

2026 EDITION / WOMEN'S SPORTS & AUDIENCE EVIDENCE

Sportsmetric Sports Marketing & Fan Attention Report 2026

Women's sports, athlete audiences and observed brand activity

By Sportsmetric Research · Published 2026-10-29

Women's sports, athlete audiences and observed brand activity. This 2026 edition uses evidence available through October 29, 2026—not a full-year result. Its central finding is practical: a percentage-growth shortlist, an absolute-gain shortlist and a brand-evidence shortlist answer different questions. Treating them as the same ranking obscures both opportunity and missing information.

[Read the HTML edition and linked public evidence](#)

Executive findings: momentum is not the same as scale

Only 135 of 221 eligible tracked WNBA-linked profiles had usable audience-change measurements (61.1%). The 86 excluded records are missing or unusable measurements, not athletes with zero growth. This alone rules out a league-wide growth claim.

Within the 20 published growth leaders, Kaila Charles led by percentage (+41.45%; +15,331 followers), while Gabby Williams led by absolute gain (+43,003; +11.42%). Both observations cover September 29–October 29, 2026. Choosing a ranking measure changes the discovery decision.

The 20 selected leaders gained 154,948 Instagram followers in aggregate; their median individual growth was 8.04%. These are statistics of the selected leaders, not estimates for all 135 measured profiles, all WNBA players or unique new fans.

The public sports-creator top 20 contain 40 recorded platform counts, of which 3 lack observation dates. Dated counts span 2026-10-23–2026-10-29. A same-day edition label does not mean every platform was measured together.

A separate review of 63 already-published WNBA-linked player pages found 16 brand-sighting event records across 6 profiles and 12 brand labels. None of those records supplies a paid-disclosure field. “Seen in posts” must not become “paid endorsement.”

Scope and publication eligibility

The report is an original secondary analysis of Sportsmetric’s existing public, real-data snapshots plus two public league announcements. No private account-level audience models, unpublished warehouse rows, personal contact information or inferred commercial terms were added. Publication eligibility is bounded to records already exposed on the linked public profiles and ranking editions; the existing identity and publication gates were not relaxed.

The WNBA-linked growth source was published 2026-10-29T18:45:03.982Z; the public profile snapshot was generated 2026-10-29T16:52:42.461Z. The creator edition was published 2026-10-29T18:45:03.982Z. The three samples are separate and are not assumed to describe the same people. Recorded WNBA competition or roster evidence establishes inclusion in the source cohort; it is not a claim about a player’s current team, contract or active league membership.

We narrowed the women’s sports analysis to this basketball-linked cohort. There is no comparable reviewed women’s soccer cohort in this edition. The creator data supports a size-and-freshness audit, not measured creator audience change. We do not infer women’s audiences from athlete gender, or call account followers “fans” without qualification.

Evidence coverage — separate samples, not additive audiences

Evidence set	Available coverage	What is published here
WNBA-linked Instagram growth	221 eligible; 135 usable measurements	20 selected leaders; 2026-09-29 to 2026-10-29
Sports-creator account totals	8,837 eligible; 8,654 usable totals	20 published size leaders; platform date audit only
WNBA-linked public player pages	63 selected profiles	16 retained brand-sighting events; profile window 2026-07-29 to 2026-10-29
Official brand announcements	2 purposively selected league releases	2026-04-07 and 2026-04-13; not a market census

Finding 1: percentage and absolute growth produce different shortlists

Every row below has a real baseline on September 29 and endpoint on October 29, 2026, a 30-day interval. Percentage growth is $100 \times (\text{endpoint} - \text{baseline}) / \text{baseline}$. Values are rounded to two decimal places only for display. The table retains the source’s percentage ordering; there is no audience-size boost.

Gabby Williams accounted for 27.8% of the aggregate follower gain in these 20 selected leaders. Kaila Charles’s smaller baseline produced a faster proportional increase, but not the largest numerical increase. Neither result tells us which athlete would deliver better campaign performance.

A buyer looking for emerging momentum can start with percentage change. A buyer planning a larger account-level audience opportunity can also inspect absolute gains and current size. Neither is a measure

of incremental ad reach, sales or causal brand impact.

Selected top 20 by percentage growth — Instagram, September 29–October 29, 2026

Player	Baseline	Endpoint	Net gain	Growth
Kaila Charles	36,990	52,321	+15,331	41.45%
Gabby Williams	376,460	419,463	+43,003	11.42%
Naz Hillmon	44,962	49,939	+4,977	11.07%
DeWanna Bonner	108,696	120,286	+11,590	10.66%
Kayla Thornton	25,828	28,539	+2,711	10.50%
Janelle Salaun	31,309	34,542	+3,233	10.33%
Tiffany Hayes	113,758	125,222	+11,464	10.08%
Jordin Canada	87,944	96,325	+8,381	9.53%
Myisha Hines-Allen	35,241	38,258	+3,017	8.56%
Kaitlyn Chen	117,860	127,945	+10,085	8.56%
Makayla Timpson	40,852	43,925	+3,073	7.52%
Kiah Stokes	79,364	85,218	+5,854	7.38%
Cotie McMahon	59,653	63,640	+3,987	6.68%
Miela Sowah	29,412	31,274	+1,862	6.33%
Jessica Shepard	85,711	90,723	+5,012	5.85%
Marine Fauthoux	44,119	46,616	+2,497	5.66%
Pauline Astier	58,304	61,599	+3,295	5.65%
Allisha Gray	161,315	170,193	+8,878	5.50%
Brionna Jones	29,651	31,089	+1,438	4.85%
Rhyne Howard	112,151	117,411	+5,260	4.69%

Finding 2: the apparent middle is a selected-leader statistic

The 8.04% median is the midpoint of the tenth and eleventh values among these 20 leaders. It is deliberately not called “typical WNBA growth.” Selecting the fastest-growing accounts removes much of the measured distribution, including any slower, flat or negative observations outside the top 20.

This report does not retain the other 115 usable measurements and cannot calculate their median, total gain or direction mix. It also cannot establish why the selected accounts changed. Match results, news, creator posts, platform corrections and account cleanups may coincide with movement without causing it.

No event-attention timeline is published here because this report’s public sources do not provide a complete, aligned daily series for a defensible event comparison. Two endpoints support a net change, not a claim that attention rose steadily or persisted each day.

Finding 3: creator totals carry a freshness cost

The creator source contains 8,654 usable totals from 8,837 eligible tracked records; 183 did not pass its usable-total checks. Our audit is limited to the 20 published leaders, not the full measured pool. These profiles include individuals, media, clubs and organizations—not exclusively independent human creators.

37 of 40 platform-count cells have dates; 3 do not (7.5% undated). The 2026-10-23–2026-10-29 range is a spread in collection dates, not an audience-growth interval. Missing dates remain missing. Summing platforms does not deduplicate people or make the counts comparable in freshness.

For example, the published IShowSpeed record includes undated X and Facebook counts alongside dated platforms. FC Barcelona is a club account. These examples show why a large cross-platform total cannot be treated as a dated, human-only creator recommendation. This edition makes no creator-growth or creator-gender comparison.

Freshness audit of the 20 published sports-creator leaders

Check	Result	Interpretation
Recorded platform-count cells	40	Counts, not people or distinct fans
Dated cells	37	2026-10-23 to 2026-10-29
Undated cells	3	Cannot assign a collection date
Repeated audience measurements	Not supplied	No creator growth calculation

Finding 4: observed brand activity is evidence, not a deal register

The 16 records below were retained in the public events shown on 63 selected WNBA-linked pages for the window 2026-07-29–2026-10-29. Their retained event dates run from 2026-07-29 to 2026-10-24. They are event records, not a complete count of posts, partnerships or brands in the league.

The public export does not preserve a paid-disclosure field or the tagging direction for each record. Some linked posts are visibly hosted by a brand or publisher account. We therefore use “observed brand sighting,” not “athlete-authored ad,” “signed deal” or “official sponsor.” Dates below are the public source’s recorded sighting dates, not independently re-verified platform publication timestamps.

A page without a retained brand event is not evidence of no commercial activity. Public pages show selected recent events, and source matching and publication coverage are incomplete. This sample cannot estimate the prevalence of paid sponsorship or rank brands by investment.

Retained brand sightings — source links numbered in the sources section

Profile	Brand label	Recorded sighting	Evidence
Cameron Brink	Apple	2026-10-24	Observed sighting [P1]
Cameron Brink	PORTLAND GEAR	2026-10-19	Observed sighting [P2]
Cameron Brink	SLAM	2026-09-26	Observed sighting [P3]
Cameron Brink	FIJI Water	2026-08-01	Observed sighting [P4]
Monique Billings	Dove	2026-10-02	Observed sighting [P5]
Monique Billings	Spectrum	2026-08-31	Observed sighting [P6]
Monique Billings	Veronica Beard	2026-08-27	Observed sighting [P7]
Monique Billings	Athleta	2026-08-03	Observed sighting [P8]
Arike Ogunbowale	SLAM	2026-10-01	Observed sighting [P9]
Olivia Miles	Coach	2026-10-04	Observed sighting [P10]
Olivia Miles	GEICO	2026-09-28	Observed sighting [P11]
Olivia Miles	SLAM	2026-09-28	Observed sighting [P12]
Olivia Miles	Xfinity	2026-08-04	Observed sighting [P13]
Lauren Betts	Coach	2026-09-10	Observed sighting [P14]
Lauren Betts	Xfinity	2026-08-27	Observed sighting [P15]
Natasha Howard	Nike	2026-07-29	Observed sighting [P16]

Keep three evidence categories separate

An observed tag or sighting establishes a post-level connection to inspect. It does not establish payment, a contract period or available rights. A paid-disclosure label establishes that a particular post disclosed a commercial relationship; it still does not supply fee, exclusivity, duration or results. An official announcement states what its issuer announced at a date; it does not verify that every planned activation occurred.

Disclosed paid posts: unavailable in this report’s public export. We did not code any of the 16 sighting records as paid or unpaid, and report no paid-post rate. Unavailable is not zero.

Official announcements: the two 2026 examples below were checked against the WNBA’s public releases on October 29, 2026. They are illustrative, purposively chosen primary sources—not a comprehensive list or an estimate of market growth. Marketing language about engagement or cultural impact in the releases is not adopted as a measured finding.

Official announcements — separate from the observed-post sample

Release date	Issuer / relationship	What the source supports
2026-04-07	WNBA / Procter & Gamble	Announced multi-year, multi-brand league partnership; release describes Secret and Olay collaborations and Tampax draft activation. [A1]
2026-04-13	WNBA / Mars Snacking	Announced multi-year partnership naming M&M'S Official Chocolate Partner; release describes planned draft activation. [A2]

Practical implications for sports marketing buyers

Use three separate working lists: audience momentum, audience scale and commercial evidence. Keep platform, baseline, endpoint and evidence type beside every candidate. A smaller starting account can lead on percentage without leading on absolute gains, and a visible brand mention does not establish a paid endorsement.

Use the existing brand sponsorship tracker to inspect dated, sourced records, then record the exact source and evidence type in your own working shortlist. Confirm rights, category conflicts, disclosure, availability and pricing with the relevant representatives before an activation. Use the sports partner finder to compare dated public metrics only for what those values support; do not turn follower differences into a campaign forecast.

For women’s sports research, missing or uneven data is a decision input. Request the evidence needed for a specific brief rather than filling the gaps with a synthetic league benchmark. Official announcements and post sightings answer different diligence questions and should remain separate in a sponsorship report.

Methodology and reproducibility

Analysis and editorial responsibility: Sportsmetric Research. This is original desk research and snapshot analysis, not a respondent survey. The publication date is October 29, 2026; collection and event dates are stated separately. We have not claimed an independent external review.

Growth eligibility follows the source's active profile, active sports record and supported provider-identity gates. WNBA inclusion requires recorded competition or roster evidence. Shared Instagram accounts follow the existing directory deduplication rule; names are not used to merge identities. Latest snapshots must be no more than ten days old at publication; the baseline is the real observation nearest 30 days earlier within a 20–60-day interval. Missing, zero-baseline and stale observations are excluded; real zero and negative changes remain eligible. For these particular 20 published rows, all intervals are exactly 30 days.

The full 135 usable WNBA-linked measurements were ranked by percentage change in the source before publishing the top 20. Ties use absolute gain, then numeric profile ID. This report recalculates each displayed change from its endpoints, sums the 20 net gains, takes the median of their individual percentage changes and compares percentage and absolute-gain leaders. It does not re-query private data.

Creator eligibility follows the existing active sports-topic classification. Usable totals must equal available nonnegative platform counts, with inconsistent totals and explicitly shared handles excluded by the source. We count platform-date cells in its public top 20; we do not impute missing counts or dates.

Brand records are all retained partnership-type events on the 63 WNBA-linked player pages in the frozen public profile snapshot, with their original "seen in posts" labels and source URLs. We count event records, distinct profile names and distinct literal brand labels without merging corporate parents or inferring contracts. Official releases were separately selected and read at their primary URLs.

The offline report builder is `scripts/build-sports-marketing-report.mjs`. It reads the already-public snapshots and writes a frozen report document and a provenance manifest. The PDF generator `scripts/build-sports-marketing-report-pdf.py` reads that same document, keeping HTML and PDF findings aligned. Builds do not silently refresh this edition; any future edition needs a new dated review.

Limitations: what this report does not measure

This is a selected tracked-account study with incomplete coverage, not a census of the WNBA, women's sports, creators or sports consumers. Recorded competition membership may be historical. The public-profile sample and growth-leader sample are not interchangeable. Selection by recent activity and by fast growth introduces selection bias.

Account followers can overlap across people, profiles and platforms. Net account changes include follows, unfollows, platform removals and corrections; they are not counts of newly acquired fans. Two endpoints do not establish sustained attention, exposure or cause.

We collected no survey respondents, advertising spend, compensation, NIL valuations, broadcast exposure, fan demographics, sentiment, brand lift, sales or ROI. We report no audience overlap or brand affinity. No 2024 survey result has been relabelled as a 2026 finding, and this report does not reproduce Genius Sports

research.

Sources can be revised, deleted, inaccessible without platform login or stale after publication. Primary announcements describe issuer claims and plans at their release dates. Consult the dated linked evidence and current representatives before acting; missing evidence remains unavailable.

Continue your research

[WNBA-linked growth source: October 2026 edition](#)

[Sports-creator source: October 2026 edition](#)

[Public WNBA player and team profiles](#)

[Compare dated public metrics in the sports partner finder](#)

[Free sports marketing tools](#)

Sources and further reading

[A1] WNBA official release, April 7, 2026: P&G multi-brand partnership (accessed October 29, 2026)

<https://www.wnba.com/news/wnba-procter-and-gamble-partnership>

[A2] WNBA official release, April 13, 2026: Mars Snacking / M&M'S partnership (accessed October 29, 2026)

<https://www.wnba.com/news/mars-snacking-wnba-partnership>

[P1] Cameron Brink / Apple — recorded 2026-10-24; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/De7OLFjuT6t/>

[P2] Cameron Brink / PORTLAND GEAR — recorded 2026-10-19; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DesLsy2Sn7k/>

[P3] Cameron Brink / SLAM — recorded 2026-09-26; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/slam/p/DdwyYGICULg/>

[P4] Cameron Brink / FIJI Water — recorded 2026-08-01; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DcywE3Lu6dq/>

[P5] Monique Billings / Dove — recorded 2026-10-02; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DeABKELRdLO>

[P6] Monique Billings / Spectrum — recorded 2026-08-31; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Dct5OTpBznG>

[P7] Monique Billings / Veronica Beard — recorded 2026-08-27; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/monique.billings/p/DcjhcbfEW7n/>

[P8] Monique Billings / Athleta — recorded 2026-08-03; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/monique.billings/p/DbIpd7hkZVM/>

[P9] Arike Ogunbowale / SLAM — recorded 2026-10-01; public snapshot 2026-10-29

https://www.instagram.com/slam/p/Dd8Gj_tkaKo/

[P10] Olivia Miles / Coach — recorded 2026-10-04; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/coach/p/DeFqpCwFiHJ/>

[P11] Olivia Miles / GEICO — recorded 2026-09-28; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DdIWylcx1Ay>

[P12] Olivia Miles / SLAM — recorded 2026-09-28; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/slam/p/Dd1yWZhpTGW/>

[P13] Olivia Miles / Xfinity — recorded 2026-08-04; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/xfinity/p/Dej-wLyBXNw/>

[P14] Lauren Betts / Coach — recorded 2026-09-10; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/coach/p/DdUTjq7RNnt/>

[P15] Lauren Betts / Xfinity — recorded 2026-08-27; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/p/DckJCL1Rt7o>

[P16] Natasha Howard / Nike — recorded 2026-07-29; public snapshot 2026-10-29

<https://www.instagram.com/nikebasketball/p/DbZOr4pBkOi/>

Kaila Charles: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/kailacharles5>

Gabby Williams: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/gabbywilliams>

Naz Hillmon: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

https://www.instagram.com/naz_hillmon

DeWanna Bonner: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/dewannabonner>

Kayla Thornton: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

https://www.instagram.com/k_thornton6

Janelle Salaun: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/janelle.sln>

Tiffany Hayes: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/tiphayes3>

Jordin Canada: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/jaeeacan>

Myisha Hines-Allen: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

https://www.instagram.com/bpf_mooks_22

Kaitlyn Chen: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/kaitlyn.chen>

Makayla Timpson: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/kay.timpson>

Kiah Stokes: recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 (historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition)

<https://www.instagram.com/kstokes41>

Cotie McMahon: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/cotiemcmahon32>

Miela Sowah: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/mielasowah>

Jessica Shepard: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/jessicalshepard>

Marine Fauthoux: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/marine.fauthoux>

Pauline Astier: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/pauline.astier>

Allisha Gray: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

https://www.instagram.com/graytness_15

Brionna Jones: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

https://www.instagram.com/bri_jones18

Rhyne Howard: [recorded Instagram account; endpoint 2026-10-29 \(historical counts preserved in the linked ranking edition\)](#)

<https://www.instagram.com/rhyne.howard>

The takeaway

Use measured momentum to discover, dated scale to size the account opportunity, and explicit sources to verify brand evidence. None substitutes for campaign outcomes or commercial diligence.

[Open the free brand sponsorship tracker](#)