

2006 SENATE INQUIRY - WOMEN IN SPORT & RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA.

SUBMISSION FROM WOMEN'S GOLF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE YOWANI COUNTRY CLUB, ACT.

BACKGROUND NATIONALLY

Twenty years ago women who played golf in Australia were “associates” and men were “members”. Such a hierarchical history and culture in golf has been pervasive and has been difficult to shake-off. However, today, access to a golf course is more likely to be determined by the amount of money a person pays for a category of membership and “members” are usually referred to as “five” or “seven day” members. Unfortunately, this liberated approach to membership is not always carried through to governance at club level.

GOVERNANCE – STATE AND DISTRICT

Women's Golf in the ACT is part of Women's Golf New South Wales (WGNSW). While there are some advantages to being part of WGNSW, the Central Southern District Golf Association (CSGA) is not part of the ACT sport system and does not have access to ACT Government funding. This does not affect established programs such as district pennants and other major trophy events. However, it does place limits on the effectiveness of district golf start-up or training programs for women and girls which must be self-funded and staffed by volunteers. This tends to make any initiatives ad hoc and dependent on the enthusiasm of a small number of women.

YOWANI COUNTRY CLUB

Yowani Country Club (YCC) is one of ten golf clubs in Canberra. It is also a lawn bowls club. YCC is situated close to the centre of Canberra and has a restaurant, function rooms and motel accommodation.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF WOMEN AND GIRLS AT YOWANI

The proportion of male to female players at YCC doesn't appear to have changed greatly over the years. There are currently 744 male (82%) and 157 female (18%) members. There are 43 under 18 junior golf members of which 38 are male and 5 are female. Approximately 60% of the female membership plays golf each week. The extremity of the age range of active female participants at Yowani is a source of pride to the club and gives the sport of golf something quite authentic. Nine year-olds in the sub-junior program at Yowani are being mentored by a number of their feisty and fit grandmothers! At least twenty active women golfers at Yowani are in their seventies or eighties and the overwhelming majority of female players are “vets” (over 50). The younger players are at school, young mothers or are working women who play mainly at weekends.

GENERIC ISSUES RELATED TO GOLF FOR GIRLS & WOMEN

While golf is an excellent sport for older women this demographic creates a ‘down-side’. Golf is perceived to be an ‘old persons’ sport which costs lots of money and takes too long to play! Those who know and enjoy the benefits of the sport lament that this

perception prevails and regret that very few children have access to the sport. Golf is seldom on the school curriculum. However, when girls do become members of golf clubs there are rarely structures in place to accommodate the 'average' girl golfer, although elite junior performers do have a pathway in the sport.

INNOVATION AT YOWANI & IN THE ACT

“A Women’s GIG (Get into Golf)”. YCC women golfers supported a recent CSGA initiative in Canberra, “Get into Golf”. More than 50 women responded eagerly to an opportunity to learn golf over 10 weeks. The response to and the success of the program reinforced that golf is a popular recreation option for women approaching retirement.

The Yowani Sub-junior Program. Yowani offers a unique sub-junior program. The modifications made to cater for these young players could just as easily be made for women with limited time / skill to play golf. Every Monday after school, up to 34 nine to twelve year-old children compete in competitions over 1- 4, 5 or 9 holes. During their time in the program the children progress through four grades. The ‘beginner’ grades play well forward of the adult tees and, as their skills develop and they get older, they progress to hitting off the permanent tees.

The club’s professional golfers support the program by providing lessons and equipment for all children. From time to time, club members donate items of equipment which are distributed amongst the children. The program relies heavily on about twenty Yowani members who are known as “walkers”. Walkers are adult mentors who volunteer their time to accompany small groups of children as they play their rounds. The walkers, score, introduce children to rules and explain etiquette. There is also a very strong emphasis on appropriate behaviour. Of the 34 players only 6 are girls. Of the 20 members who assist as volunteer mentors in the sub-junior program, 15 are women.

WOMEN AND VOLUNTEERISM AT YCC

It is usually not difficult to encourage women at YCC to volunteer their services, particularly if the role requirements are perceived to be practical, not overly time-consuming or within their level of capability. If technological competence, a major time commitment or the high-level skill required to serve on the Board are sought, it is a different scenario. The club has struggled in recent years to fill such roles with volunteers, whether men or women. This issue is no doubt impacting on the wider sport industry as well.

CONCLUSION

Inroads into issues of equality and equity have been made, sometimes laboriously, for women and girls who play golf at YCC. Adequate advances in the future will rely on both women and men’s voices being heard about constitutional and governance reform from the club through to the national leadership level at the new Golf Australia. Local level sport is looking to the maturing sport industry for much needed guidance about the sustainability of our sport in a complex 21st century.

Shirley Willis, Vice-President for WGEC 15 June 2006.