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**Get Out In Front! An evaluation of a media workshop for young elite sportswomen**

Clifton Evers and Megan le Masurier

Research into sport and gender in Australia has suggested that teenage girls are still under-represented in sport and physical activity when compared to boys of similar age groups. Sports such as football and cricket dominate media coverage (and sponsorship interest) and remain male-dominated. While there has been increasing opportunity for young girls to participate in mixed and non-traditional sports, the perception of these sports as predominantly a masculine pursuit at pre-elite and elite levels affects assumptions about adolescent girls' competency and interest in sporting participation. This article is about how young elite sportswomen view the fact that women's sports continue to struggle for recognition and coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations. This type of representation impacts on women's sports credibility.

**Keywords**

Young Women, Sport, Media, Youth, Australian Sports Commission, Sport Program Evaluation, Media Program Evaluation, Workshop, Girls, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Sporting Facilities, Metropolitan and Rural Sports, Young Women's Opinion on Sport and Media, Sporting Access for Young Women, Sports Coverage of Young Women.

[1] Research into sport and gender in Australia has suggested that teenage girls are still under-represented in sport and physical activity when compared to boys of similar age groups (Australian Sports Commission; Booth et al; Malaxos and Westwood; Vescio and Crosswhite).

[2] According to the Australian Sports Commission sports such as football and cricket dominate media coverage (and sponsorship interest) and remain male-dominated. While there has been increasing opportunity for young girls to participate in mixed and non-traditional sports, the perception of these sports as predominantly a masculine pursuit at pre-elite and elite levels affects assumptions about adolescent girls' competency and interest in sporting participation (James and Embrey; Malaxos and Westwood; De Knop et al).

[3] The Australian Sports Commission has carried out research on mass media coverage of women's sport. Their reports *An illusory image: A report on the media coverage and portrayal of women's sport in Australia* and *Towards a Level Playing Field* shows that women's sports struggle for recognition and coverage in newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations. Duration of coverage is short. The report goes on to explain that in women's sports media coverage athletes are often associated with gendered terms that stress "weakness, passivity and insignificance". This type of representation impacts on women's sports credibility.

[4] The reports suggest that media coverage of women's sports is a necessary priority to address if young women are to pursue elite and amateur sporting careers. Crosswhite and Vescio argue educating young women on how to build a positive media profile is crucial to increasing participation, obtaining sponsorship, and offsetting the peer pressure young women experience when it comes to sport.

[5] Research has found that girls will feel peer-pressured in their high school years to downplay, or even neglect, sport in order to conform to strong gender expectations and avoid conflict over their femininity and sexuality (Griffin; Kluka et al; Lopiano; Malaxos and Westwood; Hargreaves). Threat to ongoing sports participation of young women at elite and pre-elite levels is of concern because sport is used by young women to build and solidify friendships, improve skills, achieve physical fitness, build self-esteem and to be part of the community.

[6] To offset this peer pressure, assumptions about young women's interest in sports, and under-representation of female athletes young sportswomen need to develop skills to obtain sponsorship and how to work with the media to promote their sporting futures (Crosswhite and Vescio; Schofield et al). Such training can provide young women with the opportunity to establish sporting skills, financial support, a sense of reward, confidence, and social networks that would allow them to continue to play sport and pursue elite sporting careers.

### **Workshops**

[7] During February and March 2006 the New South Wales Institute of Sport [NSWIS] conducted workshops to increase emerging elite women athlete's understanding of sponsorship and the media. The workshops took place in the following regions: South West (Wagga Wagga); Hunter (Newcastle); Central Coast (Forrester's Beach); Western Region (Dubbo and Bathurst); Illawarra (Shellharbour); Northern Inland (Tamworth); Far North Coast (Coffs Harbour and Lennox Head); South West Sydney (Campbelltown); Far West (Warren); Western Sydney (Parramatta).

The workshops had two key aims:

- To educate young women athletes on how to obtain sponsorship and understand its benefits, obligations and responsibilities
- To provide young women athletes with skills training on how to conduct media interviews and how to develop a media profile.

[8] The focus of the workshops was the women athletes currently developing their sporting skills with NSWIS. Complementary to these participants was the involvement and introduction to media and sponsorship literacy for parents and coaches.

The following methods were used to support these aims:

- A lecture on media skills and the role of media in sport
- Practical workstations on different media skills – Audio-Visual station; discussion with elite athlete about media experience; print media training via tape recorder interview; sports profile development with media expert
- A lecture on sponsorship

- Elite athlete story
- A workbook

[9] The New South Wales Institute of Sport commissioned us researchers to evaluate the workshops by collecting data on and making judgments about satisfaction with the workshops, content relevance, application of training, and enthusiasm for future programs. The researchers attended the twelve workshops.

The following methods were used to evaluate the workshops:

- An evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix 1: sample questionnaire)
- Small focus/discussion groups
- Written notes taken during lectures and focus groups
- Sample of literature on young women, sport and education methodologies

[10] The focus groups consisted of young women athletes from NSWIS. In terms of athlete cooperation with the research team all the young women who attended the workshops participated in the focus groups and all completed the questionnaire.

Table 1: Questionnaire response by number of respondents and region

By region:	Number of respondents:
South West (Wagga Wagga)	24
Hunter	29
Central Coast	27
Western Region (Dubbo)	25
Illawarra	20
Northern Inland (Tamworth)	24
Far North Coast (Lennox Head)	16
South West Sydney	24
Far West (Warren)	27
Western Sydney	15
Total number of respondents:	231

## Report Summary

[11] The format of the media and sponsorship training program was rated as excellent by the majority of the athletes. The response to the presenters was resoundingly positive. Information presented was considered relevant, and the parts of the workshop the young sportswomen liked most were the workstations and interview practice. The girls' level of confidence grew after the workshop. All the participants in the workshop suggested the training would benefit other young athletes.

[12] Many athletes wanted the workshops to include more active style learning, such as role-plays. There were lots of requests for more mature elite athletes to speak about their experiences with the media and sponsorship. The girls enjoyed meeting such elite athletes face to face, and found the contact inspiring. Practical experience of photo and film shoots, especially while playing sport, was a clear desire. The workbook functioned best as a reference guide rather than as an educational tool. Some girls from younger age groups had trouble understanding the relevance of the workshop. Young sportswomen from rural areas and Aboriginal heritage found that the workshop didn't address their particular circumstances.

[13] Few girls could readily name female sporting heroes. This is due to a lack of media coverage of women's sports. All the girls wanted more media coverage of women's sports, but emphasised that commercial TV was their favoured platform. Participants discussed the prospect of mentoring programs, particularly mentoring programs directly tied to elite athletes. Active learning that involved lots of practical activity was considered to be the best pedagogical method for building media literacy. Some academies had access to better educational facilities, and this was reflected in the enthusiasm of participants and their ability to retain information. In the focus groups there were clear differences in the media and sponsorship needs between individual and team sports. Individual athletes develop media literacy out of necessity, while girls in team sports feel they can escape engagement with the media if they choose to do so.

[14] Recommendations include: tailoring workshops to the differing needs of regions, be they rural or metropolitan; accounting for cultural and ethnic differences of participants; grouping girls in their age groups/level of experience during practical stations; using the workbook as a reference guide; excluding parent participation in practical stations to facilitate peer discussion; using facilities that are education-friendly; offering weekend camps for all participants, particularly in rural areas;

organising workshops so that they are almost exclusively activity-based ; addressing the differences between individual and team sports; developing a mentoring program; teaching athletes how to work with photographic and film-based media; using film as a workshop evaluation tool.

## **Evaluation**

[15] The media and sponsorship training program was structured in three main parts, sandwiched by an introduction and an evaluation questionnaire. A brief introduction of the presenter, elite athlete, researcher and objectives of the workshop (15 minutes) was followed by a lecture on media skills (45 minutes). The girls then broke into four groups to develop skills related to different media: Audio-Visual (AV) station for television experience; discussion with elite athlete about personal sports/media experiences; print media experience via tape recorded interviews; media skills with the presenter (developing a profile and preparing for interviews) (15 minutes per station, 60 minutes total).

[16] After a break for lunch or dinner, the girls returned to a lecture format for a session on sponsorship combined with an Olympic athlete's story about her media and sponsorship experiences (40 minutes). The program concluded with the evaluation questionnaires (10-15 minutes).

[17] The initial program planned to involve parents and coaches in the workstations however it was found that the presence of adults inhibited the open conversation and opinions of the girls. Parents and coaches were asked not to take part in the practical stations, although parents and coaches did participate in the more lecture-based media skills and sponsorship sessions. Studies of media literacy pedagogy have found that "If parents are to be involved they need to be seen as active participants rather than being told what they should or should not be doing" (Buckingham 101). The researchers found that the parents and coaches at all the academies were enthusiastic contributors to the lecture-based sessions. The presenters used a productive parent-involved pedagogy.

[18] It became obvious after the first workshop in the South Western Region (Wagga Wagga) that an initial plan to run evaluation focus groups at the end of the workshop was not practical. The girls were too tired after three hours of intense concentration. From the second workshop onwards the focus group was incorporated as one of the workstations (replacing a 15 minute period where the girls had initially been asked to read and answer questions in their workbooks). The evaluators decided to run a mock print interview, providing the girls with some focus group questions, and

teaching them to answer a journalist’s questions briefly and concisely. This gave each girl a chance to think about issues to do with sportswomen and media, gain print interview skills and to engage in recorded discussion with small groups. These focus groups allowed the evaluators to identify expectations the participants had of the program, to ascertain young sportswomen’s beliefs about key components of the media and sponsorship, and to measure learning outcomes of the program.

The format was rated as excellent by 53% of the respondents, and as good by 45% (see Table 2).

Table 2: How did you find the format of the presentation?

	Poor/Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
<b>Total:</b>	-	2%	45%	53%
South West NSW (Wagga Wagga)	-	4%	67%	29%
Hunter	-	3%	52%	45%
Central Coast	-	11%	59%	30%
Western region (Dubbo)	-		52%	48%
Illawarra	-		40%	60%
Northern Inland (Tamworth)	-		17%	83%
Far North Coast (Lennox Head)	-		62%	38%
South West Sydney	-	4%	33%	63%
Far West (Warren)	-		48%	52%
Western Sydney	-		20%	80%

[19] In the comments and in response to more detailed questions in the focus groups it was apparent that the parts of the workshop the young athletes liked least were the sections formatted as lectures. In rural areas, like the Far West, the girls commented that: “it would be better to have smaller ones



[workshops], closer to home". Some girls had driven three hours to the academy. The girls from rural areas also noted that weekend camps were better for them so they could train in their respective sports as well as attend the workshop. Two academies, the Far West and the Western Region (Warren and Dubbo) did arrange for the workshop to be a part of a full weekend of activity, and the athletes welcomed this initiative by the respective academies. There were also a scattering of comments across the academies that the workshop overall was "too long" and that there could have been more short breaks.

[20] The presenters of the *Sportswomen – Get out in Front!* media and sponsorship training program were all ex-Olympic athletes: Chemene Simpson, Donella Burridge and Peter Hadfield. All have had significant experience in dealing with the media and the demands of being an elite athlete.

[21] Across the ten regional sports academies, the response of the young women athletes to the presenters was resoundingly positive. 82% rated the presenters as excellent; 18% as good. There were no ratings lower than good.

[22] Individual differences in evaluation could be explained by variables in the different regional academy groups, such as the age of the girls, different levels of prior knowledge and experience with media and sponsorship skills, and availability of a critical literacy for evaluating presenters' performance (The girls at the Hunter academy, for example, were on average, younger. The girls at the Central Coast academy were older and had more media and sponsorship awareness and skills).

[23] Suggestions from the young athletes (via early evaluations) to include more interactivity with the young sportswomen in the lecture-based sections were incorporated as the workshops progressed. The effect of this modification was that the personal ratings improved overall, and the athletes' enthusiasm for the workshops increased. The comments from the girls emphasised how 'helpful', 'clear' and 'knowledgeable' they had found the presenters. There were also many comments about how 'amusing' and 'fun' the presenters were. In each regional academy the girls made special mention of the value in hearing ex-Olympic athletes speak about their experiences and sharing their knowledge.

[24] There was an almost universal agreement that all the information presented in the workshops was relevant and had assisted them. Only 3% said there was some information that was not relevant. One girl wondered how relevant it was because "we're young" (Hunter). The prospect of engaging

with the media was not yet part of her expectations of playing sport at an elite level.

[25] The parts of the workshop the girls liked most were the workstations and interview practice, particularly on camera. While some girls found this intimidating, most found the experience enjoyable. The next most enjoyable part of the training was the opportunity to talk with guest Olympic athletes – Kate Bates, Jemma Brownlow, Suzy Balogh, Kerri Pottharst, Elise Norwood, Fiona Crawford, Shelley Oates-Wilding, Jane Saville – and hearing them speak about their experiences with the media and with sponsorship.

[26] When asked in the questionnaire whether the content/training could have been more practically based, 22% of the young athletes said yes. 29% said they were not sure, and 49% said no. (The ‘yes’ responses were significantly higher in the South West and the Central Coast academies. ‘No’ responses were significantly higher in the Western Region, Illawarra and Far North Coast academies.)

[27] The question: ‘could the training have been more practically based’ was too abstract. And some girls did comment that they weren’t sure what this meant. But when prompted to think about more role-playing of interview situations, the response was resoundingly positive. 59% of the girls wanted the workshops to include more of this active style of learning.

[28] In the early questionnaires completed by the South West and Hunter academies of sport, critical comments about the lack of interactive involvement were common. The girls made statements such as: “I didn’t like sitting for so long”; “I didn’t like all the questions and the writing part”; “the long talks”; “the presenters kept going on”(South West); “I’d like more physical activity”; “more involvement” (Hunter). One of the benefits of simulations (a form of role play) is that it offers hands-on experience and learning that is difficult to teach in more conventional chalk and talk methods.

[29] To improve the training, a number of girls noted in the questionnaire that they wanted “more athletes to speak about their experiences” (South West); “more famous athletes for different points of view”(Central Coast). 61% of the girls wanted more input from fellow athletes with media experience and 63% wanted more input from athletes with sponsorship experience.

[30] One reason the young women favoured the discussions with the elite athletes is that they don’t often get to see, or interact, with women sports stars. Girls from all academies commented how much they appreciated the chance to speak directly with a female elite athlete.

"I'm not really inspired by much media coverage of tennis ... we often have a lot of the top Australian players (male) come into our training base ... some of the older boys go have a hit with him. Actually seeing the person face to face to interact is more inspiring" (Western Sydney).

What sportswomen do you admire? [researcher]

"I'd have to say Susie [Balogh] after just meeting her. Because she's from Orange and that's where I'm from" (Western Region).

"Alison Broadbent. She's done some camps here" (Central Coast).

[30] When asked about other possible content for the workshop, it became clear that visual representation in the media was a concern. Practical experience of photo and film shoots, especially while *playing* sport, was a clear desire. Across the regions, 68.35% said they would like training and experience of being filmed/photographed during training and 61.2% said during competition. 63.5% also said they wanted experience of being filmed/photographed immediately after sport.

[31] The girls were less concerned about the more styled shots that come with celebrity sportspeople in the media. 40% said they wanted experience of portrait shoots; 33.75% said they wanted experience of lifestyle shoots. Similarly, only 35.85% were concerned about paparazzi images.

## **Workbook**

[32] The workbook *Effectively Promoting Your Story* was given to the young athletes at the beginning of the workshop, and used to varying degrees by the different presenters. In the questionnaire, the girls were asked how useful they found the workbook. 44% said very useful, 40% said quite useful and 16% said useful. Only 1% found the workbook not useful. Some of the girls commented that the "booklet was excellent" in helping them to put together a sponsorship proposal (Western Region).

[33] At the first regional workshop in South West NSW (Wagga Wagga), it was found that the girls were not willing to fill out the workbook during the originally allocated space for this (as one of the practical stations). As one girl said: "it's like school". The evaluator noticed that this was a general sentiment amongst the girls. The workbook functioned too much as an assessment of knowledge and the girls reacted negatively to this.

[34] Parents said they valued the workbook and the guidance it could provide. Some suggested they would work on it with their girls at home. It was also suggested that more of the information

provided during the media skills and sponsorships session should be included in the workbook for ease of reference and later reinforcement.

### **Effectiveness of training workshops**

[35] The girls' level of confidence increased markedly after the workshops. Before the workshop, 36.2% of the young female athletes in all regional academies reported that they had poor levels of confidence in dealing with the media. And 33.6% said they had poor confidence in dealing with sponsors. This was the largest self-descriptive cluster.

[36] After the workshops, 63% of girls assessed that their confidence level was now good in dealing with the media. 57.6% assessed their confidence as good in dealing with sponsorship. This shows a major cluster shift from 'poor' to 'good' for confidence in dealing with both media and sponsorship over the course of the workshop.

[37] A significant number – 20.9% – reported their confidence in dealing with the media as now excellent (and 16.2% as excellent for dealing with sponsors). This too is a major shift from the pre-workshop self-assessment of only 2.6% as having an excellent level of confidence in dealing with the media and 2.3% for dealing with sponsors.

[38] When asked if they had changed their opinions about anything after the training workshop, overwhelmingly the girls commented that their confidence had improved:

“more confidence” (Hunter, South West Sydney)

“more confident in front of camera and the media” (Central Coast)

“feeling more confident” (Western Region)

“gave me confidence” (Illawarra)

“feel more confident” (Far North Coast)

“gave me confidence” (Illawarra, Far West, Hunter)

[39] 92% of the young women athletes agreed that the workshops had provided them with the skills they needed to deal with the media. For those who said no or were unsure, there were comments such as: “don't know if I'll ever need the skills” (Illawarra), “Maybe in future years but now I'm too young” (South West), “we're just kids” (Hunter). These comments suggest that for some girls the

prospect of becoming an elite athlete who might need to deal with the media was slim or that they were not yet ready to integrate this knowledge. Such comments says less about the value of the workshops than the girls' own level of confidence in an elite sporting future, their regional expectations, their gendered expectations and the age at which they receive the training.

At the other extreme were the girls who wanted to know more: "can't learn all skills in one day" (Illawarra), "could learn more" (Hunter), "need much more practice" (Warren, South West Sydney, Northern Inland).

[40] The majority of the girls commented on how much they had learned about the media:

"better understanding of dealing with the media" (South West Sydney)

"learnt a lot of little tricks to deal with the media" (Central Coast)

"learnt new skills" (Hunter)

"I now know what to do " (South West)

"public speaking is a key necessity" (Central Coast).

[41] In terms of sponsorship, the response was the same. 92% of all girls thought the workshops had provided them with the skills they needed to deal with sponsors and sponsorship obligations. 3% did not. 5% were not sure.

[42] In regards to sponsorship skills, the girls comments revealed how much they had learned:

"taught us what to expect" (South West)

"good ideas of what I can offer" (Western Sydney)

"know how to approach companies now" (South West Sydney)

"enthusiastic to start searching for sponsors" (Central Coast)

"good advice" (Hunter).

[43] Asked if they would recommend this media and sponsorship training to others, 100% of the girls across all regional academies said yes. Positive comments like: "valuable information for a future sports career", "important to learn new skills", "information every athlete needs to know" and "it builds confidence" were common in each academy. Some girls said they were given information they could not have got elsewhere (Illawarra). One girl said the training had helped her communication skills generally, and not just in regard to sport (Far North Coast). A number of the girls commented

that it was “a fun way to learn new skills” (Western Sydney, Far West, South West Sydney).

[44] When given the chance to suggest changes they would make to future training sessions for other athletes, the girls did offer some suggestions. They echoed the same criticisms they had made about the training needing to be more “hands on”:

“More acting and questions” (South West Sydney)  
“longer at stations” (Far North Coast and Central Coast)  
“examples of good and bad interviews” (Far North Coast)  
“more detail”, “more on sponsorship” (Northern Inland)  
“more of it” (Hunter)  
“more group work” (Illawarra)  
“more focus on interview techniques” (Western Region)  
“less talking”, “more interacting” (Central Coast).

[45] After the workshop the girls were asked if the training had changed their opinions on any issues. 78.5% said yes, 18.4% said no and 3.1% were not sure. Of the large majority of girls who said their opinions had changed, most made specific comments about their understanding of the media, of sponsorship and particularly about their increased confidence. Every academy had a majority of girls who commented on their increased levels of confidence after the training.

On the media:

“I would like to speak in the media now” (South West)  
“more respect for interviewers” (Hunter)  
“the media is not out to get you” (Central Coast, Western Sydney)  
“I understand the media now” (South West Sydney, Western Sydney).

On sponsorship:

“now have opinions about sponsorship” (Hunter, South West Sydney)  
“importance of sponsorship” (Western Region)  
“work hard for sponsorships” (South West Sydney)  
“I can go out and get sponsors” (Far West).

The girls' awareness of the gender imbalances operating in media coverage of sport had clearly been heightened by the training. Some found this an inspiration to get more involved with promoting their sport:

"women's sport deserves more coverage" (Hunter)

"women can get out there and receive sponsorships and media coverage" (Central Coast)

"more women should attempt to promote their sport" (Central Coast)

"aware of gender imbalance in media now" (Western Region)

"It gives me more motivation to promote the sport" (South West Sydney).

[46] Overall, the young female athletes were unsure whether follow-up training would be of benefit. The largest requests for more training came from the non-metropolitan regions, especially Northern Inland and the Far West. This corroborates the comments from focus groups in these areas, where some girls commented on how their facilities, opportunities and exposure to their sports was limited.

[47] When asked in the focus groups to name female sporting heroes there were very few girls who could readily access a name. This suggests a lack of familiarity with women's sports stars even though the girls play, and said they enjoy watching, sport. The most consistently named female sports star was Liz Ellis, an ex-captain of the Australian Netball Team and media personality. One girl said: "you have to balance your social life, family, training and all your other commitments, that's why a lot of people admire Liz Ellis" (Illawarra); "Liz Ellis. She's a woman, you know what I mean. She's still out there playing netball, she's a captain, a leader, smart. She addresses the public. She's like a mother. We play the same position" (Illawarra). A netballer from the Central Coast commented: "There's only a few people who get the spotlight. Most people have only heard about Liz Ellis or Alison Broadbent".

[48] A lot of the girls saw Ellis as a role model and spoke about her with a real familiarity, as if they knew her personally. In her study of girl heroes Susan Hopkins confirms this mode of relationship that girls have with such high profile figures: "these celebrities are constructed not just as distant empty ideals but as imagined friends and mentors with real character appeal. They are a dominant presence in many girls' lives: these are the women they look to for feminine self-definitions" (2002: 4). This mode of relationship figured prominently when discussing what they enjoyed, and would like, in workshops. The girls expressed a strong desire for face-to-face contact with elite sportspeople.

[49] When the girls were asked who they would go to for advice for problems with media or sponsors the overwhelming response was “the coach”. This puts a burden on the coach who may not be adequately trained in media skills to help with those issues. The researchers observed that the girls wanted a mentoring relationship with elite athletes. Some girls commented on the importance of direct mentoring relationships: “We’d like to promote sport by having younger kids at camp and stuff, getting hold of them, coaching them on their positions and making them more aware” (Central Coast). When asked about the possibility of pairing younger athletes with older ones, the response was “that would be so good”, “awesome” (Central Coast). Mentoring research has found that mentors do not have to be much older than mentees. This peer scenario can give the mentor legitimacy and authenticity; and the mentee can relate to the stories and scenarios provided by the mentor (Biskup and Pfister, 1999; Daloz, 1986; Kluka et al, 2000; MacCallum and Beltman, 2002; Vescio and Crosswhite, 2002; Weiss et al, 1996).

[50] Aboriginal girls in Warren expressed shame at doing the practical workstations in front of others and speaking about themselves to the elite athlete. In Aboriginal culture there are different expectations about attention to, and promoting, oneself. Self-focus or individualism are linked to shame in complex ways (Groom, 1995; Kelly, 2004; Ferrell, 2003; Mason and Wilson, 1988).

[51] In Dubbo one young aboriginal athlete said: “Cathy Freeman in the Olympics, how she carried the aboriginal flag... I read her book, her biography, how she came from such a little town and how she trained with her dad and how she came to be so big and win the gold medal. I’m aboriginal and I feel that it gives aboriginal people confidence that if she can make it, they can make it.” This comment indicates the importance of elite athletes to come from several different cultures to enable more girls to relate to the stories and content of the workshop.

[52] Feedback about the amount of ‘chalk and talk’ from the early evaluations (and evaluators’ observations) was noted by the presenters. The lecturing mode altered slightly after the initial workshops in the South West and Hunter academies. Subsequent workshops tried to incorporate more interactivity with the young athletes during the media skills and the sponsorship sessions.

[53] The trainers made adjustments to their presentation styles, setting up mock interview situations with some of the girls, in front of all participants. While some girls reported finding this experience intimidating, they also understood the importance of performing in front of the larger group as contributing to the development of media skills. The trainers worked hard to include humour in these



sessions and to keep the atmosphere light and entertaining. Even after these alterations, the girls' evaluations still made clear they wanted less talk and more active learning.

[54] Media literacy and pedagogy expert David Buckingham writes: "Children learn to use media largely through trial and error – through exploration, experimentation and play; and collaboration with others – both in face to face and virtual forms – it is an essential element of the process" (2003: 133).

[55] One focus group of girls in Illawarra commented: "Maybe they could have games, we need to talk like this, in small groups". This group went on to discuss a previous public speaking course run by the Illawarra Academy, and offered a critique of it:

*"Last year we did a public speaking course at Academy."*

"How'd that go?" [Researcher]

"Boring"

"Embarrassing"

"Sitting down and listening all the time"

"And the same thing, like you heard it once – then over and over."

"Give us a go – to do it."

[56] Media literacy suggests that a "dynamic or dialogic approach to teaching and learning in which students move back and forth between action and reflection is most effective" (Buckingham 143). This action-based educational strategy allows participants to be clearly connected to what they will experience, and allows evidence-based appreciation of material (Vescio, 2002; Nixon 2003). This strategy is also known as 'collaborative learning' and allows participants to generate knowledge through their own experiences, with the help of external resources (Flowers, 2001).

[57] Some workshops had access to more comfortable and education friendly facilities. Other workshops utilised sporting area that did not facilitate concentration. At Warren the young women took part in the workshop above a basketball court being used by other sportspeople. This distracted the young women and made it difficult for them to hear what was being said. At Dubbo the girls were at a sporting academy that had fields and courts they played sport on. Some girls were anxious to play or train rather than take part in the workshop. Further to this, those academies where the practical stations were held in quiet and comfortable rooms gave rise to better discussions and

enabled the young women to retain more information (Illawarra, Northern Inland, central Coast, Western Sydney).

[58] In response to a perceived lack of media coverage for women's sport one girl said: "It just annoys you. Doesn't make me angry". Some girls commented about the effect of media coverage of their sport on their motivation: "it's good when you see your sport in the media, especially if it's a big article about netball. It makes me want to do it more" (South West Sydney). One girl said that even seeing an ad with a sportswoman playing her sport was inspiring: "It's like that Myzone netballer, that ad 'in the zone' on TV. I got really excited and thought, yes, I'm playing that tonight" (South West Sydney). Some girls commented on how they are surprised when they see women in sports on TV and commented: "Sometimes I'll do a 'oh look there's a girl, woooooo!"; "Apart from the Commonwealth Games I don't see it much"(Illawarra).

[59] Many girls laughingly noted that netball is screened on ABC TV on Saturday mornings: "netball is on TV on Saturday morning, when we're playing. The people that want to watch it can't." So while the girls were aware that netball is telecast they couldn't watch it anyway. However, it wasn't only the timeslot that was a problem. The young women repeatedly commented on their preference for watching commercial TV as opposed to the ABC:

"The commercial stations make it look more exciting" (Far West)

"I 'd like to watch netball on the day after you play. On ten and Prime. You don't really turn to ABC to watch TV" (Tamworth)

"Who watches ABC ? [much laughter] You're likely to flick the channel" (Illawarra).

[60] Interestingly, the netball girls suggested they might get more media coverage if they could get across the physicality involved in playing their sport. They noted the success of the physicality of men's sports and compared the coverage and sporting performances with their own:

"they're [women's sports] not meant to be contact sports so everyone sees them as a sport that isn't worth watching" (Illawarra)

"yeah. It's [netball] seen as a girly sport. You know, you break your nails" (Campbelltown)

"People think netball is prissy. It's a contact sport but people don't see that. More biff and it might get more coverage" (Parramatta)

"We're like, let's give it to 'em!" (Illawarra).

[61] The traditional link between masculinity and sport was also blamed for lack of coverage of women's sports:

"Because girls like to go shopping and boys watch sport more than girls do and they're not interested in netball" (Central Coast)

"Football and everything is a male sport so they get shown on TV all the time" (Central Coast)

"I don't like it when our sport is ignored because then other people think that netball is a dumb sport and no-one recognises it. It's not as significant as other male sports like Rugby League that gets more coverage" (South West Sydney)

"Netball is a female only sport. Obviously there's not going to be as much interest" (South West Sydney)

"The fact that we are women and women get put down. Like, men are on a pedestal to us. Our sport isn't seen on the media" (Central Coast).

[62] A group of softball players noted the coverage that baseball got on cable sports channels:

" You mainly see baseball. Most people don't know anything about softball."

"baseball's like a men's sport."

"yeah, the domination of men over women" (South West Sydney).

[63] Gender issues also became evident when girls discussed the material differences between young male and female athletes:

"On presentation days the boys get the bus down to the oval and we walk." (Far West)

"Boys get the better uniforms. The newer ones. Girls get older ones. A bit depressing. Girls deserve the same respect." (Northern Inland).

[64] What became clear in discussion about content in the focus groups was that the issues at stake were clearly different for the young athletes who played individual sports and those who played in teams. When asked how they would respond if one team member was receiving far more media attention, most girls were clearly thinking on their feet. While the girls were aware of the team sports dynamic and the effect on the team if the spotlight shone on one member in particular, they had not considered this issue in regard to media coverage. The girls were asked to respond to a hypothetical

media situation, modelled on case studies a number of sportswomen have encountered, where one member of a team receives considerably more media attention than the others:

“It would create jealousy and tension in the team and result in us not playing as well.”

“Why is she getting all the attention? She’s not much prettier than us.” (Campbelltown)

[65] The young athletes had long discussions about the ethical problems and tensions that arise in teams and uneven media attention:

“If it was something in a team sport I’d definitely go and consult other people to make sure they wouldn’t be put out. Make sure that everyone’s okay with it.”

“I’d feel a bit put out because I’m there putting in the same effort and being pushed aside.”

“I think it happens with Liz Ellis as well. She gets a lot more media coverage. But she puts in the effort and is doing a great job.”

“It’d probably cause a bit of a rift, but you should be really happy that your sport gets coverage even if it’s just through one person. If you’re not happy about it you should do something about it yourself. Be more outspoken or try to get the rest of the team involved.” (South West Sydney)

“I play softball so it’s a team effort and no one really gets that. They don’t take all the spotlight, they talk about the team effort.”

“It’s a team sport. Not one person does all the work.” (Western Region)

“I try to promote the team, even the goalie, even the wings. Everything starts from the base line and builds up.”

“It’s [netball] a team sport and I don’t want to get all the attention. I have a bad day then.” (Northern Inland)

[66] During the discussions the girls who played individual sports – such as golf, tennis, windsurfing – often felt a little excluded, as if these issues were not relevant to them. Some girls suggested that the training would be better if it was tailored more to specific sports: “Make examples specific to our sports” (Warren), “more on specific sports” (Central Coast).

[67] The *Sportswomen, Get Out in Front!* Workshops took place in a variety of regions across New South Wales. Clear differences in needs, opportunities, facilities and sporting futures became

apparent. In the South West, Northern Inland, Far West and Far North Coast there were discussions about the differences between the facilities available in these regions and those available in metropolitan areas. The girls thought that metropolitan facilities were better and that more money was spent on them:

“Swimmers in Sydney have better facilities” (Northern Inland)

“And for my sister who trialled for the state team, travelling to Sydney every weekend for a couple of months ... facilities are a lot better than ours. We don’t have the indoor seating. We play on outdoor courts. It’s a different game when you play inside. You feel you can jump onto the ball because its not asphalt. You’re not scared of injury so much so players are really going after the ball. It’s more intense and it’s better athletes” (Northern Inland)

[68] Sporting facilities have consequences for identity and socialisation in that they communicate who is eligible to participate, who is valued and what is expected. Tangen writes that sporting facilities are not just a place for action. Young people in rural areas perceive the urban as holding more potential (Rye; Cocklin and Dibden; Schofield et al). The perception of better facilities in the city affected the girl’s confidence in their sporting and competitive skills.

“Playing the girls in the city is kind of difficult, because you feel that they are more trained and have the resources, like the flash netball courts and we’ve got the old asphalt ones” (Northern Inland).

[69] There was also some resentment at how young sportswomen in the city didn’t have to travel to the play in the rural and regional areas.

“We always have to travel down there. They never come to us. A lot of them don’t know where Tamworth is.”

“Even if you get into higher levels you have to go to the city. It’s annoying. I’d rather play at home. But I don’t like going to place with nothing, like Scone” (Northern Inland).

[70] This last comment shows that there are not only differences in perceptions and attitudes between rural and metropolitan regions but *within* these regions as well. The concern at city teams not travelling to rural areas to play games undermines rural girls’ feelings of being part of national sporting networks. Such networks can develop skills, trust and aspirations for rural girls (Rye; Schofield et al). They also facilitate the flow of information. Sporting connections within a field can

bestow status. A form of social capital is present that stems not from what you know but who you know and who knows you. This social capital enables members of a network to assert their distinctive character and affirm that they are 'not anonymous members of an undifferentiated mass' (Thornton 21). It is necessary to see sport as a network for social interaction that helps to overcome socio-cultural differences and allow the flow of information about possible sporting futures. Sporting possibilities in rural life play a central role (Rye; Stayner).

[71] Another key regional difference that emerged from the focus group discussions was the possession of media literacy. When talking to the girls about photo shoots and how far they would go to promote themselves or their sport, one girl commented that she wouldn't do *Ralph* magazine. She did say however, "there would be one that I'd do, and that's *Black and White*." *Black and White* magazine is renowned in wealthy urbanised areas for its artistic nude photographs of athletes. That a young woman from the Sydney metropolitan area had this degree of media awareness signifies the very different media resources available to girls in different regions. Further to this, the levels of engagement, discussion and strength of opinions was more apparent at the academies in Western Sydney, South West Sydney, and the Central Coast. These regions had girls with media literacy skills developed in an environment that gives access to a more diverse array of media sources.

[72] In the academies of the Far West, the Western Region and the South West there was some resistance and inability to see the point of the workshops. Their vision of the future did not include being an elite sports person:

"Every education session we did with the academy is boring ... we're here to play sport, we don't expect all this stuff. We're teenagers, we're young girls, we don't need to sit down and hear someone teach us how to talk" (Far West).

[73] The occupational aspirations of young rural women are generally more traditional than those of young women living in the city (Hunter and Riney-Kehrberg). While young women in rural areas start off with high commitment to participation in sports and community activities, this commitment decreases dramatically during their teen years.

[74] The socio-economic differences between the regions was also obvious. The girls from the far west, commented on the practical difficulties they faced in getting to competitions:

“We can’t travel over there to play. It costs a lot of money. We don’t get many buses” (Far West).

[75] When discussing possible sponsorship, regional girls focused on the need for support to travel. They cited bus companies and reimbursement of petrol for their parents as their most pressing needs. This was a statement about the socio-economic differences between the regions. None of the girls from the metropolitan centres mentioned travel or family finances as an issue that might affect their sport.

[76] The girls in the rural areas had trouble discussing sponsorship opportunities. In the focus groups they were asked who they would like to be sponsored by and most had no answer. The young women were aware of lack of monies in their sporting clubs and rural economies. Population decline, drought and population aging in rural areas have meant the contraction of rural economies (Stayner; Cocklin and Dibden). “Small businesses, traditionally significant employers in country towns, have often been forced to close or have rationalised their operations ... Donations and sponsorship were just two of the sources of funding [for sporting bodies and players] under threat” (Tonts and Atherley 127).

[77] Age influenced the effectiveness of the workshop in promoting media literacy. It is important to note that some of the older girls already had quite sophisticated media literacy as reflected in the following evaluation of Liesel Jones’s skills:

“Liesel Jones for turning her media image around. A year ago she was disappointed with her comp results and it showed in a negative way. Her attitude in media interviews. A scowl on the bronze podium, looking up at the people who beat her.”

She does it well now? [researcher]

“At the Commonwealth Games she handled the media brilliantly. Every interview was spot on, she’s been modelling” (Northern Inland).

Younger girls said that they admire athletes who not only play their sport but their position, but they found it harder to see the relevance of the workshops: “we’re just kids” (Hunter).

## Recommendations

[78] While the response of the young athletes to the training workshops was generally positive, there were many comments from the girls across all the regional academies that suggested directions for future educational initiatives.

[79] The following recommendations for more inclusive and relevant media and sponsorship education for young female elite athletes stem from listening to the voices of the young female athletes in the diverse regions of New South Wales and from recent research into sport, gender and youth education. The recommendations also draw on policy developments around gender and equality within a number of United Nations bodies and the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

[80] The concept of 'intersectionality' is useful here. Pru Goward, Australian Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner from 2001 - 2006, has described intersectionality as referring to "the connection between aspects of identity, and by 'intersectional discrimination', the different types of discrimination or disadvantage that compound on each other and are inseparable" (Goward).

[81] Intersectionality can be used as a tool for understanding how disadvantage or discrimination stem from the intersection of different factors that make up the layers of an individual's identity. These could be gender, age, class, race/ethnicity, region, local community and/or economic background. Factors which seem to be unrelated can impact on a young athlete's experience of and response to education - and to their ongoing engagement with sport at an elite level.

[82] Intersectionality entails a 'bottom-up' approach to research, analysis and planning (Symington). This means moving away from a 'top down' policy. Discussions with the relevant academies and communities, and research into their areas, along with research into the background and needs of the young athletes, should be held prior to future workshops being developed and delivered. The program can then be built 'upwards', accounting for the particularities of the female athletes to be involved. In this way the program can be in touch with community concerns, expectations, needs and opportunities. This kind of prior and specific research, requires a substantial investment in the analytical stages of the work.

[83] It is important to think about what the program is trying to achieve and where it is trying to



accomplish its aims. The presenters and organisers should unpack how the program will intersect with the cultural, economic and political setting of where it will be delivered. The program can then be inclusive, acknowledging and building on the perspectives that athletes bring to the learning situation as a result of their gender, region/community, class, ethnicity, age, sexuality and mental or physical capabilities. A 'one size fits all' approach should be avoided.

[84] In light of the above observations and responses to the questionnaire and focus group discussions, the researchers recommend the following issues be addressed in future educational programs aimed at athletes.

- **Rural/Metropolitan** – Workshops should be tailored to address the differing needs of the regions. Specific examples should be used and elite athletes should be drawn from the surrounding area as much as possible. Access to computers could be utilised as a way to counteract the disadvantages of living in non-metropolitan areas, and help girls who cannot travel to also acquire media and sponsorship literacy. A bus service could be organised to pick girls up from remote areas and to take them home. Weekend camps could be held for athletes in rural areas to make the distance they travel more worthwhile
- **Culture/Ethnicity** – Workshops should ascertain the cultural and ethnic demographics of the participants prior to running the program. This would facilitate the workshop by acknowledging the different pressures, anxieties, needs and opportunities of athletes from varying cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Elite athletes should be drawn from a broader range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to allow more girls to relate. It is strongly recommended that Aboriginal representatives of sport should be used in areas with significant Aboriginal demographics.
- **Age** – During practical stations participants should be grouped according to age. Older athletes could then work together, as could younger athletes. This would increase relevance of discussions for participants and support differing media literacy abilities
- **Workbook** – Change the workbook to function as a reference tool – question and answer guide. Using the workbook as an educational tool or requiring athletes to fill out too many details in the training sessions is not recommended

- **Parental/Coach Involvement** – Practical stations should not include parents and coaches to avoid embarrassment of girls and to facilitate peer discussion. Parents and coaches should be part of other sessions
- **Facilities** – The facilities being used for the workshop should be comfortable and quiet. The facilities should be separate from where the athletes train or play
- **Time** – Workshops should be during a day on the weekend to encourage participation. Weeknights mean that many girls are tired after school, and holding workshops on weekend nights upset some girls because they were the nights they wanted to be hanging out with their friends

A longer preparatory and delivery period is advisable to tailor workshops to more focussed/specific groups, to allow for the attendance of more areas in News South Wales, and to cater to different intersectional concerns. It takes time to change. A long-term view is necessary. Any program must not be short-term but have a vision for ongoing involvement with the regional sports communities. Otherwise there is a risk of participants and their community feeling let down or abandoned.

- **Active Learning** – Workshops should function almost exclusively as active and collaborative learning for both media *and* sponsorship skills. The format of the program should consist of role-plays intended to allow participants to construct and practice viable options. In this way the participants can learn that there is not simply one way to act and can get a feel for what to do or not to do. This experiential learning should be open-ended to provide a diverse and creative learning experience. Lecture sessions should be kept as short as possible, and some participatory exercises within them should also be carried out. Audio Visual tools could be used to keep the athletes interested and to break up lecture-based sessions
- **Team and Individual Sports** – The workshops need to address and make clear the different requirements of individual and team sports. Relationship with the media can have effects on a team's morale and bonding. Research should be done prior to workshops to allow presenters to directly address the specific sports of participants attending the relevant academy workshop eg. tennis, netball, rowing, cycling, golf, softball. Elite athletes should also represent sports most familiar to relevant participants at any given academy

- **Mentoring** – Mentor and mentee relationships should be built and encouraged. Involve the girls in playing sport with more experienced women to develop organic opportunities for connection and mentoring. Use local mentors to ensure relevance and the ability to relate to local concerns. Mentoring relationships can be among the most rewarding interactions, and are an effective way to cultivate self-discipline, provide role models, and offer opportunities for young people that would otherwise not be available (McInerney et al, 1998; MacCallum and Beltmen, 2002; Morris et al, 2004). Peer support is especially relevant for the girls in more isolated areas. An official mentoring program is recommended. Mentors do not have to be much older than mentees. This peer scenario can give the mentor legitimacy and authenticity; the mentee can relate to the stories and scenarios provided by the mentor
- **Other Media Content** – Workshops should incorporate how to work with photographic and film-based media, and how to deal with the demands and responsibilities that flow on from these eg. photo shoots for magazines and newspapers; filming during sports. The advent of digital technologies has presented significant new opportunities and challenges for media educators. The girls are part of a mobile and digital culture and are quite literate in using these technologies, often more so than current educators. This has been found to be the case in contemporary educational settings (Buckingham). These are specific skills the girls are already developing and offer self-marketing possibilities. Internet, blogging, mobile phones and chat rooms can be used as marketing tools, for sponsorship opportunities, to develop sporting networks, and to build personal sporting profiles. Particularly for the young athletes in rural and regional areas, the potential of new media technologies for communication, support and education should be looked at. There is an accessibility to this new media in rural areas as distinct from the perceived 'big business' of television and radio
- **Film** – The workshops should be filmed. Film can act as an effective way of evaluating the workshop in action and showing future trainers what is expected. By being able to see what actually happens evaluation can be more effective, and participants can have a say about what occurred. This mode of evaluation also allows for promotion of programs when searching for sponsors and other support.

## **Appendix**

### **Media and Sponsorship Training for Sportswomen Questionnaire**

1 How did you rate the presenters?

1. poor
2. fair
3. average
4. good
5. excellent

Comments:

2 How did you find the format of the presentation?

- 1.poor
- 2 fair
- 3.average
- 4.good
- 5.excellent

Comments:

3 Was there any information presented today that was not relevant or has not assisted you?

Yes:  
No:

Comments:

What part of the workshop did you like most?

Comment:

5 What part of the workshop did you like least?

Comment:

6 Would you recommend this training to other athletes or people?

Yes:  
No:

Why/why not:

**7 If this training were offered to other sports groups or athletes, what changes would you make to it?**

Comments:

**8 Did the workshops provide you with the skills you need to deal with the media?**

Yes:

No:

Not sure:

Comments:

**9 Did the training provide you with the skills you need to deal with sponsors and sponsorship obligations?**

Yes:

No:

Not sure:

Comments:

**10 Could the training have been more practically-based?**

Yes:

No:

Not sure:

**11 What kind of practical elements could have been included?**

a) more input from fellow athletes with media experience?

Yes:

No:

Don't know:

b) more input from athletes who have experience of sponsorship?

Yes:

No:

Don't know:

c) more role-playing of media interview situations – radio, television, print?

Yes:

No:

Don't know:

**12 What area/s of visual media representation would you like more training in or experience of?**

**(tick as many as you like)**

- photos/film taken during training
- during competition
- immediately after sport
- styled for portrait (feature stories, calendars, covers)
- 'paparazzi' shots
- lifestyle shoots - at home, with partner, children, pets etc

**13 How useful do you find the workbook, *Effectively Promoting your Story?***

1. Very Useful
2. Quite useful
3. Useful
4. Not useful

**14 Is there any follow up training that would be of benefit??**

Yes:  
No:  
Maybe:

Comments (be as specific as you can):

**15 Before today's training, how would you have rated your level of confidence in dealing with the media and the demands of sponsorship?**

a) With media:

- 1.poor
- 2.fair
- 3.average
- 4.good
- 5.excellent

b) With sponsors and sponsorship obligations?

- 1.poor
- 2.fair
- 3.average
- 4.good
- 5.excellent

**16 Do you feel more confident now, after the training, in dealing with the media and sponsorship?**

a) With media:

1. poor
2. fair
3. average
4. good
5. excellent

b) With sponsors and sponsorship obligations:

1. poor
2. fair
3. average
4. good
5. excellent

Yes:

No:

Why/why not?

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