

# The History of Australian Women's Football



Image source: Football Australia, 2001





# 1920s

There are reports of ladies' teams being formed in New South Wales as early as 1903, however the first official women's team in Australia was the Latrobe Ladies formed by Mr. R. Powell in early 1921.

In July, approximately 100 women gathered at the Brisbane Gymnasium, and formed the The Queensland Women's Ladies Soccer Football Association.



Latrobe Ladies Football Club, 1921



# 1920s

The first official match took place on 24 September 1921, and the North Brisbane 'Reds' defeated the South Brisbane 'Blues', 2 - 0. They were both kitted out in full football uniforms of bloomers, long-sleeved jerseys and long socks. Over 10,000 people attended the match.

A public match took place in Ipswich in October, drawing a crowd of over 3,000 people. This match ended in a 2 - 2 draw.



North Brisbane Reds vs South Brisbane Blues, 1921



# 1920s

However, at the end of 1921, the English Football Association instated a ban on women's football. While they couldn't ban them from playing, they did ban them from using their pitches and stadiums.

The Committee's ruling stated:

*"Complaints having been made as to football being played by women, Council felt impelled to express the strong opinion that the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and should not be encouraged."*

English women's teams who had been drawing crowds of 53,000 people, were now forced to play in parks, or friendly rugby or athletics clubs. This ban lasted for 51 years and the flow on effect was felt around the world.

## **THE BAN ON WOMEN FOOTBALLERS.**

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### **MEDICAL OPINION SUPPORTS THE F.A.**

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The action of the Football Association in passing a resolution requesting football clubs to refuse the use of their grounds for women footballers, as they considered the game unsuitable for females, would appear to have a good deal of support.

Dr. Mary Scharlieb, the Harley-street physician, asked to give her views on the subject, briefly replied, "I consider it a most unsuitable game; too much for a woman's physical frame."

# 1920s

In 1922 an Australian Committee undertook a report of suitable out-door games for girls.

The report stated:

*"suitable physical education, including games and sports, is as generally beneficial to girls as to boys... among the particular games the committee had under consideration, viz., tennis, netball, lacrosse, golf, hockey, cricket, and football, only the last was considered unsuitable for girls.*

*Perhaps the most important point...was its (physical education's) influence, if any, upon motherhood."*

The report concluded:

*"On the whole it would seem that there was no clear proof that strenuous physical education had any special influence upon the prospect of motherhood."*

[Women in Print, Evening Post, 19 Dec 1922](#)



Image source: Library of Congress, 1922



# 1930s - 1960s

In Australia, women's football fell out of fashion and went underground. While there were still some teams playing and training, social perception of women playing football was unfavorable, and teams all but stopped playing public matches.

Media representation of female soccer players was often not favorable.

"The referee humorously ordered no squealing, fighting or pulling of hair."

However soon women's football saw a new wave of trailblazers arising...



The Sun, Mon 10 Aug, 1942



**COOL**  
**.ORG**



Photo credit: Football Australia

# Pat O'Conner

In 1963, English-born Patricia (Pat) O'Conner migrated to Sydney.

In 1965 she became a foundation member and captain for Bass Hill Women's team and in 1971 she formed the St George women's team with her husband Joe. This team remained undefeated for seven years

In 1974 Pat was instrumental in the formation of the National Women's Soccer Championship, and the following Australian Women's Soccer Association.

From 1968 -77 she was the top goal scorer every year she played at club level.



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Photo credit: Football Australia

# Elaine Watson

Elaine is often called the matriarch of Australian Women's football. She began her career as a team manager in 1964, and was a referee, coach, and women's rights advocate.

Watson was the first person to be awarded life membership of the Australian Women's Soccer Association.

She received the Award of Merit from the Confederation of Sport and, in 1993 was presented with the Order of Australia Medal for services to women's football.

In 2010, Football Brisbane renamed the zone's premier women's trophy the Elaine Watson Cup in honour of her "many years of selfless service".



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Photo credit: ANUW Football Club

# Heather Reid

Heather has been a pioneer for women in football, starting her journey by founding Canberra's first female football club in 1978. A year later, she helped form the ACT Women's Soccer Association, where she worked to improve and promote the women's game.

In 2004, she was appointed CEO of the ACT Soccer Federation (trading as Soccer Canberra), the first female to be at the helm of a State Member Federation. In 2007 she was inducted into the Football Australia Hall of Fame.

She retired as CEO in 2016 and was appointed as a mentor in FIFA's women's leadership program and an administration instructor. In November 2018, she was elected to the Football Federation of Australia board and served until February 2021.

In 2020 she and Marion Stell co-wrote *Women in Boots: Football and Feminism in the 1970s*.





Karen Menzies  
Photo credit: CommBank Matildas

# Karen Menzies

Dr Karen Menzies grew up loving weekend football games and being reprimanded by her teachers for playing with the boys at lunch.

At age 13 she was removed from her adoptive parents and sent to an institution in Newcastle. She vividly remembers her first day in Newcastle, because during the orientation, she found out one of the activities was soccer. *"That afternoon, I was training with the local soccer team. I don't know whose clothes I was in. I don't know whether I had boots – and if I did, I don't know where they came from."*

Karen went on to be the first Aboriginal player in the Australian National Women's Football team and played from 1983 - 1989.

In 2021 she was selected to be a member of Football Australia's inaugural National Indigenous Advisory Group.



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Moya Dodd (left ) representing Australia  
Photo credit: Football Australia

# Moya Dodd

Moya started playing in the 1980s and from 1986 - 1995 was a member of the Australian Women's National Football Team. In 1988 she played in FIFA's first-ever women's tournament as vice-captain of the Matildas.

In 2013, she joined the 27-member governing body of FIFA as one of the first women in its 108-year history. In October 2015, Moya Dodd sent a submission to FIFA for a gender reform proposal.

Following this proposal, in 2016, FIFA passed the proposal and added a requirement that every continent must have a seat filled by a woman.



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