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## **Unequal Play: The Funding and Publicity Disparities Facing UCSB Women's Basketball**

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“I often walk around campus and throughout Isla Vista and see poster after poster of the men’s basketball team and their game schedule, yet I almost never see a poster of my own team,” says Alyssa Marin, senior point guard of the UCSB Women’s Basketball team. “There will be fan themes posted on campus for the men’s game, but our women’s games don’t even have enough student fans to bother creating a theme.”

Despite practicing everyday all year, the women’s basketball team often looks in the stands at their basketball season home games to see only a few local families or elderly people in the stands. Rarely is there a student body presence. Marin, along with the agreement of her teammates, has noticed the increasing sell-out games for the men’s teams while their fan attendance stays stagnantly low.

But why do the fans show so much more excitement to watch the men play? Marin discusses the over-the-top publicity and advertisement that goes into the men’s basketball games. This in turn, makes a significant difference in fan attendance. “The men’s basketball games promote things like prizes, and free food being given away at the games while the women do not,” says Marin.

In addition to this on-campus publicity of the male athletics, social media plays a large role as well. Local UCSB academic students, such as Stella Shmautz and Brooke Griswold, provided a

brief perspective on the student-body fan base side of the issue. “I always see professionally edited videos and posts of the men’s team on my Instagram and TikTok,” says Shmautz. Nodding in agreement, Griswold adds, “I almost never see anything about the women’s team unless I actively search it up on my social media or a website.”

This large discrepancy between public interest of the two genders almost always returns back to one main cause – unequal funding. The smallest amount of funding will not only make a difference in fan attendance, but the overall athlete experience for these men’s and women’s collegiate players. Consider the following inputs of UCSB Women’s Basketball Director of Operations, Sara Anastasieska, who oversees daily operations, including scheduling, travel logistics, and budget management.

“Program funding differences are obvious just walking into the locker rooms,” claims Anastasieska. “The men’s team has a significantly larger locker room. Each locker is personalized with photos, they have a larger tv, nicer bathrooms, and more up-to-date construction.”

This stark contrast underscores the broader issue of funding disparities in collegiate sports. Funding for collegiate sports teams come from both the university and external funding from donors or organizations. As the men’s program makes a larger revenue, it raises more funding each year from local donors and alumni. According to both Marin and Anastasieska, they believe external funders are the driving force behind inequalities.

To further explain an example of this, Anastasieska stated, “In my position in charge of ordering gear for the female athletes, I had noticeable spending budget limitations – something heavily influenced by both donors and the coaches’ control. The boys' players often had new hauls of gear throughout the season, while we could only do one order at the beginning of the season.”

She continues to explain that at the university, she and her program coworkers feel treated equally by administrators as the men’s staff members, yet she notices the men’s program is more organized as they have a larger coaching staff and access to resources.

As a result, inequalities in funding consequently create opposing experiences for the female and male basketball players at UCSB. Through discussion with Marin and her experience over her four years at UCSB, it is clear that the university itself treats the athletes equally, but differences in publicity, funding, sponsors, and public interest create further inequalities for the athletes’ experiences.

In recent years, progress has been made towards the rise of female athletics, but apparent remaining inequalities provide room for change. Marin concludes with the hopes that university policies will change to *require* exposure for women’s sports for outside donations and encourage the UCSB community to come to all sporting events for both genders.

In a final reference towards the light on women’s basketball post-2024 March Madness, Marin says, “I’m hopeful to see these changes and have just the slightest increase in fans and student interest as I enter my graduate year as a player here at The Thunderdome.”

