SPONSORWORKS × Nielsen Sports

THE CORPORATE HOSPITALITY REPORT 2026

Sponsorworks partnered with Nielsen Sports to survey 255 senior budget-holders on how they run major corporate hospitality programmes. We scored every programme and compared the best-run with the rest. We also asked what new opportunity women's sport opens up for hospitality, with some fascinating findings.

Our new benchmarking tool lets you score your own business against everyone in the survey.

FOUR PILLARS OF WELL-RUN HOSPITALITY

01	02	03	04
OPTIMAL USAGE	ROI & INSIGHT	EFFORTLESS AUTOMATION	AI READINESS

The best-run programmes lead on all four.

KEY *FINDINGS*

84%

The top quarter uses 84% of its hospitality tickets.[1]

The bottom quarter uses 60%, so about four in ten of its seats go empty.

80%

80% of the top quarter[2] always use guest feedback to plan future events.

In the bottom quarter, 5% do.

73%

73% of the top quarter answer guest questions within a few hours.

In the bottom quarter, 11% do.

FOUR PILLARS OF *WELL-RUN HOSPITALITY*

We looked at all 255 programmes across four pillars: four areas that shape how well a hospitality programme runs. The findings that follow take them one at a time.

01 OPTIMAL USAGE

How well tickets are used, guests are selected and cancelled places are filled.

02 ROI & INSIGHT

How consistently you measure results against objectives and use feedback to improve future events.

03 EFFORTLESS AUTOMATION

How much of your event communication is automated and how quickly guests get answers.

04 AI READINESS

How ready your technology is for AI and how much pressure there is to deploy it.

ALL FOUR PILLARS

WHAT THE BEST-RUN PROGRAMMES *DO DIFFERENTLY*

We compared the **top quarter** [2] of programmes, the ones doing best across all four pillars, with the **bottom quarter**. The gap shows up in every pillar.

OPTIMAL USAGE

Share of tickets that get used [1]

Top quarter	84%
Bottom quarter	60%

ROI & INSIGHT

Businesses that always use guest feedback and metrics to plan future events

Top quarter	80%
Bottom quarter	5%

EFFORTLESS AUTOMATION

Share of event communications sent automatically [3]

Top quarter	82%
Bottom quarter	43%

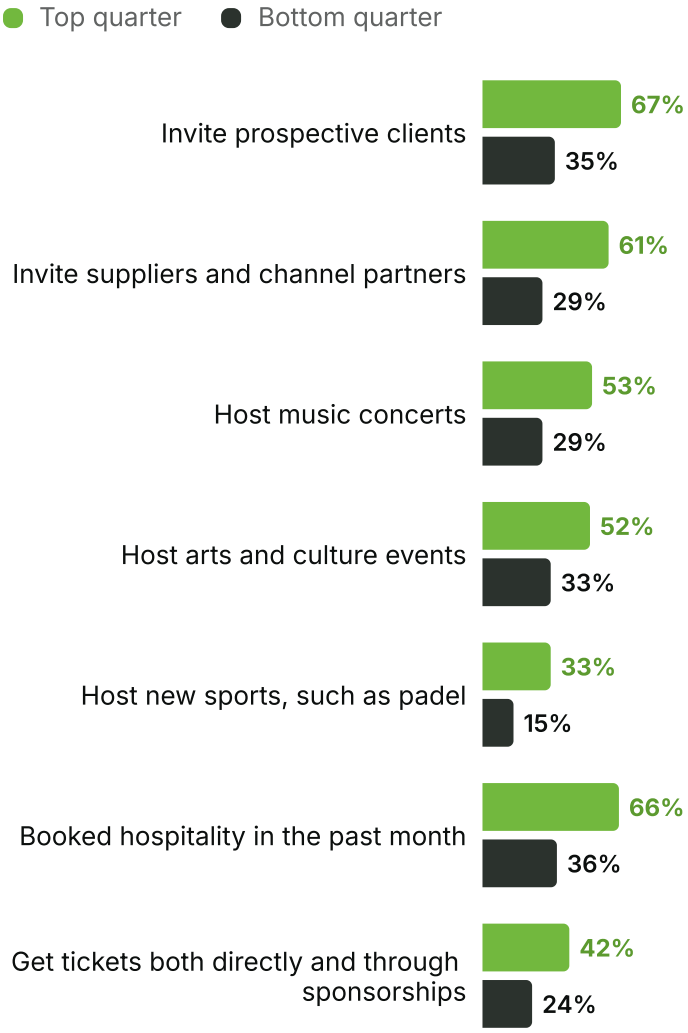
AI READINESS

Businesses using AI to respond to guests [4]

Top quarter	67%
Bottom quarter	27%

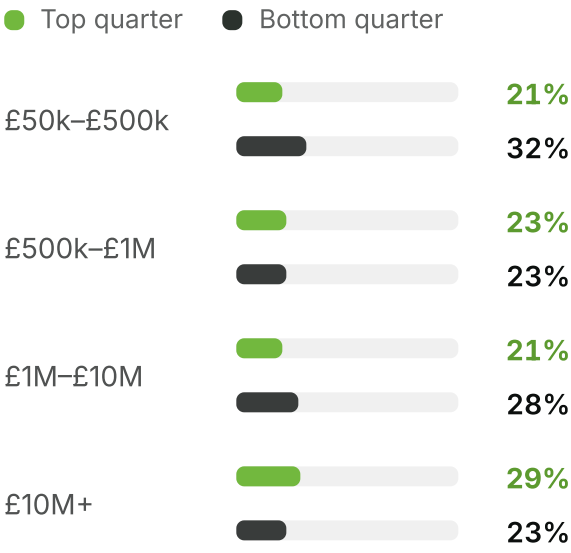
The biggest differences are in the everyday running of a programme: whether tickets get used, whether messages go out without someone sending them and whether guests can find answers for themselves. None of that needs a bigger budget.

Share of businesses in each quarter that do these things



IT ISN'T DOWN TO BUDGET

Share of each budget band in the top and bottom quarters [5]



Bigger budgets help a little, but not much. Every budget band has businesses in both the top and bottom quarters, in similar numbers.

THE BEST-RUN BUSINESSES PLAN TO GROW

Top quarter vs bottom quarter

75% vs **17%**

expect to do more hospitality in at least three of five event types over the next three years [6]

6% vs **30%**

expect to do less in at least one event type

The businesses that run hospitality best are the most likely to expand it, and the least likely to cut back. Our reading: when a programme is run well and can show what it delivers, the case for investing more makes itself. When it isn't, hospitality is easier to cut.

OPTIMAL USAGE

MORE SEATS USED, BY MORE KINDS OF GUEST

On average, businesses use 72% of their hospitality tickets, so about one seat in four goes unused. The best-run programmes use more of their seats, and offer them to a wider mix of guests.

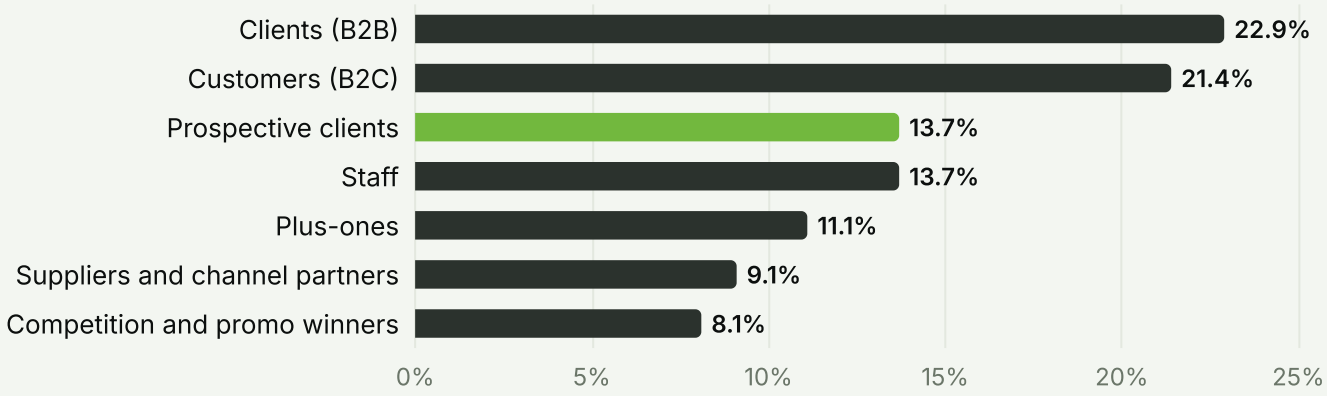
Top quarter [2] vs bottom quarter

84% vs **60%**
of hospitality tickets get used [1]

67% vs **35%**
of businesses invite prospective clients

61% vs **29%**
of businesses invite suppliers and partners

About one seat in seven goes to a prospective client



Top quarter vs bottom quarter

92% vs **9%**
of businesses are very confident each place goes to the right guest [7]

91% vs **64%**
of businesses find it easy to fill a place when a guest cancels

Almost every business (96%) is at least fairly confident that each place goes to the right guest. Only 47% are very confident, and they are mostly the businesses that check. Of those that always record results against each event's objectives, 83% are very confident, compared with 31% of the rest. Very confident businesses also use more of their seats: 78% on average, against 67%.

ROI & INSIGHT

THE BEST-RUN PROGRAMMES MEASURE WHAT HOSPITALITY DELIVERS

Few habits separate the top quarter [2] from the bottom quarter more than this one: building guest feedback into how the next event is planned.

80%

of the top quarter always use guest feedback to plan future events

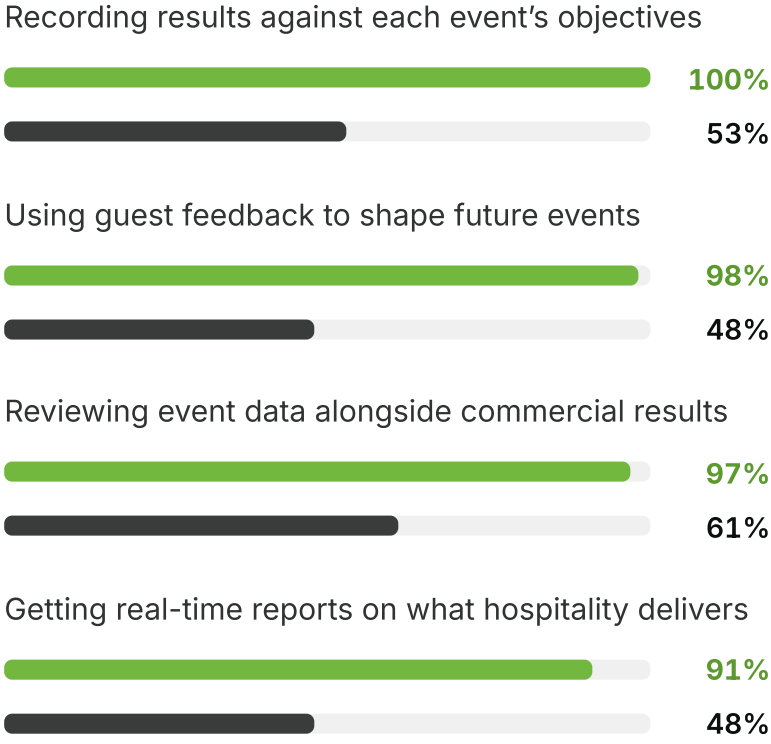
5%

of the bottom quarter do the same

Measurement is what lets a programme learn from one event to the next, and show the business what its hospitality is worth.

How many in each quarter keep up the four measurement habits

Share of businesses doing each often or always (or finding it easy): top quarter vs bottom quarter



EFFORTLESS AUTOMATION

RESPONDING TO GUESTS STRAIGHT AWAY

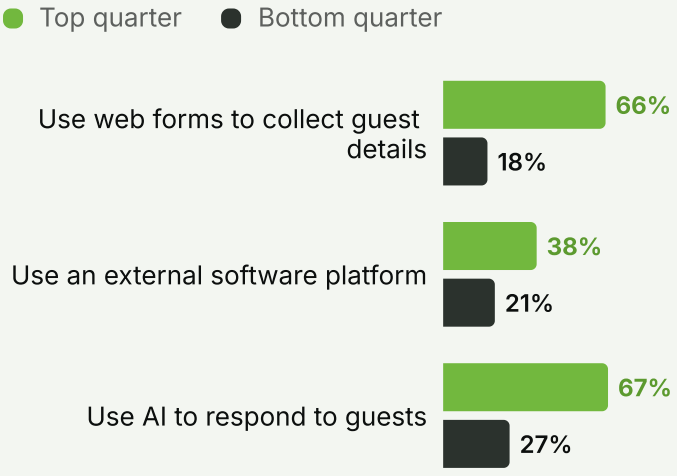
Automation is the pillar with the most room to improve. On average, 64% of event communications go out automatically, and only 35% of businesses answer basic guest questions within a few hours.

16%
of businesses let guests get answers straight away

82%
of event communications go out automatically in the top quarter [3]

43%
go out automatically in the bottom quarter

Share of businesses in each quarter using these tools



How quickly guests get an answer

% of businesses: top quarter vs bottom quarter

Answer guest questions within a few hours	73% vs 11%
Guests can look up event details instantly	44% vs 2%

When routine messages go out automatically, hosts can spend their time with guests rather than on admin.

AI READINESS

READY FOR AI ON PAPER. *NOT YET IN PRACTICE.*

Budget-holders say their technology is ready for AI. But AI depends on automation, and automation is the pillar where businesses are weakest.

87%
of budget-holders rate their hospitality technology as ready for AI [8]

64%
of event communications go out automatically, on average. Automation is the weakest of the four pillars

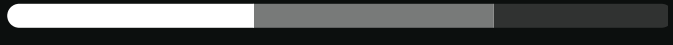
16%
of businesses let guests get answers straight away

AI does not replace a programme's processes. It runs on them. The best-run programmes are the ones already using AI: **67%** of the top quarter use AI to respond to guests [4], against **27%** of the bottom quarter.

Our view: what has changed since the survey

When we ran this survey in July 2025, 37% of budget-holders felt strong pressure to use AI. In our conversations with customers today, almost all of them feel it. The question has moved on too, from AI features to AI agents: software that runs a whole process from start to finish, with people approving the decisions that matter.

Pressure to use AI in hospitality, July 2025 [8]



37% high pressure | **36%** moderate | **26%** little or none

A PATH, *NOT A LEAP*

AI agents can only run processes that already work without people pushing them, using information that is already in one place. Each step builds what the next one needs.

1

Automate the admin

Confirmations, reminders, e-tickets and surveys go out without anyone sending them. Your processes now run in a system, not in someone's inbox.

2

Let AI answer guests

Guests get instant answers from your own event details, and tricky questions go to your team. Your event information sits in one place, and your team learns where AI can be trusted.

3

Hand whole workflows to AI agents

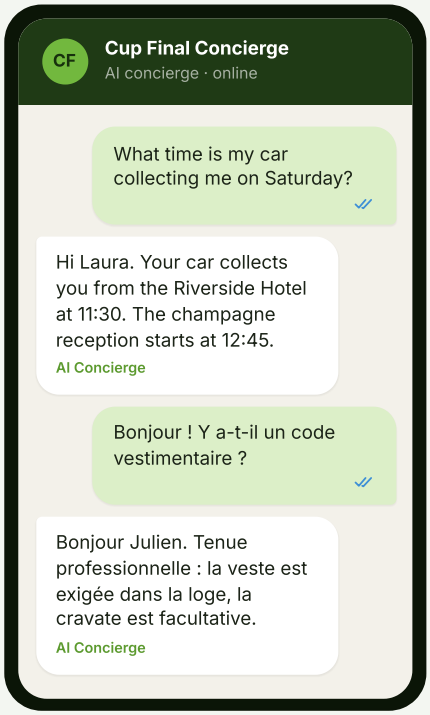
An AI agent runs a process from start to finish, ticket fulfilment for example, using everything steps 1 and 2 put in place. Your team approves the exceptions.

Nobody needs step 3 today. But no programme gets there without steps 1 and 2.

Respond to every guest straight away

Sponsorworks' AI Guest Concierge replies to guests instantly on WhatsApp, web or SMS, in 249 languages, using your own event details. Anything tricky gets handed off to your team's inbox right away.

See AI Guest Concierge →



SPOTLIGHT: BEYOND THE FOUR PILLARS

WOMEN'S SPORT: RECOGNISED POTENTIAL, *UNREALISED OPPORTUNITY*

Almost nine in ten budget-holders see women's sport as a way to reach different guests. Far fewer have hosted anyone at it.

86%

of budget-holders see women's sport as a way to engage different guests [9]

32%

of budget-holders have hosted guests at women's professional sport in the past two years

16%

of their ideal hospitality budget would go on women's sport, compared with 23% on men's sport [10]

INDUSTRY INSIGHT | ACCOR | WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

REACHING NEW AUDIENCES *THROUGH WOMEN'S SPORT*

At the launch of our previous research with Nielsen Sports, Accor's Member Experiences & Hospitality Director described how its hospitality at the Women's Champions League in Paris was reaching a distinctly different audience, including female business leaders.

> That is the opportunity the **86%** can see. Only **32%** have hosted guests at women's sport to find out for themselves.

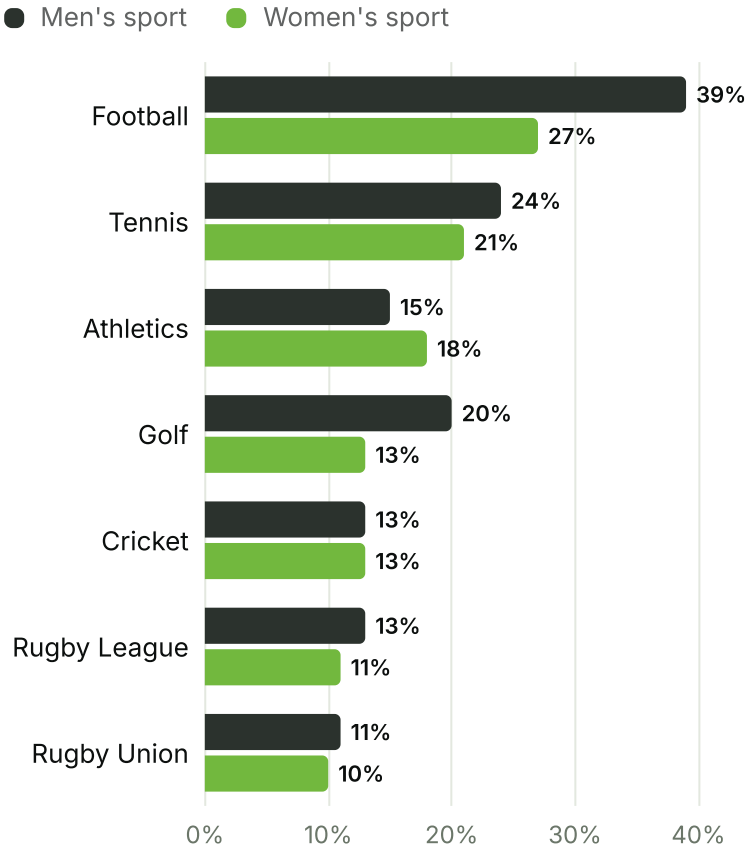
Even the keenest mostly haven't booked it. Of the budget-holders who **strongly agree** that women's sport can engage different guests, only 43% have hosted guests at it in the past two years.

The best-run programmes see the opportunity most clearly: **77%** of the top quarter [2] strongly agree that women's sport can reach new guests, against **26%** of the bottom quarter.

Women budget-holders are the most convinced: **58%** strongly agree that women's sport can reach new guests, compared with **42%** of men.

The interest is turning into plans. **45%** of budget-holders expect their company to do more women's sport hospitality over the next three years, and only 7% expect to do less. That includes 42% of those who haven't hosted it yet.

Share of businesses that hosted guests at each sport in the past two years



EXTERNAL

$2.4BN → $3BN+

Deloitte values global women's elite sport revenue at more than $2.4bn in 2025 and forecasts at least $3bn in 2026. [11]

Source: Deloitte, April 2026 ↗

VOICES FROM THE *INDUSTRY*

In their answers to the Nielsen Sports research, budget-holders keep returning to three challenges: getting the right people in the room, keeping track of it all, and keeping it personal.

Getting the right people in the room

"Our biggest challenge is finding events that suit both our guests and our budget, and still fit our anti-bribery rules."

Compliance

"Honestly, the tricky bit is making sure we're inviting the right mix of people so that it actually drives business. Matching each guest to the right event is always a juggling act."

The right mix

Keeping track of it all

"The biggest problem we have is keeping track of allocations and ensuring fair distribution across teams and clients."

Allocations

"The biggest challenge I face is managing last-minute changes and ensuring guest expectations are met on short notice."

Last-minute changes

Keeping it personal

"Less formal events and activities definitely get a better turnout, and attendees appreciate them more."

Turnout

"We tried group transport to an event. It felt like a school trip, and it wasn't a good experience."

Guest experience

Answers lightly edited for clarity.

BENCHMARK YOUR *BUSINESS*

Score your business on each pillar against all 255 budget-holders in the survey, and see how you compare. It takes a few minutes online.

www.sponsorworks.co/hospitality-report

HOW SPONSORWORKS HELPS

Two platforms, from deal to delivery. Run one on its own, or both together.

EVENTS PLATFORM

Corporate ticketing, hospitality and guest management, run as one programme instead of five tools and a spreadsheet.

Seats that get used

Colleagues request tickets and approvals take a click. When a guest drops out, the seat is transferred in two clicks, so it goes to someone else instead of going empty.

ROI you can prove

Feedback surveys go to guests automatically after each event, and ROI dashboards show what every event delivered. It connects to Salesforce.

One programme, end to end

Allocation, branded invitations, RSVPs, seating, travel and e-tickets run in one flow, with flights, hotels and transfers alongside the guest data.

AI Guest Concierge

Answers guest questions instantly on WhatsApp, web and SMS, in your brand voice and their language, and hands over to your team when it matters.

97% ticket use at Diageo, up from under 70%

3× return on Aon's hospitality and sponsorship portfolio

32 global markets on one platform at bp

PARTNERSHIPS PLATFORM

Sponsorship management software for brand partnership teams and rights holders. Get more from every partnership, and be ready to prove it.

One place

Inventory, contracts, deliverables and approvals sit in one platform, instead of being split across spreadsheets, inboxes and disconnected tools.

Your data, together

Connects to Salesforce, monday.com and the tools you already use. Ask what is behind or due next in plain English, in the platform or from Copilot, ChatGPT or Claude.

Contract to tracker

Upload a contract and its obligations, assets and deadlines become a live delivery tracker in minutes. Partner creative is checked against brand rules before review.

Evidence ready

Delivery is tracked across every partnership, so when stakeholders ask or renewal decisions begin, the evidence is already there.

up to **90%** less time on reporting

up to **50%** less time on admin

up to **100%** asset activation

SPONSORWORKS

The Corporate Hospitality Report 2026, produced by Sponsorworks in partnership with Nielsen Sports.

METHODOLOGY

A bespoke online survey of 255 UK hospitality budget-holders (companies of 100+ employees, hospitality budgets of £50k+), carried out in partnership with Nielsen Sports, 9–31 July 2025; average interview 14 minutes. This study is distinct from the 2024 research, so figures are not presented as year-on-year trends. Senior respondents and technology businesses are over-represented in the sample. All pillar scores are Nielsen's published means; the benchmark is an indicative self-assessment kept separate from the Nielsen dataset. External figures are sourced in the notes.

NOTES

1 Each business estimated what share of its hospitality tickets actually get used. The figures are the average estimate in each quarter.

2 We rated each programme on the four pillars from its answers to 14 survey questions. The top quarter is the 64 businesses that did best across all four; the bottom quarter is the 66 that did least well. The middle half is everyone in between.

3 Each business estimated what share of its event communications is sent automatically. 82% is the average estimate across the top quarter; 43% across the bottom quarter.

4 Businesses that run conversational AI to support guests, either live or as a pilot.

5 Budget-holders told us the level of budget they are responsible for. Each figure is the share of businesses in that budget band that fall in the top or bottom quarter.

6 Budget-holders said whether they expect their company to do more, the same or less corporate hospitality over the next three years in each of five event types: men's sport, women's sport, activity days, music, arts and culture, and corporate lunches and dinners.

7 Budget-holders rated how confident they are that each hospitality place is offered to the person best aligned with its commercial objective. "Very confident" is the top answer on a five-point scale.

8 Readiness: the share of all 255 budget-holders who rate their hospitality technology good or very good at taking advantage of developments in AI. Pressure: the share who feel high or very high pressure in their organisation to use AI in hospitality within the next 12 months.

9 Budget-holders who agree or strongly agree that women's sport offers a fresh opportunity to engage different guests.

10 Budget-holders were asked how they would split an ideal hospitality budget across types of event. The figures are the average shares.

11 Global revenue for women's elite sport. The 2025 figure is Deloitte's estimate; the 2026 figure is a forecast. Deloitte, *Women's elite sports revenues to reach US$3 billion in 2026*, 8 April 2026.

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