

BROOMBALL

an equal opportunity success story

Vanessa Muller

From blood sport to fun sport, the sport of Broomball in the ACT has been turned around mainly due to women's participation.

Broomball is played on an ice rink in specially designed shoes, instead of skates. There are six players on each team, a goalkeeper, two defenders, and three forwards, with reserves. A small ball, about seven inches in diameter, is propelled about the rink with a paddle-shaped stick. The game consists of two twenty-minute periods, with rules similar to Ice Hockey, but is generally played as non-contact. The play of Broomball resembles a game of hockey on astro-turf, but on ice.

Broomball develops many sporting skills that are portable to and from many other sports. Stick skills are similar to grass hockey. Running on the ice develops balance and co-ordination, and also assists in increasing aerobic fitness. Broomball is a fast-paced team sport that requires strategies and teamwork tactics for successful play.

The origins of Broomball are steeped in the mystery of time, but is believed to have started in the early 1900s, in Canada or Russia. Some of the stories on the origins of Broomball are that Broomball started as an avenue for non-skaters to participate in the rough and tumble of Ice Hockey. Another one describes the origins of Broomball arising out of the desire by women to be involved in Ice Hockey, at the time it was impossible in the male dominated sport. It commenced in Australia, in Canberra in 1981, introduced by expatriate Canadians.

Between 1981 and the formation of the official ACT Broomball Association (ACTBA) in 1991, the sport was known as a blood sport, it succeeded in frightening not only any women from playing, but also many men. In 1991 it was decided to follow the Canadian experience and encourage the social aspects of the game. Their ruling was three women and three men on the ice at all times. For Australian conditions it was decided that one female must be on the ice at all

times. This saw an immediate result of more players entering the sport, 22% of which were female. Player numbers steadily grew over the years and in 1993 the requirement in the ACT was increased to two female players on the ice at all times. By this time 26% of the players were women. Although an attempt to introduce three females on the ice at all times failed in 1997, women participation rates continue to increase with women currently representing 38% of the players.

“Half the ACTBA Committee are women and take an active role in managing and developing the sport of Broomball in the ACT.”

At a National level there is a lack of women players and as a result there is no women's National titles. There is a Mixed division played by the Canadian rule. The ACT Cougars have been National Champions for eight out of nine years. Mark Heinrich, the ACT's 1997 National Coach is quoted as saying that the ACT “have the best women players in Australia and possibly the world.”

Half the ACTBA Committee are women and take an active role in managing and developing the sport of Broomball in the ACT. In January 1999, the ACT will trial running a women's league.

Although Broomball has the potential to be a violent sport, it isn't. This is due mainly to the participation of women. The social aspects of the game are stressed and the non-contact, mixed, summer, Sunday afternoon league is the most popular competition. The league has the atmosphere of a Sunday picnic, with many people bringing their entire family along to watch all the round games as well as playing in theirs. Those so inclined pop across the road for a few social drinks with friends. Through women's participation in this sport, Broomball in the ACT has gone from strength to strength and will continue to reach greater heights.