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| In Conversation – Change Our Game ChampionsRick Bell, CEO AFL Victoria  |
| Video transcript |

**[Change Our Game Logo]**

**[In Conversation – Change Our Game Champion. Rick Bell, CEO AFL Victoria**

**Rick Bell:**

I'm Rick Bell, head of AFL Victoria and I'm a Change Our Game Champion.

**Interviewer:**

Rick, congratulations in the hot seat at AFL Victoria who've been a part of the Change Our Game program since day one. But you're now the person taking it on as a Change Our Game champion. So congratulations. Big challenges in football because so many young girls and women want to play the game.

**Rick Bell:**
Yeah, it's a fantastic challenge they have, and we've seen going back as recently as 2010 we had 58 dedicated female teams and last year we hit a thousand. So there's been an enormous change both at grassroots participation level and with that through our talent pathways. So we're replicating our talent pathways for exactly the same as we've done for boys with girls and that's providing them with the full sort of suite of opportunities to progress through our game right up to the elite level.

**Interviewer:**

So with that, you've got a sport that's existed for a hundred plus years as a male dominated, male only sport and now you've got to do exactly the same thing with girls. I would imagine facilities is the number one challenge.

**Rick Bell:**

Yeah, absolutely. Facilities is as our participation increases, just accessing facilities is a key issue. So whether that's the green space being the ovals and a time to play or having female friendly change rooms to create a welcoming environment for our female participants. Both of those are really important. So building new facilities is important, but just as much as that is about us changing the way we operate and the way we schedule, so that we don't always have to operate in the traditional weekend time slots. There might be opportunities for us to play more midweek game, to schedule differently and think a bit differently like other sports have had to do. So those are all the opportunities that we're exploring and some of our leagues and commissions are implementing.

**Interviewer:**

So that obviously means from a government investment perspective that's taking care of the facilities. The conversations with councils who might be reluctant to allow you to play on a Tuesday night or a Monday night or another time that's not the traditional football space. Is that something that's important in terms of changing the game?

**Rick Bell:**

Yeah, definitely. So we've created a really close relationship with local government authorities right across the state. We often refer to them as our biggest sponsor as a sport given the facilities they provide and the maintenance that they put into those facilities. So that relationship's really important. And those conversations continue to happen at that local level around, well what can we do differently as a sport? So it's not always about a handout to build new stuff. It's about what can we do differently as a sport to schedule differently and make best use of the available facilities whilst also, you know, planning in partnership with them to what does our future growth look like? What facilities do we need in the future so that we're planning collaboratively to make sure that we're well placed to get that investment dollar.

**Interviewer:**

So clubs have only got x amount of ovals to be able to use, x amount of hours to be able to do it. And the challenge I would imagine is that some clubs have to reduce the number of boys teams to increase the number of girls teams. Is that how it's playing out across the club land?

**Rick Bell:**

Yeah. Haven't had too many examples of that yet. I think the notion of trying to do things differently so that we don't get to that, because ultimately we want participation by everyone in our sport. Our aim is to continue to grow and increase participation. So we want to look at ways in which we can cater for both. We've catered for the increase in girls participation and catered for the existing boys participation. So whether that's changing the scheduling that I've mentioned or accessing school facilities which can sometimes be under utilized, they're the sorts of things that we're examining in the first instance.

**Interviewer:**
What about leadership positions in club committees and visible roles for women? Are they on the improve?

**Rick Bell:**

Yeah, I think they are. And as we see this ground swell of female participation in our game, that's then bringing more and more and different volunteers to our game. So we're having new coaches come in that perhaps previously weren't involved in the game because they didn't have a boy involved in the game. So the talent pool or the volunteer pool is increasing and therefore we'll start to see more and more females in roles on club committees and then in leadership roles in club committees. And that's really important for us.

**Interviewer:**

When we talked to some of our ambassadors and you hear the stories of the crusty old blokes, we hear the conversations around AFLW, it's not as good as the men's games, so I'm not going to watch it. How do you counter that when you're at club level with the crusty old rusted arms that are still there?

**Rick Bell:**

Yeah, I think it's about calling it out and just saying, look, times have changed and we have a vision at AFL Victoria to be the most accessible sport for all Victorians. And clearly now we have the aspirational piece of the AFLW and that's creating a whole lot of interest in the game amongst females. And what has been shown is where clubs have embraced that male and female environment, and we've got truly integrated clubs, so it's not just a female team sitting on the side, a male team sitting on this side. It's an integrated footy club with opportunities for both males and females. They're the ones who are really vibrant and sustainable and successful. And so if we can sort of highlight those examples to those crusty old blokes, this is about sustainability of your club and how you can grow and thrive, then that's a way in which we counter those arguments.

I'm Rick Bell, head of AFL Victoria, and I'm a Change Our Game Champion.

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