

BLACK GIRLS & SPORT: A Breakup Story

Executive Summary

MAY 2025

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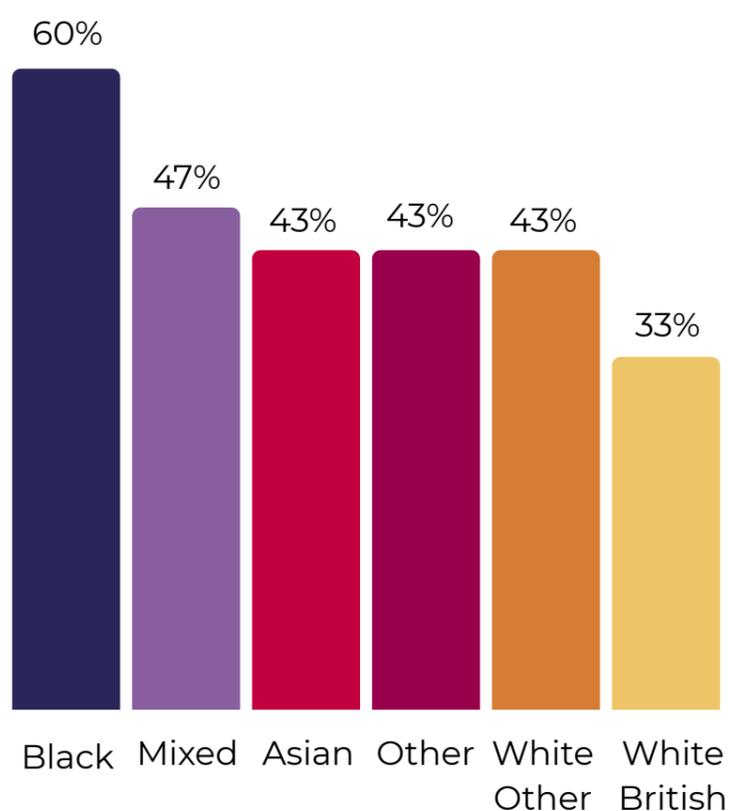
BLACK GIRLS AND SPORT: A Breakup Story

Executive Summary

Most Black girls love sport: twice as many Black girls as White British girls dream of becoming a top athlete or sportsperson [i]. Black girls are the most likely to describe themselves as sporty, with over seven in ten Black girls feeling good at both team and individual sports. Black girls are also much more likely than other groups to value sport for their mental and physical health.

Despite this, **Black girls are the least active** of any group [ii], something which is not true for Black boys who also dream big. In fact, only one in seven girls are active outside school. This is simply wrong, and we wanted to understand how to change the ending of this story.

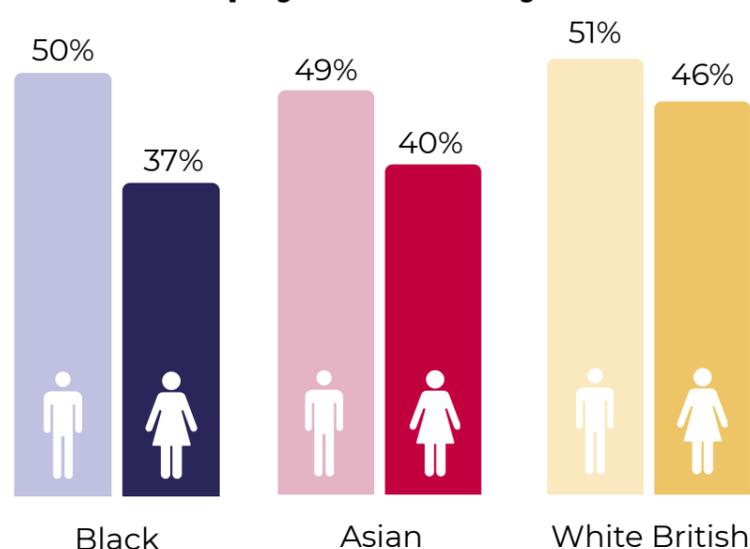
Girls who dream about becoming a top athlete or sportsperson (age 13-24)



60%

of Black girls dream of becoming a top athlete compared to 33% of White British girls

Boys and girls in years 3-11 who meet Chief Medical Officer's guidelines for physical activity

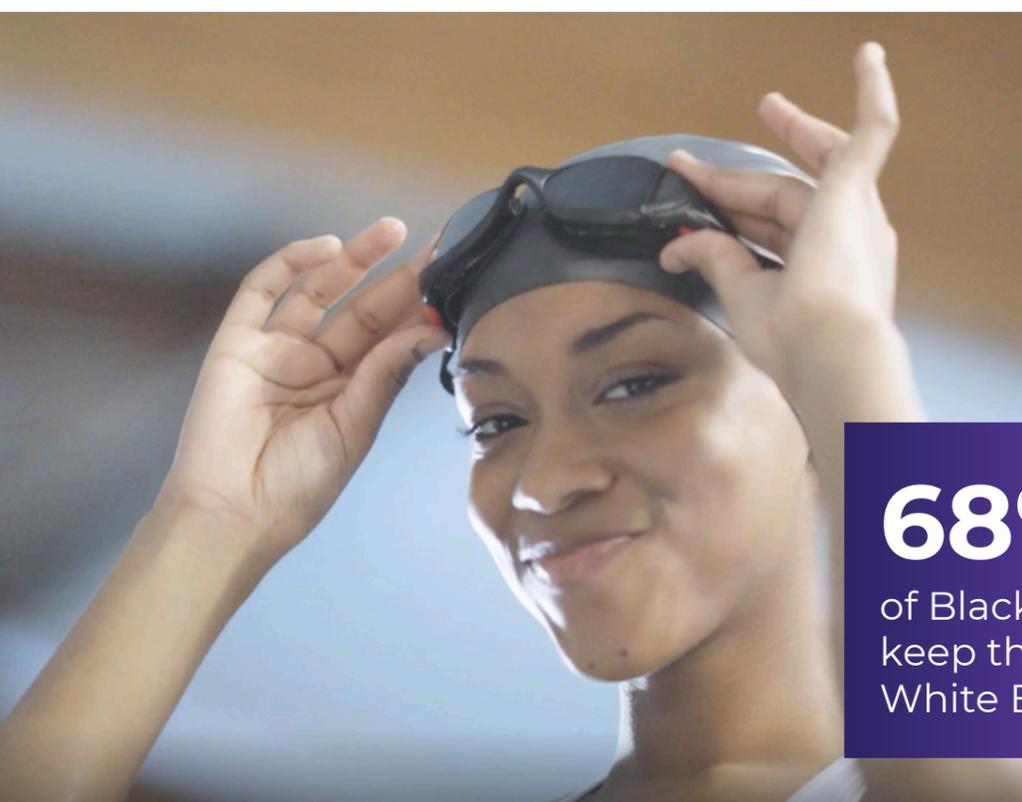


Sport is a huge opportunity to improve Black girls' lives, to provide joy and escape, as well as to give more Black girls the chance to find the safe community they seek and chase their dreams. It is not just morally right to seek to change Black girls' lives for the better: sport can benefit too. The sporting system has an opportunity to create a richer culture, one that welcomes Black girls for who they are and is lifted up by their passion for sport, their skills and enthusiasm. At elite level, women's sport is currently missing out on a huge amount of talent that might be released if we could improve Black girls' experiences in sport. In many places, the system just doesn't know what it's missing. It needs to.

This story is based on the findings of a major study, working with brilliant researchers, experts and stakeholders from Black communities. Eight sport governing bodies helped to fund this research and were closely involved in this journey.

68%

of Black girls say sport is very important to help keep their body fit and healthy, more than 49% White British, 48% Mixed and 50% Asian girls

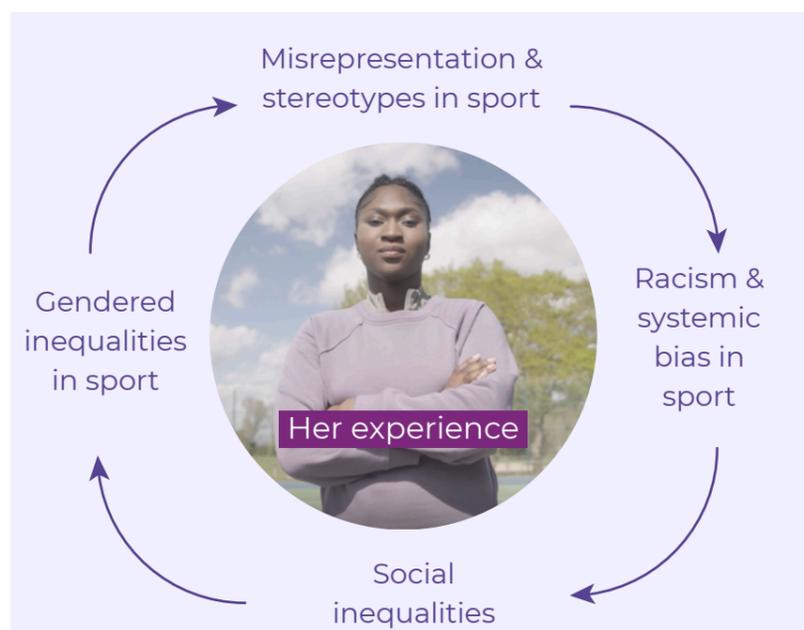


No two Black girls are the same, however our research found that Black girls share many experiences in common. We started by looking at the wider lives of Black teenage girls and found a tough space that girls have to navigate: minoritisation, adultification bias, the likelihood of economic hardship, high ambition to succeed and exacerbated fears around safety. This drives a particularly strong need for a safe space where they really feel they belong and fit in. Sport has the potential to be a powerful, uniting force, a place of belonging and celebration of difference that can be a life improving path for Black girls.

85%

of Black girls feel sport is vital for feeling joyful and carefree

But Black teenage girls' sporting experience is a story of loss and churn – all too often ending in a break-up. All teenage girls are having to manage female puberty and push back on stereotyping. Black teenage girls carry this too, and they face not only misogyny but the bias of racist stereotypes. They go to sport looking for joy and release but often they don't feel they can bring their full selves. They may be singled out or typecast into certain roles or sports and face the unnecessary pressure of an inflexible culture. Black girls also have unique needs around their cultural and physical reality, demonstrated by the issues of hair coverage, management and protection. In any relationship, ongoing misunderstanding erodes trust.



Time will be needed to rebuild trust if we are to restore Black girls' relationship with sport. First and foremost, people in sport need to read and reflect on this story and use it to inspire greater acknowledgement and respect for the unique needs of Black girls in sport.

32%

of Black girls say they are frequently penalised or get in trouble when they express themselves in sports and physical activity

We are calling on sports leaders to show leadership and commit to change, to be proactive in addressing misogynoir (racism combined with misogyny) with robust policies, to ensure better representation of Black women and to review provision and talent pathways with Black girls front of mind.

We are calling on coaches and programme leaders to make sport joyful again, to value Black girls for who they are and to embrace their unique identities and needs, giving them space to bring their whole selves. To build trust with Black girls and their families, to create safe places, to be flexible and to actively support Black girls. Also, to be aware of the biases and stereotypes that we all carry.

For a Black girl this love story should have a happy ending. Now we understand more about the unique experiences many Black girls face in life, and sport, the sector has a responsibility to do all it can to make the story an uplifting one. For a life-long happy relationship with sport Black girls from every background and culture will need to feel a true sense of belonging in sport and be able to pursue their dreams.



Recommendations for Sports Leaders

Proposals for senior leaders and non-executive directors

We urge leaders to own their part in closing this dream-reality gap for Black girls, to share these findings with Board members and senior leaders, recognise their seriousness and reflect on how to address the issues raised. This culture change will not happen unless it is led from the front.



1. Show leadership and commit to change

- **Celebrate the strong love Black girls have for sport** and commit to your sport's part in making Black girls' sporting dreams come true.
- **Acknowledge this inequality and inspire your people to understand and respect** Black girls' unique needs, have uncomfortable conversations, and seek help from expert partners to close the dream-reality gap.
- **Recognise the lost opportunity** this presents, both for the Black girls and for your sport.



2. Make your sport proactively anti-misogynoir

- **Educate your paid and volunteer workforce to be self-aware** about gender and racial stereotyping and typecasting, recognising we all carry prejudice.
- **Embed and enforce anti-racism and anti-misogyny policies** finding creative ways to ensure they really make a difference on the ground, while being aware of the risk of backlash and safeguarding against this.
- **Collect and use ethnicity and gender data on participation, progression and workforce** to inform investment, such as through gender budgeting.



3. Make sure Black women are represented at all levels

- **Value the Black women already in your sport** and work with them to help change the culture to attract and retain more Black women and girls.
- **Improve Black representation across your sport** (field to boardroom) using flexible recruitment approaches that builds trust and values lived experience.
- **Be proactive in seeking to retain Black women in your sport** making sure to give support, develop trust and have open conversations about their challenges.



4. Review your provision and talent pathways with Black girls in mind

- **Offer exciting recreational opportunities** in your sport which are sustained and valued for the sheer joy they bring.
- **Develop more flexible talent pathways** which have more tailored support, are less rigid, and not based on a single performance pathway.
- **Develop multi-year community initiatives** designed around Black girls' needs, working with trusted community groups and local schools.

Recommendations for Sport Providers, Coaches and Volunteers

Top practical tips for engaging and retaining Black girls

Coaches and volunteers should be helped to recognise the reality of Black girls' wider lives and understand their need for joy through sport, and their need for psychological as well as physical safety. Use this knowledge practically:

Make sure to:

- **Make sport free and joyful.** Allow room for spontaneity, autonomy and for co-design as Black girls are seeking joy and freedom through sport.
- **Let Black girls express themselves fully** for example through their spoken and body language, their vivacity, the way they wear their hair.
- **Build trust** with Black girls and their families, trust being the foundation, not a by-product, of participation. Go to where girls are.
- **Be flexible** with your activities and policies. For example by subsidising or waiving fees, flexing attendance rules by trying drop-ins or varying kit options.
- **Make your sport feel safe**, with girls-only or multi-generation female sessions, safe or free travel options, sensible session times, accessible and safe venues.

And don't:

- **Don't box Black girls in** by enforcing limiting gender stereotypes of how girls should behave: quiet, compliant and focused on the needs of others.
- **Don't typecast Black girls**, whether as fast, or angry or loud.
- **Don't treat Black girls as older than they are** and place unfair burdens on them.

Throughout this:

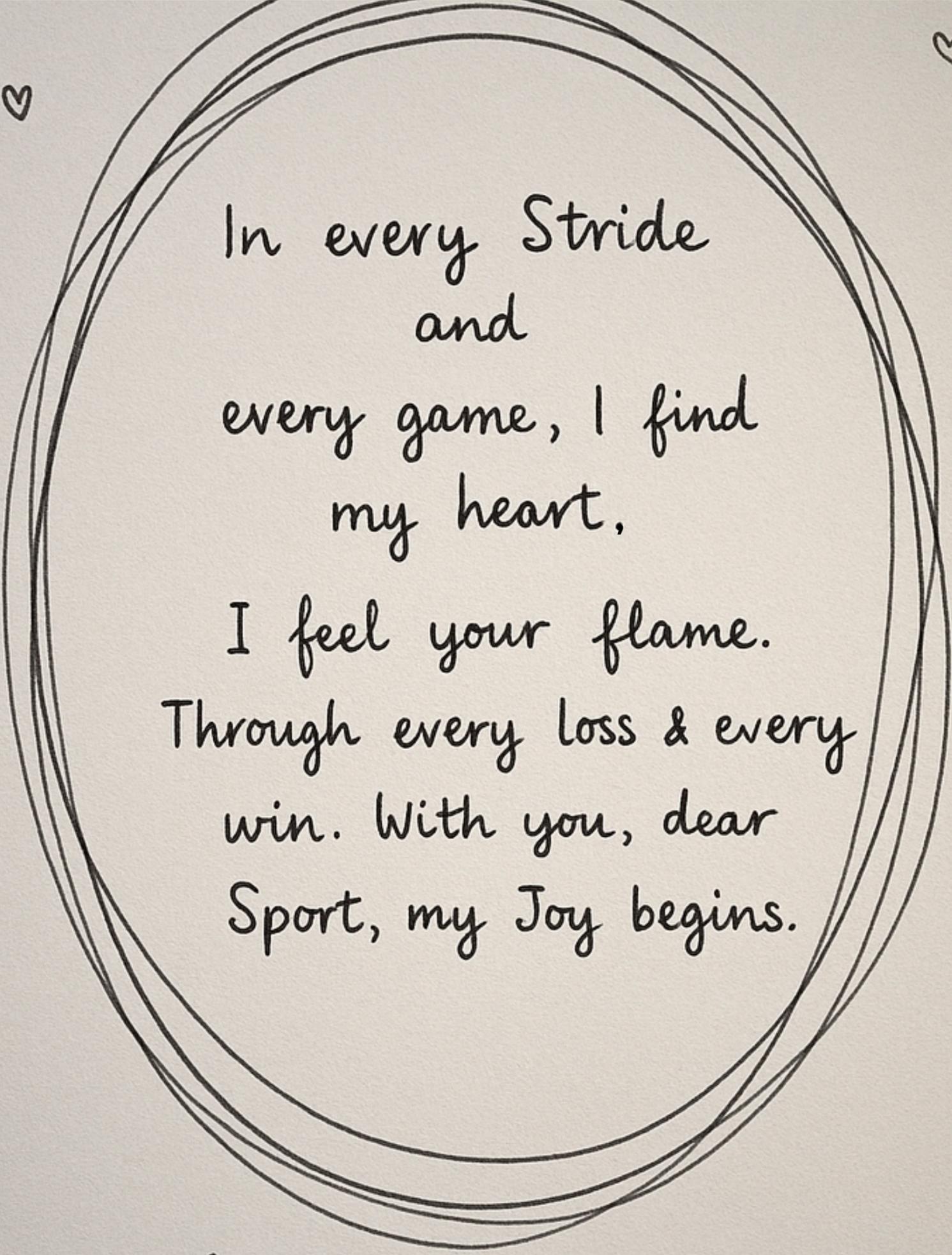
- **Value Black girls for who they are** as well as what they can do.
- **Be proactive, don't be passive.** If a Black girl is disengaging, be clear you'd like her to stay, ask her what you can do to support her and seek advice if you're unsure as to how.
- **Look for ways to build camaraderie** for the girls off the field as well as on it.
- **Avoid making assumptions.** Have honest conversations with Black women and girls about their experiences and needs. Listen without judgement.

Because Girls Belong in Sport, and Black Girls Belong in Sport



[1] Women in Sport (2024) [Chasing the Olympic Dream: Closing the Dream Deficit in Sport](#)

[ii] Sport England (2024) [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey: Academic Year 2023-2024](#)



In every Stride
and
every game, I find
my heart.

I feel your flame.
Through every loss & every
win. With you, dear
Sport, my Joy begins.

A poem to sport written by one of the girls involved in the research

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