

SoccerFit™, a successful model for increased female participation in Sport

**Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Women in Sport and
Recreation in Australia on behalf of SoccerFit™**



Author: **Liam O'Duibhir**
Mobile: 0417 579 079
Email: liamod@soccerfit.com.au
WWW: www.SoccerFit.com.au

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1 What is SoccerFit™

SoccerFit™ is a new fitness concept which uses the drills and techniques of soccer to give participants a fun-filled and thoroughly energetic fitness workout, in a safe, structured group environment. The easy to follow format ensures that SoccerFit is suited to all people, of all ages, and levels of ability – no previous soccer experience is required.

2 SoccerFit™ particularly appeals to women

To date, the female to male SoccerFit™ participation ratio has been of the order of 5 to 1 – a surprising, albeit welcome pattern. The programme has never specifically targetted female participation, yet the early conclusions are that SoccerFit™ has struck a definite chord with women.

3 Why does SoccerFit™ appeal to women

By emphasising the fitness and fun elements of SoccerFit™, and providing a learning-friendly environment in which to develop basic soccer skills, participants progress at their own, comfortable, pace. The experience of SoccerFit™ for many women is less off-putting than the comparably more pressured atmosphere that can prevail at local league soccer clubs – even at the lowest levels of competition.

4 SoccerFit™ - a stepping stone to possible eventual participation in competitive soccer at an appropriate level

For the vast majority of people, the most accessible outlet for participation in competitive sport is their local club team. The competitive nature of sport means that even, at the lower division levels, only a small number of people are blessed with the necessary skills and athleticism to secure their place on a regular basis in a team. For those who can't make the grade (the majority of people), social membership of the club at best, is their lot.

This is where SoccerFit™ comes in. It provides an outlet to those who are excluded from participation in local league competitive soccer or are disinclined to even try it in the first place. At SoccerFit™ they can, at a comfortable level, develop basic fitness, learn training techniques, learn introductory skills and tactics, learn about being part of a sports team, have fun and generally enjoy a terrific soccer experience.

Some individuals can through SoccerFit™, develop enough ability, confidence and enthusiasm to venture successfully into competitive local league soccer. Others may not make this progression, but can learn to love the sport and utilise outlets such as SoccerFit™ to regularly participate in the sport or use it as their preferred regular fitness activity.

5 SoccerFit™ removes the common discouragements to soccer participation

While many take part in SoccerFit™ for fun, for those who may have as their ultimate intention, a long-term aim of getting involved in competitive soccer, SoccerFit™ removes many of the typical discouragements that they might face if trying to secure a place with a local club team.

5.1 The fitness challenge

It can be very disheartening to join a local soccer team if your fitness levels are not comparable to those of existing members. Because of the relatively short pre-season preparation time, often a matter of 6 weeks to 8 weeks, clubs have to move quickly to get their team in shape in time for season kick-off. The clubs may not be in a position to allow for newly joined members to 'catch up' and this can cause them to feel isolated within the group, and lead to discontinuation of participation.

SoccerFit™ accommodates varying fitness levels very well and the format (particularly in its approach of dividing the workout area into a series of lanes) allows the fittest and the not so fit to operate at their own comfortable level side by side. SoccerFit™ also operates a policy of 'No Idle Time' and takes steps to ensure that every moment is fully occupied with skill or fitness-based activities – those at a higher fitness level are thus never bored waiting for others to complete an assigned activity.

NOTE : Pausing for a rest or water break is of course encouraged for those who feel the need at any time during the sessions.

5.2 The skills barrier

Soccer is a highly skilled sport, some would say, the most skilled of all popular sports. To acquire even the most elementary capability requires a lot of practice. Those with ambitions to take part in competitive soccer must have the appropriate enthusiasm and commitment to developing these skills.

The focus of SoccerFit™ is heavily weighted towards imparting the basics of soccer to participants. This is done principally with a view to giving clear instruction on how to perform skilled activities, but also, cultivating a mode of training that can be readily followed in one's own free time – so-called SoccerFit™ Solo. In this way, participants are empowered to take what they learn at SoccerFit™ and arrange to practise it in their own free time as often as they wish. In so doing, their soccer 'destiny' or how far they can progress, is ultimately self-determined.

5.3 The Time Availability Issue

Though it varies depending on the standard in question, becoming a 'weekend warrior' with a local soccer team can require a large time commitment. Typically the once or twice a-week training sessions take between 1.5 and 2 hours, and the game on a Saturday or Sunday is generally a 4 to 5 hour episode depending on whether you are home or away. Missing practice sessions or games, other than on rare occasions, is frowned upon by other team-members. Successfully managing this level of commitment is very difficult, particularly for those raising families. For many, it is too difficult.



Although SoccerFit™ does encourage a team ethic, and seeks an 8 week commitment from participants, casual attendance at SoccerFit™ is possible. Additionally, as the availability of SoccerFit™ spreads throughout Australia, the number of scheduled sessions will span a wide range of weekly 1 hour time slots, so that even the most time-poor individual has the prospect of attending.

5.4 The Cost

Local club team soccer in most instances requires a subscription payment from all its members. It is generally a yearly fee and provided the club has some form of sponsorship in place, this is affordable.

SoccerFit™ is currently available through a number of Sydney-located Community Colleges, and is very reasonably priced. SoccerFit™ is also run by professional personal trainers who charge a rate comparable with that of gym attendance.

6 SoccerFit™ is a proven successful programme

SoccerFit™ is currently run at three Community Colleges - Leichhardt-based Sydney Community College (SCC), Bondi Junction-based Eastern Suburbs Community College (ESCC), and Manly-based Manly-Warringah Community College (MWCC). The courses have received strong patronage. It has been with great enthusiasm that SoccerFit™ (the organisation) has responded to requests from both SCC and ESCC to increase the number of courses being held and this coming term will see both colleges running two SoccerFit™ programmes.

Feedback from SoccerFit™ participants to date has been emphatically positive. It is also noted that large numbers of those who have participated in previous programmes, have signed up to upcoming courses.

7 A closer look at SoccerFit™

7.1 Overview of the SoccerFit workout

The SoccerFit class duration can be varied, as required, to between 1 and 2 hours. The amount of time actually spent involved in vigorous activities is generally targetted at 1 hour. Given the nature of the sessions, this amount of time will provide a very satisfying workout to all attendees. Other time will be spent providing instruction in, and demonstration of, the SoccerFit routines.

7.1.1 Limber up (approx. 6 minutes)

Soccer is all about mobility and the SoccerFit limber up reflects this with a series of gentle body movements targetting the specific muscles that will be used during subsequent components of the workout.

7.1.2 Light Stretches (approx. 4 minutes)

The importance of stretching in any well thought-out fitness program cannot be understated. As the body is not fully warmed up yet, a series of very gentle stretches are introduced to prepare the body for the next phase of the workout. This approach is designed to ensure that at all times during the session, the risk of injury is minimised.

7.1.3 Continuous Movement Ball Mastery (approx. 14 minutes)

Ball mastery activities introduce some basic features of ball control and movement. A system of lanes ensures that all participants have plenty of space. Lanes have the added benefit too that the individual needs of people of varying fitness levels and soccer ability can be more successfully catered for.

7.1.4 Additional Stretches (approx. 2 minutes)

At this stage of the workout, the body is sufficiently warmed up to allow safe stretching of key muscle sets.

7.1.5 Game Scenario Drills (approx. 14 minutes)

Beginners and experts of soccer alike can derive immense benefit from the 'game scenario' drills. These primarily target so-called soccer 'touch and technique', probably the most important factors in determining how well players will perform during a 'real' game.

7.1.6 Small-Sided Game (2 x 10 minute halves)

The small-sided soccer game maximises the fun element of SoccerFit and affords attendees a controlled and safe outlet in which to bring the skills and techniques they have been practising into effect. By the inclusion of a game, SoccerFit delivers on the promise that people get a realistic soccer experience.

In offering this facility to members of the public, safety is of course a primary concern. Although a small-sided game can carry risks for participants, it is well established that by ensuring the focus is on fun, with just the right amount of competitive spirit, this facility can be safely offered to members of the public, including those who are not experienced in soccer.

Measures which the SoccerFit program applies to ensure that all risks are properly mitigated against include:-

- ✧ Participants not permitted to wear studded footwear
- ✧ No sliding tackles permitted
- ✧ Frequent hydration breaks
- ✧ Cancellation in the event of poor pitch conditions due to wet weather
- ✧ Having multiple intervals or outright cancellation in the event of excessively hot weather.

7.2 An 8-week SoccerFit Program

By continuously varying the SoccerFit program and introducing new techniques, drills and challenges to maintain high levels of enthusiasm, the recommended 8-



week duration of a typical SoccerFit™ programme will be packed with excitement and action throughout the entire period.

7.3 Benefits of SoccerFit™

Improved Fitness: SoccerFit™, as well as being an outstanding cardiovascular workout is also great for sharpening mobility and exercising complex motor skills. In fact, with SoccerFit™ many people safely experience usage of a wider range of body movements than ever before (caution is advised).

Weight Control: A soccer body is a beautiful body, and if you want to shed some unwanted kilos, the SoccerFit™ workout can really burn those calories.

Do it yourself, in your own time, in your own space (SoccerFit™ Solo): All you need is a ball and a clear area of workout space. By attending SoccerFit™, and making use of the instructional material available, you can learn a set of fitness techniques that will last a lifetime. Although soccer is a fun group activity, most of these techniques are adaptable for use on your own – find a field or yard, bring a ball, a rebound net or wall can also be useful – now go and work on your game. Simple!

Be part of the world's obsession with soccer: If you're new to soccer, and are curious as to why it is the world's most popular sport (participation and spectator), SoccerFit™ is a great way to check it out for yourself.

Become a Soccer know-it-all (or know-it-some): SoccerFit™ incorporates a small-sided game (see later sections) through which basic coaching points of soccer will become apparent. Additionally, your SoccerFit™ instructor should be able to provide you with some additional pointers – just ask.

Meet People, make friends: SoccerFit™ is a great way to meet people and form friendships. By actively helping and encouraging one another, SoccerFit™ can be a great bonding experience for all.

Don't just get fit, do something, make Soccer your 'thing' and join a team: With SoccerFit™, you've got a great way to get fit, and learn and improve your soccer skills. What's next? How do I stay fit? Join a team - there are always teams looking for new members. Get in touch with them and you're on your way!

8 About SoccerFit

8.1 Contact Details

For further information, please call:-

Liam O'Duibhir
Mobile: 0417 579 079
Email: liamod@soccerfit.com.au
WWW: www.soccerfit.com.au

8.2 Visit www.soccerfit.com.au

A full description of SoccerFit™ is available at our website including dates and times of sessions.