

**#smashemsixers: A report on the matchday  
presentation of Sydney Sixers Women's  
Big Bash League games**

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**A report prepared for the Sydney Sixers**



# #smashemsixers: Sydney Sixers Women's Big Bash

## League games

### Executive Summary

Cricket Australia has recently launched #WATCHME, a powerful new marketing campaign created to promote the Australian Women's Cricket Team and the Rebel Women's Big Bash League (hereafter WBBL). This report provides an important empirical snapshot and analysis of Australian sports fans' current satisfaction levels and matchday experiences while watching Sydney Sixers WBBL matches. The research was undertaken for the Sixers with the purpose of examining gendered differences in motivations for attendance, consumption practices, and the overall value placed on women's cricket.

A review of academic literature and similar research studies/reports provides the theoretical and conceptual frameworks to evaluate the data generated by the current study. The research methods employed for this study included participant observation of four WBBL matches and an online survey of 308 respondents.

*The key findings from the qualitative observational data revealed that:*

- There were differences in the presentation of WBBL games compared to those of the BBL. These differences included food and beverage options, attitudes of stadium staff, and on field-engagement activities for fans.
- There were also notable differences in the atmosphere of the WBBL games compared to the BBL. The WBBL was observed to be more family friendly and less focused on established rivalries and competitiveness.

*The key findings from the survey data revealed that:*

- Male fans value women's sport less than female fans. This finding was indicated by the difference in ticket price valuation of WBBL games by male.
- Suburban and smaller venues appeal more to female fans than male fans.
- Female fans were more likely to prefer family zones, crowd entertainment and supporter giveaways than male fans.

The report offers six recommendations aimed to improve the overall fan experience of Sydney Sixers WBBL matchdays. These recommendations included that there should be no differences in the presentation of women's cricket matches compared to their BBL equivalents, and also, that the Sydney Sixers make wider use of new media channels to engage with female fans. Further, this report recommends that a fee be introduced for WBBL games that should be on par with the BBL to offer further legitimacy and commercial value to the women's game.

**Keywords:** cricket; women's sport; gender, WBBL; fan engagement

## Introduction

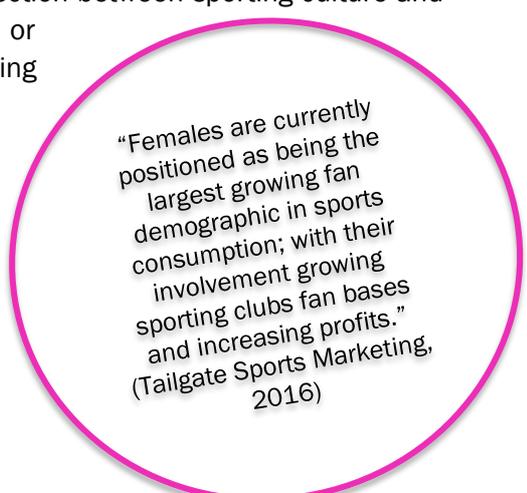
In 2015, Cricket Australia, the governing body of cricket in Australia, introduced a women's Twenty20 cricket competition, the Women's Big Bash League (WBBL). This new league aimed to capitalise on the success of the men's competition, the Big Bash League (BBL) that had been running since 2011, with eight city-based franchises. The Sydney Sixers, based in the state of New South Wales, won the inaugural BBL and have won the WBBL twice. The team is described as "the rockstars of the Big Bash" who "put on one of the best shows in town over the summer school holidays, with fireworks, music and fun over three hours of entertainment" (Sydney Sixers, 2018).

As outlined in the Australian Cricket Strategy 2017-2022, the investment in both the men's and women's BBL aims to deliver fan-friendly content to deepen cricket's fan base by fostering stronger engagement with women and girls. Although females have been participating in sport on a representative level since the beginning of the twentieth century, progress was initially slow. Australia's first female Olympians competed in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics (Australian Olympic Committee n.d.) and it was not until 2016 that Australia sent more females than males to the Summer Olympics (ABC News 2016). Indeed, women's sport in Australia has undergone rapid expansion in recent years. In addition to the WBBL, a new netball league was launched in 2017, as was the country's first national Australian rules football league for women, the AFLW. A new national women's rugby league competition followed in 2018. The W-League, the elite women's association football league had been running since 2008. However, women's sport in Australia continues to face a number of historical social, cultural, and economic barriers.

## Literature

Historically, sport has been the domain of males. The dominant classes have previously discouraged female participation in sport based on medical, aesthetic and social rationales (Kay, 2003). Indeed, women have been confined to the sporting periphery, with roles being limited to "spectator, supporter, and admirer" (Osborne & Coombs 2013, 673). However, despite Arthur Hopcraft's (1968: 179) famous saying that the sports crowd is always going to be "more vinegar than Chanel" female fans attendance at professional organised sport in Australia is increasingly. This can be observed specifically at the WBBL, which saw a 26 percent increase in attendance during the 2017-2018 seasons from the 1,863,846, set in the 2016-17 seasons (The Women's Game, 2018). Females are currently positioned as being the largest growing fan demographic in sports consumption; with their involvement growing sporting clubs fan bases and increasing profits (Tailgate Sports Marketing, 2016). The rise of female sports is also creating lucrative markets for various sporting codes. This trend can be illustrated by the large sell-out crowds for the Australian female association football team the Matildas, the success of the opening season of the AFLW (which maintained strong crowd attendance and televised audiences throughout), and most recently, the success and professionalisation of the Australian women's cricket team.

However, although sports fans are demographically diverse they are often considered as a homogenous group consisting primarily of white adult men (Sveinson and Hoeber, 2015: 405). Yeates (1995) examined how the media use masculinity to promote the connection between sporting culture and the performance of fandom by males, often to the exclusion or trivialisation of females. In this way, sports fans are presented as being predominantly "young, white, heterosexual mates bonding together through drinking beer" (McKay, et al. 2009: 173). In contrast, female fans are often constructed and confined to supporting and nurturing roles, mainly that of cheerleaders, mothers and girlfriends (Hutchins & Milkosza, 1998: 255; see also Oritiz, 2005; Harris and Clayton, 2004).



"Females are currently positioned as being the largest growing fan demographic in sports consumption; with their involvement growing sporting clubs fan bases and increasing profits." (Tailgate Sports Marketing, 2016)

The omission of females from research on sports is perhaps then because they are not usually modelled as fans of sport, but rather expected to be fans of soap operas and celebrities (Mewett and Toffoletti, 2008 see also Pope, 2011). Cricket (particularly test cricket) has a long tradition of being a masculine game which promotes 'good old-fashioned sledging' and 'old style Australian manliness' (Rowe, 2013). However, the creation of the WBBL creates a unique and exciting opportunity to explore how gender relations are played out in a sporting fixture that seeks to attract a more diverse fan base, focused particularly on targeting females, younger fans and their parents (Heenan, 2017). This literature review will explore rates of female participation in sport; the gendered nature of the Australian sportscape, as well as sports media. Subsequently, this section of the report creates a snapshot of the current climate of sporting culture in Australia, and provides an anchor to assist in qualifying the overall findings and recommendations of the report.

### *Female Participation in Sport*

Historical views on female participation with sport suggest that boys are more likely to participate in sport and physical activity than girls. According to the AusPlay survey, participation rates for NSW girls 14 years and under is 16% compared to 25% for boys; with a notable drop of girls between the ages of 12-14 years (Australian Sports Commission, 2016 cited in Office of Sport, 2017). Additionally, while sports clubs are the main avenues for both boys and girls to interact with sport throughout their childhood, boys (50%) are more likely than girls (33%) to be active through club sport (Australian Sports Commission, 2016). Given the clear benefits of regular physical activity (such as reduced risks of cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and obesity) exploring the reasons why young girls stop playing sport may be particularly useful for enhancing participation in sport and increasing their engagement rates throughout teenage years (Slater and Tiggemann, 2010: 620).

In a recent Australian study of adolescent girls (aged 13-15) multiple reasons were found to explain why girls might cease playing sport and/or engage with physical activity. Some of the reasons mentioned included: having a lack of interest, the investment of time and issues relating to teammates/peers (Slater and Tiggemann, 2010). In this study, a number of girls expressed difficulties in 'getting a shot' while playing on a mixed team, whilst others reflected that they felt they were treated differently while playing team sports because of their gender (Slater and Tiggemann, 2010: 620-622 see also Clark and Paechter, 2007; Cooky and McDonald, 2005).

Research focusing particularly on the issue of a lack of interest by females in sport have suggested this disengagement may be attributed to the lack of high-profile female sporting role models (Parry, 2009 see also Daniels, 2012; Meier, 2015). Although women's professional sport is gaining momentum and a greater share of media coverage in Australia, there remains a lack of visible role models in team sports, journalism and in the decision-making structures of sports organisations. A recent study by Dunn (2016) found that there is a particular need to advertise and emphasise the success of female athletes. This highlighting, she argued, would ensure that young women have female sporting role models to encourage on-going participation (Dunn, 2016 see also Bernstein, 2002).

Although research has suggested that only a small percentage of girls perceive a female sports athlete as a role model or mentor (Vescio et al, 2005), more visibility of females in the sporting context could increase participation and challenging traditional gender stereotypes discussed earlier within sport (Meier, 2015; Norton, 2016; Vescio et al., 2005). For this reason, the recent WBBL offers a unique opportunity to explore the experiences of fan engagement in a traditionally masculine sporting culture.



## Sport and Gender

Sports often are sites for reinforcing traditional ideas about masculinity – sport images and language often glorify a heroic manhood based on being a warrior – but when sports celebrate masculinity, gender ideology defines female athletes as invaders. Such gender ideology starts at a young age as due to their traditional position within the household women take children to games, prepare kit, wash kit etc. As an example, Howe (2003) found that women who participate in contact sports have difficulty finding acceptance for their bodies – bodies which are acceptable on the pitch, and may result in them playing as a prop for an international team, are not valued in society. Such gender ideology is often reinforced by those (men) who retain control over elite sports. Baron Pierre De Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, once stated that the role of women should be “as in ancient tournaments to crown the victor with laurels”. A century later Sepp Blatter (who was then President of FIFA, the governing body of world football) stated that: “Football is very macho...It’s so difficult to accept [women] in the game. Not playing the game, but in the governance”. Male sport continues to be seen as the ‘standard’ to judge sport in terms of status. Women’s versions of sports often are often ‘marked’ as the ‘other’ version and denoted as the women’s event. For instance, the men’s elite Twenty20 competition in Australia is referred to as the BBL while the women’s version is known as the Women’s BBL (see below for a full discussion of gender marking).

A strong masculine inflection heavily influences Australian sport and asserts and promotes hegemonic forms of masculinity against alternative versions and/or femininity (McKay et al 2001). Cricket, Australian football and rugby league have historically been identified as sports for ‘real’ masculine Australians, and are contrasted with Association football, which has been seen as suitable only for “Sheilas, Wogs and Poofers” (Warren 2003). These forms of masculinity are often promoted and reinforced by elements of the media.

## Sport Media Engagement

The mass media produce online articles, live streaming broadcasts, television, radio, newspapers and magazines related to sport which all play a major role in how female athletes are presented to the public. The media then can be considered as the ‘gatekeepers’ for choosing, creating and producing sports content that influences broader public perceptions of sports. Research exploring the relationship between the media and women’s sport overwhelmingly highlights the disparity between the coverage of men’s and women’s sport (Caple, et al., 2011; Cooky and Antunovic, 2018; Dunne, 2017; Darwin, and Sagas, 2017; Fink, 2015; Musto, et al., 2017).

Drawing on 25 years of research on female athletes in the media in the United States, Musto, et al. demonstrated that although women have made inroads into sporting realms only considered appropriate for men, the coverage of women’s sports has considerably “lagged far behind men’s” (2017: 576). Schmidt also found in his analysis of 30 years of sports reporting in *The New York Times* that 86.7% of all articles focus on men’s sport and male athletes, while just 5.2% focus on women’s sports and female athletes (2016: 275). Unfortunately, this pattern continues within the Australian media sportscape with women’s sport currently only receiving 7% of sports programming (Chalkley-Rhoden, 2015). Focusing on the Australian sports media, Lenskyj explored the pictorial content of *Inside Sport* (a popular sporting magazine in Australia) and argued that women’s representation in this magazine (and more broadly the Australian media) was misogynist and marginalised female athletes (1998).

More recent studies have suggested that not much has progressed, despite the incredible achievements and successes of the sports women discussed earlier (Quayle et al., 2017; Rowe, 2003; Whannel, 2005). For example, Quayle, et al. (2017: 15) examined the media reporting of the Australian Open in 2015 following two female tennis players being asked to “twirl” for the audience by commentators. Their research explored this event in relation to a larger semantic study which coded media statements describing male and female athletes during the tennis tournament. Overwhelmingly, male players were described in terms of mental, physical, tactical and personal characteristics whilst female

players were described in relation to their personal qualities, such as interpersonal relationships, feminine qualities, dress and off-court appearances (Quayle, et al., 2017: 8).

An explanation for the disparity between media coverage of male and female athletes can be understood through the concept of gender marking (Messner, Duncan and Jensen, 1993). Gender marking refers to the verbal and visual presentation of male athletes and men's sport in the media as being the norm, while rendering female athletes and their coverage of sport as secondary (Fink, 2015). This 'habit' was observed recently at the 2016 Rio Summer Olympic Games where the focus of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) coverage of female athletes was mostly on "socially acceptable female sports", such as gymnastics, diving, swimming, track and field and beach volleyball (Villalon and Weiller-Abels, 2018: 1141). The practice becomes problematic as the sports media reinforce normative patterns of gender (for example focusing on female athletes' hyper-femininity and heterosexuality) that serves to degrade other types of sports and female athletes sporting accomplishments and athleticism (Daniels, 2009 cited in Fink, 2015: 335).

Interestingly, the production techniques utilised by the media to create men's and women's sport broadcasts are also markedly different and portray women's sport as less important and less exciting (Fink, 2015). For example, Duncan and Messner (1998: 172) compared the technical quality and production value and contend that the "camera work, editing and sound were decidedly better in men's games than women's games". This finding is important because high-quality coverage builds audience knowledge, interest, and excitement for men's sport, whereas the lack of focus and production value in women's sport currently serves to "stunt interest in women's sport" (Musto, Cooky and Messner, 2017: 589). Additionally, the timing of sport broadcasts and the network the sport is shown on also have the capacity to draw audiences. As made evident when Cricket Australia launched the second season of the Rebel Women's Big Bash League. Channel 10, a commercial, free-to-air network televised the opening match of the season in prime time where the contest between Sydney Thunder and the Melbourne Stars attendance peaked at a respectable 637,000 viewers during the second session (Rizvi, 2016) - the opener of the men's competition attracted 1.5 million viewers this year (Cricket Australia, 2015).

However, current trends in media consumption suggest that there has been a shift in how Australians are consuming their sports media. Recent data from the Nielson Digital Ratings (Monthly) report noted that 11.4 million Australians consumed sport content on their smartphone, desktop or tablet during July, 2017. Interestingly, the number of females who went online for sports-related content during this period grew by 10% compared to 3% growth for males. Australians interest in women-specific sport leagues (AFL, Soccer, Netball, Cricket and Basketball) is also growing considerably. The Q2 2017 Neilsen Sports data reveals that 54% of Australians said they were interested in women's sports leagues, up from 51% in Q1, 2017. Despite the steady increase in volume and quality of women's sport participation over the last century, female athletes continue to be underrepresented across all platforms of the media (Sherry et al., 2016). However, the use of mobile technology to engage, interact and watch sport suggests that this trend may be changing and open up new and exciting platforms for fans to interact with women's sport. The recent introduction of the WBBL offered a unique opportunity to study how women's cricket is presented and how fans engage with it, gaining an insight into their perceptions and values.

## Methodology

A two-phase Exploratory Design mixed methodology (Creswell 2007) was adopted for this study. This approach recognised Jones' (1997) call for mixed methodology research into sport and its fans. Whilst many studies have understood sports fandom through the use of quantitative data (see; James & Ridinger, 2002; Hansen & Gauthier, 1994), reliance on only one research method can limit the opportunity to explore the norms, values, and meanings shared by large groups of sports fans in one setting. By utilising the research method of participant observation, in conjunction with quantitative survey data, this study

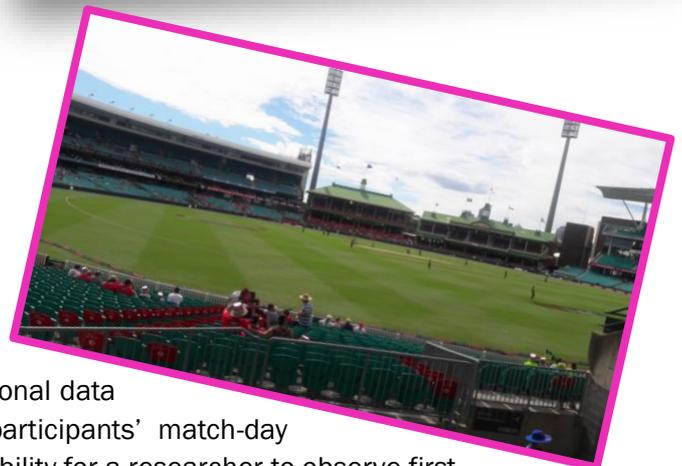
employed a multi-method design that aimed to enhance the overall validity of the project (Hammond, 2005).

### Observation method

The objective of the participant observation component of the current study was to gain an understanding of how fans experience WBBL match-day. Additionally, these observations provided an understanding of the games that informed the development of the quantitative survey. Fieldwork data was collected at four WBBL matches held at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) on the 13th and 18th January 2018 and Hurstville Oval on the 27th and 28th January 2018. The SCG is a large, historical venue near to the Central Business District (CBD) of Sydney that has undergone a number of significant redevelopments in recent years. It is an historic venue and, perhaps as a result, it is associated with social class segregation. It offers a membership package that provides access to premium seating and facilities but which has a waiting list of over ten years. Furthermore, a dress code is enforced for the members areas. The current 'Members Pavilion' was constructed in 1886 and retains some of its original features – it holds a sense of cricket tradition. More recently, a AU\$197.5 million Northern Stand redevelopment included boutique food and beverage facilities (with a 'food court' style area and a microbrewery) with integrated technology features. Hurstville Oval is suburban ground in Sydney's southern suburbs, approximately 20 kilometres from the CBD. It is also a historic venue, dating back to 1911. It does offer facilities such as big screen, ground announcements, food and beverage outlets and spectator seating but these are often temporary additions for certain games. Whilst there are various seating areas, they are generally unallocated and open to the elements. There is a small, covered grandstand and then several rows of tiered seating can be found close to the playing area, with grass banks offering additional, informal spaces for spectators. The ground is lined by trees and is less formal than the SCG in many aspects.

The first two matches held at the Sydney Cricket Ground generated approximately eight hours of observational data as observations included the men's games that followed the women's matches. These observations allowed comparisons to be drawn between the game offerings of both women's and men's matches at the same venue and women's matches at two very different venues. The second observations that took place at Hurstville Oval generated approximately four hours of observational data. Meân (2012) utilised a similar comparative method to look for gender differences in American basketball leagues through an analysis of the websites of the men's National Basketball League (NBL) and the Women's National Basketball League (WNBL). The current study followed a similar approach to examine differences between the BBL and WBBL.

One female researcher collected the observational data for all of the games gaining critical insights into participants' match-day behaviour before, during, and after the matches. The ability for a researcher to observe first hand direct observations is important for research on sports fans, as match-day is often lived as an entire day event (Richards, 2015). Additionally, the method of participant observation provided insights into



crowd processes, relationships among people and events, the organisation of people and events, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which the sporting event unfolded (Jorgensen, 1989).

Conducting fieldwork and locating the fieldwork observations in environments that best represent the objectives of the project was fundamental to the design of the research. The site of both stadiums remained the obvious choice to explore match-going fans engagement with the WBBL. The researcher was given a match-day pass that meant that the observations took place at various locations in and around the ground. These locations included the outside fan zones as well as various sections inside the stadium. Observations revealed that research participants varied considerably in match-day behaviour, team-related merchandise consumption, reasons for following the team, and the reasons for attending live matches. In addition, the researcher observed how fans interacted with each other, as well as noting the offerings that each venue had for the fans. The purpose of this focus was to provide a deeper understanding of fan engagement patterns and anomalies between women's and men's matches as well as the differences between the Sydney Cricket Ground and Hurstville Oval. Doing participant observation also enabled for a far greater proportion of the match day crowd to be observed including stewards, game officials, and merchandise and food providers (Richards, 2018).

A core component of participant observations is to ensure that what is experienced and observed is recorded through detailed fieldwork notes (Liamputtong, 2009). Recording fieldwork notes was at times challenging for the researcher whilst moving around the stadium, so notes were often detailed after the match. During observation however, the researcher used her mobile phone to write 'buzz words', or what Bernard (2006: 389) refers to as 'jotting notes'. These are short sentences or words that would later act as trigger material and assist in recalling events that had occurred during the observations. The fieldwork notes contained descriptions of group compositions, such as the age and gender of fans and their location in the stadium. The researcher also took a number of photos on the days of observations which aided her ability to keep 'track of the sequence of situations' (Kusenbach, 2003). This follows a similar pattern to that described by Kusenbach (2003) who used the "go-along" approach (which included using photographs, jotting notes and audio-recordings) to capture data in her ethnographic study of the streets of five urban neighbourhoods in Los Angeles.

This qualitative observational data was coded by the team of researchers using thematic analysis as described by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014). This process involved creating codes developed from the data, and then thematically organising these codes with evidence from the raw data. The four main themes that emerged from the observational dataset included: venue/location, presentation of the game, crowd and player interactions and differences between the BBL and WBBL.

### Survey Participants

Participants were a random sample of 308 who were invited to participate in an online survey via an email from the club to a list-based database of members. The gender breakdown was 159 females (52%) and 149 males (48%). The modal age was 18-24 years old. A large number of respondents (approximately 42%) were based in the Sydney metropolitan area and the state of NSW (approximately 33%). When asked where they had last attended a Sixers WBBL game, the most common venue was the SCG (46%, n=139) followed by Hurstville Oval (24%, n=72) and another suburban ground, North Sydney Oval (9%, n=26). 57 respondents (19%) had not attended a Sixers WBBL game and the remainder of venues were largely interstate locations that the Sixers had travelled to during the competition, such as the Adelaide Oval and 'the Gabba' in Brisbane. Interestingly, 34% of participants (n=94) did not purchase tickets or memberships to the corresponding men's games and the majority of participants were not regular attendees at BBL games, with 67% (n=187) attending 2 or fewer home games on average in a season. Approximately one fifth (21%, n=59) of respondents attended three to four games and 32 (12%) stated that they attended all home games.

### Measures

The survey instrument contained five sections. The first section asked participants to provide demographic information regarding age, gender, post code. In the following section, participants indicated

how many WBBL players they knew, if they wanted to know more about the players, and what information they would like to know. Response options to this question were player statistics, player history, player photographs, playing positions, social media contacts for players, and a free-text 'other' option. The third section of the survey focussed on consumption patterns and motivations. It first asked which venue the participants had most recently attended a Sixers WBBL home game and then examined the factors that influenced their decision to attend. This question was adapted from the Sport Fan Motivation Scale (Wann, 1995). This section concluded with a question asking participants to identify where they obtained information about the Sixers WBBL. The fourth section examined purchase intentions and the valuation of WBBL games. By using a 5-point Likert-type scale measured from much less to much more, we explored whether participants saw the same value in WBBL games played at suburban venues as at the SCG. Next, the likelihood that participants would purchase tickets to a WBBL game was measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale measured from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. A scale question then asked participants to identify what they considered to be a reasonable price for a general admission ticket to a WBBL match. The section finished by asking respondents to identify the matchday inclusions that they wanted to see at WBBL games.

Sections two to four were replicated for BBL games, with the exclusion of the question that investigated the likelihood of purchasing tickets. Two general questions followed, with the first asking participants to rate how likely they would be to spend more on food, drink, merchandise, charity donations, and transport if ticket prices were lower. Each item was again measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale measured from much less to much more. Finally, participants were provided with a free-text option to provide additional comments.

## Results - Observations

### Venue/location

The fan experience starts before the commencement of the actual game and incorporates the purchase of match tickets, traveling to the venue, and entering the ground (Parry, 2012). At the time of this study, entry to WBBL games was free with the exception of games followed by a men's BBL match, which included both of the WBBL matches that were observed at the SCG. For these games, spectators were required to purchase a ticket to the men's match regardless of whether they planned to watch it or not.

The stadium and its location play a significant role in the sporting experience. In this observation, both venues were accessible via public transport. While the Hurstville Oval is a short walk from the nearest train station, the SCG is 2 kilometres from Sydney's main transport interchange, but it does have a connecting bus route. Given its suburban location, free, on-street car parking is available at Hurstville Oval, whereas parking at the SCG costs AU\$25. On approaching the two venues, there is an obvious difference in size and grandeur. The SCG, which has a capacity of 45,000 has hosted elite level international matches for both men's and women's teams since the 1890's and is steeped in history and prestige. The stadium is an impressive and imposing venue within a larger sport and entertainment complex in the heart of Sydney. The area in the immediate vicinity of the SCG was lined with magenta (the Sixers' main colour) banners bearing the club's logo and a variety of stalls and activations linked to cricket generally or the club's sponsors. It was noticeable that a number of these engagement points were specifically advocating for women's sport and many provided activities for children. Inside the venue, there are fewer spaces for activations but the walls of the stadium concourses were decorated with images of the leading Sixers BBL players. The activations for children were primarily in the restricted access members area although giveaways of 'clap banners', inflatable hands, and 'KFC bucket head' hats were accessible for all spectators entering the venue. A variety of on-field fan engagement activities took place but these only occurred during the BBL game and there was a lack of any fan engagement activities in the long interval between the women's and men's games.

Hurstville Oval is nestled amongst houses in a suburb of Sydney and has approximately 1,000 fixed 'seats' (in the form of benches rather than seats) with further seating areas on the grass banks that surround most of the venue. The playing field is smaller than that at the SCG meaning that spectators are closer to the centre of the action. While women's One Day International matches have been played here, it is more commonly used for club cricket matches or domestic limited overs matches. Activations were present within the ground, utilising the open, grass spaces. A variety of temporary food and beverage stalls were also on offer. Some of these vendors had paid close attention to detail with Sydney Sixers-branded disposable coffee cups.

### Presentation of the game

Fan engagement interactions at the SCG were common and utilised the video screens to display live fan interviews, encourage participation through 'snog'/'wigggle'/jump cams, and social media photo promotions. There were numerous, adhoc activations encouraging the use of the free 'clappers', crowd cheers, and on-field sponsor-backed competitions. Given its larger capacity, it is perhaps unsurprising that there were more media/engagement staff present at the SCG than in Hurstville. However, the announcers appeared to be more enthusiastic at the WBBL games in Hurstville. There was extensive use of music to entertain the crowd at the SCG BBL games and to complement the ground announcements and game updates (for the incoming batter and score updates). Music was also used to fill 'dead' space when there was a lull in on-field action. For WBBL games at the SCG, the music was predominantly by female artists and many of the song selections emphasised strong and independent women (such as *Sisters are Doin' It For Themselves* by Eurythmics and *Run the World (Girls)* by Beyoncé). The choice of music was less extensive at Hurstville Oval, with the same songs repeated several times. At points, these songs felt out of place at the suburban venue.

There are a variety of food and beverage outlets available at the SCG, however, most of these options were only open towards the end of the WBBL match, awaiting the influx of people entering the grounds for the men's match. At the start of WBBL matches here, food and beverage options were limited and spectators had to walk further to find an available vendor. However, due to the small crowd size there was limited queuing and spectators were served quickly. It should also be noted that the food court area and the higher quality options are restricted to those sitting in the members section. Those in general admission have a more traditional choice of food and beverage offerings. At Hurstville Oval, there is a canteen which sold a variety of sandwiches, burgers, pies, soft drinks and snack food along with alcohol, at a considerably lower price than the SCG.



### Crowd and player interactions

The men's games were portrayed as a battle between rivals; a titanic struggle; a contest. The women's games were set up as an enjoyable family day out to support women's cricket and to be a part of the wider cricket community. The crowd sizes were considerably lower at the WBBL games than the following BBL ones with most spectators only arriving shortly before the latter match started. It should be noted that the

WBBL games here were on a weekday, starting mid-afternoon (with the men's games starting in the evening when more people had finished work). The large capacity of the stadium mean that the ground felt empty during the women's games. In addition, the aforementioned smaller playing area at Hurstville meant that there were more occasions when balls were hit into the stands, providing more opportunities for spectators to join in the action by taking catches.

There were noticeable differences in the behaviour of fans at the BBL and WBBL games held at the SCG. Verbal abuse or 'sledding' (Parry & Kavanagh, 2012) of players was also less frequently observed during WBBL games. In the BBL matches, fans would often direct comments towards players and the video screens replayed fielding errors or the wickets of opposition players to further mock them. Such practices were not seen during WBBL games and the atmosphere was more convivial and supportive of the players. For instance, at Hurstville, a disparaging comment from a male spectator on the standard of women's cricket was quickly corrected by those around him. Players of both teams were more frequently encouraged and congratulated for their performances with positive clapping and cheering.

During games, it was observed that the WBBL players were more focussed on the on-field action during and interacted with the crowds less than their male counterparts during their BBL games. Male players engaged with spectators on a more regular basis by, for instance, signing autographs when they were close to the playing boundary. However, it should also be noted that while the male players gave more interviews during play this can also be linked to the greater opportunities afforded by the larger media teams that covered the BBL matches.



## Results - Survey

89% (n=274) of respondents indicated that they wanted to know more about the WBBL players and 74% (n=212) wanted to learn more about the BBL players. The information that participants wanted to know was consistent across both WBBL and BBL teams with player histories, player statistics, and playing position the most popular choices (see figure 1). Participants were well acquainted with both the men's and women's team with the majority claiming to know 5 or more players (see figure 2). There were no significant differences between the number of WBBL players known by male and female participants [ $t(286) = -0.474; p = 0.636$ ].

**Figure 1. What information would participants want to know about players**

Information	WBBL		BBL	
	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count
Player history	27.42%	207	27.32%	162
Player statistics	26.23%	198	26.48%	157
Playing position	17.09%	129	17.37%	103
Player photo	16.69%	126	17.37%	103
Player social media contacts	11.26%	85	11.13%	66

**Figure 2. Number of WBBL and BBL players known**

Number of players known	WBBL players		BBL players	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
0	10	3.26	12	4.20
1-4	85	27.69	65	22.73
5-8	76	24.76	65	22.73
9-12	68	22.15	61	21.33
13-16	68	22.15	44	15.38
17-18			39	13.64

When asked what influenced their decision to attend Sixers WBBL games, the most popular reasons given by participants were the love of cricket (19.76%), supporting women’s sport (17.8%), entertainment (12.75%), team loyalty (12.09%) and to have fun (11.65%). Interestingly, a number of respondents alluded to the importance of female role models for their children, and specifically their daughters via the ‘other’ option for this question. When asked the same question for BBL matches, a similar pattern emerged with the most common answers being: love of cricket (19.67%), team loyalty (16.08%), entertainment (15.25%), and to have fun (13.36%) – supporting women’s sport was not an option for this question. Of the responses listed as ‘other’, the significance of the double-header with the WBBL game was a common theme, as was the significance of matches at the SCG – a number of respondents noted that they held memberships at the stadium, which provided them with access to these matches.

Interestingly, a more in-depth analysis reveals statistically significant patterns between respondents’ gender and factors influencing the audience’s decision to attend Sixers WBBL Games. Females are more likely to attend a game to support women’s sport. Following the same trend, it is women who admittedly attend the game ‘to socialise’ and ‘to have fun’.

**Figure 3. Factors influencing the decision to attend games**

Influence	WBBL		BBL	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Love of cricket	19.67%	179	24.47%	207
Supporting women's sport	17.80%	162		
Entertainment	12.75%	116	15.25%	129
Team loyalty	12.09%	110	16.08%	136
To have fun	11.65%	106	13.36%	113
Value for money	9.67%	88	11.23%	95
Socialising (family, friends or team mates)	8.90%	81	11.70%	99
To relax	4.84%	44	3.90%	33
Other	2.64%	24	4.02%	34

As detailed in figure 4, the most popular sources of information for participants included the club's website, the televised coverage of games, social media, and Cricket Australia's app. Intriguingly, the most popular source of information for the WBBL was social media. This trend may be reflective of the lower levels of mainstream media coverage that women's sport has traditionally received (Cagle, Greenwood & Lumby 2011; Musto, Cooky and Messner, 2017).

**Figure 4. Media sources used to obtain information on the Sydney Sixers**

Source	WBBL		BBL	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Sixers website	19.29%	174	19.54%	177
Radio	3.33%	30	3.20%	29
Advertising on television	5.10%	46	6.95%	63
Big Bash League Channel 10 coverage	18.18%	164	19.54%	177
Cricket Australia Live app	17.85%	161	17.22%	156
Newspaper	4.55%	41	4.86%	44
Social media	20.51%	185	17.77%	161
Online advertising	2.44%	22	2.98%	27
Billboards	1.11%	10	1.21%	11
Emails	6.21%	56	5.63%	51
Other	1.44%	13	1.10%	10

## Activations

To further explore the Sixers' WBBL and BBL offerings, participants were asked what matchday activations they prefer. Results indicated that supporter giveaways (of posters, clapper sticks, inflatable fingers) and crowd entertainment/activities were the most popular options for both WBBL and BBL games (see figure 5). Frequent suggestions for 'other' activations at WBBL games made reference to player interactions, with respondents keen for opportunities to collect autographs and photographs with players. However, several participants also commented that they had no interest in the activations and were "just in for the sport". These respondents wanted more time to watch players warm up, requesting that the venue be opened earlier. In addition, a number of participants identified differences in the presentation of the WBBL games when compare to the male equivalent as emphasised by this quote: "Stadium staff to realise we are there to watch the cricket - no just early for the men's match. Stadium facilities up and running". This comment is significant as it may indicate that venue staff do not place enough importance on the WBBL games. In addition, if facilities are not open and available to spectators the experience of attending WBBL is impacted as food and beverage offerings have been identified as a significant element of the matchday experience (Parry et al, 2018). While there were fewer recommendations for BBL games, there was again a desire for interactions with players.

Figure 5. Activations that participants would like to see included on match day

Activation	WBBL		BBL	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Family zone	19.89%	151	21.19%	153
Music	20.16%	153	20.78%	150
Crowd entertainment/activities	26.35%	200	27.29%	197
Sixers supporter giveaways	28.85%	219	27.42%	198
Other (please specify below)	4.74%	36	3.32%	24

There are interesting patterns which emerged when we analysed match-day activation preferences across genders. Amongst respondents identifying different options, females are significantly more likely to prefer family zones (61%), music (59%), crowd entertainment, and supporter giveaway activities (57%) than males. All statistics were significant at  $p = 0.05$ . This pattern indicates that the family friendly, fun atmosphere that Twenty20 games provide are more appealing for females, meeting Cricket Australia's strategic goal of fostering deeper engagement with girls and women (Cricket Australia, 2017).



## Value

There is a significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = .067$ ,  $p = .06$ ) between gender and preference for the venue that Sixers WBBL games are held at as males see less value in WBBL games at suburban venues than females. Similarly, a significantly greater percentage of men report less value for money in a BBL game at a suburban ground than at the SCG. These results suggest that smaller venues, which can be more intimate and family-friendly, will appeal more to females and can also help to deepen their engagement with cricket.

**Figure 5. Do participants value suburban ground matches as those at the SCG**

	WBBL		BBL	
	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency
Much less	6.48%	19	11.11%	30
Somewhat less	13.65%	40	17.78%	48
About the same	46.76%	137	50.37%	136
Somewhat more	16.72%	49	11.85%	32
Much more	16.38%	48	8.89%	24

The majority of participants (86%) indicated that they were likely to purchase tickets for Sixers WBBL games (figure 6). However, a greater percentage of females are significantly more likely than males to purchase tickets for a WBBL match [ $\chi^2(4, N = 276) = 7.895$ ;  $p < 0.1$ ]. This relationship may be linked to traditional views on women's sport (Meier, 2015; Norton, 2016; Vescio et al., 2005) and the unmet need for female athlete role models that continues to be seen.

**Figure 6. What is the likelihood that you would purchase tickets to attend a Sixers WBBL match?**

	Percentage	Frequency
Extremely likely	54.95%	161
Somewhat likely	30.72%	90
Neither likely nor unlikely	8.87%	26
Somewhat unlikely	3.75%	11
Extremely unlikely	1.71%	5

However, there were differences in the value that was placed on the women's and men's games. Participants were asked what they believed to be a reasonable price for a General Admission ticket to a WBBL game (see figure 7). Answers ranged from a minimum of AU\$1.10 to AU\$40 with a mean value of AU\$17.58 (SD = 7.64). However, results again indicate gender differences in price perceptions (Independent Samples  $t = .002$ ,  $p = .01$ ) with the mean price for females (AU\$18.92) significantly higher than for males (AU\$16.02). Participants were also asked to value a similar ticket to a BBL match. The

mean value was AU\$20.21 (SD = 7.38). In this instance, there was no significant gender difference in how the Sixers' BBL game was valued and the figure reported matched the price for a general admission ticket at that time, indicating that tickets for games are currently well-priced. However, this value is notably higher than for the Sixers WBBL match indicating that both male and female participants place greater value on the men's game.

**Figure 7. Perceptions of a reasonable price for a General Admission ticket to a match**

Value	WBBL		BBL	
	%	Frequency	%	Frequency
\$0.01 - \$5.00	2.9	9	.6	2
\$5.01 - \$10.00	11.3	35	.3	1
\$10.01 - \$15.00	18.4	57	3.5	11
\$15.01 - \$20.00	30.0	93	10.3	32
\$20.01 - \$25.00	17.4	54	29.7	92
\$25.01 - \$30.00	7.1	22	21.6	67
\$30.01 - \$35.00	3.5	11	11.0	34
\$35.01 - \$40.00	3.2	10	5.5	17

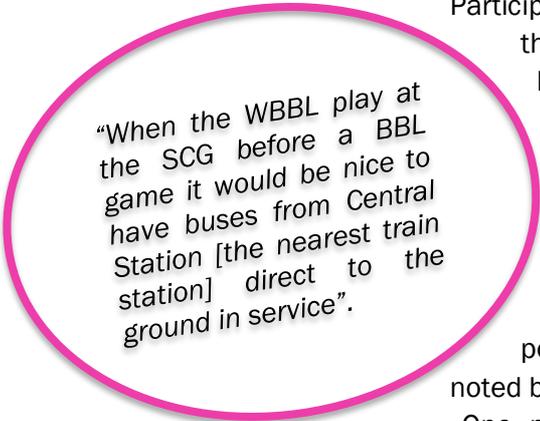
### Purchase Intentions

The final section explored the purchase intentions of participants if ticket prices (at BBL games) were reduced. Overall, participants reported that they were most likely to spend more on merchandise followed by charity donations, food, and drink. The amount spent on transport was largely unaffected by ticket price. Results showed a significant relationship between gender and likelihood of purchasing more merchandise ( $\chi^2 = .017$   $p = .05$ ), with women more likely to increase their spending on merchandise if ticket prices were reduced.

**Figure 8. Would participants spend more if ticket prices were reduced**

	Much less		Somewhat less		About the same		Somewhat more		Much more		Total
	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	
Food	4.12	11	7.49	20	57.30	153	25.47	68	5.62	15	267
Drink	6.37	17	4.49	12	59.18	158	23.97	64	5.99	16	267
Merchandise	3.73	10	4.48	12	36.94	99	39.93	107	14.93	40	268
Charity Donations	3.07	8	4.21	11	57.85	151	25.29	66	9.58	25	261
Transport	4.25	11	5.79	15	79.15	205	6.18	16	4.63	12	259

At the end of the survey, participants were provided with the opportunity to give any additional thoughts with a free-text option. A number of themes emerged, namely the price of attending, the scheduling of WBBL games, and the use of suburban grounds. Comments on price frequently referred to the food and beverage offerings (particularly at the SCG) and merchandise. As found by Parry, Hall and Baxter (2017), fans were willing to pay these higher prices if the offerings were of greater quality and if they were healthier options. In terms of scheduling, the time gap between the first WBBL game and the following BBL game during the 'double-header' matches at the SCG was identified as a point of frustration for some fans.



"When the WBBL play at the SCG before a BBL game it would be nice to have buses from Central Station [the nearest train station] direct to the ground in service".

Participants claimed the interval between the WBBL game finishing and the BBL game starting was often between two and two and a half hours. While it is recognised that there are often restrictions on start times imposed by broadcasters and other stakeholders at sporting matches (Boyle & Haynes, 2000) this gap results in a variety of issues for attendees, particularly as participants claimed that many of the food and drink outlets were not open before the BBL game started. The SCG is situated in an entertainment complex with a variety of food outlets but while it is possible to obtain a pass to leave and re-enter the venue it was noted by participants that these passes were not well-advertised.

One participant also noted an issue with bus services between the nearest train station and the venue, stating that "When the WBBL play at the SCG before a BBL game it would be nice to have buses from Central Station [the nearest train station] direct to the ground in service". It is noteworthy that participants identified discrepancies in the staging of the men's and women's games at the SCG, with a reduction in many of the supporting services that play significant roles in the matchday fan experience.

Finally, a number of comments indicated that in addition to being easier to get to, the atmosphere at suburban grounds was different to that at the SCG. One participant referred to it as "festival-like" that created a greater connection to players, while another identified that staff at suburban grounds were friendlier, claiming that "security staff [at the SCG] are some of the rudest people you will ever meet". Interestingly, one respondent indicated that the less formal nature of suburban grounds was actually a deterrent as they did not have the "premium seats" that they wanted.

## Discussion

The Sydney Sixers are clearly able to put on a high-quality matchday experience for spectators and there were high levels of satisfaction at BBL games. However, there were observed differences in the presentation of BBL and WBBL games at the SCG, with the perception of more investment in the men's game and greater availability of services. The perception of greater investment was created through a combination of closed food and beverage outlets, fewer replays on the screens, and fewer media and entertainment staff at the venue. As has been identified previously, women's sport is typically afforded fewer resources than male versions (Duncan and Messner 1998; Fink, 2015), which creates the perception that the 'product' on offer is of lesser value. It was found that the WBBL was valued lower than the BBL by participants but it is unclear if this evaluation is specifically due to the lower resources invested in the WBBL games.

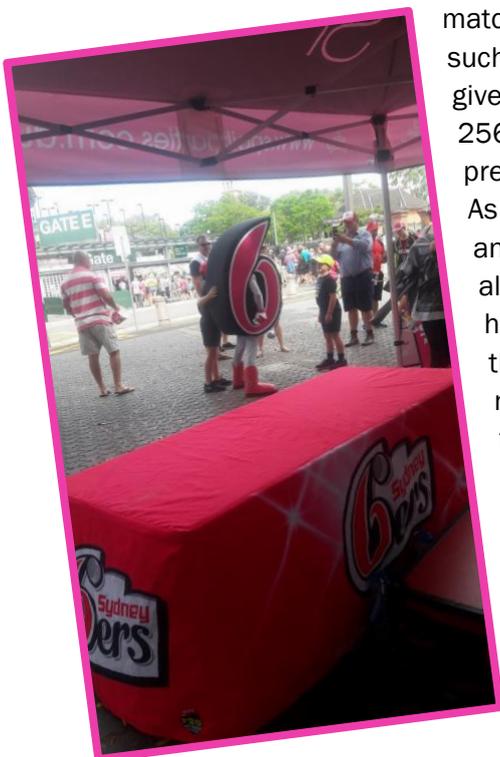
Before spectators can be expected to place an equal value on women's sport, it is important that those managing the sport (from senior administrators down to venue staff) are cognisant of the impact that subtle differences, such as closed food outlets and a lack of public transport options, can have on spectator perceptions. However, as noted above, there is a significant difference in the valuation of WBBL matches by females and males and females are more likely to purchase tickets for WBBL matches. What these results suggest is that there are still barriers to the full acceptance of women's cricket by males. It may be that a sport such as cricket, which is tied to notions of Anglo-Celtic masculinity in Australia,

continues to exhibit subconscious 'gender marking', with the men's game still seen as the standard by which the women's game is measured against. Although there has been an increase in 'interest' in women's sport leagues (Nielsen, 2017), there is still work to be done to change the perceptions and consumption patterns of male fans. Playing games at the SCG may add a sense of prestige and legitimacy to women's games but there are a number of issues associated with this venue. A positive matchday experience makes an event more enjoyable for spectators and increases the likelihood that they will return. However, a key contributor towards an enjoyable stadium experience is social interaction (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010; Koenig-Lewis, Asaad & Palmer, 2018), with fans enjoying both formal and informal spaces for socialising (Lee et al., 2012). While it could be argued that the large size of the SCG provides ample opportunity for fans to socialise with each other, this ability is negated when a small crowd is dispersed around the venue and ultimately contributes negatively towards the creation of the atmosphere. In the words of Lee et al (2012: 502), "space alone is not sufficient" to increase satisfaction and venues need to actively facilitate social interactions between fans. Hurstville Oval, with its grass banks around the playing area and open areas inside the perimeter fence offered more suitable spaces to allow fans to interact.

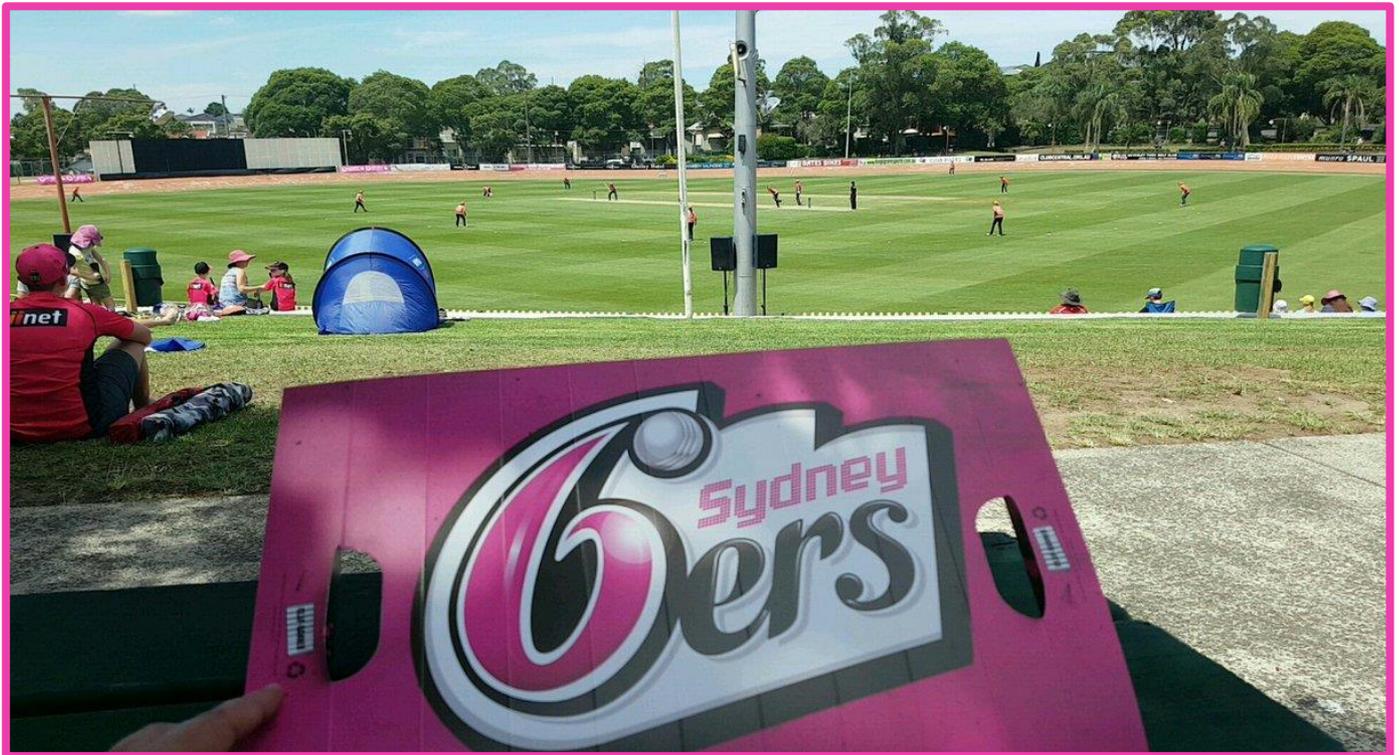


Furthermore, it has been shown that the stadium occupancy rate impacts on both the perceived game quality and the visit intention for viewers watching games on television (Oh, Sung & Kwon, 2017). The experience for spectators attending venues in person will also be positively influenced by stadium occupancy rates and a smaller, fuller stadium will provide a better atmosphere than a near-empty, large venue (Uhrich & Benkenstein, 2010). Although stadium atmosphere is not a well understood concept (Lee, Gibson & Barnhill, 2017), Uhrich and Benkenstein (2010) identified both the environmental features of the stadium and spectator-induced stimuli as factors in creating a positive atmosphere, which in turn influences spectators' decisions to reattend venues. It should be noted that highly identified fans can become so immersed in their fandom that they lose sense and their appraisal of the experience creates the impression that the atmosphere in the stadium is better than it was (Lee, Gibson & Barnhill, 2017).

It is also possible to make an economic argument for increased investment in WBBL matches, in addition to the above social argument. A study into American baseball found that total gross revenues from matches can be increased by spending more on marketing/promotions such as "low value merchandise giveaways, high value merchandise giveaways, group discounts, and fireworks displays" (Cebula et al., 2013; 256) and participants, particularly females, identified giveaways as their preferred matchday inclusion to add value to both BBL and WBBL games. As such, greater investment in WBBL games may increase attendances and generate higher revenues for the club. Filling a smaller venue will also drive higher demand for tickets thus creating the perception of a higher-quality product (Dramer, Shapiro & Lee, 2012). To ensure that this perception of higher quality is maintained it would also be necessary to address concerns around the availability and quality of food and beverage offerings at the SCG. In addition, lowering ticket prices, which could also increase attendance numbers, can generate higher revenue for the club as fans are likely to spend more on ancillary products and services, particularly merchandise.



Another 'battle' will be for an increase in media coverage. While the most recent cricket broadcasting rights deal promises an increase in the number of WBBL games screened on television (Smith, 2018), over half of the games in the 2018-19 season will only be live streamed on Cricket Australia's website and app. As a result, it is unsurprising that the primary source of information about the Sixers WBBL team was social media.



## Recommendations

Although we note that the Sixers can host one of the 'best shows in town', which has wide appeal to both males and females, there are a number of areas that could be addressed to further enhance the quality of this offering. Our six recommendations for the Sixers are:

- Ensure that there are no noticeable differences in the presentation of women's matches when compare to their BBL equivalents. Attention should be paid to subtle differences, such as the prominence of male and female players in marketing materials and the attitudes of venue and club employees;
- If double-header matches are held, the gap between games should be closed where possible;
- Host women's games at smaller venues as this move creates a 'better' atmosphere for spectators, enhancing their experience and in turn creates a demand-driven excitement. Smaller venues also allow the club to create more intimate, family-friendly atmospheres at games;
- Continue to make extensive use of new media channels to engage with their female fans in particular. While the club should also push for greater free-to-air television coverage of their games, consumption patterns are moving towards greater engagement with online platforms;
- Introduce a fee for WBBL games. This price should be on a par with BBL matches to ensure the

product is valued equally. However, it may be worth setting both of these prices lower than the current BBL rate as such a move may drive increased attendances at both games and should also result in an increase in sales of merchandise;

- Finally, the club should challenge male fans to 'walk the walk not just talk the talk' when it comes to supporting women's sport by addressing their perceptions of the women's game.

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## Appendix

### Age

Age group	Frequency	%
18-24	109	35.2
25-34	45	14.5
35-44	64	20.6
45-54	41	13.2
55-64	16	5.2
65+	5	1.6

### Postcode

The survey required each respondent to enter their home address postcode, similarly to the age responses, the research team grouped these to simplify the analysis of the data. The postcodes have been broken into the following categories: Sydney metropolitan region, NSW excluding Sydney, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia, and overseas. The postcodes for Sydney metropolitan area, rest of New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory were sourced from Impact Lists, a market list business directory (<http://www.impactlists.com.au/ImpactLists/media/list-tools/Useful-Postcode-Ranges.pdf>).

	Frequency	%
Sydney Metro	130	41.9
Rest of NSW	102	32.9
ACT	2	.6
Victoria	21	6.8
Queensland	8	2.6
South Australia	6	1.9
Tasmania	4	1.3
Western Australia	7	2.3
Overseas	12	3.9
Total	310	100.0