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World Darts Federation Restricts Women's Events to Female-Born Players, Prompting Backlash

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The World Darts Federation (WDF) has introduced new eligibility rules that prohibit transgender women from participating in women's competitions, restricting entries to individuals assigned female at birth. The decision has drawn a strong response from Dutch darts player Noa-Lynn van Leuven, who is personally affected by the change.

Van Leuven, 28, expressed disappointment in an emotional statement on social media, stating that while the rule does not currently affect her competition status in a significant way, it represents what she called another setback for transgender inclusion in sports. "It

hurts," she wrote, adding that policies based on fairness often lead to exclusion. She emphasised the importance of inclusion "not just on paper, but in practice."

The new WDF policy marks a departure from the standards of the Darts Regulation Authority (DRA), which oversees professional darts more broadly and does not impose the same restrictions. As a result, van Leuven remains eligible under DRA rules but cannot participate in WDF women's championships.

The debate over transgender participation in women's sports has led multiple governing bodies to review or revise their policies. World Athletics and World Aquatics have also enacted bans preventing athletes who underwent male puberty from entering women's international competitions, citing concerns over competitive integrity.

Supporters of the WDF's decision argue that such rules are necessary to preserve fairness in female categories, particularly in light of biological differences that may influence performance. Opponents, however, believe these regulations risk marginalising athletes who do not fit neatly into traditional categories.

The WDF's move follows a growing trend among sports organisations seeking to establish clear boundaries in eligibility criteria. While the decision reflects broader shifts in sports governance, it continues to spark discussions about how best to balance inclusivity with the principles of fair competition.