

Representation of Men's and Women's National Basketball Teams in Lithuanian Online Sports Media: A Case Study of the 2025 European Basketball Championships

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study examines how Lithuanian online sports media represented the men's and women's national basketball teams during the 2025 European Basketball Championships period. The study was based on the observation that, despite growing attention to gender equality in sport, the women's national team remained significantly less visible in Lithuanian sports media than the men's team. The aim of the study was to analyse differences in visibility, tone, framing, and source authority in the representation of the two teams and to explore how these differences were understood by media professionals and representatives of the association Lietuvos Krepšinis.

Methods: The research used a mixed-methods design. It combined quantitative and qualitative content analysis of 1,027 publications with semi-structured interviews with seven experts, including five media representatives and two representatives of the association Lietuvos Krepšinis. The media sample covered publications from seven Lithuanian online portals collected between 1 June and 30 September 2025.

Results: The results showed a clear imbalance in favour of the men's national team: 76.9% of the publications focused on the men's team, while 22.7% focused on the women's team. Article length was almost identical in both cases, indicating that the main difference appeared in the frequency of coverage rather than in the length of the texts. The women's team received a slightly higher share of positive coverage and a much higher share of neutral coverage. The main difference, however, was in negative tone: it appeared far more often in articles about the men's team. The women's team was also more often framed through inspirational narratives, while the men's team was more often discussed through analysis, expert evaluation, and conflict. The findings also showed that male voices remained dominant in the coverage of both teams.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that gender inequality in Lithuanian online sports media was reproduced through unequal visibility, different framing patterns, and a male-dominated structure of authority. The women's national team was present in media coverage, but it did not occupy the same communicative position as the men's team.

Keywords: Online sports media, national basketball teams, gender representation, framing, sports communication

1. INTRODUCTION

Sport in contemporary media is no longer only about results and match reports. It is also a part of public communication where visibility and importance are shaped. Online sports media channels do more than inform audiences. They help

decide which teams and topics receive attention and which remain in the background. In this sense, sports media are not neutral channels of information but active actors in the mediated environment of sport (Frandsen, 2016; Ličen et al., 2022). This is



particularly clear in digital media. The circulation of sports content is shaped not only by editorial decisions but also by platform logic, audience engagement, and algorithmic distribution. Some topics become more visible because they already attract attention or fit the logic of online platforms more easily. As a result, sports coverage is shaped by a broader communication ecology and not only by journalistic choice (Nölleke & Perreault, 2024; Perreault & Nölleke, 2022).

A recurring finding in sports media research is gender inequality. Women's sport tends to receive less attention than men's sport and is often framed differently. Men's sport is more often associated with tactical depth, authority, competition, and conflict. Women's sport, by contrast, is more often presented through emotional, inspirational, or supportive narratives (Bruce, 2016; Cooky et al., 2015; Dorer et al., 2020). Feminist sport media research has shown that inequality in representation is not only about the amount of coverage, but also about how athletes and teams are presented in media discourse (Antunovic, 2023).

Framing theory is useful here because media do not simply report events. They also shape meaning by choosing particular angles and emphases. The same sporting event may be presented as a story of discipline, conflict, breakthrough, recovery, or failure depending on the frame through which it is told (Goffman, 1974). Because of this, even positive coverage may still reproduce inequality if one group is consistently treated differently from the other.

Lithuania offers a relevant setting for this analysis because basketball holds a strong position in national sport and media culture. The study therefore does not examine a marginal sport, but a sport that is central to public attention. During the selected research period, both the Lithuanian men's and women's national teams were covered within the broader EuroBasket 2025 media cycle. This makes the comparison especially revealing, as it shows how gender inequality may appear even inside a highly visible sport: not only through the number of articles, but also through framing, tone, and whose voices are used to explain the game.

The aim of this study was to analyse how Lithuanian online sports media represented the men's and women's national basketball teams during the 2025 European Basketball Championships period. The study focused on differences in visibility, tone, framing, and source authority. It also examined how these differences were understood by media professionals and representatives of the association Lietuvos Krepšinis.

Based on this framework, the study tested three hypotheses: (1) that the imbalance would be seen mainly in publication frequency rather than article length; (2) that the women's team would receive more positive or neutral coverage, while the men's team would be more exposed to negative evaluation; and (3) that the women's team would be framed more often through inspirational narratives, while the men's team would be framed more often through analysis, expert commentary, and conflict.

2. METHODS

2.1. Study design

The study used a mixed-methods design. It combined quantitative content analysis, qualitative thematic analysis, source analysis, and semi-structured interviews. This approach made it possible to examine not only how often the two teams appeared in media coverage, but also how they were represented and how these differences were explained by people working in sport communication.

The study was descriptive in nature and analytical in its purpose. It was not designed to test causal relationships statistically, but to identify and interpret recurring differences in how the Lithuanian men's and women's national basketball teams were represented in online sports media.

2.2. Sample and data collection

The media sample consisted of 1,027 online publications collected from seven Lithuanian portals: Delfi.lt, 15min.lt, LRT.lt, TV3.lt, BasketNews.lt, Krepšinis.net, and Sportas.lt. These portals were selected because of their reach and importance in the Lithuanian sports media field. The sample included both general news portals and specialised sports portals.

The research period covered 1 June to 30 September 2025. It included the preparation phase, the championship period, and the post-championship cycle. Publications were included if they focused on the Lithuanian men's or women's national basketball teams and contained keywords related to EuroBasket 2025, the Lithuanian national team, women's basketball, or men's basketball. Advertisements, texts without a clear sports focus, and automatically generated aggregator content were excluded. The final corpus was compiled from the limited liability company Mediaskopas database Station.lt.

The interview sample consisted of seven experts: five media representatives and two representatives of the association Lietuvos Krepšinis. The

participants were anonymised and coded as Experts A–G. The interviews were used to place the quantitative findings in context and to examine how editorial priorities, communication routines, and institutional strategies shape the representation of the two teams.

2.3. Analytical framework

The analysis treated media representation as more than a question of coverage volume. It also examined tone, framing, and the distribution of symbolic authority. This approach follows the theoretical foundation, which combines mediatisation, framing, and gender representation perspectives (Bruce, 2016; Cooky et al., 2015; Dorer et al., 2020; Frandsen, 2016; Ličen et al., 2022).

In this article, symbolic authority means the ability to define and explain basketball in media coverage. It refers to whose voices are used to interpret performance, evaluate players, explain decisions, and give meaning to the national teams. This is important for gender analysis because visibility alone does not show who is treated as a credible speaker. A team may be covered in the media, but the interpretation of that team may still be shaped mostly by male coaches, experts, journalists, or institutional voices.

The quantitative content analysis focused on publication frequency, article length, and tone. Tone was coded as positive, neutral, or negative. Positive tone covered content focused on achievement, support, optimism, or success. Neutral tone described factual reporting without a strong evaluative emphasis. Negative tone included criticism, disappointment, conflict, or failure.

Framing analysis was carried out by assigning one dominant frame to each publication. The categories were: analysis/expert evaluation, inspirational framing, scandal/conflict, organisational theme, medicalisation/injury, and other/unclear. These categories made it possible to compare the main ways in which the two teams were presented (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Goffman, 1974).

The categories were chosen because they reflected both the theoretical discussion and the recurring patterns found in the material. Analysis/expert evaluation was used when the article focused on tactics, performance, selection, or professional judgement. Inspirational framing was used when the article emphasised motivation, unity, progress, comeback, or symbolic achievement. Scandal/conflict referred to criticism, tension, controversy, or failure. Organisational theme covered official

decisions, preparation, team selection, and federation communication. Medicalisation/injury was used when health status, injury, or return after injury was the main focus. Other/unclear was used only when no dominant frame could be identified.

Source analysis was used to identify which voices dominated the articles, including athletes, coaches, journalists, experts, and institutional representatives. This made it possible to examine not only differences in visibility and representation, but also whose perspectives were given greater prominence in the coverage of each team (Dorer et al., 2020; Peña & Bock, 2024).

2.4. Coding and analysis procedure

Each publication was coded using a predefined scheme. Coding was conducted by the first author as a single-coder content analysis. Before the final coding, the categories were tested on a smaller subset of publications in order to clarify unclear cases and apply the same rules across the full dataset. The final coding was then carried out systematically in Microsoft Excel. Every article received one main team category, one dominant tone, one dominant framing model, and one dominant source category. If more than one possible interpretation appeared in a text, the dominant category was chosen on the basis of the headline, the main narrative direction, and the overall emphasis of the article.

The data were analysed descriptively. Frequency and percentage were calculated to compare the representation of the men's and women's teams across the selected variables. Data processing was also carried out in Microsoft Excel. Before the percentage was calculated, category labels were standardised and unclear or duplicated values were recoded according to the final coding scheme.

Intercoder reliability was not calculated. To reduce subjectivity, the coding scheme was defined before the final analysis, all category labels were standardised, and unclear or duplicated cases were recoded according to the same rules.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2022). The themes were identified by combining pre-defined analytical topics with patterns that emerged directly from the interview material. These qualitative data were then used to interpret the main trends found in the publication sample.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Distribution of media attention

The analysis of the 1,027 publications showed a clear imbalance in favour of the Lithuanian men's national basketball team. Of all the analysed articles, 790 publications (76.9%) focused on the men's

team, 233 publications (22.7%) on the women's team, and four publications (0.4%) discussed both teams. The average article length was almost identical: 653 words for the men's team and 652 words for the women's team. The imbalance therefore appeared mainly as a difference in media attention, not as a difference in article length.

Table 1. Visibility and article length by team

Team	Number of Articles (N)	Share of Coverage (%)	Mean Article Length (Words)
Men's national team	790	76.9%	653
Women's national team	233	22.7%	652
Both teams	4	0.4%	1,471
Total	1,027	100.0%	–

These findings support the first hypothesis. The difference between the men's and women's teams appeared mainly in the frequency of coverage rather than in article length.

3.2. Tone of content

Positive tone dominated in the coverage of both

teams, but clear differences appeared in the distribution of neutral and negative tone. In the men's team coverage, 48.2% of articles were positive, 34.2% neutral, and 17.6% negative. In the women's team coverage, the corresponding proportions were 50.2%, 46.9%, and 2.9%.

Table 2. Distribution of content tone by team

Team	Positive Tone (%)	Neutral Tone (%)	Negative Tone (%)
Men's national team	48.2%	34.2%	17.6%
Women's national team	50.2%	46.9%	2.9%

The strongest contrast appeared in negative tone. Articles about the men's team contained negative evaluative elements almost six times more often than articles about the women's team. This made the coverage of the men's team more polarised, while coverage of the women's team was more often supportive or informational. For this reason, the second hypothesis was only partly supported. The main difference was not the positive tone, which was similar in both groups, but the much higher share of negative tone in the men's team coverage.

3.3. Dominant framing models

The framing analysis showed clear differences in how the two teams were presented. The men's team was most often framed through analysis and expert evaluation (33.3%), followed by inspirational framing (30.6%) and scandal/conflict framing (17.2%). The women's team was framed predominantly through inspirational narratives (58.4%), while analysis/expert evaluation accounted for 16.3% and scandal/conflict for only 3.5%.

Table 3. Distribution of dominant framing models by team

Framing Model	Men's National Team (%)	Women's National Team (%)
Analysis/expert evaluation	33.3%	16.3%
Inspirational framing	30.6%	58.4%
Scandal/conflict	17.2%	3.5%
Organisational theme	12.0%	17.6%
Medicalisation/injury	3.6%	4.3%
Other/unclear	3.3%	9.9%

These results show that the men's team was more often presented through tactical discussion, expert judgement, and conflict, while the women's team was more often associated with motivation, unity, progress, and symbolic achievement. The third hypothesis was therefore confirmed.

3.4. Source authority and gender balance

The analysis of dominant sources showed

that athletes were the main source type in articles about both teams. Athletes accounted for 62.0% of dominant sources in the men's team coverage and 62.7% in the women's team coverage. Coaches were the second most common source in both groups. At the same time, coverage of the women's team more often relied on journalists and experts/commentators as dominant voices than coverage of the men's team.

Table 4. Source authority and gender balance by team

Category	Men's National Team (N = 790)	Women's National Team (N = 233)
Dominant source type		
Athlete	490 (62.0%)	146 (62.7%)
Coach	112 (14.2%)	32 (13.7%)
Journalist	42 (5.3%)	32 (13.7%)
Expert/commentator	28 (3.5%)	14 (6.0%)
Club representative	14 (1.8%)	1 (0.4%)
Medical staff	7 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Fans	6 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Institutional representative	6 (0.8%)	0 (0.0%)
Unclear	85 (10.8%)	8 (3.4%)
Gender balance of sources		
Mostly male	683 (86.5%)	206 (88.4%)
Mostly female	0 (0.0%)	17 (7.3%)
Similar gender balance	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.4%)
No clear balance	107 (13.5%)	9 (3.9%)

Male voices dominated the coverage of both teams. This was also visible in articles about the women's team, where male-dominated source patterns were still very common. This shows that the imbalance appeared not only in visibility, but also in whose voices were treated as authoritative.

3.5. Qualitative interview analysis

The interview material helped explain why these differences appeared in practice. Media

representatives described the men's national basketball team as the central object of Lithuanian sports coverage and a major driver of audience interest. According to the interviews, this status is linked to audience expectations, readership, and historical attachment. The women's team, by contrast, was more often described as a topic with potential rather than as a routine priority.

The interviews also showed that the two teams are framed differently in practice. Coverage of the

men's team was described as more analytical, with greater attention to tactics, line-up decisions, physical condition, and performance evaluation. Coverage of the women's team was more often built around stories of return, growth, effort, and inspiration. These statements closely matched the patterns observed in the framing analysis.

Institutional communication was another important factor. Representatives of the association Lietuvos Krepšinis noted that although both teams are formally important, communication resources are not distributed equally in practice. Several participants pointed out that coverage of the women's team more often relies on prepared institutional material, official communication, and proactive support. This suggests that the asymmetry in representation is maintained not only by audience demand, but also by editorial priorities, communication routines, and resource limitations.

4. DISCUSSION

The results point to a clear but specific form of inequality in Lithuanian online sports media. The clearest difference appeared in the frequency of coverage: the men's team received more than three times as many publications as the women's team, while article length remained almost identical. The main imbalance therefore lay in the distribution of attention rather than in the volume of individual texts.

This result is in line with previous research showing that women's sport often remains less visible than men's sport even in digital media environments (Bruce, 2016; Cooky et al., 2015; Dorer et al., 2020). The Lithuanian case points in the same direction, although women's basketball still receives more consistent attention than in some older international examples.

The study also shows that the two teams were framed differently. The men's team was more often associated with analysis, expert evaluation, and conflict. The women's team was more often represented through inspirational and supportive storytelling. This suggests that symbolic inequality can persist even when women's sport is covered positively. In this context, the issue was not only whether the women's team was covered positively, but whether it was treated as a regular subject of serious sports analysis.

This pattern supports earlier work on gendered sports media framing, but the Lithuanian case adds an important nuance. The women's team was not ignored; it was covered in a more supportive and

inspirational register. The problem is that this register gave it less space for routine tactical debate, criticism, and expert interpretation.

The tone analysis supports this view. Negative tone appeared far more often in the men's team coverage, which suggests that the men's team is judged under higher expectations and is more open to criticism. The women's team, by contrast, was covered in a more protected or supportive way. This may look favourable at first sight, but it may also mean that women's basketball is still not treated as a central part of routine sports analysis.

The low level of negative tone in women's team coverage should therefore be read carefully. On one hand, it suggests a more supportive media environment. On the other hand, it may also show weaker analytical engagement. The women's team was less often criticised partly because it was less often treated as a routine object of tactical debate, pressure, and performance evaluation. In this sense, the supportive tone did not necessarily translate into equal analytical status.

The source analysis adds another layer to this argument. Male voices dominated not only the coverage of the men's team, but also the coverage of the women's team. This matters because sources do more than provide information. They also shape how the game is explained and whose judgement is treated as credible. The women's team could therefore be visible in the media while still being interpreted through a largely male structure of expertise.

The interview material helps explain why these patterns persist. Media professionals described the men's national team as the main centre of sports coverage and the main driver of audience interest. The women's national team, by contrast, was more often treated as a topic that still needs additional editorial and institutional support. This reflects a broader media logic: topics that already attract more attention are more easily reinforced as priorities (Frandsen, 2016; Ličen et al., 2022). In digital media, this hierarchy is also strengthened by platform logic and communication ecology (Perreault & Nölleke, 2022; Nölleke & Perreault, 2024).

These results have practical implications for Lithuanian sports media and basketball communication. Newsrooms could monitor gender balance not only by counting articles, but also by looking at framing, source selection, and the amount of analytical coverage given to women's basketball. Editors could include the women's national team more regularly in previews, post-match analysis, expert columns, and homepage positions, rather

than covering it mainly through inspirational stories. The basketball federation could also support this process by providing more regular, data-rich, and journalist-ready information about the women's team, including access to players, coaches, statistics, and expert background material.

This study has several limitations. It focuses on one sport and one national context, thus the findings should not be generalised too broadly. The analysis is descriptive rather than inferential, and the interview sample is relatively small. Two methodological limitations are especially important. First, the content analysis was conducted by one coder, and intercoder reliability was not calculated. Second, each article was assigned one dominant frame. This made the comparison clearer, but it may have simplified articles that contained more than one interpretive layer. Future research could use multiple coders, report intercoder reliability, and apply multi-frame coding or discourse analysis to examine more complex forms of representation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Lithuanian online sports media represented the men's and women's national basketball teams unequally during the EuroBasket 2025 media cycle. The clearest difference appeared in the frequency of coverage: the men's team received substantially more attention, while article length remained almost identical in both groups. This means that the main asymmetry was in distribution of attention.

The study also found that the two teams were framed differently. The women's national team was more often represented through neutral and inspirational narratives, while the men's national team was more often associated with analysis, expert evaluation, negative tone, and conflict-oriented framing. In addition, symbolic authority in the coverage of both teams remained strongly male-dominated.

Overall, the findings suggest that gender inequality in Lithuanian sports communication is reproduced not only through unequal visibility, but also through different framing and source patterns. The women's team was present in the media, but it did not occupy the same communicative position as the men's team. It received less routine attention, less analytical framing, and was still interpreted through a largely male source structure.

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