

HISTORY OF WOMEN'S FOOTBALL WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP IN 1991–2007

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<https://doi.org/10.29038/2220-7481-2017-03-122-127>

Abstract

The aim of this article was to show the initial stage of development of women's world football through the analysis of first five tournaments within the World Championships. Such beginning in the form of world class tournaments has allowed strengthening the position of women's football in the world, giving it international prestige. First tournament took place in China in 1991. Joao Havelange, a then FIFA president, was a great promoter of the establishment of the FIFA World Cup. The next world championships were played in Sweden. It was a perfect tournament in terms of organization. A turning point in women's football was a tournament played in 1999 in the United States. It was a great media success of women's football. This tournament broke the audience record of sport competitions involving women, as the final match was watched by more than 90 thousand spectators at the stadium. The next championships strengthened the position of football in the world. Currently, there is a need to monitor and register important events in women's football, as it happens in men's football.

Key words: women's football, world championship, history.

Анджей Сорока. Історія жіночих чемпіонатів світу з футболу в 1991–2007 рр. Мета роботи – показати початковий етап розвитку жіночого світового футболу за допомогою аналізу перших п'яти турнірів на чемпіонаті світу. Такий початок (у формі турнірів світового рівня) дав змогу зміцнити позиції жіночого футболу у світі та надати йому міжнародний авторитет. Перший турнір відбувся в Китаї в 1991 р. На той час великим популяризатором проведення турнірів на Кубок світу був тодішній президент ФІФА Жоао Гавеланг. Наступні чемпіонати світу відбулись у Швеції. Це був ідеальний турнір із погляду організації. Переломним моментом у жіночому футболі став турнір у 1999 р. у Сполучених Штатах. Це був прекрасний медіа-успіх жіночого футболу. Цей турнір за участю жінок у спортивних змаганнях побив рекорди, оскільки за фінальним матчем спостерігало понад 90 тис. глядачів на стадіоні. Наступні чемпіонати посилили позиції футболу у світі. На сьогодні існує потреба в моніторингу та реєстрації важливих подій у жіночому футболі, оскільки це відбувається в чоловічому футболі.

Ключові слова: жіночий футбол, чемпіонат світу, історія.

Анджей Сорока. История женских чемпионатов мира по футболу в 1991–2007 гг. Цель работы – показать начальный этап развития женского мирового футбола путем анализа первых пяти турниров на чемпионате мира. Такое начало (в форме турниров мирового уровня) позволило укрепить позиции женского футбола в мире и предоставит ему международный авторитет. Первый турнир состоялся в Китае в 1991 г. В то время большим популяризатором проведения турниров на Кубок мира был тогдашний президент ФИФА Жоао Гавеланг. Следующие чемпионаты мира прошли в Швеции. Это был идеальный турнир с точки зрения организации. Переломным моментом в женском футболе стал турнир, который состоялся в 1999 г. в Соединенных Штатах. Это был прекрасный медіа-успех женского футбола. Этот турнир с участием женщин в спортивных соревнованиях побил рекорды, поскольку за финальным матчем наблюдали более 90 000 зрителей на стадионе. Следующие чемпионаты усилили позиции футбола в мире. В настоящее время существует потребность в мониторинге и регистрации важных событий в женском футболе, так как это происходит в мужском футболе.

Ключевые слова: женский футбол, чемпионат мира, история.

Introduction. Philosophers treat sport as an amazing phenomenon of the twentieth century, especially referring it to football. No sport discipline has taken over the world just like football and no one has managed to gather such a large number of fans (Grzegorzczuk et al. 1991). Football is a very communicative game, easy to understand even if participants or spectators do not know the rules, as the whole sense of the game boils down to scoring a goal. It seems that through its simplicity and ability to trigger strong emotional and intellectual experiences in participants of the game, it has become a phenomenon of modern times (Soroka 2005).

Football's phenomenon is proved also by the fact that its popularity returned in the early 70s of the 20th century among women after the ban period, which was issued in the 1920s. This is a classic example of how difficult it is to forbid something that people care about and what are really interested in (Soroka, 2005).

The extent and scope of football's phenomenon has caused that it has been explored for a long time by sociologists, psychologists as well as representatives of other science disciplines, however to a small extent

by historians as the analysis of individual tournaments remains only in the form of statistics of individual federations. Therefore, it is important to analyze the most important tournaments such as the world championships in order to document the most interesting phenomena occurring at the turn of the century and then to compare them together.

The aim of this article was to show the initial stage of development of women's world football through the analysis of first five world cup tournaments. Such beginning in the form of world class tournaments has allowed strengthening the position of women's football in the world, giving it international prestige.

China 1991. The Real Glow of Women's Football

Women's football got real glow in November 1991, when there was an inauguration of the world championships in this sport. Joao Havelange, a then FIFA president, was a great promoter and initiator of the establishment of cyclic tournaments with participation of the best female teams in the world, out of which would emerge the best one for the period of four years.

The organizer of the first tournament was the People's Republic of China, where women's football was very popular in the 1980s. Teams from all over the world were welcomed with unquestioned enthusiasm of football fans and Chinese authorities, which undoubtedly raised the prestige of the whole tournament.

In the final tournament there were 12 national teams selected through qualifications from 46 teams that expressed their desire to participate in this meeting. They were divided into three groups, out of which two best teams and two out of three with the highest number of points advanced to the knockout phase. Subsequently, the promotion was conditioned by a better ratio of goals. Apart from footballers, six football female referees appeared on the pitch. Klaudia de Vasconcelos, a Brazilian referee was the first woman in FIFA history that led a match on such a high level as the main referee. It was the match for the third place in the tournament.

A final match for the title of the first world champion in female football gathered in the stadium 63,000 fans. The meeting ended with the victory of American female footballers after scoring two goals by Michelle Akers against Norwegians. The first world championship tournament was dominated by teams from Europe – there were five. Three European teams played in semi-final matches, although the most important trophy was won by the American team. There were also one team from Brazil, three teams from Asia, one from Africa and one from Oceania. Matches were watched in the stands by 510,000 fans, with an average of nearly 20,000 fans per match, what impressed the organizers and FIFA authorities.

Sweden 1995. Europe Welcomes the World's Best Female Footballers

If the tournament in China in 1991 could be called an organizational improvisation, the second women's world championships played in 1995 in Sweden were organized at the highest world level. It was a combination of world prestige and provincial fun due to playing matches at the Swedish National Stadium Rasunda in Stockholm as well as in small provincial venues. Football teams even from distant continents won supporters from the local community, where they lived and played their matches.

These were championships where FIFA introduced an experiment with time breaks. The team could take advantage during the match of one two-minute break in each half of the game to rest or correct team's setting or tactics. However, during matches such convenience was rarely used by trainers. The specificity of these championships was also frequent meetings of main referees with line ones, which also aimed at allowing players to rest and regenerate. All these actions were because of the high temperature of the air during the tournament in Sweden.

Out of 25 referees who led matches during the tournament, 14 were women. For the first time in the history of women's world championships the final match was led by a Swedish referee, Ingrid Jonsson, who perfectly fulfilled her duty.

It was a tournament not only for the world championship, but also for qualifications to the Olympics Games in 1996, where the national women's teams were to take part in for the first time. One could say that the inauguration of world-class women's football tournaments led football to be introduced in the Olympic disciplines.

There were 53 national teams that participated in the qualifying matches for the final tournament of the II Women's World Football Championships. The formula of twelve teams in final matches was preserved. There was only a change in scoring. If a team won a match, it gained 3 points, whereas for the game unresolved only one point. A match for third place won the team from the United States after scoring one goal in each half against Chinese team. The final match of the world championship played between the teams of Norway and Germany was watched by over 17 000 fans, who were cheering for both teams in the rain, while the entire tournament was watched in the stands by 112 000 spectators.

USA 1999. Media Championships

If the championship tournament in 1995 was perfect due to its exemplary organization, the 1999 championships were a breakthrough in women's football because of their huge audience and media attention. The matches in stadiums were watched by almost 1 200 thousand of spectators. There were 2500 journalists accredited at the championships. All 32 played matches were broadcast live on television, and they were watched by almost billion viewers in 70 countries around the world. It was a breakthrough in the popularization of football in the world.

The final match in 1999 at the stadium in Pasadena in California was watched in the stands by a record number of fans – 90,185. So far no other sport event with women's participation gained such audience. Even a then president of the United States Bill Clinton came to watch the finals match on July 10.

For the first time the number of teams in the final tournament amounted to 16. They were divided into four qualification groups, out of which two best teams advanced to the next round. Further phase of the tournament was held according to a formula developed at the previous world championships, which is a cup system.

The same as in the previous championship, it was a triumph of American team as it won for the second time the world cup. The inaugural match of A group between the hostess team of the championships – USA and Denmark was watched by nearly 80 000 fans. In the second round, there were over 65 000 fans watching the match of American team against Nigerian one. The semi-final match with the hostesses of the championship saw over 73 000 fans, where Americans beat Brazilians 2–0. In the second semi-final match, China won 5–0 against Norway.

After the defeat in the semi-final match, the Norwegian team was not motivated enough to fight for the third place of the championships against the Brazilian team. Despite extra time ordered, neither team could score at least one goal that would give a victory. The penalty shots were better performed by Brazilian players and they became third team in the world. Similar situation appeared in the final match. In this match American players dominated the middle zone of the field and controlled the game, but in no way were able to break very strong Chinese defense. In the extra time, the Chinese team might have been tempted to win the match. At the penalty shootout, the third shot of Chinese player was defended by American goalkeeper Brandi Chastain, what allowed the USA to win the final match.

The biggest number of goals in the final tournament was scored by Brazilian player Sissi and Chinese player Sun Wen – 7 each. Brazilian player was also chosen the best player of the championship. In the III World Championships there were scored 120 goals. On average, there were over 37 000 fans in the stands watching each match.

USA 2003. Again on the American Continent

Despite the nomination of China as the host of the IV World Tournament in 2003, eventually, it was held again in the United States, due to Asian SARS virus. The tournament was originally scheduled to start on May 26, 2003, but due to the epidemic, it was moved to the United States to maintain the cyclicity of the tournament. The compensation for China was the maintenance of automatic qualification for the final tournament in the United States and designation by FIFA this country as the host of the next tournament in 2007. The World Cup in 2003 was played in an identical formula as in 1999.

The semi-final meeting, especially its end, played between the teams of Germany and the USA, two favorites to the title of world champions was very surprising. Both teams played at the similar level and was filled with many attempts to score a goal. Both teams scored 11 times on the field goal, but in this match only the German players won the match, finally winning 3–0. Each team scored the goal 11 times, however in semi-final meeting only German players scored the goals, winning the match 3–0. In the second semi-final match Swedish team with a strong advantage beat Canadian team 2–1.

With more than 25 000 fans in the stands, American team won the match for the third place, defeating the Canadian team 3–1. The final match was dominated by actions of German players, but they managed to win in extra time.

China 2007. China Again

Due to SARS epidemic, FIFA decided to move the World Championships from China to the United States, automatically choosing China to become a host of the next tournament in 2007. It was held between 10 and 30 September 2007. The host country chose five cities, where there were held 32 meetings. As in tournaments held in 1999 and 2003, 16 national teams were divided into four groups. Two best teams from each group were promoted to the cup phase.

In one of semi-final matches there was a confrontation between European teams, while in the second between American teams. The favorites of the meeting German team beat Norway 3–0. The second semi-final match between Brazil and the United States also ended with a high victory, where Brazilian players beat Americans 4–0.

In the fight for the bronze medal of the World Cup from the beginning the US team achieved decisive advantage, who defeated Norwegian team 4–1.

Undoubtedly, two best teams met in the final match. German team had not lost a single goal, shooting 19 goals to the opponent teams, winning four meetings and one match drawing without scoring any goals with English team in the group phase. The Brazilians won five matches by scoring 17 goals and losing only two. In the match both teams created many dangerous situations, but effective were two shots that ended with scoring goals by German team.

The tournament in China was viewed in the stands of five stadiums by 1 190 thousand of fans, which gave the average attendance for the match over 37 000 spectators. These figures clearly demonstrate the demand of fans for women's football and its immense importance in the world.

Kristen Lilly, an American player, appeared to be a phenomenon in women's football. The World Cup in China was the fifth in a row in which she participated.

Statistics of Five World Championships

While analyzing five world championships, the US team appeared to be the most titled as it returned with a medal from every championship. In 1991 and 1999 she won gold medals, while in 1995, 2003 and 2007 bronze ones. It is worth mentioning that the US team is also the winner of the Olympic Games in 1996 and 2004. Another world's top representation that is German team won three medals of world championships: two gold medals and one silver. The teams of Norway, Sweden and Brazil won two medals each at that time: Norway with one gold medal and one silver, while Sweden and Brazil with one silver medal and one bronze. Chinese team won silver medal in 1999 (table 1).

Table 1

The Winners of the Next World Championships

| Country organizer | Year | I Place | II Place | III Place | IV Place |
|-------------------|------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
| China PR | 1991 | USA | Norway | Sweden | German |
| Sweden | 1995 | Norway | German | USA | China PR |
| USA | 1999 | USA | China PR | Brazil | Norway |
| USA | 2003 | German | Sweden | USA | Canada |
| China PR | 2007 | German | Brazil | USA | Norway |

So far, the players scored 533 goals in all five tournaments. The highest average of scored goals in the match was achieved in 1995 and 1999 at amounted to 3,8. Most female footballers with high goal scoring played in the US representations, which achieved in tournaments 85 effective shots to the goal. German and Norwegian teams scored each 84 goals, China PR scored 55 as well as Sweden and Brazil – 46 each (tab. 2).

Table 2

The Number of Goals Scored in the Next World Championships

| Year of Organization of the World Championship | Number of Teams Participating | Number of Matches Played | Number of Goals Scored | Average of Goals Scored in a Match |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1991 | 12 | 26 | 97 | 3,7 |
| 1995 | 12 | 26 | 99 | 3,8 |
| 1999 | 16 | 32 | 120 | 3,8 |
| 2003 | 16 | 32 | 106 | 3,3 |
| 2007 | 16 | 32 | 111 | 3,5 |

After each world championship tournament, there are selected three top and most valuable players. The first place is awarded with the prize in the form of «golden ball», the second place with «silver ball» and the third with «brown ball». Only two players, Michelle Akers and Birgit Prinz appeared twice in the top three players of the championship. In 1991 Michelle Akers was awarded with the «silver ball» and in 1999 with the «brown ball» of the world championship. In 2003 Birgit Prinz was named the best tournament player, and in 2007 she was awarded with the «silver ball» (tab. 3).

Table 3

Classification of the Best Players in the World Championships

| Year of Championships | «Gold Ball» | «Silver Ball» | «Bronze Ball» |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1991 | Jennings Carin (USA) | Akers Michelle (USA) | Medalen Linda (Norway) |
| 1995 | Hege Rise (Norway) | Gro Espeseth (Norway) | Aarones Ann Kristin (Norway) |
| 1999 | Sun Wen (China PR) | Sissi (Brazil) | Akers Michelle (USA) |
| 2003 | Prinz Birgit (Germany) | Svensson Victoria (Sweden) | Meinert Maren (Germany) |
| 2007 | Marta (Brazil) | Prinz Birgit (Germany) | Christiane (Brazil) |

The classification of the best snipers is also run on every world championships. The first place is awarded with the «golden shoe», the second with «silver shoe» and the third with «bronze shoe». So far, there have been six «gold shoe» awarded as in 1999 two Brazilian players Sissi and Chinese player Sun Wen took first place in the classification, due to the same number of scored goals. Among the awarded players two times was Norwegian player arones Ann Kristin, who in 1995 was the best goal shooter with 6 scored goals and in 1999 was awarded with third place wining «bronze shoe» (tab.4).

Table 4

Classification of Players with the Biggest Number of Scored Goals During world Championship

| Year of Championship | «Gold Shoe» | «Silver Shoe» | «Bronze Shoe» |
|----------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1991 | Akers Michelle (10) (USA) | Mohr Heidi (7) (Niemcy) | Jennings Carin (6) (USA) |
| 1995 | Aarones Ann Kristin (6) (Norway) | Hege Rise (5) (Norwegia) | Shi Guihong (3) (China PR) |
| 1999 | Sissi (Brazylia) (7) Sun Wen (China) (7) | Nie przyznano | Aarones Ann Kristin (4) (Norway) |
| 2003 | Prinz Brigit (7) (Germany) | Meinert Maren (4) (Niemcy) | Katia (4) (Brazil) |
| 2007 | Marta (Brazil) | Abby Wambach (USA) | Ragnhild Gulbrandsen (Norway) |

In the classification of the best goal shooters in the history of world championship in football the first positions are occupied by German player Brigit Prinz, who scored 14 goals in four tournaments in which she participated. American player Akers Michelle scored 12 goals and German player Bettina Wiegmann – 13. It should be noted that both German players scored goals in four tournaments and American player only in two in 1991 and 1995 (tab.5).

Table 5

The Best Goal Shooters in the History of the Women's world Championships

| Place | Name and Surname | Nationality | Number of Scored goals | Participation in Championships |
|-------|---------------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. | Brigit Prinz | Germany | 14 | 1995,1999,2003,2007 |
| 2. | Akers Michelle | USA | 12 | 1991,1995 |
| 3. | Bettina Wiegmann | Germany | 11 | 1991,1995,1999,2003 |
| 4. | Heidi Mohr | Germany | 10 | 1991,1995 |
| 4. | Kristin Ann Aarones | Norway | 10 | 1995,1999 |
| 4. | Sun Wen | China PR | 10 | 1995,1999,2003 |
| 4. | Marta | Brazil | 10 | 2003,2007 |
| 8. | Abby Wambach | USA | 9 | 2003, 2007 |
| 9. | Linda Medalen | Norway | 8 | 1991,1995 |
| 9. | Rise Hege | Norway | 8 | 1995,1999 |
| 9. | Mia Hamm | USA | 8 | 1991,1995,1999,2003 |

Conclusions. Women's football as a new phenomenon in world sport has become an important sport discipline thanks to vast interest of a large number of fans in tournaments of global or continental rank. The example of the first five tournaments shows the increasing interest of fans and media, which in modern world create all kind of events, both local and worldwide. Currently, the world cup are held in three age categories up to 17 and 19 and in the senior category. There were created games embracing not only the national teams, but also club competitions at the range of individual continents. Due to such organized competition, there is a need for in-depth analysis of the female game from technical and tactical side as well as to document football events. The presented work is the first part that documents the women's world championships. Further with even richer dramaturgy should encourage next generations of fans to watch sport events with participation of women.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 28.09.2017 р.