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Dr Ian Holland  
Senate Environment, Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts  
References Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Re: Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia.**

**Submission by Julie Tullberg, Journalist, Leader Community  
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Women's sport has always battled for press. During my time in mainstream journalism, women's sport's biggest headlines often generated from scandal. Women's sport will never attract the same interest as AFL, other football codes and horse racing. It is a fact of life. The problem women's sports administrators face is the lack of corporate support. Sports such as netball, hockey, basketball or softball cannot draw big crowds - for men and women.

Sports editors are often focused on what is newsworthy - what drives the fans, where the interest lies, the culture of Australian sport and the weight of a story. Editors are also driven by the results of marketing polls.

We have seen the success stories - basketball, especially in the mid 1990s, and swimming in the past decade. The coverage of these sports has been exceptional. But these sports need key players: look at the impact of Ian Thorpe. These sports need celebrities to enjoy major publicity. Other examples include Giaan Rooney, Susie O'Neill, Hayley Lewis and Lisa Curry. These swimmers have enjoyed success but they are also highly marketable. Athletes like Petria Thomas have not received the same level of public or media acclaim, despite winning Olympic gold.

I have found that the hardest, cleverest lobbyists have the potential to attract substantial funding. The best sports administrators and clever coaches have been key players in securing Federal Government funding.

The most notable person was swimming's Don Talbot, who was one of the toughest lobbyists. Women's sport needs people like that if it wants more exposure.

The best initiative I've been involved with is a partnership approach with netball, when the Sunday Herald Sun ran a weekly competition, "Coaches Most Wanted Player Award" for State League netball in Victoria. The netball community loved it. The Herald Sun's marketing department established this initiative with Netball Victoria. This program is no longer available at the Sunday Herald Sun. But Leader picked up the program about four seasons ago and our netball coverage is helping to build strong community links. We now have the Most Player Valuable (MVP) Award.

From what I have been told, running a number of women's sports stories has actually lost readers in the metropolitan press. Sports fans thrive on AFL, rugby league and union, cricket, motor sport and soccer - this has been ingrained in Australian sporting culture and it is not easy to create a major change.

I was actually employed at the Sunday Herald Sun in 1993 to write women's sport. At the time, there was no women's sport section. You need passionate journalists to back up committed sports experts for women's sport to have better impact in the press.

As men are generally seen to be physically superior, most interest lies with male athletes. Professionalism in women's sport is improving because it now has better voices. Those voices include Liz Ellis, Sharelle McMahon and Lauren Jackson. The unionism of these sports - and better lobbying - has created better results. This is what it is all about - superior representation.

As journalists, we are on the lookout for key issues in sport. Women's sport promoters need to look at interesting angles of how they can better market themselves. They also should look at taking risks with their budgets and invest in exciting opportunities.

Women's tennis is popular - pretty, attractive women do catch the public eye, but there we have characters like the Williams' sisters who draw spectator interest. How could this marketable element be transferred to other women's sports without exploiting women? A culture of media influences the culture of sport.

Building relationships and helping women's sporting organisations have been challenging. We once distributed 150 letters to women's cricket clubs, encouraging publicity. We didn't receive a single expression of interest.

Leader has often made approaches to women's sporting groups for coverage. We now cover women's cricket (VWCA District Firsts), netball (state league), women's soccer (women's premier league), women's footy (VWFL) and women's baseball (VBA). We still often have to chase the organisations because of the habits already established. Women's sport has to take ownership/responsibility and start hammering on our door. Men's sport does - why can't women's sports?

I also believe women's sport is better served at grassroots level, working with community journalists for exposure of issues and significant results. Community newspapers have plenty of scope for women's sport. Anyone can nominate a successful athlete - woman or man, girl or boy - and the story will run in general news. This is part of the sports star program, which encourages state-level and higher-achieving athletes, and volunteers behind the scenes. Sporting clubs are free to jump on this vehicle - it's currently not happening to a level it could be. This approach still caters for grassroots sports that desperately need some exposure.