

I AM A GIRL Scholarship Community Project 2022

Focusing on past and current female basketball players to explore the reasons why girls and young women have ceased playing the sport and why some who still play are thinking about stopping

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I AM A GIRL Scholarship Community Project

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Executive Summary

As part of the inaugural Basketball NSW 'I AM A GIRL' scholarship program, six Albury women elected to focus on the reasons why females cease playing basketball for their community project. An online survey, promoted by local print, radio and television media, was completed by 232 past and current female players, from ten years of age through to adulthood.

Cumulatively, of those starting (at all ages), 11.7% have dropped out in the fourteen and under age group, 31.1% by the age of sixteen and under, with a staggering 61.2% having dropped out by the time they are in the eighteen and under age group.

Key findings given as reasons indicate that a non-welcoming environment, the inability to play with friends in a social setting and coaches who place pressure on individuals all contribute to why young women stop playing basketball.

The recommendations that are made include mentoring opportunities, wellbeing sessions and courses for coaches that focus on motivating and encouraging language to assist players to develop and feel welcome.

Background

This report has been put together by a group of Albury women who took part in the inaugural Basketball NSW 'I AM A GIRL' scholarship program from 2021 to 2022. 'I AM A GIRL' is a program run by Basketball NSW that aims to create a platform to encourage females of all ages to play, referee, coach, officiate and administrate basketball. The program provides pathways and assists in the development of female role models.

As part of her involvement in the scholarship program, each recipient was expected to host a community event or activity that focuses on women and girls being involved in basketball. Examples of activities include 'Come and Try' days and 'Dads and Daughters' days. The group of six Albury women, comprising basketball players, coaches and committee members (most of whom have a daughter/s who play the sport), decided to take a different approach. The group elected to focus on past and current basketball players and to explore the reasons why girls and young women have ceased playing the sport and why some who still play are thinking about stopping.

This approach was taken because throughout the 'I AM A GIRL' scholarship, repeated reference was made to the fact that research and anecdotal evidence shows that fifty percent of females stop playing (all sport) by the time they are seventeen. What is not fully clear, however, is why this occurs.

A survey was designed to elicit information about the playing experience of current and past players (App 1). The 16-question survey, administered via the Survey Monkey platform, ran from 4 June to 24 July 2022.

The survey link was sent to the local Albury Basketball Association for their distribution to current and previous players; a host of basketball associations across NSW and the Wodonga Basketball Association. The scholarship group also sent the link to their personal networks and to local high schools that they had contact with.

The project and survey were publicised via a media release, which was picked up by local print (*The Border Mail*) television (Prime 7 News) and radio (ABC local) media. The Australian Opal's player Lauren Jackson, a local Albury resident, agreed to be an ambassador when the survey was launched. Lauren Jackson and some members of the group were interviewed when the survey was released, with follow up media stories occurring via print (*The Border Mail*) and radio (ABC local) media after a few weeks to provide an update on survey findings.

Key findings

232 responses were received in total. The majority of the responses came from women who no longer play basketball (133), with 98 responses received from current players.

Following basic demographic and scene-setting information (age, number of years playing, level of competition), the survey was split into two sections depending on whether or not respondents are still playing or have ceased playing. To ensure the ability to compare responses, both survey streams contained identical questions and statements. Those who no longer play were asked an additional question about what, if anything might motivate them to play again.

All survey participants were presented with statements and asked whether these were applicable to them/their situation. These statements included behavioural, logistical and skill level assertions, such as 'members of my team are clicky', 'competing commitments' and 'I suffered a lot of injuries'. In this report only those statements will be discussed where more than 10% of all respondents found the statements to be applicable to them. Responses percentages mainly sit between the low teens through to the high thirties. Another section of the survey focused on motivators to play and these will also be discussed.

Level of competition and ages

Competition type

The majority of survey respondents play/ed in a domestic (local community) competition (73.7%), with an even split between those playing at school (and only school, 34.8%) and/or at a representative level (32.3%) as shown in Table 1. These figures change when looking at those playing compared to those no longer playing, but are not of any major significance apart from those who no longer play showing that they played at school (72.8%) compared to those still playing who play at school (27.1%). This would suggest that schools currently do not offer basketball as a stand-alone sport (either against other teams within the school or against other schools in the local area) compared to previously.

Table 1: Type of competition (in %)

Played	Overall Percentage	of those	
		still playing	no longer playing
At school (and only at school)	34.91	27.16	72.84
Domestic (local association competition)	73.71	42.62	57.38
Representative	32.33	47.77	52.23

Age when stopped playing

No major difference can be seen when comparing the age that females start and stop playing and between those who currently play and those who have stopped playing (Table 2). What is of interest however, and aligns with the information provided as part of the 'I AM A GIRL' scholarship, is that at the age of twelve and under, significantly fewer females stop/ped playing compared to the under fourteen and sixteen age groups, where significantly more females stop/ped playing.

Cumulatively, of those starting (at all ages), 3% have dropped out in the twelve and under age group, with 11.7% having done so by or during the fourteen and under age group. The total drop out increases by the age of sixteen and under to 31.1%, with a staggering 61.2% having dropped out by the time they are in the eighteen and under age group.

Table 2: Age started vs still playing

Age started	Still Playing?	
	Yes	No
4-7	24.5	20.3
U10	37.8	28.6
U12	26.5	15.8
U14	9.2	21.8
U16	1.0	9.0
U18	0.0	1.5
Seniors	1.0	3.0
n	98	133

Competing priorities and non behavioural reasons

A key contributor to reasons why women no longer play was 'competing commitments' [study/work] (35.8%). Competing commitments of this nature are not something that can easily be addressed, especially when considering that by the mid-teenage years increased demands on time for study and work are often factors that become a component of a teenager's life. This report will therefore not make recommendations to address this specific finding.

The other area that is difficult to address in this report in relation to why girls have stopped playing or are considering stopping, relates to injuries. 'I have suffered a lot of injuries' shows similar percentages for current and past players at 13.3% and 13.4%

respectively. While this report will not make specific recommendations in relation to injuries, it can be speculated that the way these injuries may have been handled by coaches and other players may have had a psychological effect on the players.

'I played other sports' (32.1%) was also a key contributor to the reason why females stopped playing. This is something that should be explored, especially when looking at the free form comments that are discussed later in the report. If other sports are perceived to be more welcoming or to provide better opportunities for women and young girls, then there are opportunities for basketball to make improvements in the way it is run or offered in order to retain players in their mid to late teenage years.

Bullying, team capability and being 'clicky'

Other reasons that were cited as to why girls and women stop playing, include 'sometimes members of the team can be clicky and it can be a case of us vs them' (33.7% for those still playing and 17.2% for those no longer playing). 'You do not feel like a good enough player' also rated quite high, at 30.6% for current players and 24.6% for past players.

Free form comments that reflect and underline these findings include:

"It was very clicky. And focussed on winning. Competition was prioritised over fun".

"There were times where the environment could become catty and clicky".

One response that is more prevalent for those still playing compared to past players is 'there is a big gap in the ability of some teams compared to others', at 31.6% and 3.7% respectively. This disparity suggests that this is an issue that either previously did not exist to the same extent, else if it was an issue for previous players, they did not recall it as being one, or were not concerned about it as much as current players.

One freeform section within the survey requested feedback for the statement 'If you have any comments about what could have made your experience playing basketball better, we would love to hear them'. Some of the responses provided include:

"Evening out the competition so that the skills gap isn't as stark and the competition was more even in each division".

"Better domestic competition for females. Our division one competition has three teams".

"I wish that I had a good strong team from the start. I wish it wasn't mostly based around age because it's really just annoying. If I am going to play a sport, I would love to do it with my friends and have fun whilst I am doing it, not get flogged every game with people around me that cannot even catch a ball".

Another issue that is apparent for current players compared to being an issue for previous players is 'being bullied by others', at 28% and 9% respectively. 'Comments about the way you look/you play like a girl' is also a concern for current players (28.6%)

compared to past players (6.7%). Being bullied by coaches (13.3% vs 6.7%) and being bullied by other parents (12.2% vs 2.2%), as well as 'pressure from parents' (12% vs 0%) also show percentages that are of concern and for this question it is especially so for current players.

A free form comment that reflects this is:

"At the time I stopped playing, uniforms were transitioning to bodysuits for women/girls at rep levels. The added stress on what your body looked like rather than what your body could do was a factor in my decision to quit".

Whilst bodysuits may no longer be a uniform requirement, this comment highlights that women can be self-conscious and what they wear can contribute to their level of confidence when playing and how self-conscious they are. Perceptions of physical appearance, while real, should never be allowed to interfere with a person's enjoyment of the sport.

Every person in sport, in every role, has the right to participate in an environment that is fun, safe and healthy, and to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness (Goldsmith & Morris 2014). Bullying denies participants these rights and can result in feelings of disgrace, embarrassment, shame or intimidation. Bullying in sport can also affect an individual's athletic performance and level of enjoyment, with flow-on effects on work or school life, academic achievement and physical and mental health (Goldsmith & Morris 2014).

Friends, not feeling welcome, lack of support

Each of the following are more prevalent for those who are still playing, than for those who no longer play. 'Friends do not play in my team and I would like them to' 24.5% vs 15.7%. 'I have not been made to feel welcome' 22.4% vs 9%, 'Not having been supported' 18.4% vs 5.2%. The survey made the statement "not having been supported" but 'support' was not defined as such. It is difficult, therefore, to know what 'support' refers to in this instance, and it is important to note that it can mean different things to different people. It may relate to parents, coaches, understanding how to play, or something different all together.

When considering the behavioural issues mentioned above and the impact that each can have on a young woman's self esteem, these percentages are of real concern. The cumulative effects and impacts on negative comments and not being made to feel welcome can be immense. Negative comments (even if they are not intended to cause insult) can remain in the mind of the recipient, long after the comment has been made.

Coaches and parents

The combined responses when looking at the role of coaches show that coaches, for the most part, are not a key reason as to why women/girls cease to play. Table 3 shows the current and non-player responses in relation to coach expectations and commitment. Each component rates quite well, but the '(my coach) yells at me when I make mistakes' is of concern at 19.3% for current players and 35.5% for those no longer playing. When looking at the comment '(my coach) is mean to me' the findings are also of concern at 11.3% for current and 17% for past players.

Although coaches do not appear to be a key reason as to why women cease playing basketball, it is worth noting that the coach-athlete relationship is probably the most important relationship in sport (Metrifit 2021). Athletes crave feedback, and coaches can provide the information required for necessary changes to improve performance. The type of feedback and the way that it is conveyed to the athletes, however, is quite important. “Angry” coaches who attempt to get their message across in an irritated manner may be causing more harm than good. Researchers and sport psychologists have found that athletes respond poorly to negative feedback. Having the right mental state can provide a powerful physical boost – but getting it wrong, like a coach getting angry seemingly without justification or reason, can have the opposite effect (Metrifit 2021).

‘Pressure from coaches’ as a possible trigger for wanting to quit basketball is also more prevalent for those still playing compared to those who no longer play (24.5% vs 3.7%)

Table 3: Players perceptions of their coaches

My coach:		still playing	
		yes	no
Positive	Wants to be at games	96.9	99.0 *
	Knows basketball	88.5	97.1 ***
	Is encouraging during games	83.3	90.4 *
	Wants to be at training	78.7	97.7 ***
	Taught me the rules	74.6	92.1 ***
	Makes training fun	74.4	69.9
	Helps me develop my skills	70.3	87.9 ***
Negative	Always wants to win	79.2	74.4
	Only wants the good players	50.9	52.4
	Yells at me when I make mistakes	19.3	35.5 ***
	Is mean to me	11.3	17.0

*/** indicates significant/very significant differences between past and present players

When asked about gender preference for coaches, the majority of survey respondents who are still playing (80.5%) and no longer playing (78.5%) indicated that they have no preference for a male or female coach. 15.6% of those still playing and 15.4% of those no longer playing, indicated that their preference would be to have a female coach.

Free form comments that reflect the findings mentioned above include:

“Teams made up of friends or people in the same year level”.

“Playing with friends and people who were accepting of each member of the team's abilities, even if they were not as strong as their own”.

“Better team makeup, being able to play with peers and friends”.

“Keep friends playing together”.

“Kids want to play with their friends and have fun”.

“I was made to feel totally unwelcome. The rep teams are the worst”.

“If it had been a more inclusive space with less pressure I think I would have enjoyed it more”.

Game time, teams, coaches and cost

Non-behavioural issues that rated much the same for current and past players include ‘no team to play in’ (12.2% vs 11.9%), ‘no coach’ (9.2% vs 4.5%), ‘too costly’ (11.2% vs 7.5%).

Comments that rate very differently for those still playing compared to those who no longer play, are: ‘game time/day is sometimes an issue’ (16.3 vs 0%) and ‘training is not frequent or does not happen’ (26.5% vs 5.2%). These comments suggest that these issues were either not issues in the past, or if they were, respondents cannot recall them being of concern.

These components clearly impact on the ability or interest in girls/women to play. Addressing these issues is not straightforward however, as many are logistical in nature (game times/days) and relate to the availability of coaches and those who are willing/have time to volunteer.

With the COVID-19 pandemic having impacted volunteerism ever since it came into effect, and the difficulty for sporting clubs, non-profits and communities to recruit volunteers, this may remain as an issue for the foreseeable future (Parke, 2022).

Game times and days can be addressed and a way to do this would be to seek Club feedback regarding any clashes that occur and look to swap the day of the week or time that a game is played. Training not occurring is also difficult to address as it relies on the availability and willingness of the coach and/or others, as well as the availability of courts for practice sessions.

Relationship between start and stopping age

Within the survey findings, up until the age of fourteen, there is a gradual rate of girls leaving the sport and not continuing to play. From fourteen years of age onwards, the rate of loss accelerates.

Cumulatively, of those starting (at all ages), 3% have dropped out by the age of twelve, 11.7% by the age of fourteen and by the age of sixteen, 31.1% have ceased playing. These findings match those of Davino (2021) who found that that by the age of seventeen, 50% of girls stop playing sport. Further to this, not one of the 198 respondents who no longer play basketball stated that they currently play a sport of any kind. This also ties in Davino’s findings.

Of interest is the observation that females who start/ed to play under the age of twelve seem less likely to stop playing compared to females who commence playing after the age of twelve. The rationale for this is not entirely clear and needs follow-up research. It

may well be that this reflects girls/women who were more motivated to play sport for sport's sake (and hence start early) as opposed to those who start playing for social reasons.

Motivators

When looking at the factors that current and non-players have towards what motivates/d them to play, the responses are much the same for both (Table 4).

Table 4: Motivators to play

	Still playing	
	yes	no
Having a supportive environment	100.0	100.0
Making sure that everyone is given a chance	98.6	99.0
The attitude of the coach	97.1	98.4
The level of competition	97.5	96.6

This indicates that relatively simple steps can be taken to attract and retain young women to play basketball and to continue to play. 'Having a supportive environment' is very telling, with 100% given as a response by both past and current players. Scores in the high nineties show that the 'attitude of the coach', 'the level of competition' and 'making sure that everyone is given a chance' are of equal importance.

Respondents who are no longer playing were asked to indicate 'what, if anything would motivate them to play again' and to select from a list of statements as many as were applicable. Of all the options to select from, the following are shown to be statistically *very significant* motivators:

- A team or competition that focussed on just having fun
- Having friends also playing
- Feeling welcome
- Being supported
- Knowing I will not get hurt

The next four statements are *significant*:

- Being able to play without stereotyping
- Having a better body image, not worrying about the way I look/what others think
- Not having other commitments
- If it was more affordable

When looking at these statements, all but two can be addressed and potentially overcome by Basketball NSW or at an Association or Club level. 'Not having other commitments' and 'knowing no injuries will occur' cannot be addressed as they sit solely with the individual and basketball clubs cannot influence these factors, as previously mentioned.

Addressing each of the statements and preventing current and future players from facing the same situation involves some relatively simple and straightforward approaches. Before these are outlined, the authors note that the practicalities of implementing the suggested approaches are mainly reliant on funding and resources, as

well as the inclination to implement them (at all levels) — State (Basketball NSW), domestic (Associations) and grass roots (the Clubs). Whilst these elements are acknowledged, there is a strong desire by the authors, to see efforts made to address the issues that have been identified within this report, so as to keep young women playing basketball.

The recommendations to address the issues will be presented later in the report.

Comparison between still playing and no longer playing

Representative versus domestic competition drop out rates

Women and girls who played at the representative level are significantly less likely to stop playing compared to those who play(ed) 'only' at the domestic or school level. The underlying rationale for this may rest in the fact that representative level players receive emotional incentives to keep playing (by virtue of being selected and being made to feel special), and may be more committed to the sport in the first instance.

Negative perceptions expressed by those still playing

The top five negative perceptions among those still playing are (in % of respondents):

Sometimes members of your team can be 'clicky' and it can be 'us' vs 'them'	33.7
There is a big gap in the ability of some teams compared to others	31.6
You do not feel like a good enough player or as capable as others	30.6
Being bullied by other players/peers	28.6
Comments about the way you look/play or you 'play like a girl'	28.6

Negative perceptions expressed by those no longer playing

The top five negative perceptions or reasons for those no longer playing are (in % of respondents):

Competing commitments (study/work)	35.8
I played other sport/s	32.1
You do not feel like a good enough player or as capable as others	24.6
It wasn't fun: I wasn't enjoying it	18.7
Sometimes members of your team can be 'clicky' and it can be 'us' vs 'them'	17.2

Additional free form comments to note

Many of the free form comments refer to the role of coaches, parents and the perceived bias that exists within the Associations and Clubs. These comments are not necessarily captured elsewhere in the survey, but when considered as stand-alone feedback, they give pause for thought and should be addressed. They are included here, verbatim, for that reason. The responses have been arranged into major groups.

While individual comments may be dismissed, collectively they paint a picture. It should also be stressed that the extent and level of freeform comments in this survey is *much* higher than common for other surveys. This attests to the level of engagement by the

respondents, which further underscores the significance that these comments should be afforded.

One theme that is much more prominent for those no longer playing compared to those who still play relates to negative experiences in relation to basketball being inclusive, playing with friends and having fun. The majority of comments that refer to these themes/issues have been made by those no longer playing the sport.

Coaches (general)

"Giving coaches better skills at managing people (relating, communicating, displaying empathy)".

"Coaches seem to want to only develop certain players, ignoring the development of the majority. You get sick of it after a while".

"Our coach was too serious at junior level, benching players at under 12-14 level for full games".

"The coach would not let me play much. I paid the same amount as everyone else but hardly ever played".

"Coach (was) awful".

"First season was brilliant with a welcoming and encouraging team. Second season, rep players playing with what were (essentially) beginners (given all the covid interruptions) did not work. Lost all confidence because of the way I was treated/spoken to on the court. We didn't train so there was no time to create an encouraging "team" environment, learn the game or practice skills. Left every game in tears and was no longer fun. Far too much difference in skill standard and motivation within the team. Too competitive and not patient enough to teach. Not all players are competitive rep players - some enjoy the social, healthy and positive experience a great sporting team environment can bring".

Parents as coaches

"Stop letting parents coach their kids (preferences of who's on the court). Better playing times (any time after 8pm on a weekday is ridiculous). Need more structure around staff to make the overall running of the business better. Support the volunteers to not lose kids to other sports".

"Coaches need more training to be better coaches, especially those who are parents of kids playing. They may know (how) to play but not all know about motivation and giving everyone a go".

"Eliminate parent coaches"

Coaches (representative teams)

“Fair minded unselfish coaches would be a great place to start. The coaches we have come across have all been horrid. There are kids out there that have only ever been coached by their parents EVERY season!...those kids assume a wrong headed feeling of superiority. As usual, in kids’ sport they generally look down on teammates and assume a position of entitlement and superiority. Of course they are usually hopeless. The better players who actually earn and deserve their spot in the rep teams are always nice to the ones that miss out. The kids who get picked by their parents and haven’t earned their spot are often the most horrid”.

“Coaches seem to concentrate all their time on who’s who ie, families or associations and the great players but there are many many good players who love the game”.

“I had a great experience years ago, now it's over run by overbearing parents who choose their own children above talent and to the detriment of the success of associations. They are also the reason girls stop playing at 11 years despite having amazing talent that they have proved in previous rep seasons. Top scorers, top rebounders, first 5 only to be dropped the following rep season for children of parents involved in coaching or managing or some voluntary manner. Perhaps a look at game stats on players to consider their rightful place would be beneficial to organisations, and by a neutral person NOT a parent or friend. There should also be random, neutral people in the selection process. It's a huge conflict of interest”.

“When there are not enough women's teams, the younger, say 14 yrs and 16 years girls' rep teams play with the women for a bit of competition, which can be a healthy or, in my experience, unhealthy competition because the young rep teams tend to be supported by very toxic, competitive, male coaches who have a win-at-all-cost approach, as well as some toxic, overly competitive parents, which can have negative consequences for the young girls' teams, and which forces women to play competitively against them, which can sometimes get very aggressive on the court with young 14 and 16 year olds competing against women in their mid-20s to early 40s”.

“Cliques [sic] are obvious. Only rep players are looked after and there is no other development for other girls to have a go”.

“The coaches and managers were clicky. Abuse from coaches back in my days was horrific”.

“Equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of parents in certain positions higher up”.

“Once you get to rep level it should be based on each players ability not because of who you are or who your parents are”.

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"I would never play basketball ever again. Some players are included and some are excluded. I was one of the excluded ones. I'm sad now thinking about it".

Team dynamics

"Rep players are not welcoming to new player or development players".

"There were some really nasty players in a couple of the teams which didn't make it fun anymore".

Regional locations and the role of Basketball NSW

"I enjoyed basketball. Loved it. But basketball in [my location] is horrible".

"Playing in a regional location means we are at a disadvantage in all competitions and have no help from Basketball NSW with regards to costs and travel and facilitating players to get to camps etc. It has been this way since I played and nothing has changed it is almost worse. It's a huge time and financial commitment for your kids to play rep basketball".

"More support from Basketball NSW for struggling teams, a less biased team selection process especially for representative, more female figures who are experienced".

"Knowing what pathways there are to go further eg COE AIS, but how? Who do I go to? How do I get picked up/spotted"?

Costs

"Support for fees and uniforms etc, being young and at school/uni fees were a big barrier".

"It is really expensive".

"(I would play again) If it wasn't so expensive and girls were nicer to each other".

Regrets

Lastly, for those who no longer play, 57.5% regret having given up the game.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the survey, we would like to make the following recommendations.

Coaches

The attitude of a coach and the amount of encouragement that they provide can influence players while they are actively involved in a sport and once they have stopped playing. The coach is therefore one of the most important components of keeping females involved in basketball.

Sports psychology is fundamental. If the language that is used by coaches were to change so that it is inclusive, encouraging and motivating, it is likely that every player not only would be able to effectively learn new skills and further develop their playing ability, but importantly would feel more welcome, included and valued as a member of the team (UAP 2022).

To address this, coaching courses that focus on positive words, affirmation and the types of language used are recommended. An example of such a course is found within this link: <https://www.athletics.com.au/coach-framework/1cac/>.

These courses need to focus on positive feedback provided to players throughout the games and during training. These courses should be held annually, with refresher courses offered as required.

Basic coaching courses can also be offered (Level zero) in a face-to-face format, where basic skills and drills are taught to the coaches to assist them to develop basic coaching skills that can be applied to the teams to assist them to grow/develop.

Once positive language coaching has become the norm, it should be considered to offer every novice coach the opportunity to be mentored by a coach who is experienced in positive feedback and sports psychology.

It is appreciated that coaches at junior level basketball are volunteers who give up their time to support young athletes. We propose incentives to become 'better' coaches. One way could be through formal recognition such as awarding the accolade of 'best and most supportive coach' of a season (for each age level).

Social activities – Team, Club and Association level

With COVID-19 lockdowns occurring across the last couple of years, social events have ceased. These events provide the opportunity to come together in an informal setting and they assist to build friendships within the Club or Association without basketball as the focus

To offer a more welcoming environment, social activities at the Team, Club and Association level are encouraged.

COVID-19 has impacted and stopped many social activities. Hosting social activities allows a chance to bond and 'hang out' without basketball games/training and expectations getting in the way.

Wellbeing

Offer mental health and wellbeing sessions. These can focus on the opportunity to enhance positive thinking and feeling 'accepted/ok'. These can include talks that are hosted at the Team, Club or Association level and can include topics on body image, wellbeing and positive thinking.

Mentoring

Players can have someone in their age group or someone who is older than them to assist with skill acquisition and to encourage them to continue to play and work on areas to improve. This can be a representative player. By having representative players actively involved, not only will it allow skill development for the players, but also assist to address the (real or perceived) unwelcome behaviour of the representative players towards development/non representative players. This will allow representative players the opportunity to gain skills in leadership and enhance their own development at the same time.

Social games

Hosting non-competitive games where females are able to come together and play for fun, without the need to be able to play at a certain level and without pressure from coaches will offer a more welcoming environment within which to play.

Additional information/further opportunities

To further understand the feedback that has been provided, focus groups can be held. These can provide the ability to better understand the issues that girls and young women face when playing.

In addition to this it would be an ideal time to ask females their opinion on what would make things better/improve things, bearing in mind that the recommendations made within this report may not completely address the issues that have been identified via the survey. Another survey can also be run, with focus on the whole of NSW and/or tailoring the survey to allow a deeper understanding about some of the key findings.

Basketball NSW has an opportunity to invest funding into the Associations to enable them the opportunity to invest in coach courses.

Once recommendations have been implemented, there is an opportunity to re-survey current players and to ask them about their attitude towards coaches to see if any improvements have occurred. It is also worth undertaking an annual or bi-annual survey of current players (and past where possible) to gauge the level of satisfaction regarding their Club/Association. This can then be used to compare satisfaction in a longitudinal timeframe and to ascertain if the reason why females cease playing is something that can be addressed (such as coach behaviour) or is out of scope (including competing commitments).

Basketball NSW is also well placed to seek input and feedback from all of the Associations across the state for current and past female basketball players so that issues that exist across the board can be identified so that the extent of the issues that have been identified within this report can be known. If each location has the same/similar issues, there is an opportunity to address the issues collectively and to seek funding in order to assist to do so. The survey can be coded so that the location is known when undertaking the analysis in order to identify which area/location the respondent is from.

Further, at the local level (in Albury), access to courts for training is a known issue, especially when seeking to have the training to be held at a school. Basketball NSW is in a position to work with the NSW Department of Education to establish a partnership and create a Memorandum of Understanding whereby the local Association is able to access and utilise courts for games and training to be held. This would address some of the issues that have been identified within this report (no training offered), as well as to better cater for the demand to play (Albury has a wait list), without having to forego such opportunities due to the demand outweighing the supply.

Conclusion

Australian ex-swimmer Kieran Perkins who is now in the CEO of the Australian Sports Commission, made the following comments when making an address at the 'SwimCon 22' conference that was held across August the 21st and 22nd, 2022:

"The 70 per cent of kids who play sport under the age of 12 drops to less than 20 per cent once they emerge from their teens. This cliff coincides with the period of time when sport becomes serious.

[Sport] moves away from having fun, and being engaged, and being a participant, to seriousness, to winning, and to not having fun.

Technology, hormones and social distractions for drop-off rates can no longer be blamed.

What is it about the experience that we are providing that is pushing children away from wanting to be a part of our environment? And what responsibility do we have to shift that?"

Sport needs to take some time having a really good hard look at itself.

If we just want to win, and we're happy just putting people into the meat grinder and seeing how many kids survive to get gold medals, if that's all that matters ... fine, I can buy gold medals, that's not hard.

But I think we can do better than that, I think we can create a culture and an environment in Australia where everyone as they go through their life's journey ... starts from learning basic skills and having lots of fun to being an adult that would love nothing more than to give their free time to help sports succeed.

We want all Australians, regardless of their background, to have access to quality sporting experiences.

We do live in a world of great diversity whether that be gender, race, culture, age, sexual orientation, abilities, skills, experiences and or values.

By valuing that diversity and engaging with it the strength that can be created for sport in this country and that sport can help deliver in building inclusive communities is imperative". (Holmes 2022).

These comments are just as applicable to basketball and there is an opportunity for Basketball NSW to take the lead in becoming more inclusive and to address these issues.

Lastly, when thinking about the effort (time, money and resources) that is put in at an elite level (for any sport), there is an opportunity to provide a nurturing and welcoming environment and opportunities for *all* players at the community/grass roots level, (no matter what their level of capability), so that they feel achieved and happy and their experience is positive.

Currently, resources are invested into coaching at the elite/professional level, specifically in relation to coaches taking on a supportive and motivational role and assisting players to improve their performance. Given that elite players start at the grass roots/community level, this approach and amount of investment should commence at this level. If coaches in community based Clubs and Associations are provided with basic skills to enhance productivity and the quality of life of individuals, organisations and the broader community, this will have lasting positive impacts for all involved. Every player should feel achieved, welcome and motivated, and basketball can aspire to providing every skill level with a supportive and nurturing environment. If this does not occur, it is anyone's guess as to how many potential elite athletes stop playing before their potential is realised, all in the name of 'it stopped being fun/I wasn't enjoying it anymore'.

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Appendix 1 – Survey questions

I Am A Girl - Basketball survey Basketball NSW

Q1. A bit about you. What is your age? (Please select)

Answer Choices

10 to 12

13 to 14

15 to 17

18 to 20

21-24

25-29

30+

Q2. At what age did you begin to play basketball?

Answered

Skipped

Q3. Do you still play basketball?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

Q4. I play (tick all that are relevant)

Answer Choices

In a domestic (local) competition (example: as part of the Albury Basketball Association)

As a representative player

For my school, just at school/against other schools

Q5. Have you experienced any of the following? Select all that apply

Answer Choices

Being bullied by other players/peers

Being bullied by the coach/es

Being bullied by other parents

Comments have been made about the way you look/play or you have been told you 'play like a girl' (stereotyping)

Pressure from your parents

Pressure from your coach/es

No team to play in

Friends do not play in your team and you would like them to

Competing commitments (study/work)

To rely on a lift from your parents/others to get to a game

It is sometimes too far to travel

You are self-conscious about the way you look

You do not feel like a good enough player or as capable as others

You have not been made to feel welcome

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You have not been supported
It cost too much to play
You sometimes worry about getting hurt
You have suffered a lot of injuries
Your team often loses
Sometimes it is boring to play
Sometimes members of your team can be 'clicky' and it can be 'us' vs 'them'
There is a big gap in the ability of some teams compared to others
Training is not frequent/does not happen
You have no coach
The game day/time is sometimes an issue
I have not experienced any of these
Other (please specify)

Q6. The following are important to motivate me to play basketball:

Answer Choices

The attitude of the coach
The level of competition
Having a supportive environment
Making sure that everyone is given a chance

Q7. My coaches have so far been

Mostly female
Mostly male
About half female and half male

Q8. I prefer

Answer Choices

Female coaches
Male coaches
I do not have a preference

Q9. My coach

Answer Choices

Knows basketball
Helps me develop my skills
Always wants to win
Only wants the good players
Makes training fun
Yells at me when I make mistakes
Is mean to me
Taught me the rules
Wants to be at games
Wants to be at training
Is encouraging during games

Q10. Have you thought about quitting basketball?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

If yes, why?

Q11. Are you currently playing another organised sport?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

If yes please state what

Q12. If yes, how long have you played this sport?

Answered

Skipped

Q13. Do you currently take part in any informal sport (not team based, example running, yoga, swimming, gym)?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

Thinking about it

Q14. If you have any comments about what could have made your experience playing basketball better, we would love to hear them

Answered

Skipped

Q15. At what age did you stop playing basketball?

Answered

Skipped

Q16. Do you regret giving up the game?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

Q17. When I played basketball, it was (please select as many as applicable)

Answer Choices

In a domestic (local) competition (example: as part of the Albury Basketball Association)

As a representative player

For my school, just at school/against other schools

Q18. Why did you stop playing basketball? Please select all that are applicable

Answer Choices

I was bullied by other players/peers

I was bullied by the coach/es

I was bullied by other parents

Comments were made about the way I looked or played "you play like a girl"/stereotyping

Pressure from my parents

Pressure from my coach/es

There was no team for me to play in

It wasn't fun: I wasn't enjoying it

Friends did not play/stopped playing

I had other commitments (study/work)

I played other sport/s

I had to rely on lifts from parents/others

It was too far to travel

I felt self-conscious (regarding the way I looked)

I did not feel like a good enough player/ as capable as others

I was not made to feel welcome

I was not supported

It cost too much

I was worried about getting injured

I suffered an injury/too many injuries

My team always lost

It became boring

It was too 'clicky'. There was an 'us' and 'them' mentality

There was too much difference in the ability of my team compared to other teams

Training did not happen

We had no coach

The game day/times did not suit me

I have not experienced any of these

Other (please specify)

Q19. What, if anything, would motivate you to play again?

Answer Choices

Being able to play without pressure

Being able to play without being bullied by peers

Being able to play without being bullied by coaches

Being able to play without being bullied by parents

Being able to play without stereotyping

Being able to find a team that actually required players

A team or competition that focussed on just having fun

Having friends also playing

Not having other commitments

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Not having to rely on others for transport
Having a better body image, not worrying about the way I look/what others think
Feeling better about the way I play and not worrying about my capability
Feeling welcome
Being supported
If it was more affordable
Knowing I will not get hurt
Winning more
Skill development
Different days/times to play
Having a coach
Nothing
Other (please specify)

Q20. The following were important to motivate me to play basketball:

Answer Choices
The attitude of the coach
The level of competition
Having a supportive environment
Making sure that everyone is given a chance

Q21. My coaches were

Answer Choices
Mostly female
Mostly male
About half female and half male

Q22. I prefer

Answer Choices
Female coaches
Male coaches
I do not have a preference

Q23. My coach

Answer Choices
Knew basketball
Helped me develop my skills
Always wanted to win
Only wanted good players
Made training fun
Yelled at me if I made mistakes
Was mean to me
Taught me the rules
Wanted to be at games
Wanted to be at training
Was encouraging during games

Q24. Are you currently playing an organised sport?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

If yes please state what

Q25. If yes, how long have you played this sport?

Answered

Skipped

Q26. Do you currently take part in any informal sport (not team based, example running, yoga, swimming, gym)?

Answer Choices

Yes

No

Thinking about it

Q27. If you have any comments about what could have made your experience playing basketball better, we would love to hear them

Answered

Skipped

Appendix 2 – Media coverage

Prime 7 news:

<https://www.7regional.com.au/news/7476293-budding-basketballers>

The Border Mail:

<https://www.bordermail.com.au/story/7786503/teen-girls-leave-sport-in-droves-border-researchers-want-to-know-why/>