



WORLD
SAILING
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PROJECT
JUNO

*“Having a child does not
limit our ability to achieve.
I can be a champion
and a mother.”*

Alysia Montano, runner and founder of &Mother



Introduction

If the world were perfect, there would be no discrimination, and it would be inclusive and diverse, however, things aren't this simple, and navigating its choppy waters takes work.

In sailing, rules are not deliberately made to discriminate, but, in the main, they do. This does not come from a place of prejudice or negativity but rather from a history of being a male-dominated sport. Perhaps a lack of awareness and understanding is still an issue, and this is why the pace of change has been slow.

So, when on February 2nd, 2023, Clarisse Crémer posted on social media that she had been fired by her sponsor, Banque Populaire, there was uproar.

Clarisse's bombshell announcement not only exposed one of the sport's leading events* and one of its most loyal corporate supporters of being discriminatory, but it also highlighted that the sport of sailing lacks any clarity or advice for female athletes or support staff considering having children, nor any direction for the sport's events and organisations.

But this is not new; one does not need to dig too deep to find sailing's other 'Clarisse's'. Olympians Theresa Zabell and Shirley Robertson have both fallen foul of the 'system' not being sufficiently flexible or accommodating of pregnant and new mothers.

But neither of these cases, and doubtless many more, have made our sport properly reflect and consider how it could be more considerate of those athletes who wish to become mothers. Until Clarisse.

To put this into a broader sport context, this is not an issue just in sailing. Motherhood and elite sport have been uncomfortable bedfellows for a long time. In recent years, mountaineering, trail running, elite running, and a few more traditional sports have made some huge steps forward. However, when men run and manage most sports, there is no immediate overnight fix.

In an effort to help the sport take a first step to develop a more equitable opportunity to balance motherhood and competition and continue to move the inclusivity dial

forward, the following document outlines a series of considerations and recommendations for Athletes and Stakeholders to better support mothers and fathers during this critical period of their journey.

We have drawn on examples from other sports and businesses and gathered information from organisations that are proactively supporting pregnant and postpartum female athletes.

While it is essential that we take a step back to look at how we can better support women in motherhood, it is critical to link policy to a far better understanding of female athlete health. There is a need for myth-busting, education, and better care for and facilitating the development of female sailors – be they mothers or not.

Performance leaders and coaches need to become more literate about the challenges and opportunities unique to women's physiology and needs. There is very little, if any, exclusively female research regarding athletes on talent or elite pathways. Most, if not all of it, has been done with men and boys.

These recommendations do not look to address the ranking for pregnant mothers. However, World Sailing, the sport's global governing body, will be responsible for this policy and will proactively work on this over the coming months.

The recommendations provide a pathway to ensuring greater awareness and support the ongoing growth of gender equity. However, if all they achieve is to make people think twice before defining a team structure decision or proposing a rule change, then we have achieved something, however small.

As a sport, we cannot afford to have any more Clarisse's; we must ensure this never happens again.

Dee Caffari
Chair World Sailing Trust
March 2023

*On 6 March 2023 the Vendée Globe announced that it was establishing a committee to address rule changes for the 2028 edition of the race.

Case Study - Theresa Zabell

Theresa Zabell was the first sailor to win two Olympic gold medals and today remains the only Spanish female athlete to have done so. Her daughter was born in June 1997, a year after the 1996 Atlanta Games and became her main focus. But the prospect of winning a third consecutive gold was very tempting, both for her, and Spanish sport's governing bodies.

“At the time Spanish athletes who finished in the top eight in that year’s World Championship events were given financial support, and all Atlanta medallists were entitled to financial backing for the following two years, so I was able to have my daughter and return to training six weeks later. However, at the 1998 World Championships, we finished ninth, and I fell out of the support range.

It was the perfect moment to make the system more flexible and ensure that the sport took personal situations, such as pregnancy and motherhood, into account. After two months I was offered an ‘exception’, but this only applied to me and not my crew and I turned be extended to all athletes depending on their circumstances. So, for me, retiring was a way of making them realise that the system was not fair.

Ironically, a few years later, I managed to get on to the Board that managed financial support for athletes and changed things from within.”



Case Study - Shirley Robertson

After winning back-to-back Golds at the Olympic Games in Sydney and Athens, Shirley Robertson gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl, in 2006. With the Beijing Games only two years away and national trials in less than a year, she had little choice but to return to training eleven weeks after giving birth.

“I was the only British female double Olympic medallist at the time, a proven performer at the highest level - but there was very little consideration given to my new circumstances, which was hard. I had committed and delivered more than any other female athlete, but now as a mother, I was a problem. Looking back, I had zero support, I didn’t really expect any - I knew what the rules were, I knew what the system was like and the timelines I had to meet. I wanted and needed a bit more time to recover but it was not even a consideration. It was the most difficult nine months, we lost the trials by a point beaten by the eventual 2008 champion, so a success for the Federation, but a failure for sporting mothers, trying to be in top form for the early domestic trials and recover from pregnancy. In hindsight it was crazy.

Ours is a sport run by men, and, at that time, our federation was a medal-making machine, and athletes, even winners were dispensable. It is, I very much hope, different now; the culture in British sport is more about supporting athletes in the best way possible, however in my sport in the UK there are currently no competing mothers.”



Executive Summary

The stereotyping of mothers underlies one of the most significant challenges to gender equality.

We cannot ignore the motherhood penalty - a systemic bias that underlies disadvantages in pay, salary, and promotion, lower perceived competence, and higher expectations for mothers relative to men or childless women. Combine that with the lack of support as women try to navigate the family work balance, and you have a professional and sporting world where the mothers go missing.

The sports industry is an exciting and accurate microcosm of what working mothers face across industries. There are several parallels, but perhaps the largest is the myth of motherhood as a “career killer.” This myth fuelled by a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecy. When a woman does not come back to competition after starting their family, it’s because “she had a baby” or “she’s a mother.” These assumptions feed the false narrative that she made some binary choice or was not physically capable of return. But this ignores the full story of why women often do not come back to compete after having a baby.

Once society acknowledges the value of motherhood, it can then give them the support and flexibility they need to navigate work-life integration on their terms.

We need to challenge the system and create a future of work and competition that reflects the needs of the modern family.

The following document looks at four primary areas that athletes, teams, organisations, and stakeholders should consider when looking at how to best support mothers and fathers.

Through them, we also call on our sport to ensure that we remove the ‘mother blinkers’ and accept that our sport will be the best it can be only by being diverse and inclusive.

“There is an assumption that, if you have kids, you are not coming back at the same level.”

Shirley Robertson,
Double Olympic Gold Medalist



Rethinking Attitudes

Women's sports have seen phenomenal growth in popularity, revenues, and investments in the past decade and are now regarded as valuable commercial assets. Despite this increased visibility and support, studies have shown that most female athletes tend to retire prematurely.

According to a 2017 report by the International Federation of Professional Footballers' Associations (FIFPRO), 90% of female athletes have considered leaving the game early, mainly because of their intention to start a family.

The reality faced by female athletes is symptomatic of broader expectations - until recently, childbearing was never considered in most sports' development pathways and organisation.

Global attitudes towards work-life balance, especially after the global pandemic, are changing, and sports organisations (and sponsors) should consider maternity/paternity policies to ensure that not only are they legally compliant but in step with modern expectations towards athletes' rights and needs.

It is important that they acknowledge that motherhood is not a limiting factor to succeed, either professionally or personally.

Considerations:

- Understanding the minimum requirements for maternity/paternity under domestic law.
- Ensuring staff receive appropriate training and are made aware of their legal obligations and the consequences of breaching domestic legislation.
- Developing a ranking system that will allow for a 'career' break for pregnancy.
- Not reducing financial assistance during maternity leave and ensuring support is available while on leave and on returning to sport.

It is a simple fact that having more accommodating policies will positively affect performance, which in turn will reflect well on the organisation, encourage loyalty from athletes and, critically, continue to attract new talent.

What is Pregnancy Discrimination?

Pregnancy discrimination refers to the unfair treatment of athletes based on their pregnancy status. This can include denying opportunities to compete, cutting funding or endorsements, or subjecting athletes to different or more rigorous performance standards because of their pregnancy.

Pregnancy discrimination can occur at any level of competition, from school and club to professional sports. It can affect female and male athletes, although it is most associated with female athletes.

It can significantly impact an athlete's career and future opportunities, as it may result in loss of income, missed competitions, and damage to their reputation. It can also perpetuate gender stereotypes and contribute to the under-representation of women in sports leadership positions.

No female player should ever suffer a disadvantage based on her pregnancy. Consequently, the unilateral termination of a female player's contract on the grounds of her becoming pregnant will be considered a termination without cause."

FIFA – 2021 FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players



Support for pregnancy and parenting athletes is fast becoming a business imperative. Clarisse publicly shared the discrimination she faced, and her sponsor Banque Populaire subsequently withdrew their sponsorship of the Vendée Globe campaign, having been called to account from across the industry.

However, a sponsor that chooses to support an athlete who wishes to combine sport and family presents enormous opportunities for the company.

An athlete who steps away from competition for a few months is still an athlete and remains an asset.

Pregnancy and parenting can allow athletes to expand their appeal and reach audiences in new ways. Parents, particularly mothers, are a sought-after segment of the market, and they are likely to be drawn to athletes growing their families.

Sponsors can shift the contractual obligations from a performance at competitions to the athlete's value as a spokesperson until they are ready to resume competition.

Duty of Care

Championing motherhood in sailing is not only the right thing to do but also the smart thing to do. It will enable female sailors to keep competing longer and show sailing organisations as bodies that genuinely care about their athletes and wellbeing. This results in a sport that is more attractive to sailors, fans, and commercial partners alike.

Sport and other life spheres, such as being a mother, have historically been considered incompatible and require separation. However, it is evident now that these two can coexist with the proper support.

The lifestyle of a professional sailor, coach, or race official has sport as the central focal point, whether they are mothers or not.

The lifestyle of a mother requires a constant balance between family requirements and their sport. Juggling, balance, flexibility, and organisation are necessary when renegotiating and gaining control of this new lifestyle. Sacrifices regarding social life, training sessions and shared experiences with their child are made as mothers give their all to achieve their professional goals and make the sacrifices and commitment worthwhile.

However, achieving success across all these elements requires a clear series of steps for sailors and organisations from the outset. A Maternity Journey plan that includes advice on maternity mentoring, mental health, postnatal planning and matrescence is critical to the Duty of Care for a returning mother.



Maternity and Paternity Rights

Sports organisations generally need to be open to better family related policies, be more inclusive of male athletes in this discussion, and create an equitable maternity and paternity leave system.

In 2018, Anthony Martial was fined £180,000 and faced criticism for missing one week of Manchester United's pre-season training camp to support his wife through a difficult labour. As an employee of Manchester United, Martial was legally entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave at the statutory rate; however, in practice, it seems few footballers exercise this right, possibly perceiving that it may be a career-damaging decision.

Eight years prior, it was widely reported that Alex Ferguson had allowed Wayne Rooney a few days compassionate leave following the birth of his first child, seemingly ignoring the statutory two-week allowance Rooney was legally permitted.

Overall, there is a disparity in sports between male and female employee's maternity and paternity rights.

The opposite exists in the general workforce, with the increase of paternity rights being a more recent development. However, some sports are making giant steps forward, including Major League Basketball, which has gradually introduced improvements regarding paternity leave - players must miss at least one game but no more than three - despite the nature of the sport allowing many months off due to the playing season. Before this, if a new father wanted to take time off to witness the birth of his child, the team had to either (i) play with fewer players or (ii) suspend the player and withhold his pay.

English Cricketer Joe Denly is a positive example of an athlete being able to take time off to attend the birth of their child. He was able to leave at the end of the first of five days of a final Test match at the Oval. He returned to compete the next evening.

Whilst not perfect, progress is being made, and this will continue to evolve as family, and social dynamics continue to change.





Case study - Black Ferns, NZ Rugby

The Parental Policy in the MOU introduces an entitlement for players returning to the programme from maternity leave to have a support person of their choice to travel and stay with them to look after the infant during squad assembly. The costs of travel and accommodation for the support person will be met by the Player Payment Pool, with the fee capped at \$15,000 a year for each player until their child turns one. The policy also provides opportunities for players on maternity leave to move into other safe employment within the rugby network until the player goes on maternity leave.

Awahi Tangen-Wainohu, Black Ferns
with her son.

Assistance on Return Post Partum

There are examples of greater flexibility around maternity and returning mothers across various sports, including the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) which has given added protection to the world rankings of mothers who are returning to the game after giving birth. Organisations such as British Athlete Commission had a support group for mothers at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games that helped with childcare, the physical effects of motherhood and returning to training.

In 2019 Sport Ireland introduced a policy ensuring pregnant athletes receive maternity pay. They are also be entitled to a further six months pay after the birth of their child.

“As one of many athletes whose best performances followed the birth of my daughter, I’m really excited to see the introduction of this policy. It is positive that female sportspeople will be able to make a life choice that is right for them, safe in the knowledge that they will be supported by their National Governing Bodies and Sport Ireland.”

Olive Loughnane, four-time medalist, race walker.

In February 2023, the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and the Rugby Players' Association (RPA) announced a groundbreaking new maternity, pregnant parent, and adoption leave policy for contracted England Women's players. The new policy will work towards providing a supportive environment for contracted players after having children and establishing procedures to support the player during pregnancy.

“A great deal of work has been carried out by players, the RPA and the RFU to get to this point. I am confident that the policy will help normalise motherhood in sport and give players the best possible chance of returning to play should they wish to do so securely and safely.”

Abbie Ward, Red Roses

So, in terms of women performing at the highest level, the roles as elite athletes and mothers can coexist but, to make this happen, there needs to be additional consideration and not an immediate acceptance of the status quo.

Case studies

Allyson Felix – Track & Field

The most decorated female track and field athlete in Olympic history, she famously left Nike after they asked her to take a 70% pay cut because she was pregnant. She announced this decision in an op-ed in the New York Times in 2019, stating, “if we have children, we risk pay cuts from our sponsors during pregnancy and afterwards.

Mandy Bujold – Boxing

The Canadian Olympic boxer won a landmark legal battle to secure her place in the Canadian boxing team following the birth of her daughter. The International Boxing Federation changed the qualification criteria due to the pandemic to include the period when Bujold was pregnant. She fought the ruling, and the Court of Arbitration for Sport ruled in her favour. This resulted in a new rule ensuring that the IOC accounts for pregnant women or those who have recently given birth in qualifying standards.

Alycia Montano – Running

Dubbed the ‘pregnant’ runner, Montano is a six-time track and field champion who, in 2014, ran at the Outdoor Track and Field Championships while eight months pregnant. She returned a year later to win the US Trials and qualify for the World Athletics Championships in Beijing. Her experience led to founding the &Mother NGO, dedicated to breaking barriers that limit a women’s choice to pursue and thrive in both career and motherhood.

Serena Williams - Tennis

When Serena Williams returned to the tennis court following the birth of her daughter, her international ranking had fallen to 453, highlighting the sporting consequences for mothers taking time off to care for their new-born. The All England Tennis Club, which organises Wimbledon, seeded Williams 25th in the world upon her return from maternity leave, amending the rules to take her maternity leave into account.

Project Juno - Recommendations

<i>Rethinking Attitudes</i>	<i>Duty of Care</i>	<i>Return Post Partum</i>
<p>Adopt clear policies to improve female athlete's working conditions. Though sailing faces its own unique reality, clear policies should be adopted for maternity leave, protections against dismissal and potentially the rights to alternative employment during pregnancy.</p> <p>ACTION: DEFINE POLICY STRATEGY</p>	<p>Develop an overarching Maternity Journey plan To include information and support on maternity mentoring, mental health, emotional wellbeing, postnatal planning and matrescence for both sailors and organisations, starting from the initial pregnancy announcement to postpartum and following months.</p> <p>ACTION: DEFINE POLICY STRATEGY</p>	<p>Clear returning mother policies Develop clear policies to support new/returning mothers, including the implications of bringing their baby to training and/or competitions, and a potential breastfeeding friendly environment (if they have chosen to do this) whilst at training.</p> <p>ACTION: DEFINE ADVICE/SUPPORT</p>
<p>Share experiences to shape new narratives. There is an urgent need to normalise the image of pregnant athletes and athletes with children. Sports organisations have an opportunity to shine a light on athlete mothers to create a more inclusive culture in sport.</p> <p>ACTION: PROACTIVELY MANAGE MEDIA OUTPUT</p>	<p>Develop a Duty of Care strategy. In parallel to national maternity guidelines where applicable, the strategy should include Risk Assessments, for athlete and organisation and an internal and external communication plan.</p> <p>ACTION: DEVELOP DUTY OF CARE STRATEGY</p>	<p>Effective multidisciplinary rehabilitation programme Working together to develop an effective rehabilitation programme post childbirth including a strength and conditioning and an adapted programme to suit the Athlete's needs (whilst considering the necessary childcare).</p> <p>ACTION: INCLUDE AS PART OF WIDER FEMALE PHYSIOLOGY STUDY</p>

Conclusion

When the World Sailing Trust authored the Women in Sailing Strategic Review in 2019, it catalysed change in sailing. Significant progress has been made, but gender equity in sailing is still very much a 'work in progress.'

In the same way, Clarisse Cremer's calling out of her sponsor and the Vendee Globe sent ripples throughout the sailing world and beyond. We hope that this report and its recommendations can be a further catalyst for change.

However, it is important to recognise that these recommendations and considerations are very much 'work in progress'.

With better cross-sport collaboration and knowledge sharing we will be able to improve the situation for mothers and their wider families.

If these recommendations can help some of the many stakeholders in our sport to think differently, be more mindful and welcome the positive impact of providing the network to encourage and support mothers back into elite sport - it is a job well done.

World Sailing Trust, March 2023

Project Juno is dedicated to every single inspirational, amazing mother that is part of our sport, whether they be an elite sailor, coach, race official, sponsorship manager, communications specialist or hold any other role in the sport.

We know and understand the dedication and commitment that is necessary for motherhood and work to co-exist. **Thank you.**



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Additional Information

With thanks to the many resources that we referenced, including:

**Active Pregnancy Foundation
&Mother
SheRaces
Law in Sport
Bump&Glide
UK Sport
The Magenta Project**

And to the people we connected with:

**Theresa Zabell
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Sophie Power
Serena Williams
Jonquil Hackenberg
Duncan Truswell
Victoria Evans
Sam Davies**

The following lists the maternity support or resources available in some countries.

France
French ministry handbook https://www.sports.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/shn_maternite_guide.pdf

USA
Through the USOPCS Athlete Services, information is provided on pregnancy support and resources to female athletes. Athletes qualifying for USOPC Elite Athlete Insurance or Athlete Stipend will continue to receive support during and for up to one year after pregnancy.

Great Britain
UK Sport has published pregnancy guidance for the Olympic and Paralympic high-performance community to support athletes who wish to start a family during their elite athlete career. In addition, any athlete who becomes pregnant and is in receipt of an Athlete Performance Award continues to receive it throughout the duration of the pregnancy and for up to nine months post-childbirth.

Netherlands
NOCNSF offers high-performance athletes that are pregnant guidance (information in Dutch) on how to receive maternity leave support. Athletes are advised to contact the NOC athlete services for more information.

Switzerland
Swiss Olympic provides resources and information on their website (in French or German) for during and after pregnancy addressing themes such as training, maternity and sport for elite athletes. Swiss Olympic also shares information on initiatives such as smartHER where topics around female pregnancy for elite athletes are discussed through podcasts and infographics.

Canada
Sport Canada's Athlete Assistance Program offers financial assistance to eligible athletes, including in the case of short-term curtailment of training due to, for example, pregnancy. Athletes who are unable to maintain full training due to situations like pregnancy continue to receive full financial support they were entitled to prior to pregnancy.

Australia
The Australian Institute of Sports has developed guidelines and resources for female athletes covering many topics from female health to pregnancy. The High Performance Pregnancy Guidelines offers information and guidance for athletes seeking financial grants during pregnancy.

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