new records or seen increases in viewership. The Women's NCAA Basketball championship game was the most-watched college basketball game—4.85 million viewers—on ESPN (men or women) since 2008. This year's NCAA women's gymnastics championship was the most-watched college gymnastics meet ever on ESPN networks. The broadcast peaked at 1.1 million viewers, an 11% increase over 2021.

A major factor will be how traditional TV opens up more opportunities for primetime viewership for women's sports, something that has yet to happen on a regular basis.

Earlier this month, Gatorade [ended its partnership with the NHL](https://frontofficesports.com/gatorade-dropping-nhl-to-focus-on-college-womens-sports/) to focus more on youth and women's sports. Last year, Michelob Ultra committed \$100 million over five years to support gender equality in sports.

For brands, it all comes down to really wanting to make that commitment not just because it sounds like good PR, regardless of the marketing channel.

“We need enough of the businesses to want to, even when they don't necessarily have to,” Armstrong said. “We need them to want to promote gender equity in every domain of their business: sponsorships, advertising dollars, the consumer markets that they try to nurture and grow, the images that they have that are boasted and displayed throughout their organizations.”

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