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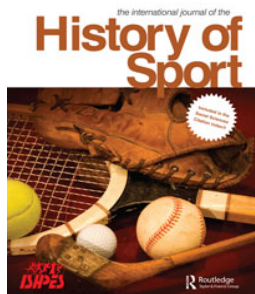
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Origin Stories: Tracing the Development of Netball in Victoria during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century

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ABSTRACT



Compared to other sports around the globe, netball has received relatively little attention from academic historians. The reasons for this omission are obvious, in that generally sport played by women has nearly always suffered in comparison to men's sports in terms of exposure, acceptance, and financial support. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the academy, throughout much of the twentieth century, has tended not to focus on studies of female sports. The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore the origin stories of netball in one particular state of Australia, namely Victoria. This task is constrained by the fact that there is only a relatively small number of published works on the history of netball in Australia, and a general lack of systematic or verified research regarding the diffusion of the sport to the antipodes. Critically, the paper is not based around a quest for a single point of origin. Rather, it calls for a better understanding and appreciation of the social context surrounding multiple origin stories, and how they may evolve, shift or be used in the light of new evidence, unexpected discoveries, or more informed interpretations. In short, the paper argues that the complexities of netball's origin stories need to be further explored, understood, and embraced.

KEYWORDS

Netball; basketball; origins; women's sport; Victoria

Historiographical Perspectives

In her seminal work dealing with the historiography of netball in Australia, Fiona McLachlan neatly encapsulates the dilemma facing scholars who wish to explore the history of the sport. As she explains: 'Netball is commonly cited as being the national game for females in Australia. Yet the game's popularity is not reflected in the field of sport history in the breadth or depth of analysis compared to other sports.'¹ McLachlan suggests that this scenario is surprising, as it might reasonably be expected that a distinctive, globally-contested sport, ostensibly 'for females', and 'arguably also an emancipatory space for girls and women', would be a prime site for academic attention.² Yet, as she observes in her critique, this is not the case, noting that

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'Barely any historians have examined the place of netball in the development of Australian sport'.³ In short, McLachlan paints a dismal state of affairs, stating that 'There are very few published works detailing the origins, processes of diffusion, codification and commercialization, and the cultural practices and lived experiences of netball in Australia'.⁴ Indeed, she claims that '... there are only two major published academic articles pertaining to the origins and development of netball in Australia', and it is these two articles that she scrutinizes in her critical dissection of the limited field.⁵ As McLachlan opines, 'Despite what is said to be known about the history and historical significance of netball in Australia, many important questions remain', hence her concern for '... the implications and consequences of this silence'.⁶

Supporting McLachlan's disquiet is a stark differential. It is a fact that academic interest in the home-grown sport of Australian Rules football (which only has a very limited international footprint) has resulted in more than 30 doctoral degrees devoted to the history and/or management of the men's code, with the first completed in 2000.⁷ However, in the case of netball in Australia there is only a single doctoral study devoted to the sport, with just some of its sections (notably those located in Chapters 3 and 4) providing relevant historical background.⁸ Nonetheless, the purpose of this paper is not to simply update McLachlan's assessment of the field with additional work completed on the national history of netball. Rather the intention is to shift the locus of investigation. Therefore, while on the surface this paper might seem to traverse the same historiographical terrain as McLachlan's work, with many similar sources cited, and elements of her critique adopted, the focus here is different. In this paper, more attention is directed to systematically identifying and correcting errors or inconsistencies in the literature (partly as a response to misunderstandings about the origins of the sport in Australia), before delving into a different range of primary sources that help to provide fresh understandings of the early development of netball in Victoria.

In Australia, historical studies on netball (initially known in elongated form as women's basket ball, but later condensed to women's basketball, before an official name change to netball in 1970), have consistently turned their attention to the national level of the game, with most academic publications devoted to the elite level of the sport. That is, the national team, and/or players who represented their country, have been the main point of attention, with specific studies completed by Ian Jobling (as a sole author),⁹ Ian Jobling and Pamela Barham,¹⁰ Jenny Sinclair and Megan Maurice,¹¹ Nicole Esposito,¹² Ashley Rose,¹³ and Lisa Fairlie and her colleagues.¹⁴ On the other hand, very little academic consideration has been paid to studies of netball at the state level or below. Indeed, perhaps as one would expect with state, local or community publication outputs, they are often essentially compilations of records put together by volunteer administrators, rather than comprehensive narrative histories written by academics. Even substantial histories of state associations, often published to coincide with significant anniversaries of the sport, have their limitations, dominated as they are by team achievements, biographical profiles, and other anecdotal information, understandably presented in celebratory tones.¹⁵ The same is essentially true at club level, although the raw publication data is somewhat skewed in Victoria, where netball clubs, particularly in country towns,

have historically been linked to (men's) Australian Rules football clubs.¹⁶ In these cases, it is not unusual for the published histories of combined football/netball clubs to be dominated by the records of the men's football competitions, which might reflect McLachlan's concern for some of the 'complex political processes, and tensions that underpin the history of netball', especially in country Victoria.¹⁷

Perhaps more informative, and more relevant, are the histories of various regional netball associations. In these compilations, the records of netball clubs that may not have lasted for any significant time-period are still often recorded and integrated into the overall history of the relevant association. Particular aspects of their existence might be marked with a date of formation, or a team photograph might reveal the names of long-forgotten participants or office-bearers, even though the club concerned might now be defunct.¹⁸ The downside, in almost all cases, is that these books (like many club histories) are usually not commercial publications (and therefore have a limited print run), sometimes suffer from poor editing or gaps in information, and rarely contain an index, let alone a list of sources. They are also often compiled by a committee of volunteers, with some aspects of the publication compromised by poor production values or an uneven approach to the flow of information.

In the above context, it is not unexpected that many published works on the history of netball contain mistakes or errors, and reflect uncertainties, in terms of the origins and diffusion of the sport. As noted, despite the long history and widespread popularity of netball, there are few scholars working in the field, and only a small number of studies that have attempted to construct a detailed narrative of the early development of the game. In 2005, Mandy Treagus provided a very succinct overview of the work of six scholars who had speculated as to when netball was first played in either Australia or New Zealand. While the majority seemed to confirm that there was evidence of games taking place in various locations across Australasia between 1904 and 1906, only one, John Daly, suggested that the sport was played 'in the 1890s', in Adelaide, South Australia, although Treagus highlights that no relevant reference was supplied by the author.¹⁹ In these circumstances, the precise origins of netball in Australia still remain unclear and are the subject of ongoing conjecture.

This is not to suggest that there is in fact a single irrefutable narrative when it comes to the history of this particular sport. Indeed, the search for 'origins' in sport can be problematic in itself, as expertly demonstrated by Tony Collins in his global history of how the world's football codes began. On the back of several decades of scholarship, Collins is able to conclude that 'Myth-making and invented traditions were common to all forms of football',²⁰ partly because they were characterized by 'open' narrative spaces that created room for 'speculation and supposition'.²¹ Collins also notes that evidence to support invented traditions across the football codes is based on 'hearsay or personal affirmation', with the point being that '... the plasticity of the argument allows the story to be fashioned according to the needs of the advocate'.²² Relatedly, the third common feature of such traditions, according to Collins, is that they '... emerge at pivotal moments in the history of the sport', with these episodes often helping a code gain extra prominence or traction at a crucial contemporary juncture.²³ Fourthly, and no less imperative, '... supporters of the

invented tradition ultimately base their position on an unverifiable belief rather than historic fact.²⁴ In support of this fourth perspective, Collins cites examples from Rugby Union (that actions attributed to a particular student at Rugby School changed the course of the code), Australian Rules football (that the Australian code was derived from an ancient Aboriginal pastime), and baseball (that Abner Doubleday was the inventor of the game), whereby proponents of unverifiable statements about the origins of particular sports are, in effect, able to ‘... insulate their arguments from critical inquiry, elevating the invented tradition to an article of faith’.²⁵ Finally, Collins also uses the above examples to demonstrate how invented traditions are projected back into the past in order to support how present day supporters of the sport wish to see the modern world.²⁶ In addition, Collins extends his argument by explaining how ‘[t]he apparent historical legitimacy of invented traditions also plays an increasingly important commercial role in the business of sport’.²⁷ In short, as Collins demonstrates with concrete examples:

Commercial exigency today plays a major role in the shaping of sporting history and heritage. The re-fashioning and even the falsification of history for commercial, publicity or political reasons is just as likely in sport as it is in any other activity.²⁸

In other words, as Collins asserts elsewhere, sport history, particularly the history of the world’s football codes, has become a ‘palimpsest’. As he says:

Details and fragments are reassembled and rearranged to create a story that meets the desires and demands of different generations, social groups and ideologies ... [and] the most powerful re-imagined narratives are the creation stories of particular sports ...²⁹

Within this framework, Collins states that particular invented traditions ‘... acquired their power and resilience because they articulated the desires of each sport for special social significance’.³⁰ On the basis that ‘origin’ stories are particularly prone to myth and invention, then, given the general paucity of research into women’s sport, it is little wonder that the story of netball’s origins (and its not well-documented diffusion around the world) is still open to debate, conjecture and myth-making. Indeed, the entire history of netball, let alone its origins and early development, is often ignored, or given scant attention, in published world histories of sport, a position reflective of the relatively small number of scholarly works, and/or its somewhat derisory designation as a ‘feminine-appropriate’ sport.³¹

The purpose of this paper, then, is to explore the origin stories of netball in one particular state of Australia. This task is constrained by the fact that there is only a small number of published works on the history of netball in Australia, and a general lack of systematic research regarding the dissemination of the sport to the antipodes. Before primary sources are investigated, a brief examination of netball’s origins in Victoria, as reflected in two key works, is provided.

Two Key Works

As alluded to earlier, the sport of netball in Australia has never really had a long-term academic ‘doyen’ or a deep repository of scholarly publications built up over decades in the way that other sports have been able to mark their historical credentials.

Also mentioned previously, this situation is reflected in the trifling number of post-graduate theses and the relatively limited amount of other scholarly outputs, most of which are focused on the development of the game at a national level.³² In terms of netball and discussion of its origins in Victoria, there are two key published sources. The first is *The Awakening Giant*. Released in 1994, this is an 80-page compendium of information. A Foreword is provided by Jean Cowan (who represented a Victorian Schoolgirls' team in 1927, played for Australia, and later became a respected netball administrator and elder statewoman),³³ and an Introduction is written by the then president, Val Morrison, a long-serving umpire and administrator.³⁴ There seems to be no acknowledged single author of the volume, but 'the special efforts' of the Publication Committee (listed as Leigh Mawby, Anne George, Lynne Sheehan, Kate Fewster, Helga Binder, Lynne Cazaly, Keren Wilson and Natalie Wright-Boyd) are recognized.³⁵ Significantly, there is no over-arching, continuous narrative thread, no bibliography and no index. There is, however, a very good array of greyscale photographs (the earliest dated 1929, although several images are undated). There are also some worthwhile sections, including eight pages set aside for 'Statistics & Results', dating back to the appointment of Louise Mills in 1922 as the first president of the Melbourne Girls Basket Ball Association (MGBBA). Mills later became the inaugural president of the Victorian Women's Basket Ball Association (VWBBA) in 1928, although in the statistical pages of the book she is the only office-bearer listed between 1922 and 1933, at which point there is a change of president, and the names of secretaries and treasurers begin to appear.³⁶

The book is subtitled 'A Celebration of 65 Years of Netball Victoria', indicating that 1928, when the MGBBA transformed itself to become the VWBBA, was understood to be the foundation year of the organization. Unfortunately there is an error (assumed to be typographical) in a two page section entitled 'Netball Victoria – a History', where it is stated that 'Netball is a derivative of the men's game of basketball. Men's Basketball was developed in the United States in 1871 [sic] by Dr James Naismith, a YMCA gym instructor'.³⁷ This date error (the correct date is 1891) was also repeated on Netball's Victoria's website, and remained there until the incorrect information was removed, following a re-vamp of the website around 2017.³⁸ The text in this section of the book also goes on to declare that 'Some years later the game was introduced into England by a fellow American, Dr Toles', adding that 'The first women's basketball game is reported to have been played in England in 1897 by ladies using broomsticks for posts and wet paper bags for baskets'.³⁹ No mention is made in the Netball Victoria book of the Swedish-born educator Martina Bergman-Österberg (1849–1915), or the sub-committee of the Ling Association (founded in 1899, and later known as the Physical Education Association of the United Kingdom), who are both acknowledged in other reputable sources as important to the early development of netball and its diffusion to other continents.⁴⁰ Instead, the discussion in *The Awakening Giant* quickly moves to uncorroborated information, highlighting, for instance, that in 1898 accommodations were made to ameliorate the difficulties caused by the restrictive uniforms of players.⁴¹ Other anecdotal asides in the book are also made to the number of players allowed on the court, the introduction of a smaller-sized ball, and the division of the court into thirds.⁴² At this point, the text in *The Awakening Giant* is not Victoria-specific,

and is largely a re-wording of Hyland's opening paragraphs contained under the heading 'History of the Game' in her 1978 publication.⁴³ Discussion of 'The Early Days' in *The Awakening Giant* then becomes more Victoria-specific, and includes the assertion that 'Well before the beginning of an organised state competition, a Victorian primary, interschool, seven-a-side competition was conducted. In 1915 two male teachers are said to have finally written out the rules and the game was played in secondary schools'.⁴⁴ However, these latter sentences are merely a close summary of what Hyland had written in 1978 about the origins of the game, suggesting that no further research or investigations on the early development of netball in Victoria were undertaken between 1978 and 1993. The one major exception occurs in that another book was co-authored by Hyland, and published in 2011.⁴⁵ In this jubilee history of the International Federation of Netball Associations, short summaries of early developments in each member nation are provided. There is also general acknowledgement of the seminal influence of Bergman-Österberg, and in the case of Australia the authors also state:

It is generally agreed that the game was brought to Australia ... by these English schoolteachers. This expansion occurred late in the 19th century. It is on record that competitions were not only conducted as early as 1904 in New South Wales, but also that an interschool seven-a-side basketball competition was conducted in Victorian primary schools in 1913.⁴⁶

Be that as it may, it is hard not to agree with McLachlan that many authors (including Jobling and Barham, and Taylor) devote a disproportionate amount of space '... to discussing the origins of women's basketball in general more so that the diffusion of the game to, and within, Australia'.⁴⁷

The second work specifically related to early netball developments in Victoria is June Senyard's contribution to a project initiated by the Australian Society for Sports History and released by Ryan Publishing in 2015.⁴⁸ The book is entitled *Sport in Victoria: A History*, and consists of 176 entries of varying length (alphabetically listed) on a range of sports, sporting events, and sporting venues, foregrounded by two general introductory essays. There are no separate biographical entries, but there are separate entries for several of the female counterparts of men's sports (for example, women's soccer), and a five page entry dedicated to 'Women's Sport', authored by McLachlan, in which she forthrightly declares that 'the history of netball is, like all history of women's sport in Victoria, embroiled in contradiction'.⁴⁹ The 77 contributors to Nadel and Ryan's collection are not all academics, and range from librarians, to students, to journalists, to administrators, and to enthusiasts. It was, perhaps, this very broad consortium of contributors, the varying quality of submissions, and the commercial imperatives of the project, that led the editorial board to ultimately eschew the usual academic apparatuses of footnotes and a bibliography.⁵⁰ A generous selection of sketches and photographs, both colour and greyscale, and occasionally sepia, are sprinkled throughout the hefty hardcover book of 286 pages. Most of the 'major' sports in *Sport and Victoria* are allocated between seven and nine pages of text and images, with 'Athletics' granted the most space with 10. Of those entries dedicated predominately to what might be termed women's sports, 'Netball' is apportioned the most area, with seven pages. 'Hockey' for example, is

granted little more than three pages, which covers both men's and women's versions of the sport. Only the briefest mention of men's and mixed netball is made in the Senyard entry on netball. In terms of published 'academic' writing on the history of netball in Victoria, these seven pages represent the best overview of the sport in the state, and deserve close attention, especially in terms of narratives about origins.

Senyard correctly points out that the predominance of Australian Rules football and cricket in Victoria has had an impact on many other sports in the state, especially in relation to raising finances, establishing facilities, and attracting patrons. Despite these hurdles, she says, '... netball in Victoria has developed to become a sport with one of the largest participation rates in the state as well as a successful elite level that plays to large, appreciative crowds'.⁵¹ In addition, Senyard claims that 'Netball has always had a distinctive culture'. As she states: 'It was developed as a sport for girls and subsequently, was taken up by women'. Senyard also adds that 'Unlike tennis, golf and hockey, netball was not the domain of the wealthy middle class and from the beginning of organised competition in the early 1920s, it can be termed a truly popular sport', with the rider that 'Neither was netball organised in the shadow of men playing the same sport'.⁵² The wider details of the evolution of the sport in the USA and England are also outlined, with a nod to the publication of Spalding's rules for basketball in 1899, and an acknowledgement that in England in 1901 the Ling Association published modified rules of the game. At the same time, baskets were replaced by nets, and the sport became popularly known as netball.⁵³ As she notes, 'The game could be played with five, seven or nine players in a team but, in Victoria, seven-aside was to prevail'.⁵⁴ Despite ongoing disagreements about the optimum number of players, Senyard writes that: 'Although it has been claimed that netball was played in Australia "around the turn of the century," there is no evidence to substantiate this', and she goes on to suggest that '... it was not until the 1900s that sport for girls became accepted in the private girls' schools'.⁵⁵ In her summation, she highlights that a Girls' School Hockey Association was formed in Melbourne in 1905, but it was not until then that netball started to make an impact as a winter sport.⁵⁶ Senyard implies that a key turning point was the arrival in Melbourne of Gwynneth Morris, who '... was appointed to take charge of games and physical education at the Melbourne Church of England Girls Grammar School ... having spent the last two years at Madame Bergman-Osterberg's [sic] Physical Training College in England where she would have come in contact with netball'.⁵⁷ However, Senyard admits that the school prospectus indicates that Morris was initially slated to look after the hockey and cricket teams, and it took a few more years before netball began to feature at other schools such as Methodist Ladies College, where, by 1912, it had displaced hockey in popularity.⁵⁸ Senyard also outlines how this set of circumstances was repeated at other prestigious girls' schools, notably at Tintern in 1912 (where a student wrote in the school magazine that 'Miss Thompson gave us a lesson in basketball, instead of our usual work; we enjoyed it very much'), and at Lauriston in 1917 ('... where senior girls gained the right to play netball in 1917', usurping the appeal of hockey).⁵⁹ As Senyard says: 'The strengths of netball and the small space required, the ball as the only equipment, the relative small number of girls in a team and the less likelihood of injury, all contributed to its popularity'.⁶⁰ She then rounds out her discussion of early

developments by pointing out that changes to the state school system during the first decade after Federation meant that there was a large influx of females into the education system across the metropolis and in country regions. For instance, in 1905, the Education Act extended compulsory attendance at school to the age of fourteen, and by 1910 the Victoria Education Act allowed schools to provide secondary and technical education, which meant girls desiring higher levels of schooling could do so outside the private system.⁶¹ As a result, school enrolments boomed, and netball was taken up by an ever-increasing number of female students. Like others, Senyard asserts that by 1913, an interschool seven-a-side competition for primary schools in Victoria commenced, to be followed quickly by a competition for secondary students in 1917.⁶²

As evident, some of the information compiled by Senyard also appears in *The Awakening Giant* (published in 1994), but both publications are lacking in specific, verifiable, linear detail about associations, clubs, teams and individual participants in the very early years of the sport. This gap in information is somewhat rectified for the years following World War I, perhaps as the result of a more easily accessible, and greater quantity of, information in the press, as well as a more accepting post-war attitude towards women's sport in general. On this basis, both publications set out the details of the formation of the YWCA competition in 1920, and allude to how this critical mass of players morphed into the formation of the MGBBA at the end of 1922. The first season commenced the following year, with five affiliated clubs and six teams, a mixture of church-based teams, a workplace team, and one team representing the YWCA.⁶³ Notably, aspects of this information are expanded and sometimes footnoted in an earlier publication by Senyard, namely a history of sport at the University of Melbourne, where there are two small sections devoted to netball.⁶⁴ Here she claims that the MGBBA ran an 'informal competition' for its first two years, and that the early identification with the YWCA '... gave netball a distinctive style', especially when compared to hockey. She says '... participation in basketball [netball] was broader and its early organisation was outside the educational arena', meaning the sport was popular, but '... it may have lacked the status of hockey and tennis.'⁶⁵ More than one netball club was also formed, as female students who had played the game at school wished to keep playing at, and with, the University. Hence, it was not long before one team played as part of the School Basketball [Netball] Association, not to mention the playing of interfaculty games between arts, science and medicine.⁶⁶ In this context, it is worth noting McLachlan's observation that Jobling and Barham spend 'much more of their paper' discussing the development of the game from the 1920s inwards.⁶⁷

Sources for Origin Stories: Cautionary Tales

What, then, are the implications of the above assessment of published work with a Victorian-orientated focus? First, there is obviously more academic work to be done, and it is still something of a mystery as to why the history of netball in Victoria (and elsewhere in Australia) has attracted the interest of so few scholars and post-graduate students. Second, there is certainly greater scope for a more transparent and diverse use of sources, for, as McLachlan laments, 'the prevailing narrative about

women's basketball has not been critically interrogated – especially in terms of evidence.⁶⁸ Thus far, a limited amount of the same or similar information (sometimes in error, or perhaps speculative in nature) has been used and then uncritically re-published in order to provide what are essentially very broad-brush origin stories and narrative histories associated with Victorian netball. Indeed, according to Andrew Brown-May, co-editor of *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, a great deal of Melbourne's past has been recorded inaccurately. He asserts that unsubstantiated historical information and narrow interpretations have been recycled for subsequent generations, resulting in what he characterizes as 'lineages of misunderstanding'. The real danger in his view is that when a small number of works have been over-used the problem becomes exacerbated and the credibility of the history discipline is undermined.⁶⁹ Third, a much more systematic approach to the gathering and investigation of primary sources is required.⁷⁰ This applies to items such as minute books, correspondence, photographs and newspapers, not all of which are digitized or easily accessible, and not all of which have been correctly attributed within existing narrative histories. The implication here is that more 'grass roots' or 'smaller scale' research is required. As demonstrated below, records on the early development of netball in Victoria do exist, but adequate time, dogged effort and often ingenuity (with a dose of serendipity) needs to underpin the research endeavour in order for worthwhile information to be retrieved and analyzed, and then integrated (or juxtaposed) with existing narratives. For example (echoing and expanding on some of McLachlan's suggestions), such exercises could involve investigating a limited time-period, a specific geographic location, a particular club or institution, or a certain individual, any exploration of which might systematically draw on a variety of previously untapped sources. *Inter alia*, this would constitute a much more diverse methodological approach, thus guarding against pitfalls created by what McLachlan characterizes as the discontinuities of a 'mono' history of netball.⁷¹

On the basis of the above, discussion of two types of sources, as outlined below, will provide cautionary tales for those interested in navigating their way to a better understanding and contextualization of netball's origin stories in Victoria. The aim in this exercise is not to be comprehensive, systematic or all-inclusive in terms of the evidence presented. Rather, it is hoped that some selective samples will indicate the wide array and richness of source material and the context they potentially provide for understanding the early development of netball in Victoria.

Newspaper Sources

History researchers now take for granted the National Library of Australia's 'Single Business Discovery Service', subsequently branded as 'Trove' not long after its prototype was launched in May 2009.⁷² This vast (and still growing) repository of digitized newspapers (and other items) has its foibles, but it is a relatively user-friendly, sophisticated search engine that enables free access to millions of pages of newspapers at the click of a computer mouse.⁷³ As yet, however, it appears that few researchers have used this database for the purpose of detailed investigations into netball history. While only a relatively small proportion of the total number of newspaper pages (largely copyright-free before 1955) have been digitized, the fact

that electronic searches of Trove (and other similar data bases) can be undertaken has opened up new methodologies and allowed different questions to be asked of the data in a time-effective and geographically unhindered manner.⁷⁴ When coupled with in-person searches of microfilm or hard copy newspapers at libraries, the scope for methodical trawling and cross-referencing of press sources is greatly enhanced, and has the potential to lead to the construction of new theories and new narratives in terms of how, when and why sport was developed, and by whom. In other words, the fine-grained detail of games played, personnel involved and specific socio-cultural contexts can be more easily unveiled. A caveat for netball, however, is that the nomenclature of 'basket ball', 'basket-ball' and 'basketball', and the fact that these terms were used to describe both men's and women's basketball, and women's netball, in Australia, often make searching for, and interpreting the text in press reports, problematic. For example, newspaper sources reveal that by June 1893 (and perhaps earlier), articles discussing the invention of basketball in the USA, with an explanation of the rules as well as related diagrams, began to appear in the Australian press. In many cases these are clear references to the men's game, not the game of women's basketball, which had just emerged in the USA at this time. Accordingly, as part of its report featuring news of the American game, the *Evening News* (Sydney) boldly suggested that 'A new game, to which the name of "basket-ball" has been given ... might come to be popular in Australia, if introduced'.⁷⁵ In other words, Australia, despite its distance from the rest of the world, was not isolated from international developments that led eventually to men's basketball, and then women's netball, being played on its shores, but it has to be admitted that the terminology for the games has the potential to be confusing. Nevertheless, given that diagrams and explanation of Naismith's new game did appear in the Australian press, it is reasonable to assume that the sport may have been trialled in Australia during the early 1890s, without any residue of such activities being left in newspaper sources. That is, experimental pick-up games (with any number of players) could have been played in a variety of locations across several states, but in an organic rather than formal manner, and therefore would have been unlikely to have attracted the attention of the press.

Although thoroughly tracking the diffusion of basketball or netball across Australia is not the prime purpose of this paper, the fact that one of the earliest games of men's basketball in Australia took place in Adelaide on February 24, 1897, in a match between teams representing Our Boys' Institute and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), is important. Noted at the time as 'the first exhibition of basket-ball in South Australia', the report indicates how and where the men's game might have put down its initial roots.⁷⁶ This slice of information, now easily retrievable from Trove, illustrates how difficult it must have been for earlier researchers who had to depend on time-consuming and incomplete manual searches of press sources. For example, in rarely cited work devoted to the history of men's basketball in Victoria, Simon Creak claimed that the earliest form of basketball to arrive in the country was, in fact, netball, 'first played in Australia in 1905 or 1906'.⁷⁷ He also explains that due to the influence of YMCA military training instructors in Europe, 'Men's basketball appears to have been introduced to Victoria by soldiers returning from World War I'.⁷⁸ More specifically, Creak notes that the first firm

evidence of men's basketball being played in Melbourne dates from March 1918, although he cautions that 'Records of early men's basketball in Australia are scarce'.⁷⁹ In this particular case, errors can now be corrected, and the uncovering of new evidence via Trove and additional research will therefore help to overturn assumptions made in previous work.

As for the development of netball in Victoria, there is an additional range of sources that need to be assessed, especially since it is clear from the existing publications of Netball Victoria (1994) and June Senyard (2004 and 2015) that further verifiable information, narrative depth and nuance is required. Apposite to netball's diffusion to Victoria (acknowledging again that the sport was uniformly called 'basketball', or variations of this term, in Australia up until 1970), is a press item from the *Ballarat Star* on Monday, March 18, 1901, that announced: 'Probably the first contest in basket ball ever held in Australia, took place on Friday [March 15, 1901], between the students of Loretto Abbey and those of Loretto Training School, Dawson street'.⁸⁰ According to the report, 'The Abbey students, with their regulation costume of navy blue relieved with white, and caps of blue velvet, were easily distinguished from the College students, in their tunics of cardinal and cream, with crimson caps'. Furthermore, 'The marked features of the game were splendid play on the part of the goal-keepers, scientific action of the centres, and instant obedience to decisions of the umpire'.⁸¹ Loreto Abbey scored seven goals, defeating Loreto Training School, who scored three goals. On the surface, this event appears to constitute 'the first contest in basket ball [netball] ever held in Australia', especially since the report was repeated in at least one additional metropolitan newspaper.⁸² However, Trove has now allowed other such claims to be more readily compared and considered. Again, the intent is not to track each relevant press source in this overview, but rather, by citing several examples, to demonstrate the breadth and depth of newspaper accounts relevant to netball's history in Victoria that are now more easily available to researchers. As an aside, then, it should be pointed out that the press accounts discussed below do not include numerous, sometimes lengthy descriptions (often re-printed verbatim) of how popular basketball was becoming among women, especially college students, in the USA at this time. Nor does it include those instances when reports of developments at Bergman-Österberg's Physical Training School were reproduced, although that type of press coverage must have directly stimulated basketball/netball activity in Australia.⁸³

A few examples from various colonies (later states) will suffice in terms of how and when the press varied in their reports of women's involvement in netball-like games, again with the uncertainty caused by imprecise nomenclature. For instance, in May of 1897, a column entitled 'Ladies' Gossip' in the *Adelaide Chronicle*, declared that:

A new game for girls, about which it is said a good deal will probably be heard in the course of the ensuing summer, is basket-ball. It is reported that it has already swept the United States, completely eclipsing lawn tennis, and effectually nipping in the bud the threatened revival of croquet.⁸⁴

What then followed was a description of the playing area and a basic overview of the rules, before a closing statement that 'The chief beauty of the game is its

simplicity and the fact that no expensive apparatus is required'.⁸⁵ Given the *prima facie* evidence that men's basketball was first played in Adelaide during February 1897, it is reasonable to assume (but not yet proven) that women in the same city might have followed suit several months later. This is more so the case, since the YMCA had been one of the competing sides in the men's contest, but it is not clear who specifically might have represented either of the women's teams.

In Tasmania, Queen's College, founded by Arthur Stephens, was located in Hobart and, after several amalgamations, opened as a privately-run college and finishing school in 1893. By 1895 the College was largely co-educational with 'mixed' classes, but there were strictly supervised separate play areas for girls and boys.⁸⁶ In 1898, a paragraph-long newspaper report advised that 'An interesting game of basket ball was played at the barracks on Monday afternoon between 12 girls from Mr Petersen's class and 12 from Queen's College', with the captains and best players named and the scores provided.⁸⁷ A similar 'basket ball game' was played in August 1899, with Mr Bjelke-Petersen's gymnasium class achieving a draw against their Queen's College opponents, 'with the match enjoyed by both teams, and, apparently also by the large number of visitors who were present'.⁸⁸ A few months later, in December 1900, in a speech by Stephens published in the *Tasmanian News*, he confirmed that the girls at Queen's College '... still continued to take a keen interest in basket ball'.⁸⁹ Subsequently, Mr C.B. Petersen (mentioned above), also noted as 'the instructor in physical education' at Girls' High School, Hobart, was recorded as awarding a 'challenge shield' to this particular school 'for basket ball'.⁹⁰

Further north, in Queensland, 'Emilia', in her March 1901 *Brisbane Courier* column entitled 'Feminine Echoes', perceived that 'Several of the big girls' boarding schools in Sydney and Melbourne are adding courts for the new game, basket-ball, to their play grounds'.⁹¹ Later in the year, in October, a long report in Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin* had more to say about 'basket ball' in its own local area (636 km north-north-west of Brisbane), where the finals of various sports at Rockhampton Girls' Grammar School had been played. 'Perhaps the most interesting feature of the programme', the reporter reflected, 'was the game of basket ball, in which the only goal was secured by Miss Hoelscher for the winning side'. As was explained, 'This game was introduced into Australia by the Head Mistress (Miss Downs), who has since supplied the Sydney Girls' Grammar School with the rules'. A technical description of the elements of the game follows, noting, as do some other match reports around Australia, 'The ball is an association [soccer] football', and that 'The number of players varies'.⁹²

From very late in the nineteenth century though to the very early years of the twentieth century, then, it is evident from press reports that forms of basketball were being played by females in various locations all around Australia. However, despite the fact that the rules for the new sport (including the preferred number of players for teams) were still in a state of flux, it does seem there was an upsurge, if not a boom, in the first few years of the twentieth century, underpinned, as this period was, by a general growth in private school education across Australia, and the general flourishing of sport at these institutions. Such a view is supported by a large number of newspaper advertisements for girls' independent colleges where the availability of sporting facilities at a school was used as a drawcard for potential

students. For example, in 1903, an advertisement for a ‘Sound and Liberal Education’ at Abbotsleigh, in Wahroonga, Sydney, appeared numerous times in a Melbourne newspaper, whereby the school was promoted not only by means of its sporting activities, such as ‘Tennis, Swimming, Cycling, Fencing, Basket Ball, and Cricket’, but also by its athletic facilities, such as ‘A playing field of nearly three acres, well laid out’.⁹³ By 1904, references to, and descriptions of, ‘basket ball’ matches also began to appear in conjunction with the activities of physical culture groups and church guilds, such as the Girls’ Guild of St George’s Presbyterian Church, located in East St Kilda (Melbourne). As one local correspondent observed, it was the first annual display of this Guild at the St Kilda Town Hall, where ‘A feature of the programme was the new game of basket ball, which comes to us from America, but has here been altered somewhat, which it is claimed, is an improvement’.⁹⁴

The selected examples above, from a range of newspaper sources, candidly demonstrate how vital aspects of netball’s early history have previously been either overlooked or have ‘fallen through the cracks’, despite being in reach of researchers before and after the advent of Trove. However, in a positive light, this small sample of discoveries hidden away in the press also serves to highlight how these apertures into basketball/netball activity, when aggregated, will help to provide much richer, more complex, and more diverse stories about the development of the sport. Against this background the next section considers another set of primary sources, which, by and large, have been under-utilized in terms of research related to netball.

Archival Sources

As noted above, there are few academic treatises on the history of netball in Victoria, and fewer still that are well documented, with basic information either being omitted, recycled from other sources without attribution, or with the early years briefly skimmed over in order to focus on more recent developments, especially at the elite or international level. This is despite the fact relevant newspaper sources, the stock-in-trade for most historians, is, in most cases, readily available via microfilm or digital formats. However, the visual culture of sport (including the photographic image) is, by comparison, sometimes problematic to work with, often being constrained by uncertain provenance, copyright issues, fragility of the items, lack of detail or misleading information in captions (if they exist), and sometimes restricted access to the archive.⁹⁵ It was a surprise, then, to come across previously unknown archives of primary source documents related to netball (especially those containing elements of visual culture) that were not only well organized and easily accessible, but maintained by professional, helpful staff. In this context, it was the serendipitous discovery via Trove of a press item from the *Ballarat Star* announcing that: ‘Probably the first contest in basketball ever held in Australia, took place on Friday [March 15, 1901], between the students of Loretto Abbey and those of Loretto Training School, Dawson street’ (discussed above), that eventually led to the unearthing of an important archive at Loreto College in Ballarat (115 km north-west of Melbourne).⁹⁶ When the match report of the 1901 game was shared with volunteer cataloguers at Netball Victoria, it was established that not only did Loreto still exist as a Catholic College, but that the spouse of Kaye Gill, one of the group, had previously worked

at a Melbourne campus of Loreto as a school teacher for 30 years.⁹⁷ She then volunteered to contact the College in Ballarat in order to share the 1901 match summary from the press.⁹⁸ Initially the College archivist, Theresa Cronk could find no relevant information for the 1901 game, and the trail seemed about to go cold.⁹⁹ It was then something of a revelation, if not a shock, to have the archivist send back the results of her search of the school magazine, *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, which revealed multiple entries related to the playing of netball at the College between 1899 and 1922.¹⁰⁰ Further email exchanges occurred in the process of having questions answered about the uniforms, along with permission being granted for use of the photographic images.¹⁰¹ Some samples of the images and the text from the school magazine are reproduced and discussed below (see Figures 1–3), but space considerations preclude a fuller exposition.

The school magazine, *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, was produced once a year, and was more or less a summary of Loreto's educational and social activities for the previous 12 months.¹⁰² On most occasions a 'School Diary' or 'School Record', was included as a regular segment in the publication, listing many of the activities that took place in chronological order. In some years, activities from Loreto's other institutions were also featured. For example, the edition of *Eucalyptus Blossoms* from 1899 carries three items relevant to this study. In what seems to be the first mention of basketball (netball) in *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, the 'School Record' includes a note as follows: 'May 30th – Basket-ball, a new American game, introduced; it threatens to rival hockey in interest, but is a milder form of exercise'.¹⁰³ On page 10, an anonymous 'Observer' writes a lengthy, somewhat idyllic, description of their 'First Impressions' of the Mary Mount campus. Sport and recreational activities, including basketball, feature prominently:

... Within the grounds the view is equally attractive. Seven acres are enclosed within the high brick wall, divided by a big shady alley into orchard, flower and vegetable gardens, paddock, play ground and tennis courts ... See, the children are trooping out for the afternoon recreation, each of the four divisions clustering around a Nun. Now the games begin; hockey players wax hotly excited in the scurry with their curved



Figure 1. Students participating in basketball (netball) at Loreto College, Mary's Mount, Ballarat, Victoria, as depicted in the annual publication of the *Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Australia*, Christmas, 1901, p. 22. Courtesy of Loreto College Archives.



Figure 2. Students participating in basketball (netball) at Loreto College, Mary's Mount, Ballarat, Victoria, 1901. Unpublished image courtesy of Loreto College Archives, POO23.

sticks; others are absorbed in basket-ball, rushing to and fro between the goal posts, apparently with no other aim in life beyond tossing the ball into the netted bags. A select few devote their energies to archery, before an admiring crowd of new-comers.¹⁰⁴

Also, on page 45, there is an extract from a Sydney newspaper, which provides a report on 'A Novel Entertainment' given by the pupils of the Loreto nuns at their Hornsby (New South Wales) location. An open-air concert ('among the more brilliant entertainments of the season') was staged in front of a large crowd, and then followed '... a basket-ball contest'. According to the press:

... the different sides were distinguished by sashes of different colours – red and blue – the costume of the players being white. The prize, presented to the captain of the winning-side, was a silver jewel-case, the gift of Mrs. Frank Coffee ... The guests had also an opportunity of admiring the handsome and well-kept grounds, taste in this matter being a particular distinction of the Loretto nuns, and a note of all their convents.¹⁰⁵

However, there are no images of basketball (netball) in the 1899 College magazine, and it seems that a magazine was not produced (or is missing from the archive) in 1900. Hence, the first photographic depiction of the sport at the College does not appear until 1901, the year that the report of a game between teams from Loreto was published in the *Ballarat Star* (cited above). In this case, a slightly hazy image appears in a bordered circle, with the inscription 'A Goal' on the bottom rim of the border's circle (See [Figure 1](#), noting that the magazine has a name change for 1901, and in some other years, such as 1920).

In the Loreto College archives, however, there is a separate sepia landscape photograph of the same image, with much better definition. On close inspection, the



Figure 3. Depicted are the two teams of nine students who participated in a basketball (netball) game at Loreto College, Mary's Mount, Ballarat, Victoria, March 15, 1901. Note the chalked inscription on the easel: 'T[aining] College 3, Loreto Abbey 7', the final score from the match. Note also the two different uniforms worn by each team. The role of the girl in the lighter coloured uniform is not clear. Resting on her knees appears to be two embroidered banners, presumably one for each team. Unpublished image courtesy of Loreto College Archives, POO22.

photograph seems to be of a group of nine girls (all with the same uniform) contesting at goal-shooting, with another girl on the far left, in a different colour uniform, looking on. The goal is a woven basket, which seems to have a pole and/or tipping device attached to the goalpost so that a ball is more easily retrievable after goals are scored (see [Figure 2](#)).

Surprisingly, there is no mention in the 1901 College magazine of the particular game that the Ballarat press reported on. However, Loreto's annual publication, under the heading 'GAMES and PHYSICAL CULTURE' (with a subtitle in French: '*Les jeux sont d'une importance souveraine en matiere d'education!*', loosely translated as 'Learning through play and games is an important part of education!') gives an important summary of how students were expected to engage in sporting activities while at the College (although it seems to contradict a previous statement from the 'School Record', which included a note that 'Basket-ball, a new American game' was introduced on May 30, 1899):

In winter Hockey and Skipping rule the day; in summer Croquet and Basket Ball with somewhat of Archery. Tennis holds its own throughout the year, and the two courts are generally in requisition. For Basket Ball or Hockey the school divides into two equal teams, each with a distinctive colour for cap and blouse. Rules are strictly enforced by

the prefects of sports and all agree that one game played scientifically is worth a dozen played at random, though it demands no small amount of self-restraint. Hockey is well-known and a favourite in schools of the old world; Basket Ball has been introduced but this year from America. The accompanying illustrations show the game some of its aspects, but to understand its hygienic value, one should see the sport in progress.

Fortunately, another image in the College archives, not published in the College magazine in 1901, almost certainly depicts the participants from the game between Loreto Abbey and Loreto Training School (See [Figure 3](#)).

Regular coverage of the basketball (netball) games played at Loreto College can be traced further in the College archives, particularly through subsequent annual publications, with the names of participants also supplied in additional team photographs, and games often played as part of St Patrick's Day activities. While detailed analysis of these games is not possible within the confines of this paper, by 1920 the embrace of basketball (netball) seemed complete, with the College magazine declaring:

This sport affords a constant source of health-giving amusement, and the generous emulation between Reds and Blues adds zest to the sport. Besides its intrinsic interest, the game is notably full of hygiene value to growing girls.¹⁰⁶

With the formation of the MGBBA still two years away, the evidence from Loreto College in Ballarat provides a clear indication that women's basketball (netball) had already become a strong and resilient aspect of the curriculum at private schools in Victoria, with this particular institution having links to, and sharing information with, other Catholic colleges around Australia.¹⁰⁷ The activities, records and archives of such educational institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century are therefore a key element of netball's early development and represent a prime topic for future researchers.

The Way Forward

The above discussion, including exploration of newspaper repositories and investigation of archival sources, indicates that there is still much to be uncovered about the early development of netball in Victoria. Multiple press sources are extremely useful in providing a great deal of narrative detail, particularly for matches that occur in the public sphere and attract sizeable audiences. However, there is a hidden wealth of knowledge and understanding to be mined from less public repositories, such as those kept and maintained by educational institutions, churches, and workplaces, not to mention cultural/social groups or organizations such as the YWCA, or the memorabilia collected by individual administrators or players.¹⁰⁸ The text and the images provided here, therefore, should not be considered as comprehensive or complete. In fact, the opposite is true. The very selective pieces of evidence presented are but a pointer to potential areas of research and investigation, especially regarding aspects associated with the less elite levels of the game.

To return to the notion of origins, though, it is salutary to be reminded again of what Collins essentially characterizes as a fruitless, if not disingenuous, search for

single, irrefutable points of origin in the emergence of particular sports. This paper is not about the quest for a single moment of origin as such, but it does call for a better understanding and appreciation of the social context surrounding multiple origin stories, and how they may evolve, shift or be used in the light of new evidence, unexpected discoveries, or more informed interpretations. To this end, it should be acknowledged that Netball Australia (NA) will be hosting the 2027 World Cup, with initial plans to deliberately mark it as the centenary of what began as the All Australia Women's Basket Ball Association on August 26, 1927. It will be interesting, therefore, to see how the national body recognize the fact that the antecedents of the sport in Australia stretch back three decades earlier to the late nineteenth century, for as it currently says on the NA website: 'Netball landed on Australian shores in 1897'.¹⁰⁹ In this situation, it is hoped that the national organization, as well as state bodies, will endeavour to do two things. The first is to actively seek to eliminate 'lineages of misunderstanding' that seem to bedevil the narrative history of netball in Australia. The second, as Collins warns more generally, is to avoid continued 'myth-making' and the use of 'invented traditions', as well as resisting the temptation to fashion particular origin stories that merely serve '... the needs of the advocate'. In short, the complexities of netball's origin stories need to be explored, understood, and embraced.

Notes

1. Fiona McLachlan, 'The Silent Game: A Critical Reading of the History of Netball in Australia', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 33, no. 17 (2017): 2153.
2. Ibid., 1254. For brief discussion of how and why netball was originally characterized as a 'feminine-appropriate' sport in the United Kingdom, where 'the adoption of strict rules of etiquette and the continuation of single-sex spheres was encouraged', see Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sporting Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports* (London: Routledge, 1994), 102, 124. Such aspects, especially the notion and significance of 'restraint' in the sport, are also explored more fully in Mandy Treagus, 'Playing Like Ladies: Basketball, Netball and Feminine Restraint', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no. 1 (2005): 99–102. See also T.L. Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity: Exploring Experiences of Difference in Netball' (PhD diss., University of New South Wales, 2000), who discusses the notion of 'compliant femininity'. That is, 'a premise that provided a socially legitimated foundation for netball and positioned it as an acceptable activity for women and girls', *ibid.*, 101. While Taylor's work is wide-ranging, she acknowledges that the specific case studies utilized in her thesis largely relate to New South Wales.
3. McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2154.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid. The articles are as follows: Ian Jobling and Pamela Barham, 'The Development of Netball and the All-Australia Women's Basketball Association (AAWBBA): 1891-1939', *Sporting Traditions* 8, no. 1 (1991): 29–48; Tracy Taylor, 'Gendering Sport: The Development of Netball in Australia', *Sporting Traditions* 18, no. 1 (2001): 57–72. McLachlan initially gives a brief summary of the two journal articles, for which she then provides a 'close reading and critical analysis' later in the paper. She also explains why some other published works '... lack enough depth to undergo serious critique'. McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2155.
6. McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2154.
7. See Rob Hess, 'Scholarly Theses and Dissertations', in *Reading Australian Rules Football: The Definitive Guide to the Game*, ed. Tim Hogan (Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2017), 135–43. Only a few of the theses are devoted to women's Australian Rules football.

8. Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity'.
9. Ian Jobling, 'Netball', in *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, ed. Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 154–71.
10. See I.F. Jobling and Pamela Barham, *Netball Australia: A Socio-Historical Analysis* (Belconnen: Australian Sports Commission, 1988); Ian Jobling and Pamela Barham, 'Netball', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, ed. Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman, and Ian Jobling, Revised 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 303–6; and Jobling and Barham, 'The Development of Netball and the All-Australia Women's Basketball Association', 29–48.
11. Jenny Sinclair and Megan Maurice, *Shine: The Making of the Australian Netball Diamonds* (Warriewood: Finch Publishing, 2016). This particular item is not rigorously academic in nature, but it is one of the better journalistic accounts of elite-level netball in Australia.
12. N.M. Esposito, 'In the Shadows of Sportsmen and Racehorses: Australian Netball, 1900–1970' (Honours diss., Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2001).
13. Ashley Rose, 'Australian Netballers: The Last of the Great Amateurs?', in *Essays in Sport and the Law*, ed. T.V. Hickie, A.T. Hughes, Deborah Healey, and J.A. Scutt (Melbourne: Australian Society for Sports History, 2008), 161–76.
14. Lisa Fairlie, Mandy Stanley, Emma George, Benjamin Serada, and A.D. Mosewich, 'Navigating the Shift from Netballer to Former Netballer: The Experience of Retirement from Elite Netball in Australia', *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* 23, no. 7 (2020): 1100–18.
15. See, for example (in publishing sequence): Judy Dunbar, *60 Years of Netball in New South Wales, 1929–1989* (Sydney: New South Wales Netball Association, 1989); Netball Victoria, *The Awakening Giant: A Celebration of 65 Years of Netball Victoria* (North Melbourne: Netball Victoria, 1996); Pauline Barker, *A Netball History in Tasmania: The First Bounce 1900–2005* (Hobart: Images and Visual Solutions, 2006); Veronica Miller, ed., *Netball NSW: Celebrating 80 Years, 1929–2009* (Lidcombe: Netball NSW, 2009); and Pauline Barker, *A Netball History in Tasmania: The Sequel* (Hobart: Images and Visual Solutions, 2013).
16. The link between football clubs and netball clubs stretches back to at least the 1930s in Victoria. Apart from shared facilities, netball games between females were often associated with Australian Rules football games between men. For instance, according to an undated press clipping on the career of Ella Athorn, when she played for Timboon (prior to moving to Melbourne in 1932) netball games from this district in south-west Victoria were played as curtain-raisers to the football match of the day. As she explains, 'The boys used to watch and barrack for the girls, and then the girls used to do the same for the boys – before the boys rushed off to milk the cows.' See 'Ella and Her Old Whistle ...', Undated press clipping, c. 1985, Edith Hull Collection, Netball Victoria (hereafter EHC). Such scenarios are also evident in many other country regions across different time-periods. For example, during the late 1960s in Romsey (61 km north of Melbourne), the men's football club organised the females to play netball games against the teams that the males happened to be playing on Saturdays, thereby encouraging opposition teams to start up their own netball team/club. See email correspondence forwarded by Tim Klar to Melinda Schoffelen, April 30, 2018, EHC. It is not surprising, then, that the 2004 final report of the *Inquiry into Country Football* by the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament acknowledged that the existence of merged football and netball clubs in country Victoria were an important part of the social fabric of rural communities. See Parliament of Victoria Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee, *Final Report: Inquiry into Country Football* (Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria, 2004).
17. Of the many examples of combined football/netball club histories, usually self-published and of varying quality, see, for instance (in publishing sequence): Max Agnew, *Blood,*

Sweat & Tears of 50 Golden Years: Hamilton Imperial Football/Netball Club, 1948-1998 (Hamilton: Hamilton Imperial Football/Netball Club, 1998); Michael Ryan, *Mt Pleasant Football and Netball Club: History Book, 1889-2000* (Bendigo: Mt Pleasant Football and Netball Club, 2000); and Darren Lewis, *A Day at the Camp: 150 Years with the Castlemaine Football Netball Club* (Castlemaine: Castlemaine Football Netball Club, 2009). For McLachlan's concerns, see 'The Silent Game', 2163-4.

18. A sample from Victoria includes the following (in publishing sequence): Tracey McArthur et al. (researchers), *Passing Shots of Kyabram Netball* (Kyabram: Kyabram Netball Association, 1999); Mininera and District Netball Association Committee, *Mininera and District Netball Association: Celebrating 60 Years of Netball, 1939-1999* (Mininera: Mininera and District Netball Association, 1999); Sandy Boulton and Jeanette Thomson, eds., *Millewa Netball Association Inc.: A Fifty Year History, 1962-2012* (Mildura: Millewa Netball Association, 2012); Anne-Maree Huglin, *Mininera and District Netball Association: Netting the Memories, 75 Years, 1939-2014* (Mininera: Mininera and District Netball Association, 2014); and Pat Kuhne, comp., *Leongatha and District Netball Association: Celebrating 50 Years* (Leongatha: Leongatha and District Netball Association, 2015).
19. See J.A. Daly (1994), cited in Treagus, 'Playing Like Ladies', 101.
20. Tony Collins, *How Football Began: A Global History of How the World's Football Codes Were Born* (London: Routledge, 2019), 2.
21. Ibid., 94. It is also worth noting that entrenched debate on the origins of football raged in the pages of *The International Journal of the History of Sport* (and other journals) for several years. See, for example, Adrian Harvey, 'The Emergence of Football in Nineteenth Century England: The Historiographic Debate', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 30, no. 18 (2013): 2154-63; Graham Curry, 'The Origins of Football Debate: Comments on Adrian Harvey's Historiography', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 31, no. 17 (2014): 2158-63; Peter Swain, 'The Origins of Football Debate: Football and Cultural Continuity, 1857-1859', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 35, no. 5 (2015): 631-49.
22. Collins, *How Football Began*, 94.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 95.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Tony Collins, 'The Invention of Sporting Tradition: National Myths, Imperial Pasts and the Origins of Australian Rules Football', in *Myths and Milestones in the History of Sport*, ed. Stephen Wagg (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.
30. Ibid.
31. Netball does not feature in the index of such works as Rudolph Brasch, *How Did Sports Begin?* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1995 [first published in 1970]), or the recently published global overview of sport by respected sport historian Wray Vamplew, *Games People Played: A Global History of Sport* (London: Reaktion Books, 2021). Only three sentences and an aside are devoted to netball in Allen Guttman, *Sports: The First Five Millennia* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004). In general, then, the lack of attention to netball's history may have been exacerbated by its relatively limited diffusion beyond the British (imperial) world, even before its strongly gendered nature became a millstone to a more prominent global presence. Taylor also suggests that 'The lack of netball-specific literature is compounded by its non-inclusion in general sport texts'. She notes that 'Many of the early works on the history of Australian sports made little or no reference to this game or its participants; instead they focussed on established male dominated sports such as the various football codes and cricket'. See Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity', 105.

32. This paper restricts itself to literature on netball in Australia (and more specifically in Victoria), but it is worth listing some items that relate specifically to New Zealand. See, for example (in publishing sequence): Jayne Broomhall, 'A Feminist Analysis of the Development of New Zealand Netball' (Honours diss, University of Otago, 1993); John Nauright and Jayne Broomhall, 'A Woman's Game: The Development of Netball and a Female Sporting Culture in New Zealand, 1906-70', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 11, no. 3 (1994): 387-407; John Nauright, 'Netball, Media Representation of Women and Crises of Male Hegemony in New Zealand', in *Sport, Power and Society in New Zealand: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Nauright (Sydney: Australian Society for Sports History, 1995), 47-65; Geoffrey Andrew, 'A Girl's Game - And a Good One Too': A Critical Analysis of New Zealand Netball' (MA diss., University of Canterbury, 1997); Peter Hawes and Lizzie Barker, *Court in the Spotlight: History of New Zealand Netball* (Christchurch: Netball New Zealand, 1999); Amy Marfell, 'Netball in the Lives of New Zealand Women: An Intergenerational Study' (MA diss., University of Waikato, 2011); Amy Marfell, 'Netball in the Lives of New Zealand Women: The Potential of Focus Groups for Feminist Sport History', *Journal of Sport History* 39, no. 3 (2012): 463-71; Lana McCarthy, 'Coaches, Captains and Constructing Culture: A Case Study of the Silver Ferns' (PhD diss., Massey University, 2018); and Bridget Tunnicliffe, 'Dispelling the Creation Myth of Netball in NZ', RNZ, November 16, 2021, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/sport/455835/dispelling-the-creation-myth-of-netball-in-nz>. For a refined historical analysis of sport in New Zealand, including netball's development, see Greg Ryan and Geoff Watson, *Sport and the New Zealanders* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2018).
33. Netball Victoria, *The Awakening Giant*, 3-5.
34. Ibid., 9.
35. Ibid., 8.
36. Ibid., 73. According to Marion Stell, 'Mills assisted with the inauguration of many sports associations and was president of basketball, baseball, cricket, night basketball, amateur athletics; vice-president of rowing; and life member of hockey, cricket and basketball associations.' See Marion Stell, *Half the Race: A History of Australian Women in Sport* (North Ryde: HarperCollins, 1991), 74. Mills was also closely involved with the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). See also Rob Hess, 'Louise C. Mills and the Development of Netball in Victoria Prior to the Establishment of a National Body in 1927', Unpublished paper presented to the Australian Historical Association Annual Conference, Deakin University, Geelong, June 29, 2022.
37. Ibid., 11.
38. The same 1871 date error is also made in Barker, *A Netball History in Tasmania: The First Bounce 1900-2005*, 8.
39. Ibid. Dr Toles, sometimes spelt incorrectly in other sources as 'Toll' or 'Tolls', was Dr Justin Kaye Toles. His direct influence on the development of netball is considered by some to be debatable. It is also worth noting that fragments of the text and quotations from this section of *The Awakening Giant* are taken, without attribution, from P.D. [Deidre] Hyland, *All Australia Netball Association: Golden Jubilee Souvenir Booklet, 1927-28-1977-78* (Sydney: All Australia Netball Association, 1978). Jobling also partly relies on Hyland's compilation, but he acknowledges the source of his information. He also bemoans that 'The early history of netball in Australia is poorly documented'. See Jobling, 'Netball', 155. Taylor also concurs that '... there is little research and critical documentation about the game's development' (Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity', 104), emphasizing that 'The precise timing of the introduction of women's basketball into Australia is uncertain and largely based on speculation' (ibid., 106). In this context, adding to the confusion, Taylor (relying on *The Awakening Giant*) mistakenly claims that '... the first recorded women's basketball game was played in Victoria in 1897'. Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity', 107. On this particular error, see also McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2162.

40. See, for example, Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*, 82; Jobling, 'Netball', 154–5; Tracy Taylor, 'Netball in Australia: A Social History', *Working Paper*, no. 2, School of Leisure and Tourism, University of Technology, Sydney, 2001, 3–4; and Treagus, 'Playing Like Ladies', 88–105.
41. Netball Victoria, *The Awakening Giant*, 12.
42. Ibid.
43. Hyland, *All Australia Netball Association*, np.
44. Netball Victoria, *The Awakening Giant*, 12.
45. Deidre Hyland and Dot McHugh, *Netball: State of Play. IFNA: History, Challenge, Future* (Np: Deidre Hyland and Dot McHugh, 2011). There are no footnotes, bibliography or an index in this book, although there are a number of biographical profiles and various appendices.
46. Ibid., 17. It should be pointed out that in Hyland and McHugh's book there are two unattributed photographs, one captioned: 'Early netball game at Burwood Ladies Club 1900', and the other 'School netball game 1910', reproduced next to the text on Australian developments. Stell also uses the first image in her 1991 book, but with a more detailed caption as follows: 'Basketball ... was first played with five-a-side teams and shots for goal were taken underarm. MLC [Methodist Ladies College] Burwood, c. 1910. Photograph by Charles Kerry'. See Stell, *Half the Race*, 35. This clarifies that the photograph is not from 1900, and that the game took place in Burwood, New South Wales, not Burwood, Victoria.
47. McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2157.
48. Dave Nadel and Graeme Ryan, eds., *Sport in Victoria: A History* (Melbourne: Ryan Publishing, 2015).
49. Fiona McLachlan, 'Women's Sport', in *Sport in Victoria: A History*, ed. Dave Nadel and Graeme Ryan (Melbourne: Ryan Publishing, 2015), 273.
50. The author was a member of the editorial board for the publication, and wrote one entry (originally submitted with footnotes). See Rob Hess, 'Women's Australian Football', in *Sport in Victoria: A History*, ed. Dave Nadel and Graeme Ryan (Melbourne: Ryan Publishing, 2015), 267–9.
51. June Senyard, 'Netball', in *Sport in Victoria: A History*, ed. Dave Nadel and Graeme Ryan (Melbourne: Ryan Publishing, 2015), 178.
52. Ibid., 178.
53. Ibid., 178.
54. Ibid., 178. It was not until the first interschool tournament in 1926 that teams from South Australia and New South Wales agreed to follow Victoria's preference for seven-a-side teams. See *ibid.*, 180. Men's basketball began at Springfield College (then known as the International Young Men's Christian Association [YMCA] Training School), in Massachusetts in 1891. There were initially nine players on each team, later reduced to a standard five players in 1897. For more on basketball's early history, see James Naismith, *Basketball: Its Origin and Development* (New York: Association Press, 1941), especially 42–60. According to Naismith, '... the game for girls began to spread almost as rapidly as the boys' game'. Ibid., 163. For the role of Senda Berenson in modifying the game for women from 1893, see Treagus, 'Playing Like Ladies', 89–94. In the view of Linda Borish, Berenson (who had met Naismith) wanted to '... promote a cooperative, less rigorous women's game'. See L.J. Borish, 'Place, Identity, Physical Culture and Sport for Women in Jewish Americanization Organizations', *Stadion* 35 (2009): 99. See also Keith Myerscough, 'The Game with No Name: The Invention of Basketball', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 12, no. 1 (1995): 148–50. For a more extended iconoclastic treatment of the origins of basketball in the USA, see Yago Colás, 'Our Myth of Creation: The Politics of Narrating Basketball's Origins', *Journal of Sport History* 43, no. 1 (2016): 37–54. For brief commentary on some discrepancies related to the origins and diffusion of Naismith's game as evident in her critique of Jobling and Barham, and Taylor, see McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2155–6.

55. Senyard, 'Netball', 178.
56. Ibid., 178.
57. Ibid., 178.
58. Ibid., 178–9. While Senyard acknowledges the importance of Morris's return to Melbourne, it is Ray Crawford who reveals the wider significance of Morris's background and blossoming career. According to Crawford, 'There can be no doubt ... that the most significant event in the development of the games movement in Melbourne girls' schools occurred with the decision of Mary and Edith Morris to send their younger sister Gwynneth to England in 1904 to train at Madame Bergman-Österberg's Physical Training College'. He explains that 'Gwynneth had been a pupil at Merton Hall [an exclusive girls' school in Melbourne] since 1898 and her all-round ability at sport and overall interest in physical training led to her appointment as games captain at the school'. As Crawford describes, 'The bold and imaginative action' of the elder sisters paid off when Gwynneth graduated with first-class honours. He also adds that 'Few girls who trained under the redoubtable principal at Dartford were likely to emerge from the college without some of Bergman-Österberg's philosophy being absorbed into their own beliefs and carried with them wherever they went to teach in the world'. Crawford's assessment obviously points to the need for more biographical work on Australian women who returned home after training at Dartford, a topic that cannot be fully explored here. All the above quotations are from Ray Crawford, 'Moral and Manly: Girls and Games in the Prestigious Church Secondary Schools of Melbourne 1901-1914', in *From 'Fair Sex' to Feminism: Sport and the Socialization of Women in the Industrial and Post-Industrial Eras*, ed. J.A. Mangan and R.J. Park (London: Frank Cass, 1987), 198.
59. Senyard, 'Netball', 179.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid.
63. Netball Victoria, *The Awakening Giant*, 12, states there were 'five affiliated clubs', but then lists six teams, including a team representing the YWCA. Senyard, 'Netball', 12, says 'It [The competition] began in May 1923 with six teams', including the YWCA.
64. June Senyard, *The Ties That Bind: A History of Sport at the University of Melbourne* (Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 2004), 167–9, 308–9.
65. Ibid., 167.
66. Ibid., 167–8. By 1927 the University team had been integrated into the MGBBA, regularly playing matches on Saturdays.
67. McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2157.
68. Ibid., 2159. For detailed discussion on the limitations of empirical sources used by Jobling and Barham, 'The Development of Netball and the All-Australia Women's Basketball Association', and Taylor, 'Women, Sport and Ethnicity', see McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2159–62.
69. Cited in Barbara Paterson, 'Professional Historians Association Seminar Report', *Rostrum* 15, no. 10 (1997): 17.
70. See also McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2164, who specifically calls for '... more systematic media analysis of netball in the 1920s'.
71. For further discussion, see McLachlan, 'The Silent Game', 2163–4.
72. Rose Holley, 'Trove: The First Year', January 2010 – January 2012, http://eprints.rclis.org/15510/1/Trove_The%20First%20Year_2010.pdf.
73. However, very dark clouds are on the horizon for Trove. According to a recent newspaper report, a Federal government funding crisis means that the platform, which receives more than 22 million visits per year, could cease operations in July 2023, resulting in an adverse impact on researchers in Australia and elsewhere. See Linda Morris, 'Key National Archive in Peril', *Age*, December 22, 2022, 13.
74. See, for example, M.G. Phillips, Gary Osmond, and Stephen Townsend, 'A Bird's-Eye View of the Past: Digital History, Distant Reading and Sport History', in *Methodology*

- in *Sports History*, ed. Wray Vamplew and Dave Day (London: Routledge, 2018), 11–26, which investigates, *inter alia*, episodes in Australian sport history via a digital platform, enabling ‘distant reading’ of the material (‘distant reading’ being an ‘umbrella term that embraces many practices, including data mining, aggregation, text analysis, and the visual representations of these practices’).
75. *Evening News Supplement* (Sydney), June 3, 1893, 1. See also, for example, the *Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser*, August 16, 1895, 5, and the *Queenslander* (Brisbane), June 13, 1896, 1134, where brief mentions of basketball in an American context occur.
 76. *Express and Telegraph* (Adelaide), February 17, 1897, 3. The *South Australian Register*, February 18, 1897, 5, claimed this match was ‘The first exhibition of the new American gymnasium game given in Australia’. For further discussion of this and subsequent games of basketball played by Our Boys’ Institute, see Stephen Townsend and M.G. Phillips, *The Playmakers: The History of Basketball Queensland* (Brisbane: UQ Print, 2021), 9.
 77. Simon Creak, ‘“Basketeers and Well-Balanced Manhood”: The Formative Years of Basketball in Victoria, 1891–1945’, in *Polemics, Poetics and Play: Essays in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Sporting History*, Simon Creak et al. (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1997), 133. Creak also claims that women’s basketball (that is, the female equivalent of men’s basketball, invented by Naismith) was not played in Australia until the 1950s. *Ibid.*, 134. A similar, though less definitive, claim is made by Townsend and Phillips, *The Playmakers*, 16. For additional discussion on the history of basketball in Victoria, see Simon Creak, ‘Shaping an Australian Sport: A History of the Victorian Basketball Association’ (MA diss., University of Melbourne, 1996).
 78. Creak, ‘Basketeers and Well-Balanced Manhood’, 134. The claim that basketball games were first played in Melbourne in 1905 or thereabouts is repeated in subsequent publications that likely relied on Creak’s research. See, for example, Lindsay Gaze, ‘Basketball’, in *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, ed. Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61–2. See also Scott Bennett, ‘Basketball’, in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, ed. Wray Vamplew, Katherine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman, and Ian Jobling, Revised 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 56–8.
 79. Creak, ‘Basketeers and Well-Balanced Manhood’, 134, 153. For the most recent commentary on the diffusion of men’s basketball to Australia, see Townsend and Phillips, *The Playmakers*, 9, where they claim that although there is ‘scant evidence’ of men playing basketball in Australia in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, it is ‘probable’ that men in the YMCA were playing the game ‘throughout the 1890s and 1900s’.
 80. *Ballarat Star*, March 18, 1901, 4. Although ‘Loreto’ is the most common spelling, and in use today across multiple campuses, there were certain periods when the College itself and external bodies such as the press used the spelling of ‘Loretto’. To avoid confusion, ‘Loreto’ is used in this paper, except for direct quotations.
 81. *Ibid.*
 82. See the *Advocate* (Melbourne), March 30, 1901, 12, where an identical report of the Ballarat match is provided in the state’s leading Catholic newspaper.
 83. See, for example, a substantial appraisal of Bergman-Österberg’s Physical Training School, which appears in the Ballarat press, commending her School, specifically noting ‘... besides the regular gymnastics exercises, the playing of all sorts of games forms part of the regular curriculum. These include, of course, cricket, hockey, tennis, cycling, dancing, golf, and basket ball’. *Ballarat Star*, February 12, 1898, 6.
 84. *Chronicle* (Adelaide), May 22, 1897, 37.
 85. *Ibid.*
 86. G.H. Stephens, ‘Stephens, Arthur Augustus (1867–1914)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1990), <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stephens-arthur-augustus-8643/text15109>.

87. *Mercury* (Hobart), October 25, 1898, 2.
88. *Mercury* (Hobart), August 21, 1899, 2.
89. *Tasmanian News* (Hobart), December 17, 1900, 2.
90. *Mercury* (Hobart), December 22, 1900, 3. It is assumed that Petersen, known by a differently structured name in each report, is the same person. For more on Petersen, whom Pauline Barker says arranged ‘... a regular [netball] roster played amongst the schools in Hobart’, noting that ‘It was clearly visible that Netball (Basketball) was introduced into Tasmania by Christian and Marie Bjelke-Petersen’, see Barker, *A Netball History in Tasmania: The First Bounce 1900-2005*, 8.
91. *Brisbane Courier*, March 30, 1901, 9.
92. *Morning Bulletin* (Rockhampton), October 12, 1901), 5.
93. *Australasian* (Melbourne), July 2, 1903, 48.
94. *Prahran Telegraph*, December 3, 1904, 3. The report also explained that ‘The “field” is divided into six sections, and each player must keep within her own section’, adding that, ‘In each section there are two players, one red and one blue opposing’. The description indicates that this particular game might have been a variation of ‘basketball’, such as ‘basquette’. The latter was a game originally devised by Clara Baer, of Sophie Newcomb College, New Orleans, who had a set of rules containing modifications of the male basketball rules for women formally adopted in 1899. See Myerscough, ‘The Game with No Name’, 149.
95. For an example of personal musings on archival work, see S.R. Wenn, ‘Archival Wanderings: Rubbing Shoulders with History’, in *Method and Methodology in Sport and Cultural History*, ed. K.B. Wamsley (Dubuque: Brown & Benchmark, 1995), 121–6. For a comprehensive introduction to the topic of the visual in sport history, see Mike Huggins, ‘The Visual in Sport History: Approaches, Methodologies and Sources’, *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 32, no. 15 (2015): 1813–30. For a more specific discussion on visual culture, including photographs, see Mike Huggins, ‘Sport and Visuality’, in *Routledge Handbook of Sport History*, ed. M.G. Phillips, Douglas Booth, and Carly Adams (London: Routledge, 2021), 128–35.
96. The Loreto College was founded at Dawson Street in Ballarat in 1877, and was administered by nuns, many of whom came from Ireland. See K.D. Kane, *Adventure in Faith: The Presentation Sisters in Victoria* (Melbourne: Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Victorian, 1974), 116.
97. The Heritage Taskforce are a group largely made up of former netballers who have played at local, state or national level, and are currently in the process of cataloguing Netball Victoria’s EHC. For further information about this group, see Kirby Fenwick, ‘The Missing History of Netball’, *Siren: A Women in Sport Collective*, July 14, 2020, <https://sirensport.com.au/netball/the-missing-history-of-netball/>.
98. Initial email correspondence from Kaye Gill to Theresa Cronk, May 6, 2021.
99. Email correspondence from Theresa Cronk to Kaye Gill, May 14, 2021.
100. Email correspondence from Theresa Cronk to Kaye Gill, May 21, 2021. There is acknowledged uncertainty regarding the dating of some of the very earliest images of netball in the Loreto archives, especially those which feature handwritten inscriptions of dates. For example, one print is designated as ‘1898/1899’ on the margin of the photograph’s backing board.
101. Email correspondence between Theresa Cronk and Kaye Gill, May 28, 2021 to June, 2021. Further assistance was also provided by another archivist at Loreto, namely Sarah Kelly.
102. There were formal and less formal names for all of the Loreto sites. In 1901, the following sites were listed on the cover of *Eucalyptus Blossoms*: Loreto Abbey, Mary’s Mount, Ballarat; Loreto Convent, Dawson Street, Ballarat; Loreto Convent, Portland; Loreto Convent, Albert Park, Melbourne; Loreto Convent, Hornsby, New South Wales; Loreto Convent, Milson’s Point, North Sydney; Loreto Convent, Adelaide Terrace, Perth; Loreto Convent; Osborne House, Perth. Some convents later changed their locations.

103. *Eucalyptus Blossoms*, no. 17 (December 1899), 54.
104. *Ibid.*, 10.
105. *Ibid.*, 45. The report from *The Sydney Freeman* (likely *Freeman's Journal* [Sydney]), was also reproduced in the WA [West Australian] *Record*, November 25, 1899, 2.
106. *Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Australia*, Christmas, 1920, 17. Courtesy of Loreto College Archives.
107. The College magazines also carried an increasing amount of commercial advertising, indicating that the publication was also for external distribution, not just for internal use by Loreto institutions.
108. A good example of where to look further in terms of netball's place in state school education, as distinct from private school education, is the impressive work by John Andrews and Deborah Towns, "A Secondary Education for All"? *A History of State Secondary Schooling in Victoria* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly, 2017).
109. See 'The History of Netball Australia', <https://netball.com.au/history> (accessed November 21, 2022).

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Disclosure Statement

The author reports there is no competing interests to declare.

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