

|  |
| --- |
| In Conversation – Change Our Game ChampionsSteven Reaper, CEO AFL Victoria  |
| Video transcript |

**[Change Our Game Logo]**

**[In Conversation – Change Our Game Champion. Steven, CEO AFL Victoria]**

**Steven Reaper:**

I’m Stephen Reaper, CEO of AFL Victoria, and I’m a Change Our Game Champion.

**Interviewer:**

Stephen tell us about your role as a Change Our Game Champion.

**Steven Reaper:**

Well it’s been an exciting role to be involved with, with SRV and I think the most challenging point of view that we’ve faced as an industry, we’ve always been male-dominated, I think with the recent growth of female football, an explosion, a positive tsunami we like to refer to it as, has provided some unique opportunities for us as a sport, and also some challenges to adapt to very quickly.

**Interviewer:**

You’ve had a 40% increase in female participation in 2016 and probably even more than that in 2017 once you’ve have counted up all the figures, incredible opportunity but challenges as well.

**Steven Reaper:**

Yeah there are, and I think that’s exciting as a sport. We saw 100% growth in 2017 and our numbers for 2018 are really positive again, another 40% jump, but that means that we’ve got a female point of view, a lot of facilities aren’t up to scratch, and we did a state-wide audit of those facilities and about 80% of them we wouldn’t class as being unisex capable, so a lot of work to do in a facilities space, but also a lot of work to do from an education point of view, upskilling what has traditionally been a male-dominated sport and how to cope with that growth.

**Interviewer:**

As a band, the Change Our Game Champions, when you talk to the other Champions, similar experiences and challenges?

**Steven Reaper:**

Yeah there are. There’s a couple of other sports that I think are a bit more advanced than what AFL has been in dealing with female sport and I think examples of cricket and speaking to Tony Dodemaide there about how they’ve gone about that, when they bought in the Big Bash for women. I think there’s some good sharing experiences when you talk to the other guys, and I think that’s critical and a key part of the framework that we actually learn off others, their at different levels and I think we’re all on a different cycle in regards to dealing with our own organisations and how we can promote females within them, so having the ability to bounce ideas off other people has been fantastic.

**Interviewer:**

What about female representation at decision-making level, and coaching and key volunteers etc. How is that playing out for AFL Victoria?

**Steven Reaper:**

Still a lot of work to do, but I think it’s in it’s infancy and I think from a product life-cycle point of view, as we get more used to females playing the game we start to see more administrators and start to see more volunteers that are females being involved at community club levels, but we are seeing also at VFL club level, TAC Cup, more females being involved. The fact that we’ve been able to replicate the talent pathway the same as the boys, that we’ve now got that happening for the girls at the TAC Cup, we’ve got a VFL Women’s state league happening, that pathway in time will mean that we’re starting to see more quality females be employed, that’s been a challenge for us, we’ve traditionally had males employed in our development roles, we’re now employing females into those roles which provides some exciting opportunities, and the diversity that the females bring, the different view-points is exciting for us as an organisation as we look to the future and being able to embrace as many females as possible.

**Interviewer:**

There’s a great saying ‘You can’t be what you can’t see’, and Peggy O’Neal being President of an AFL club who happen to be the Premiers as well, must provide those crusty old blokes who sit in their clubrooms and say ‘we don’t want the girls involved in this’, that must be a big barrier breaker?

**Steven Reaper:**

It is, and I think from a peer-point of view, people that call out those behaviours are the people that we need more of, and I think we’ve seen some shining examples of that. Peggy’s fantastic as President of Richmond at the AFL level but we’ve also seen examples of that at VFL level and community club level where those traditional views that have been held, are starting to be knocked down which I think is healthy for removing those barriers of entry.

**Interviewer:**

As a Change Our Game Champion what sort of responsibility do you feel personally to make a change and make a difference?

**Steven Reaper:**

I think it’s the realisation that you’re in a role of authority and at a certain point in time you can influence other people and I think I’ve been quite strong in trying to have our own executive team have more diversity on it. We’ve created some roles that have meant that we’ve been able to get some quality females into our executive leadership team and they’ve brought, as I said earlier, a different diversity to our way of thinking. It’s a far better organisation now that we’ve got some women in roles of leadership and as we go forward it’s about creating those pathways underneath our executive team and our middle managers and development staff, that it’s okay to want to work in football if you’re a female, and I think as we go on into the future the more and more females we do get on board, they’ll be able to see a clear pathway, whereas 12 months ago, 18 months ago, that might not have existed. So from a leadership point of view I think we have to take the bull by the horns and actually, you know, embrace the challenge and own it and actually do something about it, and I think we’ve been able to do that at AFL Victoria to this point, but hopefully that becomes obvious into the future with the amount of females that we are employing.

**Interviewer:**

And much push back at various levels of the organisation and down at the grassroots levels within the clubs?

**Steven Reaper:**

I think how you actually go out and sell the concept is really critical at the first point. If you can get that identify why we’re doing it, what are the reasons behind it, it does make that pathway and the sell a hell of a lot easier. So being very little push back at AFL Victoria but I think the explosion of female participants has also opened up a lot of eyes in regards to what the future could look like. At community club level we see your traditional seniors, reserves, under 18s all male. In time that’s going to be seniors, under 18s males and females so the whole culture of football as it’s being ‘blokey’, we’re breaking down those barriers so as we go forward, we are ultimately a club of both males and females so that’ll become the norm and as it becomes the norm so does the leadership roles and so does the employment of more females into the future.

**Interviewer:**

In AFL as a game, obviously you’re under the media spotlight a lot more than other sports, and that provides great benefits but also a lot of pressure because you pick up the paper and you read stories about females coaches and the opportunities for them, and other issue. Does that help or does it hinder progress?

**Steven Reaper:**

Well it gets a conversation going Dave which I think is healthy. At times where there’s sometimes negative issues, it also brings about solutions that we haven’t thought about previously. When it comes to coaching females they’re unique in regards to how you go about that, far more use of social media, far more use of, you know, technology in regards to how you coach females, but also the female coaches coming through don’t want to be just lumped into ‘I can only coach females’, they want to coach the men as well and I think that opens up different conversations and different mindsets into what the future can hold, so hopefully at some point down the track we can have a female coaching an AFL club, I think that’d be fantastic into the future, but we need those pioneers that are coming through, the Peta Searles of the world at St Kilda, and I think we’ve seen some fantastic coaches in the AFLW as that becomes the norm I think that’s the beauty of our sport that we can actually become diversified right across all levels of our game.

**Interviewer:**

What about for you personally as a Change Our Game Champion, who are you relying on to help you find the way forward? Deakin University are involved in this program providing roadmaps for each organisation individually, how helpful has that been for you?

**Steven Reaper:**

Yeah those frameworks have been very helpful to fall back on. I’m very lucky that my wife also has worked in elite level sport and she’s a great sounding board for me, but I think listening is the key to it all, so don’t just think you’ve got the solution to everything. Be brave enough to go and ask people questions that you might not have been wanting to do, and I think that’s a key part of it. The frameworks have helped the guys at SRV have been fantastic in supporting us through the journey and as we alluded to earlier, actually bouncing off ideas some of the other Champions of Change has been really helpful.

**Interviewer:**

We’re going to come back and talk to you later in the year, so you’re at Point A now, when we come back later in the year, what progress do you think will have made? If there are three things you really want to achieve by the end of 2018, what would they be?

**Steven Reaper:**

I think the awareness piece that we’ve already worked on is something that we’ll continue to work on, but the acceptance piece is just as critical I think how we’re being accepted in regards to what we’re trying to achieve, I talk to our team at AFL Victoria about this actual program and how we’re implementing it. So getting that constant feedback on how we’re tracking is just as important, so that self-reflection piece I think is really critical, putting up KPIs and measurements of our staffing levels and our executive team members that’s one thing that we can easily identify and easily measure but it’s what outcomes that actually come from that is most critical to us as an organisation and I think the more we can cascade that down through not only the TAC Cup, but also the VFL Women’s and also into community football that’s our, I guess, broad reaching point that we want to get that acceptance piece out there as much as we possibly can, so chipping away at it day-by-day, but I think in the future if it becomes the norm that’s what we’re ultimately looking for.

**Interviewer:**

Victorian Government recently announced a huge monetary pool available for facilities in particular and you touched on it earlier, for women’s football, changerooms are a huge issue and that amount of money must mean a huge difference to sporting clubs throughout Victoria?

Yeah it’s fantastic that the government have been able to identify that and act upon it. Everything’s fiscal these days and when it comes to the crunch, we’re dealing with local councils, state government, federal government, so any funding that comes through, help us bridge that gap. I spoke about earlier that 80% of our facilities aren’t up to scratch from a unisex point of view, the more they can come on board and we really have a generational opportunity if we don’t do it in the next three or four years we will see participants actually move away because of the environment isn’t as good as we expect. So that funding that’s coming though is going to make a huge impact on our facilities as we go forward which ultimately means that the participants coming through have a more enjoyable experience and get more out of the game.

 Now is a perfect time to Change Our Game.

**[Change our Game logo]**

**[State Government of Victoria logo]**

[Authorised by the Department of Health and Human Services, 50 Lonsdale St Melbourne. Spoken by D. Culbert and S. Reaper]

To receive this publication in an accessible format email Change Our Game <changeourgame@sport.vic.gov.au>

Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

© State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, July 2018