Interview With Ellen Hyslop, Jacie DeHoop, and Roslyn McLarty, Founders of “The GIST”

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Sport exists as a form of social currency in our society. While sports savvy can open doors and provide opportunities to connect, a more limited sport intellect can be incredibly exclusionary. For women, the sport landscape can be particularly challenging to navigate, as research shows that female sport fans are often cast as “outsiders” (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). The GIST is an audience-engagement company that caters sport news, experiences, and community to female millennials (https://www.thegistnews.ca). Its mission is to level the playing field by revolutionizing the delivery of sport content and working to provide experiences that can connect and empower women through sport. The company is the brainchild of three Canadian entrepreneurs, Ellen Hyslop, Jacie DeHoop, and Roslyn McLarty, who were inspired to action through their own experiences of witnessing the power of sport in the business world. They recognized that traditional sport commentary created by men, and for men, did not always resonate with female audiences. They also found that mainstream sources could be intimidating for those with a limited sport vernacular. The GIST attempts to address these taken-for-granted barriers by providing a female perspective to sport commentary that is packaged in a contextualized, noncondescending voice. By way of a twice-weekly e-mail, daily social media content, and various event-specific sport experiences, The GIST caters to casual sport fans by offering them a community and a variety of entry points. Content is produced that is time efficient, yet informative, and it appears to have emboldened an untapped demographic of sport consumers who are drawn to the inherent concept of inclusivity. In the last 6 months, The GIST has increased its e-mail-subscriber base 7 times over and launched a rapidly growing Instagram following. It boasts a 42% e-mail open rate (over 3 times the industry average) and an 8% click-through rate (over 4 times the industry average). Perhaps most important, the unsubscribe rate is currently less than 2%. The GIST’s audience is proving to be a highly engaged demographic and people are taking notice. The GIST was selected to be a part of the Facebook Journalism Project, and it has earned berths in Ryerson University’s Digital Media Zone, Canada’s top university business incubator, as well as the newly launched Future of Sport Lab, a partnership between Ryerson and Maple Leaf Sports

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and Entertainment in Toronto, Ontario. The Gist team was also recently honored as Notable Life’s Entrepreneurs of the Year. Given the scope of female sport fandom, the opportunity for growth in this space appears to be vast, and The GIST are well poised to lead the disruption of traditional sport-news delivery.

Lebel: What inspired you to create The GIST?

DeHoop: The three of us met while studying business at Queen’s University in Canada. After graduating in 2014, we moved to Toronto and started working in different sectors in the financial services industry. After a few years of living and working in Toronto, we noticed something interesting—sport seemed to be a social currency in our society. We realized through our own business interactions that sport could be an incredible equalizer. Sports have the unique ability to unite people regardless of age, gender, race, or religion. Sports are a part of our culture and they build relationships. We also noticed, however, that sport and sport talk can be incredibly exclusionary. We found that women, in particular, often felt left out of sport conversations and the communities that can develop through a shared passion for sport. In some cases, this was limiting their ability to network and preventing them from taking advantage of the opportunities that sometimes come through sport interactions. We dug into this issue and found that the problem stems from an overarching lack of diversity in the sport industry. The majority of sport media is created by and catered to men and avid sport fans. When you don’t identify as either of these, it’s easy to feel like you’re on the outside looking in. This was our inspiration to launch The GIST. We wanted to create a source for sport that is created by women, for women.

Lebel: How is The GIST different from other digital sport platforms?

Hyslop: What’s different about The GIST is that it’s not created for an existing avid fan. Most digital sport platforms target men and existing avid sport fans. Our audience is made up of women who may not be avid sport fans, but they have a