

AFL VIC COACH2COACH PODCAST:

(2018 EPISODE 3 TRANSCRIPT)



LA: Hi everyone and welcome to Episode three of AFL Victoria's podcast- Coach2Coach - talking all things AFL coaching for local junior clubs!

Your hosts are Education and Training Manager Lauren Arnell, State Coaching Manager Steve Teakel and Carlton Assistant Coach Dale Amos.

In this episode, we'll be talking how to create the best possible game day environment at your club. Let's get into it...

LA: Steve, how have you seen the junior game day experience evolve?

ST: It's come on in leaps and bounds especially in terms of people coming to watch junior football. That's what I've noticed over many years that there is more people around the boundary line watching, encouraging and cheering – probably giving some advice over the fence to players. One element that I have really noticed is that when I was growing up playing junior footy you really had to earn your stripes to get on the ground and there were a lot of my friends who sat on the bench for a lot of games and we didn't have interchange so if you were the 18th, 19th or 20th man in your team you might have only played five minutes in a junior footy game and you've trained two nights a week. If you were good enough you got a game and if you weren't good enough you didn't get a game. That's really changed these days where we've got a strong focus on participation including giving all players an opportunity to play the game. They've trained for it so let's get out there and you can show your skills.

LA: Dale we've seen how much of an impact that AFL and AFLW players can have as role models for junior players, how much of an impact does that have from a club perspective?

DA: Obviously the AFL and AFLW players are very much in the public eye. I think more broadly, local players, senior players and local coaches – I think back to some of the most influential people in my time growing up and I still remember all my junior coaches. I remember the way they interacted with me, how they spoke to me, what I admire about them. You talk about senior players as well and I remember a time where I was lucky enough to win a league best and fairest when I was playing at St. Arnaud which is a small country town and senior players knew who I was and shook my hand – that blew me away. The impact is far greater than just AFL and AFLW players for those leaders and the way they are perceived as role models in the community.

LA: Our special guest today is the CEO of the biggest junior league in Victoria, South Metro Junior Football League – **Sarah Loh**. Sarah thank you for joining us. Can you tell us a little bit about your role?

SL: Sure Lauren. I actually run the biggest league in the actual country, not just Victoria. We have over 456 teams, 10,500 kids and it is an absolute massive league in a very small footprint over the bayside area - over 296 square kilometres. It's an enormous amount of kids and enormous amount of competition that we fixture for every year. It's over 15 weeks so it's a lot of work to do.

LA: So, do you sleep during the winter??

SL: Actually it was my first year last year so I actually worked seven days a week last year. I really wanted to get out to all the games and meet all the clubs and all the players. It was definitely worthwhile to do that. Football is a passion so no sleeping.

LA: That is just incredible. Well we know one area of focus at the SMJFL which we'd love to talk to you about today has been the Play Fair campaign.

SL: Yes, the Play Fair campaign came about as a bit of a season launch for 2017 and it was in conjunction with St Kilda Football Club as part of our "Better Together" campaign as we were all moving back to Moorabbin so it's really exciting. Having this amount of kids playing in our competition is a real responsibility for us so it's not just running the league and the competition – as Steve said, it's about participation but it is also about *how* we participate. The Play Fair campaign really is a simple acronym:

Fun

Appreciation

Inclusive

Respect to others

That means to coaches, players, umpires and parents. This message in this campaign wasn't just for the kids, it is for everyone in just showing respect which is a really important for sportspersonship.

ST: So in terms of the coaches Sarah, how do they acknowledge the acronym?

SL: Yes, really important. The coaches that we all have go through the AFL accreditation system but we have this also as a simple reminder and have developed five different posters showing players, umpires and coaches. They went around to every single club and changeroom. It was the expectation on clubs to have those posters in every changeroom and we have had every club embrace it. The kids completely understand it – it is just a simple message for everyone including the coaches.

DA: What about the parents? Obviously, they have a huge role in terms of their interaction with their children and also the game day experience in how that is impacted particularly for the kids in that environment.

SL: Yes the parents play a really important role. They are there every week – they are coaches, they're team managers, they're behind the canteen, all different roles. Because it's their children, the respect component is a key message that parents want to reinforce and are really appreciative of the fact that the league has taken leadership in this particular area.

DA: It certainly can create challenges when you have an emotional investment (which you do when your kids are involved) with umpiring and getting caught up in results. Particularly in junior footy, the fun element and trying to create the greatest experience you can for your kids is obviously a high priority.

SL: Yes. I think it's really important that we got the clubs embracing this particular program because it really comes from the top down. Each of our 26 clubs have really gotten behind this particular project and we can really see the benefit of it. You're right, we are not playing for "sheep stations" in junior football but it is a very passionate sport as you know. Again, we have got that responsibility for our kids to lead by example.

DA: One of the things that I have seen through my brief experience with junior programs is the capacity for kids to want to turn up and come back the next year. The retention is clearly something that shows the program is working. Keeping front of mind the Play Fair concept for coaches, parents, spectators and everyone who is involved that we want as many kids playing our great game as we possibly can and clearly the program works because the number of teams and kids involved in this league is enormous.

SL: Agreed there and I think especially with AFLW starting last year the growth is huge. We had 9,500 players at the end of the 2016 season and with AFL we saw 1,000 girls join in 2017. It jumped from 36 teams to 78 teams just in girls footy in 2017. It's really important for both boys and girls to enjoy this great sport and to have some of those key core values of what a sportsperson should be behaving like.

ST: Looking at the acronym I think we have spoken previously about coaching philosophies and this could be a key element in any club when trying to develop a coaching philosophy for all of their coaches and individually at each age level. They can use this as a way in which they want their coaches to approach match day and how the coach and team behaves also.

SL: Agreed with you Steve. If you look at all the elements of it, it's not just the junior footy this can actually apply to even seniors footy. I've heard many stories from AFL and AFLW coaches where fun has been a very important element to actually just release that pressure valve so I think it's important for all coaches at all levels to learn a bit from these messages. Appreciation is really about appreciating your team mates and all of the volunteers. Being inclusive is really trying to get everyone into this great sport – multicultural, boys, girls – it doesn't matter where you come from which is of the great elements of football. The respect is the key aspect – that you respect your teammates, your club and your opponents.

ST: The umpiring side of things as well is important too. Sometimes coaches can go overboard and don't respect the umpires. A lot of the junior umpires are actually learning the game just like the players are so I think that's obviously one of the focuses as well.

SL: That's right Steve. We oversee over 500 junior umpires and they range from age 14-18 and they make up a big percentage of the umpires we have. It's absolutely integral, those kids are playing football and also umpiring so it's really important that we have a pathway for those umpires as well because umpires are part of this game.

DA: Sarah, people talk a lot about culture within footy clubs and now it's a bit of a buzz word within the AFL but the coaches, parents, administrators' behaviours and actions as key figures within that footy club are just as relevant. Again, if I go back to my experiences as a young player, I mimicked what they did and the way they conducted themselves, and culturally that speaks to your footy club and what it represents. It will have an enormous impact on not only the young players but the older players as well.

SL: Agreed. Culture like you say, whether you are at an AFL club or junior football club it's really important that the club sets a tone for what it's after. Again, this campaign was very very popular last year. I walk through in the offseason and to see these posters still up is great. Also from AFL Victoria in their Media Awards to recognise the best use of technology which is how we actually launched this Play Fair campaign. It wasn't a one-off campaign and will continue throughout the years with the really simple message for the kids and the volunteers. Fantastic to be recognised by AFL Victoria and for this campaign to keep going.

DA: It's fantastic for junior sport and obviously for the league but I think it's a pretty good message across the board. We live in an amazingly diverse society and it's really important that everyone feels comfortable and accepted. That goes for supporters who want to turn up – mums and dads who should feel included in the footy club so that they feel like it's a safe place for them to be. Footy clubs have a social obligation to the families and the community who want to be involved.

SL: Definitely. I reflect on a lot of stories in going around to a lot of the clubs last year. Because it is junior football it is very different compared to senior or AFL. Especially in the Waverly Park area. It's very multicultural and football is not part of the key demographics there so a lot of those parents just kept asking, "Should I actually volunteer? I'm not sure what to do here."

They're new to the sport and it really makes me happy to hear that those parents, especially from different multicultural backgrounds want to participate because sport is the great assimilator. I think in Australia if you can get into AFL and participate at that volunteer level (it doesn't matter if your kids are in there), participate and that leads by example to those children. Again, the Play Fair campaign is for everyone so the parents love it because these are the values they are trying to teach their kids.

LA: Sarah, thank you so much for joining us today. Your insights into the Play Fair campaign and how you run the biggest league in the universe have been outstanding so thank you very much for your time. Dale and Steve, we look forward to the next podcast of Coach2Coach.

Thanks to Carlton Football Club for their generous assistance in recording Coach2Coach. Thank you for listening and we look forward to joining you for our next instalment of the Coach2Coach podcast series. For more information, check out the AFL Victoria website or you can also join our Twitter conversation via the hashtag AFL Vic CCC.