

LOCKERROOM: PROMOTING NEW ZEALAND WOMEN IN SPORT

Visibility & Portrayal

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LockerRoom – a section on the online news website Newsroom – is dedicated to promoting New Zealand women in sport. It is edited by 2021 New Zealand sports journalist of the year, Suzanne McFadden, and features daily stories from a string of columnists that include award-winning journalists and Olympians. LockerRoom is playing a major role in growing the value and visibility of women’s sport in New Zealand, by telling stories that aren’t being told elsewhere.

What is the purpose of the project?

LockerRoom’s purpose is to promote New Zealand women in sport via the online news website Newsroom.

Newsroom was created in 2017, with the purpose of filling gaps in the New Zealand media landscape. This goal was extended to women’s sport when LockerRoom became one of Newsroom’s major sections in 2018.

Before LockerRoom existed, the value and visibility of women’s sport in New Zealand was poor and (at best) intermittent. Now women’s sport stories are told almost every day of the week.

LockerRoom’s critical success factors include:

- The development of compelling content
- Engagement with a wide readership
- Securing financial partners for expansion
- Giving voice to more women’s writers on sport

What were the enablers that proved successful in your project?

- Funding: In a bid to give another female writer a full-time position, LockerRoom needed to find extra funding - and reached an agreement with broadcaster Sky NZ, who funded a two-year scholarship. Writer Ashley Stanley has filled that

role for the past two years, and won the award for NZ's best student journalist in 2020. LockerRoom also receives funding from Women in Sport Aotearoa.

- Reach: To further the reach of previously untold stories, NZ's largest website, Stuff, agreed to run every LockerRoom story daily. This has increased readership of women's sports stories tenfold. (Stuff subsequently started a Women in Sport subsection on their site).
- Female voices: Most mainstream newsrooms around New Zealand would have no more than two women working in their sports sections (typically less). LockerRoom was determined to give more women a voice, and has grown the number of female contributing writers and columnists in the country.

What impact did your project have?

At least three system shifts are occurring as the result of LockerRoom's daily coverage of women's sport:

1. LockerRoom has been a key catalyst in the increased coverage of women's sport by the mainstream media, perfectly illustrating that 'change inspires change'. In a recent Sport New Zealand study, coverage of women's sport nationwide has increased from 11 percent to 15 percent.
2. LockerRoom stories encourage more women to achieve their potential. The motto "If you can see it, you can be it" is highly relevant here. They also help young women to consider a career in sport – not only as an athlete, but in many related careers (even journalism!).
3. The increased visibility of women's sport is helping to engage and grow fans of women's sport. That includes more men watching women's sport.

What were the outcomes for women?

LockerRoom has been telling New Zealand women's sport stories almost every day of the week since early 2018. As a result, there is now a sizeable online collection of thousands of New Zealand women's sport stories. They include

profiles of athletes, coaches, administrators and leaders, overviews of major sport events, but also critical issues affecting women in sport – like mental health, female health, RED-S syndrome, diversity and inclusion. Not only has LockerRoom’s rolling coverage ensured that stories of moment are covered, but a comprehensive archive of women’s sport stories also exists for today and for the future as legacy pieces.

Related Links

-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/manusina-icon-forges-a-path-for-young-rugby-women>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/black-ferns-find-right-fit-with-new-kit>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/breaking-the-silence-on-syndrome-hurting-female-athletes>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/what-happens-next-to-women-in-sport>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/nz-athletes-leap-to-become-climate-change-champions>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/swimmer-leads-change-by-keeping-her-faith>
-  <https://www.newsroom.co.nz/lockerroom/nikki-hamblin-takes-fair-play-to-the-next-level>