

43-45 Marion Street
Harris Park NSW 2150

Tel 02 9633 2533
Fax 02 9635 5381

www.netball.asn.au
email: infonet@netball.asn.au

All Australia Netball Association Limited
A.B.N. 66003 142 818 Trading as Netball Australia



SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE ENQUIRY INTO WOMEN IN SPORT AND RECREATION IN AUSTRALIA BY NETBALL AUSTRALIA JUNE 2006

This submission to the Senate Enquiry into Women Sport and Recreation in Australia is made on behalf of Netball Australia.

Netball Australia's key goal is to ensure that all Australians have the opportunity to participate in the sport of netball in a way that brings them good health, recognition, achievement, involvement, satisfaction, or other such outcomes that they seek.

Australia's sporting climate is dominated by males in every aspect; from coaching and administration, to media coverage and corporate sponsorship, to attendance at sporting events. So where do we begin to tackle the issues that affect women and their involvement in sport and recreation within this environment of male dominance?

Few inroads can be made, at any level, if we cannot encourage young women to be involved in sport from an early age. Although the health benefits of participation in physical activity from an early age are endless, this reason alone does little to convince a 5-year girl that she should join her local sporting club. Many factors can affect a young woman's choice to play sport. They include a variety of social, economic, environmental, cultural and personal reasons, such as include poor self-image and low self esteem, lack of access to facilities, lack of motivation, financial difficulties and the list goes on.

The absence of female sporting role models has long been cited as a contributing factor to the low participation rates of girls in sport and recreation activities. Female sport receives 2% of the total television sporting coverage and 10.7% of newspaper sporting coverage.¹ With the miniscule coverage that women's sport receives in the media, it is little wonder that young women struggle to find female role models to look up to.

In the absence of media presence of positive female sporting role models, young women will seek guidance and assurance from whoever graces the front cover of their teen magazines, or whoever appears on their favourite television shows. Currently, that void is filled with Hollywood starlets who have little more than a famous family name and an expensive wardrobe to their credit. Poor self-image is inexplicably linked with the constant coverage of these 'role models', as they are held up to represent the traits and features of the ideal woman.

Australia's female sporting elite are a small but exceptional group. With few female sports being recognised as professional, the majority of elite female athletes will compete at an international level as well as studying or working full time to support themselves. Their sporting achievements, however great, do not receive the media coverage required to bring about lucrative sponsorship deals which might otherwise allow them to focus solely on their training and competition. Netball is the most popular organised sport in Australia (followed by soccer, AFL, swimming and cricketⁱⁱ) and yet the combined total earnings of the 128 players in National Netball League is \$500 000 annually, a mere pittance compared with Matt Giteau's contract with the Western Force for \$1.5 million over 3 years, or Barry Hall's \$2 million for 4 years with Sydney Swans.

The argument has long raged about the obvious inequality of wealth between males and females in Australian sport. Would the story read differently if female sporting competitions such as the National Hockey, Basketball or Netball Leagues were broadcast on commercial television channels? Would large sponsorship deals result from such coverage? Is a female sporting event even capable of drawing the crowds necessary to warrant commercial television coverage in the first place?

These questions strike at the heart of the male dominated sporting culture that Australia sustains. But once again, we need not concern ourselves with these issues if women do not want to participate in sport and recreation in the first place.

Just like any fad or craze that stirs the imagination of our youth, the idea of getting physically active needs to be marketed at the target group- young women. It needs to be made appealing and attractive. As previously mentioned, simply identifying the health benefits of physical activity will not stir a young woman into action.

What better marketing tool than the hundreds of elite female athletes that train at rural and metropolitan facilities around the country, who give their sport their total concentration and commitment for little to no hope of financial gain? Young women need to see that there is a future in competitive sport and that there are hundreds of confident, strong women who strive daily for their sporting goals. Such women need to be promoted, so that their protégés can realise that there is a future in pursuing sport at an elite level. For every Andrew Johns, Lleyton Hewitt or George Gregan, we desperately need a Liz Ellis, Alicia Molik or Susie O'Neill.

Conclusion

With greater awareness of women's outstanding achievements and participation by the community, sponsorship and other funding will flow to sporting organizations, such as Netball Australia, for the conduct of high performance women's competitions as well as the support of grassroots level sport and recreational activities for women and girls.

Greater attention from the media will provide more role models and household names as well as some sensational events to motivate girls to participate in sporting activities and give greater equity to the female sporting population.

In particular young women in Australia deserve to be given and be able to emulate positive, powerful role models. Australian netballers are shining examples of those positive role models, and deserve to be championed by our organisation as well as the community, to inspire and support women in their development.

ⁱ “An Illusory Image: A Report on the Media Coverage and Portrayal of Women’s Sport in Australia”, Australian Sports Commission, 1996.

ⁱⁱ “Sporting Australians, 1996-97”, Australian Bureau of Statistics; Cat. No. 1301.0