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Sunday, 23 December 2012

Faster, higher, sexier: women in sport



Sportswomen in the media - as rare as unicorns*

Sports writers Phil Rothfield and Darren Hadland, in a 'lighthearted review of the year's sports highlights', today declared Black Caviar, a horse, as 'Sportswoman of the Year'.

Their 'Sportsman of the Year' is the Australian cricket captain, Michael Clarke.

In response to [outrage on social media](#), Rothfield pointed out that Black Caviar is a girl and implied that the piece was funny. Unfortunately, as [Wendy Harmer](#) has so effectively pointed out, this is wrong. He is possibly wondering why so many are so angry.

First, and obviously, a woman is a human being. In fact, a girl is also a human being. Black Caviar is not a woman, nor is she a girl. She is a female horse. It is both incorrect and uncalled for to consider women and horses in the same category.



For the record: Kim Crow is an *actual* sportswoman**

But the really offensive aspect of this ostensibly hilarious joke and the lame attempts to defend it, are that they reproduce the crippling sexism of the media in reporting women's sport. We know this article is sexist, because it would *never* happen to men's sport despite Rothfield's attempt to suggest otherwise. But it is also part of a much wider culture of sexism in reporting women's sport.

Women's sport is underfunded and women athletes are underpaid. Women's sport is [under-reported](#) and when it is reported, women athletes are often patronised. Older male Olympic Games commentators continually referring to [women as 'girls'](#) is an example of this. In another way, so is the sexualisation of the so-called [lingerie league football](#) where women are said to be athletes, but the context of the sport indicates its true agenda. In a similar vein, [Rothfield and Hadley](#) cited

About Me



Kate Galloway

I lecture in land law at James Cook University and I write and think about the nature of property and its representations in the law; about issues affecting women; about justice generally; and about legal education.

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I can read the sports pages of mainstream media for days and days without seeing a single report of a woman athlete or women's sporting competition. The message I get is that women simply do not play sport. This is patently incorrect. While I learn daily about the slightest twinge or pain (particularly in the groin region) in any number of sportsmen and endless speculation over their games, their training, their coaches and their administrators, sportswomen and their world of training, coaching and competition is all but invisible.

Invisibility is not a new experience for women and this accounts for the angry response to the Black Caviar 'award'. How dare the media heap insult onto injury by 'joking' that a *horse* is the best Australian sportswoman in 2012. The attempt at a response, namely that women can't take a joke, is a typical strategy of devaluing women's experiences, propping up the man's perspective and his status. This response confirms absolutely that this is no joke, but a deliberate belittling of women athletes. Perhaps if women athletes were more regularly and consistently visible in the media, there would not be so much outrage at this article.

It's about time the media stepped up. Failure to report women's sport daily, as men's sport is reported, is lazy and offensive to all of us who wish to know about all types of Australian athletes. It is also offensive to the many many women athletes who compete, coach, umpire and manage sport daily at all levels of competition. The newspapers that publish columns such as this one are as responsible as its authors in allowing the disgraceful imbalance in reporting of women's sport on a daily basis and the culture that validates it.

We should perhaps thank Rothfield and Hadland for pointing out so eloquently the truth about the culture of mainstream media when it comes to women in sport. Let's hope that the media is listening to the response.

**picture from <http://boingboing.net/tag/unicorn>*

***photo from http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2012/08/01/350681_sport-news.html*

Posted by [Kate Galloway](#) at [14:20](#)

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