



Point Cook Centrals Case Study - Leanne Meyer – Senior Women’s Coach

Gender Equality in Wyndham Sport project

Wyndham Gender Equality project recently spoke to Leanne Meyer about the great work they have been doing to improve opportunities for girls and women at the club. These are their key ingredients for success:

Developing girls from Day one

When Point Cook Centrals (Sharks) first started a team it was a result of conversations showing that girls were interested in playing Football. They started with one team, and focused on developing one team at a time, player recruitment has mainly been through word of mouth. The club has found ‘Bring a Friend’ days to work better than ‘Come and Try’. It means that there is no pressure, that the focus can be on building confidence, camaraderie uplifting the girls, choices of language and team spirit.

Female bodies are different to male bodies, they grow and develop differently and girls physical play is different when they are younger so they mentally and physically develop differently to boys. The Sharks teaches girls that they need to look after their bodies to play football.

We all play Football

The sport is called Football and there are girls and boys teams, there is no women’s/ girls football or boys/ men’s football.

At the under 12s level although there are boys and girls teams, the club coordinates activities often holding joint training sessions and inclusive games following the same rules.

Girls can play in boys teams until they are u14 at which stage boys and girls are developing differently.

A Voice for Women

Leanne Meyer is the Senior Women’s coach, but she is also the voice for girls and women at the club. All enquiries for Young Teens and Women go to Leanne so that participants and parents feel comfortable and included from Day 1 and can see that there is a strong pathway. Leanne also attends u12, u14 and u18 girls team training.

Equal support

All teams have a Coach, often an Assistant Coach, a Team Manager and a Trainer, regardless of whether they are a boys team or girls team, alongside Leanne. Each team has at least 3 or 4 points of contact.

Visibility

AFLW and VFLW players are invited to the club to speak and as guest trainers, role modelling that there are pathways for girls and women to play professional football. The girls and women are also invited to attend activities when the Men's AFL players visit the club.

The senior women have a rotating roster of training, watching and volunteering at all junior girls sessions and games. To show that real everyday women play football, reinforcing that the girls can play football for as long as they would like to into the future.

Training Allocations

There are no priorities of ground or training times for different genders. The priority runs from oldest to youngest, responding to player need, ie older bigger players use up more space whilst they are playing, kicking the ball further, etc. this also ties in well with the younger ones being allocated space on the side of the pitch which is closer to spectating parents for those who like to watch their children and those children who still need parental support. Every coach puts in their training request and there is an open discussion around allocations.

Room for improvement – League match scheduling

Women's games vary between Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday twilight depending on which club is hosting the match. This proves difficult for women with different work patterns and other commitments, ie family. It also means that less spectators watch the games. The men's fixtures are released much earlier and historically have always been consistently timed. Consistency would help many women.

Future

The club are working on the promotion of girls and women. Girls and women playing football is a learning process. They are building on the awareness that girls and women play Football and making team promotion more equal, however there are more boys and men's teams so there will be more media. With bringing in female players, it is important to acknowledge that it is a process, and that clubs are not used to doing these things, creating the conversation and the awareness is important and that changes will be seen over time. Language at times may just take time to develop from habit to more inclusive, habitual language is not intentionally used to provoke.

Recent changes

This year the club recognised that the women had had a big impact on the club, often the girls and women were staying back and supporting the club, helping to organise events, etc.

Female shorts – the club have brought in a choice of female shorts acknowledging that girls and women have different body shapes and having the choice is important.

Advice to other clubs:

- Having a Women's Officer – a point of contact for parents, often football is new for parents of girls. It is important that there is a voice for women in a sport that has historically been male predominant.
- Making sure that events are not gender based and are inclusive of boys/ men and girls/ women.
- Seeing and communicating that everyone is a Footballer first, not girls who play football, ie "Look at our Footballers stepping out onto the field today."
- Member surveys – feedback helps us grow stronger and to develop as a club
- Be patient – half the battle is getting girls and women to believe in themselves, they do not know the skills, they want to play because their friends play, they want to have fun. They will develop the skills over time. Be patient and the rewards will come eventually.
- Being consistent, persistent and inclusive will pay off in the longterm.
- Setting the scene from Day 1.
- First the girls/ women need to believe in themselves and that they also deserve to play on a football field. They deserve to be out there as much as their brothers, uncles, fathers, etc. and that they deserve to represent their community.