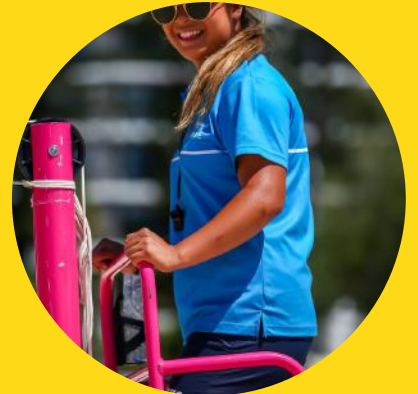


Women in Volleyball



VOLLEYBALL
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Introduction

As we celebrate International Women's Day (IWD) 2022, Volleyball WA (VWA) is using the opportunity to acknowledge the journey of our sport to become one of the world's most gender-balanced sports. Today's female athletes are enjoying increased recognition for their ability to attract crowds, more media attention, increased opportunities to represent their country and play overseas. Volleyball is truly a sport that offers everyone the opportunity to be successful, accepted, and welcomed. Here in WA, there is a real sense of community and support for athletes of all genders.

Volleyball is the second most popular sport in the world after soccer. In international competition the rules for men and women are the same, the number of games played is the same and the pay and prize money is the same. In fact, in 2019 the highest-paid volleyballer in the world was a woman. Volleyball World in 2021 reported that 84% of volleyball fans have a strong interest in both men's and women's volleyball, and this is reflected in the coverage in the media and the number of spectators and viewers at the Tokyo Olympics.

But this of course has not always been the case, some countries and cultures have been quicker to adopt a more equal treatment of women and men in the sport than others. In Australia, other more traditional sports like AFL and Cricket have been more visually active in this arena attracting media and the dollars to propel the female game. In WA, the volleyball player community is an almost 50/50 gender split, the VWA board is gender-balanced, the VWA CEO and all managers are female and across the team, there are 9 female staff members and 6 male, facts worth being proud of.

Things like objectifying female beach volleyball athletes in the media, reduced access to funding, facilities and other training resources are just some of the differences experienced by some of the featured women who have been involved in the sport at different points in the journey towards equity. Then there is still some inequity when it comes to the number of female coaches, referees, club presidents, board, and committee members (see table below). This is potentially an area of significant change to be affected in the future with the right promotion of these roles and the reduction of barriers.

This year's theme for IWD is #breakthebias. There is an international call-out to individuals to consider their thoughts and actions every day and so we ask our volleyball community to do the same to continue to break the bias in our sport. To think about inviting more females onto your committees and boards, to support the development of female coaches and referees, to promote your female athletes, and create opportunities for the Women's game to be featured as the headline match.



Coaches		
	Female	Male
Total	174	260
Referees		
	Female	Male
Total	283	372
Club Presidents	(Platinum, Platinum Regional & Gold Clubs)	
	Female	Male
Total	7	28
Club Committee Members		
	Female	Male
Total	27	108

Pauline Manser - Olympian & Coach

Pauline started playing Volleyball in high school back in the early 80s. She was very fortunate to have a female coach and role model at the time but outside of that, there was very little female representation which is changing today. It was also an era where there was a lot of money available for sport but most of that was directed at men in the sport.

The WA Institute of Sport (WAIS) Volleyball program and a National Centralised Program in Canberra was established around the same time but both were for male players only. The men were provided many playing opportunities both in Australia and abroad, while the women continued to self-fund limited opportunities.

Pauline was lucky enough to participate in a two-week Volleyball experience in Japan as a promising junior in high school alongside one other female and two male athletes. She remembers this as an amazing experience particularly seeing the high standard of female high school Volleyball as something to aspire to.

Over her playing career which includes competing at the Olympics in 2000 and representing Australia 104 times, she did get several opportunities for similar experiences, however as she progressed through the ranks she realised that there were certainly inequities, disadvantaging females in sport.

Leading the way for others

As the first Australian female Volleyballer to get a full scholarship at a US University she faced the challenge of moving across the world away from family and friends, feeling so isolated she almost quit. She was also not prepared for the culture shock, the difference in professionalism, the passion, investment, and expectations required as a player.

While representing her university she experienced first-hand the inequities in sport between the genders. Even though the women's volleyball team was the highest-ranked team at the university, they had to fight for most things, like getting access to a bigger gym for games to accommodate growing spectator numbers and they had few of the privileges and luxuries of lower-ranked men's teams at the University.

Back in WA after four and half years away, Pauline as National Head Coach (2010-2014) witnessed the fight to start up an Australian centralised program for women and while the team made progress in international rankings, it always felt like it was an afterthought in comparison to the Men's program.



Pauline Manser - Olympian and Coach

Highlights & Challenges

During her time in the US, she was a two-time All-American and played for the team that won two Conference Championships without the same level of financial support and investment as the less successful Men's team.

Pauline was also part of the U21 women's team who won the first Gold Medal for WA Volleyball in 1987 at the National Championships.

Pauline enjoyed a successful Beach Volleyball career internationally but noted that there were less tournaments for women and those tournaments were graded differently, accounting for reduced prize money even though the sport claimed to be one of gender equality. She was part of the fight to prevent the FIVB from introducing a uniform rule that prevented female athletes from wearing bikini bottoms with a side measurement of more than 7cm. This rule was introduced anyway, with no restrictions on the shorts worn by male counterparts. At all the international events the women always played the finals on the day before the men's final and never got top billing.

Her playing success and experience lead her to a coaching career at the National level. While coaching in the Australian Volleyball League the women's matches grew to become the premier matches to watch, their skill and camaraderie on the court a thrill for spectators.

Future

As for the future, she feels the rise of women's cricket and football, their ability to attract big crowds and airtime is exciting for women's sport generally but believes it will be two more decades before women's sport will reach the same level of men's sport.

She is encouraged by more women coaching men, particularly in the US, however, there are still fewer females pursuing professional coaching. In the '70s & '80s, around 70% of women's college teams were coached by females although mostly on a part-time or volunteer basis. As recent as 2019 it is as low as 30% with coaching salaries as much as \$1million.

It is promising to see at the National Collegiate Athletic Association NCAA Regionals in 2021 there were 4 female coaches among the final 16 teams.



Beth Morris – Player, Coach & VWA Board Member

Beth first started playing Volleyball in high school, she tried out for an interschool team when she was in year 8 and really enjoyed the experience of representing her school, competing, and playing with schoolmates. Basketball had been and was still her main sport until year 11 but when she made the state junior volleyball team and then the under 17 development team, volleyball very quickly took over her life!

As a player, the two things that attracted her to the sport was that it is non-contact, the physicality of basketball never came naturally to her. She didn't love pushing other girls around but had no problem trying to crank a volleyball at them! And secondly, it was the skills. She recalls a vivid memory of Stu Davis, the Volleyball WA Development Officer demonstrating setting at school and thinking, she wanted to be able to do that.

She started playing club volleyball the same year she made the state team and a few years later she also got involved as an administrator, joining the committee of the former Perth Coastal Volleyball Club (PCVC). As a university student at the time, she saw it as a really good opportunity to gain practical experience helping to run the club and something that would look good on her resume when looking for a job. She went on to hold the President and Vice President roles for PCVC.

She joined the Balcatta Cats in 2017 playing in the WA Volleyball League. Also, that year she represented the state in the Australian Volleyball League playing for the WA Pearls (now WA Steel) who won Silver that year.

Beth also had a playing career on the sand as a WA Beach Tour player from 2005. She competed at the Australian University Games, winning silver in 2008 and bronze the following two years. She was named WA Female Beach Team of the Year with Tara Banks. Beth sat on the VWA Beach Committee, joined the Volleyball WA Board shortly after that, and is currently also the Chair of the VWA Junior Committee.

Challenges & Triumphs

Beth's biggest challenge was her first year as president of Perth Coastal Volleyball Club. The club was struggling at the time with numbers and meeting the requirements to be allowed to participate in State League, this presented many challenges including friction internally and with VWA. This period was a tough crash course in strategic communication and assertiveness. As a younger female within the committee, this was very challenging and not very enjoyable at the time. As with most challenging experiences, the lessons learnt have benefitted her personally and professionally.

During the time she has been involved the sport has emerged as one of the world's most gender-balanced sports particularly the playing community who get behind each other creating a wonderfully warm environment.

Beth recounts some of her personal highlights including her first state tour away in 2005 and not wanting to get on the plane to come home, training and playing with the girls at the beach, and then of course coaching the Rams (ECU State Indoor League Women) to the 2021 Premiership.



Beth Morris – Player, Coach & VWA Board Member

A rewarding sport

Beth has found great reward in being involved with Volleyball. When she was in school, studying at university, and working, playing volleyball has been great for stress management, saying that “while you are training or playing it’s a great excuse to stop thinking about whatever has been stressing you during the day and focus on volleyball and then go back to your studies, work or family life with renewed vigour afterwards.”

Like any team sport, Beth says “volleyball teaches you about teamwork, perseverance, leadership. I love playing beach volleyball in particular and I don’t think there is many better situations to develop your communication skills than in a two-person team – on and off the court.”

Beth has also had a stellar coaching career, starting in 2007 as the Methodist Ladies College IGSSA coach, then coaching several Perth Coastal Volleyball Club teams. She was the VWA Beach Development Squad Coach in 2020, State Team Coach for the Australian Junior Beach Volleyball Championships U16 Women, and in 2020 and 2021 ECU Chequers State League Women’s Coach. The team were runners-up in 2020 and premiers, in 2021, Beth went on to win the VWA Club/Community Coach of the Year 2021.

Beth says she gets so much joy from coaching, recognising that it is more difficult than playing she said, “coaching taught me so much about myself and the skills for dealing with others but watching your team succeed or even just the juniors enjoying and developing over a week away at the tournament is so rewarding.”

Beth is also an advocate for getting involved as a volunteer in sport. So much work goes into organising training and competitions at all levels and until your inside, she thinks it’s hard to have a real appreciation for that. Volleyball has given her so much that she strives to give what she can to help keep growing the sport here in WA.



Future

Looking forward Beth is excited about the growth in the sport – particularly at the junior level and seeing how that translates into stronger senior competitions over the years to come and how that might play out at the Olympic Games, Brisbane 2032.

Personally, she is coming back from the birth of her child, continuing to build her fitness and starting to feel more and more like herself on the court and just enjoying the time she gets to play.

Renaë Harvey - Referee

Renaë started playing Volleyball when she was in year 7, somewhat by accident. She was keen to compete in the interschool competition but unable to get into her first choice she was encouraged to try Volleyball a decision she has never looked back from.

In her senior high school years, she took up refereeing, receiving a scholarship in 2011 which took her to the Australian Volleyball Schools Cup, her first Australian Junior Volleyball Competition in 2012, and subsequent National events from 2013 - 2017. Identified as a young talent she went on to the Women's World Grand Prix as an e-scorer and today is a common fixture on the court refereeing in the Australian National and West Australian Volleyball Leagues.

As a referee mentor and assessor, Renaë is also helping others achieve their goals and recognise alternative opportunities to just playing. She is also on the VWA Referee Committee and is a tournament/venue coordinator.

She loves the fact that she "gets to watch and be involved in her favourite sport from some of the best seats in the house and gets to help others see this too."

Earning respect on court

Being a female referee in volleyball is sometimes intimidating at the higher levels. Players like to push boundaries and influence your decision making, They often voice their opinions if a call has not gone their way and they think you made the wrong call, but a duty team could make the same call and get less or no reaction. Having to earn respect and get challenged on your ability to referee the game while trying to achieve that is definitely a challenge.

Renaë notes as a young female when she first started at a high level she would get players angry and annoyed because she was refereeing their game. They felt she was too inexperienced, but she had to do the high-level games at some point, otherwise, how was she going to learn how to deal with that kind of behaviour. She says the experience has helped in coaching others through similar situations now.



Renaë Harvey - Referee

A sport of opportunity

WA has provided an opportunity for expedient growth and development unhindered by gender bias because there are fewer referees in the state vying for high-level opportunities.

Renaë has lots of career highlights but being a scorer for the Russia v Argentina Volleyball Nations League match in Brisbane 2019, ranks pretty highly. As for the future she is really just excited to see where refereeing takes her.

As for this year's International Women's Day theme "Break the bias", Renaë thinks players and coaches need to be part of the solution and play a part in the mentoring for new referees both male and female. Renaë suggests that it is everyone's responsibility to help develop new or inexperienced referees, to support them even if they make mistakes, they are only human and not to overreact when a decision doesn't go the way they wanted. As for referees, she cautions new referees not to use their role recklessly just referee the game how you would want to be refereed if you were playing.



Maurice Marcelo – Secretary United Volleyball Club

A Happy Club

Maurice started playing volleyball when she was in year 4 at school. Volleyball is one of the most popular sports in the Philippines and certainly very popular among females, most of her cousins played so you could say it was in the family.

She moved to Australia when she was about fifteen and in fact, it was Volleyball that kept her from going home after experiencing extreme homesickness. Introduced to the Filipino Australian Sports Association (FASA) she was reunited with the game she loved, able to establish a new friendship circle, and eventually met her partner. She played socially with the FASA club for 17 years.

During this time Maurice discovered the WA Volleyball League and wanted to see if her skills were up to the challenge of competing in the state competition. She and her team played in the Open Division which they won that year. Maurice saw this as just the start, she could see the potential for the team to improve and build a reputation outside of the Filipino community. Coming up with the competition entry fees was not always easy though. The frustration of seeing individuals and teams miss out on opportunities drove Maurice, and current club President Tani Bernados, to start United Volleyball Club.

The two women wanted to build a club that provided support and a stepping stone to those who aspire to be volleyball players and make sure they don't miss out again. They didn't want to just play because they loved the sport. They wanted a reason "WHY". For Maurice, she decided to stay in Australia because of volleyball and this is where she met all her friends who are now family.

Maurice said, "United is here for that person who was rejected because they were too short, of a different race, or because of their sexual orientation. That person who sat alone and couldn't play because they were too shy. Those people who couldn't afford it but had a natural talent. All of those who needed someone to push them to have another go at the opportunities available out there may it be in sport or in life."

Maurice describes the club as a "Happy Club" and she loves nothing more than seeing someone's confidence grow, to see them developing new friendships and living out their dreams to play Volleyball.



Maurice Marcelo – Secretary United Volleyball Club

Challenges & Triumphs

Maurice observes that globally there are still some tournaments that do not offer Women's divisions despite making up almost half of the playing population. And that in some countries the lack of choice in uniform for women is preventing them from pursuing the game much past their teens.

One of the things Maurice is very passionate about is making sure everyone has the chance to play the game if they want to and follow their dreams. The club's 'Pass the Volley' is a project where they collect sporting equipment and gear from friends here in WA to donate locally or overseas. It may be brand new or in good condition and hopefully, this act passes on the "good luck" to these young athletes and allows them to pursue their volleyball careers. Using their established networks here and overseas they identify the next recipients of the donation and put the call out again.

Another thing Maurice is proud of is the way the club is really starting to achieve its goals through events like the Unity Cup. In the past few years of the Cup, the club focused on helping to build that bridge between individuals and other clubs. It is very rewarding to see people celebrate each other's achievements, acknowledging each other's skills and clubs supporting one another. She is confident that sticking to the values of the club is the right path to ensuring everyone feels they belong, and they are part of a community.

Future Dreams

As for the future, she would like to see greater access to high-performance volleyball coaches for all players who have the potential but because they play for smaller clubs, who don't field teams in the higher divisions they have limited opportunities for growth and further skills development. United is one such smaller club and so she would also like to see the club have more teams in the WA Volleyball League and in the future the higher State League division.

Maurice will continue to encourage UVCWA players to volunteer in the community for their personal and career development. And finally, she would love to see a packed Perth Arena watching volleyball!!!

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Tara Banks - Player

Tara grew up in Bathurst, a country town in NSW, where sport was such a big part of the lifestyle and being part of the community. She was naturally athletic, tall, played several sports including Athletics, Soccer, Hockey and Softball throughout school, and was successful in all.

Tara first started playing Volleyball at Kelso High School, Mrs Powel, a teacher at the school had daughters playing, so was the driving force behind the sport having a strong base at the school. She played as much as she could, for the school and at the local recreation centre, making representative teams and the NSW State Team which traveled to New Zealand for a Trans-Tasmin competition. After high school, Tara moved to Canberra to study Sports Coaching at the University of Canberra.

While studying she played in various Uni Games, won several Eastern State and National events, and was selected for Australian representative teams. During this time, she also took on sports administration roles, as a committee member (including President) of the University of Canberra Volleyball Club and later roles in the UWA Volleyball Club. It was also in Canberra that Tara took to the sand for a bit of fun, playing a few tournaments in Sydney.

Her move West

Tara then moved to Perth in 1999 to complete her Honours at UWA, playing for the UWA Volleyball Club team which won several championships. But it was her friend and talented player Claire Bew that really encouraged her beach volleyball career. During her early years on the sand, she was lucky enough to have spent some time under the WAIS beach program and receive coaching from the likes of game greats Glenn Hamilton, Pauline Manser, and Mandy Coombes, each who contributed to her game in different ways. Tara traveled the country for several years as part of the National Beach Tour and then traveled overseas to compete in Chinese-Taipei, which she recounts as fantastic experiences.

Over the years she was honoured to play with several different partners, all who offered something different and many who became lifelong friends. Sometimes the timing and combos just worked, and she won several State Championship titles. Her husband likes to boast about this, but she said, "she is more modest and grateful to have been able to play with so many good people and for so long."



Tara Banks - Player

Challenges & Triumphs

During her sporting career, she was challenged by an ACL injury that she sustained while playing soccer when she was 17. At the time it was devastating to find after a prolonged recovery her soccer teammates had improved and were now making Australian teams. As time went by, she started to realise that her lean, tall physique did not necessarily suit playing soccer competitively. This is when she started to focus on Volleyball. To her dismay, over the years, she has had seven knee surgeries and one shoulder reconstruction. These made maintaining fitness and recovery after games a challenge. Beach Volleyball became her game saviour as it was a little more forgiving on the joints and allowed her to continue playing.

During her time on the club administration front, understaffed committees, pressures from affiliated bodies, doing the lion's share of the work were big challenges. Over the years, she has coached State junior teams, club teams and beach squads. Tara reports coaching has the capacity to take over your life, it is hard to keep a balance and challenges such as dealing with egos is one of the hardest things.

Among her greatest triumphs were the multiple Beach Volleyball State Championship titles and the fact that as a mature athlete she is still able to play. She is certainly very thankful to her supportive parents for sacrificing time, money and energy to allow her to follow her sporting passions. Tara is now doing the same for her children, coaching Teeball and Hockey teams. As a coach, she relishes witnessing the less naturally talented athletes improve and achieve amazing results.

A place to belong

Tara said "she loves the winning feeling but also loves fierce competition." Sport has given her so many highlights but, in the end, she still plays because she loves it and wants to always be a role model for her children and the younger players - that you can be a mum, mature aged and an athlete."

She has made many close friendships through sport and says "that sometimes there is nothing better than having a game with mates. Sport gives you a second home and a feeling of belonging."

She loves that she got a chance to play against gold medalist Natalie Cook and Kerry Pottharst and other leading players over the years, and knows the future is bright with new talent.



Alex Moir - Club President Bunbury Volleyball Association

A late start

Unlike some of the other featured women, Alex didn't start playing volleyball until a little later in life. She first played indoor beach volleyball at Fremantle in 2000. She played on Tuesday mornings in the women's competition around her university studies for some fun and fitness.

Here she met Cynthia who was an inspirational player and excellent teacher and together they entered the Alcohol. Think Again Beach Tour series and competed over a number of years. To maintain her skills during winter Alex played in the Indoor Beach Volleyball Super League series and still plays in the National competitions – traveling to Darwin and Brisbane to compete most recently.

It is hard to believe that Alex is even old enough but now she is adding competing at the Australian Master Games to her portfolio. Her first games were Alice Springs where she competed in Indoor and Indoor Beach Volleyball, then South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania. She has also traveled overseas to Italy, Penang, and New Zealand to play in international masters competitions and says that the games are just so much fun, it is great to meet new people and experience new cultures.



Alex Moir - Club President Bunbury Volleyball Association

On the other side of the court

Alex has also been on the other side of the court as a referee and VWA committee member. It was through meeting Marta Makuch that she learnt about the organisational side of volleyball and the other opportunities to help the volleyball community.

Alex has served on the VWA Beach Committee and VWA Referee Committee. Both committees at the time had a diverse mix of people, male and female, young and mature. She found that each committee had a positive focus on giving everyone an equal voice. On the referee committee, there were several strong female role models who supported the advancement of female referees

She also found this at the ATABT WA Open events where she was fortunate to have the opportunity to second referee in a bronze medal match and score in several gold medal matches. Last year she took her skills indoor, refereeing during the WAVL season and completing her Level 2 Referee Accreditation.

Alex said, "One of the keys to refereeing is to be confident on the stand but also to always be seeking improvement and learning opportunities. It has been extremely helpful that VWA has a number of top-level referees who are always happy to answer questions, including Dani Francis and Sam Stewart."



Club President

Alex is currently part of the Bunbury Volleyball Association, starting off as a general committee member, Vice President and now President. Alex feels she has been lucky, her ideas and participation in discussions and decision-making being met by others with open minds and respect.

Alex counts the opportunity to play against Natalie Cook Olympic Gold Medallist as one of her highlights as well as playing mixed pairs against Logan Tom (four-time American Olympian) at the New Zealand Masters.

Shelby Maher - Player

Shelby started her volleyball career in year 9 at Mercedes College. The school was offering a trip to Melbourne to participate in the Australian Volleyball Schools Cup competition, and she decided she would give it a go. Initially, she was just interested in the trip to Melbourne, but luckily for the sport, she discovered she loved the game and has never looked back. Winning a silver medal at the event was exciting but she says “finding a group of girls who are to this day still some of her best mates” was a bonus.

Shelby then took the leap from representing her school to representing the state, she played indoor and beach in the U17's & U19's. She went on to win 1 gold medal, 1 silver medal, 3 bronze medals & 2 All-star 7 selections.

Highs & Lows of Sport

Shelby represented Australia at the U19 and U21 World Championships in 2014, Shelby says, “playing all around Europe against the best athletes in my age group was an amazing experience and definitely drove me to return home and work harder.” She dedicated the next 2 years to training and competing in the national tours with her beach partner Britt Kendall, with the goal to get selected for the U21 World Championships in Switzerland.

Shelby's incredible run and one of her biggest challenges was to come next.

About 6 months before selections for the U21 World Championships, she started to battle with a shoulder injury, which gradually worsened. At one point Shelby says she would need to hit with her left shoulder at training because her right shoulder started to decondition from the pain. Cortisone injections enabled her to compete in Thailand to qualify for a spot but shortly after she withdrew her spot due to injury.

Two weeks later she had surgery and began a 9 month journey of rehabilitation.



Shelby Maher- Player

Looking to the future

While it was a difficult time in her career in hindsight, she can now see that she has returned stronger and even more driven to compete at an elite level.

Since then, she has competed at multiple Australian Volleyball League competitions, winning silver in 2017 and awarded Most Valuable Libero in the same year. Shelby is also the current recipient of the Beach and Indoor Most Valuable Player for 2020 and 2021.

In the last couple of years, she has coached a couple of Junior Beach Volleyball State and Schools Cup teams. She says, "It is a rewarding experience when you see young athletes grow from competing at junior competitions to now competing against or with you on the State Tour".

Currently, Shelby is working as a Physiotherapist at Cannington Physio and competing in State beach tour events during summer and WA Volleyball League during winter. The ultimate goal this year however is to get back to traveling nationally to compete and win gold with the WA Steel in the Australian Volleyball League.

