

Chapter 4

Elite Participation

4.1 Australians have continued to excel in elite sporting performance in the international context as a result of focussed investment by successive governments. This investment recognises that elite sport is essential to the Australian sport and recreation system as it has three roles: assisting athletes realise their full potential; providing inspirational role models for existing and future participation; and evoking local, regional and national identity and pride.

4.2 For Australia to perform well at world championship events and major international sporting competitions such as the Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth Games, a high level of organisation is required to identify, nurture, support and develop talented athletes. This commitment starts with Australia's extraordinary community base of volunteers and enthusiasts working within Australia's community sports organisations.

4.3 The ability for an athlete to achieve success at an international level is based on the egalitarian principal that dedication, ambition and talent will determine their level of success, rather than socio-economic status, geographic location or gender etc. However, this inquiry has confirmed the ongoing reality that there are many differences between male and female elite sports people, regardless of the sport they play.

4.4 This chapter discusses problems in the recruitment and retention of elite sportswomen, including levels of remuneration and limited career paths, and the significant problems these pose for athletes in pursuing a career at the elite level in their chosen sport. The chapter also discusses issues related to the financial status and viability of many national league competitions and the opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition.

Recruitment and retention

4.5 Women's sports report problems in the recruitment and retention of female elite athletes. As discussed in chapter 3, evidence indicates that many girls drop out of sport in their mid teens and this factor poses problems in providing a continuing player base for many sports. Sports also face difficulties retaining players who have made it to the elite level due to the challenge females face in earning a living and developing a career path while participating in national and international competition.

4.6 One possible explanation or factor is the lack of career paths so that potential sportswomen are not able to reach their full potential. One witness noted that:

[a] reason that these young women drop out is that for young women there is no full-time professional career path as an athlete in a team sport.¹

4.7 Hockey Australia outlined some of the issues with retaining people in the sport, particularly later in their careers:

ACTING CHAIR—Have many of them stayed with the sport?

Mr Adamson—Some of them have, but not as many as we would have liked. They were obviously a very high-achieving group of people and so logic would suggest that they would be high achieving if they stayed in the sport in an administrative or particularly a coaching capacity. I said before that hockey players are not very well paid. There are two or three issues with those players, once they finish playing. Firstly, after training for all that time and committing themselves to competition for three months of the year, many of them were tired of the sport and wanted a break. Many of them wanted to start a family and many of them had not had the opportunity to start a career in a meaningful way and needed to establish themselves. The latter applies to men's hockey as well. In particular, there was the issue of starting a family; they retire from hockey at 30 or 33, and that became an issue for us.²

4.8 Big V Basketball stated that of the 465 athletes who competed in its elite competition in 2002, only 82 are still regularly involved in competition. A large number of players who entered the league between 17-21 years of age are leaving the league by the time they are aged 22.³

4.9 The Football Federation Australia (FFA) also commented on the 'massive' drop-off rate in female soccer which is common in all female sports – 'the challenge for us is converting [grassroots participation] into a league and then into a highly competitive national team'.⁴ Cricket Australia noted that retention of elite female athletes is difficult as female cricket in Australia is not professional. This means female athletes must also work or study which poses challenges with regard to training and competition.⁵

4.10 Submissions pointed to a number of strategies to retain female competitors in elite competition. These include:

- Provide improved remuneration and other financial benefits, including scholarships;
- Provide female athletes with access to quality facilities and coaching staff;

1 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 57.

2 Mr Adamson, Hockey Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 89.

3 Big V Basketball, *Submission 18*, p. 3; Big V Basketball, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 35.

4 Ms Buckley, FFA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 14.

5 Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

- Better assist with family issues and work-life balance; and
- Provide funding for elite programs in regional areas to encourage greater retention of athletes from those areas.⁶

4.11 Submissions noted that a major problem in retaining female athletes occurs when female athletes start a family. In most, but not all cases, a male athlete continues his career unimpeded after the birth of a child in the family. A female athlete, on the other hand, either retires or continues on with her sport, but with enormous stresses of juggling child care and training and competition commitments. The SA Premier's Council for Women stated that the numbers of women that this affects is increasing, as the average age of athletes competing at the highest level is increasing.⁷

4.12 The Australian Sports Commission and sporting organisations have a number of initiatives to assist with the retention of female athletes. The Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) provides a program for both male and female athletes –the ASPIRE Career Assistance for Olympians program. Under this program athletes are assisted to find employment which provides flexible work practices so that athletes can embark on a career without jeopardising their athletic goals. All athletes regardless of gender also have access to the Olympic Solidarity Grants which makes scholarships available to assist with training programs.⁸ The ASC programs are discussed later in the chapter.

Remuneration

4.13 Women athletes earn far less than men when playing in a national league, whether comparing women participating in an all female league (like netball) with men participating in a male-dominated league (such as rugby), or whether one is considering a sport with national leagues for both men and women (like football).

...for young women there is no full-time professional career path as an athlete in a team sport. Little girls write to me and say that when they grow up they want to be a professional netballer. I am tempted to write back, 'Me too.'...On a rough count, there are over 3,000 full-time jobs for men as athletes in team sport in Australia. There is not one single job for women in that role.⁹

4.14 Submissions noted that the remuneration of elite women athletes is generally insufficient to allow athletes to compete on a full-time basis. One witness noted that:

It is frustrating, particularly when you see what the footballers earn. By the same token, you cannot begrudge them for what they earn because they are

6 ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, pp 5–8; Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 14; Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

7 SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, p. 16.

8 AOC, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

9 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 57.

part of a marketplace that allows them to earn that. Obviously their sports are doing something well. It is frustrating not because we all want to grow rich out of our sport—if I wanted to do that, I am playing the wrong sport—but because it would be great to have the time to concentrate on it.¹⁰

4.15 In relation to netball, a 2005 survey conducted by the Australian Netball Players' Association (ANPA) and the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) found that members of ANPA do not receive sufficient amounts of remuneration to play their sport on a full-time basis with most having to rely on supplementary income.

4.16 The survey found that:

- 83.2 per cent of respondents who played in the Commonwealth Bank Trophy (CBT) in 2005 earned less than \$4000 with the average being approximately \$2000, while some earned nothing.
- All players (except those at the Australian Institute of Sport) were responsible for paying any costs associated with an injury.
- 84.2 per cent of respondents committed more than 25 hours per week to either their other job or education and 58.4 per cent committed more than 38 hours per week.
- 67.3 per cent of respondents had or were completing a tertiary qualification, 12.9 per cent were or had completed a TAFE qualification and 18.8 per cent were completing secondary schooling.
- Respondents engaged in full-time work accounted for 41.6 per cent of those surveyed, 14.9 per cent were employed part-time and 37.6 per cent were casual employees.¹¹

4.17 Netball Australia noted that while netball is the most popular organised sport in Australia, the combined total earnings of the 128 players in the National Netball League is only \$500 000 annually, which was described as a 'mere pittance' when compared with elite male sportsmen.¹² Netball Victoria stated that base payments for elite players in the CBT range from \$1500 to \$15 000 (excluding personal sponsorships) and travel and accommodation expenses are paid when travelling to play. A small number of players also have individual sponsorship.¹³

4.18 Hockey Australia stated that support for players is provided through the Commonwealth's Direct Athlete Support Scheme (now the Australian Government

10 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 61.

11 ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, pp 5–6.

12 Netball Australia, *Submission 65*, p. 2.

13 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 13.

Sport Training Grant scheme), Hockey Australia resources and through the AOC's medal incentive payments.

There is also limited scope for players to receive payment outside this scheme and playing for their states in the Australian Hockey League at best provides limited payment at and at worst requires players to make a financial contribution to play in the League.

Player payments and therefore the ability to make a small living from the game usually requires the players to go overseas, usually to Europe in the off season. However, with the very full national and international program for the national teams this is usually done by up and coming players or those at the end of their playing careers.¹⁴

4.19 Cricket Australia stated that its national female athletes do not receive payment, however, expenses associated with competition such as travel, accommodation and allowances are provided.¹⁵

4.20 The AWU, referring to netball in particular, argued that levels of remuneration will need to be addressed in association with other factors such as improved marketing of the sport:

Ultimately, this sport has to deal and compete with the legacy of male dominated sports coverage in Australia...The players have got themselves organised, they are developing a professional voice. There is some change and perhaps some other people and some further new thinking coming into the sport. I think remuneration for players has to go up, and it will. It will just happen; the tide will rise. But that process is only part of it. The rest of it has to fall into place—television, marketing and developing even better links with the private sector.¹⁶

4.21 Table 4.1 illustrates the wage distribution of elite male sports compared to netball in Australia.

14 Hockey Australia, *Submission 43*, p. 4.

15 Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 2.

16 Mr Shorten, AWU, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 63.

Table 4.1 Wage distribution at elite level sport in Australia

	Competition (\$)	Per Team (\$)	Per Player (\$)
Netball	416,600	59,514	3,967
Basketball	8,096,000	736,000	73,600
Australian Football	97,840,000	6,115,000	156,794
Soccer	12,000,000	1,500,000	75, 000#
Cricket (State)	N/A	N/A	42,500*

This does not allow for the one player per team that does not have to count in the salary cap.

*The minimum a player can be contracted for is \$22,500 while the maximum is \$65,000. However, players then get remunerated on the amount of games they play at a rate of \$3,100 for a four-day game and \$1,100 for a one-day game.

Source: ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, p. 7. The data for netball refers to women's remuneration, the other sports to men's remuneration.

4.22 The data indicate that netball compares very unfavourably with other professional sports with regards to remuneration. The ANPA/AWU submission also drew attention to the much higher remuneration and other conditions available in the New Zealand netball league. The minimum the majority of players on lists received is \$12 000, some 40 players earn above \$20 000, and seven earn more than \$45 000. The New Zealand competition only has seven rounds plus finals compared to fourteen rounds and finals in Australia. Thus for half the amount of work as Australian athletes, New Zealanders can expect to earn ten-times as much money as ANPA members.

4.23 In addition to being paid by their club, New Zealand national players receive a further salary from Netball New Zealand, along with a Prime Minister's scholarship, which is also available after they retire. This government-funded scholarship allows players to attend university free, pays for books and other associated costs with professional development.¹⁷ This is discussed later in the chapter.

4.24 The vast majority of female athletes cannot make a living from their sport in Australia, and must work on a full-or part-time basis and/or rely on financial support from a partner or family. Athletes can only reach their full potential with the right supports in place, including adequate remuneration. The more time an athlete has to focus on their skills, train and concentrate, the better their performance.

17 ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, pp 7–8. See also www.sparc.org.nz, accessed August 2006.

Balancing work-life commitments

4.25 As a result of inadequate remuneration available from their sports, the majority of elite female athletes must compete at an international level as well as studying or working full time to support themselves.

4.26 Elite sportswomen gave first-hand accounts to the committee of the frustrations involved in balancing these work-life situations, especially the competing demands on their time with sporting, family and work commitments. Mrs Ellis, the Australian Netball captain told the committee:

....a lot of sportswomen have to work full-time, obviously to support themselves. Most of us have partners or families and we need to be able to devote some time to them. It is frustrating to have to fit in so much. When you look at the Australian netball team, over half of our team have tertiary qualifications. I think that is pretty important. Education is just as important as sport. But it would be nice to be able to combine that in a much easier way.

Several years ago I was working full-time as a solicitor for a firm in Sydney. I was trying to play for the Swifts, coach and do all the things that you think you should do as part of your sport. I went very close to an emotional breakdown because I did not have the time. I had just got married and I wanted to spend more time with my husband. It is pretty tough when you think there is potential for your sport to pay you a salary, but it is not. That more than anything else makes it pretty frustrating.¹⁸

4.27 Similarly, Ms Dick, Director of the ANPA, stated that:

I have been playing for a number of years, and my circumstances have changed. When I first started playing netball I was at university. It was a bit easier then, because I was flexible with my training schedule and could work around things a bit easier. I was working as well, which was hard, just to get an income. I am still playing at CBT level and enjoying it, too. Working full time, it is a struggle to train and be fresh for games at the end of the week. I love netball and it is a passion. There are Phoenix and other commitments outside of netball, too. I want to coach little kids, because that is really enjoyable, but it is just hard to get out of full-time work for that.¹⁹

4.28 Ms Kitchin, a member of the ANPA, highlighted the health and psychological demands placed on athletes:

Other sports offer opportunities to go straight into professional sport, and that can be their living. We do not have that. We have to work full time just to support ourselves. That means that we have to get up at 5 o'clock twice a week to go to training in the morning, and on the days that we do not we have to go to training after work. It affects our health. It affects us

18 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, pp 61–62.

19 Ms Dick, ANPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 58.

psychologically. You get to a game at the end of the week and you are not in the mental state to play. It is very hard; you cannot reach your potential as an athlete and you cannot reach your potential in your career. You cannot reach your career goals all the time, because you have to sacrifice the time to put towards your sport.²⁰

4.29 Ms Ellis raised similar concerns:

There has been a spate of knee injuries in the last six months, which I think is due to athletes trying to do too much in their lives. They are trying to train. They are trying to do everything that their coach is asking of them. You do not want to let your team mates down. You cannot take a night off because you are tired. You cannot do that to your team mates, and you do not want to let your coach down. You do not want to let your employer down either, because they are often helping you get through your career, giving you time off and being very lenient. So you do not want to not turn up just because you are tired. It is probably less to do with the decisions that you make and more to do with the impact that it has on your life.²¹

4.30 Witnesses also stated that work and study commitments resulted in less time being available to devote to coaching clinics and public profile media work. Ms Ellis stated that:

I know that a lot of the girls in my team whom I play with are either working full time or studying full time. They cannot get out to do shopping centre promotions, which leads again to the invisibility of the sport. There are footballers out there doing coaching clinics in schools, promotions and appearances. A lot of my team mates cannot afford to do that because there are just not enough hours in a day and they are trying to do too much. It is probably a fairly good reflection of what women are like generally, I think, in terms of trying to be superwoman and do absolutely everything—have your home, your career and your family and, for us, our sport as well. That impacts again, I think, negatively on our sport.²²

4.31 Similarly, Ms Dick stated that:

There are a number of such [promotional requests] requests. Of course, you want to do that. I love my sport and I want to put back into netball what they give me as well. It is great going to a clinic where the little girls aspire to be like you, and they are the things that I want to do. Unfortunately, I have to decline those requests. That is just the way it is.²³

20 Ms Kitchin, ANPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, pp 58–59.

21 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 62.

22 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 62.

23 Ms Dick, ANPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 58.

4.32 An ability to earn a living from their sport would be an important advance as it would remove the other pressures and distractions athletes face so they could concentrate on their sporting performance.

4.33 The above discussion starkly illustrates the challenges female athletes face in managing the competing demands of high-level competition as well as work and/or study and family commitments. This is also related to broader societal issues related to time and work life pressures that women face and the division of labour between men and women generally. Evidence indicates that women continue to carry the responsibilities of caring and domestic roles within relationships and the demands of elite competition pose an additional burden on female athletes.²⁴

Career pathways

4.34 Submissions and other evidence noted the lack of professional career pathways for elite athletes.²⁵

4.35 The FFA commented on the problems of structuring effective elite player pathways in women's soccer. There is 'some confusion or lack of cohesion' between the current pathways (the school system, the club system and the National Training Centre programs at the State Institutes or Academies level). Given the age of the elite players, many players participate in all three pathways and some do so concurrently – 'this equates to a huge time commitment on the part of players and cost commitment on the part of their parents'.²⁶ The FFA noted that while the pathways will never be overly clear, the challenge for the Federation is managing the player's workload and players need to be monitored to ensure there is no burn out or increase of injury and that their non-football career or education is not adversely affected. The Review Committee into Women's Football recommended a structure that is inclusive of all pathways, but with a need to prioritise a particular pathway that accelerates development to compete for the national team at an international level.²⁷ The Federation commented on the status of the Review's recommendations stating that:

....the organisation has adopted the principles of the report but has had to say that it is something that we can only do when we can afford to do...
The importance of it is recognised. It is just the affordability.²⁸

4.36 Submissions also noted a lack of opportunities for female athletes to stay involved with their sport once they have finished playing at an elite level. Ms Dick stated that with regard to netball:

24 See, for example, SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, pp 10–11.

25 Ms Ellis, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 57.

26 FFA, *Submission 47*, p. 19.

27 FFA, *Submission 47*, Appendix 1, p. 19. See also Ms Buckley, FFA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, pp 20–21.

28 Mr Boulton, FFA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 17.

I do not think they are as recognised in the sport. I do not want to say ‘not respected’. I have played over 100 [Commonwealth Bank Trophy] CBT games and I am not even invited to the Netball Australia dinner. I am not whingeing about that. But there are things like that, that connection, and the communication between the sport as well and their players. In terms of the head of Netball Australia, I never met the CEO before Lindsay came. It was great that we met her, but it is about that kind of relationship and building that network.²⁹

4.37 Netball Victoria stated that involvement in the sport would be enhanced if the sports were supported via subsidies to employ athletes as staff members or special scholarships were provided to enable athletes to work and train and also develop skills in administration which could be used within the particular sport.³⁰

Support for elite athletes

4.38 The Australian Sports Commission funds a number of programs for elite athletes. The ASC administers the Direct Athlete Support (DAS) Program, a Commonwealth Government initiative to provide direct funds to targeted elite athletes, selected on the basis of medal potential and individual need, to assist with daily living and training environment costs. DAS allocations are made directly to athletes by the ASC based on submissions received from NSOs.

Table 4.2 Direct Athlete Support Scheme breakdown by gender (payments made prior to 14 August 2006)

Scheme	Female (\$)	Number Supported	%	Male (\$)	Number Supported	%
Athens 2004 Direct Athlete Support	\$577 166	118	52.7	\$472 833	106	47.3
Melbourne 2006 Direct Athlete Support	\$1 615 276	254	50.2	\$1 773 079	252	49.8
Australian Government Sport Training Grant	\$746 597 (1 Jul 05 to 14 Aug 06)	74	71.2	\$253 484	30	28.8

Source: ASC, *Submission 30A*, p. 3. The gender breakdown for the Australian Government Sport Training Grants is skewed by the nature of the sports in which grants have been disbursed to date, and the committee was advised that the likely longer term breakdown would be similar to previous direct athlete support schemes.

29 Ms Dick, ANPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 60.

30 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 13.

4.39 The ASC, through the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), also provides scholarships to elite athletes. Approximately 700 athletes access these scholarships each year in 35 separate programs covering 26 sports. At present there are 673 scholarship holders, comprising 383 males (56.9 per cent) and 290 females (43 per cent). The selection criteria vary among sports but, as a general rule, successful applicants need to be competing at the national championship level who are recognised by the relevant national sporting body as elite or who have developmental potential. Scholarship benefits may include access to facilities; high performance coaching; personal training and competition equipment; travel, accommodation and living expenses for events chosen by the AIS; full board at the AIS Residence or living out expenses; reimbursement of education expenses up to certain limits (depending on the type of study undertaken); assistance provided by the Athlete Career and Education program (ACE); and incidental expenses. Acceptance of scholarships require the acceptance of certain conditions, including undertaking a technical or academic course or finding suitable full-time or part-time employment.

4.40 The ASC also provides Indigenous Sport Excellence Scholarships. These scholarships are available for elite-level Indigenous athletes, as well as coaches and officials. 45 per cent of these went to women in 2005-06.³¹ The Elite Indigenous Travel and Accommodation Assistance Program is also available for Indigenous sportspeople who have been selected for a state team to compete at national championships or an Australian team to compete at an international event.³² 48 per cent of these went to women in 2005-06.³³

4.41 The ACE program, which is a program of the AIS, is also available. This program provides AIS Scholarship holders with career, education and personal development services as well as transitional support for athletes experiencing personal and sporting changes. The ACE program provides all AIS Scholarship holders with access to these services to assist them in preparing for 'life after sport'. More than 3000 elite athletes, from amateur and professional sports, access ACE each year. In the year to date, 2173 athletes have accessed ACE services, comprising 1174 males (54 per cent) and 999 females (45.9 per cent).³⁴

4.42 The relatively balanced gender outcomes for ASC schemes reflects the commitment of the Commission to gender equity goals. The government's sport policy *Building Australian Communities Through Sport* commits to 'continue to encourage female participation in all aspects of sport in Australia'.³⁵ The Commission saw its role in this context:

31 ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 18.

32 www.ausport.gov.au, accessed August 2006.

33 ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 19.

34 www.ais.org.au, accessed August 2006.

35 ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 4.

Australia must continue to foster a culture of change through a mature approach which encourages and supports the full involvement of all women and girls in every aspect of sport, recreation and physical activity in Australia.³⁶

4.43 In New Zealand, the NZ Academy of Sport operates a number of programs to assist elite athletes, many of which are similar to the AIS programs. These include:

- the Prime Minister's Athlete Scholarships programme;
- ACE; and
- Performance Enhancement Grants.

4.44 The New Zealand Prime Minister's Athlete Scholarships programme assists talented and elite athletes achieve tertiary and vocational qualifications while pursuing excellence in sport. The Prime Minister's Athlete Gold Level scholarships are also available as part of the Prime Minister's Athlete Scholarships programme. The scholarships provide athletes with an opportunity to study for a tertiary or vocational qualification after they are decarded and/or retire.³⁷

4.45 The New Zealand ACE programme assists athletes to effectively manage their lives in order to achieve sporting excellence. ACE advisors provide athletes with individualised services in the areas of integrating sport and other life goals; life skills, such as decision-making and goal setting; employment; financial budgeting; career advice; education options; and media skills. Performance Enhancement Grants offer elite athletes financial support associated with training, equipment and day-to-day living so they can focus on their sports performance.³⁸

4.46 Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) manage the 'Avenues' program which is designed to prepare athletes with a career opportunity when they retire from sport and take off some of the financial pressures while they are participating. The program is supported by a human resources company and places athletes with suitable 'athlete friendly' employers.

4.47 It is in the intrinsic nature of women's sport that most women pursue a career and education while playing. The tensions, both around the demands on time, and between sport and different, perhaps better paid careers, take their toll:

Managing to train at the level required to be selected for state squads and the Australian squad demands full-time employment, and it gets too demanding on many of the girls and they have to give it up.

The government assistance that we receive once we reach the AIS squad and the Australian team is extremely helpful, yet we are required to take

36 ASC, *Submission 30*, p. 4.

37 Athletes who are 'carded' are eligible for funding and services, as determined by their National Sports Organisation.

38 www.sparc.org.nz, accessed August 2006.

about six to eight weeks off a year from our full-time jobs to travel to international competitions, and that just gets too much. The decision is: fulfil your dream and play for Australia but maybe not have a job when you get home. Most of the girls in the squad, 99 per cent of us, have a university degree, so we are quite employable.

ACTING CHAIR—What percentage?

Miss Quigley—Some 99 per cent. Every single player bar one has a degree. We are very employable. Some girls choose going off and taking a good wage over playing softball, which is unfortunate.³⁹

4.48 This steady migration of young women away from their sports may be exacerbated by the fact that there are not many genuine career paths in the sport on completion of playing, such as the very limited number of full time coaching roles in women's sport.

Need for female role models

4.49 Submissions emphasised the need to promote sportswomen as role models to inspire and motivate girls and young women to pursue sporting careers. The absence of female sporting role models is a major contributing factor to the low participation rates of girls in sport and recreation activities.

4.50 The Women in Sport Media Group stated that young women and girls:
...need to be familiar with the names of the captain of the Matildas, the captain of the Southern Stars cricket team and the captain of the Hockeyroos. They need to know what the Matildas have just achieved and where they are going. Those sorts of things should be part of the general information that is out there for our women and young girls.⁴⁰

4.51 The Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly also noted that:
A lot of the girls do not have a role model to identify with. When some of our better sportswomen, for example, choose to have families in the middle of their sporting career, a lot of girls miss out on seeing them, because they have issues to do with child care and, obviously, there are other priorities.⁴¹

4.52 Evidence to the inquiry indicated that sportswomen provide excellent role models:

Women in sport are some of the best role models in society today; although we work full-time and train the hours of professional athletes, like some of those in the AFL, NBL and NRL, we find time to still work with the development of softball. A lot of us go back to our local clubs and

39 Ms Quigley, Softball Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 97.

40 Ms Mitchell, Women in Sport Media Group, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 45.

41 Ms Trotter, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 31.

associations and work with charities such as Red Dust Role Models and ARM Tour, where we go up to the Northern Territory and work with the Indigenous children up there.⁴²

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.⁴³

4.53 Netball Australia outlined the dangers of not encouraging positive female role models:

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 inextricably linked with the constant coverage of these 'role models', as they are held up to represent the traits and features of the ideal woman.⁴⁴

4.54 The powerful role of the media in 'creating' role models is illustrated in several studies. One study reviewed a range of media that involved various depictions of women and girls, especially where physical appearance is valued, and concluded that the media plays a key role in shaping young people's beliefs, perceptions and attitudes.⁴⁵

4.55 The Women in Sport Media Group argued that if there was greater coverage of women's sport, 'it is likely that girls will choose some role models out of those people who they are widely exposed to and they will imitate and say, 'It is great to be involved in sport. I like to do that as well'. The Group added that:

We have actually done some research with a group at the University of Technology Sydney into role models for adolescent girls. It was found that the adolescent girls prefer to have a female role model and also usually below 40 years of age. Now, if they were to see all these sportswomen on TV and in the paper, they will have plenty to choose from. But we also

42 Miss Quigley, Softball Australia, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 97.

43 Netball Australia, *Submission 65*, p. 2.

44 Netball Australia, *Submission 65*, p. 1.

45 Kaiser Family Foundation and Children NOW, *Reflections of Girls in the Media: A Two-Part Study on Gender and Media*, 1977. See also V. Barry, 'Adolescents' Uses of Media for Self-Socialisation', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol. 24, no. 5, 1995, pp 519-33.

notice that they often do not choose them because they are not available. One comment was made in a focus group. A girl said—and it is typical—‘If Don Bradman had been a woman, he would have been my role model, but because he is a man I can’t take him as my role model.’⁴⁶

4.56 The lack of promotion of women's sport – and the participants as role models – is illustrated in the case of the Matildas.

I think a good example is what has just happened with the Matildas. I was actually interviewed...to comment on the poor media coverage of the Matildas. If you take that in comparison with the Socceroos, they said that when they played the last qualifying round to get into the World Cup, there was a huge atmosphere all around the country. When that happened to the Matildas—it was about a week ago when they played and won that particular match—hardly anyone knew about it. There was a bit of media coverage... But it is sometimes such a great pity when we have fantastic sportswomen out there but no-one knows about them...For those men’s teams, why does everyone know about them? They have huge advertisements all the time in the papers, everywhere on the radio; you follow all the players. If they would do something like that sort of promotion for the Matildas, I reckon you would get full stadiums, no doubt.⁴⁷

4.57 Submissions and other evidence suggested that increased media coverage of women's sport is essential in creating positive role models. Increased media coverage would:

- lead to recognition for sportswomen and their achievements and a sense of equity in the media so that people are aware of what these women have achieved.
- attract more sponsorship and other funding and to lift the profile of women’s sporting teams, events and programs. Without media coverage, the sponsorship and funding is difficult to obtain because the necessary 'profile' is not there and it is hard to convince people to support women's sport.
- provide fit and healthy role models for young women and girls (as discussed above).

Issues related to the role of the media in promoting women's sport are discussed further in chapter 6.

4.58 The committee considers that a concerted effort is needed by governments, sporting organisations and the media to promote female sportswomen as role models to girls and young women. It is important that we as a nation celebrate and value the contribution of sportswomen.

46 Ms Vescio, Women in Sport Media Group, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 51.

47 Ms Vescio, Women in Sport Media Group, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 49.

Other issues

4.59 Other issues raised during the inquiry related to the financial status and viability of women's national league competitions and the opportunities and barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition.

Women's national league competitions

4.60 Submissions raised questions in relation to the financial status and viability of women's national league competitions.

4.61 Several national leagues appear to face questions over their continued viability. Netball Victoria stated that Netball Australia and each of the member organisations have managed under 'extraordinary pressure' to keep the national netball league operating. Netball Victoria noted however that the losses sustained by the organisation over the past nine years in the Commonwealth Bank Trophy (CBT) program have been 'significant' – 'the investment made in this area compared to all other areas of our sport are significantly higher and cannot be sustained in the long term'.⁴⁸ The organisation argued for a review of the national competition to ensure its continued viability.⁴⁹ The ANPA/AWU also questioned the viability of the CBT competition as presently structured.⁵⁰

4.62 Cricket Australia stated that the Commonwealth Bank Women's National Cricket League is almost totally funded by the state associations. The competition is 'a long way off' being self funded as it attracts limited sponsorship and spectator interest. In an effort to improve the viability of this league Cricket Australia is investigating increased promotional activity; new game formats; increasing media exposure; and increasing sponsorship.⁵¹

4.63 The FFA noted the considerable difficulties it faces in establishing a national league. The requisite investment costs are too high in relation to the revenue generation opportunities available. The geographical size of the country means home and away competitions are very expensive to stage. Airfares are the largest expense item. For example, in the men's national league when Perth Glory travels to Auckland to play the NZ Knights it is currently the world's longest road trip in a domestic football competition: 'almost 5400 kilometres separates Perth from Auckland meaning a flight of over 8 hours and a time difference of 4 hours for the travelling team'.⁵² On the revenue generation side, the commercial opportunities for female sport are more

48 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 15.

49 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 15.

50 ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, pp 10–12.

51 Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

52 FFA, *Submission 47*, p. ii.

limited. Limited media coverage makes it more difficult to attract sponsors, which means limited revenue with which to conduct a viable national league.⁵³

4.64 Despite questions over viability, evidence indicated the importance of national league competition to elite sport. The FFA, in particular, noted that the formation of a domestic national league is important for the Federation because it forms part of the national team selection process; provides regular, high level competition for elite players; enables players to test themselves against the best players; and assists develop women's football generally by showcasing the best players.⁵⁴ These considerations undoubtedly apply to other sports as well.

4.65 Various strategies were suggested to improve the viability of national league competitions. Netball Victoria argued that government should play a role in providing strategic advice and support to assist sporting organisations to become more commercially oriented businesses.⁵⁵ As noted above, Cricket Australia is investigating several strategies including increased promotional activity and sponsorship; and increasing media exposure.⁵⁶ These sports generally lack the funding to support advertising to any substantial extent, therefore public awareness suffers as a result, and little interest can be generated within the various television networks to televise these sports.

4.66 The committee believes that, given the importance of national league competition to elite sport, that the leading women's sports of netball, basketball, hockey and football in particular should be professional in the national league competitions.

International competition

4.67 Submissions noted that there are significant barriers for national team members and competitors in international competition. The most significant barrier was identified as the difficult balance athletes must maintain between their commitment to their sport and work commitments.⁵⁷ Obtaining sponsorship is also a major issue for women competing at international competitions. This is linked to the profile of women's sport, which in turn is linked to media coverage.⁵⁸

4.68 The ANPA/AWU stated that women face significant challenges in the bid to compete in open international netball competition. ANPA members indicated that the

53 FFA, *Submission 47*, p. ii.

54 FFA *Submission 47*, p. ii. See also Ms Buckley, FFA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 2 August 2006, p. 13.

55 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 15.

56 Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

57 Netball Victoria, *Submission 21*, p. 14; Cricket Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 3.

58 SA Premier's Council for Women, *Submission 57*, p. 16.

major barriers to international competition are the high performance training requirements placed on them as national squad members and inadequate remuneration arrangements.⁵⁹

4.69 Some sporting organisations provide financial assistance to athletes to compete in international events. The AOC Funding Program provides National Federations with funding to contribute to the cost of competitors in international competition in each of the four years in preparation for an Olympic Games. In addition, athletes and coaches who won medals at the 2004 Olympic Games or who win medals at World Championship events are considered for AOC direct funding to help achieve selection at the 2008 Olympic Games. Neither funding program differentiates between male and female athletes.⁶⁰

4.70 Another issue raised in evidence was the importance of reasonable coordination between national league competition programs and international representative commitments of athletes. The FFA referred to the Women's Football Review Final Report:

The review committee recommends that the timing of the league season be determined in the best interests of the development of Women's Football. It should not be determined by national commitments but determined in cooperation and consultation with the national team. As with the A league, known dates of national team activity may be avoided where possible, such as Asian Championships.⁶¹

4.71 Another perspective was offered by a netball player:

The commitments are increasing all the time to get gold medals or reach the world championships. I was in the Aussie squad a couple of years ago. The commitment was quite extensive at that time. We have a couple of Aussie girls in our team. They spend a week off work every sort of second week leading up to the Commonwealth Games. That is going to increase. We have the world championships next year. The commitment is amazing. They have to juggle their full time work or university. They have to have very understanding employers.⁶²

4.72 Evidence suggests there may also be opportunities for some sports where the men's teams have a much higher profile, to schedule women's international matches with the men's international matches. The FFA, in their Women's Football Review Final Report states a one of their key recommendations:

59 ANPA/AWU, *Submission 62*, p. 9.

60 AOC, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

61 FFA, *Submission 47*, attachment 1, p. 16.

62 Ms Dick, ANPA, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 August 2006, p. 59.

The season would be played over summer with the finals series to coincide with the men's A league to enable cross promotional opportunities.⁶³

4.73 In some cases, particularly in sports where the men's competition is dominant, evidence suggests that women's teams would benefit from greater opportunities to compete at an international level because the resources are not currently allocated to them:

International fixtures and playing opportunities are governed by Cricket Australia and states would be fully supportive of moves to increase playing opportunities for not only the senior, squad, but the Youth Development Squad (U23) who have been under-serviced and under-exposed to international opportunities.⁶⁴

Concluding remarks

4.74 The committee found that:

- There are significant problems in the recruitment and retention of elite sportswomen in Australia.
- There is significant inequity between elite men's and women's capacity to earn a living from their sport. The remuneration available to elite sportswomen is insufficient in the vast majority of cases to enable them to play their sport on a full-time basis.
- The inability to earn a living from one's sport creates significant problems for many sportspeople, particularly sportswomen, in managing the competing work-life demands of sport, family and work/study commitments.
- Earning a living from one's sport can have significant flow-on benefits for participants and sports organisations alike, such as keeping role models involved in various ways with their sport for life.
- There is a distinct lack of professional career pathways for sportswomen and this impacts on their ability to commit to a full-time sports career.
- There is a need by governments, sporting organisations and the media to promote elite sportswomen as role models to motivate girls and young women to pursue sporting careers. It is important that we as a nation celebrate and value the contribution of sportswomen just as sportsmen are promoted and valued as role models.
- Given the importance of national league competition to elite sport, leading women's sports should aim to be professional in the national league competitions.

63 FFA, *Submission 47*, attachment 1, p. 4.

64 Cricket NSW, *Submission 40*.

- There are significant barriers to the participation of elite sportswomen in international competition and financial assistance may be needed to provide on-going opportunities for this standard of competition.

4.75 The committee commends the AOC for its ASPIRE initiative, as well as the ASC for its ACE program, both of which provide valuable assistance to athletes in developing and maintaining career paths.

Recommendation 9

4.76 The committee recommends that the Australian Sports Commission further develop and expand the AIS ACE career assistance program to enable a greater number of athletes to compete in elite sports. The committee recommends the AOC expand its ASPIRE Career Assistance Program.

Recommendation 10

4.77 The committee recommends that a concerted effort be made by governments, sporting organisations and the media to promote sportswomen as role models to girls and women and to the wider community. This recommendation aims to motivate girls and women to pursue a career in sport and to motivate them to commence or continue participation in sport and recreation.

Recommendation 11

4.78 The committee recommends that NSOs review, and modify if required, the timing of national league competitions to facilitate participation by elite sportswomen in Australia's national representative teams.