

Big V Basketball

Submission to: Parliament of Australia - Senate

Inquiry into women in sport and recreation in Australia

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Big V Basketball

Big V basketball is the elite senior basketball competition in the state of Victoria. The Big V is an affiliated body of Basketball Victoria.

The Big V's competitions comprise 98 teams, making it one of the largest semi-professional basketball leagues in the world.

Played between Victorian Basketball Associations, the Big V commenced as a women's only competition, originally with a majority of teams coming from country Victoria. After rapid early growth after commencement in 1987, growth in the league stagnated during the mid 1990's.

The women's competition merged with its male counterpart in 2000, bringing a new level of professionalism to the management of the league. Since then the competition has experienced strong growth. In 2006, five new women's teams entered the competition, outstripping men's growth for the first time in the league's history.

In 2006, the league will celebrate 20 years of elite state-wide competition in Victoria. The men's competition is playing its 18th year of competition.

Scope of this submission

The Big V are pleased to be able to make this submission to this important enquiry.

We will limit our comments to those areas which the league has experience in, or which the league considers impacts on the capacity of our clubs to deliver a strong competitive environment for female athletes.

In particular we would like to provide the enquiry with comments relating to:

1. Participation by women in elite basketball competition in Victoria
2. Profile and Retention of women in these competitions
3. Government Policy and its impact on the capacity of organisations to deliver programs
4. Competing Interests and factors affecting Regional Victoria
5. Comments on Media Coverage

We have not attempted to consider more general questions, such as the health benefits of the participation of women in sport. It is our view that a great deal of empirical data exists already to support these assumptions. Likewise, more general participation questions and questions of the role of media can be more effectively answered by our governing bodies, namely Basketball Victoria and Basketball Australia.

1. Participation by Women in Elite Basketball competition in Victoria

The Big V provides four levels of senior elite basketball competition for women.

Big V Championship, which acts as a member conference of the ABA, Australia's second tier development basketball competition. Nine teams compete in this competition. Only one team is from Regional Victoria - Geelong.

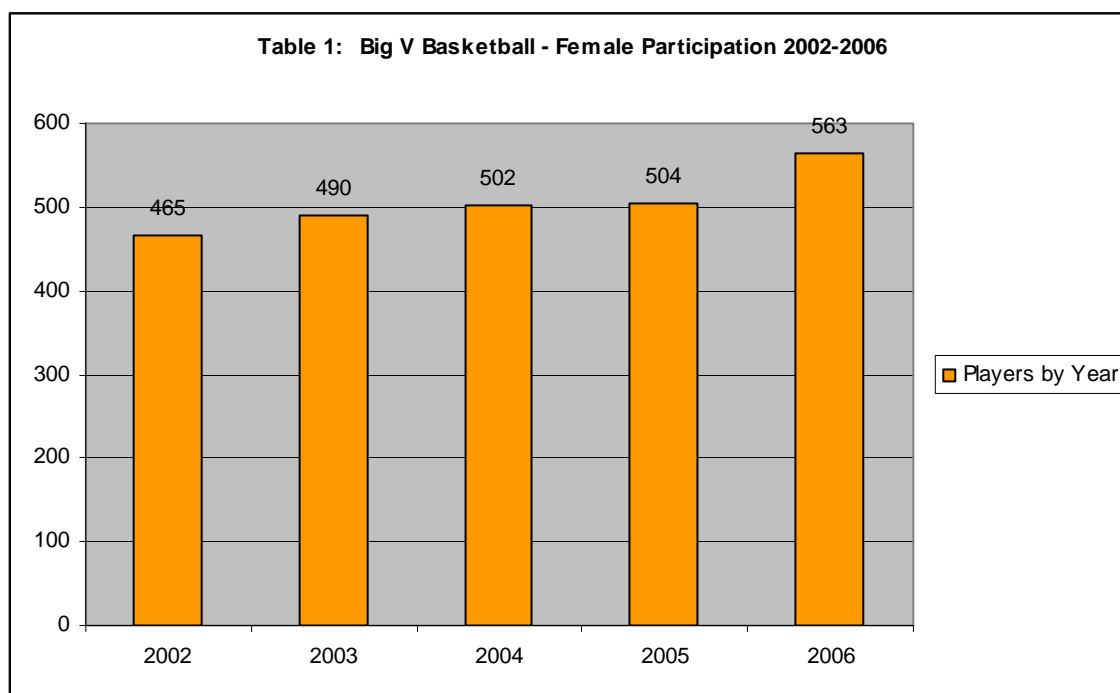
Big V Division One, the level directly below Championship, which also comprises nine teams, two of which, Warrnambool and Shepparton are from Regional Victoria.

Big V Division Two, another subsidiary level. 12 teams compete with three, Mildura, Southern Peninsula and Latrobe City (Traralgon based) representing Country Victoria.

Big V Youth League, a senior competition, in which approximately 80% of registered players are Under 23 years of age. Only one of the 12 teams in this competition represents regional Victoria - Ballarat.

In all in 2006, 563 female athletes have to date taken the court in Big V Women's competitions. This figure has grown steadily since 2002, which is the first of five years of satisfactory data that we have at our disposal.

Table 1 shows the simple growth in participation of female participants in our competitions over the past five years.



As a league, these numbers are pleasing at face value - we would consider they generally reflect a strong growth in the sport at junior levels over the last five years.

2. Profile and Retention of Women in Big V Basketball Competitions

Behind the growth in participation, are more disturbing trends concerning longevity and retention.

At the most simple level, our analysis shows that of the 465 athletes who competed in our competitions in 2002, only 82 are still involved in regular competition.

Of course, an element of this will be desired attrition, with some players moving to higher levels of competition within Australia or overseas.

Generally though, for only 17% of female participants to still be involved indicate the sport is failing to make life-long participants of our athletes.

This hypothesis is further supported by the following table (2).

Table 2
Numbers of athletes in each age group in each season

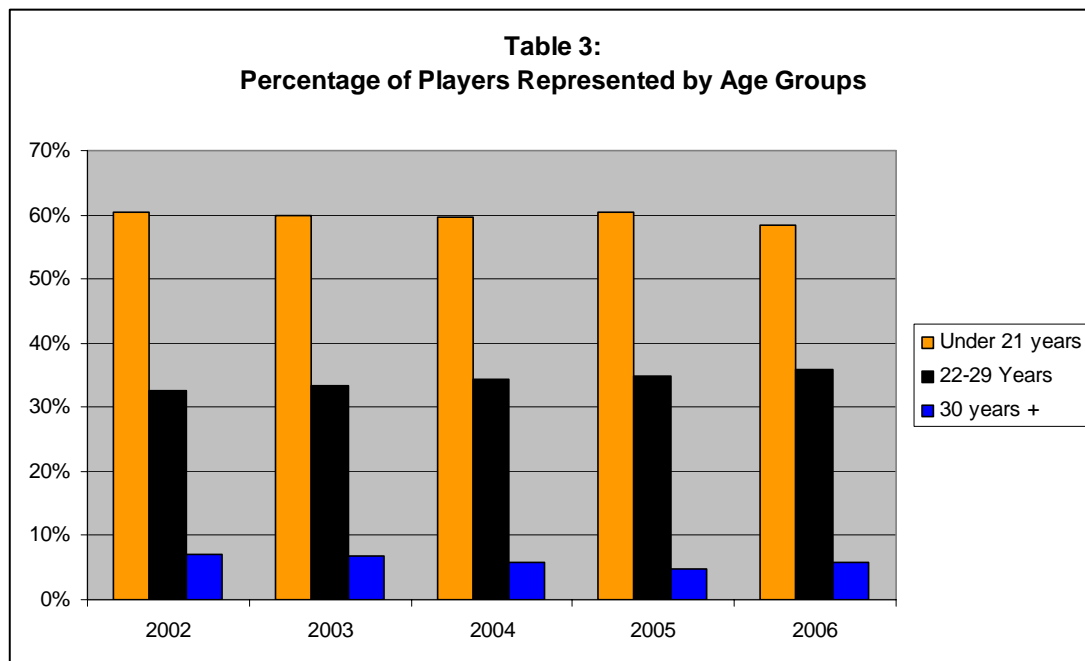
Ages between	Season				
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
13 to 15	12	21	10	15	14
16 to 17	95	77	67	73	71
18 to 19	110	102	129	114	116
20 to 21	64	93	94	102	127
22 to 23	69	70	70	65	83
24 to 25	37	44	55	51	51
26 to 27	23	31	34	40	35
28 to 29	22	18	14	20	33
30 to 31	16	17	10	13	11
32 to 33	6	8	6	6	8
34 to 35	7	3	3	1	6
36 to 37	2	2	6	1	2
38 to 39	1	3	2	2	4
40 to 41	0	1	2	1	1
Over 41	1	0	0	0	1

The largest grouping of athletes is in the Under 21 year age grouping.

This is further emphasised in the table (3) on the following page, which combines detail above into three broad groupings - 21 and Under, 22-29 years and 30 years +.

The conclusions from this are clear:

- a) The competition is generally not maturing. In any given year over 58% of all players are under the age of 22 and in years 2002 through 2005 this figure is 60%.
- b) This has remained remarkably stable over the first four years of the data. Only in 2006 have we seen a small movement in a positive direction, with genuine growth in the 22 - 29 year old age group.
- c) A large number of players who enter the league between 17-21 year of age are leaving the league by the time they are 22.



Finally, this was further reinforced when we considered the average age of all players in our competition across the five year period. Table 4 demonstrates this.

Table 4
Average Age of Participants by Year

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Average Age	20.67	20.85	20.93	20.85	21.18

Again, while the trend is positive in 2006, it is too early to tell whether this will be sustained.

3. Government Policy and Its Impact on Organisations Capacity to Deliver

It is important that the league comments on the major factor we see as making it difficult for Basketball Associations to sustain long term elite women's programs.

There exists within sport within Australia major differences between the way local government deliver recreational services for indoor sports such as basketball and outdoor sports such as football, cricket and netball.

Case Study

The Geelong Basketball Association fields a team in the Big V Women's Championship competition. The Association has played in our competition since the early 1990's.

The Association, due to the heavy demand of social and recreational competitions, is unable to provide training times for this team at its usual venue, which is hired from the City of Greater Geelong at a fee of just over \$90,000 per annum.

Accordingly, the association hires external training courts (both Council owned and school facilities) for 4 hours per week for approximately 30 weeks of the year to provide for training for this team.

The minimum hourly rate for such training at the Council owned venue is \$22.00 per court per hour - a cost of at least \$2640.00 per year for court hire alone.

In contrast, the City of Greater Geelong provides its premier Netball centre, at Kardinia Park, to the Unity Netball Association and Geelong Netball Association, who jointly pay less than \$2400.00 per season to the council for six month usage of the 12 netball courts along with use of a pavilion. On top of these costs the two Netball associations pay for power costs when the courts are used of an evening.

This represents a massive disparity in the provision of services between the two sports over the course of a similar length season. Netball gain full weekly access to 12 courts for under \$2400.00 for six months, while Basketball pay \$2600 for 1 court for four hours per week for about six months.

The end result of such a policy is that those services which the basketball association might otherwise pay on behalf of their team are not able to be met. The team does not provide the medical and physiotherapy services for example, they do not treat their athletes as elite, even to the point that the athletes themselves often have to make a contribution in order to be able to play. These factors often make it difficult for a female player to continue to play at the highest level available to them.

Contrast this for example with local football leagues, where it is common place for players to be receiving substantial game payments to participate in their sport. No player in Geelong's elite women's basketball team is paid to play and across the full league, very few would receive game payments at all.

Council policy dictates that they must seek a commercial return from indoor sports facility, and at the same time their policy dictates that they will subsidise outdoor sporting activities. Such policies are freely available on a range of municipal websites across Victoria.

4. Competing Interests and factors impacting Regional Victoria

While the above case study is important, it is just part of the impact on regional women's basketball in Victoria.

In recent times the league has become aware of similar venue issues affecting clubs like Warrnambool and Shepparton.

Mildura and Ballarat benefit from ownership of their facilities.

The recent moves to align country football and netball in Victoria is proving extremely damaging.

Elite basketballers often also excel at netball and the alignment of football and netball clubs is having an impact on the availability of elite players for the sport.

We are increasingly seeing female players being offered payments to play local netball, in much the same way we have seen many male athletes encouraged away from basketball to football in country Victoria in the past. In many cases the player will declare their preference for basketball, but, being young, a payment of perhaps \$100 cash per game is better than having to take up a part time job.

Local councils are pouring significant financial resources into building extra netball courts beside football grounds, to the detriment of the development of other sporting facilities. State Government has supported this with a range of funding programs.

In Geelong, the City has recently announced that it will, in 2006/7, invest in the development of five netball facilities at football club grounds. The extension of this in future years will be requests for lighting, and then dual gender change rooms.

Our concern is not that this is bad because netball is receiving this benefit. We have no problems with councils generally investing sport, as long as they do so equitably.

Geelong already has netball courts in strategic areas that are surplus to requirements so obviously the basketball community, which does not have enough courts for its representative teams to train on, is at a loss to understand this further investment.

In the same paper, the City has announced it will contribute \$188,000 in 2006 to Geelong Cricket Association for the maintenance of turf wickets - a major investment in what is basically an elite male sport. In contrast the city will profit from Geelong Basketball Association activities (male and female) generally by as much as \$60,000.

A more direct threat is the cost of fuel and the cost of travel generally.

A team like Mildura will make six - eight major road trips to Melbourne per season. The cost of that travel, with bus hire, fuel costs, accommodation etc., is becoming prohibitive. The league assists with this wherever possible, making fixturing as efficient as we can and providing some equalised rebates for country clubs travelling extensive kilometres.

However, given the city's isolation, they have little choice but to bear the major cost of fielding a team to enjoy the competitive standard that their players deserve.

5. Comments on Media Coverage

The Big V as an organisation is fortunate to receive significant media coverage across Melbourne and Regional Victoria.

Overall we would consider that our regional women's teams, in the smaller regional centres such as Mildura and Warrnambool, receive excellent media support in both electronic and print media.

In the larger regional centres, coverage is focused far more on men's sport than on women's.

Again, using Geelong as an example, reserves grade local football gains significant coverage in Monday's edition of the Geelong Advertiser, but elite women's state level basketball receives virtually no coverage.

In Metropolitan Melbourne, the league is fortunate to receive many articles in suburban newspapers contributed directly to us by journalists. There is a distinct difference in the amount of coverage given to men's and women's teams.

It is common for us to receive an article that provides a game report of a men's basketball game, and then simply lists the scores for the equivalent women's game for the same association.

Summary

Big V thank the enquiry for the opportunity to make this submission.

While we have not proposed "solutions" in this paper the league would be prepared to co-operate in the future with Government to implement strategies to resolve many of the issues raised here.

Should the enquiry require further information, we would be pleased to provide that.

Matthew Cowling
CEO
Big V Basketball