

# WOMEN AND SPORT IN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES: THE CASE OF *HOME GROUND*

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## FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN TELEVISION FICTION ABOUT SPORTS

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Since the beginning of the 21st century, representations of women on TV have grown exponentially both in quantity and in terms of the diversity of genres and formats (Lotz, 2006). Female characters in recent series are characterised by a shift from traditional—mostly stereotypical—roles towards new character types and traits, including archetypes traditionally associated with men (Hernández-Carrillo, 2022; Higueras-Ruiz, 2019). Contributing to this change has been the new context of production in the international television industry (Ruiz Muñoz & Pérez Rufí, 2020), with a larger number of women in senior creative positions (López Rodríguez & Raya Bravo, 2021).

At the same time, sport has become an increasingly prominent topic in TV fiction. The rise of digital streaming platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, AppleTV+ and HBO Max has contrib-

uted to the thematic diversification of television content (Evans, 2011), including an increase in the number of fiction series with sports-related topics. Some of these series have included storylines focusing on female characters (Gil-Quintana & Gil-Tevar, 2020), contrasting with the tendency towards male dominance in other media formats, such as sports-related fiction films. Indeed, women have traditionally been neglected on the big screen, relegated to a limited number of supporting roles that are generally subordinate to the male characters (Crosson, 2013; Cummins, 2009; Lieberman 2015; Marín Montín, 2021). There are also very few sports-related films that have explored questions of gender with a focus on women's experiences (Whannel, 2008), or in which female characters are more than mere sex objects for the male gaze in the traditional sense (Caudwell, 2009).

The growth in the number of sports-related TV series about women has coincided with recent initiatives calling for women's sports to be recog-

nised on a par with men's sports (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022). In the last few years, the proliferation of television fiction series about women in sport in different contexts and formats has allowed for the exploration of new issues that emerge when women are the protagonists rather than merely incidental characters (Gavilán, Martínez-Navarro & Ayestarán, 2019). Moreover, the increased presence of women in television fiction has resulted in the construction of more complex and realistic characters (García, 2022). Some series underscore the challenges and hardships that women have to overcome to succeed in the sporting world. Others explore issues such as the gender inequality or sexist behaviour that women in sports are subjected to. However, the plotlines of many of these series still reproduce a pattern associated with men's sports and with a hierarchical perspective that places males above females (Sezen & Çiçekoğlu, 2020).

Television series about sports can be found in a wide range of genres. A significant number of these productions are aimed at young audiences, featuring female protagonists who face all kinds of obstacles to make it to the top in their chosen sports. Examples include the North American series *The Kicks* (Alex Morgan & David Babcock, Amazon Prime Video: 2015-2016), about a young girl who plays football, and *Ride* (Jill Girling & Lori Mather-Welch, YTV: 2016-2017), about a girl at an equestrian academy. Among European productions, *Voetbalmeisjes* (Addy Otto, NPO Zapp: 2016-) is a Dutch series about a football team made up of girls of different ethnic and religious backgrounds who have to cope with sexism. Examples from Asia include the Japanese series *Shogi Meshi* (Nagisa Matsumoto, Fuji TV: 2017), about a professional *shōgi* player who ties her eating choices to her performance in the sport; the Chinese series *The Whirlwind Girl* (Xuan Feng Shao Nu, Ming Xiao Xi, Hunan TV: 2015), about a female martial artist whose path to success is marked by personal hardships, including the loss of her parents; and

the South Korean series *Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok-joo* (Yeokdo Yojeong Kimbokju, Han Hee, MBC: 2016-2017), about a university student who follows in her father's steps to become a champion weightlifter.

One of the most prominent features of these series is the importance they give to the emotions expressed by their young protagonists as members of a group of girls whose insecurities make them more vulnerable (Forteza-Martínez, 2019). Taking more of a feminist perspective, the Spanish series *The Hockey Girls* (Les de l'hoquei, N. Parera, TV3 and Netflix: 2019-2020) tells the story of an amateur girls' roller hockey team whose members have to fight to keep their team alive and demand greater visibility, crucially with the support of the boys' team (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022). There are other fiction series that are more drama-oriented, targeting an older audience and offering a more realistic reconstruction of a sporting world in which women play leading roles. Notable examples of this include the US productions *Hit the Floor* (James LaRosa, VH1: 2013-2018), *Pitch* (Dan Fogelman & Rick Singer, Fox: 2016) and *Spinning Out* (Samantha Stratton, Netflix: 2020): the first tells the story of a group of cheerleaders for a professional men's basketball team and the complex romantic relationships they form with team members; the second focuses on a young baseball pitcher who becomes the first woman to compete in the men's major league; and the third depicts a figure skater who, after suffering a serious injury, has to confront personal

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**THE PROLIFERATION OF TELEVISION FICTION SERIES ABOUT WOMEN IN SPORT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND FORMATS HAS ALLOWED FOR THE EXPLORATION OF NEW ISSUES THAT EMERGE WHEN WOMEN ARE THE PROTAGONISTS**

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**THERE ARE OTHER FICTION SERIES THAT ARE MORE DRAMA-ORIENTED, TARGETING AN OLDER AUDIENCE AND OFFERING A MORE REALISTIC RECONSTRUCTION OF A SPORTING WORLD IN WHICH WOMEN PLAY LEADING ROLES**

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and family circumstances that threaten to thwart her goal of becoming an Olympic medallist. Another in this group that is worthy of mention is *The Queen's Gambit* (S. Frank & A. Scott, Netflix: 2020), a US miniseries about an orphan girl who becomes a chess prodigy. What makes this series unique is the way it deconstructs the female stereotype with its depiction of an imperfect heroine who suffers from emotional disorders that lead to drug and alcohol addiction (Menéndez-Menéndez & Fernández-Morales, 2023).

The sitcom genre has also tackled the topic of women in sports. *Back in the Game* (Marc Cullen & Robb Cullen, ABC: 2013) is a series about a former baseball player who, after getting a divorce and changing her life, ends up coaching the school team that her son plays on. Recent television series that have combined comedy and drama include *Glow* (L. Flahive & C. Mensh, Netflix: 2017-2019) and *A League of Their Own* (W. Graham & A. Jacobson, Amazon Prime: 2022-). *Glow* is a series inspired by the television program *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (1986-1989), about the women's wrestling circuit, which offers a critique of the sexist degradation that women of different national, ethnic, racial and gender identities were subject to in those years (Sezen & Çiçekoğlu, 2020; Chow & Laine, 2022). *A League of Their Own* is an adaptation of the film of the same name (Penny Marshall, 1992) about a women's baseball team that competes in the top professional league in the United States during the Second World War. The series explores issues including the prejudices suffered by women due to their race, ethnicity or

class, as well as their sexual orientation and gender identity (Stier Adler & Clark, 2023).

In the context outlined above, the main purpose of this article is to analyse the representation of women in sport based on a specific case study: *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), a Norwegian drama series about a female football coach who is hired to coach a team in the men's premiere league. More specifically, this study aims to examine the contributions made by the series to sports-related fiction, to identify the gender issues explored in it, and to consider the gender stereotypes evident in the depiction of the protagonist. The methodology adopted for this research is qualitative, combining a case study with critical discourse analysis. The study sample is comprised of the ten episodes of the series' first season. The findings are organised on the basis of the recurrence of aspects that connect to three key points: the depiction of gender inequality, the protagonist's defiance of stereotypes, and female empowerment in the series.

**BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE COACHES IN FILM AND TV FICTION**

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The representation of gender in television entertainment generally reproduces normative roles, stereotypes and existing inequalities between men and women (Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay, 2021). In the case of television fiction, stories of heroism also include realistic depictions of women fighting against the patriarchal system (García, 2022). These elements have been reflected in certain sports-related film and TV productions that feature a female coach in a leading role. An obvious example of inequality in sport is the predominance of male coaches, who, despite the marked growth of women's sports over the past decade, still vastly outnumber female coaches in both men's and women's sports (DuBose, 2022; Walker & Bopp, 2011). Female coaches are practically non-existent at the elite levels of men's

football, largely due to the lack of opportunities for their advancement in a sport dominated by men (Norman, 2012). Moreover, female coaches face additional obstacles including less recognition for their work, sexual discrimination (López, 2017; Reade, Rodgers y Norman, 2009) and gender-based violence. In addition, women in coaching jobs find it harder to develop professionally and sustain a viable career (Solanas, Hinojosa-Alcalde et al., 2022).

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### **FEMALE COACHES HAVE RARELY BEEN PORTRAYED IN LEADING ROLES IN FILMS OR SERIES**

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To address these challenges faced by female coaches, the empowerment of women in sport is essential. Currie, Callary & Young (2021) describe one example of empowerment as when female coaches see themselves as participating and competing in a sport that they belong to, overcoming the social restrictions imposed on them. Another example can be found in organisational initiatives aimed at recognising the presence of women in sports, such as the program designed by Nike, in collaboration with Women Win<sup>1</sup> and Gurls Talk,<sup>2</sup> to help increase the number of female coaches through the creation of a network of mentors in order to prevent girls from leaving sports due to a lack of role models (Menéndez, 2020). Similarly, a group of Australian coaches of Muay Thai, a sport traditionally associated with men, created their own training program with a feminist dimension, specifically aimed at women (Nichols, Pavlidis & Fullagar, 2023). In addition, despite the limited opportunities, there are female coaches who have managed to reach elite levels in their chosen sports, such as Katie Allen, the only woman ever to have coached a men's field hockey team in Spain's First Division (Amorós, 2022). In the case of elite football, despite the growing number of fe-

male coaches on Spanish First Division women's teams, most aspire to make the leap into men's football (Puig, Tikas & Soria, 2022).

Female coaches have rarely been portrayed in leading roles in films or series. Notable among the few exceptions in the case of film are *Coach* (Bud Townsend, 1978), *Eddie* (Steve Rash, 1996), *Sunset Park* (Steve Gomer, 1996) and *The Mighty Macs* (Tim Chambers, 2009). These productions all portray women who try to take control of their careers and win the respect of the players, while challenging the traditional structures of their chosen sport (Lieberman, 2015). In the case of television fiction, a female coach is depicted in the series *Hockey Girls* with the character Anna, the new coach of the club's girls' division, who tries to develop unique strategies that distinguish her from her predecessor's male-oriented approach, and also calls on the players on the top team in the boys' division to support real equality (Tous-Rovirós, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022).

### **HOME GROUND: A PORTRAIT OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

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The characters in the series analysed in this article are people who have a direct relationship with professional football (players, coaching staff, management) and an indirect one (the players' families and fans). The team depicted in the series, around which most of the characters' relationships are articulated, is Varg IL, a top-tier team based in the small Norwegian coastal town of Ulsteinvik. Helena Mikkelsen is the main protagonist, occupying a central role in a story that follows her evolution as a coach. After playing football herself until the age of 24 and completing a master's degree at the School of Sport Sciences, Helena starts coaching Trondheims-Ørn, the top women's football team in Norway, leading them to three consecutive national championships and to the semifinals of the European Champions League. She then goes

onto become the first female coach of Varg IL, a men's football club that has recently risen to Norway's Eliteserien.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of gender inequality is made clear from the very beginning of the series, reflected mainly in two ways: the lack of parity between men's and women's football, and the lack of respect given to Helena as a coach. For example, the series' depiction of the current state of Norwegian football reveals the lack of women at the elite level by showing Mikkelsen as the only female present on a football talk show (Image 1). And when she talks about the state of men's football in Norway, her analysis is dismissed by two of the men on the show, who remark that "[...] passion and motivation can take you a long way in women's football, but in the men's game the demands are different [...] for the girls who play women's football it may be more of a so-

cial thing, a hobby, motivation is fine to get a spark going" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). In the same episode, her first interactions with the players in the changeroom make it clear that they have little faith in her, doubting her coaching ability and undervaluing her professional achievements. She also has to contend with the hostility of some of Varg IL's more extreme fans,<sup>4</sup> for no other reason than that she is a woman. This hostility includes sexist threats graffitied on her house and her car (Image 2) in an effort to bully her into leaving the club (#1x04: Supporters, Medgangssupportarar, Cecilie Mosli, NRK: 2018). Another example of the lack of respect for Helena is the constantly dismissive attitude of the club owner, who expresses his discontent to the board of directors and seeks to use the team's poor results as an excuse to get rid of

Image 1. Helena Mikkelsen taking part in VG Sporten



her, when in fact the real reason for his dissatisfaction is the fact that she is a woman (#1x09: *It Was a Very Good Year*, Over streken, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). The undervaluing of her work is made clear when, after she has been fired as coach, she receives an unexpected visit from the club manager and the players, who ask her to continue training the team in secret, to which she responds: “You want me to explain to Michael [the new coach] everything that occurs to me about tactics? And if it goes well, I let him take all the credit, in the hope of getting back the job I’m already doing. Do you think that makes sense?” (#1x10: *The Great Escape*, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). But the ultimate display of gender inequality identified in the series is the sexual assault committed against Helena during a match by the coach of the opposing team, who provokes her and grabs her by the vagina (#1x05: *Fair Play*, Stian Kristiansen, NRK: 2018), and even breaks into her house a few days later to harass her further, threatening her to keep quiet about the assault because he is afraid of losing his job (#1x06: *No Comment*, Ingen Kommentar, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). These various moments in the series reflect Helena’s immersion in a reality dominated by men and the patriarchal values associated with it (García, 2022).

Image 2. Offensive graffiti targeting the female coach



## HELENA MIKKELSEN AND HER DEFIANCE OF STEREOTYPES

Many of the situations that Helena experiences at different moments in the series relate to traditional gender norms whereby women seek social acceptance by means of both their physical appearance and their behaviour. These are stereotypes associated with femininity, such as physical beauty, vulnerability, motherhood and dependence, which are reflected by other female characters in the series, such as the players’ wives. Helena’s physical appearance is not stereotypical, as she wears her hair pulled back in a ponytail, uses no make-up and is nearly always shown in a sports training outfit. However, she occasionally abandons her usual style in an effort to conform to traditional gender standards, although this generally makes her uncomfortable. For example, when she goes to a business dinner with the club owner, Bjørn, and manager, Espen, she puts on make-up, lets her hair down and wears a red dress and high heels (Image 3). In this sequence there are also various pieces of dialogue that allude to this stereotype of femininity. Before leaving for the dinner, Helena justifies her attire to her family by explaining: “I have to go have dinner and be charming.” Later, when Espen meets her at the

restaurant, he tells her: “Concentrate on being polite and sincere; I’m sure you’ll charm him.” Then, when Bjørn himself sees her, he says: “What a beautiful dress. You should have worn it to the press conference too” (#1x02: *Jolly Good, Lads!*, Steikje bra, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

Another stereotype present in the series is related to motherhood, as Helena has a 17-year-old daughter, Camilla, who lives with her, although they don’t





Image 3. Helena Mikkelsen with Espen greeting the club owner

spend much time together because Helena prioritises her career over her home life. Helena thus challenges the conventional model of what a mother should be. For example, when she arrives home hungry and finds no meal prepared, she asks her daughter flatly: “Don’t we have anything for sandwiches?” Camilla replies: “I’m sorry. I forgot to go shopping” (#1x09: *It Was a Very Good Year*, *Over streken*, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). Helena is unable to take time out to do things with Camilla and she often makes promises that she ends up breaking. The sudden changes in her job situation as a coach spark a conflict with her daughter, who feels neglected and ends up leaving home. As she explains in the note she leaves behind for her mother: “I feel alone. If we had talked, things would be different” (#1x10: *The Great Escape*, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

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**THE DEPICTION OF HELENA IN THE SERIES ALSO CHALLENGES THE FEMALE STEREOTYPE OF DEPENDENCE, AS SHE IS NEITHER ECONOMICALLY NOR EMOTIONALLY RELIANT ON ANYBODY**

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The depiction of Helena in the series also challenges the female stereotype of dependence, as she is neither economically nor emotionally reliant on anybody. For example, just when the women’s team she is coaching is on the verge of qualifying for a major final, Helena decides to leave them in the interests of professional development and makes the jump to elite men’s football. Her fierce independence is evident in the first episode, when one of the women’s team players says to her: “You can’t leave us... we’ve come so far,” to which Helena replies simply: “It’s the Eliteserien” (#1x01: *Who Wants It More?*, *Den som vil det mest*, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Helena’s emotional independence is reflected in her choice not to have any emotional ties that might constrain her. This can be identified in the series, for example, when she deals with the sexual assault without any kind of support (#1x06: *No Comment*, *Ingen Kommentar*, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

Contrasting with the stereotype of weakness associated with women, Helena comes across as cold and calculating. She shows strength at different moments of tension throughout the series, such as when she has to negotiate with Varg IL’s owner to sign up a player at a decisive mo-

ment to keep the team from dropping from the top tier (Image 4). In this situation, she maintains her self-confidence and refuses to be pushed around, despite the owner's lack of respect for her when he tells her: "You are insolent, selfish and arrogant... I'm not going to bother investing in you" (#1x07: Deadline Day, Yngvild Sve Flikke, NRK: 2018). All these examples reflect how the depiction of the protagonist in this series abandons traditional models of femininity to offer a picture closer to the contemporary social reality (Tous-Rovirosa, Prat & Dergacheva, 2022).

### **FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN TELEVISION FICTION ABOUT SPORTS**

Another element explored in *Home Ground* is related to female empowerment, which is reflected by the protagonist in various situations. For example, Helena seizes the chance to coach at the elite level of men's football and advance in her career, drawing on her professional experience in the sport. This is evident in a conversation she has with the club manager, when she tells him: "I've been doing this for fifteen years... nobody wants this... more than I do" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Much later in the series when she is fired as Varg IL's coach, she is offered another opportunity to coach Norway's under-21 women's team because of her iconic status as a coach in the country (#1x10: The Great Escape, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). Her empowerment is also evident in her ability to take control of her own career; for example, when she is initially offered the job of assistant coach at Varg IL, she rejects the offer, telling the manager: "I don't want to be second coach; I want to be first" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). And in the same episode, when she introduces herself to the team in the changeroom (Image 5), she highlights her own agency in her description of her career: "I was a player, but at the age of twenty-four, I decided to become a coach" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

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### **HELENA'S LEADERSHIP OF THE TEAM REPRESENTS ANOTHER KEY ELEMENT OF HER EMPOWERMENT, EARNING HER THE RESPECT OF THE COMMUNITY IN A MALE-DOMINATED ENVIRONMENT**

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NRK: 2018). Much later in the series when she is fired as Varg IL's coach, she is offered another opportunity to coach Norway's under-21 women's team because of her iconic status as a coach in the country (#1x10: The Great Escape, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018). Her empowerment is also evident in her ability to take control of her own career; for example, when she is initially offered the job of assistant coach at Varg IL, she rejects the offer, telling the manager: "I don't want to be second coach; I want to be first" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). And in the same episode, when she introduces herself to the team in the changeroom (Image 5), she highlights her own agency in her description of her career: "I was a player, but at the age of twenty-four, I decided to become a coach" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

Image 4. The coach meets with the club owner







Image 5. Helena Mikkelsen in the Varg IL changeroom

Helena's leadership of the team represents another key element of her empowerment, earning her the respect of the community in a male-dominated environment. Particularly notable in her interactions with the players are her aggressive pep talks, especially during the matches, which ultimately influence the team's performance: "Let's go, boys! Let's give them a beating. Go for it tooth and nail. This match isn't going to be won by the best players, but by the team that can put aside all their bullshit" (#1x05: Fair Play, Stian Kristiansen, NRK: 2018). Meanwhile, Varg IL's fans, who initially reject Helena, end up praising her work, as reflected in their chants from the stands: "Nobody can beat our girl, our girl, our girl, nobody can beat our girl" (#1x09: It Was a Very Good Year, Over streken, Eirik Svensson, NRK: 2018).

The media coverage of Helena in the series is marked by a predominantly sensationalist tone, although occasionally it is more strictly informative, referring to issues related specifically to

the sport. For example, when she is introduced at her first press conference (Image 6 and Image 7), some media outlets react positively: "You're making history. You're the first female coach in the Eliteserien... You're a pioneer and a great role model for sportswomen" (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018).

Another aspect related to women's empowerment in the series is Helena's use of unique strategies that break with the traditional male approach to football. A glimpse of this is offered when Helena appears on a TV show explaining her work method, which is based on encouraging drive, motivation and passion, elements that led to her success as a coach of elite women's football (#1x01: Who Wants It More?, Den som vil det mest, Arild Andresen, NRK: 2018). Another example is when Helena applies her method to the men's team, as revealed in the following dialogue: "We're doing everything really well. Don't lose your concentration. We can do this" (#1x04:

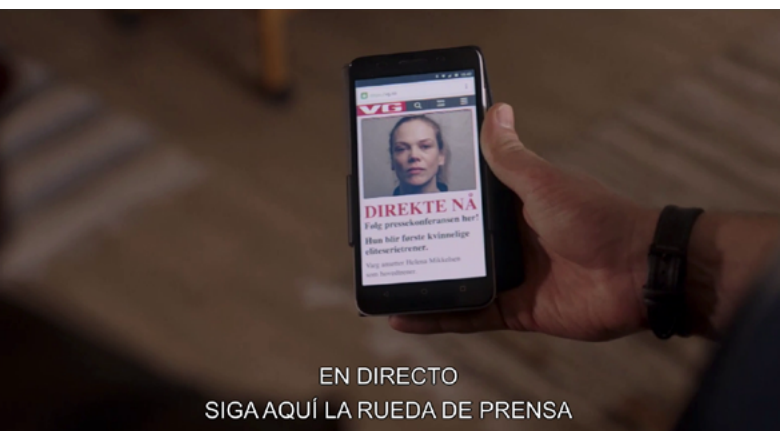


Image 6. Live press conference

Supporters, Medgangssupportarar, Cecilie Mosli, NRK: 2018). These various aspects associated with the empowerment of the female coach reveal how Helena manages to overcome the obstacles inherent to a predominantly male environment (Currie, Callary & Young, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

This analysis of the representation of women in sport in *Home Ground* has shown that its realistic depiction of a female coach in the world of men's professional football is the most prominent aspect of the series. The inclusion of various real-life elements serves to enhance the verisimilitude of the series' treatment of its sport-related subject. A notable example is the presence of the celebrated Norwegian former footballer John Carew in the role of Michael, who works with Helena as assistant coach. In addition, the depiction of the Eliteserien involves the use of the name and official image of Norway's real premier league, and the appearance of real teams such as Rosenborg and Aalesunds. Another element that enhances the realism of the series is the recurring presence of the Lerkendal Stadion, Norway's most emblematic football stadium, as well as the presence of real-world media outlets such as Norway's public television broadcaster, NRK, and the sensationalist tabloid VG.



Image 7. Helena Mikkelsen faces the media

The main sports-related issue explored in *Home Ground* is the upheaval of the traditional structures of men's football provoked by the arrival of a female coach. In the series, the rupture of the traditional all-male model in the sport at the elite level (Norman, 2012) unsettles various stakeholders, including managers, fans, the media and the players. Of the various gender-related issues identified in the series, gender inequality constitutes the most significant challenge that Helena Mikkelsen has to confront. This is reflected in the shortage of opportunities for a female coach to develop professionally and gain recognition in keeping with her achievements, as pointed out by García (2022) and Tous-Roviroso, Prat & Dergacheva (2022). At the same time, the extreme level of contempt for women is identifiable in the harassment suffered by Helena, which is depicted explicitly in the series, as she is the victim of gender-based violence used as a form of misogynistic intimidation intended to pressure her to give up her job. The analysis of the gender stereotypes represented by the protagonist has revealed that Helena deconstructs normative roles and disrupts the traditionally established binary order for men and women. Her defiance of stereotypes thus contrasts with the tendency identified by Marcos-Ramos & González-de-Garay (2021). Related to this point is the break with the classical female hero stereotype in film and television fiction, as described by Menéndez-Menéndez

& Fernández Morales (2023), with the depiction of a strong, independent woman who ultimately achieves success. Moreover, female empowerment constitutes a key component of the stereotype represented by Mikkelsen. The series thus constructs a world in which a woman is able to enter the elite level of men's football as a coach, which in reality would be highly unusual (DuBose, 2022; Walker & Bopp 2011). Another dimension of empowerment associated with Helena is related to how she consciously chooses every step she takes in her career, successfully overcoming the social obstacles placed in her way, in keeping with the findings of Currie, Callary & Young (2021). This study has thus shown how, although women continue to be under-represented in television series, *Home Ground* contributes to closing the gender gap in professional sports through the visibility it gives to a woman in a leadership position. ■

## NOTES

- 1 For more information on Women Win, visit their website ("Women Win", n. d.).
- 2 For more information on *Gurls Talk*, visit their website ("Gurls Talk", 2023).
- 3 The top-tier league in Norwegian football.
- 4 Fans are represented exclusively by men in the series.

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## **WOMEN AND SPORT IN TELEVISION FICTION SERIES: THE CASE OF HOME GROUND**

### **Abstract**

This article analyses the representation of women in sport in contemporary international TV fiction, based on a case study of the Norwegian series *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), about a woman working as a coach at the top level of men's professional football. The study also aims to examine the specific contributions the series makes to sports-related fiction, to identify the gender issues explored in it, and to consider the gender stereotypes evident in the depiction of the protagonist. The methodology used combines a case study with critical discourse analysis, taking the first season of the series as the study sample. The findings reflect the unexpected changes to the traditional structures of men's professional football resulting from the entry of a woman into this male-dominated world. The gender inequality faced by the protagonist, in a context of limited opportunities for her professional development, is also an important issue in the series. Another notable element identified is the defiance of traditional gender stereotypes, as the coach depicted in the series challenges traditional norms for women. Finally, female empowerment is reflected in the visibility given to a woman in a leadership position in a context characterised by male dominance.

### **Key words**

*Home Ground*; Television fiction; Series; Women; Sport; Gender.

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## **MUJER Y DEPORTE EN LA FICCIÓN TELEVISIVA SERIADA. EL CASO DE HOME GROUND**

### **Resumen**

Este artículo analiza la representación de la mujer en el deporte, a través de la ficción televisiva contemporánea internacional y, en concreto, a partir del caso específico de la serie noruega *Home Ground* (Heimebane, Johan Fasting, NRK: 2018-), cuya protagonista es una entrenadora de fútbol que trabaja en la alta competición masculina. Asimismo, el estudio busca examinar qué rasgos propios aporta la serie a la temática deportiva, identificar qué cuestiones de género aparecen y considerar qué estereotipo de género representa la protagonista en la ficción. La metodología utilizada combina el estudio de caso con el análisis crítico del discurso, siendo la muestra analizada la primera temporada de la serie. Los resultados indican cómo la llegada de una mujer al entorno del fútbol profesional masculino provoca cambios inesperados en sus estructuras tradicionales. La desigualdad de género, a la que se enfrenta la protagonista, en un ámbito de escasas oportunidades para acceder profesionalmente, es otro componente relevante en la serie. La resistencia a los estereotipos tradicionales de género constituye otro hallazgo destacado, ya que la entrenadora quiebra el modelo tradicional asociado a la mujer. Finalmente, el empoderamiento femenino permite visibilizar a la mujer en posición de liderazgo dentro de un contexto caracterizado por un predominio masculino.

### **Palabras clave**

*Home Ground*; Ficción televisiva; Series; Mujer; Deporte; Género.

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