

---

## Can technology make sport better?

The history of technology in sport is a long and complex love affair. It has thrilled, it has broken hearts, it's been hailed as a success, or has elicited cries of fraud.

Technology has yet to be fully embraced in by the sporting world. This has largely been down to a certain amount of resistance by sports fans and purists.

In a talk at Web Summit 2018 titled 'Is sport still sceptical of technology', former ice-hockey Olympian and co-founder of Sports Innovation Lab, Angela Ruggiero; the CEO of Polaris Sports, Luis Correia; and professional cyclist Annemiek van Vleuten sat down to discuss technology in sport and whether more should be done to bring technology to the fore.

"Technology allows for more accessibility to content. It also allows more young children to follow their dreams and allows us the athletes to serve as better role models. I think the positive to having more technology in sport far outweigh any negative opinions people may have," says Ruggiero.

"The fan of the future is always demanding more. They want sport to give them an everlasting experience and technology will be that medium to meet their demands," she added.

"Technology is how we need to make sports grow," says van Vleuten. "I think in cycling we need to engage with the fans more – we are behind sports like soccer and rugby with that form, but the technology within the sport for athletes is incredible. We need to find the right balance to get more fans on board."

However, van Vleuten warned that sport must not put too much emphasis on technology because it could lead to serious problems. "If the beauty of sport is taken away, that's when technology becomes too much because it will become boring for fans," she added.

Football has recently followed sports like rugby and cricket by introducing video-assisted refereeing (VAR) which has been met with lots of criticism, but Luis Correia thinks football is not behind other sports for adapting technology. "I don't think football took too long to embrace tech. The sport is growing at such a rapid speed, it makes it hard to keep up with the demand. Cricket and rugby were able to embed tech much easier because there's less demand," he said.

Technology is all around football, and that is one of the main reasons why it's the biggest sport in the world. Everyone wants to reach wider audiences and football is leading in this area," he said.

Speaking about VAR, he said, "Everyone wants the competition to be fair and eradicate all

mistakes. The only issue is that it disrupts the flow of the games so we are still struggling to find that right balance because it needs to be quick.”

Ms Ruggiero finished with a very interesting point about traditional values in sport acting as a blocker for adapting technology. “Traditional sports are scared of embracing technology. I know of many sports organisations that are only leaning in the door but they need to be breaking it down. The traditional values of a sport are so important and we must respect them, but we can’t sit still because we’ll fall behind. By embracing the new, it helps us compete with all other forms of entertainment.”

*Article by Stephen Larkin.*