

WOMEN'S LACROSSE IN AUSTRALIA – FROM AWLC TO ALA

In 1936 female lacrosse players from the Williamstown (Victoria) area formed the Williamstown Women's Lacrosse Club, along with Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)/Melbourne University, became members of one of the first women's lacrosse clubs in Australia. At this time the Victorian Women's Lacrosse Association was formed (President – Nell Rawlins; Secretary – Joy Newhouse) however, due to WWII the women put their lacrosse gear aside, or donated it to men's clubs. Included in the Williamstown team were Joy Newhouse (Mother of Vivienne Parker-White and Leonie, Russell, Howard and Phillip Parker) and Lorna Saker (Mother of Alan & Pam Rolley).

Fast forward to the early 1960's and interest was again being generated in Melbourne and Adelaide. In 1961 Mal Taylor from the Williamstown Lacrosse Club was approached by a group of girls from Williamstown about re-starting the game for women and Mal suggested that they speak with Joy Parker, she was approached, and she set about putting things in motion. In 1962 the Victorian Women's Lacrosse Association and the Williamstown Women's Lacrosse Club (2 teams) were reformed, and the Malvern and Footscray women's clubs (1 team each) were established. The first inter-state match between Victoria and South Australia was played in Adelaide in 1962. At this time the Australian Women's Lacrosse Council was formed with a 3-year rotational system of office bearers, the inaugural President being Joy Parker. In 1965 the Western Australian Women's Association was formed and a 3-way national championship took form that year in Perth.

For many years the already existing organisations – Australian Women's Lacrosse Council/Women's Lacrosse Australia and Australian Lacrosse Council/Lacrosse Australia (Men) – operated independently and were supported by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), now Sport Australia, through funding grants for specific purposes. For a period of time funding was received by Women's Lacrosse Australia which included the area of high performance, however, this was phased out and all funding since has been for participation only.

In 2004 the ASC advised both bodies that one unified national organisation for lacrosse in Australia must be formed to enable continued funding to the sport. Apart from this need to ensure funding many believed that the coming together of the two national bodies for lacrosse in Australia could have many benefits across the sport, i.e. one identity, greater efficiency for management, administration, development, marketing, programs, etc. Many hours of time of the Directors of both bodies were taken up with this process over a few years with the ASC advising in July 2006 that funding would not continue past 30 June 2007 unless the new organisation was in place as required. The plan was for the new organisation to be put in place with a transition board (2007-2009) and financials finalised to meet the 30 June 2007 deadline.

The ALA was incorporated on 15 March 2007 with a transition Board consisting of 3 directors from women's lacrosse and 3 Directors from men's lacrosse. The transition Board was to operate for a maximum of two years.

Over the coming years both Women's Lacrosse Australia (2007) and Lacrosse Australia (2012) were wound up and subsequently deregistered from ASIC. As part of the winding up, Women's Lacrosse Australia transferred its web domain name – www.lacrosse.com.au – for the ALA to use.

On 10 December 2008 the first Annual General Meeting of ALA was held and with this milestone the first election of a Board of Directors was also held. A total of twelve (12) nominations were received to fill the eight (8) Board positions.

2009 saw the ALA take full responsibility for all aspects of lacrosse in Australia and in the following ten (10) years has seen great leaps and bounds taken by the very hard working members of the ALA Board to grow the game. All involved in the lacrosse fraternity in Australia should be pleased with the advancements made, the great growth in participation numbers through schools, clinics and modified versions of the sport. Over the years there has also been some increase in government funding due to the player and participation increases. Further gains in club numbers and other participation areas will further fund growth which in turn will see more growth of the game.

A major outcome of the establishment of the ALA has been the setting up of the Lacrosse Australia Foundation. This body is in place to support the development/growth of lacrosse in Australia and does need people to assist by making donations, of any amount, to the Foundation so that grants can be provided to support development/growth initiatives across Australia. Deductible or non-deductible donations can be made, visit the website for more information –

www.lacrosseaustraliafoundation.com.au.

Lacrosse in Australia has had its ups and downs but overall it is certainly in a better place overall, than it has been previously. Like local clubs and state associations the ALA has had to weather storms, has been able to applaud fantastic performances, host remarkable events and looks forward to the wonderful lacrosse family continuing to work towards increased growth and development across the country.

The outlook for the future of lacrosse in Australia is a very positive one.