

Slide 1 – title slide

My story is about the evolution and progress of Capital Football – a fully integrated single football association representing the interests of women, men, juniors, referees, coaches and 5-a-side Futsal). It's a success story particularly for female players who now enjoy much more recognition and resourcing than they had under the previous structure. It's a story about how the careful and courageous facilitation of change and the willingness of all parties to compromise and collaborate led to a better sport for everyone.

Slide 2 – CF logo

Capital Football represents the biggest sport in Australia's national capital of Canberra which has a population of just over 300,000. We have 17,000 players including 4500 girls in junior competitions and another 1200 players in 78 senior teams across ten's divisions - including the expanding under 18s and the unique over 35s league. Our budget this year is around \$3.4 million with \$400K dedicated to women's programs. And we have a team in the national women's league with games on free-to-air television thanks to the FFA and ABC.

I'd like to tell you about how this happened and encourage you to be persistent and take some risks to facilitate the change that may be needed in your sport or organization. But first let me tell you a bit about me.

Slide 3 - HR

I am the only female CEO of a football federation and I'm the longest serving CEO around the table of blokes in suits. My journey as a player, manager, coach, volunteer, mentor, administrator, leader and to some people, a trouble maker, extends more than 30 years. My involvement for the first 25 years was mainly through the ACT and Australian women's associations where I dedicated my time and energy to creating and implementing initiatives for women and girls to enjoy the same rights and privileges that men had in the sport. I have essentially been striving for cultural changes in order to ultimately increase the diversity, equity and fair play within the football family so the sport can be enjoyed in all its many facets by everyone regardless of gender.

This has meant negotiating the 'gender' politics more than any other kind in the overall process of challenging the male hegemony in the sport.

There are piles of reports calling for reform in Australian soccer. Very few, however, were as effective in bringing major change until the Federal Government initiated an independent review into the running of the sport culminating in the release of David Crawford's Report in 2003. The 53 recommendations reflected the totality of soccer's problems - including cronyism, nepotism, mismanagement, incompetence, lack of mutual trust and power struggles.

Change was vital for the sport's sheer survival and future success.

Slide 4 – Crawford Report 2003

Treating the problems rested with the introduction of a new national constitution and governance structure. And this model was expected to be adopted by Member Federations in each State and Territory. Recommendation 25 was most significant to me because it specifically spelt out the need for numerous state soccer bodies to undertake amalgamations with Soccer Australia's nine recognised state members. Apparently, at the time, there were about 37 different organisations running various aspects of the game in Australia.

Amalgamation was not a new phenomenon and whilst there was general support for the concept, nobody had ever worked out HOW to make it happen.

Slide 5 – AWSA first 20 years

Prior to the 2003 Crawford Report, the Australian women's association had initiated a merger with Soccer Australia without knowing the extent of the problems within that organisation. Around the same time, the AWSA experienced a premature collapse (due to a range of peculiar and potentially fraudulent circumstances) leaving only four independent state women's associations without any obvious national leadership and in a very tenuous position. My local ACT Association was one of those four.

Slide 6 – 1<sup>st</sup> Pacific Cup and See the Best in the Country

From 1974 until 2002, women's football had made great progress under the circumstances. The women's associations had government recognition and

funding and participation was growing. In reality, however, they had NO official recognition by Soccer Australia and consequently no formal link to FIFA.

Slide 7 – 91 and 97 World Cup programs

A series of events, interventions and public comments changed the profile of women's football in unprecedented ways during the late 1990 and early naughties. These included the head of FIFA, Sepp Blatter declaring 'the future of football is feminine' after the huge success of the 1999 world cup in the USA with a sell out crowd over 60,000 spectators and hence giving great credence to the women's game. Popular culture was also instrumental in changing attitudes with movies like Bend it like Beckham having a huge impact on young girls and women and no doubt also boys and men.

Slide 8 – Matildas cover and team photo

In 1999, the release of the very controversial and somewhat startling Australian team calendar also took the game to new heights in Australia and across the globe. The Matildas calendar featuring 'cover girl' Amy Taylor who is now a successful tv presenter, and Australia's most capped player – male or female, Cheryl Salisbury, heralded a 'new fashion in football'. Whether we agree or not with the approach taken by the players to let the public see that they were real women, and not men in disguise, there's no doubt it brought international recognition and changed attitudes towards the female player that were never realised in the previous 20 years.

The next slides may surprise some of you but they are relatively tame compared to other photos in the Calendar.

Slide 9 – Amy Taylor and Cheryl Salisbury

By stripping off and using the "sex sells" marketing strategy the players were essentially reaching out to a particular audience and hoped to reduce the unwarranted stereotyping, discrediting and marginalizing of the female player. This was a far cry from the first poster girls of 1993 who told us to 'get our kicks from soccer' because it was 'a sport for all'.

Slide 10 – Get your kicks from soccer poster

Towards the end of 2003, I felt it was time to address the HOW question of integrating women's and men's football on an equitable basis. Through an odd chance, I was tapped on the shoulder to apply for the position of CEO of Soccer Canberra. After an open recruitment process, I was appointed to the job in early 2004 becoming the first woman to get paid to have charge of an organisation with responsibility for men's and junior football as well as referees (in an affiliated connection).

According to some people, I'd gone to the dark side and might as well be working with the enemy. I was betraying my sisters with the amalgamation agenda in sight. On the other hand, others just didn't understand how a woman could fill such a position.

One of my first tasks was to bring together Soccer Canberra, Women's Soccer Canberra, ACT Futsal and the Referees Association with the aim of forming a new single entity for football in the national capital. A new governance structure combined with a new management framework and the adoption of a new brand for football in the national capital were vital instruments in persuading the parties to work collectively.

Slide 11 – FFA logo and Member Federations

The job was daunting and it would take years to make it all happen. One of the hardest things I had to deal with was the conflict between my own personal views and the professional obligations that left little room for compromise or deviation from national directives.

In particular, I had to negotiate with the women's association that I'd been instrumental in forming 25 years earlier to give up its autonomy and engage with partners they didn't trust. It also required the women's association to work inside the tent rather than stay outside on the fringe. Negotiating a compromise and looking forward to a better future was always foremost in my mind.

A Transitional Taskforce was formed with the aim of drafting a strategic plan and a vision for a unified and inclusive sport. It was facilitated by an independent consultant and crucial support was given by the national federation and the ACT Government.

In 2005, Soccer Canberra was the first state body to adopt the new FFA model constitution and we launched the new ACT Football Federation name – trading as ‘Capital Football’.

Formal Memorandum of Understanding had been signed between the four bodies and the risks associated with the integration, as well as the treatments, timelines, targets, responsibilities and reporting mechanisms were identified. The resultant plan of action documented six key goals including:

- effective governance and decision making;
- use and allocation of resources;
- stakeholder engagement and relationship management;
- communication and change management practices.

These were underpinned by detailed strategies to achieve the key targets.

In 2007, Women’s Soccer Canberra voted to wind up its business acknowledging that women’s participation was stronger and better resourced than they’d expected under the new federation.

Slide 12 – CF structure

Six years after we started the integration process, all components of the football family are within the same entity. In the main, there’s stakeholder confidence in our governance and management and overall confidence in the future of the sport is higher than ever. We’ve grown from having 5 staff in 2004 to 14 this year, and we have 17 cost centres in our budget of 3.4 million dollars compared to 8 when I started as CEO and Soccer Canberra was close to insolvency.

#### Slide 13 – W-League poster

Change is ongoing in so many areas of our business. Of significance for women is the inclusion of Canberra United in the 'football with style' national women's league. It was a major achievement to establish this team as the W-League is based on the men's A-League model and given that Canberra doesn't have an A-League club, there was every chance that we would not get a W-League team. The acceptance by the Board of Capital Football for the management responsibility and financial risk for the team as well as my involvement was important in FFA's decision to grant us a licence.

But just in case I get complacent, I often have to justify why we have a women's team in a national league but not a men's team. The main reason is that FFA haven't yet given a licence to Canberra for the A-League, and when they do it won't be a Capital Football responsibility but one that will require community or private ownership with around \$6m to sustain it ... this is not a gender issue, but a commercial reality.

#### Slide 14 – CU players

My journey in football has been quite remarkable and also very rewarding and. My CEO job keeps me very busy as I deal with all aspects of competition management, high performance and business operations. At times, it also has a flip-side as it can be tough to handle – especially when personal and mischievous attacks are made to destabilise or steer us in a different direction. I don't mind the 'trouble maker' label that was once thrown at me many years ago because unless you cause a bit of trouble, you won't change the way things are.

And despite also once being described as a formidable woman, I'd like to think inspire and provide hope for other women to enjoy their participation on the field, to think strategically and smartly about how to take action off-the-field to change the regulations, the environment and the culture of sport to make it a better place for all.

Slide 15 – Captain of the England Ladies 1894

And finally, I wonder what our great grandmothers who played the world game more than 100 years ago would think of all this given that it only takes one ball to play football ?

Thank you

Heather Reid

CEO, ACT Football Federation (Capital Football)