

WOMEN IN SPORT

BEFORE ELSY JACOBS BECAME THE FIRST WINNER OF THE WORLD ROAD CYCLING CHAMPIONSHIP, WOMEN HAD TO FIGHT HARD TO EARN THEIR PLACE IN GLOBAL SPORTING LANDSCAPE. FROM SPECTATORS TO HEROES, FOCUS OVER MORE THAN A CENTURY OF FIGHTING FOR PARITY.



INVENTORY

AVANT QU'ELSY JACOBS NE DEVIENNE LA PREMIÈRE LAURÉATE DU CHAMPIONNAT DU MONDE DE CYCLISME SUR ROUTE, LES FEMMES ONT DÛ BATAILLER POUR GAGNER LEUR PLACE DANS LE PAYSAGE SPORTIF. DE SPECTATRICES À HÉROÏNES, BILAN DE PLUS D'UN SIÈCLE DE COMBAT POUR LA PARITÉ.

A BIT OF HISTORY

To fully understand the progress made and any delays, it is important to remember how far we have come from. Without necessarily going back to the ban on women wearing trousers until the painter Rosa Bonheur applied for an exemption in the 19th century, or to the legal status of women in Napoleon's Civil Code of 1804, when they were considered as "unable" in the same way as minors and mentally deficient persons, it has to be said that women were hardly welcome in sport either.

NOT IN FAVOR (1896-1924)

When Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the "inventor" of the modern Olympiads and nonetheless an well-known misogynist who must be seen in the context of hegemonic masculinist thinking, was called upon to include women, he made that kind of following comment: *"I remain hostile to such participation. It would be impractical, uninteresting, unsightly and - let's not be afraid to add it - incorrect. It goes against purity"*. In a nod to these repeated blows to the brakes, women nevertheless became Olympic athletes as early as 1900, at the first Games in... Paris. 18 women competed in the women's events of golf, tennis and fencing, as well as in the mixed events of sailing, croquet and horse riding.

Drowned in the Universal Exhibition, these games before their time paved the way, but the revolution was far from underway. In 1904, only 6 to 8 women (according to different sources) were allowed to take part in the Saint Louis Games (USA), all of them in archery. Four years later, the London Games, organized over 6 months and including the "Spring Games", "Summer Games", "Water Games" and "Winter Games", welcomed 37 women athletes. However, they were confined to four reserved disciplines: archery, figure skating, sailing and tennis. The IOC, founded by Coubertin in 1894 and made up exclusively of men, was reluctant to open the Olympic events to women, but agreed to include them in two new disciplines in 1912: in Stockholm, women competed in swimming and diving. 48 women did indeed take part in these Games, a significant increase that must be put into perspective with the exponential growth in the number of athletes: they represented just 2% of those entered. As a result, the first Women's World Games were held in 1922.





CATCHING UP (1924-1960)

It was not until the second Paris OG in 1924 and Baron Coubertin's last ones that real progress was made: 135 women were part of the 3089 athletes. Among them, Renée Brasseur and Lory Koster represented Luxembourg in swimming, while Rozel Le Gallais wore our colors in the tennis tournament. From 1928 onwards, after years of struggle by the Frenchwoman Alice Milliat, who campaigned for this opening up, sportswomen finally had access to the gymnastics and athletics events: our first representatives were Triny Bourkel, Milly Ludwig and Tilly Decker. But it took a long time for attitudes to change: after the 800 meters at the Amsterdam Games, the press was up in arms against Germany's Lina Radke, who won the gold medal. They mocked her lack of femininity, going so far as to belittle her achievement by arguing that women's physiology could not allow them to reach the required level. The IOC even took the decision (legitimately disclaimed by feminist movements, particularly in England) not to allow sportswomen to compete in races longer than 200m! It was an arbitrary decision that was not challenged until the 1960 Games.

In 1948, Dutch track and field star Fanny Blankers, urged by public opinion to go home and look after her children, was subjected to archaic laws that made it impossible for a woman to take part in more than three individual Olympic events. Having already won the 100m, 200m and 80m hurdles, she had to forego the long jump and high jump in London, despite holding the world record in these disciplines. She consoled herself by winning a fourth title in the 4x100m relay (considered to be the same event as the 100m), which earned her the distressing nickname of "flying housewife" by the press at the time.

The Helsinki Games (1952) were the first in which the proportion of female athletes exceeded the 10% mark. In the Grand Duchy, however, the pre-war patriarchy still had a bright future ahead of it: in 1956, the young fencer Colette Flesch, aged 19, had the opportunity to take part in her first Olympics. But she was discouraged from doing so, in favor of a man, as quotas since Los Angeles 1932 had restricted access to

the Games to three athletes per nation. Flesch had to wait until 1960, when the OG were covered entirely by Italian television, for her Olympic adventure.

A SMALL REVOLUTION (1960-1984)

Rome ushered in a new era for sportswomen, with its stars: the Black American Wilma Rudolph had an outstanding performance, winning gold in the 100m, 200m and 4x100m relay. The Czech Dana Zatopkova was no longer in the shadow of her husband, the legendary Emil Zatopek, when, at almost 38, she won silver in the javelin throw. The American Christine Von Saltza dominated swimming, collecting four medals and three titles, although she was a long way from the Russian gymnast Larisa Latynina, who raked in her usual average of 6 medals, including three golds in 1960, after her 4 titles in 1956 and two golds in 1964. The sexual revolution took hold and even the most reluctant minds were persuaded. At the 1972 Munich Games, infamous for other tragedies, more than 20% of the athletes taking part were women. Liselott Linsenhoff from Germany became the first woman rider to win an individual equestrian title. Soviet gymnast Olga Korbut followed in the footsteps of her compatriot Latynina by winning three Olympic titles, as did Australian swimmer Shane Gould, aged just 15, in the 200m freestyle, 200m medley and 400m freestyle. In 1976, Montreal organized the first women's Olympic basketball tournament and also opened up rowing to women athletes. Los Angeles 1984 inaugurated women's cycling with a road race and opened up shooting to women.



DEMOCRATIZATION OF WOMEN'S SPORT (1984-2012)

Aside from the Games, all the major sporting events are now featuring women: the women's Tour de France, after an isolated edition in 1955, will be a popular success from 1984 to 1989 as a curtain raiser to the men's stages, thanks in particular to local girl Jeannie Longo. Not everyone was happy about this, however, with cyclist Marc Madiot declaring to the champion in 1987: *"There are sports that are masculine, and sports that are feminine. For me, seeing a woman dance is very pretty. Seeing a woman playing football is ugly, seeing a woman on a bike is ugly..."*. In 1990, the two tours divorced and the women's tour, now known as the *"Tour de la CEE"*, faded from the limelight, like its competitor, the *"Grande Boucle féminine internationale"* and its successor, the *"Route de France féminine"*, which disappeared into general indifference.

On the women's side, after a number of competitions in the 70s and 80s, organized without its approval and bringing together international women's teams, FIFA decided at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico to finally look into the possibility of setting up a proper Women's World Cup: a full-scale test was carried out in 1988 in China in the form of a friendly international tournament. The first official Women's World Cup was held in 1991, at the same 4-year interval as the Men's World Cup, in an odd-numbered year immediately following the Men's World Cup.

With the reintroduction of tennis to the Olympic programme in Seoul, Steffi Graff dazzled the entire sporting world on mondovision by winning all 4 Grand Slam tournaments and the gold medal at the 1988 Games, proving that female athletes can be just as inspiring as their male counterparts, and that their performances are just as remarkable. It was with this philosophy in mind that the Barcelona Games introduced women's judo events. At Atlanta 1996, more than a third of the Olympic entries were women, and they were now able to take part in a women's football tournament (as well as beach volleyball). Four years later, in Sydney, the men's disciplines were extended to include the hammer throw, pole vault, water

polo, weightlifting and modern pentathlon, with women now accounting for 40% of participants. In November 1999, the FIA restored the reputation of Fanny Blankers, a four-time gold medallist in London in 1948, by honoring her with the title of female athlete of the 20th century. In Beijing, 127 women's events and 10 mixed events are on the programme for 2008. The organizing committee has also decided to reduce the gap between men's and women's participation by increasing the number of teams taking part in the women's hockey, handball and football tournaments.

THE NEW WORLD ? (2012-2024)

In 2012, for the XXXth modern Olympiad, London allowed women to take part in the boxing competition. These were the first Games in which women were allowed to compete in all 26 sports. Qatar, Brunei and Saudi Arabia eventually included female athletes in their delegations under pressure from the IOC, which wanted London to mark the end of the exclusion of women in every Olympic nation. The page of institutional sexism had been turned.

With *#Me Too* and then the pandemic revealing the daily violence against women, the last Summer Games were the first parity Olympics in history. A belated event, but one to be remembered: 5,250 male and 5,250 female athletes took part in Paris 2024. In boxing, a women's category even took the place of a men's event, a decision unthinkable until the start of the new millennium. Ordinary sexism has not been eradicated from the sporting sphere, however, as our colleagues at Slate pinpointed during the Rio Games by compiling the dubious comments made by French television journalists. Focusing more on the physical appearance or supposed emotional fragility of female athletes than on their sporting performances, we can hear many *"extremely pretty"* or *"cute and feminine"* alongside *"the chicks are crying"* or *"the two biggest drama queens on the circuit: there are going to be big demonstrations, screaming and tears"*.



- TIME TO SHINE -

While women are now an integral part of the sporting landscape, their media visibility and angle of approach still raise questions. In 2008, the famous benchmark French media So Foot reprinted a story from the Spanish daily Sport on the "Top 11 most beautiful women of the Euros"... All the more reason to wonder about the work still to be done. The "All In Plus, Promoting greater gender equality in sport" project, launched by the Council of Europe in 2018 and which will conclude its second session in La Coque in February 2025, focuses on media coverage of sport from a gender perspective. Media professionals representing all the member states of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport and other partner countries will benefit from feedback in collaboration with the International Olympic Committee and the European Broadcasting Union, providing them with best practices, such as those published by the town of Esch-sur-Alzette and ADT-Center in 2022 at the launch of its "Towards gender equality in sport" project.

The aim, according to Joëlle Letsch, member of the executive

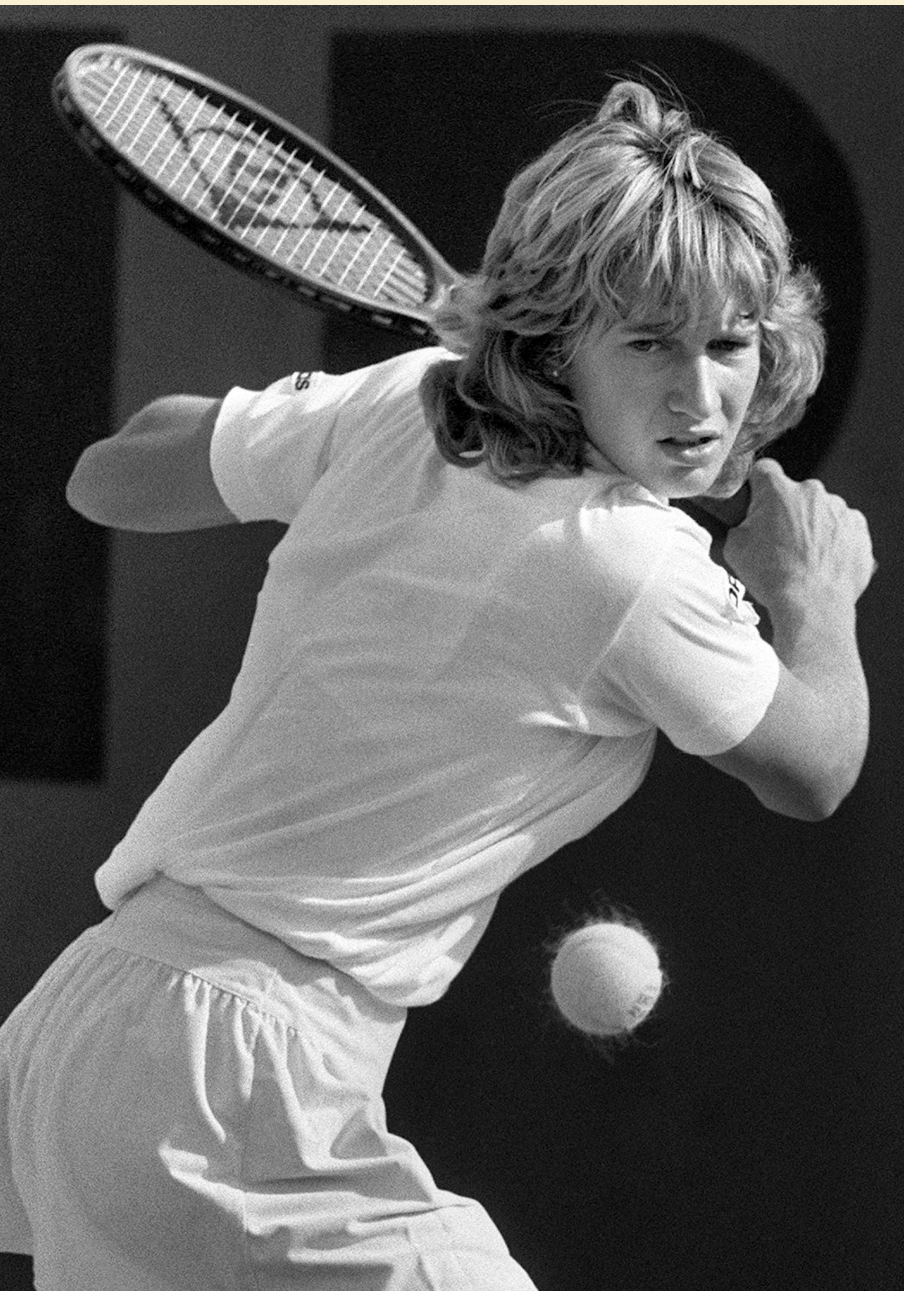


board of the Luxembourg National Women's Council, is to see "awareness and action continue over the long term, with the introduction of a Chart for Equality in Sport, which is intended to extend beyond the local area". By proposing areas for improvement and good practice, and by asking ourselves how we see things without ever passing judgment, these initiatives enable us to focus on valuing rather than stigmatizing or punishing discriminatory behavior that is deeply rooted in our way of life. "It's all about using education and subtlety to move the lines and change habits."

DEEP-ROOTED STEREOTYPES

These commendable initiatives are based on the universal observation that female athletes are treated unequally by the sports press, which often focuses on their situation (pregnancy, maternity, marriage, age) or their supposed attributes (grace, flexibility, aesthetic qualities), and presents them with condescending verbs ("participate", "According to the study Aesthetics over Athletics when it comes to Women in sport carried out by the University of Cambridge in August 2016, based on over 160 million examples contained in the sports corpus of its library!

The toolkit "How to influence gender equality in sport" published in 2019 by the Council of Europe and the EPAS stresses: "A solid body of research is devoted to analyzing the representation of sportswomen in different media, over distinct periods and in several countries. Generally speaking, female athletes are much less present in the sports media than their male counterparts. What's more, they are often portrayed in a stereotypical, comical, sexualized and even sexist way. Their physical appearance, femininity and/or sexuality are more often highlighted than their sporting ability. For example, between 1997 and 2008, only 38 (5.6%) of the 676 issues of the American magazine Sports Illustrated featured women on the cover, 12 of whom were not sportswomen but models in swimming costumes", citing the 2009



report "Women's Sports and Fitness Facts and Statistics" by the Women's Sports Foundation.

It is not uncommon even in the Grand Duchy to listen to an ordinary sexism of comments made "off the record" by some spectators and even journalists who come to watch women's competitions. While we have come a long way from the clichés about women's place would be "in the kitchen" rather than on the pitch - real-life memories of women players from the 1970s highlighted by Tessa Troes in her documentary "Um ball: 50 years of women's football in Luxembourg" (2023) - the sexist prejudices that have always existed in sport are still commonplace.

The Council of Europe nonetheless welcomes the progress that has been made, and there is no doubt that the next reviews following All in Plus 2023-2025 campaign will support this, particularly after the Paris Olympics Games, considered as being exemplary and respectful regarding parity.

EQUAL TREATMENT

The fact remains that women are not treated equally everywhere, including by the highest authorities. In Luxembourg, for example, we had to wait until 2024 for the Athletics Cup to bear the same name regardless of gender, like its counterparts in handball. A major step forward. Formerly known as the Coupe du Prince for men's athletes and the Coupe des Dames for women, the same is still true of the national football and basketball cups. With 45% of its members being women, athletics could not afford to sit on this change in mores. It's probably a different kettle of fish in basketball, where women account for 31% of active players, and even more so in football, where they make up just 8.07% of the competitive pool (figures from the Rapport d'activité du ministère des Sports - Exercice 2023).

- A RELEVANT COMPARISON -

Obviously, you have to compare like with like. Media coverage of women's sport and trends in the number of women taking part in sport cannot be compared in the same way whether the country has 67 million or 670,000 inhabitants. In the Grand Duchy, sports coverage by media is nowhere near the level achieved by our neighbors' written press, radio or television. If we compare the media coverage of football, the most popular sport in our country, with that of other, more confidential sports in France and beyond-Moselle, Luxembourg's coverage of football is more in line with that of archery. Inevitably, the first to suffer are those who are not only subject to the under-media-coverage inherent in women's events in even the most highly-regarded sports, a minority proportion of female licence-holders, and a 'quality of play' reputed to be inferior even though the spectacle on offer is said to be superior. Even so, this is the final domino, waiting for all the links in the chain to be improved upstream. The promotion of sport (and all sports) among young girls, training on a par with that offered by the staff of men's teams, or infrastructure that is at least equal. Some women's footballers have to give up their place if their training pitch is unavailable to the flagship team, and most do not play official matches in the club's A stadium and make do with the artificial turf, without bleachers. Not to mention the fact that there are still no plans to broadcast regular league matches.

Some disciplines are over-represented in terms of the number of women practicing: 59% of volleyball players are women; 2,316 women are licensed in gymnastics, representing over 84% of the FLGym's total; a figure that rises to 87% in horse riding. In federations that are already struggling to relay competitions and events on a national scale beyond their niche audience. And the situation is hardly any more exciting for the more popular competitions. More than once, politicians and sports media have asked the question: is Luxembourg a country of sport? While the answer seems to be no, at least as things stand at present, women's sport is the first to be impacted and left behind. If we had to conclude this dossier with a single idea, it would be to say that we aspire never again to deal with this subject in our magazines.

Because we will no longer have to ask ourselves the question of the place of women in sport, but that of sport in general, all genders combined, thanks to the results and performances of the athletes and teams who inspire the younger generations and serve as role models for little boys and girls, whatever the discipline concerned.

File written by our journalist: **Marco Noel**
AFP:
AFP



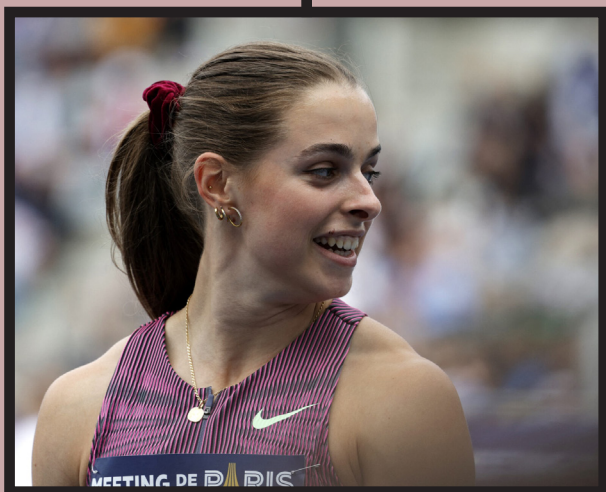
HEADLINERS

STARS HAVE AN OBVIOUS ROLE TO PLAY IN PROMOTING SPORT AMONG WOMEN. FROM MODELS OF PERFORMANCE AND RESILIENCE TO AMBASSADORS FOR THEIR SPORT, SPOTLIGHT ON SPORTSWOMEN WHO PROMOTE WOMEN'S SPORT IN THE GRAND DUCHY.

PATRIZIA VAN DER WEKEN

SETTLED TO LAST FOR A LONG TIME

Luxembourg women's athletics had its moments of glory in the past, with Danièle Kaber and her 7th place in the Seoul marathon, but never before had an athlete achieved performances able to put our nation at the forefront of the international scene. The Northern Arrow has achieved one feat after another in 2024, coming close to the 11-second mark in the 100m event, competing in a European Championships final for the first time and taking an historic 7th place in Rome, winning her first Diamond League against the best and reaching the Olympic semi-finals in Paris aged just 24. Enough to make any little girl dream! Beyond these results, Patrizia shows an iron will as she juggles between her sporting career and university studies, with a communicative joy of life : she proves that you can still have fun and be yourself even in top-level competition.



CHRISTINE MAJERUS

LONG TO BE REMEMBERED

Since the end of the Schleck brothers' and Kim Kirchen's era, no doubt she took a role model for Luxembourg cyclists of all kinds. Competing in the last four Olympics, she has steadily improved in the final rankings despite the years: 21st in the road race in London, she will be 18th in Rio, and even 17th in Paris for her last PG, at the age of... 37! An impressive career during which she dominated national debates, winning 44 Luxembourg championship titles, including 18 in time-trials and 12 in cyclo-cross. Despite her retirement she will continue to inspire all those who tend like her to ride on the roads of the Tour de France Femmes, reborn thanks to Marion Rousse in 2022. She retired after a last-ditch ride at the Tour de Romandie, where she finished 1'46" down overall and 2nd in the points classification. Following in Elsy Jacobs' footsteps as one of Luxembourg's cycling legends, she is also an ambassador for the local project "Towards gender equality in sport".



MARIE MULLER & JENNIFER WARLING

BORN TO FIGHT

The Stuttgart-born judoka who dreamed to look like Steffi Graff became a role model on the tatamis and throughout sport in the Grand-Duchy. Finishing fifth at the London Olympics 2012, Marie Muller came close to win Luxembourg's first medal since Josy Barthel! Jenny Warling is meanwhile the most accomplished karateka at 30, piling up awards and now competing in the sport's top category. She has followed in the footsteps of her elder Tessy Scholtes with brio, and is now a karate ambassador for all young Luxembourgers, while her career has been littered with injuries and comebacks, making her a model of tenacity and sportsmanship.



AMY THOMPSON, LAURA MILLER & MARTA ESTEVEZ

THE RED LIONESSES ROAR TOGETHER

At just 1.48m tall, Amy Thompson is nothing but a big girl. She proved over and over again that hard work and talent are no match for willpower. Whether with Mamer (and now Swift) or the national team, since her come-back from the United States she acquired the rigorous physical and mental preparation of a true champion. At 30, Rout Léiwinnen's most capped player (43 caps) brings the necessary grit to Dan Santos' entire squad. As does Laura Miller, a dazzling exile for the last 3 seasons at Standard de Liège after Metz and Montpellier: the 22-year-old midfielder sets as an example to all football fans of the professional path. Following in her footsteps, Marta Estevez, 27, has signed for Greek club PAOK Salonika. These three internationals are sure to inspire next generations.

Journalist:
Marco Noel
Pictures:
AFP
Serge Feltès
World Archery
FLF



XIA LIAN NI

ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE!

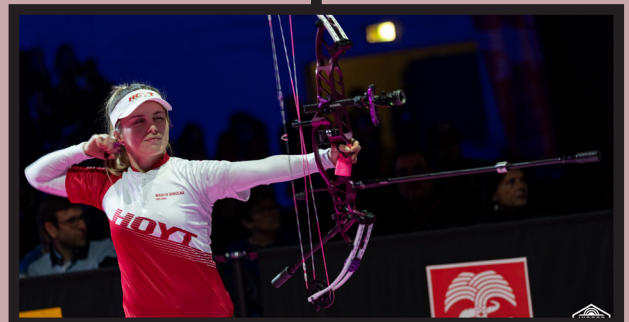
The most famous table tennis player in Northern Europe - if not the world - needs no introduction: all media in the world, His Royal Highness the Grand-Duke himself, and the Parisian public were not mistaken this summer, when the 61-year-old received a standing ovation at the end of her 6th Olympics. This longevity record commands respect. A model of courage (to succeed in qualifying under the new selection system), consistency (Ni never fall outside the top 100), and efforts to show that table tennis is available to all genders and ages. And that's not talking about the exceptional performances in the doubles with Sarah De Nutte and the mixed doubles with Luka Mladenovic, and her undiminished motivation that does not rule out a historic participation in a possible seventh OG.



MARIYA (SHKOLNA) KLEIN

EASTERN ARCHER

When she was born, nothing predicted that Mariya Shkolna will become a Luxembourg sportswoman. An archer in an archers' family, she first shot for her native country Ukraine, then for Poland, the land of origins, before a life-changing encounter: in 2015, she met Pit Klein, who would become her husband eight years later and would have her compete under our colours, much to our delight. Unfortunately, our compound bow champion has not yet had the chance to see her discipline endorsed by the Olympic Committee, but she could be hoping for a change by 2032. In the meantime, at the age of 26, she is putting in a string of performances in compound (12th in the world rankings), while also taking on the role of coach for Luxembourg's up-and-coming young talents.



Next generation

SOMETIMES IN THE SHADOW OF THE BIGGEST STARS, OR AT THE OPPOSITE IN THE SPOTLIGHT THANKS TO A PRECOCIOUS TALENT, THE NEW GENERATION OF SPORTSWOMEN FROM LUXEMBOURG IS ALREADY AT WORK TO CONQUER FUTURE MEDALS.



Céleste Mordenti
(21) / GYMNASTICS

Céleste moved up from the COSL Promotion category to Elite one in 2022 at just 19 years old and has since continued to represent our colors with dignity all around the world, narrowly missing out on Olympic qualification when she performed at the 2023 World Championships, and winning bronze at the World Cup in October 2024.



Marie Weckerle
(21) / TENNIS

Mandy Minella is full of praise for her. The young Marie who has already won three ITF titles is currently ranked 411th in the WTA rankings, a jump of almost 500 places this season. A No. 1 ranking in Luxembourg women's tennis that she is not ready to give up.



Anna Zens
(21) / FENCING

Luxembourg's fencing young star competed in her first World Championships in Milan in 2023, and got the word out about her ever since. She finished in the last 16 of the European qualifying tournament for Paris Olympic Games in April, and should keep lots of surprises in the forthcoming competitions.



Maud Allar
(16) / SWIMMING

The flag bearer at the opening ceremony of the European Youth Olympic Festival in Maribor 2023 has many great years ahead of her! Maud was admitted to the Olympic Committee's Promotion category this season after breaking her own national record in the 50m breaststroke at Euromeet in January, and coming second in the mixed 4x100m medley relay. This augurs well for the future of Luxembourg swimming with Emma Barthel and Jacqueline Blanky.



Léa Tonus & Kenza Pop
(17 AND 16) / ARCHERY

Both young women shine in compound archery, the favorite category of their mentor Mariya Klein, ten years their senior. For Léa, 108th in the world, the future looks bright with an average target of 9.08. Her youngest daughter Kenza still has encouraging room for improvement, with an average of 9.03 per arrow (157th in the world rankings).



Gwyneth Ten Raa
(19) / ALPINE SKIING

She took part in her first Winter Games in Beijing the year she entered the Elite category only at the age of... 16! 2022 was just a whetting of appetite before the Milan Olympics in 2026, the country where she trains aside the greatest champions.

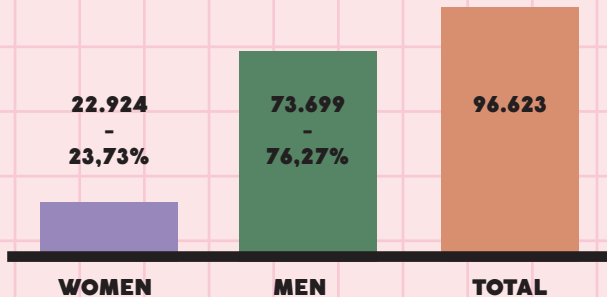
Journalist:
Marco Noel
Pictures:
AFP, COSL

SPORTSWOMEN IN FIGURES

WHILE MOST OF MEDALS AND TITLES WON BY OUR NATION IN 2024 WERE GOT BY WOMEN, SPORTSWOMEN STILL OCCUPY A VERY SMALL PLACE IN LUXEMBOURG'S SPORT ECOSYSTEM.

FEMALE PLAYERS

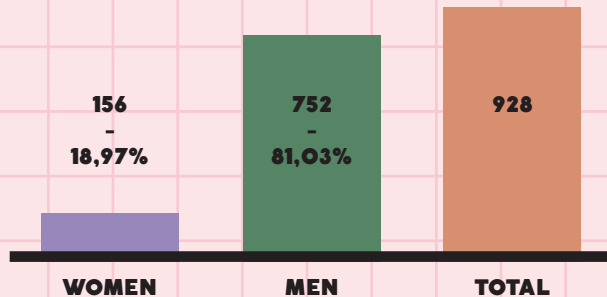
LICENCE HOLDERS ACTIVE IN COMPETITION :



Source : Ministry of Sport Activity Report - Financial Year 2023

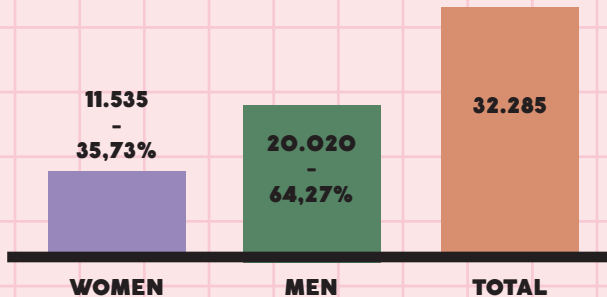
EMPLOYEES

EMPLOYEES IN SPORTS CLUBS :



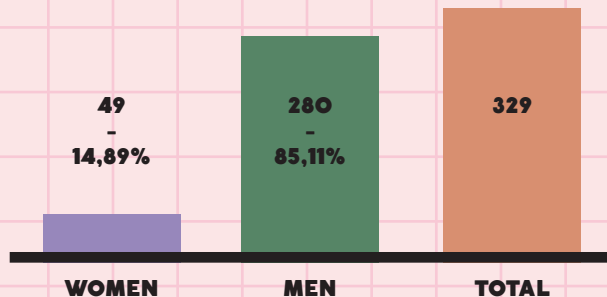
Source : STATEC - 27/01/2023 (2021 statistics)

LEISURE MEMBERS :



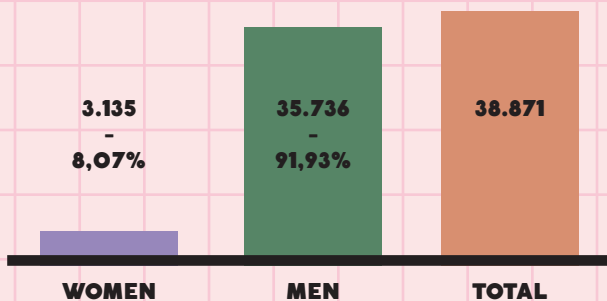
Source : Ministry of Sport Activity Report - Financial Year 2023

ATHLETES EMPLOYED BY CLUBS :



Source : STATEC - 27/01/2023 (2021 statistics)

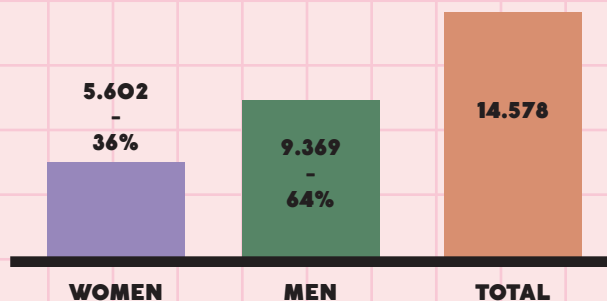
MEMBERS OF FOOTBALL CLUBS :



Source : Ministry of Sport Activity Report - Financial Year 2023

VOLUNTEERS

DISTRIBUTION OF VOLUNTEERS IN SPORTS CLUBS :



Source : STATEC - 27/01/2023 (2021 statistics)