

To the Senate Committee – Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts - Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

Submission from Janice Crosswhite OAM

I strongly support the Senate Inquiry into Women's Sport as much still needs to be done to achieve equity in sport, although recognising what has changed over the past 20-30 years.

When I look back over my years involved as a physical education teacher, lecturer, consultant, sports administrator and committed volunteer in all areas of sport management I can see what has improved and what needs still to be changed. And that is what this inquiry should do – define the areas for improvement and change, and identify the solutions to remedy the inequities.

Why do I have such a strong commitment to the women's sport?

I think it is because I experienced inequity as I grew up and saw differences in attitudes, opportunities and facilities - differences that demonstrated discrimination in sport for girls and women.

For example, in 1965 when I started teaching physical education at Preston Technical College (Vic) the girls gymnasium was a small volleyball court, partitioned off from the full length basketball court and stage of the boys gymnasium. I could take my classes and basketball (then called International Rules) teams into the boys' gym after school. But no-one had previously challenged this situation. It was accepted and indeed, the female physical education staff considered ourselves most fortunate to even have an indoor area to teach girls' physical education.

During the 1960s and 1970s it was a time of separate operations and sometimes facilities for women's sport. As a member of the Victorian softball team and on various committees, I was aware that the Victorian Softball Association constitution did not allow males on their committees or to act as state coaches. A separate athletics field for women operated at Royal Park and there were separate associations for men and women in Athletics and Rowing. When I started playing basketball at the age of 21 (in 1965) I was soon involved in the sport's administration, again on a separate women's committee for the VABA. These sports (and others) succeeded for women as they were administered by women for women. Over this time there was even some consistent print media coverage of women's sport. Indeed, the Melbourne Sun employed Judy Joy Davies as a sports journalist, who produced regular columns on women's sport.

To have separate women's committees and organisations is still being debated as often issues are hived off to the women's committee rather than being dealt with by the mainstream organisation. Yet, at the recent World Conference on Women's Sport in Japan, there was much agreement that mainstreaming has been a backward step for some sports and organisations with fewer outcomes for women.

From my experience, at the elite level there have been not the same opportunities for women as there was for men. For instance, I attended the Montreal Olympics in 1976 where my husband was captain of the Australian Basketball team. The Australian Basketball Federation did not nominate the Australian Women's Basketball Team – although these were the first Olympic Games for women's basketball. It was not until the 1984 Olympics that our women were given this opportunity and in 1996, 2000 and 2004 the Opals won Olympic bronze and silver medals. The highest the men have finished is fourth place.

Swimming has a similar story. The first time the Australian Swimming Federation selected a relay team for women was the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, yet male relay teams have been selected ever since the first Olympics. Of course to have a relay team you need 4-5 swimmers and this number of places were not given to women. If they had Australia would have won a lot more medals in swimming at Olympic Games and World Championships.

As a parent involved in school sport and community sport, I have coached and managed many a team in various sports and been Secretary or President of clubs and associations. One of the hardest things to get is qualified and suitable coaches for junior girls' teams. The better/experienced coaches are often with the boys' and men's teams.

As President of Manly Warringah Basketball Association (1997-2002) one of my initiatives in our local competition was to play A grade women on court 1, where C grade men were used to playing. Did this cause a stir, to think that women had a right to play on the feature court! A small step forward. I was the first female President of MWBA in its existence from the 1960's.

In the 1990s, two of our daughters were harassed by male coaches, while playing at national level as junior athletes. One daughter was threatened that that she would lose her sport scholarship and the coach would make sure she never represented her state again. Near the end of a national under 16 championship, when requesting to take another of our daughters to see a doctor, as from her performance she was obviously unwell, the coach firstly said no and when we insisted he replied we could take our child but there was a team rule that what one player did so did the rest of the team. Resisting this bullying tactic, we then left the stadium with a rally of 20 cars containing players, families and officials and went to the hospital where our child was blood tested and eventually diagnosed with severe glandular fever and possible liver damage. After this experience I wrote to the state association and had a code of conduct introduced for state level coaches but this was after much time had lapsed. At the time no-one wanted to know about our experience and deal with harassment in sport.

From this family experience and later as President of MWBA, when the ASC Guidelines on Harassment were introduced, it became clear that as cases were notified to the association and investigated there needs to be more provision of counselling for all parties involved.

While in Sydney I worked in local government as a Recreation Planner and was able to examine the provision of local sport and recreation facilities. For the 1997 Senate Inquiry into Community Sports Facilities I did a small research survey of the north Sydney Councils, examining the provision of football (Australian Rules, soccer, rugby league and union) fields relative to netball courts. The results showed the ratio of 3 football fields (a football field takes up a much larger area than a netball court) to 1 netball court in this “well-to-do” north shore area of Sydney.

All of the above is written as personal experience to document the need to change institutional and organisational attitudes in the sports industry. Until there is cultural change, with most sports still operating on a patriarchal model, our sports industry and communities are not operating to the best of their capacity. The gender order in Australian sport needs to be challenged so that what is expected, allowed and encouraged in relation to what women and men do in sport is changed. The good news is that any “gender order” is not set in stone –it is possible to challenge and change.

This is a sports issue not a women’s sports issue. When sport meets the needs of boys and girls, men and women, then we will have a healthier and stronger sports industry for everyone.

How to achieve this? The top 12 things to do!

1. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) to link gender equity outcomes to its funding of National Sporting Associations (NSOs)
2. Further to the above, improved collection of data in regard to NSOs so that an accurate picture is known of gender breakdown in all areas of operations.
3. The Australian Sports Commission to develop a national women’s sport policy.
4. ASC to continue with its Sports Leadership Grants for Women with increased funding to \$1 million (now it averages per \$2500 per person or organisation, totalling \$400,000).
5. ASC to increase its research into issues relating to women’s sport (e.g. female athlete triad).
6. Further to the above, for the ASC or the Office for Women to support current data collection relevant to media coverage of women’s sport.
7. ASC or other federal agency to support the development and production of a quality half hour national television program on women’s sport.
8. ASC to host an annual meeting of government and non-government womensport agencies.
9. The Australian Communications and Media Authority should have regulatory power to direct the broadcasting media to have a mandatory amount of coverage of women’s sport, similar to the 20% stipulation that drama content on television is Australian. Such a standard should be capable of clear understanding, implementation and monitoring by ACMA.
10. The Federal Government to give financial support to the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association, similar to the Canadian Governments \$350,000 annual support for CAAWS, the Canadian Association for the Advancement for Women in Sport..

11. Federal government financial support for the 2010 World Conference on Women's Sport, to be held in Sydney.
12. Establish a national task force to implement the strategies from the Senate Inquiry into women's sport.

Lucky 13 - Develop a role model for all women but particularly older women - encourage Mrs Janet Howard to join her husband on his daily walks!