

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
HANSARD - Excerpt**

**Tuesday 5 September 2023**

**MOTION**

**Acknowledgement of The Matildas Football Team**

*[excerpt]*

[2.57 p.m.]

**Ms WEBB** (Nelson) - I am delighted to speak in support of this motion today and thank the member for Windermere for bringing it forward for us to contemplate and discuss.

Along with the entire nation, my family and I watched spellbound every Matildas game throughout the recent World Cup, hosted for the first time here in our nation and region. This team of extraordinarily talented, hardworking women captivated the whole country and inspired our national pride to a degree that exceeded any previous sporting achievement or event, I believe.

It is notable that the extent of the engagement and adulation that we all experienced took us by surprise and that in itself is telling. We had not realised the whole country would erupt with a fierce passion, inspired by the sporting prowess of our world-class Matildas. This was an opportunity that we had not been provided with before this World Cup but I believe it has been a watershed moment.

As acknowledged in this motion, it is inevitable that the exceptional achievements of the Matildas in the World Cup will have a significant impact right down to our local sport environment, especially football, and in this case, I mean soccer and I will continue to use football for that.

In particular, it will be an inspiration that will increase participation in local football and drive motivation to excel amongst our young people and our adults. The electorate of Nelson is home to a number of fantastic football clubs, including the Kingborough Lions United Football Club, the University of Tasmania Football Club, Hobart City Beachside Football Club and the Taroona Football Club.

In preparing a contribution on this motion, I contacted the Taroona Football Club as it has a particular connection to the Matildas and invited the club to provide some reflections on the impact of the Matildas' performance at the World Cup. I am happy to be able to share their response here today and particularly, I thank Karen Wills and Shelagh Curtain for organising to provide this reflection. I will read the short statement, which includes some wonderful quotes from the Taroona Football Club folk. This is what they said:

The recent Women's World Cup held across Australia and New Zealand has certainly lifted the profile of women's football across Australia and the rest of the world. With a game attendance of almost two million people across the two host nations and the millions who watched the games on their screens across the world, interest in the women's game has certainly exceeded

expectations prior to the event. Throughout this tournament, the world was watching Australia to see just what we could offer the world in this space; and the Matildas have presented as great role models, showing us what can be achieved for players of all ages.

Taroona Football Club has had a steady stream of contact from new players wanting to join at junior, youth and senior levels during and since the World Cup. Some are playing for the first time and some are wanting to put the boots back on after a break. We are hoping that this momentum will continue and that, as well as growing participation in the game, we can also build a healthy environment for our players and improve their wellbeing.

Taroona Football Club's skills program manager and head of youth development, Holly-Lace Ayton, also works for the Matildas as their technical director.

**Mrs Hiscutt** - Through you, Mr President, Holly Ayton is my cousin.

**Ms WEBB** - Hey, it is Tassie. Holly-Lace's passion and enthusiasm for the game is contagious around the club, as is her positive attitude towards the women's game. To quote Holly:

Ten years ago, I dreamt about having a job in football and in dedicating a lot of time and taking opportunities presented to me. I was honoured to be representing Australia and Tasmania by working with the Matildas at the World Cup. Reflecting now, it feels very surreal. For someone who can experience both the epitome of women's football in the world and then, weeks later, be back home at the Taroona Football Club and visiting the Burnie Football Club, seeing how the World Cup has captured the whole community, even here in Tasmania, is incredible. To hear our young female footballers speaking about women's sport in such a strong and powerful way is truly inspirational. This is a gamechanger.

The statement from the Taroona Football Club goes onto say:

13-year-old Evie O'Neill, who currently plays in the under-14 mixed competition, the under-16 girls competition, and coaches a junior team at Taroona was lucky enough to get tickets to the Matildas vs Denmark game.

Evie said, 'I have been playing soccer for as long as I can remember and seeing more and more girls start to play is amazing. I think you have to give the most credit to the Matildas. When I coach younger players, they all say they want to be a Matilda and when team names are required for games, it is always "The Matildas". Going to the game was a dream come true, and the fact that there are the most amazing role models that close to you is impossible to put into words. Seeing all the support for the team, and the roar when Caitlin Foord scored was the loudest thing I have ever heard. I have been to a lot of sports games and concerts and it has never been that loud. Seeing the support for the green and gold is rewarding for everyone involved because what they have done now is a part of Australia's history, and to know that I got to witness that makes me so grateful. Go Matildas!'

Tasmania has, so far, had four senior female national representatives over the years: Yolanda McCarthy, Yvonne Mitchell in 1987, Lisa Rader and Zoe Nolan. We look forward to seeing further investment in the sport to help ensure many more young players from the state realise their aspirations and play for our country. Holly-Lace said:

We have fought for this moment for so many years and I think it is safe to say that it has exceeded all our expectations. A home World Cup that has reignited the light in so many of us, we now need to use it to drive social change for women and girls and their opportunities here in Tasmania and across the country. We now know that anything really is possible.

That was a great statement from Tarooma Football Club and wonderful to hear the direct voice of Holly-Lace and also of Evie, a young girl who has lived through this moment and it has made such an impact.

I reiterate my thanks to Tarooma Football Club in the Nelson electorate for providing those reflections. It is so valuable to have that direct voice, as we are commenting here about things that can seem theoretical, even though the impact flows right down to the most grassroots in this sport and other sports.

Mr President, I am a football parent of long standing and I will make a few more reflections of my own on the impact of the Matilda's World Cup performance as outlined in the motion. One of the most impactful parts of the whole experience across the weeks of the World Cup was watching the six-episode documentary on the Matildas that was aired at the same time. I watched it with my teenage son, who wants to be a professional sportsperson, and it was a huge experience for us. It made the whole World Cup experience so much richer. The back story presented in that documentary, showing the growth and the planning across the last three years towards this World Cup, showed the highs and the lows of the players. It showed the injuries, including Hayley Raso's broken back, Ellie Carpenter's ACL surgery - all the highlights and the lowlights that these women experienced on their pathway to this World Cup.

It showed the sheer grit and determination of these women who did not have an easy path laid out for them. They had to fight and work and sacrifice to get to where they are today. They had to move countries, move cities, move states for greater opportunities. They had to do the hard yards as young players, working to be on representative sides, selling chocolates door-to-door to fund themselves to get there; girls who were kicked out of other boys-only sports that they wanted to pursue but were not allowed to and, by default, ended up in football. Thank goodness Sam Kerr is one of those. The women in this team who balance motherhood alongside being an elite sportsperson - all of this is shown in those documentaries. It was extraordinary and brought such a richness to watching the games across the time of the World Cup. I could see the impact of the path to this competition, to help fully understand the magnitude of the achievements that we were seeing played out in the 90-odd minutes on screen.

Watching the documentary series and engaging with other commentary alongside watching the games as the World Cup progressed prompted me to reflect on a few key issues that epitomise the inequality and the barriers that were faced by these elite female athletes, and the degree to which this World Cup has turned those issues on their heads. In causing that disruption, we can see progress being made; but we are not out of the woods yet - so reflection is important.

One of those issues is pay disparity. Women's football has come a long way since Australia qualified for the first Women's World Cup in 1995. Back then FIFA offered women no prize money at all. None. At that time, the Matildas, who made history as Australia's first representatives, could barely afford the privilege of playing for their country. Most of them returned home to part-time jobs, struggling to make ends meet, to be able to play and continue playing the game that they loved at an elite level.

From no prize money in 1995, improvement in prize money for women at the World Cup was slow. Total prize money in 2007 was \$5.8 million for the whole event. In 2011, \$7.5 million. This is US dollars, I should say. In 2015, it was US\$15 million in prize money for the Women's World Cup. In 2019, FIFA had triumphantly announced that as part of their commitment to gender equality, they were doubling the prize money for women playing in the World Cup in France in 2019, doubling from 2015 to US\$30 million.

That sounds great, but what FIFA did not say and trumpet at that time was that still only amounted to 7.5 per cent of what the men were being paid for their World Cup the year before. In fact, that increase increased the gap between men and women's prize money, because the men's increased more. The FIFA Council had no justification for why they were increasing the gap in pay - they just trumpeted the raw increase in women's prize money. That meant that the US women's team, who won that 2019 World Cup, received just 10.5 per cent of what the men got for winning the year before; and only 50 per cent of what the US men's team received for merely qualifying to go to the World Cup. That same year, 2019, there were still Matildas playing for us who could not afford to represent Australia and, therefore, did not go.

Fast-forward to 2023 - more progress. Excellent. The direct prize money on offer was three times more than that in 2019 and six times more than in 2015. It was US\$110 million. Australia stepped up and delivered equality of pay for the Matildas as national team members - that is, the pay they received to be on the team from Australia. For the first time, the Matildas received the same pay as their male counterparts from Australia as national team members. But it is still the prize money that drives the inequality, because despite the threefold increase on 2019 prize money for their stellar performance this year, in 2023 the Matildas will take home only a quarter of what the Socceroos and other men's teams were paid in the Men's World Cup, because just last year, prize money was still only a third or so of the prize money of the men's competition.

It is clear that by awarding women significantly less prize money than men, FIFA is exacerbating the existing differential impacts on women and undermining their ability to participate in this sport. That is a shame. On the positive side, there is a plan to bring equality over the next four years. The outstanding success and commercial success of the 2023 Women's World Cup will provide them with absolutely no excuse for falling short when we look ahead to the 2026 and 2027 World Cups and look for an improvement in the delivery of equality at that time.

As I was engaging with the World Cup, watching the games, the documentary and reading the commentary, another issue that epitomises some of that inequality and the barriers faced by elite female athletes - including the Matildas - is viewership. It was also an issue that got blown out of the water with this World Cup where, as noted by the member for Windermere in his contribution, each Matildas game was watched by more than the last and broke record after record for viewership. I contrast that with the situation when we look back not that far. I recall some descriptions by Ellie Carpenter, currently one of our wonderful Matildas, playing

on the right in defence and also for Lyon, France. She is an outstanding defender and started representing this nation when she was 16. She talks about going to watch the Matildas play when she was 12 and there were 300 people watching. A national team with 300 people watching.

Not long after that, in 2014, the Matildas were playing here, in this country against the absolute football giants, Brazil. Brazil had come here to play two games against our Matildas at the Queensland Sport and Athletics Centre and, unlike what we have just experienced this year, tickets for those two matches against Brazil in 2014 could not even be given away.

The first match attracted a crowd of just over two-and-a-half thousand fans. The second match, because of that, saw them actually shut the stadium and have no spectators whatsoever because it was too expensive to open to only a handful of spectators. This is not ancient history, it is only eight years ago. Seven of those players from 2014, in that empty stadium, are still on the Matildas squad now and were some of our outstanding performers in this World Cup: Claire Polkinghorne, Steph Catley, Emily van Egmond, Alanna Kennedy, Hayley Raso, Mackenzie Arnold and Katrina Gorry.

We all cheered for them, we all were enraptured by them, watching our TVs, watching our streaming services. What changed since 2014? It is not the fact they were not outstanding sportswomen then, as they are now; it is that there has been a hell of a lot more done to support and bring to the forefront these incredibly talented women.

What must it be like for those seven to have experienced this progress from only eight years ago when they had to play to an empty stadium, to now see what they can mean to us as a country, when they and their sport are provided with even a small approximation of what men have been provided with for decades in terms of support, investment and putting them out there into the public domain as elite sportspeople?

**Ms Forrest** - To watch Mackenzie Arnold front up when she missed that penalty in that game and then front up back in the goals to defend was the most amazing thing.

**Ms WEBB** - The epitome of composure, that woman.

**Ms Forrest** - To have the crowd there would have been extraordinary for her.

**Ms WEBB** - We have been told for decades that people would not watch women's elite sport because women's sport is boring, it is less skilful, it is worth less than the men's game, it is not commercially viable. These are things that have been repeated many times over. If there is one thing this World Cup has taught the world, it is if you give women's sport a platform, the audience will come. The FIFA World Cup in 2023 was the biggest global sporting event of the year, the most attended standalone women's sporting event in history and a true celebration of women's sport.

**Ms Forrest** - It wasn't boring, it was heart-stopping. Heart attack material, that French game.

**Ms WEBB** - 100 per cent. As the member for Windermere mentioned, we would all agree that Optus got the deal of the century where peanuts were paid for the broadcast rights. I doubt those rights will go for such a song next time around.

**Mr Valentine** - Guaranteed that is the case.

**Ms WEBB** - One issue I wanted to mention that also epitomises that inequality and the barriers that are faced by elite female athletes is the downplaying of women's prowess and achievements. Only last year, Sam Kerr surpassed Tim Cahill's goal-scoring record for Australia and, at the time, was told by another former Socceroo, Robbie Slater, that comparisons between the two greats was disrespectful to Cahill. Robbie Slater went on to write:

Don't get me wrong, Sam Kerr is a fantastic player and I am delighted that she has now scored 54 times for Australia. Yes, she has scored more goals for the Matildas than any other player in history, but Tim Cahill was a Socceroo, not a Matilda. His 50 goals for the Socceroots is a record that shouldn't be overshadowed by Kerr's achievements.

I would say that distasteful, sexist piece of commentary has aged pretty damn badly in the last couple of months, and I would like to hope that we will never see the like of it again. Because, quite simply, there is no need and it is ridiculous to suggest that there is less merit in achievements of an elite athlete based on their gender. We do not need to denigrate one over the other. We can celebrate the achievements of both equally and recognise greatness wherever it lies.

In conclusion, they say you cannot be what you cannot see. But the outstanding women in the Matildas squad launched themselves into the stratosphere where no-one had gone before them. It took the Matildas and Australia into uncharted territory of achievement. They forged paths of international glory never before achieved by Australian footballers, male or female. Through utter determination, strength, hard work and outstanding skill and talent they forged a dream and they shared it with all of us. For three glorious weeks we were them and they were us. For the first time ever, an Australian female sports team was the pinnacle and epitome of our collective national spirit and pride.

The effect of that is and will continue to be profound for all Australians, but especially for girls and young women who have witnessed it.

Australian boys and young men have always been fortunate to grow up saturated in a culture that venerates elite male athletes. Because of the achievements of the Matildas at this year's World Cup, young girls in Australia have had the opportunity to experience that same joy and have seen what they can now dream to be.

The legacy of this moment can and should be nation-changing.

*[end of excerpt]*