

## Baz Moffat, CEO at The Well HQ

Good morning,

I'm one of three co-founders who've spent our careers pushing for the worlds of sport and fitness to do better in how they connect with, care for, and cater for women.

The Well HQ launched in 2021 and today we work with national and international sport governing bodies, gym chains large and small, regulators and businesses to advance the same mission.

I've gone back and forth on how to begin this speech. My first instinct was to describe the fundamental differences between women and men ...

I *could* tell you that women have breasts, periods, menstrual cycles and unique hormonal patterns. That our muscles, hips, knees and feet differ to men's in form and function.

The risk of starting there is that I'll insult your intelligence. Everyone in this room knows the female body is different to the male one.

But very few people – and this includes top-tier coaches, health professionals, and policymakers – know and appreciate that the differences in the female body and how it works translate into an entirely unique set of needs.

These are needs which must be reflected in strategy, education and culture.

But they're not. And right now all across the world **women are shoehorned into sporting systems** that were never designed for her.

We can all feel warm and fuzzy that women's sport is gaining in exposure, viewership and value. But it's a false dawn.

The fact more women are in gyms, classes and sporting pathway systems is actually a dangerous distraction from the truth.

The truth is that we're building in the wrong direction. We're building on quicksand.

What's happening now is not enough, and unless we in this room join forces and strategies then it's all ***very close to breaking point***.

My other starting point for this speech was going to be the past. And if you thought breasts and periods were uncomfortable **this is so much worse**.

In this room we hail from different places and cultures, but most European nations are similar in that our institutions – law and order, medicine, education, civil society – were born once upon a time in religion.

And though doctors share the responsibility, religion is largely to blame for women's relatively late arrival into sport.

See, not so long ago, preachers declared that exercise caused women to age prematurely; that female bodies and minds were too delicate to expose to the rough and tumble of sport.

It was said that participation in sport would damage her reproductive capabilities. That it would delay and distract her from her ***primary duties in life***.

Today we'd like to think we're more enlightened ... but we can't afford to be so naïve.

I mentioned earlier that women's sport is close to breaking down and it's precisely because old ideas about sport destroying our fertility, our femininity and our fragile bodies are creeping back in.

Sadly, because only 6% of sports science research is done exclusively on women, we don't have data to dispel the myths. The "truth" is up for grabs.

And until we in this room unite, we won't have the voice, we won't have the power and we won't have the cohesion to right-size silly rumours and mount an appropriate defence.

I'm not going to mention what's happening across the pond - I've only got 10 minutes.

But I've seen enough UK headlines in recent days – and this is in credible media – talking up the negative impact of sport and exercise on women: on our brains. On our fertility. On our musculoskeletal health. On our menstrual health. On our mental health.

Messages are coming through loud and clear and almost unopposed ... that when women participate in sport, it hurts us.

And the worst part is if we in this room don't unite, sensational claims and stories hold just enough water to sow doubt. Every Anterior Cruciate Ligament rupture in women's football, every fertility horror story, every head injury ... it's all enough to question the good we in this room know sport does for individuals, communities and nation states.

Women are not fragile, but the systems around us are.

Women learn to play sport via educators who don't know the female body with techniques that put our bones and muscles at risk. We play in kit and shoes that weren't designed for us and we base nutrition regimes on best-practice for humans in different bodies 1.5-times our size.

Breast pain, leaking, periods – the fundamental things that make us female are taboo and silenced in sport.

We've never had a system that works with the female body, only against it. It's time to change that.

Right now sporting systems the world over are still obsessed with the idea that women **can** adapt and fit if only we push them hard enough.

And for sure we're pushing. We're pushing so hard that women are breaking.

So, we need a new playbook. We need data. We need long-term studies. We need collaboration. We need governance.

We need to be strategic in order to address the gender gaps that are reported year after year after year. And we need to do it now.

**Now** is probably the biggest word in my speech. The best time for pan-European collaboration and strategic alignment is now. In actual fact it was 40 years ago.

Now is also the easiest time. Every high-profile injury and sport scare story raises the peak of the mountain we have to climb.

The good news is that we're not going from a standing start. There are pockets of progress all over Europe. There is a lot of good and much to build on. But we need to join together. We need a cohesive strategy if we're to move the needle and claim the truth.

For women's sport to thrive, she needs to thrive. For her to thrive, every female in every system in every country needs to know how she works. She needs to know how to train with her body – not against it.

This isn't a question of **If**. This is a question of **When**. This is going to happen. It has to.

We have to come at this with the same commitment, rigour, enthusiasm and resource as we do the other major issues of our time.

Because women's future in sport isn't as bright as we like to think. A generation of female athletes are, as we speak, sacrificing their bodies to light up a path that wasn't paved for us.

We need to build a new path ... in parallel, in collaboration, and in time.

That time is **Now**.