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# The Unseen Players /

*Banco Pichincha*

**Ecuadorian bank promotes gender equality in football by staging a match with 'invisible' players**

► <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3Pg5xiNKPs>

**Banco Pichincha**, the main sponsor of Ecuadorian football team Liga Deportiva Universitaria de Quito (LDU), launched a campaign in January to raise awareness of the importance of gender equality in sports.

During an international match at LDU's Rodrigo Paz Delgado stadium on 25 January 2020, Banco Pichincha and creative agency **MullenLowe Delta** in Quito staged an additional match with a twist: it was invisible. At half time, a ball appeared on the field and began to move as though being passed around despite there being no players in sight, while the referees presided over the game as if it was real.



**The Unseen Players** match lasted several minutes and concluded with a goal. (The ball was controlled by a radiofrequency device developed by Argentinian tech company Pasto).

After the mysterious spectacle had played out, a video message from Belén Aragón, captain of LDU's women's team, appeared on screens around the stadium and said: 'Like this match, there are 234 matches that very few people see. It is very important that together we promote gender inclusion and equality in sport.'



Following this, the men's team returned to the field and formed a guard of honour – essentially a parallel line that is traditionally used in football as a display of respect and is usually reserved for winners of a league or cup competition.

**Results** / According to the agency, over **40,000** fans saw The Unseen Players match live and the campaign resulted in over **25 million** impressions. The earned media was valued at **850%** more than the cost of Banco Pichincha having to pay for the ads to be seen by the same number of people.

## Contagious Insight /

**Game on** / Interest in women's football has increased dramatically over the last few years. The Fifa Women's World Cup in 2019 reported record viewership, with 10 million people watching the opening game (the biggest ever audience for a female match), while 1 billion people globally were expected to have tuned in to at least some of the matches. However, viewership discrepancies between men's and women's matches are still rife, particularly in Latin America. According to MullenLowe Delta, a match between the female sides of LDU and Ñañas saw just 210 attendees arrive versus the packed crowds of 42,000 people that typically attend the men's games.

And this isn't the first time that we've seen a brand try to balance the scales. For example, earlier this summer, we reported on how Budweiser addressed the shocking pay gap between female and male players by creating prototypes of products across a variety of sectors (deodorant, condiments, eyewear) and encouraging people to pledge to purchase them while tagging the brand they wanted to see become a sponsor of the National Women's Soccer League. As a result of the campaign, six new brands became sponsors of the league, which increased the salary cap of female players by 19.3%.

What makes Banco Pichincha's Unseen Players and Budweiser's campaign stand out is how both brands have gone beyond traditional notions of sponsorship and are stepping up to try and enact change. As Marisa Siegel, head of marketing at Budweiser USA, told us: 'All brands – beer and otherwise – are looking to make even more authentic connections with consumers. This means sponsorship can't simply mean slapping a logo on a jumbotron and hoping that [this] will be enough to resonate.'

**Out in the open** / While the primary objective of this campaign is to hijack a popular event to raise awareness about gender equality in sport, it also enables Banco Pichincha to shine a light on its own female equality initiatives. In fact, in 2015, Banco Pichincha was the first business in Ecuador to sign the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles, which aims to get the private sector involved in efforts to achieve gender equality. The bank was also one of the first to join the Financial Alliance for Women, which supports initiatives focused on women's financial growth and role in the economy. Not to mention that it's a leader in the development of financing programmes for female-led micro, small and medium-sized businesses. With over 40% of Banco Pichincha's customers being women, it makes sense for the brand to raise awareness of its efforts and increase its visibility among this demographic to drive consideration.

**Centre stage** / The stunt itself only lasted several minutes, but the idea to have an invisible football match is innovative enough to generate the PR value Banco Pichincha needed. Some brands opt to grab people's attention by getting a well-known public figure to speak on its behalf – for example, beauty brand Avon entered the debate around sexism in sport by partnering with Brazilian football star Marta Vieira da Silva. Here, however, it is the lack of outside influence that allowed Banco Pichincha to stay front and centre, claim the attention for its cause and bolster the brand's image in an authentic way.

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