



# Why eve. cricket

is the new flavourite of the season

Why the Women's IPL is evoking so much interest and whether it is all hype



Report by  
Rajendra Gupta

# Women's IPL: THE GOLD RUSH

A women's IPL has been due for a while, and finally, the BCCI has set the wheels in motion.

The India women's team had finished runners-up in the **2017 ICC Women's Cricket World Cup** as well as in the 2020 T20 World Cup. It made the audience take serious note of the performances, the women were putting up on the field. There were many prominent voices calling for a **T20 league** in India for female cricketers similar to WBBL in Australia or England's now-non-existent KIA Super League.

The ICC Women's World Cup had a cumulative global television

audience viewership of 104.8 million. That, I think, was the trigger for the BCCI to look seriously at the WIPL. Many financial experts believe that women's cricket is an untapped mine of something precious, if not gold, and WIPL 2023 may be an opportunity for brands to invest in it. Despite a few brands expressing interest until now, the numbers are expected to go up in the days to come.

Skeptics abound. But one can be sure that the WIPL is a step in the right direction — for women recognition and gender equality; and equally for women's empowerment.



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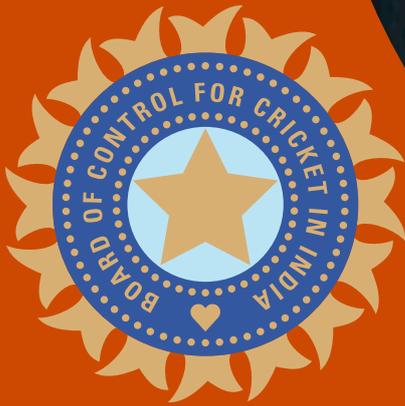
# Women's IPL: A moneyspinner like the Men's IPL?

One question probably every cricket fan/associate/lover/player/critique is asking today is whether the Women's IPL (WIPL) will make money the way Men's IPL has been doing right from its inception. It is also a test for a world's most profitable sports organization, BCCI, to make the women's edition succeed.

Sports, whether team or individual, men or women, have proven that they are able to cultivate critical skills — confidence, leadership, and problem-solving — that also serve individuals well in their personal and professional lives. The WIPL is a true test for **'eve cricket'** to mature into a watchable league that will spawn its own ecosystem, creating its own legends.

In the last few decades, money has made its presence felt in a big way in sports. As a result, sports have become very appealing to people. Monies are pouring in every year, in larger amounts than previous occasions, leaving people to wonder what is next. The abundance is all-round.





However, in this scenario as well, where money is raining proverbial cats and dogs, it only appeared skewed in favour of men's sports. Women's sports mostly stayed deprived of the bounty. And if money did happen, there was a vast disparity between the payouts meted out to men versus what was done to women sports and events. Tennis and golf have attempted to bridge the gap but even there, the women's compensation trails the men by a wide margin.

WIPL is now being looked at, with a new lens by the sporting pundits. And the reasons are not difficult to seek. Cricket is considered only second to Bollywood in India, supported by the milling population of the country, which seems ready to spend umpteen hours in queues and spend thousands of rupees to get a seat at an IPL match. The question is whether the Women's IPL will also get the same salute?

# Early signs of success

The **Board of Control for Cricket in India** assigned the **WIPL media rights** to **Viacom 18** for **Rs. 951 crore (US\$ 116.5 million)** beating out **Disney Star** in a closed-bid auction that includes both global television and digital rights until **2027**. The value of a single match in the WIPL will work out to **Rs. 7.09 crore (US\$ 868,737)**.

The fee paid by Viacom18 works out to **Rs.190.2 crore (US\$23.3 million)** per season, which is among the biggest rights investments in women's sport today.

**VIACOM 18**



# Teams go for record prices

• Ahmedabad	– Adani	– Rs. 1289 Cr
• Mumbai	– Reliance (MI)	– Rs. 912 Cr
• Bangalore	– Diageo (RCB)	– Rs. 901 Cr
• Lucknow	– Capri Global	– Rs. 757 Cr
• Delhi	– DC franchise	– Rs. 810 Cr

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) secretary, **Jay Shah**, revealed last Wednesday that the Board has garnered a whopping **Rs 4,669.99 crore** in total bids for the franchises during the auction process for its inaugural **Women's T20 leagues' sale** of teams. It is a whopping amount for sure for an infant league with almost no credentials so far. But the aggressive bids are testimony to the faith being already reposed in the future of the WIPL.



BCCI Secretary  
**Jay Shah**

# Is it all hype?

## A Red Lab straw poll

Researchers at the Rediffusion Red Lab reached out to 24 clients and 17 media buyers over the Republic Day weekend to gauge sentiment and vibes... here's the barometer check:



### 1. Is WIPL all hype?

No, say most of them we spoke to. It is serious business. In 10 years, the League will be as good a money-spinner as the Men's IPL. The sale of the teams for such large amounts, and the media rights too, point to the BCCI being onto a good thing.

The tiny minority that said yes felt that it is all speculation – the league is never going to be even a fraction of the men's version.



### 2. Will the likes of HUL support the WIPL?

Maybe. Maybe not. The likes of HUL show no sentiment in media buying. If the eyeballs are good and spot rate make for good ROI, then HUL will support. If the numbers do not stack up, the likes of HUL will just look the other way.



One learned media planner pointed out that HUL advertised brand Boost on women's cricket previously – not one of its women-centric brands.



### 3. Will the League be profitable?

Mixed response. Everyone agreed that BCCI has already raked in the moolah. The media rights holder will have a tough time in initial years but may eventually be in the blue at the end of the bid tenure of 5 years. The team owners will take very long to reach break-even – but then team ownership is really about bragging rights anyway.

### 4. Is the League not going to be really 'national' since all matches are in Mumbai?

The League is really a television event, most averred. The location of the games is not really an issue.

### 5. How much should ad-spots be priced at? 1L per 10 sec?

No consensus. Wait-and-watch, they all said.

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**The Red Lab team feels that the League is off to a good start. There is support, though somewhat lukewarm for now. But the momentum could pick up pace in the days ahead.**

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# The advent of Women's IPL T20

The Women's IPL got going from the **Women IPL Challenge**.

The near-success of the Indian team in the **Women's World Cup 2017** (India finished second), gave rise to the idea of having a Women's IPL. What started as the **Women's T20 Challenge**, an Indian women's cricket T20 tournament, began with one match in Mumbai, before the start of men's matches in 2018. It is now becoming a bigger reality.

In 2019, it was expanded to a three-team tournament, in a round-robin format, and this continued till 2022. In March 2022, BCCI decided to replace Women T20 Challenge with a Women IPL T20.

The WIPL will start from **March 3, 2023** and the final matches will be played from **March 26, 2023 to April 1, 2023**.

It is going to be a five-team round-robin format to start with. A 22 match event, the matches are expected to be played at **Brabourne** and **DY Patil** stadiums in Mumbai.



# A different set of rules

The WIPL's rules are slightly different from the **Men's IPL**. While men's teams could take 8 overseas players in a squad strength of **18 to 25 players**, in case of women's teams, only six of these can be overseas players. Also in case of the women's chosen **11 of every team, 5 of these overseas players** can play; whereas in case of men, only **4 overseas players** can be part of the team. The total number of franchisees has been **restricted to 5**. More will surely be added in the future.



# How have women sports been faring globally?

There was a time when it was felt that men's sports enjoyed an unfair advantage. But recently, there has been a drastic increase in women's participation and even spectator viewing, both in physical form, and on television in the case of women's sports.

**YouGov**<sup>®</sup>  
What the world thinks

**YouGov**, an international research data and analytics group, headquartered in London, has studied what kind of growth women's sport has seen past and what it means for marketers.

To analyze if Women's IPL would be successful, we looked at YouGov's global report to study whether women's sports is less popular than men's, and, if yes, why are these less popular and more importantly, should they remain so.

The report is based on research carried out in 13 countries from YouGov's panel of over 15 million respondents.



# Globally, which is more popular, men's or women's sport?



In the 13 countries researched, almost double the number of people in general watched or followed men's sports compared to women's sports. Although the difference varied across the types of sports, but in none of the sports, the relationship reversed.

But the difference was stark in the case of professional sports, which are considered to be 'rich' and 'influential' category. Football/soccer, tennis and golf took center stage for being 'rich' sports with huge prize money at stake. Remuneration for men outstripped that for women quite significantly.



# Followership for types of sport – by gender

Richness and popularity of IPL is primarily due to the interest and viewership it generates when the games are on. In India, if one were to rank the viewership of the three most popular sporting events viz. **Olympics, IPL and FIFA** – FIFA is no competitor to the IPL while the Olympics are a complete non-starters. While men watch men play – even women just want to see the men play!



**FIFA**  
The Game. For the World.

# Franchisee teams crystal gazed

Each franchisee will require one captain. Here is some guesswork based on T20 history of international games played by India.

Let us take a look at the probables.



1. **Harmanpreet Kaur**, the most eligible and undoubtedly the first choice for any team today, being current Indian captain and has donned the captain's cap for most number of matches, **which is 87**. She also has the highest percent of wins, **which is 59%**.



2. **Mithali Raj**, although she has announced retirement, has expressed her desire to don the WIPL cap. As a captain of Indian team for T20 matches, she played **32 matches, won 17 and lost 15**. Her capability with the bat is also well known. With a biopic in her pocket, she has a reasonable following as a cricket star.

3. **Jhulan Goswami** has played 18 matches as Indian captain, **won 8 and lost 10**. 18 is good number of matches to show her mettle. She has also got a biopic



**'Chakda Express'** coming soon. She is a great bowler and has taken the highest number of wickets in women ODIs – **a record 255**. Although she too has announced her retirement since September of 2022, who knows that like Mithali Raj, she too may decide to take a look at playing again through WIPL?



4. Then there is **Anjum Chopra (30% wins)** and **Smriti Mandhana (50% wins)**; both with 10 matches each as captain. Of the two, Anjum has become a commentator, and hence may not even try a come-back like Mithali. But who knows?



These are our choice of captains for the 5 franchisees, purely based on the fact that they have been Indian captains.

# The future for women's sport and W IPL



84%



People across the countries believe that the situation of women's sport is improving, though in differing degrees.

Indians are most optimistic and assert that women's sports/games have improved and this has been voted by **84%** of the respondents in the **13 country study** of **YouGov**.

The real test will come to light when people will spend from their pockets to watch W IPL live. This 'moment of truth' will also pave way for the future of sports in general, and cricket in particular.

For sponsors, there seems to be good potential reward for brands who might consider supporting Women's Sports. Considering the relative cost of sponsoring Men's vs Women's IPL, and there may actually be real value in supporting the latter.



One thing is pretty apparent, that, there is no doubt about women's sport's calibre in general, and cricket in particular. There are some who feel and hence cite speed, quality and physicality, as reasons for not voicing their favour, but that is because there has not been enough exposure to the women's game. With increased coverage on TV and with the fan following created due to digital platforms, this would hopefully improve as well.

This, ofcourse, is a classic marketing conundrum – a great product and a lot of latent demand. The challenge for sports marketers is to find a way to bring them together. To that end, we hope our report represents a useful starting point.

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