

**Moya Dodd's speaking notes for IWG conference: PLAY, THINK, CHANGE**

**Topic: women and leadership in sport**

**Keynote session with Peter Holmes a Court, 22 May 2010 at Darling Harbour Convention Centre**

Thank you Jane.

What a wonderful collection of people to be amongst.

The fact that I am here, and that many of you are here, is testament to the power of sport to generate leaders.

I'm here because my involvement on the field put me in the running for a position off the field. I've been able to PLAY. Today, we've come here to THINK and CHANGE.

The fact that I made it to this podium at all was against the odds – not only because football (that is, world football) was the poor relation of other codes, but also because participation outcomes for girls are systemically poorer than those of their brothers.

One of my strongest memories of primary school - in the well-intentioned 70s in South Australia – is of being shooed off the oval at lunchtime each Monday, Wednesday and Friday, because they were “boys days”. Girls days on the oval were Tuesdays and Thursdays. Even my grade two mathematics told me that something was very, very wrong.

In my sport, football, it is little wonder that we began several laps behind our male colleagues. In England, a country we have inherited so much from, women's football was actually banned for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This is the account from David Goldblatt's wonderful book on the history of football *The Ball is Round* (p 181-2): [paraphrasing]

*Reports show that women's football began in the 1880s in Europe and Britain – but it had hardly begun when the backlash started. The exclusively male members of the Dutch FA banned an international women's game in 1892, then women's football generally was banned from all their stadia. Similar policies of exclusion were adopted in Germany, and the English FA ruled that men's teams were not to play against women's teams.*

*Then, during the First World War, as the men were sent to slaughter, women replaced them in the factories and formed football teams just as the men had done. They began to organise and play charity matches to raise money for injured servicemen. Women's football was an instant hit, with around 150 teams and attendances peaking when 53,000 people went to Goodison Park in 1920 to watch Dick Kerr's Ladies defeat St Helens Ladies. At the same time, women's football took hold in France, Belgium and elsewhere in Europe.*

*But in 1921, Dick Kerr's Ladies and every other women's club was banned from FA-registered stadiums, setting the women's game back 70 years. It was relegated to odd parks and municipal pitches, cut off from formal systems of coaching, and reduced to the periphery.*

*At the same time, the medical and scientific world declared that the game was too rough and dangerous a game for the female body.*

[Obviously they had not seen the photos you have on the screen today!]

It took until the 1970s to remove the ban in Britain.

Meantime the game progressed slowly around the world, with the first Australian women's team formed in 1978. The game's pioneers played with little recognition. At best, we were unheard-of; at worst, we were perverse. Most just regarded us as a novelty.

Of course, there was no payment. I remember saving up at University so I could *pay* to play for Australia. But there was plenty of passion and pride to build the foundations for those who followed.

As for support, it was sparse. Once we were asked to sew our own Australian badges onto our tracksuits, because there was simply no-one else to do it. But we were footballers - not seamstresses -- a point that soon became obvious, because the outcomes were so random and unfortunate that we were never asked again.

From small beginnings we now have over 100,000 women and girls playing in registered competitions and we are the fastest-growing team sport not only in Australia, but also in Asia.

With the support of our members, we have a semi-professional national women's competition, the Westfield W-League, which is just two seasons old. Almost all of the clubs in the Hyundai A-League participate, so we can leverage common branding and club membership. And one match a week of the Westfield W-League is broadcast live on ABC TV, reaching around 100,000 viewers.

We are proud members of the Asian Football Confederation, reflecting the reality of Australia's social and economic ties. Our national team, the Westfield Matildas, are in China right now, contesting the Women's Asian Cup.

And tangentially -- I hope you tuned to the ABC last night at 5 pm to watch a fabulous game against Korea. If you missed it, then on Sunday at 6 pm you can see the Matildas take on China -- again, tune into our broadcast partner the ABC. It's all too rare a pleasure to watch our elite teams shown live in prime-time, so don't miss it!

Back to the plot. What is the relevance of this football history to leadership and governance today? Well, history tells us at least three things:

First, we've actually come a long way in the last thirty years. If you love football, there has truly never been a better time to be alive. My own calibration test is that when I'm introduced as a Matilda, people are much more impressed now than they ever were at the time I played.

Second, this truly is just the beginning. We're a young sport. We've come this far despite everything – and there is every reason to believe that the future is much brighter than the past. And with the men's World Cup about to get underway, we can expect another wave of interest as all boats rise with the tide.

Third, and most importantly for this discourse, there are substantial 'lost generations' of women – certainly anyone of around my vintage or older – who simply never got to play the game. That's a tragedy, but also an opportunity.

**Why? Because those women are now in the prime of their business lives. In terms of leadership and governance, there is everything to be gained by finding that lost generation.**

Specifically, I believe there are three areas in which I believe women are especially well suited to lead. So let's not talk in the abstract – here are three tangible things that we can do to inject women leaders into sport.

The first is in the **commercialisation** of our game. For women's sport to offer meaningful career paths, we need to grow the business. While men's football globally enjoys extraordinary wealth, nowhere can the same be said of women's football. In only a few countries are women paid at all, and the wages do not begin to compare. The same is true of virtually all other women's sports.

If we want to create professional career paths for players, coaches, referees and administrators, we need to commercialise our sport. Typically, that means creating a highly watchable product, selling the rights to watch it, and selling the distribution audience to sponsors.

There are plenty of good women out there with the skills to help you do that.

At the FFA, we've established a women's advisory group to assist management and the board in this challenge, and we're delighted to have a group of highly talented businesswomen on our side. Carla Zampatti, with her immense experience in fashion and media, brings the profile and expertise that you would expect of someone with her extraordinary track record in growing and managing businesses. We also have an agency director, Shirley Brown from Sponge Agency, a marketing and recruitment expert, Anita Zeimer of Slade Group, and a new media specialist, Mia Garlick. Each has a passion for football and for women's sport.

Australia is in the unusual position of being a developed economy, with high female workforce participation, but a not-so-developed football nation. This gives us the opportunity to match some serious female business brains with an almost greenfields opportunity in a sector (football) that is globally successful and locally dynamic. Great minds love to apply themselves to great opportunities, and we want their help.

And while I'm dropping names, I'll also mention that our Governor General, Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC, who opened this conference with such flourish and poise on Thursday, is also the Patron of women's football in Australia. With Her Excellency and Carla Zampatti both, this must count as one of the biggest upsets in fashion history, with the two most fashionable women in Australia both on our side. (Although sadly, none of it has rubbed off on me so far.)

So, here is my first tangible idea for you: can you assemble a commercial brains trust, door-openers, advisers to advance the commercial profile and program of your sport? Not necessarily all women, but I think you will find there are some exceptional women out there who would love to be asked.

Second, **corporate social responsibility**. The world is awakening to the power of sport to do social good.

I'm sure you've heard of the Street Soccer network, and the Homeless World Cup. Let me tell you about another: Football United.

My law firm, Gilbert+Tobin, first connected with Football United in 2007, and became its first corporate sponsor. Theirs is a simple, powerful idea: organise football programs for refugees to promote social inclusion and other positive outcomes. Football is often the only constant among disruption and disorder of dealing with undeserved and unthinkable hardships. It's a common international language, and a sporting and social foothold in a new country.

How does football help? Well, all of you who have ever played the game know just how good feels to place a pass just right, to time a perfectly, or hit the ball just right.

But you also learn: teamwork, persistence, the value of doing the right thing all of the time, how to deal with disappointment, and the thrill when it all pays off.

And those learnings yield benefits off the field too. They multiply and multiply, life-long. And they are all the more important to offer to those who've lost the most.

We especially wanted to support the girls program. We know that women and girls often face particular hardship and physical threats on their refugee journey. Football is a chance to take command of your physical environment. You cross that white line, and you're no longer a victim – you're in charge. You boss the ball about and make things happen – and that's a very empowering thing.

And for all of the boys in the program – what better way to teach them that in their in their new country, in Australia, girls can do everything that boys can do – all without saying a word.

CSR through sport is truly powerful. If I told you there was a pill that would bring you better health, more friends and improved self-esteem, I'd be sold out. Well, there is – it's round and white and you should kick it not eat it!

As governments and businesses start to "get it" I'd suggest that those in the CSR sector will be in high demand.

Women, I think, intuitively “get it”, so we should have especially good opportunities to excel in this field. So that’s my second tangible idea: work out how your sport can offer CSR, and put yourself or another women in the way of job or project.

Finally, **social media**.

Media rights generate key revenues for sport. But have you noticed? The media is being fundamentally reshaped.

Facebook now has over 400 million members. That’s more people than there are US citizens. In fact, only China and India have bigger populations than Facebook. If it were a country, it would be the third largest country on earth. And it’s now overtaken Google as the biggest referrer of eyeballs to news and entertainment websites. In Australia, almost half the population engages in social media. If you’re under 24, you almost certainly use it far more than your email account.

What is this telling us? It’s saying that people don’t search for news anymore, so much as they just look at their Facebook feeds and read the stories that their friends are telling them to read. At the same time, they are putting out their own feeds, which others are selectively reading. Driven by smart, portable devices, it’s a cacophony of output that is capturing more and more eyeball time around the world.

So, if you think your sport is ignored by mainstream media notwithstanding its obvious compelling qualities, this is very good news indeed. No longer is there a news editor who can put a red line through your story, take out the picture, or drop you to page 36.

So that’s my third tangible idea: get on top of social media, and get your story out there. Better still, don’t fall into the temptation of trying to control what’s said – the very nature of social media is that you can’t.

That’s just three ideas – I’m sure there are many more and many better. But as I’ve gotten older, slower, and steadily worse at the PLAY component of our conference theme, I’ve learned that the challenges of THINK and CHANGE are almost as much fun as kicking a ball.

Sport is powerful. I know that my sport – world football – is contagious and incurable. Over the next few weeks you’ll see the world stop in fascination and watch a round ball kicked among 22 players. (I wish I was talking about the Women’s Asian Cup Final on May 30 in China!)

But it’s only half-time. Without doubt, we were robbed badly in the first half. We copped some shocking decisions. But the second half starts NOW. We have everything to play for, and as they say in change-rooms around the world, *make it yours*.