

Episode 5: Using a Gender Lens in Sports Analytics

Why do we call the Men's World Cup in soccer just "The World Cup" and for women, it is the "Women's World Cup"? Why is the NBA—the National Basketball League—just for men, and the one for women is the "WNBA."? People think they are an add on...a niche market...But, they would be wrong. What would happen if we thought about women's sports and women in sports as equally valuable as men? In this episode, we are going to hear from two accomplished entrepreneurs, Meghan Chayka and Jacie De Hoop, on what using a gender lens in sports analytics might do.

Featured guests:

[Meghan Chayka](#) is co-founder of Stathletes, a sports analytics and insights business that provides industry leading data precision within the sport of hockey. Meghan was named in the 2018/2019 season Top Young Entrepreneur of the Year by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Top 40 under 40 by the Athletic NHL, and the Top 100 of Power & Influence by Hockey News. At the Rotman School, she plays a key role in shaping the data science education and research through her work at the TD Management Data and Analytics Lab.

[Jacie De Hoop](#) is a co-founder and head of revenue at The GIST, a sports media startup that makes sports more accessible and inclusive to all sports fans. She leads the company's revenue generation, growing revenue from \$100K to over \$2.5M in 18 months through partnerships with Under Armour, the NBA and FanDuel. Jacie and her team were named to Forbes 30 Under 30 Media 2020 and have been accelerated through programs with Facebook, Comcast NBCUniversal and Techstars. GATE wrote a case study on The GIST which we'll post in the show notes.

Moderator: [Adil Sethi](#) is Senior Manager of Business and Content Strategy at Bell Media. As a former professional athlete himself, his experiences include franchise and athlete management, sports marketing and more recently plying his trade in the sports betting and online gaming industry. Adil has been an ardent advocate of equality in sports. It was his time as a sports agent to some of India's top women athletes—when he witnessed first-hand, gender-based discrimination and disparity in the sports industry—that gave rise to his research, as a GATE MBA Fellow, that focused on assessing the biases that exist around corporate sponsorship in women's sports and how they can be overcome.

Resources:

- GATE Case study on: [*The GIST challenges gender inequality in sports media*](#)
- [Gender Analytics: Possibilities conference](#)

Gender Analytics is a way to analyze your products, services, processes and policies with a gender lens to uncover hidden opportunities for innovation and improved effectiveness by considering gender, race, Indigeneity, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and other identities. Learn more here: www.genderanalytics.org

Want to hear more from the Institute for Gender and the Economy? Check out our signature podcast series, [Busted](#), which busts prominent myths about gender and the economy!

Credits:

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Transcript

Jacie deHoop: It is really hard, I think, to kind of pitch your business to folks that haven't really felt that pain point themselves. That's kind of really what it comes back to. And we had countless conversations with VCs in particular, who would take the conversation. I think that's something that it took us a while to understand and learn is that a lot of people in this space aren't going to explicitly say no to a female founder, aren't explicitly going to say no to women's sports and female fans. You know, that's they recognize that much that it's like you shouldn't be just kind of like immediately...I'm not going to take this call, but that wasted so much of our time because, frankly, if you're not actually seriously considering investing, then don't waste my time.

Sarah Kaplan: Why do we call the Men's World Cup in soccer just "The World Cup" and for women, it is the "Women's World Cup"? Why is the NBA —the National Basketball Association—just for men, and the one for women is the "WNBA."? I think that says something about how we often treat women's sports. People think they are an add on...a niche market...But, they would be wrong... The 2023 Women's World Cup was watched by as many people as watched the men's tournament in 2022. WNBA viewing audiences are up 67% in 2023. So, what would happen if we thought about women's sports and women in sports as equally valuable as men?

Welcome to episode 5 of Designing for Everyone, a podcast by the Institute for Gender and the Economy or GATE. I'm Sarah Kaplan, she/her pronouns, and a Professor of Strategic Management at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, Founding Director of GATE and your podcast host. In this 7-part limited series, we're featuring a high-impact set of conversations we had in April 2023 at our Gender Analytics: Possibilities conference.

In this episode, we're going to focus on what using a gender lens in sports analytics might do. We'll be joined by two accomplished entrepreneurs:

Meghan Chayka is co-founder of Stathletes, a sports analytics and insights business that provides industry leading data precision within the sport of hockey. Meghan was named in the 2018/2019 season Top Young Entrepreneur of the Year by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, Top 40 under 40 by the Athletic NHL, and the Top 100 of Power & Influence by Hockey News. At the Rotman School, she plays a key role in shaping the data science education and research through her work at the TD Management Data and Analytics Lab.

And, Jacie De Hoop is a co-founder and head of revenue at The GIST, a sports media startup that makes sports more accessible and inclusive to all sports fans. She leads the company's revenue generation, growing revenue from \$100K to over \$2.5M in 18 months through partnerships with Under Armour, the NBA and FanDuel. Jacie and her team were named to Forbes 30 Under 30 Media 2020 and have been accelerated through programs with Facebook,

Comcast NBCUniversal and Techstars. GATE wrote a case study on The GIST which we'll post in the show notes.

Their conversation was moderated by Adil Sethi who is Senior Manager of Business and Content Strategy at Bell Media. As a former professional athlete himself, his experiences include franchise and athlete management, sports marketing and more recently plying his trade in the sports betting and online gaming industry. Adil has been an ardent advocate of equality in sports. It was his time as a sports agent to some of India's top women athletes—when he witnessed first-hand, gender-based discrimination and disparity in the sports industry—that gave rise to his research, as a GATE MBA Fellow, that focused on assessing the biases that exist around corporate sponsorship in women's sports and how they can be overcome.

Take a listen to what they had to say.

Adil Sethi: So both of you work in the intersection of sports and data analytics. Both these domains are heavily male dominated. So let's start off with how the both of you discovered business opportunities within these domains. Meghan would want to start us off.

Meghan Chayka: That's a great question, because there are all sorts of other undertones about entrepreneurship...what startups are, that sort of lifestyle that I think Jacie and I completely have gone a path that a lot of people don't go as a woman, just because it's, you know, so rare, and often not encouraged as well. So I think being up here is not only in data analytics, but also as entrepreneurs, I think, is like the other footnote to this panel. I would say that, for me, I fell into it. Like many women entrepreneurs, it wasn't something that I thought...hey, I will do. I, fortunately/unfortunately, graduated in 2008 with a finance degree. So, as you know, that was about one of the worst times in the history of the universe to enter investment banking when full banks were going under. And they say necessity is the mother of invention. So, I put my hat on and thought of other ways I could use, you know, finance, data, economics, all the different tools that I learned in undergrad and I went into Graduate School. And my co-founders as well were in Business School. So we just started doing business pitches. And, you know, I was pushed to to be, like, more entrepreneurial and to think differently by my parents from a very young age. So, I like to lean into a bit of that unknown and create things that you know weren't created. And I got into the space of data where, you know, when you have results and you have a product that people can use, there's generally buy in when you're solving problems. So, I found that I went sort of a more of an unconventional backdoor. I thought I would stay in academia or thought I would stay in other areas and U of T has been awesome, the Rotman School of Management, the TD Data Lab is having me as a data scientist in residence, so I still get to do a little bit of academia. And take, you know, the energy and the excitement from like the student lifestyle and then, you know, go into the my scale-up world. And we have about 100 to 150 employees at this point. We service all different levels of sports analytics, mainly the elite level, into media, into sports betting, digital...all of these other verticals as well. So, we have had considerable success, but definitely as a woman, there has been challenges which we'll talk about, but that's in general my journey.

Adil Sethi: Thanks Meghan. Jacie.

Jacie deHoop: Oh, my gosh, Meghan, I didn't know you had 100 to 150 employees. That is crazy and. Yeah, that's a...

Meghan Chayka: Lot. A lot. Yeah, that's a lot.

Jacie deHoop: A lot to deal with, too. Yeah, so hi everyone. I'm JACIE. I'm a co-founder of the GIST. So, Meghan is very much so in that analytics space. I sit more on the sports media and content side of things. Similarly though, myself and my co-founders came from a business background. My career before starting the GIST was in management consulting. Actually, Alicia's here. We both worked at the same firm before starting the GIST. But really the concept around our startup really came from a pain point that the three of us, myself and my co-founders experienced. Really firsthand working in different areas of finance. And essentially what the GIST is all about, for those of you that aren't familiar, is... We are all about really accessibility, inclusivity, and centering more underrepresented voices in sports, making sports content, and just generally the sports world, feel more inclusive. Our values are very rooted in equality. And just progressiveness. And particularly as female fans, we really felt like on the outside of that sports community, even though all of us grew up playing sports and generally being sports fans. there's something about the sports world that when you don't look a certain way or haven't grown up with a certain background, it can feel very exclusionary, which is the exact opposite of what sports really can and should be. It's such a passion point for so many people. I'm sure we have some Leafs fans in the room. And yet, as a female fan in particular, it's very easy to feel on the outside of that community, on the outside of that sports conversation. And so we really created the GIST to be the exact opposite of that kind of boys' club mentality around sports and to really be a welcoming space for all sports fans. And again, the concept of the GIST really came about pretty organically and just from this pain point that the three of us experienced ourselves. So my cofounders are friends from Queens and we were catching up one night over takeout kind of thing. And I actually think this was in 2017 and the Leafs were also in the playoffs in the first round. And we were talking about it. And we're just chatting as girlfriends about how it's so much more engaging to get your sports updates and to be talking about sports with other women and particularly from your kind of sports-obsessed best friend as opposed to some of the more traditional media channels. And we were also talking about how, especially for myself, being in a client services kind of role in the consulting side... People really come together over sports. And yet, as a female fan, there's always that assumption that you don't really know what's going on, don't care what's going on. Not to mention just such an incredible lack of coverage of women's sports as well, which has always been really important to us as former athletes. So, is that very night when we were having takeout, talking about the Leafs in the playoffs that we were like, we should start a business. And it's always been a business and I think that's really important to keep in mind. But we should start a business that is the exact opposite of that boys' club around sports, and really through content and through community, we can create something that's just much more inclusive and just makes more people feel like they are a sports fan and that they are part of that world. So about six months later, we launched and started writing the GIST newsletter, which, if you're not subscribed to, sign up

theGISTsports.com. But essentially the premise of the newsletter, which is was our first product and is still our main product, has been around equal coverage of women's and men's sports, but also again centering more underrepresented voices in sports. So, our entire content team is female identifying. And for those of you who are familiar with our content, it's really rooted in those values of equality and progressiveness that frankly is just missing in the sports content that we received today. So that's how we kind of came up with the concept. And like Meghan mentioned, the sports world, the startup world is incredibly male dominated, of course. So, there have been lots of challenges along the way, but overall it's been a fun ride, I can say, overall, I've lost some years of my life, but it's been fun.

Adil Sethi: Well, I am a subscriber and I think other than all the other target audiences that you're gonna catering to right now, it's even great for someone like me who hasn't had a background in North American sports. I think the way you break down the content and make it so easy to understand is just a great way of actually consuming sports content. So thank you for that.

Jacie deHoop: Thank you, yes and you're exactly our target market. I appreciate that.

Adil Sethi: There you go. Well, to summarize, your business is tackling the problem of how sports is represented in traditional media. So, could you talk a bit about some of those distinct approaches you take to cater to that gap that the traditional media is put across here.

Jacie deHoop: Yeah, definitely. And I mentioned these at a high level earlier. But I think there are two really key things that differentiate our content and the community that we've built to what we refer to as more traditional sports media. The first is really rooted in this stat that only 5% of sports media coverage is on women's sports, and that is just SO ridiculous. Frankly, just given where we are at as a society, that is just not OK. And I think for those of you that are familiar with the sports industry, media and content is really at the core of what we consume, the stories that we tell and what drives importance, impressions, views, and therefore, dollars, in the sports industry. And so, it was that stat that only 5% of media coverage is on women's sports that really drove us to ensure that all the content we're creating always has 50/50 equal coverage of women's and men's sports. And that's really been the cornerstone of our content. A lot of the time we're talking about what's happening on the women's sports side a little bit more, because frankly there are so many exciting stories and there's so much progress and so much momentum happening. But I think our future state and where we need the sports industry to move to is that equal coverage. So, we don't just cover what's happening in women's sports because I think the way that we need this entire industry to grow is that you are a fan and you're a fan of both women's sports and men's sports, and they're on that level playing field. That's always been really, really important to us. The second piece is rooted in the stat that only 14% of sports journalists are women. So, in that content that we create or in the content that we consume around something like sports that, again, has just so much influence over our culture. It's coming from a very specific kind of person that is then going to have a certain perspective

on what's happening in the world, and is going to write in a certain way, and is going to be engaging to certain people, and not in many ways has perpetuated why, you know, the sports landscape can look really homogeneous. And so, we have, again, an entirely female identifying content team. And we really try to ensure that we are centering those underrepresented voices and perspectives. And so, this comes through in our content quite a bit in terms of the actual storylines that we cover. General just kind of like progress that's happening in this space is something that really hits with our audience. Just women succeeding in sports, too. Like we've featured Meghan a few times. This is so important to our audience as well. I think we also don't shy away from some of those harder topics. And the reality of the sports world is that there are a lot of problems. There are a lot of issues in so many different ways. But that traditional sports media really shies away from and doesn't shine a light on. We have been very unapologetic about having an opinion and making sure that we are speaking to those things, because they are really important. And they are, you know, at the crux of many of the issues that are happening in the sports world today. And so, I think, actually having that opinion and in many ways shining a light on some of those things is why our audience, who we call our GISTers, are so sticky and so engaged and really are incredibly loyal to us. Because the content is relatable, they see themselves and our team that creates the content as well. So those are one of the three main things.

Adil Sethi: Right. Hear you. Moving a bit to the data analytics side, Meghan. And I believe it was a statement made by a WNBA spokesperson that you had quoted in one of your interviews, I believe it was last year. And it really resonated with me. I mean, without data, you have no history on these women, right? So from the perspective of a data scientist, what are some of those big missed opportunities by not incorporating a gender and intersectional lens in sports analytics?

Meghan Chayka: Definitely in women's sports and that's actually Sue Bird, who is like a legend in the WNBA. And she wrote that in a Players' Tribune article. So by herself about 7-8 years ago, way before the time when people really thought, OK, analytics is a mainstay in, you know, modern sports. And her point was really, if you don't have the data, and analytics, and insights, and other technology in these women's leagues, you really miss out on a lot. It's not just the fans consuming it in that moment, it's other media. It's other digital. It's social media where other creators can talk about your game. It's general fans like GISTers who can't talk about the WNBA except for the box score. So you just have who got points, who got assists, that's all, you know who played, who is in the lineup. You have this whole chasm of all these other athletes that are, you know, Olympic level elite representing our countries. And I will say as well in hockey it's a really interesting sport because when you look through the sponsorship and the impressions and the numbers from an analytics perspective of like consumers, the Women's Olympic gold medal game has the most impressions of every one-day event, when you look at like the MLS and F1 and all that sort of stuff. They had about 5 million eyeballs on that on that final game. So there's huge compelling business reasons to invest more in time, in capital and technology, and especially data to be able to tell their stories, have their records and jump off that. And for me, a lot of the data, when I think about, my company and building something scalable. Obviously, I'm capitalism first. I need to make money. I need to keep scaling. But I also think that there's a good business case to use anything for the women's game and build that up because there's

immense growth opportunity. You're thinking 5 million viewers and that's completely an afterthought for a lot of broadcasters or traditional media. So, for me, I think it was six or seven years ago, I realized the men weren't going from the NHL weren't going to the Olympics. So, I filled my contacts. I marched in the building. The gentleman there, he's now doing another role in a different company. So, I'm not telling anything that would surprise him. But I literally sat down and said let's do the analytics and data and visuals like we would with the men's game, because the best women in the world are playing and the best men are still playing in the NHL. And he thought, yeah, that's a really interesting concept. So, he walked me up. We had like a big meeting with the full staff. They were like, this is amazing. This will go over really well. And then he turned to me and said, but what about the men? Like it honestly just dawned on him that now the women's product would be, you know, at a very high level. And the men's product would be left behind. And that bothered him. He said, just write a number on that paper. I'll pay you whatever for the men's. But we have to keep it consistent. And I said, oh, isn't that a novel concept? You know. What has that ever happened the other way? you know? And that was sort of a mindset for me that I knew I really had to flip the script. Create the business reason. Get buy in. But also these tools, this technology isn't gender specific. It's sport specific, right? There's no reason to not figure out a way to keep building, to keep scaling, to keep growing both the men's and women's game the same. And I also say with like Jacie and she was in women's sports before it was cool. Now everyone wants to talk about women's sports. That's like the cool growth area, the WNBA, if you don't know, is coming to Toronto in May, there's an ESPNW conference around it as well. It's very in vogue to invest in women's sports at this point. But at the same point, the data, the underlying issues, now is the time to scale and figure out that an approach that creates sustainability long term. So that even if capital flows in and out, we can still push forward the game and can keep continue to push. Because I think, as you know, women athletes are treated...we see like broader society, whether it's in business, whether it's in finance, very similar undertones to women's sports.

Adil Sethi: Well, great segue into my next question and you know investing in women's sports and is pretty cool for sure. And I know there's a question that states, what are some of the stats and tactics our panelists use from the back pocket when they're trying to build a case and change someone's perspective? So you'll hear them quite a bit coming through from the conversation. But I really hope this question also feeds into that. Jacie, often you talk about the fact that female millennials are an important target audience for you, but unfortunately, some of the, well, a lot of the investors aren't necessarily female millennials. So how do you connect with investors who either differ or disagree with your focus on your core target audience? And what are some of the reactions have been so far? And maybe if you can add a bit more of how you've persuaded them, tying back to this question of convincing them that it is the place to invest?

Jacie deHoop: Yeah, sure. So, to Meghan's point, it wasn't always cool to invest in women's sports, in female fans. There has been so much progress in this space over the last two years in particular. It's just such a different conversation. So, we launched the GIST in Canada in 2018 and in the States in 2019. And we needed to fundraise. We immediately needed some capital to get this thing going. And we had quite a journey of speaking with different potential investors. We were initially in as part of the DMZ here in Toronto. We went down to Philadelphia and we're part of Techstars and Comcast NBC. So we were in these very startup heavy environments that

the automatic place that you go to for funding is venture capital kind of firms. And so, we had a lot of those conversations. It was really hard, transparently, to fundraise at that time. And, you know, even outside of some of those VCs, we spoke with a lot of senior executives here in Canada, in sports media, who, at that time in 2018, just told us that there was simply no demand for what we were building and that there wasn't a space for it, which is really hard to hear, I think. Especially when you are a very excited first-time entrepreneur and these really senior really smart people who have been in this space for a long time are telling you that there really isn't a business opportunity here. It certainly can be super discouraging. And it was. I think we were able to find investors in creative ways in 2018. We ended up finding really strategic angel investors that came on for our very first pre-seeds at that time. And yeah, it definitely was a process in finding them. To your point, Adil, there aren't a lot of female millennial investors, yet. They are coming. And so, I think what we did was really look to find people who had that more so values alignment. And so, there are a lot of people out there. And investors, in particular, that saw the potential in this space. I actually found that, even if they didn't and we do have some investors that really aren't in the sports world, aren't in the media space, like really don't understand in some ways the ins and outs of our business, but they understand where the world is going and the way that we see the world and they agree with. And I think in a lot of ways that pre-seed round investment, those investors are coming on because they believe in the founding team and the actual person. And so, I think we were fortunate to be able to bring on some investors that got to know us and had the value alignment with us. And we're really betting on us as founders. But it is really hard to pitch your business to folks that haven't really felt that pain point themselves. That's kind of really what it comes back to. And we had countless conversations with VCs in particular who would take the conversation. I think that's something that took us a while to understand and learn...that a lot of people in this space aren't going to explicitly say no to a female founder, aren't explicitly going to say no to women's sports and female fans. You know, like they recognize that much... like you shouldn't be immediately I'm not gonna take this call. But that wasted so much of our time. Because, frankly, if you're not actually seriously considering investing, then don't waste my time. Took us a bit to really learn. And I think that faster getting to yes or no and that kind of directness is something that we've really had to navigate in this space. Because it was really different, even just a few years ago. Now I'm happy to say there are so many of those same senior executives in particular who are in sports media, who would love to invest in the GIST. And we don't have that open door anymore. So, it's been interesting to see how progress has really happened. And we're so grateful for that in many ways, I think. Looking back, we were a little bit early, which was discouraging at the time. And I'm so grateful that we stuck to our gut and recognized that not everybody is going to understand this pain point and that's OK. We need to focus on the people that do and that see the broader vision here. But it definitely took a bit of perseverance and resilience at that time too.

Adil Sethi: I hear you. I mean, I think this concept of this vicious cycle in women's sports where it's hard to pierce. I think when you started off this process, you had to find creative ways to do so and probably not the case anymore for the good, which is great. My next question to Meghan here. You've often talked in previous discussions about hoping to see the likes of Hayley Wickenheiser ascend to more elite positions within the industry. For those of you who may not know who Haley Wickenheiser is. She is a former member of the Canadian National Ice Hockey team for 23 years and is now the assistant general manager of the Toronto Maple Leaf. So we

want to understand, Meghan, what are some of the concrete benefits from these moves? And what holds us back from seeing some of these moves come up in the future?

Meghan Chayka: Yeah, there's a couple layers to that question. But I think first off is, going back to Jacie's comment about fundraising, it's just tough. Like there was a tough environment for women. So, we went from zero assistant general managers to now there's four being appointed within the last year and a half. So a very big change, very big different. And women in positions where they're managing people, they're the end decision maker. It's not just a checklist that people feel that they have to make. But making like considerable change and giving the reins of power to women as well. You know about 2% of venture capital goes to women-led or women-founded startups. So it's a huge issue in the tech world as well. And then you layer that with the business world where actually women CEO's in the Fortune 500 have just passed the name John for being a CEO. We're beating Johns, you know, which is my brother. So, it's kind of funny. But, you know, my brother was a co-founder with me as well with my husband. And he ended up taking a job, being one of the youngest, the youngest GM presidents, and sat on the Board of Governors as well. So, you know, I see the different movement from men in sports to women in sports, and see the same pathway trajectory when you have the background, the skill set, and then are given opportunities as well...I think that's been lacking in the past. With that said, there is that movement where now you see women executives as a market that has been overlooked historically and there's so many great candidates. And the women's team is one good example because typically women athletes go to the NCAA, many cases are Ivy League graduates. They have to work that much harder, have second jobs, while they play hockey. So many of them have, like Harvard pedigree and all XYZ to be great executives. They just need that next step, that next opportunity. So even in my company as well, looking towards women in data science and engineering and all of these faculties, which have good representation in university, and then for whatever reason in the corporate world, in that innovation sector, tend to drop off and don't get those leadership roles. So I try to heavily recruit in different departments. And have that outreach and at least interview candidates that I feel would be great in the pipeline. And not only in the pipeline, but promoting them to roles that they can thrive in and have that upward mobility. And I have three or four managers that are women that take on a large amount of staff and overachieve and have a lot of people that say, well, how did you find them all? And it's like, well, you know, doing this year over year for 15 years, there starts becoming a scaling effect where you're able to reach a lot more different candidates. And I'm different to begin with, so that helps. I know, not only find them, but create that environment where there are two-way conversations. Women see that there's a potential for them in a space that they've never thought of before. So, it's really motivating to seeing those hirings change. All different departments look towards people that would not necessarily in the past 20 years work in those roles, those departments, and being interviewed, and now being granted jobs.

Adil Sethi: So talking about more diversity inclusion in the tech space and then how it's getting momentum, thanks to the likes of you. How might these changes change the way we produce and consume content in the future? It's open to both of you.

Meghan Chayka: I think with the content piece, especially with data, I think that's why it's so important to have data from a women's sports or women in sports at a similar level, because the engagement and the growth opportunities is not just in the traditional spaces. It's in all these other areas and we're seeing when capital and eyeballs and they're put on linear TV at times when people can tune in, they're getting viewership. So, creating a more meritocracy with content creation, I think just helps everyone. And also, I will say, because to Jacie's credit that the GIST was way before their time, I think also just not having men step in and say OK, now we'll take over women's sports. It's like no. Help elevate companies like the GIST that, you know, figured out the market are scalable, have put in the time, are female-led, have done all the work. Help them grow and evolve too. Because it's one thing to say, OK, women's sports is here. But like we all have to get together and help the whole system of everyone that really is passionate and puts the time, effort and capital behind the scalable approach. So, whether that's social media, TikTok, you see young people up to 4 hours.... I think in between like 15 to 18, they're on TikTok at night. So they're consuming sports data, media, creating their own content in entirely different ways than has happened in the last 30 years. So, thinking about business models. About how we approach that with data at a foundational level and really level the playing field for everyone.

Jacie deHoop: I agree.

Adil Sethi: Well, I'm going to shift gears a bit again and this is probably one for me. But sports betting has been a very actively trending topic for the past three to four years with the industry due to all the legislative and regulatory changes across North America. With an increased focus of sports content and data catering to betting, has the expand of an exponential growth of sports betting increased engagement in women's sports, and if so, how so? What does the data tell us?

Jacie deHoop: Yeah, I can go first. Yes, the sports betting industry is certainly growing as all the stats have shown. And I actually just came from an event where the WNBA and the NWSL and a lot of the sports books were talking about this. And sports betting in many ways is very much so here to stay. It can really elevate that fan experience and can really drive incredible engagement. So the sports books really need to be providing opportunities to be betting and again driving that engagement and growth and viewership around women's sports. Meghan would probably know about this better than I. But I know we've heard a lot from some of the sports books that they don't have the data to do so and that historical data to be able to provide the odds and provide some of those same opportunities that they do on the men's side. We've tried to be very selective and intentional about those sports books that we are working with and ensuring that there is again equal opportunity and that level playing field around...if you're going to engage with sports betting around men's sports and who we're working with needs to be offering that on the women's sports side as well. Because it can be a tool for growth and engagement and it is really important. So yeah, that's kind of what we've seen and I know that a lot of the women's leagues are doing a lot with a lot of the sports books to be able to have that data and to be able to facilitate that kind of engagement through betting.

Meghan Chayka: I think with the betting space, it's really an interesting engagement point because you see in the WNBA, people are returning to watch a blowout in the fourth quarter because they want to see if their prop bet hit, if that person got a rebound, if they got a shot. And that had never happened in sports before. They just turn off the channel and watch whatever Netflix. So that returned eyeballs for women's sports, I think, is incredibly important and a lot of the sports books do see the growth of women's sports, too, and a demographic that also pulls in women that are watching sports, both from the men's side and from the women's side. So it's a good investment. But you're entirely correct. Without the infrastructure to have accurate, efficient data that can get out to sports books, so they can set lines on, you're just basically betting on the final score over under the very traditional bets. Whereas a lot of bettors that aren't like sharps, that aren't committed to making bets, the more casual fan that you want to engage with, they want these like novel bets where it's like who will score the goal; will there be five goals in the third period... All of those, you need more advanced data for. So it's sort of a call to action for leagues, women's leagues especially, in this sort of start-up phase, we are going through to get it right on the data side. And it's also a call for sports books to be very mindful about wrapping in women's sports. So, if they are talking about a certain NBA bet, why not throw in a WNBA bet? Why not make same game parlays, which basically just means like a few bets on the same game? Why not make it across sports? So it's not just one game, but you can make multilayer boosts for your clients, or whoever's logging on to your sports books. So, I think that there's definitely ways to optimize and bring women sports, women's sports leagues up to that level. And the sports books can do it from very early on in their journey. It just became legal in Ontario since last April. So, it hasn't really even been a year of development. So, it's not a huge step to ask them, hey, think of women's sports as well as men, or in some cases, women's sports first.

Adil Sethi: Thanks for that. I assume some of the terms that Meghan used were a bit...they may have been going over your head. And I think it's an important thing to talk about the casual sports fan and something that the GIST does really well is that education piece around sports betting. So maybe talk a bit about how you bring in the casual sports fan into that ecosystem that drives greater engagement in women's sports?

Jacie deHoop: Yeah, for sure. And I mean, we are all about engaging new fans and more casual fans overall, so sports betting is a piece of that. But going back to the overall premise of the GIST is that sports should really feel like they're for everyone. And for those of you in the audience, that might be a more casual fan or you're like, honestly, I don't care or I'm just not interested, that is really fair because the sports industry has really made so many people feel like an afterthought or really made sports not feel like it's for you, and how much of that is nature versus nurture. Maybe if it's this content is actually created with you in mind and created for you, it's going to be that much more engaging. So that is something that is really important to us... I think even myself. I go really deep on certain sports and there are other ones that I just have never felt like it's for me and it doesn't seem interesting. And through the GIST, because I consume so much sports content now, I've seen my fan journey kind of evolve and certainly education is a huge piece of that. I think for those of us that might not have grown up in a sports

household with the game on all the time, or grew up somewhere else where you haven't been around Western sports, it's again just really easy to be on the outside of that conversation, on the outside of that community. And to start consuming sports content or just follow what's happening in playoffs right now in the NHL, there is certainly this assumption that you already know how it's structured and already know everything going on. And so, we try to always take that step back and never assume that somebody grew up with this sport, which is something that's again really comes through in our content. We create a lot of educational content. And we really try to nurture somebody through that fan journey and that might mean eventually sports betting as well. But in many cases, it just means including more people and getting more people interested in sports. And women's sports, of course, is a big piece of that too. For so many of us, especially in Canada, like we really don't have access to WNBA games and so many women's sports. So, for many of us, it's hard to be a women's sports fan. And again, when the content isn't created with you in mind, of course, it's going to be hard. Of course, it's not going to be interesting or engaging. So, we always again try to take that step back. Be really intentional with the wording that we're using, always explaining different acronyms or pronunciations that can be really tricky; explaining the structure of things and being careful about doing so, never in a condescending way. I think that's what can be really tricky with this space is that...a lot of it can just be condescending sometimes when you're catering to a female fan and there's this 'shrink it and pink it' kind of mentality. A lot of the time that comes from, frankly, really avid senior folks at a sports media company that look a certain way and have been sports fans all their life trying to create content for a demographic that they don't understand and don't understand how sophisticated and smart they are too. So, we have done a lot of testing and a lot of just understanding our audience and making sure that we strike that right balance and that right tone; while being really inclusive and trying to bring more people into the conversation and really hopefully spark an interest in sports that a lot of fans might not have had before. So educational content is a big piece of that. And we really provided across a lot of different mediums too. Everyone learns and engages with content in different ways. So, our main product again is our news. So that succinct written form is really our bread and butter. But we've been experimenting a lot with what that can look like on socials, on TikTok, and more of that kind of visual graphic way too. And we get so much engagement around it. I think that's something that's been really cool to see as well. How many people out there really want to understand something a little bit more and don't really know where to go for that content. So all of our more introductory educational content around sports, sometimes around sports betting too, does really well and it gets really high engagement.

Sarah Kaplan: What a great conversation with these entrepreneurs in the sports industry. What struck me particularly was the idea that women's sports have historically been treated as a niche market that's not worth investing in. Yet, Meghan and Jacie make it clear that there is huge upside potential in this market. I loved it when Meghan pointed out that any investment in a women's sports opportunity was seen as needing an equal investment in men's sports... but never the other way around! With the massive global attention to the most recent Women's World Cup in Soccer (along with the attention to unequal pay and sexist treatment of the athletes), to the towering success of athletes like Serena Williams, to the dramatic rise in sports betting on women's sports, people are beginning to see the opportunity for what it is.

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This podcast was produced by me, Sarah Kaplan, and edited by Ian Gormley. We are grateful for support from the Rotman School’s TD Management and Data Analytics Lab who co-hosted the Gender Analytics: Possibilities conference with GATE.

See you next time!