

# Turbocharging Growth in Women's Sport With Data, AI and Cybersecurity



**TIAKI**

## A Data-Driven, AI-Powered Approach

Women's cricket, football, and rugby are experiencing unprecedented growth, captivating audiences worldwide with their athleticism, skill, and sportsmanship. To further accelerate this momentum, a comprehensive digital strategy is crucial, leveraging the power of data, artificial intelligence (AI), and robust cybersecurity to cultivate a global legion of passionate fans.

### 1. The Imperative of Live Content Creation:

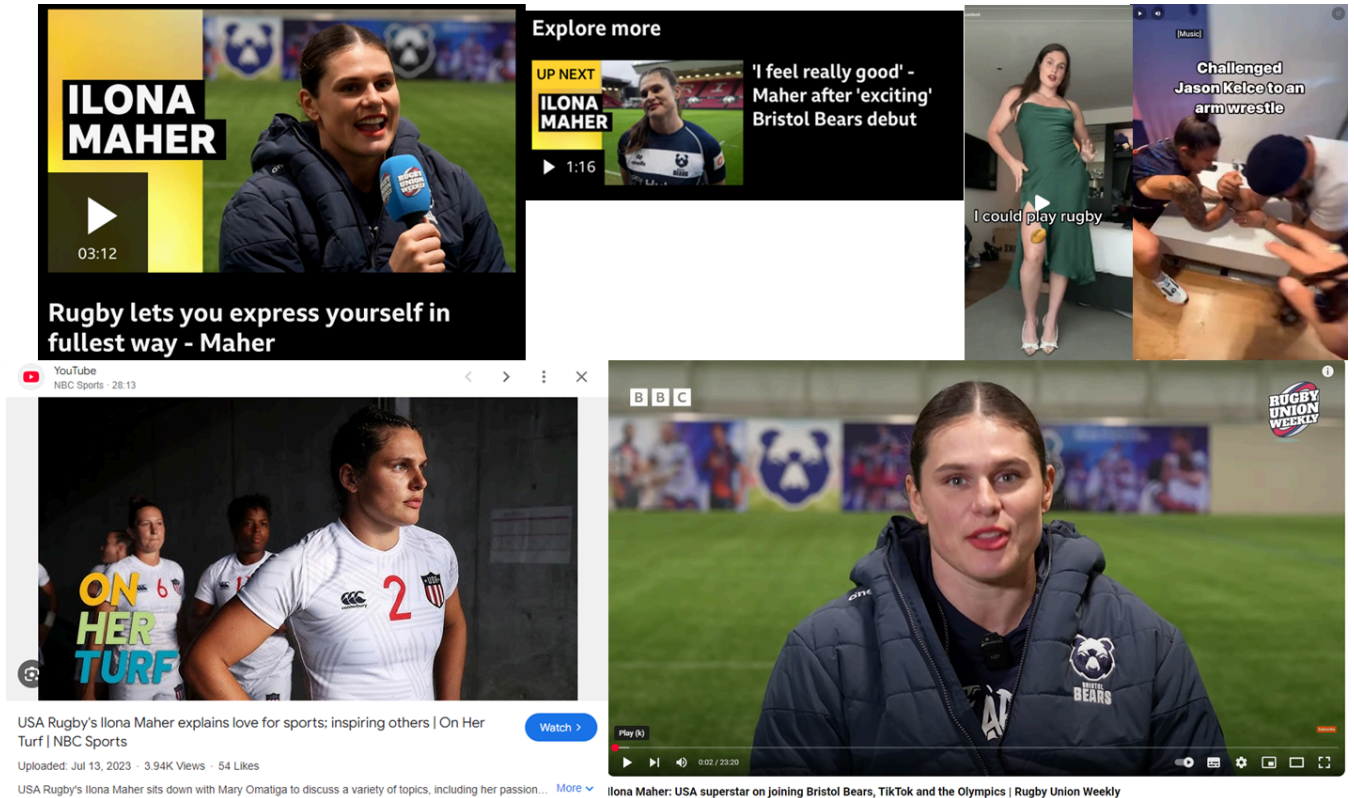
In the hyper-connected digital world, fans crave genuine connection and authentic experiences. To truly resonate with audiences, women's sports organizations must prioritize the creation of content that is:

- ★ **Honest and Transparent:** Showcase the challenges, triumphs, and personalities of the athletes. Share behind-the-scenes stories that offer a glimpse into their lives beyond the field of play.
- ★ **Human-Centered:** Focus on the human element of the sport. Celebrate the resilience, dedication, and sportsmanship of the athletes, and highlight the positive impact they have on their communities.
- ★ **Diverse and Inclusive:** Represent the diverse voices and experiences within the sport, showcasing athletes from various backgrounds and celebrating their unique journeys.
- ★ **Fan-Driven:** Actively listen to fan feedback and incorporate their suggestions into content creation. Engage with fans through social media, surveys, and focus groups to understand their preferences and interests.
- ★ **Examples of Authentic Content:**
  - **Player Vlogs:** Offer intimate insights into the lives of athletes through personal vlogs, showcasing their training routines, hobbies, and travel experiences.
  - **Social Media Takeovers:** Allow fans to experience the game from the athletes' perspective through social media takeovers, providing exclusive behind-the-scenes access.
  - **Long-form Documentary Series:** Explore the deeper narratives of the athletes and their teams, delving into their personal journeys, challenges, and triumphs.
  - **Live Q&A Sessions:** Host interactive live Q&A sessions with athletes, allowing fans to connect directly and ask questions.

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Ilona Maher is a fantastic example of sports fan growth momentum created by a high profile rugby star raising life issues to teenage girls through her personal TikTok and YouTube feeds such as body image, personal setbacks and struggles based on authentic personal stories.

Ilona's move to join Bristol Bears in UK caused the match attendance to double in January 2025 at her debut game and the game needed to be relocated to a bigger stadium. Many of the fans attending Ilona's debut admitted to not yet playing the game and some had not ever watched a rugby match before. However, because they follow Ilona on Instagram and TikTok, they want to come and watch her.



*Ilona Maher is a USA rugby superstar, Olympic bronze medalist and role model for teenage girls. She has pioneered, trailblazing authentic content on her multiple social media platforms. Ilona is the world's most popular rugby player on social media with more than eight million followers.*

By prioritizing authenticity and human connection, women's sports organizations can build stronger relationships with fans, foster deeper engagement, and cultivate a loyal and passionate community.

**2. The Role of Data and AI in Fan Engagement:**

Data is the lifeblood of modern sports marketing. By effectively collecting, analyzing, and utilizing fan data, organizations can:

- ★ **Understand Fan Behavior:** Track viewing habits, social media interactions, and purchase history to identify key demographics, preferences, and engagement patterns.
- ★ **Predict Fan Behavior:** AI algorithms can forecast future trends, allowing organizations to proactively tailor their marketing efforts and optimize content delivery.
- ★ **Improve Fan Experience:** Data-driven insights can be used to personalize the fan experience, such as offering customized ticket packages, exclusive merchandise, and personalized content recommendations.
- ★ **Identify Emerging Markets:** Analyze data to identify untapped markets and develop targeted marketing campaigns to attract new fans in specific regions.

**3. The Critical Importance of Secure Data-at-Scale and a SASE Strategy:**

To effectively leverage the power of data and AI, a robust cybersecurity infrastructure is essential. This includes:

- ★ **Data Encryption:** Protecting sensitive fan data with advanced encryption technologies to prevent unauthorized access and data breaches.
- ★ **Access Control:** Implementing strict access controls to ensure that only authorized personnel can access and utilize fan data.
- ★ **Data Governance:** Establishing clear data governance policies to ensure the ethical and responsible use of fan data.
- ★ **Cloud Security:** Utilizing secure cloud platforms to store and process large volumes of data while maintaining the highest levels of security.
- ★ **SASE (Secure Access Service Edge) Strategy:** Adopting a SASE architecture provides secure and consistent network connectivity and security services across distributed environments. This is crucial for organizations operating in a global landscape, ensuring secure access to data and applications for fans, athletes, and staff regardless of their location. SASE integrates network security functions like firewalls, intrusion detection/prevention systems (IDPS), and secure web gateways (SWG) with networking capabilities like SD-WAN. This convergence simplifies network management, improves performance, and enhances security posture.

By incorporating a SASE strategy, organizations can effectively manage and secure their data, AI and network infrastructure while supporting the dynamic needs of a global fan base.

#### 4. Building Immersive Fan Experiences:

To truly captivate fans, organizations must create immersive experiences that extend beyond traditional match viewing. This can include:

- ★ **Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) Experiences:** Bringing fans closer to the action through interactive AR and VR experiences, such as virtual stadium tours, player meet-and-greets, and immersive training sessions.
- ★ **Fantasy Sports Platforms:** Engaging fans with fantasy sports platforms that allow them to create and manage virtual teams, compete with other fans, and win prizes.
- ★ **Gamification:** Incorporating game mechanics into fan engagement activities, such as rewarding fans for completing challenges, unlocking exclusive content, and climbing leaderboards.

#### 5. The Rise of Private Equity and Big Tech:

The immense potential for fan growth in women's sports is attracting significant investment from private equity firms and major tech companies. These players recognize the following key factors:

- ★ **Untapped Market:** Women's sports have a relatively untapped global audience, offering significant opportunities for market expansion and revenue growth.

- ★ **Accelerating Growth:** The popularity of women's sports is rapidly increasing, presenting a unique opportunity for early investors to capitalize on this burgeoning market.
- ★ **High ROI Potential:** With a strategic approach to fan engagement, women's sports have the potential to deliver significant returns on investment, surpassing those of many established men's leagues.

#### **6. A Multi-faceted Approach to Success:**

To maximize fan growth, a multi-faceted approach is necessary, encompassing:

- ★ **Strong Partnerships:** Collaborating with key stakeholders, including broadcasters, sponsors, and technology providers, to maximize reach and impact. For example, Netflix announced in Dec'24 that has secured exclusive US rights to the FIFA Women's World Cup for 2027 and 2031, marking the first time this tournament will appear on a streaming service.
- ★ **Grassroots Development:** Investing in grassroots programs to develop a strong pipeline of future athletes and fans.
- ★ **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:** Creating an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and empowers female athletes and fans from all backgrounds.
- ★ **Advocacy and Education:** Raising awareness of women's sports and educating the public about the value and importance of supporting these athletes.

#### **7. The Future of Women's Sports:**

With a data-driven, AI-powered approach, and a commitment to creating authentic, immersive fan experiences, women's cricket, football, and rugby are poised for unprecedented global growth. By leveraging the power of technology and embracing innovation, these sports can inspire a new generation of fans, create new revenue streams, and solidify their place as major forces in the world of sports entertainment.

## **Conclusion**

The future of women's sports is bright. By embracing a data-driven, AI-powered approach, and prioritizing fan engagement through authentic content, immersive experiences, and robust cybersecurity, organizations can unlock the full potential of these exciting sports and build a global community of passionate fans. As private equity and big tech increasingly recognize the immense potential of women's sports, the stage is set for a new era of growth and success.

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*David is the Founder & Managing Partner at TIAKI, a niche consulting practice helping executive leadership in sport make confident, informed decisions on their risks, investments and business outcomes powered by secure 'data-at-scale'.*

*He collaborates with bold and determined leaders in the sports ecosystem to define their data, AI and cybersecurity strategies to deliver sustainable value.*

*David's vision for TIAKI is to empower sports franchise CEOs, leadership teams, sports media broadcasters and investors in the global sports industry with strategic advisory frameworks to deliver secure, pioneering digital fan experiences and new ecosystem business models to achieve breakthrough returns.*

*David has over 20 years of strategy and technology enabled business transformation experience, providing consulting expertise in cloud native technologies, data strategy, digital business enablement and cybersecurity strategy. He is passionate about helping talented leadership teams succeed in securely growing their differentiated business models in the data-driven, digital sports economy.*

*Based in Stockholm, David previously worked for IBM Consulting, EY, Accenture Strategy and Orange Business. He studied Chemistry at Durham University and holds an MBA from Trinity College, Dublin Business School.*



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