

Onside Law Sports Business Breakfast Seminar hosted by Google

The Triumphs and Tribulations of Three World Cups – 12 November 2019



Thank you to Google for hosting Onside Law's latest seminar, panellists **Steve Elworthy (Managing Director of ICC Cricket World Cup 2019)**, **Tomos Grace (Head of YouTube Sport EMEA)** and **Alan Gilpin (Head of Rugby World Cup 2019)** and also to **Clare Balding** and **Karen Carney** for a thought-provoking and insightful Q&A on women's football and women's sport more generally.

What a year it has been for sports fans, but how do we build upon the successes of the three recent World Cups to reach, engage and retain existing, new and complementary audiences for these sports?

Key takeaways from the morning were:

- Women's football is in effect a start-up business from a commercial perspective, and whilst it has seen incredible progress over recent years (with unprecedented viewing figures for the Women's Football World Cup this summer), it is still in the early stages of professionalism. As with any start-up, it needs stakeholders to take risks and make substantial investment to enable it to continue to flourish.
- Marquee football clubs have started to fully embrace the women's game, encouraging their fans to be fans of the 'badge' and not just a fan of the women's or men's team. The challenge for women's football is to build a following that can fill stadiums week in and week out. Given the Lionesses can attract nearly 78,000 to Wembley Stadium on a very wet night in November, the platform is clearly there.
- As women's football and the profile of female footballers continues to grow, there is a big opportunity to create relationships with fans. As a group they have a reputation as humble, grounded and approachable individuals, whilst also being elite, professional athletes. This authenticity and approachability is rare in professional sport, and perhaps contrasts with some of the male players!
- Global tournaments offer a one-off opportunity to reach new audiences in territories which may not be traditional strongholds for a particular sport. Digital and broadcast rights, ticketing and fan engagement strategies all need to be aligned to optimise take-up from these new groups.
- For the Rugby World Cup, the decision to take the World Cup to Asia and a Tier Two nation for the first time put growth of the game at the heart of its strategy. An emotional and engaging run of form from the Brave Blossoms and a warm Japanese welcome helped establish all manner of engagement records. The tournament achieved 1.7 billion digital views, a global broadcast audience of 400 million and a record-breaking domestic audience in Japan of 54.8 million for their match with Scotland...half the entire population!
- For the Cricket World Cup, staged in a traditional stronghold, the digital rights strategy was critical in targeting new audiences. The "once in a lifetime final" and iconic moments, such as Ben Stokes' catch against South Africa, created plenty of bite-sized, fun and shareable content. Social media platforms such as YouTube delivered this and other micro content to new younger and previously untapped online audiences, whose appetite for the consumption of sports content differs from traditional cricket fans. 2.4 billion minutes of Cricket World Cup content was viewed on the ICC's YouTube channel.
- As for the weather... you have to expect rain in England in June and the odd typhoon in Japan in autumn! All you can do is diligently plan for it. What you can't predict is the hundreds of Japanese staff volunteering to sleep in the stadium during the typhoon in order to get the Scotland match on the following day!



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