

WHY DON'T GIRLS PLAY SPORT



- Most frequent query about women's sport but there's no simple answer
- Issue that's confounded governments and sporting organisations alike
- Involvement of boys and girls in sport during the early primary school years is virtually identical – then why do girls start to 'opt out' even before they hit secondary school and why does their involvement decrease at a more rapid rate than that of boys through their teens and beyond.

REAL MEN PLAY SPORT According to an Australian Survey



- Sport seen by society as turning 'boys into men' and is a significant form of male socialisation.
- Sporting prowess gives boys status amongst both male and female peers.
- Girls receive the message from an early age that boys play sport and girls watch them. This message is reinforced daily in many different ways.

Eg – Frequently argued that girls should not play football and other 'traditional' male sports because they might get hurt. Many junior schools are allowed to have girls in their football teams but this is not allowed once they reach secondary age.

MEDIA COVERAGE



- The lack of media coverage for women's sport limits girls' opportunities to find out more about women's sporting achievements and denies many young women 'sporting' role models.

(Kelly Holmes Olympic wins – how many girls suddenly took up athletics?) - why is it that the performances of female athletes can be so interesting during the Olympics and not at other times.

- Lack of coverage also decreases female athletes opportunities to attract sponsorship (could argue the opposite in Table Tennis).

COMPETITIVE SIDE OF SPORT



- Women do want to be active – statistical evidence indicates that women are more likely to be active in non-organised activities and are often more interested in playing sport to have fun and make friends.
- Poor self image – studies have consistently found that girls will tend to underestimate their performance and are less likely to view themselves as talented as their male peers.
- A lack of confidence in their own abilities can lead girls to avoid situations which could expose their lack of competence.
- Further complicating factors are that females are more concerned than males about eating, body weight and appearance and dieting can become obsessive during adolescence – and many schools/club sports uniforms make them feel even more self conscious.

IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY



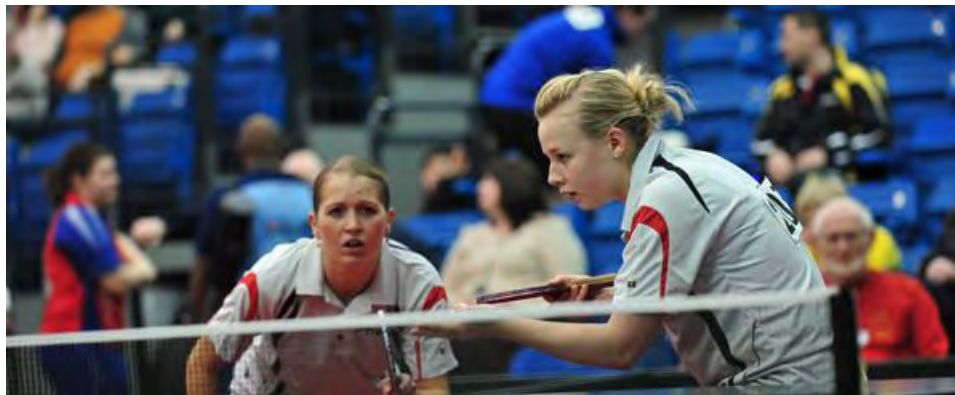
- Girls whose parents are involved in sport are more likely to continue their involvement in sport than those whose parents are inactive.



INFLUENTIAL ROLES OF FRIENDS AND PEERS



- Many teenage girls already feel a lack of confidence in their skill level and appearance can be confounded by the way their peers treat them, particularly in settings such as schools or clubs
- Boys dominate space in school playgrounds and can also do the same in clubs (they also monopolise sporting equipment unless special measures are put into place to ensure this doesn't happen – schools and clubs need to designate times at which only girls can use equipment or space).



ABSENCE OF ROLE MODELS



- The lack of promotion of females reinforces the concept that sport is a male domain.
- Female role models in the form of coaches are still under represented.



SO WHY BOTHER?



- Sport and physical activity provide girls with unique physical, social and psychological benefits:
 - * improvement of self esteem
 - * assertiveness
 - * pride
 - * confidence
 - * independence
 - * leadership skills
 - * improved physical health
 - * a more positive body image
 - * more social contacts
 - * 40% of women over the age of 50 suffer from osteoporosis so playing sport helps to build up bone mass
- Teenage girls drop out of sport at a faster rate than boys. The reasons why teenagers drop out of sport can be very different from the reasons why girls don't play sport in the first place:
 - * peer group/social values
 - * enjoyment/other priorities
 - * confidence

So what are the solutions to these and whose responsibility is it?

NATIONAL GOVERNING BODY



- **Use social networking methods** to link girls who play our sport – keep in regular contact with members/participants by emails/magazines throughout the year.
- **Use promotional materials** – using positive imagery of girls and women playing the sport as much as boys.
- **Get advocates of women's sport** at all levels of ETTA.
- Ensure that our **women's International teams** get as much publicity as the mens at all age groups.
- **Club level** – encourage clubs to ensure that girls have the opportunity to compete within their own age group not just within adult teams – hub club links?
- Encourage sports manufacturers to look at more feminine flattering style clothing.
- Maintain and strengthen links between schools and clubs (help to ensure that players have a natural/comfortable route for progression).

CLUBS



- **Social events**
- **Encourage girls to take on responsibility** within the club (eg assistant coaches with younger age groups – officiating at events – general volunteering)
- New membership night – encourage them to bring along a friend
- No pressure – don't pressure them into competitions – perhaps have training/fun memberships
- Consider female only sessions
- Keep changing rooms/facilities as attractive as possible
- Keep in regular contact (during 'closed season' – arrange training sessions, social events, newsletters etc)

COACHES



- Fun elements to training (ease off on being competitive – many girls respond well to continuous improvement rather than winning at all costs)
- Allow flexibility in clothing
- Get to know your audience (adapt coaching styles to build confidence – devise opportunities to encourage input wherever possible)
- Don't allow boys to dominate in mixed sessions (girls only sessions maybe)
- Feedback (give opportunity to say what they have enjoyed and what they would like to change)
- Speak to parents regularly (need reassurance about ways in which studies can be prioritised alongside sport – remind them that regular physical activity can boost academic results)
- Need to remember that the number one reason why girls and boys play sport is because it is **FUN**

SUM UP



- Many people think girls are not as interested in sport as boys
- Age 14 girls drop out rate is six times greater than boys. Girls and women simply don't receive the same reinforcement about sports participation
- Even though not as discouraged from playing sport as they were in my era they certainly aren't encouraged and given the same reinforcement about their sports participation
- We need to do a better job of supporting 'daughters' sports participation – for Christmas and birthdays – how about some gifts of sports equipment or sports coaching
- Aspirational role models drive demand – it isn't an accident that girls' sports participation in Olympic sports increases significantly following the Olympic games, one of the few times that coverage of the women's sports is equal to that of the men