Wednesday, 30 March 2016

Do Australian women even care about the AFL?

With the prospect of a women’s football league in 2017, and a series of women’s exhibition matches scheduled for the current AFL season, it seems an opportune time to investigate not only how Australian women’s involvement in the AFL is tracking, but whether many women actually play Aussie Rules football themselves. The results suggest there is room for improvement...

The latest findings from Roy Morgan reveal that the proportion of Australian women aged 14+ who support an AFL team slipped slightly from 35.6% to 33.8% between 2012 and 2015, as did the proportion who watch matches on TV (down fractionally from 34.0% to 33.4%).

On a brighter note, there were modest increases in paid-up club membership among Aussie women (from 3.1% to 3.6%) during the same period, as well as in attendance of AFL matches (admittedly, an almost negligible growth from 9.8% to 10.0%).

But while the overall proportion of women who support an AFL team has declined, nine of the league’s 18 teams have actually seen their number of female supporters rise over the past few years. Fremantle Dockers experienced the largest growth by far, gaining an additional 70,000 female supporters since 2012, which puts it in sixth position overall for number of female fans.

**AFL club supporters 2015 – women**

![Bar chart showing the number of female supporters up and down since 2012 for each AFL team.](chart.png)

**Source:** Roy Morgan Single Source (Australia), January–December 2015 (n=3,076).

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As the country’s most widely supported club, it is no surprise that Sydney Swans have the most female supporters (451,000) — and rising, with an additional 31,000 women joining their fan base since 2012.

Female support also grew for last year’s Grand Final winners the Hawks (up by 34,000 women since 2012), as well as for Port Adelaide Power (up by 28,000) and the Western Bulldogs (up by 14,000). In contrast, it plummeted for the Brisbane Lions (down by 96,000 women), St Kilda Saints (who lost some 41,000 female followers) and West Coast Eagles (down by 39,000).

Meanwhile three teams boast the distinction of having more female supporters than male: Collingwood, Geelong and Western Bulldogs.

**Women’s participation not kicking many goals**

Of course, supporting an AFL team is one thing, and playing Australian Rules is another entirely. While the proportion of Aussie women 14+ who play footy has always been low, participation has decreased marginally since 2012 from 1.3% to 1.0%. Or, to put it in perspective, fewer women play Australian Rules than niche sports such as field hockey, archery, gymnastics, martial arts or ice/figure skating.

There has, however, been an incremental increase in participation among girls aged 6-13 years, with 7.5% now playing Aussie Rules at school, up from 6.5% in 2012. (Outside school hours, participation remains steady at 3.0%). Over the same period, the proportion of girls who watch the AFL on TV has also risen, from 26.6% to 29.4%.

**Michele Levine, CEO, Roy Morgan Research, says:**

“As any AFL fan would know, the 2016 season has kicked off, with the next women’s match scheduled for this coming Saturday. In anticipation of a national women’s league being launched next year, we delved into our database to measure women’s involvement in footy – both as supporters and players.

“Although the proportion of Aussie women who support an AFL team has slipped, this is consistent with the national trend rather than being gender-specific (it must be said, however, that the decline among men who support an AFL team was softer, down from 44.9% to 44.0%). Likewise, participation in Australian Rules is fairly static among both men and women, although obviously considerably less widespread among women.

“Curiously, while some teams have gained supporters of both genders over the last few years (with the increasingly successful Fremantle Dockers gaining an extra 90,000 male followers in addition to their growing female fan-base), others have gained female and lost male supporters or vice versa, while others yet have lost supporters all round.

“Nobody would be particularly surprised that such a small proportion of women play Aussie Rules themselves, as this has always been the case, but it bodes well for the future of the women’s league that participation by and interest among younger girls is growing.
“For sporting organisations, educators, clubs and TV networks seeking further information on the football habits of Aussie women and kids, Roy Morgan data is an ideal starting point, containing comprehensive insights on their leisure activities, demographics and attitudes – and how these are evolving...”

For comments or more information about Roy Morgan Research’s sports data, please contact:

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About Roy Morgan Research

Roy Morgan Research is the largest independent Australian research company, with offices in each state of Australia, as well as in Indonesia, the United States and the United Kingdom. A full service research organisation specialising in omnibus and syndicated data, Roy Morgan Research has over 70 years’ experience in collecting objective, independent information on consumers.

Margin of Error

The margin of error to be allowed for in any estimate depends mainly on the number of interviews on which it is based. Margin of error gives indications of the likely range within which estimates would be 95% likely to fall, expressed as the number of percentage points above or below the actual estimate. Allowance for design effects (such as stratification and weighting) should be made as appropriate.

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