

*Woman's Weekly*  
**Leshia Hawkins on Girl Power – Redefining Cricket Leadership**

Success in sports doesn't *always* follow a rulebook. At least that's what Leshia Hawkins is actively proving every day.

**“I never used the word male-dominated. I used the word male-prevalent.”**

As Managing Director of the Recreational Game at The England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB), Hawkins dedicates her life to challenging the traditional image of leadership in a sport often referred to as “male-dominated.” But she refuses to be defined by that outdated label.

“I never used the word male-dominated. I used the word male-prevalent,” she explains. “And actually, for the most part, it's probably the other way around. I probably dominate the men that I've come up against,” Leshia says.

And that she does.

It's evident not just in her words but in how she presents herself. Upon first meeting her, she was wearing sleek black pumps and a chic black dress, accented by bright pink straps that peeked out underneath. Her appearance, much like her approach to leadership, is unapologetically her own — breaking expectations while commanding the room.

“All of a sudden, you know, little Blondie totters in, in her heels, and it's, well, not what you'd have expected.” And perhaps she's right — maybe that isn't what you'd anticipate from the Managing Director of a sport deeply steeped in tradition for decades — but somehow, it makes perfect sense.

Even in ways that might seem unconventional, she is the type of leader who isn't afraid to express herself — demonstrated by how she keeps a bottle of nail polish next to her computer during Zoom meetings — a simple act of self-care that helps her feel grounded. In an industry often seen as rigid for women, she proves that you don't have to sacrifice what makes you feel good in order to succeed.

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Growing up in a household where sports were a core part of her childhood, she and her sister were raised in an active environment where playing and watching sports was simply the

norm. “We were brought up quite sporty, so sport was kind of normal for me...watching it, playing it. I never thought for a second that I could get a job in it.”

Seeking a career that reflected her passion for sports was quite difficult, and the path to her current position at the ECB was anything but straightforward. After graduating from Durham University, she noticed many of her peers heading into corporate jobs. She, though, was determined to go in a different direction.

“You fell into the sports industry if your dad knew somebody, and my dad knew nobody because he was selling soap to a supermarket somewhere,” she laughs, recalling how slim opportunities were for women in sports back then. Lacking connections, she felt stuck.

To get her foot in the cricket door, she began her career in recruitment with a sales role at the ECB, where she sold sponsorships for women’s cricket. For a lifelong fan of the sport, stepping through the gates of iconic cricket grounds was surreal. “I thought, oh my God, I’ve made it. But I was kind of like a baby, really selling sponsorship rights,” she reflects with a chuckle. This role was more than a personal achievement. It offered her the opportunity to elevate the sport she had always loved.

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Hawkins stopped at nothing to achieve her dream of working in the sports industry, as she did not want to settle for the conventional life her father had at Procter & Gamble. Though his stable job provided financial security, it didn’t match her ambitions.

Fueled by her desire for something a bit different, she chose to carve out her own unique path, working tirelessly to make connections and taking every last opportunity presented to her. “I pretty much said yes to every opportunity in my 20s and 30s. Whether it’s dinners or lunches...getting people to know who you are,” explains Leshia. This intense work ethic eventually pushed her up the ladder at the ECB.

As she advanced in her career, eventually becoming CEO of Cricket Wales before taking on her current role, she stayed true to herself in an industry that often resists change. “I probably represent that just how I walk into a room... how I act, how I think. I’m not afraid of doing things differently,” she states. Staying true to herself has served her well, influencing her leadership style and commitment to fostering inclusive growth in the sport.

Reflecting on her journey, she admits, “There was never a plan... there was probably always just an innate desire to do something a bit different.” That drive took her from a young girl watching sports in her living room to a leader in cricket’s transformation.

Leshia is clearly dedicated to making cricket more inclusive and representative of society. “Specifically, what we are undoing is 200 years of a culture, of a sport run by men for men,” she asserts. She believes that true change occurs when you challenge the “norm.” Her commitment to inclusivity extends beyond professional ambitions — it’s a personal mission to expand opportunities for women and girls in the game.

It is clear that she is passionate about the need for diverse voices in the sports industry. “Just keep pushing,” she advises. “The opportunities are there, and we need more diverse thought and diverse backgrounds in the sports industry.” By redefining the conversation around gender in sports, she emphasizes that success is not just about overcoming obstacles. It’s about claiming space in a historically male-prevalent field.

“Women’s cricket only came under the auspices of the national governing body in 1997 — I was in university in 1997,” she notes, highlighting how recent the shift toward gender inclusivity in the sport has been. Just a few decades ago, women were largely excluded from the game.

As Hawkins leads initiatives to expand opportunities for women and girls in cricket, she is particularly ardent about introducing women’s softball cricket, which offers a more accessible entry point into the sport. It’s about making space for everyone, and sometimes that means rewriting the rules.

By embracing a refreshingly relatable approach, she is redefining leadership in cricket. She finds equal joy in witnessing a child pick up a bat for the first time and in discussing strategic initiatives in the boardroom. Her message resonates with many: “Be who you are, and be true to that. Be memorable for all the good reasons.” This emphasis on authenticity and passion highlights her commitment to fostering a supportive environment in the sport.

The journey up the ranks in the cricket industry is about more than her achievements. It’s about creating equal opportunities for others, particularly women who may feel out of place in the cricket game.

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The ECB's initiatives have already contributed to a notable increase in female participation, now making up around 25% of registered fixtures. Yet, she remains driven. "I don't think we will ever complete inclusion and governance, but I would like to think that cricket will be a leader," she states. This is a perspective that diverges from many activists who seek absolute solutions. She wants cricket to lead the way in inclusion — not just in sports but in society as a whole.

Looking to the future, Hawkins envisions a cricket world as diverse and vibrant as the communities it serves. "Sport is there for the community, and the community is 50% female so if you are not serving your communities, what's the point?" she asks.

And for women navigating industries that may be resistant to change, she offers this unexpected advice: "Wear good shoes, because there's a lot of shattered glass around with all the glass ceilings being broken."

Her words resonate deeply in a world where perseverance and authenticity are key to dismantling barriers and paving the way for future generations. "Once you get through the glass ceilings, whether perceived or actual, I do think it's incumbent on people like me to reach back through and pull other people back up."