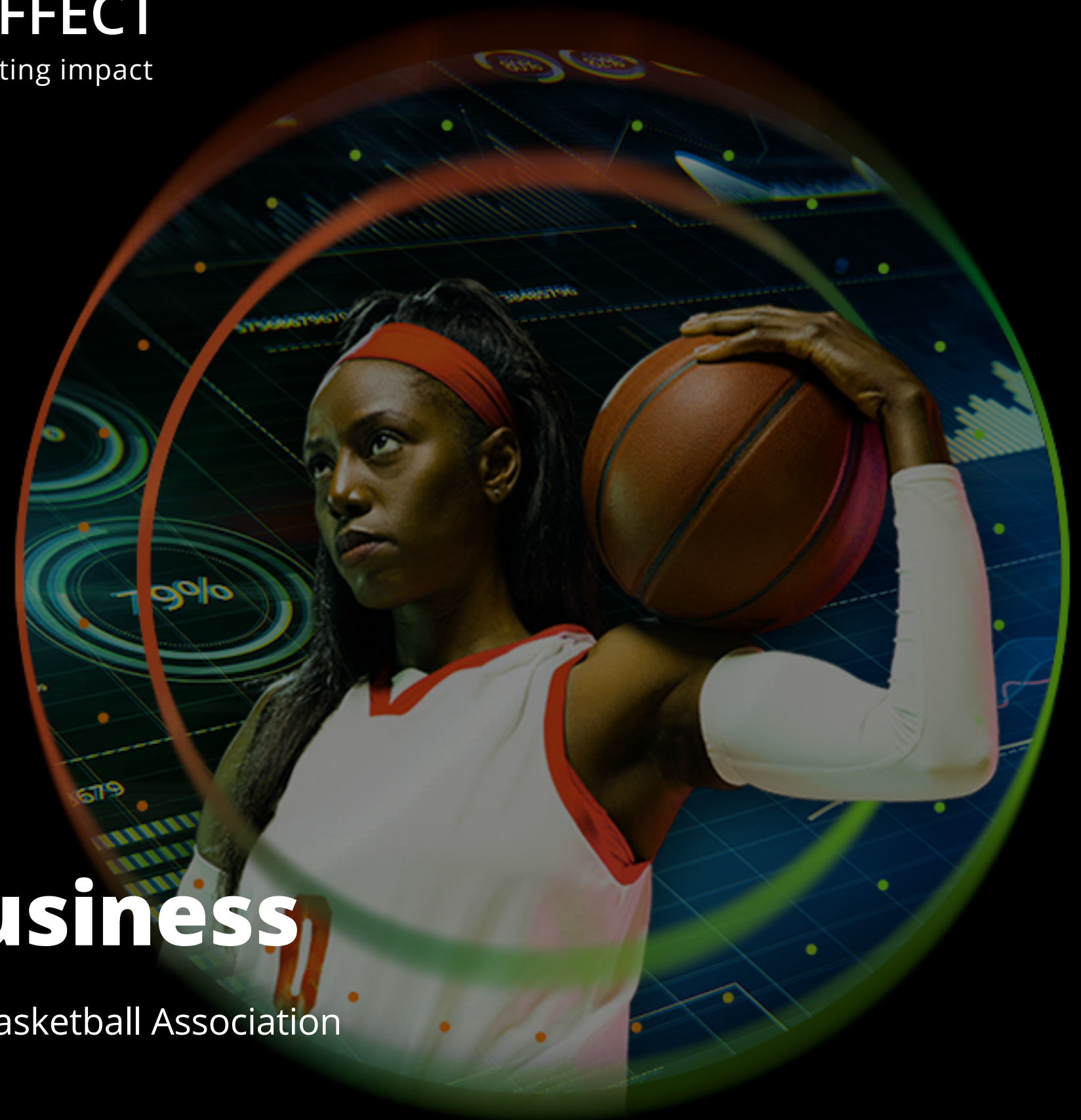




THE RIPPLE EFFECT

Stories of purpose and lasting impact



The WNBA means business

An integrated strategy helps the Women's National Basketball Association create value for fans, teams and corporate sponsors.

WORLD-CLASS TALENT PAIRED WITH WORLD-CLASS LEAGUE INFRASTRUCTURE CAN CHANGE THE GAME.

THE SITUATION

The Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) has been in the business of basketball for 30 years. The business of buzzer beaters, of dynasties, of unbelievable half-court heaves and record-setting performances. To stay in the game, the league is also in the business of building fandom, curating digital experiences, selling and servicing sponsorships, and producing compelling media.

Before 2018 games brought fans to arenas, but after those couple hours of game time the WNBA all but lost touch with them. The league wanted to understand the journey that brought fans to the game and bring new audiences into the fanbase, even if they never stepped foot into an arena. The league suspected that raising its profile to bring in new fans and meet the evolving expectations of current fans would require securing major media coverage. And, if it could sharpen the narrative of how increasing the value of fan relationships contributed to higher return on investment (ROI), the league thought it could also attract marquee sponsorships—and gain resources to elevate the teams and players.

The WNBA knew it held lightning in a bottle. The league had incredible potential not only as *the* destination for top basketball talent, but as a major force in the business world. To get there, league leaders wanted to solidify a growth strategy and build the digital, media and sponsorship infrastructure to execute and sustain that strategy.



THE SOLVE

Lisa Borders, the WNBA president in 2018, took stock of all the league's then-current priorities. Her small team handled hundreds of initiatives, often jumping between them unexpectedly as dynamics shifted. To make hard decisions about which initiatives propelled the vision forward and which ones distracted from it, the team participated in a [Deloitte Greenhouse Lab](#).

This exploration helped define actionable strategic priorities and established Deloitte, with deep sector experience, future-focused insights, and integrated capabilities—all part of its [IndustryAdvantage™ approach](#)—as an advisor that could support the team from vision to execution.

The collaboration deepened when Cathy Engelbert, former Deloitte US CEO, became WNBA commissioner and continued with the newly defined vision. Each morning, she walked into her office, wrote three priorities for the day on a whiteboard, and didn't walk out until she had tackled all three. With grit and deep belief, her team kept pushing the plans forward.

One thing that wasn't in any strategic plan? The pandemic in 2020, which brought live sports to a screeching halt. The WNBA moved quickly and carefully to relocate all games and operations to the Wubble (the "bubble" isolation zone in Florida where players and personnel followed strict health protocols) where the league and players' resilience and spirit kept the season going. As the end of the remarkable Wubble season approached, thousands of new eyes were trained on the league's next move. Deloitte brought future-focused industry insights to help scenario plan for a new world where no one knew what might come next. A multidisciplinary team identified potential market outcomes, planned for each of those scenarios, and projected the financial and tax implications of each—work that allowed the WNBA to prepare for building momentum in any of those futures.

To fuel that momentum Deloitte helped the WNBA enhance its sponsorship efforts with the [Changemakers platform](#), focused on an inner circle of high-visibility brands that could amplify the league through investment, marketing, and close collaboration. Deloitte advised the WNBA on the value strategy, the design of the operating model, a sharpened sales pitch that articulated tangible ROI for sponsors, and a more scalable platform for long-term growth.

As a Changemaker itself, Deloitte continued providing valuable services. The Deloitte team drew on its industry insights to conduct perception, market and fan segmentation research that uncovered a gap between the public's desire and ability to connect with individual players and their stories across every media channel, not just during a game's 40 minutes of regulation play. To make that possible, the league needed expanded coverage on major sports networks, social media and all of the many channels through which today's fans seek out content. [Deloitte's Media Solutions practice](#) brought experience across media rights and visual production to help the WNBA add consistency and quality to the viewing experience regardless of team, region, broadcaster or streaming platform. This elevated content fed into a digital experience with the [WNBA App built by Deloitte](#) at the center.

Through the integrated media and digital strategy, Deloitte helped the WNBA strengthen the commercial and operational capabilities needed to sustain growth by bringing better content, more storytelling around players, and more highlights to the app and everywhere else the current and rapidly increasing new fanbase consumed content.

DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS, STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AND CULTURAL MOMENTUM ELEVATE THE WNBA.

THE IMPACT

Now, a handful of years later, turn on the TV, scroll through social media, tune into analysts—the WNBA is everybody’s business. By 2024, the league had its most-watched full season in 27 years¹, and the WNBA was named the fastest-growing brand in the United States.² And the league today has no intention of slowing down.

While in-person arenas fill up, integrated digital experiences connect fans regardless of where they are in the country—courtside or on their own couches. Life-long fans and curious newcomers can go beyond consuming content to actively participating in the community through the mobile app. These new platforms give the athletes significant avenues for their own individual brand building and storytelling, which can help make fans feel closer to them than ever before. And with analytics engines in place, the WNBA can analyze fan data and continuously evolve its offerings.

The Changemakers platform and other infrastructure help turn all that attention into real value for sponsors and team owners. Despite fierce on-court competition, the WNBA continues to find ways to elevate each individual team to build a stronger unified league and align the needs of all stakeholders through an integrated commercial, product and operations strategy. Co-creation with players, fans, media and other brands can help raise the profile of all involved today and in the many years to come.



PROPELLING THE BUSINESS OF BASKETBALL
FORWARD FOR THE NEXT 30 YEARS

¹ WNBA, internal and owned research, March 2025.

² Grant Young, “WNBA Ranked as Fastest Growing Brand of 2024,” *SI.com/Sports Illustrated*, December 9, 2024, <https://www.si.com/onsi/womens-fast-break/news/wnba-ranked-as-fastest-growing-brand-of-2024-01jep3jxr4hb>, accessed April 2, 2025.

LET'S CONNECT.

Do these challenges sound familiar?



CHAD DEWEESE

Principal

Deloitte & Touche LLP

cdeweese@deloitte.com

+1 678 896 1470



About this publication

This publication contains general information only and Deloitte is not, by means of this publication, rendering accounting, business, financial, investment, legal, tax, or other professional advice or services. This publication is not a substitute for such professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser.

Deloitte shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies on this publication.

About Deloitte

As used in this document, “Deloitte” means Deloitte Consulting LLP, a subsidiary of Deloitte LLP. Please see www.deloitte.com/us/about for a detailed description of our legal structure. Certain services may not be available to attest clients under the rules and regulations of public accounting.

Copyright © 2026 Deloitte Development LLC. All rights reserved.