



Speech by

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Hansard 11 September 2001

### **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPORT**

**Mr SHINE** (Toowoomba North—ALP) (12.06 p.m.): Recently I had the pleasure of representing the Treasurer and Minister for Sport at a celebration of women and sport in Toowoomba. The Leader of the Opposition was also present. Womensport Toowoomba's work in advancing the cause of women at all levels of sport is to be commended and is certainly something that greatly supports what the government is doing in this area. I think members will agree that sport is, unfortunately, still very much a man's world despite the fact that some of Australia's greatest athletes have been women. Dawn Fraser, Betty Cuthbert and, more recently, Susie O'Neill and Cathy Freeman are firmly entrenched in Australia's sporting culture and stand as a testament to what women can achieve in spite of the many obstacles that even today can prevent them from participating in the same way as men.

I was personally delighted to see Australia's women up there with the men in winning gold at the recent World Swimming Championships in Japan and of course at last week's Goodwill Games, not to mention the brilliant performances of our women at last year's Sydney Olympics. Women have always represented Australia with distinction at the Olympics. From 1948 to 1996 women have won 30 of the 89 gold medals whilst only comprising 21 per cent of the Australian teams. In Sydney, women could only compete in 40 per cent of events but won seven gold, only one less than the men. But the unfortunate reality is that women in general still have lower participation rates than men. Female athletes, particularly women's teams, also lack the media coverage they deserve. How often do we see our female athletes headlining the news? Yes, Karrie Webb winning a major or the Hockeyroos winning Olympic gold will get a run on the press and on TV, but how much coverage does week-to-week women's sport receive? I think members know the answer.

If you read the major papers on a regular basis, you can expect to see football, football and more football in the winter and cricket, cricket, cricket in the summer, which does not leave much space for women's sports. The media might have us believe that this is simply a reflection of what people want to read. But it clearly goes deeper than that. We know that sport holds a significant place in our society. It affects how people think, it shapes ideas, and it creates emotion and creates heroes. The media reflects this and so communicates the importance of sport in our lives. But just as sport is critical to the media, the media is critically important to sport. With that in mind, it is greatly concerning that more than six times more newspaper space is devoted to men's sport than women's sport. Television coverage is even more one-sided, with studies revealing only two per cent of all sport coverage features women. When the public broadcasters are excluded, the figures are even worse, falling to only 0.2 per cent.

It is frustrating that, despite the hard work of government agencies, sporting organisations and the athletes themselves, the amount of coverage for female athletes remains static or goes backwards. For its part, the government has produced resources to help sporting organisations manage and promote themselves. Ultimately, the media can have a huge impact in encouraging women's participation in sport. This takes on added importance when we consider that only 47 per cent of girls aged between five and 14 play sport outside of school hours compared with 64 per cent of boys. It is vital to the health and wellbeing of our female population that the gap closes rather than widens, so I call on the media to re-examine its priorities.

The Queensland government is working to address the many issues affecting women in sport by helping sporting organisations identify why girls and women leave their sport, assisting sport development initiatives to increase female participation in all areas, developing programs and policy which support the important contribution women and girls make to sport, encouraging networking

among women in the industry, helping women access the training they need to develop their skills in all areas of the industry, and working with the Australian Sports Commission and other peak industry bodies.

The government also provides funding to state organisations and local grassroots clubs for initiatives aimed at increasing participation in sport and recreation across the board. More than \$67,000 was distributed to 27 organisations across Toowoomba, the Darling Downs and Southern Downs through this year's community sport and recreation development program. We need more organisations to undertake projects that encourage women and girls to become involved, not just as players but also as coaches, officials, managers and administrators. The government is also working to raise the profile of volunteers within the sport and recreation industry. Women continue to play vital roles in making sport possible, particularly for our young people.

Despite the fact that women's participation is still comparatively low, rates have risen dramatically in recent decades to the point where more than half of Queensland women aged over 18 now do some form of exercise, recreation or sport. Female athletes continue to excel at the international level and women's sport is starting to secure more sponsors for individual athletes and teams. We are also starting to see more female sports journalists and television presenters, which can only help to improve the quantity and quality of women's sports coverage in the media.

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