Detroit 2029 WNBA Sponsorship and Ticketing Strategy

Mekhi Simpson

Sports Industry Management, Georgetown University

MPSM 7990: Capstone

Professor Lorenzen and Advisor Anson Hargadine

May 3, 2026

Table of Contents

DETROIT 2029 WNBA SPONSORSHIP AND TICKETING STRATEGY 1

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4

INTRODUCTION 5

THESIS STATEMENT 5

LITERATURE REVIEW 5

The Women's Sports Fan Base 6

The Commercialization of Women's Sports 7

Stakeholders & Investment Momentum 7

The WNBA's Momentum 8

Ticketing & Sponsorships Background 11

Ticketing 11

Sponsorships 13

A DETROIT SHOCK CASE STUDY 14

Macroeconomic Pressures on the Detroit Sports Market 15

Ownership, Financial Losses, and Relocation 16

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS 17

Company 18

Customers 18

Competitors 19

FINANCIAL & OUTCOME ANALYSIS 20

Analytical Assumptions 20

Financial Analysis 21

Ticketing Revenues & Costs 21

Sponsorship Revenue & Costs 23

RECOMMENDATIONS 26

Ticketing Strategy 26

Pricing and Product Design 26

Season Ticket & Membership Strategy 27

Membership Benefits and Growth Strategy *28*

Theme Nights *29*

SPONSORSHIP STRATEGY 29

Target Categories & Sponsor Profile *30*

Asset Design & Packaging *31*

Sponsor Management *32*

CONCLUSION **33**

APPENDIX A **35**

Table 1 ..... *36*

Ticketing Revenue, Costs, and Profit *36*

Table 2 ..... *36*

Sponsorship Revenue, Costs, and Profit *36*

Table 3 ..... *36*

Combined Revenue, Costs, and Profit *36*

REFERENCES **37**

Executive Summary

The WNBA plans to expand to Detroit in 2029 with the backing of Detroit Pistons owner Tom Gores, sharing Little Caesars Arena and inheriting a previously engaged fan base from the Detroit Shock, the WNBA team that preceded it (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025). The franchise is entering one of the most competitive markets in North America with both structural advantages and real financial risks.

This paper asserts that the franchise can reach financial stability in five seasons by executing a disciplined ticketing and sponsorship strategy built on fan loyalty. Detroit's projected year-one ticket revenue is $20.8 million, and sponsorship revenue is $1.7 million, growing to $30.7 million and $5.6 million, respectively, by year 5. Variable pricing, rather than dynamic pricing, can build fan trust in early years. A Shock Legacy membership plan can convert Detroit's existing women's basketball fan base into season ticket holders. To avoid the Shock's mistakes, having a diverse portfolio and targeting value-aligned sponsor categories of women's health, family consumer brands, digital platforms, and insurance can create a stable group of sponsors that fans connect with. Capitalizing on the Pistons' existing sponsor relationships gives Detroit a built-in path to securing its first wave of founding partners before the inaugural season, an avenue that the Shock never leveraged.

To evaluate this claim, this paper examines the commercialization of women's sports, the WNBA's business trajectory, ticketing and sponsorship tactics, the Shock's relocation, and a five-year ticketing and sponsorship strategy framed through the 3 Cs and return on objectives (ROO) approach. Through the proposed recommendations, the new WNBA franchise can be financially sustainable.

Introduction

Women's sports are one of the fastest-growing segments of the broader global sports industry. The WNBA's exponential growth is the key driver of this commercial momentum. Detroit will receive an expansion team in 2029, but Detroit's history with the Detroit Shock shows that even championship success does not guarantee financial stability in a crowded sports market. That said, although women's sports are thriving, there are real questions around whether a new WNBA team can thrive in the Motor City, especially when competing for attention and spending against established men's teams. Within five seasons in a densely saturated sports market, this sponsorship and ticketing strategy can convert latent demand for women's basketball into committed season ticket members and value-aligned sponsors.

Thesis Statement

Drawing on the lessons of the Detroit Shock, this paper asserts that within five seasons, a targeted sponsorship and ticketing strategy can convert latent demand for women's basketball into a sustainable revenue base of committed season ticket members and value-aligned sponsors.

Literature Review

This literature review establishes the commercial and strategic context for Detroit's 2029 WNBA expansion. It examines the growth of the women's sports fanbase and the broader commercialization of women's sports to demonstrate that audience demand is present, growing, and profitable. Then it analyzes the ticketing and sponsorship strategies sports teams deploy to turn fan demand into revenue, providing the theoretical foundation for the recommendations that follow.

The Women's Sports Fan Base

One of the primary drivers of women's sports growth is the rapid expansion of their fan base. McKinsey identified women's sports as having a monetization gap rather than a demand issue, meaning that audience growth has outpaced revenue-generating infrastructure (Stengel, 2026). Sports fans who only watch or follow women's sports make up only 1% of all sports fans, whereas 22% follow only men's sports, and the remaining 77% identify as fans of both men's and women's sports (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Women now account for a large share of fans in women's sports at 47% (Nielsen, 2025). Almost half of fans are ages 18-34, 32% are ages 35-54, and 21% are over 55 (McKinley, 2025). This broad and growing fan base represents an existing pool of demand that can be converted into ticket buyers and sponsor audiences.

Direct and targeted marketing to a growing fan base can improve financial sustainability, as loyal fans contribute disproportionately to revenue through repeat purchases and advocacy (Lyngdoh et al., 2025). A particularly important statistic regarding women's sports fans is that 42% of female fans identify as avid fans, compared with 33% of overall women's sports fans (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Loyalty is primarily driven by individual athletes: 45% of avid women's fans indicate that their loyalty stems from their favorite players, and 70% plan to attend more sporting events in the next year (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Additional research finds that avid female fans are 27% more likely to purchase from brands that partner with female athletes (McKinley, 2025). Almost a third of fans say they are more likely to buy from brands that support women's sports, and 53% are more likely than average to recommend products to others (McKinley, 2025). Barbara Jonas, Sports Information Director for Women's Basketball at Georgetown, emphasized that the WNBA and women's basketball fan base has always been

"very strong in the LGBTQ community" and highlighted that older fans and families, especially those with young girls, have been loyal fans for years (B. Jonas, personal communication, February 20, 2026).

The Commercialization of Women's Sports

Media rights revenue for all U.S. women's sports properties is projected to reach about $520 million annually by 2030 (Vonwiller et al., 2025). However, media rights is only a small part of the global sports market that comprises men's and women's domestic and international competitions, as well as major revenue streams such as media and broadcasting, sponsorship and advertising, ticketing, merchandising, and licensing (Zygband et al., 2011). In 2025, global women's sports revenue is projected to reach about $2.35 billion, out of an estimated $600 billion in the global sports market (Zink, 2025; Vonwiller et al., 2025). Despite this revenue gap, women's sports revenue is expected to grow roughly 4.5 times faster than men's sports revenue in the coming years (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Additionally, basketball is anticipated to remain the top revenue-generating women's sport, not just in North America but globally, accounting for $1.03 billion of the $2.35 billion in global revenue (Zink, 2025).

Stakeholders & Investment Momentum

According to the World Economic Forum, women's sports have reached a critical inflection point (Abrash, 2025). In response, corporations like Deloitte, Capital One, Cisco, and AT&T have created the Athena Pledge, which aims to "mobilize investment, research and opportunities in the industry and to rally other brands and companies to increase investment and support for women's sports" (Abrash, 2025). The expanding female fan base globally

distinguishes investment in women's sports as a compelling business imperative rather than merely a social trend (Nielsen, 2025).

In late 2024, Ariel Investments, an asset management firm, raised $250 million for a dedicated women's sports investment fund, reflecting the sector's emergence as a serious institutional asset class (Stengel, 2026). The current shift among investors is foundational; instead of chasing short-term visibility, investors are getting equity in teams, media, infrastructure, and services (Stengel, 2026). The primary stakeholders contributing to the expansion of women's sports include marketers and sponsors, media organizations, investors, and rights holders. Marketers and sponsors allocate advertising budgets to sporting events and sponsor teams or individual athletes (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Media organizations encompass both linear television and streaming companies that acquire broadcasting rights from rights holders. Investors, such as private equity firms, provide capital to teams, leagues, and other sports-related entities. Rights holders include teams, players, and leagues (Vonwiller et al., 2025).

The WNBA's Momentum

Recent research shows that interest in women's sports has increased substantially, with global surveys indicating that roughly half of respondents now express interest in women's competitions (Nielsen, 2025). For the WNBA specifically, the proportion of sports fans interested in the WNBA has doubled in the past five years (Harraghy, 2025). WNBA average attendance reached 11,000 fans per game in 2024, up approximately 100% since 2022, with several teams selling out arenas throughout the season (Sullivan, 2025). The 2024 season also attracted 54 million viewers, making it ESPN and CBS's most-watched WNBA season ever (Pougnet-Green,

2025). The 2024 all-star game, presented by ABC, increased viewership by 305% from 2023 (Pougnet-Green, 2025).

TV viewership for the WNBA is projected to grow by 32% by 2027, driven by the new media rights deal and continued fan base growth (Bradley, 2025). The league is now looking to hold exhibition games in Europe, Asia, Mexico City, and the Middle East to expand reach (Ariail, 2024). Previously, the WNBA was seen as an afterthought and unable to operate as its own league (M. Williams, personal communication, February 17, 2026). For a long time, the systems surrounding women's sports and their athletes were thin, media rights were underpriced, facilities lagged, and sponsorship models were inconsistent (Stengel, 2026). Today, with a driven commissioner, new collective bargaining, and new star power among players, the WNBA seems to have a new purpose (M. Williams, personal communication, February 17, 2026).

A key driver of the WNBA's recent growth has been the rise of women's basketball players as social media influencers. Younger fans spend about 15% less time watching live competition but spend over 2 hours per week engaging with player accounts and social media content (Harraghy, 2025). Younger audiences are driving engagement through platforms like TikTok and Snapchat, contributing to the WNBA ranking first among all other U.S professional sports leagues on these platforms (Darvin, 2024). A new generation of players who first gained stardom in their collegiate careers boosted engagement and heightened demand for WNBA broadcasts and tickets (Darvin, 2024). Players like Caitlin Clark, Angel Reese, and Paige Bueckers have accumulated millions of followers on social media, amplifying engagement among an expanding young fan base (Darvin, 2024).

Empirical data on women's basketball social media shows that oncourt performance and perceived quality are positively associated with engagement, and that the presence and number of star or allstar players further amplify that engagement (Pegoraro et al., 2021). When Caitlin Clark played the Mystics for the first time, the team needed to shift venues from its 4,200-seat arena to the Washington Wizards' 20,000-seat stadium, due to ticket demand (Conway, 2024). These findings, together with the rise of high-profile rookies, suggest that many WNBA fans respond better to individual stars than to team success alone, contributing to a star-driven fan culture that resembles the NBA (Pegoraro et al., 2021).

The WNBA's new media rights deal takes effect in 2026 and is worth $200 million per year, more than three times the estimated $60 million per year for the 2023 to 2025 term (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Forbes notes that when rights fees increase, everything downstream changes, including sponsorship pricing, venue investment, and institutional appetite (Stengel, 2026). Researchers note that this deal positions the WNBA as the most valuable women's domestic league in the world, with a media rights valuation more than three times higher than comparable properties (Harraghy, 2025). League executives expect to add further broadcast partners to the package, which could raise total annual rights income to approximately $260 million (Ariail, 2024). The WNBA has added at least 14 new league-level sponsors in 2024 and 2025 (Vonwiller et al., 2025). WNBA teams now average 44 sponsorship deals (SponsorUnited, 2025), a 52% increase from 2022 (Notte, 2025a), contributing to an estimated $76 million in total team sponsorship revenue (Sim, 2025). Brands, on average, paid $143,000 for team-level sponsorships in 2024, with deal values expected to rise as attendance, viewership, and social engagement continue to grow (SponsorUnited, 2025). The league's growth has fueled expansion

demand, with WNBA franchise valuations rising an average of 180% year over year in 2025, surpassing the previous year-over-year record for a major professional league (Morse, 2025).

Ticketing & Sponsorships Background

Building on the WNBA's recent growth in media rights, sponsorship, and attendance outlined above, this section focuses on the core concepts of ticketing and sponsorship that shape how that demand is monetized.

Ticketing

Ticketing in sports works similarly to other industries, with a couple of differences. When considering products, sports teams and leagues usually offer single-game tickets, group tickets, season tickets, and premium seating. Season ticket packages offer the chance to purchase access to all games or events in a season at a discounted price compared to individual tickets (Yellowbrick, 2024). Group tickets allow larger groups to attend games at discounted prices, while premium seating offers luxury suites, club seats, and other VIP packages to provide fans with a more exclusive experience (Yellowbrick, 2024). For most of sports history, organizations used static ticket pricing models, in which ticket prices were set and unchanging despite fluctuations in demand (Greer & Zoroya, 2025). This began to change with the adoption of dynamic pricing, a modern ticketing strategy used in many different industries that analyzes demand, competitor pricing, and other market trends to adjust ticket prices in real time (Kreuser & Neville, 2025). The sports world began adopting dynamic pricing in the early 2000s, and by 2012, over 30 teams had adopted the strategy that would later become the standard for data-driven ticket pricing (Greer & Zoroya, 2025).

Despite the popularity of dynamic pricing among teams and rights holders, 68% of US consumers view it as price gouging, according to a 2024 survey (Kreuser & Neville, 2025). Consumer needs and sentiments are just as important as analyzing market demand when setting ticket prices (Min et al., 2022). Perceptions of ticket pricing fairness influence purchasing behavior: fans are more likely to purchase when tickets are perceived as fair (Greer & Zoroya, 2025).

Another commonly used ticketing strategy is variable ticket pricing, which involves setting ticket prices before the season based on expected demand for games, such as rivalries, theme nights, high-profile opponents, or holiday/weekend games (Greer & Zoroya, 2025). Variable ticket pricing considers market demand, which refers to product attributes that contribute to higher ticket prices, such as opponent, previous team performance, and other core features (Min et al., 2022). Ticket sales in the primary market increase by almost 2% per game when variable pricing is implemented (Smith, 2023). However, researchers note that sports teams find variable pricing limiting, though it still allows them to respond to changes across games (Smith, 2023). Variable pricing may lack the flexibility of dynamic pricing, but it offers teams the chance to communicate the value of tickets far in advance, giving fans greater predictability and transparency, which simplifies the purchasing process (Greer & Zoroya, 2025). A successful ticketing and marketing strategy considers consumers' needs and desires, as well as market demand (Min et al., 2022).

While the WNBA's audience is growing, new fans are influencing rising ticket prices. The WNBA has seen a 100% increase in female fans aged 18-34, and viewership among Gen Alpha and Gen Z has risen 60% (Levitt, 2025). As demand increases, teams that do not raise

ticket prices risk fans being priced out through the secondary market (Meschke, 2025). Fans at a New York Liberty game wore shirts saying “We’ve been priced out” after season ticket prices were raised, and in 2026, the median price for a Liberty season ticket will rise by 37% (Meschke, 2025).

Sponsorships

As the number and the size of WNBA sponsorships grow, it is important to clarify what sports sponsorship is and what it offers brands and teams. Sports sponsorships are a marketing strategy in which a company or entity provides financial or material support to an athlete, team, event, or league in exchange for visibility, promotion, and brand association (LaLiga Business School, 2025). Sponsoring sporting events is an effective way to increase sponsors’ brand equity, which, in turn, drives consumer purchase intent toward the sponsor’s products (Hsiao et al., 2021).

There are several types of sports sponsorships. Athlete sponsorship occurs when a brand pays a fee for the right to associate its brand with an athlete who helps promote the sponsor by using its products or appearing in advertising and marketing efforts (*Understanding the role*, 2023). Team sponsorship involves sponsors paying a fee to associate with the team, often through logo placement on jerseys and team-branded merchandise (Bardon, 2025). Companies can also sponsor leagues, which gives them exposure through the league’s media and advertising efforts across many games and teams (Bardon, 2025). Lastly, venue sponsorship is when specific sports venues, such as stadiums or arenas, are sponsored by brands that gain the right to have their logo prominently displayed throughout the venue (*Understanding the role*, 2023).

Companies leverage the emotional power of sport as a platform for their own needs, such as raising brand awareness, improving image, increasing sales, or conveying social issues and values (Podewils, 2023). Brands receive sponsorship assets in exchange for a sponsorship fee. A sponsorship asset is any tangible or intangible service, item, or opportunity a brand can use to create value (Trak.io, 2024). According to a sponsorship industry professional, "digital products, community programming, CSR, and signage/awareness are the really big pillars for sponsorships" (K. Schreck, personal communication, February 19, 2026). Sponsorship assets are especially valuable for their flexibility and creativity, which enable brands to engage their target audiences in unique ways (Trak.io, 2024). Sponsorship deals enable brands to engage with customers, create positive sentiment, and foster goodwill (*Understanding the role*, 2023).

Sponsors can generate new leads by promoting their offerings to potential customers through the prestige of a sports entity (*Understanding the role, 2023*). In fact, the probability that a consumer buys a product from a sponsoring brand is higher than from non-sponsoring brands; this likelihood increases 25% for fans of women's sports (Podewils, 2023). For teams, sponsorships generate revenue, expand visibility, and engage new audiences, which is essential for their ongoing success (Universidad Europea, 2024). Besides the financial appeal of sponsorship deals, well-negotiated deals can foster audience loyalty and often lead to long-term partnerships (Universidad Europea, 2024).

A Detroit Shock Case Study

The Detroit Shock's story illustrates how basketball success does not always ensure stability off the court. This sets the stage for the WNBA's return to the city and invites a closer

look at the structural, financial, and market dynamics that drove the Shock's 2009 relocation to Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Despite three WNBA championships and record-breaking attendance, the Shock's place in Detroit was not safeguarded. Behind the success, the franchise relied heavily on court success to cover costs and did not secure a stable season-ticket base, leading to a $2 million loss in 2009, when it performed much worse than the year before. While specific sponsorship records are not publicly documented, the franchise's vulnerability to the automotive industry collapse suggests its portfolio was heavily concentrated in the auto and financial sectors. Lastly, although the Detroit Pistons and the Shock were under the same ownership portfolio, they had very limited overlap in their sponsorship portfolios.

The Shock was founded in 1998 as one of the WNBA's first expansion franchises (Sports Teams History, 2025). After early struggles and a near exit from the league, Bill Laimbeer became head coach and general manager in 2002, promptly turning the team into champions (Voepel, 2009). Under Laimbeer and led by stars Cheryl Ford, Deanna Nolan, and Ruth Riley, the Shock won their first title in 2003, making WNBA history as the first team to go from last to champions in one season (Sports Teams History, 2025). They repeated as champions in 2006 and won a third title in 2008, leading the league in attendance during those years (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025).

Macroeconomic Pressures on the Detroit Sports Market

In 2007-2008, a financial crisis, the worst since the Great Depression, hit Detroit and the rest of the world (Singh, 2025). Analysts anticipated that the economics of the sports industry would, without question, be directly affected by the ongoing crisis (Knowledge at Wharton,

2008). In a state with a struggling economy and a double-digit unemployment rate, the Shock's survival became more difficult (Bond, 2009).

Compounding these financial pressures, generating fan interest posed a significant challenge for the Shock in a region with four major sports teams (Williams, 2025). The Shock were fifth on the list of most-interesting teams despite winning three championships, lagging behind the Detroit Lions (NFL), Detroit Tigers (MLB), Detroit Pistons (NBA), and Detroit Red Wings (NHL) (Bond, 2009). In essence, the financial crisis sharply limited revenue opportunities for the Shock and increased competition for every entertainment dollar in Detroit. Without a robust ticketing strategy, a diverse set of sponsors, and sponsorship overlap with the Pistons, one bad season was all it took for the Shock to relocate.

Ownership, Financial Losses, and Relocation

Franchise ticket revenue was highly sensitive to short-term performance, meaning strong seasons and championship runs likely drove sales, while a single down year produced a large loss that a stable season ticket base might have countered. Despite winning a WNBA championship in 2008, the Shock lost $2 million in 2009, their final season in Detroit. In 2009, their regular-season record fell to 18-16 (Basketball Reference, 2009). This pattern is reinforced by the franchise's early history: poor results in its first seasons reportedly brought the franchise to the brink of collapse before Bill Laimbeer's arrival and its subsequent turnaround. Even as part of a wealthy ownership group, absorbing multi-million-dollar annual losses during the financial crisis was unsustainable (Bond, 2009). Additionally, Head Coach Bill Laimbeer, who had been eyeing an NBA position, left to become an assistant coach with the Minnesota Timberwolves a week into the 2009 season (Voepel, 2009). Long-time team owner Bill Davidson

died in 2009, which led to the team's sale but not necessarily the relocation (Eck, 2018). Beyond the extraordinary circumstances the Shock faced, such as the death of an owner and a financial crisis, Detroit's 2029 franchise must prioritize a stable season ticket base and a diversified sponsor portfolio, rather than relying on early on-court success to drive revenue.

Executives at the Shock explained that the relocation was a necessary business decision (Bond, 2009). The Shock lacked sponsor diversity, with main sponsors heavily concentrated in the auto and financial industries, which were hit especially hard by the 2008 financial crisis. Although the Shock led the league in attendance in championship years, they failed to build relationships with their community and secure sponsorships that mattered to fans. Researchers even suggest that the aligned interests and resources that had kept the Shock in Detroit disappeared (Voepel, 2009). There is little evidence or research that the Shock leveraged sponsors in the Pistons portfolio, despite belonging to the same ownership group, a mistake that might have cost them sponsorship revenue. Years after relocating, the spirit of WNBA basketball and lingering demand remain in Detroit (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025). Altogether, the Shock's performance-dependent ticket revenue, undiversified sponsorship portfolio, and failure to leverage Pistons sponsors represent three structural vulnerabilities that contributed to relocation.

Strategic Analysis

The analysis in this paper uses the 3 Cs framework to examine the company, customers, and competitors. The 3 Cs are factors used to analyze the environment in which a business operates when creating an effective business strategy (Mindtools, 2024). Detroit's expansion

team will enter a highly saturated local sports market with a fast-growing yet undervalued women's sports ecosystem. The three Cs help identify how the franchise will fit into this market.

Company

Detroit's new WNBA team will launch in 2029 as part of a three-city expansion that includes Philadelphia and Cleveland (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025). Each ownership group will pay an expansion fee of $250 million. Detroit's franchise is backed by Pistons owner Tom Gores and investors, including sports legends such as Grant Hill and Jared Goff, bringing credibility and support to a modern WNBA franchise (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025). The expansion comes at a critical time for the WNBA. In 2025, the league set records with about 3.15 million fans and an average attendance of 11,148 per game (Sim, 2025). Detroit joins the league as the WNBA's business fundamentals are stronger than ever.

Customers

As discussed in the Detroit Shock case study in the literature review, Detroit already has a fan base that is willing to support a WNBA franchise, so the 2029 expansion team is not entering a market with an empty fan base (Thickette, 2024). Research on women's sports fans shows that they are a diverse and growing group motivated by a desire to support women, the quality of play, plus a strong interest in individual athletes (Vonwiller et al., 2025). Women's sports fans, and WNBA fans specifically, heavily engage with platforms such as TikTok to support their favorite athletes and teams (WSC Sports, 2025). This leaves multiple important customer segments for Detroit: legacy women's basketball fans who were fans of the Detroit Shock, Gen Z and Gen Alpha individuals who discover players and their unique storylines through social media, families looking for affordable, family-friendly live sports, and LGBTQ fans and allies

who have historically been a core part of the WNBA fan base. This provides Detroit with a stable, core fan base, even as younger fans and traditionally men's sports fans emerge as key fans. For Detroit, this means sponsorship and ticketing strategies must connect star-driven social media content and storytelling alongside grassroots community programming that builds a friendly climate for both newer and legacy fans.

Competitors

Detroit is one of the most competitive local sports markets in North America. The franchise will compete directly with four longtime, established men's pro sports teams in the Lions (NFL), Pistons (NBA), Tigers (MLB), and Red Wings (NHL), as well as college sports and live entertainment options (Bond, 2009). These existing properties already command large season-ticket bases, media coverage, and long-term relationships with regional and national sponsors. Auto, financial services, and major retail sponsors are already heavily involved with the Lions, Pistons, Tigers, and Red Wings, which reinforces the case made in the sponsorship strategy for targeting other categories as well, such as women's health, LGBTQ organizations, and family consumer brands, where the WNBA faces less direct competition for sponsorship dollars. This means the franchise cannot assume there is leftover demand for sports waiting to be claimed. Instead, the franchise will need to differentiate itself through authenticity, community impact, and the unique value of women's sports.

The competitive context in Detroit's market has clear effects on ticketing and sponsorships. Regarding ticketing, the franchise must assume there is limited availability in household budgets left over for women's sports and design ticketing packages and price points that clearly speak to families, women's basketball loyalists, and LGBTQ fans, rather than trying

to compete with any of the four established men's sports teams for attention. On the sponsorship side, rather than simply taking whatever sponsorship dollars are left after men's teams, the franchise should be intentional about targeting value-aligned partners, especially brands focused on women, families, or community health. Market constraints necessitate differentiation in both ticketing and sponsorship strategies.

Financial & Outcome Analysis

This section presents a five-year financial and outcome analysis of the two revenue streams that are most directly within the franchise's control, ticketing and sponsorship, for Detroit's 2029 WNBA expansion franchise. It begins with the analytical assumptions that guide the projections, followed by a detailed financial analysis of ticketing and sponsorship revenues, costs, and profit. Then, it utilizes a Return on Objectives (ROO) framework to evaluate success against clearly defined benchmarks. These analyses further support the notion that the franchise can reach financial stability within five seasons.

Analytical Assumptions

For this analysis, several assumptions guide Detroit's financial projection. The WNBA's recent growth in attendance, ticket pricing, and sponsorship revenue is expected to continue at a very moderate pace through the 2029 season, rather than accelerate or decline (Sim, 2025). Detroit's expansion team is expected to share Little Caesars Arena, where the Pistons play, as other WNBA franchises do, providing access to an established venue and operational infrastructure.

Ticket prices are expected to be lower than those for established sports properties like the Pistons and the Red Wings, but higher than for a G-League team or other niche properties. For

financial projections and benchmarking, the expansion franchise is compared to the Golden State Valkyries and New York Liberty due to their NBA-backed ownership, shared arenas, and operation in saturated sports markets. Both teams leverage existing NBA fan bases and venue infrastructure. The primary difference is Detroit's smaller metropolitan area compared to those markets. This analysis assumes that Detroit can benefit from some overlap in sponsorship portfolios between NBA and WNBA properties. Across the league, several WNBA teams share sponsors with their NBA counterparts, including Sephora and United Airlines, which have expanded their partnerships from the Warriors to the Valkyries. The Pistons' owned WNBA franchise could secure a mix of new and existing partners seeking to reach the women's sports fanbase over the next five years.

Financial Analysis

Revenue streams, such as media rights distributions and league-level revenue sharing, are largely determined by the league and fall outside the scope of this analysis. The goal of this section is to present a five-year breakdown of how local ticketing and sponsorship revenue, along with their associated costs, can support a credible path to financial stability.

Ticketing Revenues & Costs

Since the Liberty averaged an attendance of 16,425 and the Valkyries averaged 18,064 (Boggs, 2025) last year, this five-year projection assumes that Detroit's team averages 13,000 in year one, given its similar structural situation but smaller market. For this projection, the average ticket price for year one will be $80. This number reflects a mix of lower-priced upper bowl seats, higher-value lower bowl seats, season ticket packages, and premium seating, rather than a single walk-up price point. The average for the Liberty and other high-tier WNBA markets is

about $100 (Lopez, 2025), so it is reasonable that Detroit's price point will be lower. With these numbers in mind, Year 1 Ticket revenue = 13,000 x 80 x 20 (home games) = $20,800,000. Although leaguewide attendance grew by almost 50% in a single year (2023-2024) (ESPN Internet Ventures, 2024) and by 12% the following year (Broughton, 2025), this analysis assumes attendance will grow at a steady, conservative average rate of 6% year over year. This way, the model can still expect attendance to grow as women's sports do, but not at the rate of outliers like previous years. Similarly, ticket prices have seen massive rises (as much as 43%) as demand has broken out over recent seasons (Just Women's Sports, 2025). However, it is safe to assume that price will increase at a steady 5% rate for long-term growth, as overall league growth will not be nearly as high each year.

After adjusting for the increase in attendance and ticket pricing: Year 2 = $22,932,000, Year 3 = $25,279,248, Year 4 = $27,869,768, and Year 5 = $30,747,265. To ground the cost assumption for ticketing, the projection references industry examples showing that platform fees, processing charges, and related ticketing expenses can total 6-10% of ticket revenue in normal event scenarios (AudienceView, 2026). However, this analysis also includes the salaries and commissions of internal ticket sales staff, as well as additional game-day ticketing labor. To conservatively estimate the full set of ticketing costs, this projection assumes total ticketing expenses to be 25% of annual ticket revenue. In terms of ticketing profit per year (Revenue - Costs): Year 1 = $15,600,000, Year 2 = $17,199,000, Year 3 = $18,959,436, Year 4 = $20,902,326, Year 5 = $23,060,449 (see Appendix A, Table 1).

Sponsorship Revenue & Costs

According to the most recent WNBA sponsorship data, teams average $6.3 million in revenue (Sim, 2025). Rather than assuming Detroit will immediately match the top of today's market, this analysis assumes the expansion franchise launches well below the future league average and grows to $5.6 million in year 5. The Valkyries reported over 20 sponsorships in their first year, around half of the current league average (Notte, 2025b). Using the Valkyries as a reference, it is reasonable to estimate that Detroit will start at a similarly conservative level, then ramp up as the franchise matures.

Year 1 sponsorship revenue is projected at $1.7 million, based on 17 sponsorship deals averaging $100,000 each. Revenue grows to $2.42 million in year 2 (22 deals x $110,000), $3.36 million in year 3 (28 deals x $120,000), $4.42 million in year 4 (34 deals x $130,000), and $5.6 million in year 5 (40 deals x $140,000) as Detroit signs founding deals, converts overlapping Pistons partners, and benefits from rising leaguewide demand for women's sports sponsorships. The average deal value starts below the 2024 reported league average of $143,000 (SponsorUnited, 2025), reflecting Detroit's status as an expansion franchise entering a competitive, multi-team market. By year 5, deal values are projected to reach $140,000, still conservatively below the league average, as the franchise will lack the track record of more established teams.

As sponsorship revenue increases, Detroit must invest more in its in-arena and digital assets, executions, and contractual obligations to ensure partner retention. For costs, this model is similar to ticketing, with expenses fixed as a percentage of sponsorship revenue. The main drivers of sponsorship costs are staffing for activation and sales teams, activation execution,

creative production of assets, client hospitality, and measurement of sponsorship metrics (social media impressions, fan engagement, business impact). Although there is no publicly available industry data on sponsorship costs, this analysis assumes they are 20% of sponsorship revenue. This figure is intentionally conservative because Pistons' sponsorship staff may also cover the WNBA franchise's sponsorship portfolio. At the broader franchise level, a portion of this sponsorship profit would typically be reallocated to further support non-revenue-generating operations, such as community programming and fan development, but those costs are outside the scope of this section. In terms of sponsorship profit per year (Revenue - Costs): Year 1 = $1,360,000, Year 2 = $1,936,000, Year 3 = $2,688,000, Year 4 = $3,536,000, Year 5 = $4,480,000 (see Appendix A, Table 2).

Combined ticketing and sponsorship revenue grows from $22.5 million in year 1 to $36.35 million in year 5. Combined profit grows from $16.96 million in year 1 to about $27.54 million in year 5 (see Appendix A, Table 3).

Return On Objective (ROO)

This analysis uses a return on objectives (ROO) framework because the key question for the expansion franchise is whether ticketing and sponsorship are meeting clearly defined strategic benchmarks over the first five years to support long-term growth. For ticketing, the objective is to build a stable base of loyal fans whose purchases will cover an increasing share of game-day costs over the first couple of seasons. Success will be measured by year-over-year growth in ticket revenue, reflecting modest increases in attendance and pricing in line with league trends. Additionally, success is measured by a rising share of total tickets held by season

ticket members rather than single game purchasers, with a target of 40% of all tickets sold being held by season ticket holders by year 5 to ensure a stable and reliable revenue base.

The Valkyries sold 10,000 season tickets out of a stadium of around 18,064 (Field Level Media, 2025). The Valkyries' year 1 season ticket rate of approximately 55% of capacity is an outlier, suggesting Detroit's 40%-year 5 target is conservative and attainable. Former WNBA president Donna Orender described Detroit as a basketball-loving city, especially for women's basketball (Carr, 2026). Fan interest surveys and local reporting consistently indicate a strong demand for the franchise's return (Detroit Sports Commission, 2025). Given this interest, it is reasonable to assume that the 5-year target of 40% is attainable. For sponsorships, the objective is to secure a core group of multiyear partners whose combined commitments place Detroit above today's WNBA average on sponsorship revenue. Teams now average roughly 44 sponsorship deals per team, up about 52% from around 29 deals in 2022 (Sim, 2025), reflecting rapid growth in both the number and diversity of brand partners.

This analysis assumes that Detroit will start below half of the team sponsorship average and ramp up to right below the league average by year 5. Given that the Valkyries reportedly secured more than 20 sponsors by opening night and in a larger market, it is reasonable to assume that Detroit sponsorships will be lower but close to those of the Valkyries, especially since both cities have a passion for basketball. Success will be measured against three benchmarks: (1) growth in the number of active teamlevel sponsorships, with a target of increasing from approximately 17 partners in year 1 to around 40 by year 5, (2) total sponsorship revenue rising from about $1.7 million in year 1 to roughly $5.6 million in year 5, and (3) a strong renewal rate of 80% among anchor partners at the end of their initial terms, indicating that

sponsorship is delivering sufficient return for brands to maintain or increase their investment. Although renewal rates for sports teams are not public, an 80% renewal rate suggests that sponsorships are delivering measurable returns on objectives for brand partners.

Recommendations

The recommendations for the new franchise align directly with the ticketing and sponsorship objectives outlined in the previous ROO section. These recommendations also directly address the Shock's mistakes and structural gaps.

Ticketing Strategy

This ticketing strategy will ultimately help Detroit achieve the ticketing success metrics outlined in the financial analysis and ROO sections. The franchise should look to build a stable base of loyal fans whose purchases will cover an increasing share of game-day costs over the first couple of seasons.

Pricing and Product Design

As established in the financial analysis, the average ticket price of $80 reflects a mix of ticketing tiers designed to position Detroit as a high-value sports option while remaining accessible to its core fans.

Detroit's most affordable ticketing option will be the upper bowl of the arena. Ticket sales for these seats will focus on families, groups, and younger fans who benefit more from lower ticket prices well below the average. The lower bowl will serve as the mid-tier inventory, designed to attract higher-paying customers and die-hard WNBA fans who value proximity to the court. Premium tickets include club, suite, and courtside seating. These seats will be priced the highest among all ticketing options.

In terms of ticket packages, Detroit will offer single-game tickets, group tickets, family plans, a Shock Legacy plan, mini-plans (3, 5, or 7-game bundles), half-season tickets, and full-season tickets. Additionally, some tickets will be bundled around theme night games throughout the season. Although many teams use dynamic pricing, it is in Detroit's best interest to adopt variable pricing instead. The first five years of the franchise will focus on building attendance and establishing itself in the market. Dynamic pricing blurs the lines of transparency and fairness between teams and fans, leading to a negative sentiment among fans. Variable pricing is set before the season and allows Detroit to capitalize on additional value for bigger games and theme nights while upholding fairness and transparency for fans.

Season Ticket & Membership Strategy

Season tickets allow franchises to secure a stable revenue stream throughout a season, enabling better forecasting and stronger relationships between fans and the franchise. For Detroit's season ticket strategy, the franchise should offer full-season plans with the highest savings relative to single-game tickets, as well as high-priority lower-bowl and courtside seating options. Half-season plans will include weekend games, theme nights, and marquee games, providing fans with a valuable experience that encourages future full-season ticket purchases. Detroit should also have a founding season ticket plan to incentivize early fans. Lastly, Detroit should have a membership plan explicitly targeting former Shock fans, enabling it to capitalize on the existing WNBA fanbase. This Shock Legacy tier would offer early access to seat selection, a modest loyalty discount or price lock on season tickets, and exclusive communications that recognize fans' longterm support of women's basketball in Detroit. To be eligible for this membership plan, fans must provide proof of past Shock engagement, such as

previous season ticket accounts, official Shock merchandise, or archived email lists, which will give the franchise a concrete basis for targeting and rewarding legacy supporters. This will include special recognitions and heritage night games.

Founding season ticket plans are also necessary to incentivize early ticket holders. Detroit should have both individual and group season ticket plans. Individual founding members will receive priority seat selection, guaranteed price lock for the first 5 years, exclusive founding merchandise, and early access to playoff tickets. These benefits are designed to deliver both financial and emotional value.

Group founding ticket plans should target youth basketball clubs, schools, businesses, and nonprofits. These members will receive reserved seating blocks, discounted bundle pricing, scoreboard recognition, and special experiences like postgame photos and on-court moments. This plan aims to align the franchise with impactful community organizations.

Membership Benefits and Growth Strategy

Experiential benefits for season ticket holders and Shock Legacy plan members will include member-only events, such as access to open practices, Q&A sessions with coaches and staff, and player meet-and-greets. Digital benefits will include exclusive content, early access to player announcements, and a member-only newsletter featuring behind-the-scenes coverage.

For membership renewals, Detroit should communicate new prices and deadlines within a week of the end of the season, with a 6-week renewal window. Early-bird incentives will be offered for renewing tickets at least 3 weeks in advance, including no pricing change (non-founding members), bonus merchandise, and an extra guest pass for certain games. Outreach will

involve short emails and phone calls designed to clearly state new prices, added benefits, and deadlines.

To convert single-game and mini-plan buyers into season ticket holders, Detroit will identify fans who have attended multiple games and sit in the lower bowl. These fans will be contacted through personalized phone outreach and emails describing the benefits of upgrading their memberships. Additionally, sales efforts should focus on fans with high engagement, such as high spenders or high email response rates, as they are more likely to convert.

Theme Nights

The inclusion of theme nights is an important part of Detroit's marketing and ticket sales efforts. Each season will feature four main theme nights: Family night, Detroit Shock legacy night, Pride/LGBTQ awareness night, and girls and women's basketball night (Youth, high school, and college basketball). Each of these theme nights supports Detroit's efforts to target different segments of the women's sports fanbase. Barbara Jonas and Katie Schreck specified that families and the LGBTQ community were integral parts of the women's sports fanbase (B. Jonas, personal communication, February 20, 2026; K. Schreck, personal communication, February 19, 2026), so it is important to have events that directly target those demographics.

Sponsorship Strategy

This sponsorship strategy demonstrates how to build a high-margin sponsorship portfolio with a core group of multi-year partners that puts the franchise on a path to long-term financial stability, growing revenue from $1.7M in year 1 to $5.6M in year 5. In year one, Detroit will look to secure 17 partners, a number that will grow to 40 by year 5. Additionally, an 80% renewal rate for the core group of sponsors is integral to financial stability.

Target Categories & Sponsor Profile

Five categories of sponsors stand out as targets for sponsorships, including financial services and insurance, healthcare and wellness, education, family and women-focused consumer brands, and digital platforms. The franchise should specifically target sponsors that overlap with the Pistons and local organizations that can help connect the organization with the community. Pistons sponsors that the WNBA franchise should target are CURE Auto Insurance, Henry Ford Health, GameAbove Sports, Kroger, MeetKai, and Uptop. CURE Auto Insurance, which targets a broad consumer base, is well-positioned as a high-value sponsor as it can broaden its customer base and expand its reach among women. Consumer brands tend to sponsor sports teams because their audiences often overlap with those teams' fan bases. A grocery company like Kroger is a strong fit, as grocery stores tend to be family-oriented organizations. Lastly, tech platforms are essential sponsors, as digital platforms are often the main ways that WNBA fans engage with teams. Brands like Uptop and MeetKai can offer digital services for fan loyalty and engagement programs. These fan engagement platforms would support ticket sales and retention.

Education and community brands help support youth, families, and women's empowerment movements, so a brand like GameAbove, which sponsors the Pistons' "Court of Dreams" program and provides youth basketball opportunities, would be well-positioned to support girls' youth basketball initiatives.

Healthcare and wellness organizations are closely tied to the community and women's health, so sponsoring a WNBA team will help expand their audience and raise awareness of the medical issues that specifically affect women, which makes Henry Ford Health a well-positioned sponsor for the franchise; however, it is beneficial to also have a women's-focused sponsor,

similar to how the Pistons have a men's health sponsor in Rugiet. A Detroit native company like All About Women, a women's health boutique that offers a full array of specialized healthcare products for women, including products for women with mastectomies and other breast cancer-related needs, is a strong fit. To convert Pistons sponsors into WNBA partners, the franchise should host a WNBA partner preview event before the inaugural season to give companies an early opportunity to secure category exclusivity.

To differentiate itself and connect with the values and priorities of its core fanbase, the franchise should target Affirmations, one of the city's largest LGBTQ+ community centers, which offers therapy, counseling, and resource navigation. Partnering with Affirmations is necessary to align with the LGBTQ+ community, which has been the WNBA's most dedicated group of fans since the league's inception.

Asset Design & Packaging

Detroit should have sponsorship tiers representing pillar sponsors, supporting sponsors, and community sponsors. Pillar sponsors represent the highest investing sponsors. Pillar sponsors receive category exclusivity options and major branding rights (presenting, jersey patch, or major signage). These sponsors will also receive most of the regional and national broadcast signage, social media sponsored posts, and ticket inventory. Supporting sponsors will include mid-size brands whose investments will result in a smaller mix of digital assets, in-arena signage, and tickets. Community sponsors would include local organizations that are directly tied to community outreach, impact, and engagement programs.

To incentivize partners to sponsor the franchise in the first year, Detroit should introduce founding partner perks. Given the popularity of the WNBA and its players on social media,

founding partner perks should include a branded social media content series featuring players, player appearances at key partner events, premium hospitality, and official founding partner recognition during the launch period across all platforms. Experiential activations have been shown to significantly influence sponsorship satisfaction, reinforcing the value of partner experiences and events over passive logo placements (Hsiao et al., 2021). WNBA fans engage heavily through digital platforms and player-driven storytelling, so founding perks are built around these high-value assets.

Based on the sponsorship tiers described above, the core sponsorship categories should be in arena visibility, digital and social, community, and hospitality. In arena visibility includes LED boards, basket stanchions, concourse signage, and PA reads. Digital and social includes branded content series, highlight clips, community stories, and website and app placements. Community assets include youth basketball clinics, volunteer events, and court renovations. Hospitality assets are suites and clubs (pillar partners), group tickets, and on-court experiences for clients and employees. Each sponsorship package would include assets from a mix of different categories to deliver value to the team, sponsor, and community.

Sponsor Management

To ensure a high renewal rate, Detroit should have a dedicated sponsorship team. Account managers will be assigned one pillar partner and a mix of community and supporting sponsors. Each sponsor will have a pre-season planning meeting, a mid-season check-in, and a post-season review to ensure assets are delivered and executed. Research on sponsorship indicates that satisfaction is a stronger predictor of partner retention than brand exposure alone, suggesting that ensuring sponsors are continuously satisfied with their activations is more

important than mere visibility (Hsiao et al., 2021). Sponsor check-ins allow Detroit to analyze where to adjust a sponsorship deal during renewals. To measure the success of each partnership, Detroit should track media and arena impressions and reach, social media engagement metrics for branded content, and, when necessary, lead-generation numbers (promo codes, sign-ups). At mid-season and post-season meetings, the sponsorship team will provide clear summaries outlining exposure and engagement of sponsorship assets. To achieve the 80% renewal rate objective, renewal conversations must begin before the end of the season, up-sells must be offered through contract restructuring, and partners who do not wish to renew at the same cost must be offered a lower-tier sponsorship contract. High renewal rates indicate that sponsors see sufficient year-over-year value to maintain or further their investment.

Conclusion

The sponsorship and ticketing strategy proposed in this paper shows that Detroit's WNBA franchise can generate $22.5 million in combined ticket and sponsorship revenue in year one, and grow that figure to about $36.35 million by year 5. This is a trajectory the Shock never had the infrastructure to sustain, and one that the 2029 franchise is far better positioned to achieve. Despite a much better landscape, the franchise still operates in a highly competitive sports market, making it increasingly important to develop a unique ticketing and sponsorship strategy. The Detroit Shock's history is a gift in the form of a fanbase, but also a cautionary example. Three championships and record attendance only provide short-term success without the supporting financial infrastructure.

The ticketing and sponsorship strategies focus on building loyalty before focusing on revenue. In a market with four other professional sports teams and fans with limited

entertainment budgets, chasing casual fans is a losing strategy. Variable pricing, the Shock legacy plan, and value-aligned sponsors are all answers to that specific constraint.

The WNBA has exceeded all growth expectations in recent seasons. Given Detroit's structural advantages and previous women's basketball fanbase, there is a real upside beyond what the financial analysis captures. Notably, this analysis does not cover the full operating budget for the entire franchise, including player personnel costs, marketing spend, and non-revenue departments. The expansion team arrives in a market with a hungry fanbase; all that is left is the right strategy.

Appendix A

The following tables summarize the five-year revenue, costs, and profit projections for ticketing and sponsorship.

Table 1

Ticketing Revenue, Costs, and Profit

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Ticketing Revenue	$20,800,000	$22,932,000	$25,279,248	$27,869,768	$30,747,265
Ticketing Costs	$5,200,000	$5,733,000	$6,319,812	$6,967,442	$7,686,816
Ticketing Profits	$15,600,000	$17,199,000	$18,959,436	$20,902,326	$23,060,449

Table 2

Sponsorship Revenue, Costs, and Profit

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Sponsorship Revenue	$1,700,000	$2,420,000	$3,360,000	$4,420,000	$5,600,000
Sponsorship Costs	$340,000	$484,000	$672,000	$884,000	$1,120,000
Sponsorship Profits	$1,360,000	$1,936,000	$2,688,000	$3,536,000	$4,480,000

Table 3

Combined Revenue, Costs, and Profit

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Combined Revenue	$22,500,000	$25,352,000	$28,639,248	$32,289,768	$36,347,265
Combined Costs	$5,540,000	$6,217,000	$6,991,812	$7,851,442	$8,806,816
Combined Profits	$16,960,000	$19,135,000	$21,647,436	$24,438,326	$27,540,449

References

Abrash, L. (2025, January 21). 3 reasons why businesses should invest in women's sports now. *World Economic Forum*. https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/01/women-sports-business-investment/

Ariail, C. (2024, July 21). This week in women's basketball: WNBA secures 11-year, $2.2 billion national media rights deal. *Swish Appeal*. https://www.swishappeal.com/2024/7/21/24202161/wnba-media-rights-deals-billion-disney-amazon-nbc-lindsey-harding-lakers-bumble-draftkings-mercury

AudienceView. (2026, March 4). Event ticketing software costs: What every venue should know. https://audienceview.com/guides-and-reports/event-ticketing-software-costs-what-every-venue-should-know/

Bardon, A. (2025, October 19). Impact of sponsorship and endorsements in sport management. *Lindenwood University*. https://www.lindenwood.edu/blog/impact-of-sponsorship-and-endorsements-in-sport-management/

Boggs, J. (2025, August 21). Attendance record silences skeptics as WNBA draws 2.501 million fans in 2025. *Scripps News*. https://www.scrippsnews.com/sports/attendance-record-silences-skeptics-as-wnba-draws-2-501-million-fans-in-2025

Bond, G. (2009, October 22). Shock's move to Tulsa makes financial sense. *MLive*. https://www.mlive.com/shock/2009/10/shocks_move_to_tulsa_makes_fin.html

Bradley, B. (2025, March 11). Women's sports score huge 56% increase in ad impact. *Adweek*. https://www.adweek.com/convergent-tv/womens-sports-increase-ad-effectiveness/

Broughton, D. (2025, August 20). WNBA tracking toward nearly 3 million in total attendance for 2025 season. *Sports Business Journal*. https://www.sportsbusinessjournal.com/Articles/2025/08/20/wnba-tracking-toward-nearly-3-million-in-total-attendance-for-2025-season/

Carr, B. (2026, April 11). *Detroit awarded WNBA expansion team, set to play at Little Caesars Arena*. WDIV. https://www.clickondetroit.com/all-about-ann-arbor/2026/04/11/detroit-awarded-wnba-expansion-team-set-to-play-at-little-caesars-arena/

Chernick, H. (2013, July 24). Detroit's bankruptcy: How did we get here, and what's next? *Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College*. https://www.rooseveltthouse.hunter.cuny.edu/?forum-post=detroits-bankruptcy

Conway, T. (2024). Caitlin Clark, Fever vs. Mystics moved to Capital One Arena amid 2024 WNBA hype. *Bleacher Report.* https://bleacherreport.com/articles/10117489-caitlin-clark-fever-vs-mystics-moved-to-capital-one-arena-amid-2024-wnba-hype

Darvin, L. (2024, May 14). Angel Reese, Caitlin Clark and Cameron Brink bring WNBA fan engagement to new heights. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/lindseyedarvin/2024/05/14/angel-reese-caitlin-clark-cameron-brink-usher-in-new-era-of-wnba-fan-engagementnew-data-shows/

Basketball Reference. (2009). 2009 Detroit Shock season. *Sports Reference*. https://www.basketball-reference.com/wnba/teams/DET/2009.html

Detroit Sports Commission. (2025, July 2). A legacy reignited: Detroit named WNBA expansion city. https://detroitsports.org/news/2025/7/2/general-history-of-the-wnba-in-detroit.aspx

Eck, S. (2018, June 20). IRS imposes $2B tax bill on sports mogul's estate. *Spencer Law Firm*. https://www.spencerlawfirm.com/2014/06/irs-imposes-2b-tax-bill-on-sports-moguls-estate/

ESPN Internet Ventures. (2024, September 27). WNBA touts 48% attendance jump; over 2.3M fans attend games. *ESPN*. https://www.espn.com/wnba/story/_/id/41477940/wnba-touts-48-attendance-jump-23m-fans-attend-games

Field Level Media. (2025, March 26). *Expansion valkyries 1st WNBA team to hit 10k season tickets*. ESPN. https://www.espn.com/wnba/story/_/id/44418026/expansion-valkyries-1st-wnba-team-hit-10k-season-tickets

Greer, J., & Zoroya, N. (2025). Fan perceptions of dynamic ticket pricing in professional sports: The impact of transparency, incentives, and demographics. *The COSMA Journal*. https://doi.org/10.25035/cosma.02.01.04

Harraghy, D. (2025, May 16). How the WNBA's fan growth contributed to a record TV deal. *SportsPro*. https://www.sportspro.com/opinions/womens-sport/wnba-tv-rights-deal-fan-engagement-data-ampere-analysis/

Hsiao, C.-H., Tang, K.-Y., & Su, Y.-S. (2021). An empirical exploration of sports sponsorship: Activation of experiential Marketing, sponsorship satisfaction, brand equity, and purchase intention. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.677137

Just Women’s Sports. (2025, September 12). New York Liberty fans protest surging WNBA season ticket prices. *Just Women's Sports*. https://justwomenssports.com/reads/new-york-liberty-fans-protest-surging-wnba-season-ticket-prices/

Klier, T. H., & Rubenstein, J. (2012). Detroit back from the brink? Auto Industry Crisis and Restructuring. 2008-11. Yale School of Management, Program on Financial Stability. https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2356&context=ypfs-documents

Knowledge at Wharton. (2008, December 10). The financial crisis reaches a new arena: Professional sports. *Knowledge at Wharton*. https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/podcast/knowledge-at-wharton-podcast/the-financial-crisis-reaches-a-new-arena-professional-sports/

Kreuser, J., & Neville, M. (2025, October 6). Dynamic ticket pricing: A game-changer in the industry? *Softjourn Inc*. https://softjourn.com/insights/dynamic-pricing-in-ticketing

Levitt, S. (2025, August 11). The rise of the WNBA. *Operative*. https://www.operative.com/resources/the-rise-of-the-wnba/

Liga de Fútbol Profesional. (2025, July 17). Sports sponsorship: What it is & types. *LaLiga Business School*. https://business-school.laliga.com/en/news/what-is-sports-sponsoship-s

Lopez, J. (2025, May 16). Good luck scoring a Liberty ticket—prices jump 76% as WNBA demand spikes 145%. *Secret NYC*. https://secretnyc.co/liberty-ticket-prices-wnba/

Lyngdoh, D., Manamkandath, M. P., Paikarathodi, S., Prasanth, P., Manamkandath, M., & Asaraf, R. K. (2025). Fan loyalty continuum and its impact on consumer commitment in sports. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 4, 4001–4011. https://acr-journal.com/article/fan-loyalty-continuum-and-its-impact-on-consumer-commitment-in-sports--1498/

McKinley, C. (2025, October 27). 3 things advertisers need to know about women's sports fans. *Basis*. https://basis.com/blog/3-things-advertisers-need-to-know-about-womens-sports-fans

Meschke, J. (2025, October 19). The WNBA has become extremely popular. Ticket prices are now rising. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/19/business/wnba-fans-tickets-prices.html

Min, S. D., Zhang, J. J., & Byon, K. K. (2022, September 6). Push and pull factors associated with the consumption of women's professional basketball games: A canonical correlation analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.806305

Mindtools. (2024, May 17). Ohmae's 3Cs model. https://www.mindtools.com/avi3qka/ohmaes-3cs-model/

Mode, M. T. (2024, January 23). Media pride: Women's sports and the LGBTQ+ community. *New Digital Age*. https://newdigitalage.co/media-pride/media-pride-womens-sports-and-the-lgbtq-community/

Morse, B. (2025, June 30). WNBA expansion teams coming to Cleveland, Detroit and Philadelphia. *CNN.* https://www.cnn.com/2025/06/30/sport/wnba-expansion-cleveland-detroit-philadelphia-spt

Nielsen. (2025, June). The future of sport: Nielsen's 2025 report reveals growth drivers. https://www.nielsen.com/news-center/2025/the-future-of-sport-nielsens-2025-report-reveals-growth-drivers/

Notte, J. (2025a, May 16). Golden State Valkyries Bring Brands Off Bench in WNBA Debut. *Adweek.* https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/golden-state-valkyries-brands-wnba-debut/

Notte, J. (2025b, July 24). WNBA sponsor deals jump 52% since 2022, according to report. *Adweek*. https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/wnba-sponsor-deals-jump-52-percent/

Pegoraro, A., Kennedy, H., Agha, N., Brown, N., & Berri, D. (2021, May 14). An analysis of broadcasting media using social media engagement in the WNBA. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fspor.2021.658293

Podewils, K. (2023, December 5). What is sports sponsorship? *SPORTFIVE*. https://sportfive.com/beyond-the-match/insights/what-is-sports-sponsorship

Pougnet-Green, J. (2025, April 4). The treasured WNBA expansion bid: Why cities are vying for a chance to secure it. *Michigan Journal of Economics.* https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mje/2025/04/04/the-treasured-wnba-expansion-bid-why-cities-are-vying-for-a-chance-to-secure-it/

Schneider, A. (2024, November 14). Sponsorship rights vs. sponsorship activation. *Sport Dimensions*. https://www.sd.team/insights/difference-between-sponsorship-rights-and-brand-activation

Sim, J. (2025, September 1). WNBA team sponsorship revenue soars to US$76M. *SportsPro*. https://www.sportspro.com/news/wnba-revenue-sponsorship-teams-fever-reese-sponsorunited-july-2025/

Singh, M. (2025, November 25). The 2008 financial crisis explained. *Investopedia*. https://www.investopedia.com/articles/economics/09/financial-crisis-review.asp

Smith, A. (2023, January 24). New research finds variable pricing for NFL games increases ticket sales. *EurekAlert!* https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/977581

Sponsorship and endorsement deals. (2024, November 11). *Universidad Europea*. https://universidadeuropea.com/en/blog/sponsorship-endorsement-deals/

SponsorUnited. (2025, August 13). WNBA partnerships report 2024–25. https://www.sponsorunited.com/insights/wnba-partnerships-report-2024-25

Sports Teams History. (2025, September 18). Detroit Shock history – team origin and achievements. https://sportsteamhistory.com/detroit-shock/

Stengel, G. (2026, February 12). Women's sports is becoming a real asset class. *Forbes.* https://www.forbes.com/sites/geristengel/2026/02/12/womens-sports-isnt-having-a-moment-its-rebuilding-the-capital-stack/

Sullivan, B. (2025, July 19). The WNBA's success last year wasn't a fluke. now, the league and its players want to cash in. *NPR*. https://www.npr.org/2025/07/19/nx-s1-5471422/wnba-all-star-game-caitlyn-clark-indianapolis

Thickette, L. (2024, June 18). The Detroit Shock's potential comeback. *Winning Her Way*. https://winningherway.com/detroit-shock-potential-comeback/

Trak.io. (2024, August 1). What is a sponsorship asset in sports and entertainment marketing? https://www.trak.io/blog-posts/what-is-a-sponsorship-asset-in-sports-and-entertainment-marketing

Understanding the role of sponsorships in sports. (2023, June 7). *UWP*. https://online.uwp.edu/degrees/business/professional-programs/ms-sport-management/role-of-sponsorships-in-sports/

Voepel, M. (2009, October 20). Disappointment meets pragmatism. *ESPN*. https://www.espn.com/wnba/columns/story?columnist=voepel_mechelle&id=4579105

Vonwiller, B., Elby, B., & Kutcher, E. (2025, August 20). Closing the monetization gap in women's sports: A $2.5 billion opportunity. *McKinsey & Company*. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/closing-the-monetization-gap-in-womens-sports-a-2-point-5-billion-dollar-opportunity

Williams, J. (2025, February 1). Detroit WNBA bid: Why did the Detroit Shock leave the city in 2010? *Detroit Free Press*. https://www.freep.com/story/sports/nba/pistons/2025/01/31/detroit-wnba-bid-why-did-the-detroit-shock-leave-the-city/78087339007/

WSC Sports. (2025, September 15). Beyond the Caitlin Clark effect: How the WNBA is building sustainable growth with storytelling. https://wsc-sports.com/blog/industry-insights/beyond-the-caitlin-clark-effect-how-the-wnba-is-building-sustainable-growth-with-storytelling/

Yellowbrick. (2024, March 21). Sports ticket pricing: What you need to know. https://www.yellowbrick.co/blog/sports/sports-ticket-pricing-what-you-need-to-know

Zink, A. (2025, March 18). Women's elite sports exceed expectations as revenues forecasted to surpass $2.3 billion globally in 2025. *Deloitte*. https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/about/press-room/womens-elite-sports-exceed-expectations.html

Zygband, P., Collignan, H., Sultan, N., Santander, C., & Valensi, U. (2011). The global sports industry is growing faster than overall GDP. *Kearney*. https://www.kearney.com/documents/291362523/291364094/Sports_Market.pdf/