

women in

# SPORTS

How many lists of “sexiest female athletes” or “hottest sideline reporters” must we bear? These six phenoms have helped gals be (deservedly) hailed for their skills, not looks.

**Michelle Wie** As a kid prodigy (she turned pro at 15), Michelle was the first woman to shoot a sub-par round at a Men’s PGA event. “I was so young that I didn’t see men and women in different categories, I just respected great players,” she told us. That gender-blind attitude and an intense focus have served her well: She’s won four LPGA tours, including the 2014 U.S. Women’s Open. Recently waylaid by injuries, Michelle could easily take on a side job: mentor. “Female athletes are truly role models now. I’m proud to be [one].”

**Serena Williams** Fresh off of her sixth (sixth!) Wimbledon title and 21st major championship, Serena has solidified her spot as the best tennis player in the world. Period. Throughout her 16-year run, she has grand-slammed past some of the harshest sexism, racism, and body shaming the sports world has ever seen. “For all their practice, preparation, and confidence, even the best competitors have a voice of doubt inside them that says they are not good enough,” Serena has said. “I am lucky that whatever fear I have, my desire to win is always stronger.”

**Danica Patrick** Fast girls usually get a bad rap. Not Danica. She holds NASCAR and Indianapolis 500 women’s records and was the first female to win an IndyCar race. Still, she’d rather talk about her driving. “I want to accomplish things in the sport that haven’t been done before”—by anyone. Though as far as her legacy goes, she

admits it wouldn’t be so bad if people said, “You know, she was a girl, and I’ll tell you what: *She was awesome!*”

**Ronda Rousey** Thirty-four seconds. That’s all it took for Ronda to knock out her latest opponent and maintain her flawless 12-0 record. The former Olympian and UFC Women’s Champion hasn’t just worked her ass off to get here—she’s the one who persuaded the UFC president to let women fight in the first place. Now one of the most recognizable faces in sports, Ronda has been called the Mike Tyson of mixed martial arts (minus the ear biting, of course). Rumor has it she could beat up just about anyone, gal or guy, in her class. Her fans believe it (and at her last bout, even her opponent’s side cheered for her). So do we.

**Robin Roberts** Before cohosting *Good Morning America*, Robin reported from the field. As in, the actual field: She spent decades as a sports anchor and ESPN contributor—back then, uncharted territory for women. “I had to constantly prove I was knowledgeable about sports,” she told *WH*. She also had to lobby for equal access to athletes, including inside the men’s locker room. She got it. Now, she says, “you don’t blink when you see a woman sports reporter.”

**Sarah Thomas** Being on the sidelines sucks. Unless you’re Sarah; then it’s your job. The first-ever, full-time female NFL game official (i.e., referee) hit the gridiron this spring. “When I’m out there, the guys don’t think of me as a female,” she has said. And not just because she tucks her trademark blonde pony under her cap. “My hair is the least of my concerns. [I’m] just an official—that’s what I’ve always set out to be.”



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