

Girls' Schools Sport & Girls Sport Victoria - a History

Note: dates in brackets refer to the date of the founding of the school.

Girls' Independent schools increasingly have seen the value of fitness, and healthy physical activity. In the late 1800s, most offered Physical Culture – calisthenics exercises and drills using rods, Indian clubs and light dumb-bells - as an extra subject, a brave stance since most medicos argued at the time that exercise was unhealthy for girls, a waste of the reproductive energies required of them in adulthood. Even though hampered by their long dresses and general disapproval of boisterousness in girls, students played their own range of games in the 1870s, including croquet and roller skating at PLC (1875), and tennis at Tintern (1877), PLC and Ruyton (1878), inspired by the 1877 Wimbledon tournament. The first interschool contests were friendly tennis matches. At MLC (1882), girls also played Hildegarde, a type of Rounders, and Croquet and Cricket, while Lacrosse and Archery were also tried in some schools. While school magazines report some of these early matches in vivid detail, it is seldom revealed who won: to enjoy winning was regarded as immodest. Cycling was in vogue in the 1890s, and dancing was taught, but the opening of MLC's "swimming bath" in the 1890s signaled a more serious approach to physical education.

It was not until the 1900s, that competitive team sports were formally introduced. Men were still publicly opposing sport for women, when Mary Morris, Co-Principal of Merton Hall (Melbourne Girls Grammar) spoke boldly at Speech Night in 1901:

The great importance of sport in school girl life should at once be recognized. Our girls need open air exercises just as boys do, especially if they are doing good mental work. More especially, they need the discipline of the playground which boys get, and which enables them to understand the values of co-operative efforts in later life.¹

In 1902, Miss Hatchell-Brown of the Priory Ladies' School in St Kilda suggested the formation of a schools Club to play tennis, and in 1902, the Kia-Ora Club was formed, of which Toorak College, Ruyton, Tintern and Lauriston were among the members.² At the same time, Margaret Irving, co-founder of Lauriston (1901), on a visit to English schools found the new game Hockey being played, which she and her sister Lilian introduced that year to her girls. She encouraged other schools to take it up, and in 1903, the first inter-school match was played between Lauriston and Ruyton, with Merton Hall girls as enthusiastic spectators. Mary Morris took the initiative, and with Lauriston, Ruyton and Tintern, formed the Girls' Schools Hockey Association in 1904. It was the first Association of its type. Oberwyl and Toorak College joined in 1906. Some of the original rules give a clear idea of the scene on the playing field:

1. Skirts must be eight inches off the ground.
2. No white petticoats to be worn.
3. Hard-rimmed hats and hatpins must not be worn during play.³

Gwynneth Morris, Mary's sister, was the first specialist physical education teacher appointed in a girls' school, and other schools soon followed. Not only female, but male heads of schools offered their full support: Otto Krome (MLC, 1906-17) attended every interschool contest, while James Bee (PLC, 1906-13) coached school teams, encouraging them to 'hit hard and play to win'. At this time, Physical Culture entered the main curriculum for all students' participation.

The range of sports being played expanded. Basketball (Netball) was played in some schools by 1907, lacrosse on a regular basis by 1908, and baseball by 1909. By now, a considerable number of pages in school magazines were being devoted to sports reports, bursting with enthusiasm for school sports heroines and interschool wins. Inter-form and House competitions grew swiftly.

¹ *Jubilee History*, MCEGGS 1953, pp.68-69

² O Hay *the Chronicles of Clyde Melbourne* 1966 names as members Faireleight, Priory, Toorak College, Ruyton, Oberwyl and Tintern, while H Y Daniell *History of Ruyton 1878-1956 Melbourne* 1957 p 66. names as members Aldworth, Clyde, Cromarty, Lauriston and Stratherne.

³ *Ruytonian* April 1928

Schools actively promoted sports as inculcating high ideals of justice, loyalty, honour and decency, as well as good health. Even patriotism was connected with healthy sporting competition.

Swimming and athletics emerged a little later. MLC's first annual Swimming Sports took place in 1908, and its first Athletics Sports in 1914. Interschool swimming competition was provided by the Brighton Ladies' Swimming Club prior to World War 1, when they set aside a part of their annual Aquatic Carnival for school teams. By 1920, the schools section of the carnival was the major part of the program. Athletics was slower to form, and Korowa (1890) had a typical first Athletics Day in 1919: as well as running and high and long jumping, girls competed in the slow bicycle race, the sack race, the potato race, the Siamese race (two runners with legs tied together) and skipping and hopping races - and basketball throwing. The latter began a long tradition of races which combined running and basketball throwing, which over time became increasingly sophisticated and competitive, and which only ceased to be a part of interschool athletics with the formation of GSV.

The inappropriateness of ordinary school clothing for playing sport was a major problem. Ruyton's first hockey uniform in the early 1900s, had a navy blue skirt 20cm from the ground, a white blouse, black stockings and belt, and a bright red tam o'shanter (a round beret-like floppy hat). Some time prior to 1913, MCEGGS (Melbourne Grammar) adopted a three-pleat tunic, which was taken up by some other schools, while in the 1920s, Lauriston introduced a fashionable and risqué tennis outfit – a divided skirt reaching the knee which, for the first time, did not require the girls to wear stockings. There was little significant change in sport uniforms until the coming of new fabrics like nylon and lycra in the 1960s and '70s. Now, the school sports wardrobe consists of dozens of pieces, from shorts to polar fleece snow vests, body suits to crop tops.

The first fully-fledged sports associations, embracing a range of sporting contests, formed in the 1920s. The Church Secondary Schools Sports Association created in 1920 by Firbank (1909), Tintern, St Michael's and Korowa, joined in 1926 by Lowther Hall (1920) and Ivanhoe (1923), conducted the first combined girls' schools sports day held in Victoria on 30 April 1930, at Toorak Park Cricket Ground, in the presence of Lady Ferguson, the Governor's wife. Firbank traveled to the venue by horse-drawn drays decorated with ribbons in school colours, "the long, slow journey beguiled by songs and war-cries".⁴ Later again, Camberwell joined the group, which was known as the Associated Anglican Girls' Grammar Schools (AAGGS) at the time it ceased with the formation of GSV. The Girls' Secondary Schools Sports Association (GSSSA, later GSSA) was also formed in 1920 by Lauriston, Fintona, Ruyton, and St Catherine's, with Korowa and Tintern joining a little later, and it too was flourishing at the time GSV came into being, being probably the strongest interschool competition then existing. Other less long lasting Associations were created during the following decades amongst other schools.

The 1920s were a golden decade for girls' schools sport. Sports colours were introduced in most schools, and trophies were now being awarded widely. The Headmistresses' Association became concerned at what they considered 'the excessive publicity given to the doings of school girls in connection with their sports and otherwise' and asked in 1924 for 'the co-operation of all concerned in the welfare of girls in checking the growing evil'. But it proved difficult to stem the tide of enthusiasm. In 1930, Tintern girls noted with a frown that "unfortunately there has been an element creeping in of *not playing seriously*". Blow by blow descriptions of significant matches found their way into school magazines, including criticism in Tintern's *The Brook* magazine of girls who had performed badly, which did not cease until the end of the decade.⁵ Eventually the AAGGS Principals banned the chanting of aggressive war-cries, a ban which was not lifted until the early 1990s.

From the 1960s, the range of competitive sports expanded hugely, eventually to include diverse water sports such as Diving, Water Polo, Kayaking, and particularly, Rowing, while girls were

⁴ J McKenzie & I Dickson *Life at Firbank 1909-1959* Melbourne 1959.

⁵ L Gardiner *Tintern School and Anglican Girls' Education 1877-1977*, Melbourne 1977, pp. 99-100.

introduced to Artistic and Rhythmic Gymnastics following the success of these sport in Olympic Games after the 1950s. Volleyball and badminton also entered schools at this time. Formal interschool Skiing competition was developed by the ski resorts during the 1990s, and is now a multi-discipline contest lasting for days. Rowing became extraordinarily popular, and by 2000, the Head of the River on the Barwon River at Geelong was the largest schools sporting event in the Southern hemisphere

Sources:

Ray Crawford, "Sport for Young Ladies: The Victorian Independent Schools 1875-1925" in *Sporting Traditions*, Vol 1 No 1, November 1984

Many school histories

The coming of Girls Sport Victoria

In the 1990s, several trends came together. There was much dissatisfaction with the awkward and complex structures for inter-school sporting competition. The many Associations varied greatly in what they could offer, and the quality of competition. Old linkages yoked large schools with small schools. Some schools on Melbourne's fringes found it difficult to join any competition, and thus were less able to offer the sporting programs parents expected. Some schools were members of two Associations, and were overextended, but found it difficult to choose to leave either group. There was no peak sporting event for all schools, except for those sports organized outside the Associations, such as Rowing, Snow Sports and Gymnastics. By the 1990s, the number of boys' schools which had decided to develop co-education and enroll girls was reaching a peak, and boys' schools were actively seeking to recruit girls from wherever they could be found, including from their sister schools. There was encouragement of the belief that co-education was superior to single-sex schooling, which put girls' schools under extreme pressure, even though their success academically was notable. Almost half the schools in the top forty for their VCE results in the 1990s were girls' schools.

Girls' schools worked hard to develop their own excellence in all areas to attract and retain students. One area where it was felt girls' schools could always do better for their students was in the area of sports. There was great potential for providing challenging and enjoyable sports for girls, catering for those who just enjoyed the group activity of sport, to those who had the potential to represent their country in a sport at the highest level.

There were several serious attempts to unite all existing girls' schools sports associations during the 1990s. In 1991, Warren Stone of Kilvington called a meeting at which Principals expressed enthusiasm for a new model of inter-school competition, but the enormity of the difficulties of doing so proved too much for the idea. The formation in 1994 of the Alliance of Girls' Schools Australasia provided a new impetus to the Principals of girls' schools. They developed co-operative forums for discussion which empowered Principals and confirmed the value of their work, removing a reticence and sense of isolation which many felt.

In 1996, Di Fleming of Kilvington, launched another attempt, which gained greater ground. It began to identify a model of girls' sport which was based on provision for the range of sporting needs of all girls, included those very gifted in sport. The group undertook much data collection, including a survey of school sporting facilities in 49 schools, and the range of existing Associations.

Sports Associations in 1998

Associated Anglican Girls' Grammar Schools: Camberwell, Firkbank, Ivanhoe, Korowa, Lowther Hall, Melbourne GGS, Mentone, Shelford

Girls' Schools Sports Association (1993)*: Camberwell, Genazzano, Ivanhoe, MGGS, MLC, PLC, Strathcona

Girls' Private Schools Victorian Sports Association: Loreto, Melbourne GGS, MLC, PLC, Tintern, Toorak

Girls' Schools Sports Association (1920)*: Fintona, Korowa, Lauriston, St Catherine's, Tintern, Ruyton

Secondary Catholic Sports Association: Genazzano, Loreto, Sacre Coeur, St Columba's, OLM Heidelberg

Southern District Sports Association: Assumption, Kilvington, Lowther Hall, PEGS, St Leonard's, St Margaret's, Toorak

Zone Sports Association: Firbank, Loreto, Mentone, Sacre Coeur, Shelford, St Michael's

* For a brief period, two Associations existed with the name "Girls' Schools Sports Association".

- The older, formed in 1920, had for many years been the "Girls' Secondary Schools Sports Association" (GSSSA) but the "Secondary" was dropped from the name in the 1990s.
- The 1993 "Girls' Schools Sports Association" was formed by girls' schools then in the Eastern Suburbs Association. The ESA had earlier permitted girls from the co-educational Carey Baptist Grammar School to enter its competitions. This had caused great difficulties to the girls' schools members, especially as Carey in its vigorous marketing for female enrolments claimed access to high-level competitive sport for its girls through membership of the ESA. In 1993, ESA member schools were Ivanhoe, Strathcona, PLC, MLC, Camberwell, MGGS, Carey and Genazzano as a non-voting member. When the ESA was dissolved and the new GSSA was constituted at the end of the same year, its members were Camberwell, Genazzano, Ivanhoe, MGGS, MLC and Strathcona, with PLC joining in 1994. The name of the new Association crucially identified its members as "Girls' Sschools".

In 1999, Christine Briggs of Melbourne GGS hosted a historic meeting of Principals of the girls' schools at the Lyceum Club. She was impelled to call the meeting after receiving a letter of invitation from the Associated Private Schools (APS) inviting her to put Melbourne Girls Grammar's sporting fortunes with this group. Many APS boys' schools had introduced co-education and were finding it a challenge to provide strong interschool sports experiences for their girls. As the oldest schools association, the APS felt it was in a strong position to attract girls' schools to its ranks. Christine was concerned that the APS saw girls' schools as the solution to their sports needs, but saw that girls' schools sports were fragmented into so many associations, that the APS would think their approach might be successful.

Christine put the issue of girls' sports to her fellow Principals at the meeting, and they agreed it was time seriously to consider the ideal of a new sports organization. There could be no question of abandoning the strong heritage of girls' sport built over more than a century by girls' schools. There followed a forum led by Diana Bowman, a former Principal from NSW, with experience of the united association in her State. It was at this meeting that the unanimous decision was made by all present to create a new sports organization to which the twenty four girls' schools could belong. While acknowledging the past century's great heritage, Principals made the decision in the full realization that existing Associations would then cease to exist. In the same year, the name "Girls Sport Victoria" was selected for the new organization. It was agreed that the huge task of creating the organization would take time, and a Project Officer was needed to undertake the task. Fiona Preston was the person selected, and commenced work immediately, to complete preparations for the sports program for 2001. She was supported by the Management Committee of Principals, the Committee of Heads of Sport, and working committees for each sport.

To raise enthusiasm, and to provide a foretaste of what was to come, the Alliance of Girls' Schools (Australasia) ran the Alliance Games at Olympic Park in May 2000, as a way of celebrating the outstanding talent of the best athletes of the Victorian girls' schools in the year of the Sydney Olympic Games. Some competitors in the Olympics were graduates of the girls' schools.

Fiona Preston, the first Executive Officer Meredith Prime, and a small staff, created an extensive program of sports and three major carnivals, Athletics, Swimming and Diving, and Cross Country, in three Divisions. Zoned groups of schools were established for weekly interschool competitions

in Netball, Basketball, Softball, Tennis, Indoor Cricket, Hockey, Waterpolo, Soccer, Volleyball and Badminton. In addition, Saturday morning sport, especially attractive to boarding schools, offered Golf, Australian Rules Football, Taekwondo and Triathlon. A seasonal competition in Cricket, Surf League, and for Year 7 and 8 fun days, was co-ordinated.

There were many challenges to meet: the huge geographic spread of schools; the varying size of schools, ranging from 300 to almost 2000 students; the varying quality and number of sports facilities both within and outside schools; the difference in strength between schools and within sports; the cost to schools to meet their responsibilities in staff, timetabling and money; concern at the loss of academic time through travel to venues; the provision of GSV rules and regulations; talent identification; promotion of leadership opportunities; provision of quality umpiring; safety.

GSV has become a superb vehicle for girls' sports in Victoria. Achievement at the highest levels, as well as enjoyment in their sport for all girls, has been achieved. GSV has a powerful logo, and active website, and an annual magazine reflecting all member schools' efforts. Results are published weekly. Superb major carnivals have produced sporting feats at the highest level. This powerful organization is giving girls their due in sport.

Member Schools 2000

Camberwell Anglican Girls' School	Loreto Mandeville Hall	Ruyton Girls'
School		
Fintona Girls' School	Lowther Hall Anglican Grammar	Shelford Anglican Girls'
		School
Firbank	Melbourne Girls Grammar	St Catherine's School
Genazzano FCJ College	Mentone Girls' Grammar	St Margaret's School
Ivanhoe Girls' Grammar	Methodist Ladies' College	Star of the Sea College
Kilvington Girls' Grammar	Our Lady of Mercy, Heidelberg	Strathcona Baptist Girls
		Grammar
Korowa Anglican Girls' School	Presbyterian Ladies' College	Tintern Anglican
Girls		
Lauriston Girls' School	Sacre Coeur	Grammar
		Toorak College

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Photographs:

Physical culture classes/tennis outdoors at MLC 1890s – p. 240 in A Zainu'ddin “The Dreamt of a School”

Lauriston Hockey Team 1903 – absolutely historic!! p.33

Lauriston Baseball Team 1918 in the new 3-pleat tunic p. 53

Lauriston Tennis Team 1920s in the new divided skirt, no stockings p. 113

All in C Rasmussen, “Lauriston: 100 Years of Educating Girls 1901-2000”

Kia Ora Club Premiership Tennis Team, Ruyton 1909 – wearing HUGE hats! p.10

In H Y Daniell “History of Ruyton 1878-1956”

Korowa Tennis Team 1912 p.48
In P Chessell "And, as We Journey"

Croquet 1921, Sacre Coeur p.86
Cricket 1923, Sacre Coeur p. 88
In "Sacre Coeur Burke Road 1888-1988"

The three tennis photos show the evolution of dress.