

Women's football shouldn't be an afterthought

In 2019, I sat on a sticky leather armchair in a country pub and complained about the lack of football on the many big screens. France was hosting the Women's World Cup. The landlady, miraculously hearing my various grumblings from the other side of the pub, bellowed, "I'll only show the women's football if England make it to the final." Even then, equality was seen as a reward for excellence, rather than a right.

We've come a long way since then. Thanks in no small part to England winning the European Championships in 2022 (and again in 2025), record numbers are tuning in to watch women's football. Things should be on the up. Except, wait, what's that? It might not even be happening.

It's a long story that involves Fifa president Gianni Infantino, who has announced plans to sell stakes in competitions, including the World Cup, to private investors.

The Union of European Football Associations (Uefa), the governing body for football in Europe, has voted to boycott Fifa competitions – including the World Cup – if the proposals go ahead, with a statement saying the World is "not for sale".

While Uefa's boycott has received an outpouring of public support, if it's forced to go ahead, the first affected senior tournament will be the Women's World Cup in 2027. And that's just really sad.

But that's not even half of the story. Did you know there's a major women's tournament happening right now, and it's practically impossible to watch it? The 2026 Women's Africa Cup of Nations is underway in South Africa, and fans are struggling to watch any of it because of ongoing confusion between broadcasters and the Confederation of African Football.

Why does women's football so often bear the brunt of organisational failures? Is it reductive to suppose that it's because it involves, you know, women? While there's been no shortage of controversies in the men's game – hello, hydration breaks – you can still rely on broadcasters to buy the rights to show it.

Come June 2027, I want to walk back into that country pub and see all matches of the Women's World Cup blaring across the screens. Next week, I want to switch on my TV and see Senegal take on Morocco during the Women's African Cup of Nations. And right now? I need women's football not to be an afterthought in all the drama.

Lucy Morgan, Slate, 31 July 2026