



“We Did It Ourselves!” - Sydney Women’s Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)



“We did it ourselves!”

10 Years of Women’s Australian Rules Football in the Harbour City.

The Official History of the Sydney Women’s Australian Football League





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Front Cover Photo Top: 2000 – The very first match: Two matches are held on a half field at Monarch Oval, Macquarie Fields with 9 a side football.

Front Cover Photo Bottom: 2009 Grand Final – the two most successful clubs in the league: Newtown and Wests slug it out once more in the grand final. Kaya Lyons is tackled by Tracey Farrugia and Cassie Lees.

Back Cover Photo: Regardless of what club you play for, once the game’s finished - it’s the friendships you make that count. Players from various clubs gather for a photo at the 2009 SWAFL Presentation Night.



Title of this history booklet

The title was taken from the theme of Lucy Burgmann and Yvette Andrews “Top 10 Reasons why I love SWAFL” speech at the SWAFL Presentation Night celebrating the first decade of the football on 12 September 2009.

Foreword by the editor Lancelot Yu

This history booklet which briefly captures the last ten years of football, can only offer a brief glimpse of the proud history of the Sydney Women’s Australian Football League (SWAFL). It’s the story of a niche women’s sport that those who have / currently play in it are passionate about the sport as part of the overall number one football code in Australia. As the only indigenous football code, all of us as players, officials and administrators are guardians of the game to ensure the growth for future generations to come.

The history booklet reflects on the past, so as to understand where we are going – we need to know where we came from. The funny stories of the PVC posts would be a revelation to today’s players who turn up to play on one of the best football fields in Sydney, which the male footballers now use when their grounds are closed by rain. Some of the struggles in starting up a club are also discussed which would not be unfamiliar to those currently involved in administration and show that it’s not all bed and roses behind the scenes.

This booklet isn’t about the ball-by-ball or match-by-match account of each season but gives enough information for the casual reader to enjoy a brief summary of the seasons past.

The contributions from past and present players, officials and administrators have been extremely valuable in understanding the early origins of our league as well as providing much needed laughter and humour to this otherwise dry publication. I cannot emphasize enough the thanks to our past and present league presidents and committee members who have put in numerous unpaid hours in running the league as well as setting up the strategies that have ensured that SWAFL now plays on grounds that are as equal if not superior to many men’s club grounds in Sydney.

Regardless of club affiliation, we are united by our love of “footy”. Enjoy as we celebrate ten years of the best game in the world!





The beginning

Stimulated by the success of the Sydney Swans who had made the Grand Final in 1996, Aussie Rules interest exploded at all levels of the game including women's football. In 1998 Yvette Andrews contacted the NSW AFL about female participation in the sport but never heard back from the official body. So with her good friends; Patrice Ladson and Evonne Lukas after having a kick around with the Sherrin and they believed that there was potential and viability for a women's league. Thus leading to the momentous day on 8th March 1999 when the Sydney Women's Australian Football League was inaugurated at the Western Suburbs Australian Rules Football Club (WSARFC) in Croydon Park. Victoria Free of the WSARFC had contacted Yvette and was very interested in assisting the league. Attendees included Yvette Andrews, Lucy Burgmann, Patrice Ladson and Victoria Free. The league formerly incorporated on Valentine's Day 2000.

So through friends or spotting people kicking footies in parks and just asking them if they wanted to play footy, informal matches throughout 1999 were set up around Sydney including scratch matches at Monarch Field, Macquarie Fields. An exhibition nine a side game was displayed at Monarch Fields on 13 March 1999 which was the first organized match. Numbers were such that a trip was organized by the newly formed Sydney Gold to play the Ainslie team located in the ACT resulting in a win to the Sydney Gold of 4.7.31 to Ainslie 3.6.24.

It was agreed in various meetings in 1999, that in 2000 organised competition be setup to promote women's participation of football.

The original foundation clubs were in alphabetical order:

- A) **Glebe Cyclones** (became the Balmain Tigers in 2002 - renamed the Dockers in 2008 and now aligned with the Balmain Dockers Football Club). Yvette said she was having a picnic at Jubilee Oval and spotted women kicking the Sherrin so she just asked if they wanted to play, and thus the Glebe Cyclones was born under Helen Swan and Natalie Morgan.
- B) **Monarch Panthers** (Campbelltown) – existed only in the league's inaugural season consisting of Army personnel run by Nicki Hargraves and Tanya Ferrera.
- C) **Norths** – existed for only one game in Round 3 and then folded due to lack of numbers.
- D) **Sydney University Bombers** (a stand-alone club aligned with the Sydney University Football Club). Meredith Gray was very involved in organizing a team. Lachlan Worthy wrote *"Over the summer of 2000; Meredith and I approached Sydney Uni about starting a Women's team there. Actually, it was all Mere; I was an hour late to our first meeting because I got lost driving around the Uni trying to find a park. In terms of the players, well they just turned up. Some were students; some were friends of friends, some..... I have no idea.... they were just there."*
- E) **University of New South Wales - Eastern Suburbs Stingrays** (aligned with the UNSW-ES Football Club). They were originally called the Dolphins.
- F) **Western Wolves** (a stand-alone club with close links to the Western Suburbs Australian Football Club). Karen Taylor set up the team.



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The early years of the league were noticeable for the desire of players and administrators working together regardless of club affiliation. Yvette Andrews believed this solidarity was the desire to play footy which triumphed club loyalty. Most men’s clubs at the time were suspicious of women’s motives to play football. Solidarity meant that with limited assistance apart from John Livy, CEO of NSW AFL, the early women of the league had to do just about everything such as arranging grounds and umpires that players today take for granted. Ground access for Australian Rules in a place in Sydney meant capacity constraints and thus matches in the early years were played across Sydney in order to conduct matches.

Atmosphere of the Early League

- The first few years of the league was very inspiring, the committee and people involved really just wanted to see women’s football happen. Nothing was ever a problem and they would work out every possible angle to get games going. Now in retrospect it was a mammoth achievement and these people just seemed to make things happen, some of the people who performed extraordinary feats at the time were Yvette Andrews, Lucy Burgmann & Meredith Gray.
- It was also a really creative group of people who put a lot of time in to promoting, supporting and generating interest in women’s football
- There are memories of radio interviews, TV interviews and newspaper articles in order to promote the game
- One of the most popular activities was the videos & photographs that were shown at the presentation nights each year. They were pretty spectacular and showed what a creative and energetic crew had taken hold of football.

The very first game

The very first game was at W.H.Wagener Oval – Ashbury on April 1, 2000 (no jokes about April Fools Day, please!) with the first match being Wests 8.11.54 defeating Glebe 3.4.22. The second match was Sydney Uni 12.16.88 defeating Easts 10.4.64

In the early days of the league (2000 only) with small numbers participating, games were held on half-fields so that meant two games could be held simultaneously using portable PVC posts. Tennille (Summers) Smerdon (UNSW Player) recounts the early years of the league, when everyone was new to playing the game *“The umpires would explain the rules as we went along which made for a slow game but meant players would get a better understanding. It was very much like an under 10’s game everyone chasing the ball. There were only 10 players on each team and we played on half a field with two games going on the oval at once separated by witches’ hats. The goal posts were PVC pipes taped together with duct tape, a few goals were at the goal umpires discretion as the goal/point posts fell over or had a permanent tilt.”* We acknowledge the SWAFL posts makers Teresa Wilson, Vicki Keys and Karen Miethe.

Melinda Hyland (Sydney University) also recounts the early days of the league: *“Our first season of footy was played on half-sized fields (two of which fitted neatly across a full-sized footy field). The field was marked with cones and the goals were made from different lengths of PVC pipe stacked together”.*



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The very first Grand Final between Wests and Sydney University in 2000 ended in a draw and it required double extra time before Wests became the inaugural premiers. Invited guests included Craig Davis and John Livy who was the then NSW AFL CEO.

Inaugural Premiers - 2000: The Western Wolves

Back Row: Karen Miethé - Manager, Julie Rogers, Yvette Andrews, Lucy Burgmann-Vice Captain, Patrice Ladson, Graham Mumme - Coach, Gabby Morahan, Sophie Ewart, Michaela Ekman

Middle Row: Evonne Loukas, Teresa Wilson, Wendy Holtby, Christine Hibbens, Vicki Keys - Captain, Phoebe Thomas

Front Row: Bernie Cox and Fiona Huntington



The start of some traditions and infrastructure

The subsequent year in 2001 must have been a very wet winter as an inspection of the league ladder shows an extraordinary number of matches being washed out. This year turned out to be Sydney University’s year coming out on top over Wests in the 2001 Grand Final.

Away from the field saw the institution of the SWAFL Trivia Quiz which was run by Balmain at the Drummoyne club as a way of raising money for the NSW State Team. It has become so successful; it is now an annual tradition and one of the big income generators for the league. Another tradition at trivia quiz was SWAFL Vision where each of the teams dressed up and had to sing songs ASEAN Style with modified lyrics. The year also saw the launch of SWAFL.org – the league’s website. The website is discussed separately within this report.

Groundbreaking in 2001, the league introduced the trans-gender policy due to a post-operative female expressing an interest in playing. As no policy had existed in sports, Lucy Burgmann did some research before Helen Swan approved it. Basically the policy states that if you live your life in another gender you could play which was seen to be very progressive at the time. Since the introduction of the policy, other sports have contacted SWAFL to use it as a basis of making their own policies.



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2002 saw Helen Swan and Yvette Andrews being involved in women’s football at the National Level with other delegates from across Australia and the outcome was a realization amongst the Australian Football League hierarchy that women’s football had to be taken seriously. Which led in the following year to the formation of the AFL Women’s Advisory Committee, grant funding and umpire supply at National Carnivals. The year also saw the composition of the SWAFL Song “See the Women Fly” which was written by Jen Crowe, background vocals (Wests players), guitar by Yvette Andrew’s brothers as well as the 25 minute documentary “Balls, Bras and Bruises” (producer: Amanda Macintosh/Yvette Andrews) which was a big hit at the 2003 NSW State Jumper Presentation.

2003 saw the inauguration of the Michelle Daley Shield. Michelle Daley was a Balmain player who in a game against Wests in 2002 suffered an injury which required a liver transplant. This meant her playing days were over and both clubs in their traditional preseason clash have renamed the match the Michelle Daley Shield with proceeds going towards transplant related causes. The first game in 2003 resulted in \$700 donated to the RPA A.W.Morrow Gastroenterology and Liver Center and the following year \$800 to Transplant Australia. Matches between these two friendly rivals have always been close.

Finally the year saw Alexandria Park as the home of Women’s Footy which is covered later in this report with an Aboriginal blessing by the Cadigal tribe. Other events that occurred during Lucy Burgmann’s Presidency was marching in the Mardi Gras and having a stall at Field Day. These activities were designed to be a recruiting tool for SWAFL to varying degrees of success. 2003 also saw Stephanie Foster (NSW Captain) being featured in the Footy Record Publication who was the first SWAFL player to do so.

The start and rise of the Newtown Breakaways

The origins of the Newtown Breakaways lie in the early years of Sydney University. In the early years of SWAFL with less than full sized numbers on the pitch, Sydney University had many reserves. One of the Sydney University players - Jamie Robertson decided to start another club and with some former ex-Sydney University players started the Newtown Breakaways in 2002. Apparently it was very contentious within the Sydney University club as players split in different ways whether to remain at the club or join the Newtown Breakaways.

The club playing in the Swans colours of Red and White soon became the powerhouse club amongst the SWAFL league winning in its first year of competition and then winning the four years in a row to make it four premierships (2002-2005) equaling the AFL record of consecutive premierships of Collingwood (1927-1930). One of the strengths of Newtown was their attacking prowess combined with an awesome defence. Coached by Jamie Robertson from 2002-2006, they were the benchmark of the competition. In the years of 2002-2007, Newtown managed an enviable record of being minor premiers in 5 out of 6 seasons and contesting the grand final each year. With the return of Jamie Robinson in 2009 as coach, Newtown made it premiership number five to be rightly called the “club of the decade”.



Expansion/contraction - the middle years of the league

Under the presidency of Lucy Burgmann and Karen James, various clubs came in and out of the league as they found that fielding enough female players proved to be a constant struggle especially when injuries hit their toll. Clubs that participated in the league and may one day again included Macquarie University in 2004, UTS (University of Technology, Sydney; 2001-02) and Camden Power (2005-06). Most of the players from these folded clubs were able to be absorbed by the existing clubs in the competition thus not losing players from the sport (i.e. UTS Players went to Balmain, Camden players were split amongst St. George and Easts).

Camden was an example of a club that probably entered too early for its time. Based out in the new masterplan suburb of Harrington Park, it entered SWAFL for the 2004-2006 seasons. Its home ground location was probably a shock to many of the players who resided in inner-city Sydney. Rachael Paton (UNSW Player, ex-Camden) reminisces *"It was so big, that the warm-ups nearly killed us, and the ground was infamous for all the duck poo, so tackling wasn't a big priority for both teams"*. Camden folded at the start of the 2007 season and their players were dispersed amongst both St George and UNSW – Eastern Suburbs.

Although Australian Rules Football has a maximum of 18 players on the field. In the early years and today is still a problem currently, fielding a full strength side on the field remains a present challenge and forfeits or playing under-strength wasn't uncommon. At the start of the league there was only 10 a side competition, increased to 12 in 2001, rising to 15 a side in 2004, then 16 a side in 2006. In 2008, the league insisted on full 18 a-side for the participating teams. If one team didn't have the full squad available but had minimum numbers to constitute a game it was dependant on the good will of the other team to match up or if they were desperate for a win they would pull their maximum numbers on the field. (Ed: I've been on both sides of the fence!).

In 2006, SWAFL managed its first Tribunal Proceeding. As most incidents had previously had been dealt by umpires on the field, this led to initial confusion amongst board level. Without identifying the personalities involved, the case concerned the Newtown club citing a Wests player for a post-match incident where the Wests player grabbed the Newtown player from behind and slung her to the ground. The case was sent to the NSW AFL Tribunal under Chairman Langton and the player pled guilty receiving a 2 week suspension.

In 2006 Wests finally stopped the Newtown juggernaut in the Grand Final playing in the torrential rain and mud at W.H.Wagener Field. By playing smart footy and rushing the ball for deliberate behinds, they sufficiently kicked accurately enough to win their second title. It would be an understatement to say that rivalry between Newtown and Wests remains keen.

Sydney University with many players entered two teams in the competition in the years 2005-2007, divided into Sydney University Blue and Sydney University Gold. This allowed broader participation amongst playing numbers. Following a successful recruitment campaign player numbers during pre-season training hovered between fifty and sixty and for the first time a SWAFL Club entered two teams in the competition. Sourcing double of everything (coaches, jerseys, footballs, bottles, grounds etc) proved to be challenging, as did the division of players into two teams according to President of SUWAFC – Mel Hyland. Rivalry between the blue and gold teams was healthy and it was wonderful to see twice as many women enjoying the sport. It was probably safe to say that after the premiership in 2007 by Sydney University Gold a lot of players retired upon reaching the ultimate dream thus Sydney University reverted back to one unified team.



Foundations of St. George – a long time in fruition.

In 2007, the St. George team affiliated with the St. George Australian Football Club entered the competition and broadening the reach of the competition to the Southern parts of Sydney included the populous Sutherland Shire. According to past minutes of the SWAFL Competition whilst expression of interest were submitted from 2004 annually, a lack of players was the main stumbling block to fielding a team. Key promoters of the St George team were Rebekah Lucas, Sandra Haberley and Andrew Cubitt, President of St George AFC. Originally playing in Adelaide Crows jumpers, in 2009 they reverted back to the red and white colours but will play in Crows jumpers when playing against Newtown.

Sandra Haberley who is the AFL Development Manager of the Sutherland Shire writes *"In 2004, I was President of the Miranda Junior Australian Football Club, and together with Kate Winterbottom, tried to start a Women's team that would play under the Junior Club strip, the name "Bombettes" was bandied around at the time.*

Unfortunately we were only able to get 18 players to commit and needed 22 as a minimum to enter the comp. The following year but again just fell short with numbers. By then I was working for the AFL as an AFL Development Manager and could not commit as much time to the project as I had in the past. The AFL Southern Development Team ran a girls clinic at Jenola Park, Woolooware in an effort to raise some interest from Girls and women who may be interested in playing AFL. We did have a few dozen girls/women turn up, and this led to some of the girls training at Olds Park together.

Again, we just fell short again, and the girls that we had attracted them were snapped up by other established AFL Women's teams. The following year, largely due to Rebekah Lucas, the St. George Women's team finally got up. It was a very long, and at times very disappointing, process. But thankfully we now have a Women's AFL side in the St. George and Sutherland Shire Region, where young girls and women can go and enjoy playing our great game."

Rebekah Lucas recounts this episode *"After playing at Sydney Uni for years I had my first child and moved to live in downtown Loftus, a 45 min drive south of the Inner west. I played another season for Sydney Uni but found that I couldn't make training with a baby and the distance made playing on Saturday difficult. So I called both Cronulla Sharks and St. George about starting up a women's side. St George were the more interested Club, so after talking to Andrew Cubitt, I then had a task of recruiting players as St George weren't going to commit without the players available. I hadn't lived in the Shire or St George for about 15 years, so trying to gain players was proving difficult. There seemed to have been a history of the Shire / St. George getting about 10 players together from year to year but they had never gotten any further. Once my details were put on the SWAFL website then enquires happened. We had a meeting about 3 weeks before the season we started (I forget which year) and we had 12 players I think. There was Kate Winterbottom (prev. Easts) and I who had played before. Then there were a group of cricketers interested in playing and then a few people who had looked up the SWAFL site and indicated they wanted to play.*

We started training with one of the men training us; Declan Donahue (men's club captain) was just brilliant. He trained us that first season and he was sensational, he was obviously an experienced player, an enthusiastic AFL motivator and keen to help out women's football at St. George. Greg McKay was our Saturday coach, as he put it, he turned up to watch his daughter, happened to have a pen and ended up as the coach. Greg was an ex-St George player and an enthusiastic, strategic and supportive person to have at the helm.

Soon after the meeting I contacted the local newspaper named the Leader and surprisingly ended up with a half page article about the team. Then some more enquires followed through, although not enough to form a team.



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*I have to say that it was the demise of the Camden team that finally allowed the St George to grab the final players we needed to make the team. I think in the end we stole 5 players from Camden to play that inaugural season. Needless to say that season we registered 45 players (I think a record for the league) yet we barely managed a full team each week. Though we did manage a core group of players who I believe are still playing now, this is fabulous. I didn’t manage to last the season - falling pregnant again!! I am pretty sure we won a game in the end (**Editor:** it was actually two) but most of the time we were flogged that season but I imagine that things will change in the coming years!!*

That first year was difficult as although we were part of the St George club there was not a lot of support for the team. I found that to be personally confronting and challenging. I am hopeful that these issues have since been worked out and the women’s team is an integral part of the club. I am hoping to return next season after my third child is born.”

2008 Season

That season saw most matches centralized at the league’s new home ground at Mahoney Park, Marrickville. Mahoney was relatively easy for most players to access and with good links to the M5 Motorway was pretty beneficial to those living in outer Sydney. The opening of Mahoney was attended by the first female AFL Commissioner Sam Mostyn and ABC Grandstand who conducted some interviews. We also like to acknowledge here the long standing support of the NSW AFL Commission board member Gabrielle Trainor who attended many SWAFL Functions including premiership dinners over the years.

Other highlights of the 2008 season saw night league matches held at Jubilee Oval, Village Green and Sydney University Oval No. 1. The 2008 Grand Final was between Western Wolves and Balmain Dockers (in their first ever Grand Final appearance) was a classic match of footy in the torrential rain. Whilst the skills were not as sharp as dry football all the spectators appreciated the skill, desire and commitment of all the players. It was the lowest scoring grand final and probably one of the lowest scoring games in SWAFL history as the Western Wolves despite scoring only in the first half won their third title 2.1.13 over Balmain 1.5.11.

In 2009 another attempt was made to resurrect the Macquarie University Club. Operating with the men’s football club the Macquarie University Warriors are coached by Belinda Harrison who had played with Wests. The foundation of the Macquarie University is important as a beacon for women who live in the strong AFL areas of the Hills District, Northern Suburbs and North Shore. With the solid backing of President Grant Stodulka, the Macquarie University Warriors are blessed with magnificent infrastructure such as a great home ground. However a lack of numbers to field a full-sized squad caused the team to be placed in development status where other teams will play them for no competition points allowing Macquarie University to enjoy the benefits of full-fledged competition.



The start of the Bondi Shamrocks from the Compromised Rules Matches between Aussie Rules and Gaelic Football.

Maybe the seeds of the Bondi Shamrocks could be traced back to 2004 when the very first International Rules match occurred between Lucy Burgmann, president of SWAFL at the time must have been one of the first of many cross-over sports players playing both codes. The match was held at W.H.Wagener Oval in October 2004 as part of the NSW GAA build up to their Australasian games in NZ.

At the end of 2008, there was a second compromise rules game between the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) of NSW and SWAFL. Proposed by Jamie Fitzsimons who played both forms of the game so that the 2008 SWAFL Team (a team in name only) could have a match. Some of the players mainly from Western Wolves actually played both forms of the game each weekend and the match resulted in a 49-14 score to the Gaelic Footballers. This was due to the match being held five weeks after the grand final so most SWAFL Footballers had tapered off if they hadn't due to excessive Grand Final Celebrations whilst the Gaelic Girls had just come back from their national championships. One of the Wolves players, Lisa Roper was designated to be the Gaelic Girls coach as they learnt some AFL skills and after the match, the players from the GAA thought they could make a serious attempt at playing AFL.

So in November 2008, a new club was formed called the Bondi Shamrocks coached by Lisa Roper which composes the bulk of the Gaelic Footballers plus some former players from Wests and Sydney University. It'll be interesting to see how transferable their Gaelic Football skills are to Australian Football but based on what was displayed in the compromise rules game they'll be an exciting addition for the competition.

2009 Season

The most visible introduction of the 2009 season was the installation of a six floodlit lights at Mahoney Oval which was in use for the very first game of Round 2 between Western Wolves and Bondi Shamrocks on Anzac Day Eve. Since then, Mahoney has hosted training sessions and matches on both Friday and Saturday nights and will no doubt become a bigger part of the draw.

The 2009 season saw a rude introduction to the new club the Bondi Shamrocks playing the Newtown Breakaways in their first ever game. Although Bondi was leading at half-time, Newtown piled on the physical and mental pressure in the third quarter to kick ten goals and run away 54 point winners. However the raw talent of the Irish girls soon revealed themselves with a narrow 8 point loss to the premiers (Western Wolves) in the next game and a 20 point win over grand-finalists Balmain in the third game.

The 2009 competition was one of most even in the history of the SWAFL Competition. History was made when St. George defeated a club other than UNSW-Easts in the form of Sydney University in Round 8. The final four was a tight race with five clubs in contention who were Newtown, Wests, Balmain, Bondi and Sydney University. It was only decided in Round 12 about the makeup of the finalists where newcomers the Shamrocks secured 4th spot.

The 2009 season saw a combined SWAFL Rookie team take on the visiting US Freedom (US Women's National Australian Rules squad) on their inaugural tour on 8 August 2009. Local pride in not losing to the Americans in the home of footy was assured with a 15 point victory. 4.9.33 to 2.6.18.



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2009 was to be a season where there was something to talk about on Monday morning. The newest club Bondi Shamrocks managed to field 19 players on the field at once which was spotted by their opponents and thus was forced to forfeit their score of 19 points at the time under the laws. Another two occasions was where SWAFL managed its own version of sirengate between Balmain and Newtown where the scores were in dispute and with the final determination of a draw becoming the official score.

The last round (Rd. 14) had three matches going simultaneously across Sydney. Although the games had little bearing on the ladder determination, most interest was focused on who would win Golden Boot with three players in contention. Due to the footy gods, the three players ended up tying on 31 goals each to share the award in that year.

In the final series, undefeated Newtown lost their major semi-final to Newtown in a pulsating game whilst first time finalists Bondi lost to Balmain. There was a real sirengate episode in the preliminary final between the Balmain Dockers and the Newtown Breakaways where the result was appealed to the NSW AFL who ruled that the rules were applied correctly and Newtown were declared the winners. In the grand final, the match was close between Wests and Newtown until five minutes to go when Newtown kicked away to win by 13 points and thus be declared the club of the decade with five premierships.

The future?

Throughout the early start of the league, raising awareness of women’s football in the wider media and money to run the league was a constant priority. Today just like the start of the league, SWAFL relies on a mixture of club participation fees, ancillary revenues and funding from the AFL and the NSW/ACT AFL to operationally run the league. This doesn’t mention the numerous voluntary hours that the league presidents and the board committee have done in making decisions and attending meetings.

What we have seen that the humble origins of women’s football in Sydney to the transformation to the showpiece that we are today is not possible without the efforts of the early pioneers who had to convince a skeptical audience to be taken seriously. Without their efforts and many voluntary hours there is no doubt where we are today is built on the shoulders of giants.

One day we hope SWAFL originally like Rugby League with its inner city origins will include more clubs across Sydney broadening the reach and popularity of this great game of football.

One of the questions the editor asked all the interviewees was what would the next decade mean for SWAFL. I think the considered responses shows that the respondents care deeply for the future of this league as we commence our second decade of operation.

What will the last year of SWAFL’s first decade bring to us? No-one can predict the future but I’m sure that there will be keenly contested matches, outstanding individual and team play, some great goals kicked, agonizing victories and defeats where the difference between agony and ecstasy comes down to an accurate kick. Maybe more new clubs might enter the league and create a stir with their style of play. It’s the mysteries of football that has led players, fans and officials alike over the last decade and in the future to keenly anticipate each Saturday between April to September for the opening ball up of the Sherrin.



OTHER ASPECTS OF THE LEAGUE IN THE LAST DECADE

Developing Youth Girls

Youth girls’ pathways to football have always been a problem for women’s football in NSW. Currently girls are allowed to play to an age of 14 with the boys before being barred. Historically the transition to women’s football has not been handled well meaning that a natural source of talent has often pursued other sports and are lost to the league. In 2008, with a better relationship between the NSW/ACT AFL and SWAFL, Youth Girls gala days have been held in both Sydney and the Illawarra region as a way of promoting the game and identifying future talent. In 2008 a record number of 4 Youth Gala Days were conducted introducing women into football in NSW.

In 2009 in the aftermath of the celebrated media publicity of 14 year old girls from the Illawarra -Madison Giffin & Jessie Mulholland of the Figtree Kangaroos who were told by the NSW/ACT AFL not to compete in mixed competition, the Illawarra Youth Girls AFL (IYGAF) set up a youth girls competition for 14-17 year olds in the region. On the 1st May, the competition kicked off with major success in front of MP’s and celebrity singer Christine Anu. Later that year there was youth representative matches against the ACT WAFL Youth Girls competition in the U15’s and U18’s category. Both states won a match each displaying some of their precocious talent in front of SWAFL President Jemma Still.

Umpires – can’t live with them, can’t live without them

Umpires were usually obtained from willing volunteers who held at least level one qualification and here we pay tribute to our two longest serving umpires John Freeland and John Van Den Ham who must have umpired over 200 games by now over the first decade. In the early years, we borrowed umpires from junior football including Northside Umpires and Sydney South Umpires. In 2008, we had our first two female umpires who had graduated from the playing ranks Victoria Rawlings (Sydney University) and our esteemed league president Jemma Still on top of her million and one other hats! Although many players probably had a whine about umpiring decisions, it’s been broadly recognized that we have limited resources and are competing with junior and senior level umpiring resources on Saturday’s. In 2009 a “Respect the Game” initiative was launched by the umpires, players and coaches to improve the standard of behavior and communication between all three stakeholders. History was made in 2009 when the first female was appointed to umpire the SWAFL Grand Final in Victoria Rawlings.

The Website – WWW.SWAFL.ORG

The league was blessed with willing administrators who were able to harness the potential of the Internet in promoting the game. The site was first run by Rikki Ballantine from 2001. Until 2007, the website was managed by firstly Rikki Ballantine and then Amanda Wynne running on the original platform. The website (www.swafl.org) has been an invaluable advertisement for the league as well as a communication tool to existing and future potential players. The best comment was received from an official from one of the Interstate women’s leagues saying we were up with the Victorian Womens Football League when it came to communication. (2008).

The original site was much loved as it had weekly match photos, updates, history and a blog. The blog was of much use during the 2003 nationals where players could file match reports back home.



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In 2008, the SWAFL moved to a new platform (the current SportingPulse) which NSW/ACT AFL is running on. The new website has some more powerful tools that allow information to be uploaded without requiring html skills.

2009 sees the exciting (or time-consuming if you’re the manager) addition of Footyweb which brings match statistics and scores into line with what the Sydney AFL (men’s) do currently. Here scores, statistics, match reports and clearances can be entered into electronically.

Our own home ground

Our first home ground wasn’t Mahoney but actually Alexandria Park located in inner-city Sydney. This was secured after much hard work by President Lucy Burgmann, Sally Lambourne (Balmain) and Secretary Yvette Andrews from the then Council of South Sydney. Alexandria Park was rather notorious for it’s profuse dog droppings, lack of grass being cut and most of all the shortness of the field which was measured I think at a generous maximum of 110m. The ground was open with the Jen Crowe song “See the Women Fly.”

Thanks to the NSW AFL and the persistent hard work of many SWAFL officials including presidents Karen James and Jemma Still, Marrickville Council announced in December 2007 that it had entered a long-term lease with the NSW AFL to make Mahoney Park (a former soccer ground) was to be converted into a dual use oval (football and AFL). No doubt the promise of infrastructure improvement dollars the AFL has flush from its latest television contract has allowed it to build grass-roots football.

The editor can honestly say Mahoney Oval is one of the best maintained AFL Ovals in Sydney, with beautiful drainage in the wet (as tested in the 2008 Grand Final), mostly irrigated by council and a soft surface with no hardcover cricket pitch in the middle. Mahoney is an all year round AFL Ground making the ground available for men’s representative training and pre-season matches in the Women’s competition. Upgrades occurred thorough out the 2008 season included change rooms with working showers.

The 2009 season saw the installation and completion of 6 light towers around the ground making Mahoney available for night matches. This exciting addition will benefit the Newtown Breakaways and Bondi Shamrocks who train there on weeknights.



Bondi Shamrocks warm up at Mahoney with the light towers in the background.



Grand Final Records

Year	Premiers	Winning Score	Runner's Up	Runner's Up Score
2000	Western Wolves	8-14-62 after double overtime	Sydney University	7-7-49
2001	Sydney University	7-4-46	Western Wolves	1-6-12
2002	Newtown Breakaways	8-8-56	Western Wolves	2-4-16
2003	Newtown Breakaways	5-11-41	Western Wolves	4-12-36
2004	Newtown Breakaways	10-12-72	Western Wolves	5-3-33
2005	Newtown Breakaways	10-12-72	Western Wolves	4-1-25
2006	Western Wolves	5-4-34	Newtown Breakaways	1-15-21
2007	Sydney University Gold	7-4-46	Newtown Breakaways	2-5-17
2008	Western Wolves	2-1-13	Balmain Dockers	1-5-11
2009	Newtown Breakaways	8-2-50	Western Wolves	5-7-37

League Awards

Best and Fairest in the League

Following the AFL system, umpires at the conclusion of each match vote on a 3 (best), 2 and 1 vote system. Votes are then tallied by the operations managers and announced at the SWAFL Presentation Night held the weekend after the grand final.

2000 Teresa Wilson (Western Wolves)

2001 Nicki Richards (Sydney University)

2002 **4 way tie** Kim Harper (Western Wolves), Stephanie Foster (Newtown), Nicki Richards (Newtown) and Tarsha Gale (Newtown)

2003 Gianna Abbonizio (Sydney University)

2004 **4 way tie** Stephanie Foster (Newtown), Kerry Taylor (Wests), Ali Crighton (Sydney Uni) and Tania Lennon (Newtown).

2005 Katharyna Kobzan (Balmain)

2006 Melinda Hyland (Sydney University Blue)

2007 Natalie Redford (Newtown)

2008 **2 way tie** Trish Muller (Western Wolves) and Erin Burns (St George)

2009 Natasha Devlin (Newtown)



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A few words from Best and Fairest Winners – Tricia Muller (2008 – joint winner, Western Wolves)

2008 was a wicked year for the Western Wolves, week in and week out the vibe stayed the same on and off the field. For my first season of AFL, I couldn't have asked for a better team! With a mixture of skill, determination, mateship and passion for the game that Jase and the girls have was contagious and made it easy to pick up on the game and rules. It's awesome being able to run your guts out for your mate and know they are doing the same for you. I was/am that stoked to be a part of it all, and was blown away when I received the award for best and fairest. With each vote the girls (wolves) made me drink, so by the time the final round came along I was a little tiddly and thank god for that Dutch courage cause I'm normally not great for speeches, ha ha, but in all honesty it was an absolute privilege winning the award alongside Erin Burns. I look forward to many years ahead with the sport and SWAFL, There is no doubt the love of the game is growing through Sydney. I believe there's another team joining in 2009; this should make for another great season. Well done to the SWAFL committee and all the other players of 2008, I hope to see you all in '09.

Best and Fairest Winner – Natalie Redford (2007 – Newtown Breakaways)

It was the biggest shock of my first year of playing football. I nearly didn't make it to the Awards night but I'm glad I got there. I had spent a lot of time chatting to the girls on my table so I really wasn't rating myself going in to the night. It wasn't until I started getting some votes half way through the rounds that a bit of excitement came out. Right up until the last vote I didn't actually think I'd win so it was very unexpected to say the least.

The Deb Rogers Memorial Award (Best on Ground) at SWAFL Grand Finals

The Best Player as selected by the umpires is nominated at the SWAFL Grand Final wins the Deb Rogers Award which is the match ball and the trophy. Deb Rogers (Pattie) was a player in SWAFL and a manager for the NSW State Team and passed away in her prime in 2006. Best on Ground on Grand Final Day from records constructed are:

- 2000** Evonne Loukas (Western Wolves)
- 2001** Nikki Richards (Sydney University)
- 2002** Kath Pade (Newtown)
- 2003** Kerry Taylor (Wests)
- 2004** Rebecca Burrridge (Newtown)
- 2005** Emma Hender (Newtown)
- 2006** Kath Pade (Newtown)
- 2007** Emma Yuen (Sydney University)



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2008 2 way tie Melissa Bibby (West) and Natasha Devlin (Balmain)

2009 Talei Owen (West)

The Yvette Andrews Players Player award

The Players Player award is probably an award most cherished by players as it’s awarded by each individual opposition teams at the end of each match with the results tallied at the end of the season. In 2009 the SWAFL Committee renamed the Players Player award after Yvette Andrews, player, NSW representative, an early administrator, co-founder of the league, member of the team of the decade and coach.

Winners have been

2000 Natalie Morgan (Glebe)

2001 Margot Fitzgibbon and Bernie Cox

2002 Not mentioned in any reports

2003 2 way tie Heather Noblett (East) and Kerry Taylor (West)

2004 3 way tie Megan Webster (Balmain), Jemma Still (Sydney Uni), Regan Schell (Camden)

2005 Not mentioned in any reports

2006 Melinda Hyland (Sydney University)

2007 2 way tie Kelly Woods (East) and Erin Burns (St George)

2008 2 way tie Emma Yuen (Sydney University) and Krystle Thompson (Newtown)

2009 2 way tie Cynthia Dufaut (West) and Roxy McGee (Newtown)

Rookie of the Year

2006 Alison Parkin (Balmain)

2007 Erin Burns (St. George)

2008 Karla Spilarewicz (Balmain)

2009 Una McKay (Bondi)



SWAFL Leading Goalkickers – the Golden Boot Award

The award is given to the leading goal kicker at the conclusion of the home and away round.

2000	Fiona Huntington	Wests
2001	Jamie Robertson	Sydney University
2002	Vicki Keys	Wests
2003	Stephanie Foster	Newtown
2004	Joint Winners: Stephanie Foster (Newtown) and Amee Hogarth (UNSW/Easts)	
2005	Amee Hogarth	UNSW/Easts
2006	Rebecca Burridge	Newtown
2007	Rebecca Burridge	Newtown
2008	Marie Keating	Wests
2009	Joint winners: Belinda Pride (Balmain), Marie Keating (Bondi) and Rebecca Burridge (Newtown)	



PERSPECTIVES OF THE GAME

Players Perspectives

Present Player 2009 Rookie – Verna Iles (Newtown Breakaways)

I grew up in NSW so I have been a latecomer to AFL. For years I've known it existed but I thought of it mainly as the incomprehensible game that was always taking up hours of TV on a Saturday. That's all changed now of course, though it's still incomprehensible, and ironically I can't seem to ever catch a game. As for SWAFL, I didn't discover it. A good friend of mine found it. I think she read an article or saw something on TV. Anyway she decided this was a good thing and that I was going to come and play alongside her. If you knew my friend then you would understand that I didn't have a whole lot of say in it. Thankfully she was right. It's just awesome. As I mentioned before I didn't discover SWAFL and had no choice in the decision to play for Newtown. It could well have been the first club my friend found, or more likely it was related to the great pubs and social scene around the club. As it turns out there is a club far closer to home for me but it's far too late now because a 'Breakaways all I wanna be'. They are a fantastic group.

I felt before my first game nervous, pumped and elated. Let's not downplay the nervous. Really nervous. I was desperate not to let myself down and also not to let my team mates down. So when I finally ran out onto the field it was a great relief. For good or bad it was finally underway and of course being a competitive sort the action quickly took away the butterflies. Soon the excitement of it all, the training we had done, and the support of my team mates came to the fore. I was really pumped. I can't wait for my next game so watch out!

About my first goal. It was early in the first quarter of my first game. The first goal of the Breakaways season. The ball has been kicked. Its high and I have a bit of clear space away from my defender. Time to think.... Time to panic... Ball coming down, defenders closing in..... PHEW! Ok I might have actually squealed at this point but let's not make a big deal of that... I am in the goal square, the kick. GOOAAAL!! A great feeling and hopefully the first of many.

What's not to like about footy? It's a great team sport. There's a place for everyone and every body shape. The friendship and support of team mates that all work together, protecting each other and working towards the same goal. If only more women knew. It's a little hard to know where the SWAFL will be in 10 years. I know where I want it to be and that's bigger and better. I am shocked and horrified to think that I might have lived my whole life and never known how good AFL can be. We really need to get a bigger profile. Spread the message further and wider so that more and more women get the chance to play.

In practical terms I guess I would like to see the geographical scope of the competition grow. There is a whole world of greater Sydney out there and I am sure it's an untapped resource. Of course this doesn't happen on its own and will take a lot of hard work and money (the gaining of which is usually harder work still). From what I have seen though the competition is blessed with many skilled and tireless workers and I'd like to take the time to thank them all personally. I think as long as we stay so committed that the SWAFL can't possibly go wrong.

Go Newtown!!



“We Did It Ourselves!” - Sydney Women’s Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

Present Player 2009 Rookie – Lisa McGinnigle (Balmain Dockers). Lisa was named the 2009 Dockers rookie of the year.

I guess I discovered AFL by accident. I have always played sport, for the last 10 years my life has revolved around training for and playing Ultimate Frisbee. And it was time for a change- try something different, challenge myself, make new friends. So I decided to give AFL a go, as it is reasonably similar to Ultimate. I just looked it up on the internet and started training with my local team.

Straight away I knew I was onto a good thing with the Dockers. Everyone was friendly, helpful and encouraging. Which meant I stuck with it. Playing with a nice group of people is very important to me. I remember my first game I was very nervous and the adrenaline was pumping. I think I'm pretty fit but I remember huffing and puffing non-stop that game because I was so nervous. Probably because I've never played contact sport before and getting smashed to the ground (while wearing little purple shorts) is a whole new experience for me. Anyway, I made it through the game in one piece.

I kicked a goal in that first game, my only goal for the season so far! It was from less than 10m out, the ball kind of fell into my hands in a marking contest, and I couldn't really miss from there. Was a great feeling and the girls gave me lots of pats on the back. Now I play up the other end of the field so don't get many opportunities to kick goals. The main thing I love about the game is my team, the Dockers. It's an excellent, fun group on and off the field, they congratulate me when I do something good and give me tips on how to improve the way I play, in a positive, encouraging way. They're also a very fair team and play with a great deal of sportsmanship. I also enjoy the fitness side of the game, and last but not least I love defending and tackling, and then turning defence into attack.

Present Player 2008 Player – Jenya Kalagurgevic (St. George Dragons – last year St. George Crows).

When a friend wanted to try a new sport and suggested AFL I jumped at the idea. After playing netball for fourteen years the thought of playing a game that involved tackling, kicking and some real physical contact was exciting as well as scary! So I along with my two friends joined the then St George Crows and since then we have never looked back.

For a girl who had never taken a real interest in AFL growing up my first training session was a real eye opener let alone my first game. I remember thinking what on earth is this game? Everyone just runs after the ball and takes anyone out who gets in their way. My first game was intense. I felt like a chicken running around with its head cut off but I soon got the hang of it. When it was over I was covered in bruises and dirt but I had never had so much fun!

Kicking my first goal was such a great experience. I remember I was awarded a free kick right in front of the posts and I thought this is it. Don't stuff it up! When the ball went through the middle posts I went crazy and the team showed their support. That's what I love about playing the game: the team camaraderie. Playing with a bunch of passionate, encouraging and supportive girls only made the season more enjoyable.

Playing AFL last season has made me really appreciate the sport and see it for all its glory. I think that SWAFL will only grow and strengthen in the future as more people realise just what a great league it really is.



Grown up with the Game – Present Player -Rachael Paton (UNSW Easts)

Rachael is a 5th year player playing with Camden and UNSW Easts Stingrays

I had played junior mixed football with Jane Freeland before transferring to women’s football at Camden living in the area. I felt so many emotions before my first women’s game as it was against Balmain and man did they look scary to me especially that I was only 14 ...well 4 years later - they still do! But I was really really nervous and went to the bathroom about 10 times before the game. Half way through I was sore with my first tackle which lasted about a week and after I was just happy it was over.

Our first win was against Easts and it was by 1 point. They thought they had won but I was the only girl on our bench and the only one that realised we had won. Easts all thought I looked like an absolute idiot jumping up and down as though I was happy for them until they heard the actual score. I was pretty sad about leaving Camden it was really close to home and everyone was nice but despite that the Easts girls welcomed me with open arms and straight away it felt like a family, same with this year’s team they were all awesome girls, I love them all I love the atmosphere most of all in footy, it is a great game that everyone can be a part of. Hopefully I can see SWAFL in 10 years a lot larger with more teams and more girls wanting to be a part of it all young or old.

Present Players – Annie Rose Phillips (Bondi Shamrocks)

Annie Rose played two years with Sydney University before transferring to the Shamrocks in 2009.

I discovered AFL at Sydney Uni through my rowing partner when we were rowing competitively; she would use AFL to get away from her formal rowing sessions. She once told me that we couldn’t race because she had a game on at the same time... So I thought this must be a pretty cool sport to play, if you’re going to give up a rowing race for it! My first match was VERY scary, I had watched tones of games at the SCG with my mum so I knew the general way that it worked but that didn’t seem to help with pre-match nerves, it was a pre-match against Newtown and our coach (Lachie) told me not to worry and just go for it, I gave away a free kick for walking through a mark and I remember a girl being quite upset and obviously quite passionate. I haven’t done that since! I got such a buzz after the game and all the girls were so welcoming.

Again there is such a thrill when you win a game. I am very competitive so winning is something that means a lot to me. It isn’t everything, but it’s certainly something. There is nothing quite like wrapping shoulders with your team mates and singing the club song. My first goal was just as exciting, team mates from all over the field run done to shake hands with you. Mine was a long time coming, but you sure feel like you’ve done a really good thing for your team.

What I love about football:

- The game, the fitness and the Tackling
- Team-mates from all over the field shake your hand after you’ve scored a goal
- The girls and social side of things
- The drinks afterwards



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To win a premiership is something really special. Some might play for 10 or 15 years and still not win one. I won mine in my first year and it truly is a wonderful feeling. There was a great party afterwards and you feel like you have a special bond to the girls that were part of that team. Also to feel like you are the best in the league is so cool – especially when you go into a grand final as underdogs!

In 2009 I decided to switch to the Bondi Shamrocks. My decision was reinforced especially after hearing Marie Keating "Keats" who had kicked 97 goals in the 2008 season would join the new team. I was ready for a change of scenery and I really enjoy meeting new people. I had heard that the Irish parties hard but also train hard, and that they stick together on the field. With Keats playing I knew that they had a real chance to do well, so I thought Why Not?

The Future for SWAFL I guess is just getting more girls interested and a more competitive league. I would like to see proper sponsors and the same recognition that the boys get.

Present Players - Shelley Bates is a 4th year player currently with Western Wolves and previously played at Sydney University. Shelley was named in the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

I was introduced to SWAFL through a friend, Kim Rielly, who was playing for Sydney Uni Bombers and with whom I had been playing basketball. She mentioned one day that they were short of players and I was keen to get involved. The game was the next day but as it turned out, I had to work in the morning so I couldn't make the game time. I rocked up at half time to just watch and get a feel for SWAFL and was planning to play the following week. When I arrived they told me they didn't have enough players and were desperate. I tried explaining that I didn't have shorts etc but they produced them for me and I went on the field after halftime.

I was a tad nervous before I went on, mostly that I would get snapped in half within five minutes. I went out there and decided it was 'kill or be killed' so I tried to put on the hardest possible hits. After I got tackled a few times I realised I was being a little excessive and so I relaxed and enjoyed the rest of the game. I have no idea whether we won or lost that day and I can't really remember my first goal either, but it was definitely the start of something beautiful ;)

In 2008 I switched from Sydney Uni to Wests. I was actually going to have a year off and go back to playing basketball because the travel into Uni for training was a bit of a pain. Then I got a call from Jason King telling me he was coaching at Wests and it all fell into place. It was a little closer to home and I love Jase's passion for the game. I thought it would be a bit strange playing against the old club but it wasn't too bad. You get to know players from the other teams so it's usually like you're having a run around with your mates no matter who you're playing.

It felt pretty awesome winning the premiership in 2008. It was a shocking day and I hate playing in the rain – I don't do cold weather well at all. The morning of the Final, one part of me was just hoping the match would be cancelled but the other part wasn't, because I had basketball finals down in Melbourne the next week so I would have missed that game if the footy final was put back a week. The match was such a low scoring affair and a real grind, so it was great to get over the line (and get out of the rain). Having lost finals at basketball in previous years, I know there's nothing worse so I was pretty pumped when we won and that feeling of elation continued well into the night ...

The thing I love most about footy is that you can smash people, in a nice way, sort of... I was always getting fouled out at basketball and the idea of unlimited fouls still gets me excited ;) I'm still waiting for basketball to make that rule change. It also gets rid of some of my ADD, which is a general plus! There are heaps of funny



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moments each week... I love that Geeza (Rachel Mercer) sparks up a cigarette at half time. Heids (Heidi Wiedner) complains that the opposition ruck smashes her in the box every week. I can’t really think of anything right now.

Hopefully SWAFL continues to grow in numbers and support. Over the next 10 years, I’m sure the corporate world will be all over SWAFL like a rash and there will be teams in places like the Central Coast and Wollongong so that we get road trips too! Maybe we’ll get grandstands for all our fans too...

Present Player – Natalie Redford is a third year player with the Newtown Breakaways. She won the Best and Fairest Medal in 2007 with All-Australian Honours in 2009. She also was captain of the premiership Newtown Breakaways in 2009 as well as being named in the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

I discovered football when I was out one night at the Bank Hotel in Newtown, quite pissed and got lined up by an equally pissed Bec McKee who wouldn’t leave me alone until I agreed to play for Newtown.

The rest is history... In my first game I was pretty nervous before the game because I wasn't sure if I'd be any good. After I got a few early touches I settled into things and had a great game. Kicking my fist goal was such a great feeling. I remember getting a sweeping hand ball on one of the few leads I made into the forward line and I had to tell myself to be calm, and kick it like we'd been practicing... managed to split the middle of the sticks. What I love about football is the intensity and skill of football – it’s always challenging and keeps you thinking. I also love the fact I finally got the chance to play the game I grew up watching and loving since a kid.

The future of SWAFL in the next ten years is that I think it's only going to get stronger. We’ve got such an awesome group of girls who’ve come into the sport from a wide range of sporting backgrounds. Ultimately it’s the people who make SWAFL great, so the future will very much depend on our continued support and championing of the game.



RETIRED PLAYERS

Retired Player – Natalie Morgan is a 8th player with the Balmain Dockers and retired at the end of the 2009 season. The Best and Fairest Award at Balmain is named after her. She was named in the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

I discover SWAFL after being invited to training by a friend, two weeks before the very first game in 2000. Glebe Cyclones was the name of the team and we trained at Jubilee Oval. Tommy Rich was our first ever coach. I was nervous at my first training, didn’t have footy boots, didn’t stretch, just straight into kick to kick drill. Thought I better impress and I let rip on my first kick ever of Aussie Rules Footy. Ouch! Strain to my hamstrings straight away but I didn’t let anyone know.

My first game was rather memorable as with 20 minutes before our first game in our inaugural season we didn’t have any team jumpers. Tommy, our coach had gone to collect them so we had to organise ourselves even selecting a team and positions. I was desperate not to start on the bench but having only been to two training sessions I didn’t think I would be in the starting line-up. A senior girl started filling in positions. She started with full-back and asked who wanted to play there, no-one said anything so I said I would. And that began my AFL career and for the next two years I played at fullback. It was a great opportunity at fullback as the Glebe Cyclones were pretty ordinary and the defence had to work really hard in most games. My skills improved greatly in this period.

Our team jumper finally arrived five minutes before kick-off. I had such great expectations having grown-up in Melbourne I was expecting a traditional looking v-neck, woolen jumper. But no, we got a shiny, slinky, sky-blue basketball singlet with a collar – so disappointed!

My first goal took me three years to achieve being a fullback. I finally swapped to the other end of the field to become a full forward, although my memories are hazy I think it was a snap from the pocket and I instantly realized there was far more glory playing on the forward line.

What I love about footy?

- *I love going to the pub after training*
- *I love being physically aggressive and not having to apologise*
- *I love singing the team song*
- *I love telling the umpire they’re wrong (Ed: thanks Nat, but we don’t listen unless you’re the captain)*
- *I love receiving a perfect pass*

My break from the game (temporary retirement)

Yes I did retire. Due to my family situation I gave up footy at the end of the 2005 season I had a trophy named after me at Balmain. At the 2005 SWAFL Presentation night people said nice things about me which was totally unexpected! I got a standing ovation from everyone there.

Then I came out of retirement. Halfway through 2007 President Tracey Kick rang and said they were short of players and asked me to fill in. I hadn’t kicked a footy in 18 months but after thinking about it for a couple of days I said yes. I was so nervous leading up the game, I didn’t want to make a fool of myself. All worked out well, I kicked 3 goals and could hardly walk for a couple of days but I rocked up to training on the Tuesday and haven’t



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looked back. I often wonder if Tracey had only meant for me to fill in for that one game and now they can’t get rid of me!

Retiring second time around has been easier and harder. Easier knowing that I was making the right decision as I had been looking for reasons not to attend training and wishing the wet games would get called off. But harder given the way my last game panned out with controversy @ the final siren. The emotional rollercoaster has been quite a ride. Knowing that I will still have a role @ Balmain next year has made things smoother and I really look forward to seeing what coach Tracey Kick can do with the reins from the start of a preseason. Seeing the leaps and bounds that SWAFL has made since the inaugural year has me excited to see where things will be in 10 years time. I wish only the strongest of hands and the straightest of kicks to all who have the honour to play this wonderful game.

Where will SWAFL be in 10 years? A stronger competition with 2 divisions. More female umpires and coaches and a schoolgirls competition.

Retired Player – Kerry Taylor played for Western Wolves for 6 years (2002-07) and was part of their 2006 premiership team. In 2009 she played on the Macquarie University development team and was named in the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

I think I played between 130-150 games for Wests. The records were hazy in the early days.

NSW Player 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005

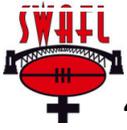
All Australian midfielder 2003 & 2004

I was introduced to AFL by a Kiwi, aka Lisa Roper (whom I met when she joined Sydney United Soccer Club). I started playing in season 2002. I didn’t even know the rules; I remember we prepared for our new sport by downloading the AFL rulebook off the AFL website.

Before my first game I remember moulding one of those packaged mouth guards before my first game, thinking that if I need a mouth guard, it can’t be that good. I finished my first game with a rather large and odd looking contusion that covered the top of my left hand. I vowed never to play again. I did go back and was eased into the sport by the great Wests coach Graham. He had a unique ability to teach the game to new players and I probably wouldn’t have gotten so much enjoyment from the sport if I wasn’t taught how to understand the game and play the game how it is intended to be played.

One of my role models for inspiration is that I played alongside Kim Harper for a number of years at Wests, she tackled me to the ground at my first training session and I wasn’t overly happy. Funny how things work out, she was the player who I spent the next 5 years keeping up with on the field and trying to emulate.

The premiership was great for Wests in 2006, we made the GF every year since 2002 and I don’t think we really came away with a performance that reflected our ability during the regular season games. Wests have been blessed with a good support structure and really great coaches Graham, Laddie, Patrick and Vetto, so I think they will continue to be strong because of the hard work that key individuals put in each year at the club.



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One of the things I enjoyed about football was that I was lucky enough to meet a number of people at Wests whom I hope I will never lose contact with, participated in a few nationals with the NSW team including the magical 2003 Nationals in Darwin. Overall go to play a really challenging game in good spirit with some great sportspeople and enjoyed every moment. Also I played midfield and I couldn't believe I was playing a sport where my coach told me to go out and follow the ball.

My funniest moment in football was when I was chosen to play in the NSW team in my first season; Lachy from Sydney Uni was the coach. I remember being pretty intimidated surrounded by a completely new team with the pressure of trying to perform well for NSW. I was rubbing liniment on my legs in the dressing room and Stephanie Foster announced "Kerry's rubbing girl repellent on her legs".

I have a wish list for what the next 10 years of SWAFL is:

- *I really hope to see all Women's teams affiliated with AFL clubs in Sydney.*
- *A competition for junior girls.*
- *A weekly highlights package on Fox Sports*
- *A NSW team consistently ranked in the top 3 in the national competition.*

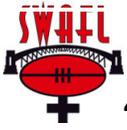
I stopped playing after 2006 to finish off my Masters at Uni. No regrets, just a feeling that I got so much out of playing asport that I was initially very reluctant to play. I got roped in by my fellow Wests teammate Belinda Harrison who was also the coach to play for Macquarie University in the hope that I would quit when they reached a full team. Unfortunately they never got to that stage so I played a whole season instead for Macquarie University! But I am definitely hanging up my boots after this season.

Retired Player- Amanda (Mandy) Jennings was a 7th year player with Newtown Breakaways. During the 2009 season, she discovered she had shin splints and retired after winning the Grand Final.

I was actually out at the Burdekin Hotel, Oxford Street (Bump-her Bar) on a Friday night and a Newtown player came over to me and told me I looked like I would be a good AFL player. So of course I gave her my number. Anyway, she contacted me when training started and away I went.

Before my first game I was pretty excited and a little nervous because I didn't quite know how I was going to go. During the game I think I was in a bit of shock really. The game was a lot more physical that I thought it would be. I remember another girl and I were running after the ball and she sent me flying face first into the ground. I picked myself up and swore to myself I would not let that happen again. After the game I felt great. It was great to be a part of such an amazing team. I was absolutely worn out though. Think I ran water for the next game because I could barely move and had strained all of the muscles in my legs.

Well my first game was a win so that was a great feeling. I am a very competitive person and absolutely hate losing. I was very blessed to have joined the best team in SWAFL at the time and didn't have to experience losing all that often. The first goal kicked (I have only kicked about five in five years so they are all very special) was actually in my first Grand Final. Think it was a bit of a fluke really. Just kicked the ball and the wind must have blown it through the goals. We ended up winning that Grand Final by less than a goal so that made me feel pretty good. Well the first year I played was my first Grand Final and we won it so I think that one was my favourite. It was also a very close game and it could have gone either way towards then end.



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The following was to a question about whether Newtown had declined or whether the other teams had raised their standards to catch up to Newtown since 2006 - *I don't think Newtown has declined but there has been a definite improvement in the playing standards of all teams. There have been a few really good coaches that have joined SWAFL in the past few years that have really developed some of the teams. There have definitely been changes in the way the game is played over the past couple of years. Everyone seems to have a much deeper knowledge of how the game is played which has come about due to not only the improvement in coaching standards but the knowledge and experience of some of the "Veterans" of SWAFL...*

Our wonderful President Jemma Still has been doing a great job and I think everything she is trying to do is going to help us immensely. I think if we keep trying to improve the standards of coaching and development, we will start to see more attractive football which in turn will attract more players. It's disappointing when you see teams join the League then one or two years later they drop out. If we can find a better way to embrace and develop those new teams so they don't turn up and get smashed 240-0 each week then SWAFL is only going to get bigger and better. Also if we can continue to try tap into the talent in the Junior AFL and keep the young girls keen to keep playing, we will definitely see an increase in teams and talented players joining SWAFL.

After an initial diagnosis of shin splints I was able to make a return for the finals as I wanted to go out in style but 2009 was definitely my last season unless I want to end up in a wheelchair before I turn 30. It was an amazing feeling to win the 2009 Grand Final, probably the most meaningful grand final of the six as it was my last ever game of AFL also. Unfortunately I have had to retire due to chronic stress fracture issues in my legs, otherwise I would happily keep playing for many years to come. 25 does seem far too young for retirement! Anyway, I think the game itself was also made even more amazing but the absolute guts and determination shown by the Breakaways. We had so many of our key players miss out on the grand final through unfortunate injuries. We also had players on the field with fractured bones and even with Tash doing her knee and still coming back on the field and kicking a goal just to get carried off again moments later in agony was inspirational. I think we also proved on the day that we are a great team and can win despite losing so many players and don't rely on individuals to win games.

The main thing I am going to miss will definitely be the people I have met and being a part of that amazing team spirit. I have made friends with players from almost every team over the years and it's great that we can go out on the field and smash each other but still enjoy a beer together after the game. One thing I will not miss is the constant physical pain... But I would have to say it has been well worth it! I think we would all love to see SWAFL become a big organization in women's sports and hopefully one day it will.

Retired Player - Emma "Clam" Hender played with the Newtown Breakaways from 2002-2006. She was All Australian in 2006 representing the Australian Defence Force team in the AFL National Women's Carnival.

I discovered Newtown when I was in Brisbane catching up with some mates before I left Brisbane to move to Sydney. It was actually a toss-up between West and Newtown. A friend from the Army was playing in the West team and told me to give her a call when I got to Sydney to talk about playing footy. At the same time I had met a couple of girls that had just split from Sydney Uni and was starting up a new team Newtown. When I arrived in Sydney I rang Wests and Newtown it just happened to be Newtown that rang me back which I was happy with as they are a great team and I made so many great friends. They are such a welcoming team they became my second family.

My first game in the SWAFL was exciting and an eye opener. I had been playing in a local comp in Brisbane when I was there and they were a very young bunch of girls. The teams and the skill level was nothing like the Sydney



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comp. Although Newtown was a new team to the comp, the girls were very skilful and worked well as a team. The coach was a player herself- Jamie Robertson and gave her all on and off the field which was a great inspiration to the team. The game was over before I knew it, it left me wanting more. I grew more and more passionate with each game.

The first win was amazing it's not just about winning its about playing well as a team and coming off the field holding your heads high knowing you played your position to the best of your ability with fairness and want. It's not about one player it's about the 18 players on the field all doing it for one another and that's what Newtown was about. I don't remember my first goal.

Winning our first premiership in 2002 was madness :-) Each premiership brought different emotions. Newtown got better with each year. As individuals we grew improving on our skills and our friendship within the team. New girls would come to the team and old girls would leave but that never changed what Newtown stood for and that was about a passion for footy. To walk off the field knowing you gave your all and having come on top was amazing/truly satisfying.

I moved away with work to Canberra, I was sad to have to leave such an amazing bunch and girls who I had grown to love who I considered my family. I decided to play in Canberra with a local team seeing as I had got so much out of playing in Sydney I wanted that same camaraderie in Canberra. I chose to play for Newtown as well as the Canberra comp the distance weren't a problem at all when you are so passionate and have such a love for the sport and the team distance is nothing. At the end of the day it's about promoting Women's AFL all over Australia.

Women's footy has come in leaps and bounds over the years I started playing in 1999 in Brisbane which was such a small league with very low skill level to then moving to Sydney where the skill and league grew as I did with each year. The girls are smarter and that is about learning about the game and being smart about the way we play not harder but smarter. Working more as a team then having a great bunch of individuals doing their own thing. I believe not only has the players improved but the coaching staff becoming involved in women's football has improved.

The future for SWAFL is only one way and that is up. If I could sum Women's football up in one word that would be Camaraderie, I have played in 3 States and about to play in Sth Aust no matter where you go across Australia the friendship you make in footy are friends for life.

Retired Player – Rebekah Lucas played for Sydney University from 2000-2006 and part of the season for St. George in 2007.

My friend Sarah Groube was working at SOCOG in preparation for the Olympic games. So it would have been before the Olympics but I cannot recall whether it was 1998 or 1999 – I think 1998. She encouraged me and a friend of mine Annie Edwards to come down to this AFL training session down at the Village Green at UNSW. We missed the first training session but attended the second and subsequent training sessions. It was run by a couple of guys who worked with Sarah at SOCOG and the girls were preparing to play against the ACT in a friendly (I think the game was in the ACT but can't really remember as I didn't go.). There was a girl organising it who I cannot recall her name, she worked at SOCOG and her boyfriend was one of the coaches.

I remember training each week trying to learn the skills of marking, kicking and bouncing. (pretty impossible for me as coming from soccer - marking was a completely foreign concept.) I recall there being around 20 people there at the training and that a game against the ACT occurred and we were thumped but the details escape me.



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I remember that most of the girls were very enthusiastic and keen AFLers. None of whom had played before. I don't really recall anyone attending these trainings who continued in the league except for Sarah Groube, Annie Edwards & myself but that is probably due to my poor memory rather than anything else.

Then the next year started the competition as it was written in the history with the short fields etc. I didn't play as I was serious about soccer at the time but I watched many matches of Sydney Uni and had a great time celebrating afterwards at the now defunct Leichardt Hotel and Caesars palace in Petersham with all of the girls in the league. I think I started playing at Sydney Uni the next year but not continuously as I would get serious about soccer for some reason and not play for a year.”

Retired Player – Victoria Rawlings is a person who has done it all – player, administrator and now SWAFL Umpire.

I discovered Aussie Rules when I was in high school (year 12 particularly), I had a really strong desire to get into footy, so I just googled it and SWAFL came up! After stalking the site for a bit I knew that Sydney University would be the team for me, especially as I wanted to study there. I signed up with a few school mates at O-Week and was training with the team shortly after- I never looked back! My best memories of football were travelling to Nationals in 2005. Even though I had a broken wrist and was stuck running water, the lazy afternoons playing Singstar and Hypotheticals were unbeatable. There are too many funny moments of football to name over the many years. When you get such an eclectic mix of girls in one area - hilarious outcomes always result.

What I enjoyed most are the friendships that were so strong both on and off the field. There is camaraderie in footy that aren't found in any other sports I've come across so far. This was particularly evident when waiting in the emergency department after various injuries, we always found ways and means to make the experience fun despite the circumstances! I retired after having my nose broken and coming back to consciousness. It was the last straw after a string of injuries and I think I knew that I would be hard pressed to find the motivation and courage to keep on going. I didn't regret retiring in the end because I knew that it was the right time for me, despite the fact I was so young!

In the next 10 years SWAFL will thrive and grow as we are already seeing with interest spreading up to the North of Sydney with Macquarie Uni, and further to the East with the Bondi Shamrocks. It's great to see our game growing and involving more and more people. With the continuing effort from the fantastic volunteers in the league the possibilities are endless.

Retired Player – Tennille Smerdon played for the UNSW Stingrays (Easts) from 2000 to 2006 as one of their inaugural players.

I started playing for Easts basically from the beginning in 2000 after moving up from Melbourne that year with my boyfriend at the time. I was still studying nursing (going into 2nd year) and transferred my degree to Sydney Uni. Whilst attending "O -Week" there I thought well I need to meet people here, I love footy although I was a netballer and thought I would go along to training at Sydney Uni. Whilst at the first session I met a girl called Siobian who was lovely and we caught the bus back to Maroubra together (where we both lived). She informed me as we passed UNSW that they also had a team...UNSW was a lot closer to home for me and my timetable at uni meant I would have to wait 6 hours from lectures finishing to training starting. Needless to say I went along to Easts training and never looked back!



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Before my first game I was so so nervous but excited too. As SWAFL was only a new thing in Sydney there was a lot of players who barely followed the game let alone had played before. After the game I was exhausted, the adrenaline was spent and I remember the first year instead of heading out drinking I would always head home for a nap...and I thought I was fit then. I remember my first goal. It was in about my fourth year playing football. I was usually a backman, but we were playing Balmain and Jo Willesee and I were going for a run down the field and I scored a goal!!! Bonazza I was so pumped I even did the chainsaw. The thing I enjoy most about football is the friendships I have made. Training was great for building up these friendships and I can honestly say that Easts introduced me to girls and guys from all walks of life who I would not have met under other circumstances.

I retired on 99 games at the end of the 2006 season. The thing I missed not playing (As I moved interstate) going from seeing the team at least three times a week (those I did not live with) to phone calls and emails is just not the same. I also missed the fitness and competition. We trained 2 times a week for a couple of hours each session not having my team mates there to challenge me made fitness difficult to continue back here.

SWAFL has come so far in the last 10 years I am so impressed by the professionalism by which it is now run. I would hope that SWAFL will continue to expand (with more teams) whilst maintaining those teams that have made it what it is from the start. I imagine the entire women's competition across Australia will become stronger and although will not draw the crowds like the men's game should certainly attract more and more attention from sponsors etc.

Retired Player – Allison Day played seven years for Sydney University between 2001-2007.

I discovered SWAFL through walking around O-Week stalls at Sydney University, one of the girls jumped out of the crowd and asked me if I'd like to play Aussie Rules. Before my first game I was nervous! Then during the game – there was a range of emotions including being proud and excited. Then after a sense of achievement mixed with a bit of disappointment I didn't get much game time. I don't remember the first win, but my first goal was from a free kick right in front of goal. It was a good feeling :)

Yes I was part of the 2007 Sydney University Gold premiership side. I had mixed feelings -happy that we'd won and proud of the girls, but disappointed that I didn't play as well as I wanted to, and felt a little detached from the excitement because of that. My funniest moment in football include Nudie runs at presentations are always good for a laugh! I never had the guts to do it myself though. The things I enjoyed most about football are the camaraderie, the close friendships. Hanging out with a bunch of great girls and having a laugh. Winning is great but I mainly played for the social side.

Retiring – I felt sad to leave the girls, but also relieved not to be playing any more. Why? I played for 7 years, and didn't really improve after the 3rd year. I'm not really a contact sport person. I just realised that I'd had enough of playing and comparing myself to the new players who would come through and end up being better than me in only 1 year! Also, winning a grand final was a good note to go out on.

I would like to see SWAFL in 10 years time having 2 divisions would be great! But just to maintain strong numbers each year and have 8 teams playing would be good. Better media coverage too, and a girls youth feeder comp would be fantastic.

Retired Player – Melinda Hyland played seven eight for Sydney University from 2000-2007. She was also President of Sydney University and served on the board of SWAFL for many years. She represented NSW in



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many national carnivals and deservedly won the Best and Fairest Medal in the League in 2006. Melinda was named in the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

Like many of Sydney University Women’s Australian Football Club’s (SUWAFC) foundation players, I signed up to be a member during the university’s 2000 Orientation Week.

Our first training session was at St John’s Oval. I remember being impressed by the coach’s training attire (a dress suit) and being a little overwhelmed about how little I knew about the game. Nevertheless, I enjoyed running around and kicking the footy and I continued to return each week. My contribution on the field during the first few seasons wasn’t anything special; our coach, Lachlan Worthy, even claimed that for years he had to “hide me in the forward pocket”. I really can’t remember how I felt before/during/after my first game as it was ten years ago! I must have enjoyed it though as it wasn’t my last! I still get a little nervous before the first game of the season or before big matches, but that probably would have been the case back then as well. I can’t remember kicking my first goal either! Having played in the back line for so long I could probably tell you how many have been kicked against me...

Our grand final appearances in 2000 and 2001 didn’t faze me much; I, along with another twenty girls, spent a fair amount of time warming the pine, and I also ended up with a broken nose after getting in the way of a team mate! It wasn’t until much later in my football career that I began to appreciate the importance of playing finals footy.

A large overturn of players and administrators meant that 2002 and 2003 were challenging years for the SUWAFC (Sydney University Women’s Australian Football Club) with 2003 Sydney Uni failed to win a single game. Personally, 2003 was a significant year in my football career. In the absence of stronger and more experienced players I (and the remaining few who had played previously) had to assume leadership roles on and off the field. Spectating was no longer an option! Under the guidance of Lachlan Worthy and Gianna Abbonizio (our captain and 2004 SWAFL Best and Fairest recipient) I began to develop a real passion for the game.

In 2004 the SUWAFC continued its rebuilding phase. Player numbers were higher, morale around the club was fantastic and Sydney Uni returned to playing finals footy. 2004 was also the year that I established another team at Macquarie University, and consequently I was able to reap the benefits of playing for two teams!

In 2006 family and work commitments meant that I had to travel from Wagga for training and games each week. Nevertheless, I continued to captain the Blue team, and to even at times coach the team in the regular absence of a non-playing coach. Although I found coaching and playing challenging, I found that the greater awareness of game intricacies required by coaches significantly improved my own football. In that year I was awarded the league’s Best and Fairest, Players’ Player and club Awards. I am equally proud of these awards and believe that how well you play the game, the way you interact with others on the field and contributing to the game away from the field are equally important.

In 2007 I returned to Sydney to play two games for Sydney Uni. After eight years I finished my football career with Sydney Uni and SWAFL with 100 Club games, 30 state representative games, and numerous pre-season and charity match appearances. I am proud to have been President and Secretary of the SUWAFC, vice captain and captain of numerous Sydney Uni teams, manager of the Macquarie University/UTS team, SWAFL Assistant Secretary (Grounds), SWAFL Junior Development Officer, NSW Representative to the Advisory Council of Women’s Football Australia, NSW State Team Manager and NSW Vice Captain.



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In 2009 I hope to continue playing football with the Riverina Lions in the ACTWAFL competition, continue coaching North Wagga Juniors and continue with my role on the ACTWAFL Executive.

I am forever indebted to those women who had the courage and vision to establish and develop SWAFL in late 1999 (Yvette Andrews, Lucy Burgmann, Meredith Gray, Karen Taylor, Vanessa Bishop, Annie Edwards, Natalie Morgan, Yvonne Loukas) and to all those men and women who have volunteered their time to further the development of the sport. In particular, thank you to all of the fabulous coaches that I have had the opportunity to play under – Lachlan Worthy, Kate Beltran, Koen Andrews, Julie Swan, Teresa Wilson, Lancelot Yu, Tommy Rich, Ray Stoddart, Graham Mumme, Shauna McKenna and Chris Hughes.

Congratulations to Gianna Abbonizio (Sydney Uni), Michaela Ekman(Wests) and Chris Matthews (Balmain) for being the only players to have played in the SWAFL competition for ten consecutive years!

What I most love about footy - that it's a team game, that it is a contact sport, the mateship and good times after the game, the range of different people you get to meet and being to run around outside.

Over the next ten years I hope that the SWAFL will follow the lead of more established leagues around Australia; to forge stronger links with the NSW/ACT AFL, to strategically develop the league into a multi-tiered competition with twice as many participants, to develop a sustainable and beneficial pathway from Youth Girls to Australian Representation.

From overseas - Melissa Laura Lewis (Sydney University Bombers)

Melissa was a 3rd year player at Sydney University and only learnt about the game when she immigrated to Australia from Canada.

I am a Canadian who came here in 1996 as a fourteen year old with my mum & sister to "start a new life". Meant to stay for 2 years but here I am still 13 years later :) I started playing in 2005 when I saw an ad on telegraph pole advertising for girls to play for Newtown. That's when I realised women could play and I asked my friend Roland Wood from the USYD men's club if USYD had a woman's team. Voila! I did skip 2007 with my knee injury but played 2005, 2006 and 2008. The knee wasn't the only injury though!

Before the first game was so nerve-wracking I wanted to vomit. During the game I felt good as I had trained well and had encouragement from Coach Mick Reilly. I also felt smaller and faster than my opponents and used that to my advantage in running back and forth to annoy them :) I did some good things that first game such as taking a mark with one hand which helped my confidence for the rest of it!

My first goal was when I was getting tackled and she pinned both my arms back so the ball was dropping and I just made a last-ditch-effort kick at the ball. It rolled through before it got touched! I remember Mick didn't know I was the one who made the goal though and so I gave him shit! Highlights of footy definitely include the social part, including with the mens club, without that it would be a different story. Playing in the finals in 2005 was definitely a hit too! And even though I didn't play that year, being there for the grand final win in 2007 was AWESOME!!!

What I love about footy is the fitness aspects and the feeling of utter emptiness as you get smashed to the ground but have to get back up and keep running. I love the feeling of friendship as well, you can go away for a whole year and come back and it's the same feeling. The funniest moments in football take place off the field...



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well, kind of... for example the girls nudie run across oval #1 in the middle of the men's club party last year... also silly things that happen like girls getting called off for talking back to the ump, or doing ridiculously stupid things like running the wrong way... actually an opponent smashed mine and Kaya Lyons heads together one year while we both dove for the ball. Her cheek came up immediately with a watermelon-sized lump and I got concussion. I knew I had to go towards the posts but I started staggering towards the opposite end posts. Kaya had to point out that the lump on her cheek came from my head and that's when Mick realised I wasn't just completely stupid, but concussed. Kaya having her eyelashes pulled out during a game was also hilarious!

I think that's all! It is a very rough sport and the public very much underestimate how dangerously the girls play, just like the boys! I've heard ribs break from the opposite end of the ground, seen people being stretchered off with spine and neck injuries, seen bones poking out of arms, and have had broken feet and knees and fingers myself. Fingers are very easy when it's cold!!! So I think it's a fantastic sport and fantastic fitness, but you have to go to training and have to warm up so well! Or else you can have your season end as quickly as it begun like Kat and I both experienced last year (broken rib, finger and foot in the first game). The social side is awesome though so don't take it too seriously!!!

In 10 years time SWAFL will be huge and there will hopefully be a club at every university and even high school. I think with the second pro Sydney team starting, AFL will grow more and more in NSW and hopefully SWAFL will follow. I remember being at a Swannies game in 2007 at ANZ and they announced the women's state team and they did a lap of the grounds, I think a lot of people said then "women play too?!?!!" and it was a great advertisement.



Umpires Perspectives

Field Umpire -John Freeland – John has been the most experienced umpire of women’s football in SWAFL.

I have umpired over 220 games in the women's league since 2003 including GF in 2004- 2009.

The rules when I first started umpiring the Women's League in 2003 were not aligned with the AFL or State League rules.... there were many deviations such as 'No Mooning' and lots of rules about bad language and abusive behaviour toward everyone on and off the paddock including the umpires.

My first game was between Balmain and Wests. The language was foul and the gestures were obscene and the game was not played in good spirit. The skill level was very low and about that of the Under10s. I worked hard on field and off field with coaches and players and it took two full seasons to see some changes to the 'SWAFL footy culture' and I continued with focus on match day discipline and on field coaching of players who didn't know the footy rules.

With the support of the then President of SWAFL, the committee in 2004 amended the SWAFL rules to align more with the AFL state rules, but there was a long way to go to completely align with AFL.. I made many approaches to AFL NSW/ ACT to have the Women's League aligned with the Men's competition as did Karen James the then President and the result was the same... It was a bloke's only sport run by a boys club. I regularly received comments such as 'No one cares about the girls competition' or 'They are all dykes and it is only a matter of time before there is a sexual legal issue with them' AFL NSW/ ACT in 2006 had no recognition of the importance of Women in the development of AFL, let alone any commitment for the support of the women who play Australian Football in NSW.

I was assistant coach of the NSW team in 2005 for the National titles in Melbourne and Umpired 18 non-NSW games during the week of competition at Windy Hill (Essendon), Punt Road (Richmond), Optus Oval (Carlton) and ended up umpiring the Grand Final between The Victorian Senior side and the Victorian Under 19s on Whitten Oval (Western Bulldogs field previously Footscray), a game that must surely go down in SWAFL history..... There was a female stalker..... and she was from a SWAFL team. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I was the umpire controlling play at the time and the streaking event occurred behind play, so I cannot verify whether or not it happened. However after confronting certain women exiting the female toilets after the game, I had a good idea who the stalker was, and that is, if it really happened. Maybe it will go down in SWAFL history as an umpire's urban myth.

I coordinated the Umpires for the Women's Nationals in Sydney in 2006, The series was played at Drummoyne Oval and Henson Oval, however Sydney was severely rained upon and all grounds in Sydney were closed, so all games were moved to Camden and all the players were bussed out and back adding an hour to each day's games. The Grand Final was played at Henson Park between Victorian Seniors and Western Australia and the Victorian team continued their dominance as Australian Champions.



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Field Umpire - John Van Den Ham started umpiring in a round-about route after getting involved as a coach and team manager of a team. He umpired his first grand final in 2008. In 2009 John was the first winner of the Golden Whistle Award which is voted by coaches, captains and umpires, the fact that he received at least one vote from everyone who voted showed how much he is highly regarded in the league.

I first started with SWAFL in 2005 as a helping hand with Camden Football Club. I was talked into it by Leah Childs who would not let up until I did and the rest is history. I spent nearly every Tuesday and Thursday nights helping at training when I did not have Army commitments. The club was in its young stages of development and throughout the following years started to develop but as we now know it was hard to get girls out at the Camden area interested in AFL. During 2005 Camden was a team of girls of all ages from young Jane Freeland who was only 15 and Rachael Paton and the what I called the Westies - Julie Watts and Jules who travelled from St Marys on nearly every training night and to all the games I ended up taking training most nights as John Freeland would run laps and sprints around the oval while waiting for Jane to finish training. The hardships training Camden faced was that all the girls who played also played Netball, hockey and other team games that did not leave them any spare time to train so we had a regular six people at training and it was hard to do any drills.

The coach was then moving on and I took over for a short time with help from John Freeland but it was the start of a long season. I ended up doing the coach’s job, the runner/water runner and Team Manager. On game day it was very difficult to do all the jobs and not having supporters like most of the other teams within SWAFL it was difficult to keep the girls all interested in training and playing. The club (Camden FC) being a new club the Senior Mens team was always wanting the girls to help the club but due to other sporting commitments, it was left to a few girls who attended most of the club functions. The Mens teams were getting all the training and club sponsors, so the girls got jumpers but little other help so it was hard to keep the girls involved with the football team and club. They would prefer to go to the local hotel before using the club premises. The girls would get only a small area on the ground for training and would need to move when the Mens team required it which made it very difficult to keep interest in training. Camden only won 2 games during the two seasons and I left to take an army posting to East Timor and during the off season Camden was unavailable to raise a team in 2007. Just before I left for East Timor, John Freeland asked me if I would like to umpire a game due to SWAFL being short of umpires and thus my umpiring career began. On returning from Timor I started to Umpire more games in SWAFL. The reason I started was I wanted to give something back to AFL as I started playing when I was six and have played until my late forties. I still enjoy umpiring in the league because it is good seeing girls involved in AFL and enjoying what they were doing.

During 2005 I became involved with the NSW State team and went to every training session and I started to help with drills and training. I was lucky to be able to help with some training facilities in Holsworthy. The squad enjoyed the facilities and were grateful to get the help and those that travelled to Melbourne on the bus enjoyed the overnight trip. During the trip we were attending the welcome function at AFL House and while we were waiting, the Victorian team was giving the team a little stick. I went back and got the bus which holds 16 people, we had about 22 people in it and as we passed the Victorian team still waiting for their transport a whole bus of NSW Girls gave the Vics a bit of their own medicine. The next day I got a phone call from my boss in Sydney, he had a report of a group of girls in a unit bus making rude gestures from the bus in a public space. I had to explain the events to him and he said “Well done, stick it up to the Vics”. In 2007 I also helped with the State team and again enjoyed every minute of it.

I enjoy helping SWAFL in any area I can as I see it getting bigger and better every year. The introductions of new teams are an example of what the League is doing is working. The only way it can grow is for ex and current



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players and supporters is to help the committee. They can also join the ranks of the well-loved Orange brigade (Ed: Irony at it’s best!) which is a great way to give back something to the game we all love.

Field Umpire Lancelot Yu – Lance started umpiring in 2009 and was the umpire’s coordinator for that year.

I’ll tell you a dark secret Being an umpire, you get paid to be in the best seat of the house every Saturday. Sure you get to make decisions that 50% of your audience will probably disagree with but that’s okay. Where else do you get to see skill, body contact and get fit each weekend short of playing yourself?

I started junior umpiring back in 1996 for the old St George Juniors Association and received my level one accreditation then before going into coaching. This year when I wasn’t assisting the Bondi Shamrocks as their runner, I did umpiring and became the umpires’ coordinator when the previous umpires’ coordinator couldn’t do it due to business commitments. Although I’ve never done rosters before, it was fascinating putting the umpiring matrix together mindful of Swans Commitments, the fact that some players were also umpires and geographical distances. It worked out well, most of the time unless an umpire pulled out and then the inevitable ringing of other umpires to juggle things would occur.

I did the second most number of games in 2009 after John Van Den Ham and the more games I did, the more confident I got in applying decisions and explaining them. Okay I made some boo-boos which make me wince but I think I got better as the season progressed. I really appreciated all the technical advice that all the other umpires and even coaches took their time out in instructing me as I would tend to get caught too close to play at times. The best thing was seeing Joanne Farrell, Jemma Still and Victoria Rawlings umpire and hopefully it’s a sign that more former players will umpire in the league when they finish their playing days. It was a pleasure to appoint Victoria to the 2009 SWAFL Grand Final on merit and she fully deserved her opportunity.

What I enjoy about SWAFL is that most of the play is clean, fair and legal. Sure they may be the occasional late hit or square-up but I think as umpires we pay the appropriate penalty. I enjoy watching skillful teams deliver the ball quickly from the back line to the forward line in a matter of seconds. As SWAFL is a league that doesn’t differentiate on skill, you can have some games that have skills that are not evident to games where it is sublime.

Female Field Umpires Victoria Rawlings started umpiring after retiring as a player in 2008. She was the joint winner of the Best Umpiring Award in 2008 and umpired her first grand final in 2009.

I became an umpire after retiring because I just loved the sport and wanted to be involved. I had a good understanding of the rules (some players may disagree!) and wanted to stay in touch with footy. On the change from playing to umpiring, it’s hard sometimes having to give frees against your previous teammates but in the end I think most of the players appreciate that umpiring is a tough job and that you’re just doing your best. The responses from the player/coach/fan vary, and obviously how much they know of the rules. Often the people who are disagreeing with a decision the most are about 100m away from the action, or don’t really understand what the decision means. Part of the history of AFL though is abusing umpires, so it’s understandable that people like to have a go sometimes- I know I do! Finally players should appreciate that umpires also love the game and go with our gut instinct, and that we want all of the players to play to their best ability.



Coaches Perspectives

The Coaches – Lachlan Worthy coached Sydney University from its inaugural season until 2004, and then coached Sydney University Gold in 2007. He was Sydney University’s Premiership Coach in 2001 and 2007. Finally he coached NSW from 2000-2002. Lachlan was named Coach of the SWAFL Team of the Decade.

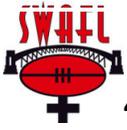
“I moved to Sydney from Melbourne in mid 1999 and a work colleague, Meredith Gray mentioned that she and a few others were interested in learning some footy skills and were getting together at the Village Green at UNSW for a run around once a week. Another work mate Ray Stoddart, who originally played AFL in Campbelltown in the early 90's also came down and between us we would run a basic skills session. I had played local footy in Melbourne but had been out of the game for 5 years and was missing just having a kick with my mates.

I had never coached any sort of team before so I just kept thinking back to my junior footy coaches and what they taught me. Every Saturday morning I would get out to the ground early and just hope and pray that enough players would turn up. Without fail every week we had enough to field a team. The skill level was varied in the early years. Some players brought skills from other sports like rugby, soccer and hockey which helped with their fitness while others were just really enthusiastic about getting out there and having a go. Each week two of the four teams had to set up the PVC goalposts as well as putting out the little witches hats marking the boundary lines. There were some pretty interesting shapes created around the wings and pockets. It meant before the game there were players scattered all over the oval setting up cones, chasing wayward footies, on the phone to lost players, and generally milling about. It was pretty chaotic. I always tried to get every player on the ground for at least half a game. It was pretty tricky in 2001 when we had a bench of up to 10 players. In 2000 the matches reminded me of the little league games at half time of the AFL. You would have two or three players wandering around each of the goal squares and the remaining 18 or so just chasing the ball around in a great big pack. The skills weren't great but there was a whole lot of passion and enthusiasm out there.

The 2000 Nationals in Canberra were a real eye opener for the SWAFL playing group. Only a handful of players had ever played on a full size field and our first game was against Victoria. We were flogged twice by them and beat the NT twice and won one and lost one game against the ACT. We played the Vics in the Grand Final but only after a scorecard mix up almost cost us our spot. The skills definitely improved in SWAFL in the second half of the season.

The double extra time 2000 Grand Final was a heart stopper. Wests were unbeaten all year. When we kicked the first couple of goals I thought we could actually knock them off. I remember Graham and I and various SWAFL committee members and Craig Davis all making decisions on the run when it was a draw at the end of full time and then after extra time. In the end I wasn't disappointed and I don't think the team was heartbroken (nothing a few beers couldn't fix up afterwards). Wests were the dominant team that year and thoroughly deserved the win but we really gave them a run. It was a great finish to the first season of SWAFL.

The only experience I had coaching males was taking a couple of training nights of the Under 10's or Under 11's a long long time ago. The only real difference I have observed coaching men and women is that there aren't as many smart arses who think they know better in the SWAFL. There was never any answering back. I found that nearly every player who has ever turned up to a training session or a match has really wanted to be there and take in what I or other coaches had to say. In the early days I found it had to be critical of the players because I didn't know if they would take it personally and never come back. As the years went by and I got to know the



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players better and what they were capable of I was more confident in letting players know my feelings when they've done the wrong thing.

I got a great deal of satisfaction out of watching players grow in skills and confidence throughout the year and come back the next year to become leaders at their clubs. Players who came to training in the preseason having never kicked a footy before end the year as a key part of the team. I saw this time and time again and it is what kept bringing back year after year. I got a real buzz out of watching and listening to the players embrace with such enthusiasm all the aspects and traditions of footy that I love. I also really enjoyed watching players with a whole lot more ability than I ever had take on board my messages and go out and do amazing things on the footy field.

Players like Alena "Junior" Summers, Stephanie Foster, Tarsha Gale, Alison Dingwall, Kyrsten Winkley and Talei Owen were just fantastic to watch when they were on their game. Apart from Sydney Uni I also got a lot of satisfaction out of taking NSW to the Grand Final of the Nationals in Sydney in 2002. We had a very strong team and beat the likes of SA, NT, ACT and the Def. Force in the round robin tournament. In each and every game, the team played strong hard disciplined footy and really seemed to enjoy themselves out on the ground. Again we were comprehensively beaten by the Vics in the Grand Final but we did give them a run for their money at times during the match.

In 2001 we had a very dominant team. We had a very strong core group of players from full back to full forward. We also had a large bench which was both a blessing and a curse because as much as I would have liked to I couldn't give players as much game time as I thought they deserved. I think we only lost one game for the year.

The 2002 formation of the Breakaways was the best thing that could have happened for Sydney Uni as well as the greater SWAFL. It meant players who stood in the shadows had to stand up and become leaders within the club. Players like Mel Hyland and Gianna would never reach their full potential had Newtown not started.

After a couple of years off I was ready to have another go at coaching full time. The 2007 Sydney Uni Gold team contained a great mix of experienced players and first year rookies. The SWAFL competition had improved markedly between 2001 and 2007. I didn't think there was much between Wests, Newtown, Balmain and us. On the ladder we were behind Newtown throughout the year and were comprehensively beaten by them in the last round of the season and again in the semi final. That second loss really hit the team hard and I thought we might not even make it to the big one. I was really proud of how everyone stood up and played strong hard team footy in both the Prelim Final and the Grand Final. The senior players showed great leadership while the really strong group of first year players went in like there was no tomorrow. Personally, as the season went on, it got harder and harder to balance work, family and footy. Without the support from Sydney Uni Blue girls and in particular Jason King and Pete King, I have no doubt Sydney Uni Gold would not have gone all the way.

Every premiership is special but I think I enjoyed 2007 more because the road to it was a lot harder and a lot longer and I learnt a lot more about myself, the players and how to work as a team.

In 10 years time I'd like to see 12 solid teams in SWAFL split into two divisions with 1 or 2 teams relegated and promoted each year. I'd like to see a team on the North Shore and one out west - Parramatta or Blacktown-way especially with the inclusion of the new West Sydney AFL team in a few years time.



The Coaches – Jamie Robertson is SWAFL's most successful coach with four premierships (2002-05) all at the Newtown Breakaways and was fairly fundamental to their foundation. After a couple of years away from the game, she returned to coach Newtown in 2009 for the club's fifth premiership.

After playing AFL with the Sydney Uni team for 2 years in 2000 & 2001, and falling in love with the sport [and the occasional footie player!] – it seemed like a good idea to expand the league and add another team. Whilst I loved being part of the Sydney Uni team, it had grown to such an extent, we often had 10 players starting on the bench, and it just seemed logical to begin another. Another Sydney Uni team mate – Trinette Bagnall and I started discussing the possibilities of setting up a new team.

With the encouragement and sponsorship offer from my best mate, Donna Asensio, publican of Kuletos Cocktail Bar, Newtown, the next step was to see who was willing to make the move with me. Especially after winning the 2001 Grand Final playing for Sydney Uni, it was a big ask to get players to leave and commit to a new team.

I organised for a handful of girls – those I drank with – to meet at Kuletos to seek their backing. Stephanie Foster, Tarsha Gale, Sarah Groube, Nikki Richards & Rebecca Burridge, were keen, providing we got the okay from the Sydney Uni captain – Meredith Grey, and coach – Lachie who whilst being surprised, were very sporting about it.

The rest is a little bit of women's AFL history!

The first year

We knew that starting a new side would involve hard work but would also be rewarding if achieved successfully. Finding a training oval proved to be the most difficult task, with dozens of phone calls being made (and hardly ever returned) for some 6 months prior to the beginning of the season. Councils still didn't get it when it came to equality for women in sports (though I think it may have changed now). Only thanks to the efforts of Yvonne (Balmain) and Yvette (West), we managed to get by. I think we trained at 5 different venues throughout the year – two of which were patches of public parks. We also had a couple of coaches that year – Jack, my trainer at the local gym, and Shauna McKenna – who had a great understanding of the game.

Probably the most important component was the recruitment. The results were interesting – with word of mouth, and friends of friends being the best method of recruiting. We encouraged a lot of people who played other sports to come down and have a run – even if it was just for one game. Most of our players had great skills drawn from other sports: league, union, soccer and even softball – but still had to work on all aspects of playing AFL. We were also proud to have 9 players represent either NSW or the Defence Forces at the Nationals. For most of the year, the enthusiasm and team spirit was incredible. Our off field support from Lyn Passant (medic and orange girl), Dimonte (manager), and Donna (flag lady) also contributed to on field successes. Our expectations were exceeded when we won the grand final (interestingly we only had 3 of the previous year's Sydney Uni players for that game, and with 14 of the other 16 players, newcomers to the SWAFL competition).

Newtown Breakaways 2003 Season

2003 was the second year for the Newtown Breakaways as a club and team. 2003 seemed to be extremely similar to 2002 – we attracted players who were eager to learn and participate both on and off the field as a team. A couple of games in, and it was hard to tell the newbies from the oldies.



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With the 2nd game being against Wests, who looked even stronger than last year, I think we were all surprised at the win of 55 to 21, especially after just beating Balmain in the first round the previous week by 43 to 31. I think the tone had been set by that game, and we went on to win with margins as high as 164 to 0. Against Balmain and Wests, it was never a sure thing, and a credit to all players for never being cocky about these games. The winning margins with those teams were often only by 5, 6, 11 or 12! Whilst the games against both uni teams – Sydney Uni and Easts / UNSW never seemed like pushovers on the field, the scores were quite remarkable.

We broke another record for our new club, and we became the undefeated minor premiers for 2003, which was an improvement from 2002. The stats now stood at something like 30 wins out of 33 games. The semis like the previous year, we encountered a loss, and also like the previous year, made us more determined to rectify this for the following 2 games. The prelims against Easts/ UNSW was a good fun game (despite the injuries), where we got to show our best – handballing, backing up, accurate kicking and mark taking etc.

The grand final day again started with what now had become our traditional breakfast at 'Fawltly Towers' cafe. The game started out tight as – and never really changed throughout its entirety. If you had compared Wests and us in the grand final, it was clear to see that we were definitely matched on the day for skill, speed, preparation, team work etc. Wests definitely wanted it as much as we did, so again a big credit to the determination of the team to make it theirs.

Again, we would not have achieved the success we did, without the enormous off-field support. People like our Manager – Disie, Medic – Linnie, Sponsor – Donna, our numerous Runners and Water girls, Flag Hag – Lance, Captains & vice captains – Tarsha Gale, Nicki Richards and especially Clam Hender for her fitness sessions at training.

Newtown Breakaways 2004

2004 saw the Newtown Breakaways enter its 3rd year in the SWAFL competition. After having 2 very successful years, we knew that going for a third premiership would be the most difficult – especially as all existing teams showed major improvements.

The start to the year was good in that we a) had a set training field and b) retained a number of players from the previous year to have a great continuity.

We were also very fortunate to have an extra sponsor – Harry from the Alexandria Hotel approach us after noticing how much alcohol we consumed after games and training at a nearby hotel – and suggested we propose to him as a sponsor. I think he definitely got a good return on his investment! Again, we were also lucky to have the continued support of Donna from Kuletos – who also did flags for half of our games.

For the first time, we organised a preseason game in Canberra against a Wagga Wagga team – which was fortunate in that one of their players was soon moving to Sydney and helped with numbers for us.

For 2004, the level of footie was great and Newtown had a blast playing in the expanded competition and getting to meet new players. We did really well, losing one game all year – against a very impressive Sydney Uni side. After being involved with 5 consecutive grand finals, this one was as exciting as the first when Wests and Sydney Uni went into extra time, then extra time again. In this grand final – Wests were leading at the first quarter mark – and then right up until the last 20 minutes or so of the game – we were neck and neck. The end



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result ended up in our favour – which meant 3 in a row. Another incredible achievement that year was Steph and Emma Hender were named as part of the Australian team at the Nationals, and Steph Foster was also awarded Player of the Nationals Tournament – which was quite remarkable!

Newtown Breakaways 2005

2005 saw the Newtown Breakaways enter its 4th year in the SWAFL competition and win their 4th consecutive premiership. Retaining 13 players from the previous year and recruiting 14 more, we were lucky to again, attract players with great team spirit and the determination to go all out when the chips are down. 2005 was also the first time, the Breakaways won a premiership without experiencing a loss throughout the season, – an achievement, as there were a couple of very close calls.

Aspects of SWAFL were the best I'd experienced since my involvement. Mel Hyland organised an 8 team draw, Lucy Burgmann organised quality umpires (and often 2) for every game, and especially Karen James, who's energy, passion and professionalism for women's AFL in Sydney was an inspiration and was pivotal in guiding SWAFL in a positive direction.

Newtown Breakaways 2006

This was to be my final year coaching the Breakaways. Besides devoting double the time towards footie, than to my business, it seemed like a good idea to have a break from something that had become "front and centre" 24/7. It seems now that I didn't keep a record of this year – maybe deliberately :-). My memories of it include doubting for the first time that we might not pull this one out of the bag. It was in fact, the first time I did not buy champagne on the grand final morning, optimistically thinking I would be spraying it over the girls at the conclusion of the game.

This Grand Final day was as wet as they come – with puddles of water that were in places – boot deep. Karen James put it to both us coaches if we wanted to play in these conditions – and as everyone was psyched to play, we let the game begin. The game was actually quite close, probably because the ball didn't travel far when kicked, handballed or batted and the game resembled rugby rather than AFL.

As it was my last year coaching, it would have been icing on the cake to have won, but Wests played the better game and deserved the win. Coached that year by Yvette Andrews, Wests simply outplayed us and had an excellent tactic in using Michaela Ekman – their captain – to combine with another player to keep one of our best players from much ball possession. Anytime the ball was in our forward 50, Micky adeptly coveted the ball, and then ran it through the goals as a behind. The final score was Wests 5-4-34 to Newtown 1-15-21. 1 goal and 15 behinds! Anyway - Breakaways put in a good effort, and runners up is still a great achievement. "

Over the 6 years I coached, we played 78 games, won 65, drew 3 and lost 10 (5 of them being lost in 2006).

As Nicki Richards would tell us in our group huddle, "Broken bones will mend, but memories will last forever!" I'm still in awe of the guts and determination the players had in the team. On the field, the girls played selflessly, putting their bodies continually on the line and playing for each other. I was surprised by how many girls were prepared to strap up an injury, (or not fully disclose the injury) just so they could take the field with the rest of the team. I was humbled by this level of commitment and felt privileged to be able to be part of something that was extraordinary. The on field team spirit contributed to our off field camaraderie and the team played just as hard off the field as they did on!



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Postscript

At the time of beginning to write this (December 2008), I was adamant that I would never be involved with women's footie again – due to time constraints, but again, after a few drinks with some of those very first girls who were part of the initial setting up of the Breakaways – Rebecca Burrridge, Sarah Groube and Tarsha Gale, now find myself geared up for another year of coaching the best sport there is. Go Breakaways in 2009!

The Coaches - Lancelot Yu coached Sydney University Blue in 2006, St George in 2008 and trainer/assistant coach at the Bondi Shamrocks in 2009.

I found SWAFL by accident using Yahoo! as a search engine about Aussie Rules (proves how old I am, Google hadn't even arrived yet!!!) and found the old SWAFL website. So I invited myself down to a match in 2003 which happened to be Newtown and did goal umpiring for them and Sydney University that year. I had zero coaching experience when I jokingly offered my services to Sydney University in 2006. With alacrity my offer was accepted. I was in charge of the Sydney University Blues Team and I have to say in hindsight I was a pretty awful coach and went the wrong way about it. I learnt a lot on how not to coach.

Two years later, I was back coaching St George. With lots of rookies just like the Sydney Uni Blues it was a tough but enjoyable challenge forming a team and building up their base skills. I think I was very blessed with the natural sporting abilities of the players. Whilst the results haven't gone the way I wanted in some of the games, there was much promise and optimism at St George.

Then in 2009 it was time to join a new club and I learn a lot under Coach Lisa (Kiwi) Roper at the Bondi Shamrocks. The Irish Girls have been fantastic so far, not just on the field but more importantly off the field in terms of organizing social events. I am so in awe of the Irish girls having to play both Aussie Rules and then backing up Gaelic Football and Camogie (Hurling) on the Sunday. The season exceeded initial expectations reaching the finals but too many injuries at the wrong time depleted our playing list in order to field a fully fit team at the Minor Semi-Final.

From a supporters perspective during my time at SWAFL I have noticed the following things

- A) The game has become faster because the girls are more skilful. Back in 2003 the game was more static and very much a kick-2-kick contest whereas in 2008 Wests and Balmain were innovating to almost a Gaelic Football situation with continuous play and retaining possession. The players across the board are a lot fitter than in previous years.*
- B) The standards of the grounds used are becoming a lot better across the board. For someone used to Alexandrina Park with its 3 kicks from goal square to goal square are becoming things of the past. Mahoney Park and Pioneer Park is indeed sporting heaven.*
- C) The blowouts are less frequent and I think the competitiveness of the matches on a week-by-week basis has improved across the board. In previously years the highest scoring teams were averaging 100 points a game over 12 rounds. In the 2009 season, the highest scoring team was averaging 78 points a game over 12 rounds.*

Since I haven't coached men's football I really can't comment on the differences but if I did, I probably have to explain concepts a bit more instead of using assumed knowledge of the game. Male players are more likely to shrug off criticism easily as part of the heat of the moment whereas women may internalize criticism a bit more.



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So what do I love about women’s footy? I guess as a coach is just that how amazing it is that everything that you do shapes who they are as players. With usually no preconceived notions of playing football usually, it’s fun to go back to the basics and explain what on earth is a handball/a shepherd or a block. It’s like molding putty in your hands. You just want to make sure you do the right thing every time. The most memorable moment for me was the Rd 15 match against Easts in 2008. With both teams on one win each, it was a winner takes all moment for both clubs. I was probably relieved winning after going through three matches where St George had victory denied after leading at three-quarter time. The team was actually playing like a team and executed most of the skills very well. I’ll continue to show an interest in their progress in 2009.

The funniest moments in footy are many but the fact that in 2006 I knocked out the current SWAFL President Jemma Still at football training - practicing tackling was hilarious!! I’m sure the Ferrero Rocher chocolates made up for it. Sorry Jemma! In conclusion, coaching is a hard but enjoyable caper and I appreciate coaches in all sports. Never again will I knock coaches in any sport.

SWAFL ten years from now I hope will be something like what the Victorian Women’s Football League or the ACT Women’s Football League currently is at with a junior youth girls competition to set up pathways for females from Auskick to SWAFL and may the best of those compete on a national stage biannually for NSW. In a utopian state, sufficient numbers of girls would be able to graduate from the youth girls competition to play in senior grades so that some clubs would not be recruiting all summer as present to determine whether they have sufficient numbers to viably field a team. The committee of the last decade has gone a long way from organizing the game from its humble roots to where we are today and all those who served have to be congratulated. I would like to see in the next 10 years clubs in outer Sydney setup to tap in the youth of tomorrow.

The Coaches - Darren Morrow was a third season coach with the Balmain Dockers starting in 2007.

I moved from Melbourne to Sydney in 2007 to take a position with a coaching company that worked in the schools throughout Sydney. Not knowing many people here apart from my sister Simone I didn’t really have a lot on when it came to the weekend. Simone had played softball against Natasha (Tash) Devlin at several state carnivals so she went out to train with the Dockers for a bit of fun. As it turned out they were looking for a coach. Coming from Melbourne I had grown up with AFL and played most of my life before injuries ended my playing days. I went to watch the annual Michelle Daley game to make sure I wasn’t taking on a job that I wouldn’t enjoy. After the game I spoke to Tracey and we have had a lot of fun and some success over the following two years.

From the past two seasons that I have been at the club there has been a few ups and downs. When I first started I just assumed that it would be straight forward, as if I was coaching one of the teams that I played for. I soon found out that I was starting from scratch with a few new girls to the game and then at the other end of the spectrum some girls had a great understanding. I think that has been the most difficult thing. There has been a lot of rewarding things throughout as well, the most rewarding being the standard and style of play that the girls showed in 2008. Rather than just moving the ball forward they are using each other and looking for targets, the flow on play and fluency of ball movement has been second to none in my opinion. When the Dockers played Newtown under lights the Docker men came out to watch and I overheard someone say “ Why can’t we play like that?“. I told the girls after the game and I think we all took something home that night.

There have been lots of funny moments during the course of the season, most of which are verbal but if something happens on the field that everyone laughs at I could almost guarantee that Peta Hemphill or Kylie Maxwell would be the reason. Pete has the smallest hands in the league but has a great footy brain. She knows



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what she wants her hands to do but they just don’t seem to get it done sometimes. She also has an uncanny knack of falling over for no apparent reason.

I think the main reason for Balmain’s success in 2008 was largely to do with the playing group working together. In 2007 we had the same group mainly but the voice and desperation certainly lifted in 2008. The girls started to feed off each other’s achievements. If Bee (Belinda Pride) kicked a goal it wouldn’t just be her to get a pat on the back but the girls in the midfield and on the flanks would also get one.

The Grand final loss was hard to swallow especially after having double the scoring shots as Wests. I personally went into the game nervous as hell but the girls seemed to take it in their stride. The conditions were appalling but I think that is one of the factors that made the game so memorable. When the game was over we grouped up in the change rooms and I could only praise the girls, they gave all they had and just came up short. If it had have been dry who knows but Wests thoroughly deserved the premiership as they were the best team all year as shown every week on the top of the ladder.

Coaching a Women’s side is hard for a male to do in the fact that we can’t get out there and show what we want to happen, much like coaching an under-age team. I feel that I am forever asking the girls for more even though I know they are giving it their all. There are a lot of frustrations on the side line for any coach and that soon turns into mood swings that no one can predict. In terms of appreciation of coaches go, all a coach wants from their team is enough respect to listen and try to achieve to the best of their ability.

SWAFL seems to be getting stronger and more organized each year that I have been involved. The committee works tirelessly and unrecognized all year to make sure that the games go ahead. I think soon the NSW/ACT state team will see more success as a direct result of the hard work being done at club level.



Administrator Perspectives

The Club President - Lou Graham is the current President of Sydney University Women's Australian Football Club (SUWAFC) since 2007.

I originally was a Student Representative of SUWAFC at what was then Sydney University Sport meetings and think I was Secretary one year, and was thrown into Team Manager for EUGs at the last minute one year also. When it came time for our outgoing President to stand down she approached me (I think because she knew I was the only person who may possibly say yes to the role) and I suppose I reluctantly accepted. In addition to this, I have been SUWAFC Team Manager which anyone can tell you is not always easy when you are trying to prepare yourself on game day whilst attempting to organise others. I was also a member of the SWAFL committee for a few years however have taken a step back this year to focus on SUWAFC and other commitments. I've seen a lot of people come and go over the years I have been involved in the sport and have seen positive developments at both club and league level.

What I enjoy most about being Club President?

I'd like to say things going right - but most of the time it is a bumpy ride cause regardless as to how many things you plan, and how best prepared you are there are never any certainties. I think for me it is seeing the number of people who get involved, knowing why they are playing, seeing friendships and relationships grow in addition to the skill base and love of the game.

What I don't like about being Club President?

Politics. Inevitably, you are never going to please everyone especially when you need to liaise with other relevant parties - whether it be the club, the uni, the mens club, the league... We have had ups and downs over the years, but we've survived and we continue to learn and grow as individual's and as a club.

What's the workload of Club President?

It really does fluctuate. When I first started in the President's role it was like having a second full time job. Since then, we have been constantly working as a club to have an increasingly effective committee where everyone has defined roles as oppose to one person trying to take the majority of the load. We also have employed an Administrator together with SUANFC (our Men's Club) and Sydney University Sport and Fitness (SUSF). This has also made significant difference on many levels to both my workload and the other committee member workloads.

What is one thing the players don't realize about how much work the administrators / committee do?

Just how much can be involved and why certain decisions are made. Obviously as a club you make certain decisions on various issues however sometimes there are other factors that can't be ignored, and certain procedures/expectations that may be in place. We need to work with all stakeholders involved (in our case stakeholders can include our own club i.e. players/committee/coaches/volunteers, SUANFC, SUSF, sponsors etc) and some people do not understand the importance of sometimes having to compromise or pick and choose your battles.



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

Where do you think SWAFL will be in 10 yrs time in terms of administration.

The more experience individual clubs and the league becomes, and the more everyone grows, the more efficient SWAFL will be. In terms of administration, communication and set (and known) procedures can be the most important key to success. I am uncertain if each club has a Strategic Plan, but if clubs can develop a Plan and work towards achieving the goals outlined in the document, both the individual clubs and the league itself will benefit and develop. It may assist in ensuring that SWAFL remains in existence and be a more prominent force in future years. When you consider what it was like ten years ago, well, let's say we've all grown tremendously. Even in the past five years I have been involved with SWAFL I have seen many changes for the better. Without being clichéd, only time will tell.

You were president when Sydney Uni Gold won the premiership in 2007, what does that mean to you?

From a President's perspective it was awesome. We had never made it to the Grand Final whilst I had been with SUWAFC and given that from a committee side of things we were still trying to develop set roles and responsibilities, it was a huge relief that this was the outcome at season's end. Obviously given we had two teams there was a degree of criticism and conflict about the best way to manage two teams, but I was glad that at the end of the day, both teams were able to support and encourage each other regardless as to where either team was placed on the ladder.

I was not out there playing that day (I was instead water running/taking photos), but rightly or wrongly I felt that in a way I had contributed to the success the 19 or so girls had on that day. To see the joy, to see the focus and see all the hard work of everyone involved pay dividends was great. I only wish I had played in the match myself. At the time I did not think too much about my involvement in the team's on field success until we'd returned to our sponsor pub (The Forest Lodge Hotel), and I had people thanking me. It was good to know that they could acknowledge without a committee to organise things off field, they would not have been able to take to the field that season.

The Club Secretary - Victoria Rawlings was the secretary of Sydney University for many years.

I started in administration when I was in my fourth year of uni doing a sports degree and really wanted something in the field- the fact that it was part time was also perfect. Additionally something that could be combined with footy was ideal and I jumped at the chance to be involved. What many people don't realize in running a club is the absolute number of issues that there are to negotiate just to get a team on the field every week!

I think sports administration is always difficult because of the sheer level of need of a club. There are no set hours because you need to be on the job all the time, whenever something comes up, even if it's ten at night! It was great to work with such a fantastic committee at Sydney Uni though; the volunteers do a great job throughout SWAFL. I was an administrator at the time of the 2007 Sydney University Premiership and had stopped playing, but it was fantastic to see all of my old team mates enjoying something they had wanted for so long, especially the girls who had been playing for so many years.



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

The Team Manager - Tanya Searle was the 2008 Manager of the UNSW Stingrays.

My name's Teej or more accurately, Tanya Searle. In 2008 I was the Team Manager for Eastern Suburbs/UNSW Stingrays.

I am a passionate AFL supporter. Yes, supporter not player. I love the game; I understand the fundamentals of kicking, handballing, shepherding and marking. I have a limited grasp on the rules of the game. But the intricacies are beyond me. I have nothing but the utmost respect for AFL players particularly SWAFL players. The opportunity is there for me to play but at the end of the day, I just don't have the guts of a SWAFLer. I yell instead of marking, I cheer instead of kicking, and I jump around like a mad, crazy woman when my team does something brilliant (or something really stupid).

My family is from a town on the far south coast of NSW, Pambula. My brother Brad was the first Searle to migrate to Sydney. He joined his Uni's AFL team, the Eastern Suburbs/UNSW Bulldogs in 2003. He played with the team in various grades for several years before his work stole him away to Brisbane. My sister and I both eventually moved up to Sydney as well and in 2006 the second Searle, Mel, joined the Easts/UNSW club. Mel was a player for the Stingrays for two years and she was my inspiration for getting involved in 2008.

Except that I'm not brave or tough or strong, in fact until recently I smoked fairly heavily and had for 10 years and couldn't jog for a continuous 100m without keeling over. So I decided to involve myself with the Stingrays off the field instead. When it was first suggested that I take on the role of Team Manager I was skeptical. I wasn't sure what the role would include and I was really worried that it would alienate me from the team rather than including me as one of them. What I quickly discovered was that being part of a team is up to you. You can be as big or as little a piece of the puzzle as you choose. And given my obsessive-compulsive tendencies; filling in forms, writing rosters and carrying a clipboard was the perfect position for me.

There were moments in 2008 that I would change if I had them over (most certainly the 50 m penalty I gave away against Sydney University because I have no mute button) but for the most part I wouldn't trade the experience for anything. I have made the BEST BEST BEST friendships and shared some pretty hilarious nights out. I loved the after games drinks at the Donny (The Doncaster Hotel) and various local pubs for away games, the training sessions where I stood around trying not to look surplus to requirements, and most of all the camaraderie of being part of a team. There were times when I wanted to tear my hair out, kick myself or even throw it all in. The thing with being a team manager is that you stand on the fringes of a group of amazing, committed, wonderful people and are unfortunately the person who has to remind them to pay registration, fix up for the uniform, sign the game sheet, bring the oranges or serve in the canteen. I was lucky, the Stingrays never seemed to blame me for being the kill-joy, and they often pulled me into the circle. Although I've hung up my clipboard for 2009 I am not bowing out completely. You will still see me at games cheering and dancing and have offered to help out as a canteen wench or whatever.

As to the future of SWAFL? I have discovered what everyone involved in SWAFL should be so proud of and grateful for. There is an incredibly dedicated and enthusiastic group of people pushing for the development and advancement of Women's AFL in Sydney, the SWAFL committee. With people like them behind the code it's bound to only get better. We've already seen two new teams (Ed: Hopefully) join the ranks in 2009 and I would expect that over the next ten years we'll see even more teams join and maybe (hopefully) even a young women's (12-18yo) competition get going. Next time you have a drink to toast your team, your victory or your courage, think about raising a toast to the SWAFL committee too!



Presidents of the League

Victoria Free	1999 -2000
Helen Swan	2001
Lucy Burgmann	2002 -2004
Karen James	2005 -2007
Jemma Still	2008 to 2009

All other committee members in a position are listed on the SWAFL Website.

Click on the "SWAFL Past History" for all other positions listed.

SWAFL Teams of Participation:

2000 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Campbelltown.

2001 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, UTS.

2002 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, UTS.

2003 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown.

2004 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, Macquarie Uni/UTS.

2005 – Sydney Uni Gold, Sydney Uni Blue, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, Camden.

2006 - Sydney Uni Gold, Sydney Uni Blue, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, Camden.

2007 – Sydney Uni Gold, Sydney Uni Blue, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, St George.

2008 – Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, St George.

2009 - Sydney Uni, Wests, Easts, Balmain, Newtown, St George, Bondi, Macquarie University (development status)



League Ladders (where records have been kept)

2009 Ladder – Home and Away

Team	Wins	Draw	Losses	For	Against	Percentage	Points
Newtown	10	2	0	938	322	291.30%	44
Wests	9	1	2	784	320	245.00%	38
Balmain	7	1	4	614	359	171.03%	30
Bondi	6	0	6	569	515	110.49%	24
Sydney Uni	5	0	7	523	483	108.28%	20
St George	3	0	8	319	779	40.95%	12
UNSW/ES	0	0	12	108	1077	10.03%	0

2008 Ladder – Home and Away

Team	Wins	Losses	For	Against	Percentage	Points
Wests	14	1	1164	317	367.8	56
Balmain	12	3	1125	269	418.6	48
Newtown	10	5	898	590	152.2	40
Sydney Uni	6	9	520	669	77.7	24
St George	2	13	323	959	33.7	8
UNSW/ES	1	14	154	1331	11.6	4

2007 Ladder – Home and Away

Pos	Team	Played	Win	Lost	For	Against	%	Pts
1	Newtown	12	11	1	1236	401	308.2	44
2	Sydney Uni Gold	12	9	3	1001	419	238.9	36
3	Balmain	12	8	4	775	483	160.5	32
4	Wests	12	7	5	734	551	133.2	28
5	Sydney Uni Blue	12	5	7	640	620	103.2	20
6	St George	12	2	10	201	1087	18.5	8
7	UNSW / Easts	12	0	12	228	1254	18.2	0



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

2006 Ladder - Home and Away

Position	Team	Played	Won	Draw	Lost	For	Against	%	Pts
1	Wests	12	11	0	1	1101	293	375.8	44
2	Newtown	12	9	0	3	947	390	242.8	36
3	Syd Uni Gold	12	7	0	5	823	416	197.8	28
4	UNSW - East	12	6	1	5	593	457	129.8	26
5	Balmain	12	6	0	6	760	510	149	24
6	Camden	12	2	1	9	320	816	39.2	10
7	Syd Uni Blue	12	0	0	12	19	1681	1.1	0

2005 Ladder – Home and Away

Position	Team	Played	Won	Drawn	Lost	For	Against	%	Pts
1	Newtown	14	14	0	0	1181	253	466.8	56
2	Wests	14	12	0	2	869	339	256.3	48
3	UNSW - East	14	8	0	6	878	699	125.6	32
4	Syd Uni Gold	14	8	0	6	813	657	123.7	32
5	Balmain	14	7	0	7	687	507	135.5	28
6	Syd Uni Blue	14	4	0	10	488	937	52.1	16
7	Camden	14	3	0	11	391	843	46.4	12
8	UTS - Darlinghurst	14	0	0	14	129	1201	10.7	0



2004 Ladder – Home and Away

Position	Team	Played	Won	Draw	Lost	For	Against	%	Pts
1	Newtown	12	11	0	1	1242	369	336.6	44
2	Sydney Uni	12	9	0	3	762	411	185.4	36
3	Wests	12	8	0	4	956	367	260.5	32
4	UNSW - ES	12	6	0	6	780	502	155.4	24
5	Balmain	12	6	0	6	835	561	148.8	24
6	Camden	12	1	0	11	204	1181	17.3	4
7	UTS Darlinghurst	12	1	0	11	85	1252	6.8	4

2003 Ladder – Home and Away

Position	Team	Played	Won	Draw	Lost	For	Against	%	Pts
1	Newtown	12	12	0	0	1055	188	558.2	48
2	Wests	12	7	0	5	620	367	168.5	28
3	Balmain	12	7	0	5	560	362	154.3	28
4	UNSW-ES	12	4	0	8	251	749	33.5	16
5	Sydney Uni	12	0	0	12	165	985	16.7	0

2002 Table

Team	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	Washed out	Points	For	Against	%
Newtown	15	13	1	1	0	54	1400	438	319.6
Wests	15	12	3	0	0	48	1123	337	333.2
Sydney Uni	15	8	6	1	0	34	860	570	150.9
Balmain *	15	8	7	0	0	32	781	624	125.2
East/ UNSW	15	3	12	0	0	12	503	988	50.9
Macquarie Uni/UTS	15	0	15	0	0	0	151	1735	8.7



2001 Table

Team	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	Washed -out	Points	For	Against	%
Sydney Uni	12	10	1	0	1	42	733	199	368.3
West's	12	5	3	0	4	28	433	184	235.3
East's UNSW	12	5	5	0	3	24	303	439	69.0
Balmain	12	5	6	0	1	22	371	547	67.8
UTS	12	0	10	0	2	4	86	657	13.1

2000 Table

<i>Team</i>	Games	Won	Lost	Draw	Points	Points for	Points against	Percent- age
West's	12	12	0	0	48	931	256	363.7%
Sydney Uni	12	6	5	1	26	771	586	131.6%
Monarch	11	4	6	1	18	457	634	72.1%
UNSW	12	4	8	0	16	632	861	73.4%
Glebe	12	3	9	0	12	522	867	60.2%



State Football

The highest representative honour a player can achieve is to pull on the sky blue jersey of NSW. NSW has always entered a state team in the Australian Women's National Football Championships.

The earliest representatives were actually part of the ACT team that went to the Nationals in Perth in 1999 and they were Yvette Andrews, Lucy Burgmann, Patrice Ladson and Evonne Lucas. The next year was the first year of NSW as a separate entity.

2001 saw the start of the NSW Jumper Presentation Ceremony at NSW Parliament House. This has been where AFL Hierarchy and Sydney Swans players have presented the jumpers to those lucky to be chosen. In 2002, NSW hosted the championships with matches held at Drummoyne Oval on 12-14 July 2002 with the best ever result of finishing runners up to Victoria in the final. The Patron of the Championships was Ron Barassi. The organization of any National Championships is usually complex and much thanks to the organizational committee of Anne Edwards and Meredith Gray as co-convenors.

Whilst the team has yet to taste victory against the powerhouse Victorian team. SWAFL hosted a memorable National carnival in 2006. Much thanks to the 2006 committee under the leadership of the then-president Karen James for winning the right to host the National Championships. The league has historically played in a role in selecting a coach and funding the team's participation in the carnival which has been held across Australia. In 2007, a decision was made to play biannually so thus there was no state team selected in 2008.

At the end of the national carnivals, an All-Australian Team would be selected out of the best players in the carnival and we acknowledge those representatives from NSW which are mentioned at the end of this excerpt. These representatives are the ones who actually played for NSW. Congratulations to all those who have pulled on the Sky Blue Jersey of NSW!

NSW State Representatives

2000 (Canberra)

Coach: Lachlan Worthy

Assistant Coach: Tommy Rich, Ray Stoddart

Manager: Vanessa Bishop

Players: Toni Grimes, Amanda Furness, Vicky Keys, Teresa Wilson (c), Evonne Loukas, Sarah Groube, Zoe King, Fiona Huntington, Yvette Andrews, Karen Taylor, Melinda Hyland, Tarsha Gale, Joanne Young, Linda Morris, Nikki Richards, Louise Baty, Lucy Burgmann, Nikki Harwood, Natalie Morgan (vc), Deb Pattie, Maggie Chambers, Tracey Escreet, Louise Plemming, Sophie Ewart, Julie Rogers, Bernie Cox.



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

2001 (Melbourne)

Coach: Lachlan Worthy

Manager: Melinda Hyland

Players: Tarsha Gale, Felicity Moran, Josephine Kelly, Michelle Daley, Leah Childs, Meredith Gray, Susan Ness, Nikki Richards, Yvette Andrews, Trinette Bagnall, Stephanie Foster, Natalie Morgan (c), Jamie Robertson, Sarah Groube, Lucy Burgmann, Vicki Keys, Jo-anne Armstrong, Sally Lambourne, Nicki Harwood (vc), Bernadette Cox, Patrice Ladson, Kate Andrews, Kristen Teale, Carolyn Donnellym Jane Cordin, Belinda Sims.

2002 (Sydney)

Coach: Lachlan Worthy

Assistant Coach: Tanya Ferrai

Manager: Melinda Hyland and Eleri Morgan-Thomas

Players: Alena Summers, Alison Dingwall, Caroline Epstein, Tarsha Gale, Janene Thorpe, Kellie Nolan, Lisa Roper, Lucy Burgmann, Michaela Ekman, Natalie Morgan (c), Sam Barakat, Stephanie Foster (vc), Koen Andrews, Alison Crighton, Belinda Sims, Dianne Kennedy, Evonne Loukas, Kate Beltran, Kerry Taylor, Sarah Groube, Meredith Gray, Moya Dodd, Nikki Richards, Sophie Ewart, Vicki Keys.

2003 (Darwin)

Coach: Shauna McKenna

Manager: Melinda Hyland and Deb Pattie

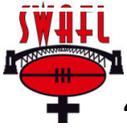
Players: Marie-Therese Barclay, Karen James, Alyssa Stewart, Heather Noblett, Candice Cushway, Rebekah Lucas, Michelle Gavin, Melinda Hyland, Penny Armstrong, Janene Thorpe, Katharyna Kobzan, Kellie Nolan, Joanne Nayler, Lucy Burgmann, Lisa Roper, Kerry Taylor, Yvette Andrews, Rachel Mercer, Tanya Phillips, Alecia Nolan, Stephanie Foster (c), Deb Pattie, Iris Yeo.

2004 (Adelaide)

Coach: Shauna McKenna

Manager: Deb Rogers and Rosyln McMahon-Bostick

Players: Gianna Abbonizio, Yvette Andrews, Marie-Therese Barclay, Hannah Burton, Cynthia Dufuat, Caroline Epstein, Elissa Fletcher, Stephanie Foster (c), Aine Glesson, Melinda Hyland, Karen James, Katharyna Kobzan, Lenore Lambert, Jane Leyshon, Rachel Mercer, Heather Noblett, Kellie Nolan, Tanya Phillips. Kim Rielly, Lisa Roper, Jemma Still, Kerry Taylor, Janine Thorpe, Megan Webster, Kate Winterbottom.



2005 (Melbourne)

Coach: Chris Hughes

Assistant Coach: John Freeland

Manager: Jude Hetherington

Players: Stephanie Foster (c), Jane Freeland, Victoria Rawlings, Kate Winterbottom, Cynthia Dufaut, Kerry Taylor, Talei Owen, Rebekah Lucas, Marie-Therese Barclay, Caroline Epstein (vc), Melinda Hyland (vc), Jemma Still, Pete Kajewski, Hannah Burton, Rebecca Burrige, Bujuanes Livermore, Meredith Gray, Lucy Willesee, Erin Coughlan, Mandy Jennings, Anna Barker, Katharyna Kobzan, Leah Childs, Rachel Mercer.

2006 Dubbo Match against ACT (20/3/06)

Coach: John Van Den Ham

Caroline Epstein (Newtown), Jemma Still (Syd Uni), Tracy King (Balmain), Talei Owen (Easts), Kate Winterbottom (Easts), Peta Kajewski (Camden), Erin Coughlin (Camden), Jane Freeland (Camden), Rachel Mercer (West), Cynthia Dufaut (West), Renae Fritzell-Flint (West), Kellie Hume (West), Alex Cook (West), Belinda Harrison (West), Kristy Stroop (West) and Julie Bernstein (West)

2006 (Sydney)

Coach: Chris Hughes

Assistant Coach: John Van Den Ham

Manager: Jude Hetherington, Caroline Epstein

Players: Kat Borman, Emma Yuen, Peta Kajewski, Kate Winterbottom, Cynthia Dufaut, Erin Coughlan, Talei Owen (vc), Tennille Summers, Meredith Gray, Caroline Epsten (vc), Melinda Hyland, Jemma Still (c), Belinda Harrison, Camille Chicheportiche, Anna Brown, Monica Chew, Marie Keating, Kellie Hume, Rowena Golledge, Sarah Tallis, Mandy Jennings, Lisa Roper, Tracey King, Katharyna Kobzan, Keran Durston, Rachel Mercer, Genevieve Delves.

2007 (Canberra)

Coach: Jason King

Manager: Kellie Nolan

Players: Alison Parkin, Genevieve Delves, Tarsha Gale, Cassi Bell,, Kim Rielly (VC), Emma Yuen, Shelley Bates, Belinda Michalk, Meredith Grey, Kellie Nolan, Claire O'Neill, Christine McDonald, Jemma Still, Amelia Dever, Corrine Quaratino, Heidi Weidner, Jane Leyshon, Keran Durston, Belinda Harrison, Cynthia Dufaut (DVC), Michaela Ekman, Lisa Roper, Kellie Hume, Lauren Byrnes (C)



2009 (Perth)

Coach: Jason King

Manager: Annie-Rose Phillips

Players: Heidi Wiedner, Michaela Ekman, Cynthia Dufaut, Trish Muller (c), Cassi Bell, Krystle Thompson, Roxy McGee, Natalie Redford (vc), Jemma Still, Libby Sadler, Kyrsten Winkley, Claire O'Neill, Cherie Harmer, Jo Willesee, Sarah Court, Jenna Lineham, Nadine Miller, Kathryna Kobzan, Katherine Fitzsimmons (DVC), Lisa Roper, Elizabeth Gavaghan, Kate Lancaster, Marie Keating, Una McKay

SWAFL International Rules match against Gaelic Athletic Association of NSW, 18/10/2008 for the Irish Australian Cup.

Coach: Jason King (West's)

Natasha Devlin, Kate Fitzsimons, Chris Matthews, Nat Morgan, Belinda Pride, Karla Spilarewicz, Katie Walsh, Sarah Court, Jenna Lineham, Carli Siemmens, Rachel Paton, Natasha Redford, Christine Coles, Vanessa Smith, Gianna Abbonizio, Claire Dunn, Talei Owen, Annie Phillips, Emma Yuen, Elspeth Banks, Cynthia Dufaut, Michaela Ekman, Trish Muller, Margarita Obien

SWAFL Combined Rookie Team against the United States Freedom National Women's Team. 8/8/09.

Coach: Gary Slowgrove (St. George), Assistant Coach: Lisa Roper (Bondi).

Una McKay, Evelyn Synnott, Verna Iles, Suzy Jackson, Kate Woodlands, Jenny Gillett, Larissa Roper, Lara Creber, Brittany Day, Kristy Thornton, Alex Frolich, Jennifer Lui, Stella Yulei Hoi, Olivia Matthews, Lisa McGinnigle, Georgia Woodyard, Baccara Griffiths, Leigh Taylor, Vicki Zacharia, Rachel Coates (captain), Clare Wells



All Australian Representatives from SWAFL.

Australian Representatives:

2000 – no mention in the annual report

2001 – Nikki Richards, Vicki Keys, Tarsha Gale & Natalie Morgan

2002 – Alena Summers, Belinda Sims, Tarsha Gale, Diane Kennedy

2003 – Stephanie Foster, Kerry Taylor

2004 – Jemma Still

2005 – Stephanie Foster, Talei Owen*

2006 – Talei Owen

2007 – Cassi Bell

2008 – no carnival held

2009 – Natalie Redford

*played for Australia in Ireland in the International Compromise Rules for Women.

Criteria: You must have represented NSW and SWAFL. Talei Owen in 2000 was from the ACT and 2005 Emma Hender represented the ADF.

SWAFL 10th Anniversary Celebrations

The 10th Anniversary Celebrations were officially commemorated by the league when they held it's annual presentation dinner on 12th September 2009. Here past players, coaches, administrators and umpires were acknowledged for their role in building the game from the humble roots of yesteryear to the exciting and competitive product it is today. Apart from this history project booklet you are reading right now, other initiatives included naming the SWAFL Team of the Decade. After Internet links were posted on the SWAFL Website asking for nominations, a committee of former club and state coaches selected the team of the decade providing many happy memories for those nominated and selected and also a good forum to reminiscence about "the good ol' days!".



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

The SWAFL Team of the Decade was thus:

Coach: Lachlan Worthy (Sydney University)

Team

Backs: Gianna Abbonzio (Sydney University), Vicki Keys (Wests), Cazz Epstein (Newtown Breakaways)

Half Backs: Jemma Still (Sydney University, Newtown), Krysten Winkley (Sydney University), Michaela Ekman (VC) – (Wests)

Centre: Kerry Taylor (Wests, Macquarie University), Natasha Devlin (Balmain, Newtown), Alison Parkin (Balmain)

Half Forwards: Cynthia Dufaut (Wests), Stephanie Foster (Captain) (Sydney University, Newtown), Talei Owen (Easts, Sydney University, Wests)

Forwards: Natalie Morgan (Balmain), Marie Keating (Wests, Bondi), Bec Burridge (Newtown)

Followers: Tarsha Gale (Sydney University, Newtown), Nat Redford (Newtown), Emma Yuen (Sydney University)

Interchange: Kath Kobzan (Balmain), Heather Noblett (Easts), Kim Rielly (Sydney University), Shelley Bates (Sydney University, Wests), Mel Hyland (Sydney University) and Yvette Andrews (Wests).



Photo: Top Row left to right: Natalie Morgan, Tarsha Gale, Talei Owen, Cynthia Dufaut, Natalie Redford, Michaela Ekman, Krysten Winkley, Alison Parkin, Shelley Bates, Jemma Still, Cazz Epstein, Marie Keating and Natasha Devlin

Bottom Row left to right: Stephanie Foster, Kerry Taylor, Gianna Abbonzio, Bec Burridge, Emma Yuen, Melinda Hyland and Yvette Andrews.



"We Did It Ourselves!" - Sydney Women's Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)

Premiership Photos (2000 photo is in the early years of the league – page 6).

2001 – Sydney University



2002 – Newtown Breakaways





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2003 – Newtown Breakaways



2004 – Newtown Breakaways





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2005 – Newtown Breakaways



2006 – Western Wolves





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2007 – Sydney University Gold



2008 – Western Wolves





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2009 – Newtown Breakaways



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World Footy News article “International Rules: the Women’s/Ladies game”.

Interviews with the following people (in alphabetical order):

Yvette Andrews*, Shelley Bates, Allison Day, John Freeland, Emma Hender, Melinda Hyland*, Verna Iles, Amanda Jennings, Jenya Kalaguragic, Melissa Laura Lewis, Rebekah Lucas, Lisa McGinnigle, Natalie Morgan, Darren Morrow, Tricia Muller, Rachael Paton, Annie Rose Phillips, Victoria Rawlings, Natasha Redford, Jamie Robertson, Tanya Searle, Tennille (Summers) Smerdon, Kerry Taylor, John Van Den Ham & Lachlan Worthy.

*Major thanks for past historical information not in the SWAFL Archives



Club Statistics (Alphabetically)

Balmain / Glebe.

Played 138 Games: Won 72, Drawn 1, Washed Out 1, Lost 64. Finals Record: Played 10, Won 3, Lost 7.

Finishing Positions: 2nd once, 3rd three times, 4th twice, 5th four times.

Bondi

Played 13 Games: Won 6, Lost 7. Finals Record: Played 1, Lost 1. Finishing Position: 4th once

Camden

Played 38 Games: Won 6, Drawn 1, Lost 31. Finishing Position: 6th twice, 7th once

Easts

Played 136 Games: Won 40, Washed Out 2, Lost 94. Finals Record: Played 8, Won 2, Lost 6.

Finishing Position: 3rd three times, 4th three times, 5th once, 7th three times

Macquarie University

Played 15 Games: Won 0, Lost 15. Finishing Position: 6th once

Monarch (Campbelltown)

Played 11 Games. Won 4, Drawn 1, Lost 6. Finals Record: Played 1, Lost 1. Finishing Position: Fourth once

Newtown

Played 122 Games: Won 102, Drawn 3, Lost 17. Finals Record: Played 18, Won 12, Lost 6.

Finishing Position: Premiers 5 times, 2nd twice, 3rd once.

St. George

Played 39 Games: Won 7, Lost 32.. Finishing Position: 5th once, 6th twice

Sydney University

Played 182 Games: Won 85, Drawn 2, Washed Out 1, Lost 94. Finals Record Played 16, Won 8, Lost 8.

Finishing Position: Premiers twice, 2nd once, 3rd four times, 4th once, 5th three times, 6th once, 7th once

UTS

Played 53 Games: Won 1, Washed out 2, Lost 50. Finishing Position: 5th once, 6th once, 7th once, 8th once

Wests

Played 149 Games: Won 110, Lost 34, Drawn 1, Washed Out 4. Finals Record: Played 21, Won 13, Lost 8.

Finishing Position: Premiers three times, 2nd six times, 3rd once



“We Did It Ourselves!” - Sydney Women’s Australian Football League – The First Decade (2000-09)



The End!