



## *Female Officiating in Local Associations*

**Based on an article produced for the Australian Sports Commission – Sports Official Magazine**

**M**atching the number of referees to the booming number of players has been a challenge for Basketball Victoria's Basketball Associations for many years. As a consequence there has been, and continues to be a major focus on recruiting and retaining officials, with many associations now focusing on females.

Over the past few years referee branches have identified there's a dearth of female officials, particularly when comparing the percentages of female officials to female players, so it's been an area that's generated direct attention, resulting in specific programs for women officials.

The VBRA and Basketball Victoria are very keen to promote and even assist in initiatives by local associations that are a little different and address areas that need specialised attention, such as encouraging female officials. Both organisations have been supporting several initiatives by local associations

to tackle the shortfall. There are a number of associations that have implemented specific initiatives to recruit and retain female officials, such as the Girl Power program at Knox, the DIVA program at Kilsyth, the Women in Basketball Program at Werribee, and the Mum's Hoop Time Program conducted by Basketball Victoria, which all have been extremely well received.

**O**ver time the Knox Referees Branch recognised there was a need to attract more female officials, according to President Sean Gottliebsen. "We had a lot of trouble retaining female officials and our association was dominated by males. At the time we only had one female on the committee and one female representing our branch on refereeing panels, so we realised we had a deficit in all areas," Gottliebsen said.

The Knox Referee Branch developed a comprehensive approach to encouraging more female participation. "We actively went out to spark the interest among females by doing things like advertising our official's courses at girl's schools.

"Attracting females was the first step and retaining them was the next. So once we had the interest we started female-only education sessions, which have now been running for around six years," Gottliebsen said.

The sessions cover topics as diverse as dealing with conflict to perceptions of body image. The presenters are of a

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high caliber including some of the top female Women's National Basketball League referees.

**T**he Knox Branch also recognised the importance of creating a positive environment for all basketball officials. "We've put a lot of effort into educating the members of our association about respecting officials, and backed this up by putting policies and procedures in place regarding expectations about behaviour on and off the court. Over time there has been a change in culture which has resulted in a much friendlier environment," Gottliebsen said.

Another focus has been on improving the social side of officiating, which has also contributed to the retention of officials.

"It's all about creating an enjoyable atmosphere and promoting the fact that you can form friendship groups that can last a lifetime," Gottliebsen said.

The Girl Power Squad has a representative on a development committee to ensure the needs of female officials are being addressed. There is also a mentor program where experienced female officials are teamed up to develop new officials.

"We've now got as many as twelve females representing us at a state level on junior and senior panels, which is a huge improvement considering that less than ten years ago we had none. We've been able to step it up now and our representation at that level has increased to the point where we almost have more females than males,"

Gottliebsen said.

Ideally, Basketball Victoria would like to see this trend continue with as many female officials as males.

**T**he DIVA Program introduced by the Kilsyth Association, adopted a slightly different tack with funding used to create a mentoring and leadership program for young female referees already in the Kilsyth program. Referee Adviser, Sharon Arnold explained "the DIVA Program aims to utilise experienced female officials and have them work with twelve talented young female referees, working on all facets of their game." The program of ten workshops, plus mentoring and officiating sessions is initially planned for a twelve month period but it is hoped this will become an ongoing program. "After the experience of taking some young referees away on the Zebra Tour to Newcastle last year, we realised that once you take officials out of their comfort zones there is a whole new officiating world out there." Arnold said. The DIVA Program provides, sometimes, above depth challenges, for these developing female referees, working with their mentor in Championship level games. "These referees are given every opportunity to progress down the officiating pathway – some step up and some struggle, but they all achieve and learn," Arnold said.

The DIVA program has also provided,

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some female specific, workshops aimed at giving the referees some additional and extensive education and training. The DIVA referees are provided with a distinctive polo referee shirt and jacket, to give them the recognition of being involved in a Female Officials Program.

**W**erribee Referees Association have introduced a "Women in Officiating Program" for all the female officials within their association. "This program aims to create an opportunity for our female referees to develop social and professional networks, officiate together and generally support one another." Emily Camilleri, Werribee Branch Adviser, reported. The program focuses on one day every three months, where all the female referees officiate together, officiating the women's games, wearing different coloured shirts. Emily highlighted "it is a fun day, usually a Sunday, where the female referees officiate women, and after the games meet together over dinner, and have a guest speaker address them on topics which tend to be significant to females and officiating." Again this program has successfully evolved, so much so that the male referees at Werribee are looking at introducing a similar concept.

**B**asketball Victoria and the Victorian Basketball Referees Association have also implemented a specific women's

program over the past three years, targeting mothers to officiate in the daytime Aussie Hoops Program. A specialised Mum's Program sees mothers attending condensed theory and on court practical sessions, to prepare them to officiate and help supply referees during the day for a primary-school program. Some of these female referees have now continued on to become fully fledged referees at their local association.

**T**he VBRA acknowledges that female officials bring another element to a sport which has a very close split between female and male players. They are also very mindful of the need for increased numbers of female officials at all levels. There currently are a number of female officials at the elite end who act as great role models and mentors for up-and-coming officials. Clearly, in the programs mentioned above, these females are more than willing to assist in the promotion of women in officiating. Unfairly, female referees tend to have to work a little harder for acceptance, but once this is achieved they are simply looked upon as another official. The introduction of special initiatives and programs has clearly been a success in a number of associations, this maybe be something worth strongly considering.