

Scoring goals with Marisa Calvert



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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Bizcommunity.com is celebrating [Women's Month](#) by focussing on women in various industries. I chatted to Marisa Calvert to find out what this month means to her and what are some of the barriers she's overcome in the business of sports communications.

■ You are currently the Sports Communications Manager at Brandnew Creative Agency. Could you briefly describe your role?

Marisa Calvert: I manage all the sports PR at Brandnew Creative as well as head up the sports division, Brandnew Sport.

From the client brief to the creative concept, together with my colleagues we come up with strategies catered and tailor-made to each client's vision for their event/brand, and we create actions that will resonate with the sports fan thus driving results for clients.

With a mix of traditional and experiential PR, a touch of press release writing and dissemination, peppered with a few publicity stunts and activations, I am responsible to maintain and grow all my clients' images in the market place and also, act on behalf of these clients, to ensure they receive the most beneficial and abundant exposure.

The most important element of my job requires the building of positive relationships with all stakeholders (media, clients, consumers/fans). From the client brief to the creative concept, together with my colleagues we come up with strategies catered and tailor-made to each client's vision for their event/brand, and we create actions that will resonate with the sports fan thus driving results for clients.



Marisa Calvert, Sports Communications Manager at Brandnew Creative Agency

■ *You've got vast experience in the business of sporting - from a sports news anchor to being on a panel discussing the 2013 UEFA Champions League final. What has been the highlight of your career?*

Calvert: I have three highlights: the first was when I had the opportunity to have a one-on-one interview with President Jacob Zuma at De Tuynhuys. We talked about maybe one day having a "BruinOu Olympics" in Cape Town and he said he was a boss in dominoes. Despite the negative image he currently has, I still see it as a huge day for me.

The second highlight was closing a deal with a major sponsor while I worked in Oman. We had to sign a \$1m deal in order to bring the 2009 Brazil football team to Oman for a friendly. I remember pitching to the client (who was an Arab male) and they were looking at me with blank stares. Firstly I'm a Western woman in the Gulf and secondly, what do I know about sport? I remember walking out of the boardroom and as I got into the car, I felt like I failed. Then my boss called me to say that he just received a call from the client who wants to know when and where do they sign. That elated feeling of success was one of the best feelings ever. It was then that I knew, this is where I belong.

The third highlight was more recent. I have a huge passion for youth sport and after generating over R10million in PR for the Coca-Cola Youth Weeks, I felt inspired to do more and be better. You're only as good as your last project after all.

■ *What barriers did you face, as a woman, becoming successful in your field, and how did you overcome them?*

Calvert: In all honesty, the game has changed in the recent years where the barriers I face for example, aren't as difficult as my ancestors would've faced. We see a lot more women entering the sports industry and making the right moves - from ripples to major waves.

Women in the sports industry have become quite tight-knit in a sense that we learn from each other as opposed to stealing the limelight from one another.

My biggest barrier was in the Middle East where women aren't seen as progressive as we are in South Africa (another reason I returned to home soil). I had to grow up very fast and that benefited me hugely going forward. Also, I've been blessed with some of the greatest mentors in the industry and I draw strength from them. Everyone needs a coach - whether you're an athlete, a sales assistant or a sports communications manager. You just have to find one that is right for you and make it your duty to learn as much as you can from them. This is how I could overcome most of the negative energy that was thrown my way. Also starting my career in the Middle East was definitely a bonus. You learn how to not take things personally and how to shake off negative energy.

🔴 *Who is your biggest influence/role model/icon and what have you learnt from them?*

Calvert: Icon: Serena Williams! The footnotes of her success, the sheer mercilessness of her dominance, are nearly insulting. Out of 269 matches in the last 5 years, she has won 249 of them. She has amassed nearly \$70m in earnings and this is excluding endorsements. She has had no real competition over at least two distinct eras. Her rivals have come, gone, retired, procreated, unretired, became coaches, re-retired (Martina Hingis, Kim Clijsters, Amelie Mauresmo, Justine Henin come to mind) - all while Serena continued to collect hardware. Longevity? The Backstreet Boys and Britney Spears ruled music when she won her first tennis tournament and Garbine Muguruza was 6.

Is there even a greater athlete than Serena Williams? She is probably the Michael Jordan of our time.

Her drive, her tenacity and perseverance inspires me every day. I always think that she used her talent (tennis), saw opportunities - grabbed them, had doors slammed in her face - opened them. Nobody saw her tears; none of us were there when she told her coach "No More! I'm done!" She is beautiful yet routinely mocked, intelligent but often marginalised, confident yet frequently diminished...yet that didn't deter her. She became the greatest of all time...it took her two decades.

As cliché as it sounds, hard work really pays off. And this is the greatest lesson - I don't go to my client with a problem. I go to them with a solution to the problem. They must trust that I will sort it out just like we must trust Serena will win another Grand Slam.

🔴 *What is your view on Women's Month in SA? How do you feel about Women's Day in general?*

Calvert: Women's Month is so important especially in this day and age where women and child abuse headlines every news bulletin. We have to remember what our ancestors fought for in 1956, when they marched to the Union Buildings in protest against the proposed amendments to the pass laws. These were women of all races who stood together for a common goal. The world is ridden with crime, abuse, racism, sexism - all kinds of -isms actually - and one can only draw strength from these brave women.

Today we are fighting a different battle. From childhood right through to adulthood, we have all either encountered or been the nasty girl in class, the bitchy girl at varsity or the office gossip queen at work. Women always tend to put each other down in front of others. We compare ourselves, we compete with each other, we covet, we cyber bully, gossip, break down when instead we can use our energy and build each other up. In some women, there is this fiery competitive spirit. They always have to be better, faster, prettier or richer. They fight over job positions, and men! One is always trying to outdo the other, obviously causing friction.

Women are strong, we are fierce and we each deserve a piece of the throne. We are unique and we each have different talents - there is no need to bring out the claws.

🔴 *Do you think it's important having a month dedicated to women?*

Calvert: Definitely! And it's not the feminist in me talking. We have to use this month to celebrate the success of women in their respective fields, to talk about things that are sometimes deemed taboo, show our daughters what it means to be a lady, uplift our peers. Basically, we have to celebrate sisterhood! It doesn't just have to be in August but it can definitely start in August. I would suggest each woman reading this writes down five qualities that makes her beautiful - whether you're great at being a mom, a great cook, you look good in them jeans - anything that makes you feel like you are a boss lady, and recite that to yourself in the mirror every day. And then, believe what you're telling yourself. Let this run through August right up until July, and re-assess. Tell me how good you feel about yourself after this.

🔴 *Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in your field?*

Calvert: It's hard work. You will fail. You have to be tenacious and you have to list your daily plan every day. It has to stare at you while you're replying to emails, or talking to media on the phone. You have to be reminded of your purpose daily! Read! Always be hungry for knowledge. Ignore the naysayers. And most importantly, get yourself a mentor. Someone who will motivate you, push you and challenge you. If it doesn't challenge you, it won't change you. This is an extremely tough industry and you will need to have a thick skin to be able to handle the different kind of people you interact with daily. Don't be a 'she-devil' but don't be a doormat either. Own it!

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