

# CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

## RURAL AND REGIONAL SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into country football

Ballarat –27 April 2004

#### Members

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#### Witness

Mr C. Dole, coach, North Ballarat-University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team (affirmed).

**The CHAIR** — Welcome. I will begin by informing you that under the powers conferred on this committee by the Constitution Act and the Parliamentary Committees Act this committee is empowered to take all evidence at these hearings on oath or affirmation. I also wish to advise all present at these hearings that all evidence taken by this committee, including submissions, is, under the provisions of the Constitution Act, granted immunity from judicial review. I advise witnesses that any comments made outside the committee room are not protected by parliamentary privilege. Would you mind, for the purposes of the transcript, giving your full name and address and organisation you are representing and your position in it.

**Mr DOLE** — My name is Cameron Dole. I live at 37 Lanita Street, in Delacombe. I am the coach of the North Ballarat-University of Ballarat Roosters Women's Football Team.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much. I will ask you to make some brief comments, to begin with.

**Mr DOLE** — Women's football has a short but successful history in Ballarat. A team formed in Ballarat competed in the then one division VWFL in the late 1980s and early 1990s, winning three premierships. Unfortunately that team folded in the last 1990s due to a lack of junior players coming through. In 2002 a team consisting mostly of students from Mount Clear College was entered into division 3, with assistance from the Mount Clear Junior Football Club, and finished runner-up and was promoted to division 2. Despite this success the trial by Mount Clear was not considered worthy of its continued assistance. The team struggled by itself, but still made the finals, despite regularly playing with less than a full team. In 2004 the senior players and coach pursued the option of becoming a University of Ballarat Student Association club, and moving to the university for training purposes. An expression of interest from the president of the North Ballarat Junior Football Club was also pursued, and led to the formation of this year's team which will continue to train at the university, but play home games at Northern Oval 2. The team has had minimal support and sponsorship, and has been largely funded in the last two years by player subscriptions, and a sizeable donation from the coach.

The relationship with men's football on a local level has been patchy. At first Mount Clear was supportive, but this relationship quickly soured. We were given access to the Mount Clear ground to train on Friday nights, but just prior to our grand final in 2002 the coach of one of boy's teams decided that not only would they train on that Friday night, but they would use the whole oval. There was no negotiation; we were just told it would happen. The following day at the club's presentation that coach also went to great lengths to denigrate our achievement in making the grand final, basically saying that because it was women's' footy it did not count as being the first team from the club to make the grand final. This lack of respect has had a directly negative effect on recruiting, as we would often have prospective new players attend training, only to have to stand around waiting as boys' teams trained well past their allotted time without notifying us. Indeed it continues now, as our team was the first to book the university oval on Wednesdays, only for the university's men's team to start turning up two weeks after we had started, and attempt to hog the oval without having booked it at all. They just assumed that they were entitled to it. It is hard to criticise male clubs too much when we have problems with our own league. We have played a total of 11 games in Ballarat, plus the one in Daylesford, and for exactly half of those we have not been provided with an umpire, and on three of those occasions we were not even notified prior to the game that we would not have one. The president of the VWFL, who is also the captain of St Albans, also encouraged three of our better players to leave this season, and encouraged them in their attempts to persuade others to do the same.

However, on a positive note, this year North Ballarat has been very helpful and supportive, and it attempted to arrange for us to play our first game this season as a curtain-raiser to the club's VFL team when it played Bendigo, as Bendigo does not have a reserves team; but it was denied permission by the Ballarat council. Faced with no ground to play on, the football-netball operations manager for the Ballarat Football League, Tim Beacham, arranged for us to play in Daylesford, and the two major local media outlets — WIN television and the *Courier* newspaper have been very supportive, with several stories on the team and its achievements. As with most other sports, we struggle with player unavailability due to work commitments, but also those with other sporting pursuits as well as their education-based time constraints. We believe that women's football is important as it provides another alternative for female participation in sport, and although the size of the team can sometimes be difficult to maintain, it is also a plus as more can be involved in a team than occurs in other sports such as basketball and netball.

I personally believe the fact football has largely been a single-sex pursuit is a major contributing factor to the current problems regarding the behaviour of AFL players towards women. In a recent interview Robert Shaw, an assistant coach at Essendon, was discussing Matthew Lloyd's approach to practising his goal kicking and said that

rather than spend a lot of time practising the difficult shots, he drilled himself on the easy shots — ‘the ones my daughter could make’. It is this inherent often unconscious belief that males have a birthright to football that leads to the situation we have at present. I have been involved in swimming for 25 years and have never seen or heard of such behaviour by male swimmers towards females, and the fact that swimming is very much a co-ed pursuit is largely to thank for that. All football clubs and leagues should be encouraged develop female participation, especially in the junior ranks, and then provide a pathway, as North Ballarat has done, for females to continue their participation beyond their junior years. Although it would most likely be non-feasible for each club to develop a team, it would be possible for most leagues to develop a team and rotate training and games among its member clubs. We feel it is important that junior males grow up respecting participation in football, as unfortunately, at the moment, for every North Ballarat and Tim Beacham there are many more individuals who do not respect or appreciate the participation of females in football.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks, Cameron. It gives us a very frank idea of where things are with women’s football. In regard to getting women to come along and play, there have been some comments in the media about the big gap between when girls can play football and keeping them after 12 years of age, and the problem of them getting a game because of their joint size, especially if they are very good players. Then there is a big gap until they can play women’s footy. Has any work been done to try and fill that gap for those young keen players?

**Mr DOLE** — Not in the country. A competition has been developed in south-east Melbourne for — I think — under-17 teams, and the recent raising of the age to 14 years for mixed football helps bridge that gap a little. It is interesting that you note that because there is a girl from Gordon who is now 15-years-old, who is a bit on the small side. We have been trying to get her to play, but she is worried about the fact that she is going to play open-age football. She is going from playing under-14s to suddenly playing against adult women. Unfortunately the country has no alternative to that. We have a girl from Newstead in the same boat as Ashley Pearce; she is too old to play for Newstead in the junior team but, luckily for her, she is quite a large girl and therefore she played last week in our first game and did not have a problem — as a matter of fact she was the star. It is a worry that any person should miss out on participating in a sport they like doing for whatever reason. If there is any way that we can overcome those hurdles to make sure that people can participate in what they want to — because we all know the problems of obesity with young kids — we should help. Females need as much choice as possible. A lot of girls in our team play other sports, but there are also at least half a dozen that do not. If we did not exist, there would be another half a dozen young women sitting on their backsides each weekend instead of getting out there and being active.

**The CHAIR** — Have you spoken to the leagues about your idea of encouraging a women’s team?

**Mr DOLE** — Yes, I have emailed the Ballarat Football League and the Central Highlands league with the same ideas about our team being a representative of the league in particular, and about how we could provide feedback if they had a player playing for their club. We could give them regular updates on that player’s progression and other things that they could put in their club newsletters to say that Mary Smith had kicked two goals last weekend and things like that. But unfortunately there has been no interest. It has been very sporadic. Mt Clear was very half-hearted, but at this stage it looks as if North Ballarat is very keen on the idea. But then again, that is probably why it is so successful; it is prepared to think ahead and see possibilities that perhaps others do not.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — Do most of the players in your senior team come from a history of playing mixed junior football, or is it fifty-fifty, those who come through mixed football and others who at the age of 15, 16 or 18 years or when they go to university decide that they would not mind playing football?

**Mr DOLE** — Over the three years we have had about 60 registered players and about 5 of those have a history of playing junior mixed football. The rest would probably have played school football — girl’s school football is very strong. In Ballarat the private schools have a Thursday afternoon competition, and the government schools participate in the VSSSA, and that is where this team has come from, because the team from Mt Clear made the state finals and attracted interest from Football Victoria. There are still a lot of others that come to university in particular as netballers, basketballers and perhaps from areas like Mildura — for example, our captain, Emma Lynch, is from Mildura. She never had the opportunity to play football but always wanted to. She quit playing with the Ballarat Lady Miners to play football and made the All-Australian team in just her second year of playing football. So it is a mix.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — One of the issues that clubs face is that of public liability insurance. Are you treated the same as the male footballers in terms of insurance costs, or is there discrimination for or against female footballers in insurance costs?

**Mr DOLE** — Up until this year the VWFL obtained its own insurance for players and each club then had to get its own public liability. We were not covered by the existing North Ballarat public liability; we had to go out and get our own cover, which when you are dealing in such small volumes is obviously going to be very expensive. But this year, because the VWFL has affiliated with Football Victoria, we fall under the national scheme, so that has been a huge reduction. Basically last year our cost of entering a team was \$2000; this year it is \$1200. You can imagine the difference that makes to player fees and therefore more people are likely to play the game because they are not going to pay so much to participate.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — I plead ignorance of women's football, so can you explain to me the league structure across Victoria? What league do you play in?

**Mr DOLE** — The Victorian Women's Football League is mostly based in Melbourne. There are teams from Melton, Sunbury, East Geelong and Corio. Apart from that they are all based in Melbourne suburbs. Up until this year it has been a stand-alone, with volunteers from within the clubs organising something. This year it is under the wing of Football Victoria and is an affiliated league, so it is progressing.

**The CHAIR** — You talked about sharing your facilities being an issue. It is not just with women's football; it could also be with cricket and other sports, as we have heard. Since those situations occurred have you developed communication strategies to ensure that they do not happen again? Has there been some proactive work to make sure that the role of women's football is respected at those grounds?

**Mr DOLE** — We left Mt Clear. It became obvious that it was just not interested, and we thought that if we trained at the university we would not have those problems — apart from the men's team there, which only competes on the odd occasion in university games. I am on the committee of the North Ballarat Junior Football Club, so there is an opportunity for me to raise those sorts of issues. We have already discussed ideas about our top four or five players who, regardless of the fact that they are female, are exceptional footballers, and certainly there would be no problem with them training with the under-15 or under-16 boys; they would probably show a lot of them up. Josie Smith is an ex-junior player from North Ballarat and that is where the interest came from the club. She won two premierships with the club in the under-12 team and the club was quite aware of how good a football player she was and it was the same reason why I started doing all of this in the first place. I did not think it was a good idea that someone who was so good at that sport was not going to have an opportunity to play it.

**Mr McQUILTEN** — What sort of age are your players? You said 14 and 15 years?

**Mr DOLE** — Our youngest is Erin from Newstead. She is 14 years and is a year 10 student from Castlemaine Secondary College. Our oldest player is 42 years. She is an ex-national volleyball player who has been roped in to help fill in the team each week and has taken to it like a duck to water.

**Mr McQUILTEN** — Where do you do your training now? Is it at the university?

**Mr DOLE** — Yes. We train on Wednesday and Friday evenings at the university.

**Dr NAPHTHINE** — What assistance does women's football in general, or your club, receive either through the AFL, the VCFL, or from the state government, and what things would you like?

**Mr DOLE** — I am not quite sure of how much financial assistance we get from the AFL. Last weekend Carlton provided an opportunity for a curtain-raiser — country versus metro — and the AFL has given a Mother's Day curtain-raiser, which will be a premiership match. The division one grand final will be played at the MCG. Therefore there is a lot of in-kind support rather than anything in the way of financial support. ANZ has given \$10 000 sponsorship, which is the first time the league has had such major support. In terms of the VCFL, because we are the only country team as such, Melton and Sunbury would certainly be involved in that as well now because their parent clubs are involved in the Ballarat Football League, so hopefully we can get something going there. As I suggested, it would be a good idea if each league had a women's team. Obviously Sunraysia cannot compete in the VWFL — the logistics would be a bit awkward; but if the Wimmera and the North Central region and teams like that had teams there is a possibility of competitions going. If the boys grow up training with girls, then they will

have a better understanding and appreciation. That is very strong in my mind — that that is why sports like swimming do not have these problems; they just grow up training with girls all the time. If they are faster than us then they go in front of us in the line and no-one seems to care.

**The CHAIR** — Cameron, thank you very much for giving your time. It is the first time we have heard from the women's football league so it is very informative. You will receive a copy of the transcript and you can correct any matters of fact and grammar but not substance.

**Witness withdrew.**