



ANNUAL REPORT



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Netball Australia respectfully acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we live and work. Netball is played in communities across Australia and we acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional custodians of the lands on which we play and recognise the significant contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to our game.

We pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging and commit to working respectfully to honour their ongoing cultural and spiritual connections to this country and recognise the role and value of culture in all our communities.



A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION

JOHN WYLIE AM

The start of 2020 has been an extraordinarily tough time for Australians, including all of us committed to sport.

The impact of bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic have been confronting for communities, where we all know sport plays such an important role.

At the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), comprising Sport Australia and the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), our energy is focused on supporting our partners through these times as we continue to advocate the importance of sport to our economy, productivity, health, wellbeing and culture.

We believe whole-heartedly that when we get through this challenging period, sport will play a prominent role in lifting the nation's energy and spirits again.

Times such as these can also make us more appreciative of what we do have and of the success we have achieved.

Success in sport is always hard fought. But it's a fight Australian high-performance sport welcomes as it continues to achieve success.

Last year the wonderful Ash Barty won the French Open and became our first female No.1 tennis player since her idol, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, in 1976. Javelin-thrower Kelsey Lee-Barber set personal

bests throughout the year and took the title at the IAAF World Championships in Doha. Dylan Alcott added three more Grand Slam quad wheelchair singles trophies to the cabinet and Sailing duo Matt Belcher and Will Ryan claimed the men's 470 World Championship. In the pool, our swimmers won seven gold medals at the FINA World Championships, placing Australia fourth on the medal tally.

This year our inspiring women's cricket team won a fifth World T20 title, drawing a record crowd of 86,174 to the MCG. How fitting that this historical moment fell on International Women's Day. These results are a testament to the tenacity and passion of athletes, coaches, sports staff and sporting organisations, which know we have all the skills and abilities to achieve success. I am proud too of the service our organisation provides to Australian sport each year, on behalf of the Australian Government.

The ASC, through Sport Australia and the AIS, delivers 25,000 grants a year.

The AIS, funds and prepares our Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth Games to represent us at the highest level in international competition.

In the past few years, we have enhanced our support to athlete wellbeing and engagement, a move that is essential, especially in the current environment.

Sport Australia invests in sports participation programs, from our national Sporting Schools program for younger children through to the Better Ageing program aimed at Australians aged 65 and over.

So many of these grants fuel aspirations. Our Local Sporting Champions program supports 9,000 children a year to reach for their sporting dreams.

Our Women Leaders in Sport program and the AIS Talent program provide opportunities for women to progress their professional development in all roles across sport.

We continue to work with sports to modernise traditional governance structures in Australian sporting organisations and we continue to encourage environments that are inclusive, diverse, safe and welcoming, making sport the benchmark for a more equitable society.

This was to be the year of the 2020 Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo. Instead, it has been postponed to 2021, with the Olympic Games to be held from 23 July to 8 August 2021 and the Paralympics from 24 August to 5 September 2021.

We have already witnessed a great deal of positivity from athletes who now need to re-set. I'm confident, as a united sport system, we will do the same.

NO YEAR LIKE NO OTHER

*Paolina Hunt, Netball Australia Chair
Marne Fechner, Netball Australia CEO*

Time seemed to move by different rules in 2020, and it's hard to believe that we began the year by pouring our energies into the bushfire crisis, unaware that the world was on the precipice of a global pandemic

However, this year of extreme disruption and difficulty was also one of great opportunity. Amid the adversity of 2020 came significant achievement, showcasing our resilience and capacity to adapt and innovate during such extraordinary times.

With community sport largely on hold, the Origin Diamonds' program postponed, development pathway events cancelled and the elite Suncorp Super Netball competition relocated and reimaged in a Queensland hub, it was essential to find different and creative ways to deliver and engage.

As we look at where we are, where we are headed and where we want to be for our centenary celebrations in 2027, what has been the most challenging period in our proud history is poised to become a catalyst for lasting change at all levels.

Through the ground-breaking independent State of the Game Review led by former national captain Liz Ellis AO, the largest research project the sport has ever undertaken, we asked questions of ourselves and others and over 10,000 respondents across more than 60 cohorts replied.

And we have not just heard but truly listened to our diverse Netball Nation, as we commit to implementing the report's eight core recommendations and working co-operatively with internal stakeholders who have demonstrated their desire to do so in a crucial next step to reimagining the game's future.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic did not come with a strategic playbook. As international competition took its regular January pause at the start of the new four-year cycle, few could have imagined that the bushfire benefit match between the Diamonds and Suncorp Super Netball All-Star team in Sydney on March 1 would be the only 2020 outing for the famous gold dress.

Within 22 days of the successful fundraiser that farewelled long-serving head coach Lisa Alexander, the focus had switched from a desire to help those affected by the catastrophic blazes and Queensland's summer floods to increasingly urgent warning signs that the fast-spreading coronavirus would leave no sport untouched.

Despite the complexities of the federated structure and complications involved with navigating eight sets of government rules, it was essential amid the chaos to make considered moves swiftly. The Team Girls Cup in Sydney and National Netball Championships in Hobart were the earliest casualties. The Deakin University Australian Netball League was next.

Aside from the health and wellbeing priorities, all decisions were based around the need to protect Netball in the Australian system and ensure its survival into 2021 and beyond. As case numbers rose, and borders closed, non-essential personnel and services were cut and salaries reduced for the skeleton staff that remained, even as working hours increased.

To ensure the health of our Member Organisations, Netball Australia issued COVID grants to each of the States and Territories - a \$2.4 million injection into the netball economy to assist them to deal with the impact of COVID-19 on their grassroots bases.

On March 23, the shopfront window that is Suncorp Super Netball was delayed from its original May 2 start date, but its delivery was prioritised, given its commercial importance and the trickle-down benefits of major broadcast and sponsor partnerships to the broader netball community. Along with the desire to protect existing assets came another need in this time of crisis: to be open to opportunity.

As part of a major digital pivot, a deal was struck with online provider NETFIT Netball to help fill the competition void and support families during lockdown. Almost 100,000 children signed up for a free two-week virtual clinic during the April school holidays that was extended until the end of July with

the backing of corporate partners Suncorp, Origin, HCF and Woolworths.

For our youngest participants, the launch of Suncorp NetSetGO Playground, scheduled for 2021, was accelerated to support parents and coaches to deliver the sessions in a remote location.

The fate of Suncorp Super Netball was far more complex. Among the myriad of options - including format, timing, length and location - cancellation was unthinkable, given the strong but silent determination that the country's leading women's sport would remain visible in this time of crisis for so many.

It would ultimately be the first domestic women's league to return to our screens, but it would take many months of negotiation before the first whistle on August 1. Often, no sooner had a crisis management meeting devised a new plan than the situation would change; a border would close, or a new obstacle emerged.

After initial concerns, a hub was required and with the generous assistance of the Queensland government that effectively saved the season, an affordable financial option supported by the clubs, players and officials was found.

We received incredible support and co-operation from our broadcast and commercial partners on a journey that we believe ultimately strengthened these relationships. We also have immense pride in what was achieved on and off the court: the professionalism of the athletes and officials who sacrificed so much, and from the staff who worked such long hours to deliver the product.

Remarkably, all 60 games were played via a rolling, condensed fixture, with viewership up across all platforms and increases in every metric except - for obvious reasons - match attendance figures.

The season culminated with an exceptional Grand Final at Nissan Arena in which the Melbourne Vixens defeated the West Coast Fever 66-64. A joyful send-off for two great servants in Caitlin Thwaites and

Tegan Philip. It was an emotional day for so many, given the immense effort it had taken just to get there.

Another changing of the guard came despite the world No.1 Origin Australian Diamonds not playing an official test match in 2020, with Stacey Marinkovich appointed from an outstanding field to become the program's 15th head coach. Stacey brings a people-first approach to the role, reflecting the evolving nature of elite netball and the need to cater for the whole athlete. An enlightening recruitment process challenged us to think beyond the existing norms and our own unconscious biases in determining what qualities we sought.

We acknowledged Lisa Alexander's achievements during her 102-Test tenure, as well as the respectful nature of her departure after more than eight years of service. What was a difficult decision not to renew her contract provided the chance for us to test the market and reset our direction for the international cycle that concludes in 2023.

Despite resources being stretched so thinly throughout 2020, we remained intent on winning hosting rights for the 2027 Netball World Cup. After an

extended deadline due to COVID-19, we emerged as the sole bidder - our innovative bid document and presentation acknowledged as outstanding, and the commitment from the NSW Government crucial to its viability. The pinnacle event will be the centrepiece of Netball Australia's centenary commemoration and we eagerly await a final determination from the International Netball Federation.

Five new Directors joined the Netball Australia board, bringing fresh skills and perspectives to the sport and their impact is already apparent.

But as we welcomed new members to our organisation, we also said goodbye to others, including CEO Marne Fechner, Deputy CEO Nadine Cohen and Suncorp Super Netball CEO Chris Symington.

Each of these people played a crucial role in ensuring that netball not only survived, but innovated and led in the most challenging of circumstances. And while each made a critical contribution to our 2020 efforts, we acknowledge the remarkable job they've done across their netball careers.

The departures of these colleagues has allowed us to welcome the experience, energy and positivity of our interim CEO Ron Steiner as well as providing the opportunity for our talented team to step up and take on more responsibility.

While the pandemic was clearly our greatest challenge, we confronted other issues which tested our capabilities and processes. The Total Player Payment breaches of the West Coast Fever, the important debate around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes, coaches and officials in our system, even the introduction of the Suncorp Super Netball two-point shot, have forced us to reflect and review.

But while each of these issues is unique, we can be proud of the fact that our response to them has remained true to values and standards that we demand of ourselves and each other.

Change and challenge is inevitable, but it also allows us to introduce new ideas and energy. And the blueprint for reform comes from the State of the Game Review findings, which will help to inform the way forward.

As we look ahead, another priority is to be more insight-led in order to retain the vast participation base - and the core 12-17 year age group in particular. While there are no precedents to suggest how a pandemic impacts drop-out rates in sport, we know the benefits netball provides, and are committed to providing a smooth pathway back while further reinforcing our long-held status as the nation's No.1 sport for women and girls.

So much work has already been done to provide clarity about where netball is headed and how to get there. The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the flaws in the sport's framework and the need for change to ensure a thriving future. Its financial impact has forced a reset and a restructure and whilst that has led to a reduction in headcount and the need to do more with less, it has also taken us to the precipice of a new and exciting place.

There is great strength within our federated structure, and with a renewed commitment to work together arising from the State of the Game Review, we are confident our full potential is yet to be reached.

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS



PAOLINA HUNT | CHAIR

Paolina Hunt is a Business Manager with operational and strategic experience across a number of industries. The combination of her business and law degrees, extensive business background and creative approach make her a valued member of the Netball Australia Board. Paolina currently chairs the Board and is a member of the Governance Committee and the Nominations Committee, both of which she has previously chaired. Paolina is passionate about the contribution netball makes to the social fabric of communities and the support network it provides for young girls and women at every level of the sport. A former Australian Institute of Sport scholarship holder, she grew up in Sydney, has spent time in Canberra, Perth, Adelaide and Melbourne, and was involved in netball at some level in each of those locations. Paolina has a law degree and a Master of Business Administration.

Director appointed to fill a casual vacancy on 1 June 2012.

Elected to the Board in April 2013 and appointed Chair in April 2017.



WENDY ARCHER AM | DIRECTOR

Wendy's lifelong passion for netball started in her days as a junior player, and her achievements in senior ranks include being awarded the National A standard in umpiring and excelling in administrative roles. Wendy is currently the Patron and a Life Member of her local association, a Life Member of Netball NSW and a Director of Netball Australia. Wendy's strong leadership has been recognised through being named Sportsperson of the Year within the Port Stephens LGA and as a finalist in the Administrator of the Year category in the NSW Sports Federation Awards. In 2005, NSW Governor Marie Bashir, AD, CVO, made Wendy a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services to netball. Wendy's vision during her time as President of Netball NSW included working closely with the NSW Swifts, and the creation of GIANTS Netball. Wendy received a Parliamentary commendation for her outstanding service to netball and her work helping to establish the state-of-the-art Netball Central in the Sydney Olympic Park precinct. Wendy is currently the Executive Director of Australian Rescue Management Pty Ltd and InteRisk Pty Ltd. A passionate sports follower with strong community values, Wendy believes in the power of sport and community to create a sound environment in which young people can be nurtured.

Director elected 21 April 2018.



SUSAN COMERFORD | DIRECTOR

Susan Comerford is a senior executive with strengths in strategic human resource management, business structure, practice development and operational management. With a degree in law, she has over thirty years' experience in legal and professional services, having held a wide variety of management roles with some of Australia's leading national commercial law firms. In 2015, Susan completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors Course with a grant for Women Leaders in Sport from the Australian Sports Commission. Susan has a passion for netball and has been involved in netball governance for many years, serving as a Director of Netball SA for 10 years prior to her election to the Netball Australia Board. She has also served on the national board of Australian Legal Practice Management Association, the peak industry body for legal practice managers, including a term as Vice President. Susan established her own consultancy firm, Comerford Consulting, in 2017, providing strategic and operational services and advice, particularly from a people perspective. Her major consulting projects have included roles at executive director level for member-based professional associations including the Law Council of Australia. Susan is a member of the Audit and Risk Committee, the Nominations Committee and has been the Netball Australia Board liaison for the Australian Netball Players Association.

Director elected 21 April 2017.

Director re-elected 21 April 2018.

Ceased 11 September 2020.



KAREN STOCKS | DIRECTOR

Karen Stocks is Global Director, Measurement Solutions at Google. Prior to this she was the founding Managing Director of Twitter Australia, growing the Australian business to become the fastest growing region globally for Twitter. Karen has been instrumental in supporting netball's growth on the popular social media platform and was an ambassador for Netball World Cup 2015 (Sydney). Karen was the 2014 Patron for Go Girl – an initiative encouraging young women to work and study within business and/or IT. She is a member of Chief Executive Women and an ambassador for Business Events Sydney. In 2016 Karen was runner-up Managing Director of the Year (CEO Magazine) and since 2015 has been included in the annual B&T Magazine's Most Influential Women in Media. Having also previously worked at Vodafone, Karen has a passion for utilising new technologies to enhance the customer experience. She has a degree in financial administration, an Master of Business Administration, and is a Fellow of CPA Australia. Karen is an avid netball follower who is excited to contribute to the sport's increasing popularity. She has served on the Audit and Risk Committee and the Confident Girls Foundation Board.

Director appointed 29 August 2015.

Director re-appointed 27 July 2018.

Ceased 27 February 2020.



MARCIA ELLA-DUNCAN OAM | DIRECTOR

Marcia Ella-Duncan OAM was the first Aboriginal scholarship holder at the Australian Institute of Sport and the first Aboriginal woman to represent Australia in netball. She received an Order of Australia Medal for her services to netball in 1988 and has held executive and coaching positions with Randwick Netball Association. She is the founder and a life member of the La Perouse Pearlers Netball Club. Born in La Perouse in Sydney's southern suburbs and a descendant of the Walbunja people on the NSW Far South Coast, Marcia has over 30 years' experience in Aboriginal affairs and combines her love of sport with a commitment to social justice. Marcia has a wealth of governance and strategy experience in the community and government sectors. She is currently an independent consultant specialising in facilitation and community engagement and a current member of the Australian Government's One Voice Senior Advisory Group and a member of Netball NSW RAP Working Group. Marcia is a member of Netball Australia's inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group and is a member of the Governance Committee.

Director elected 21 April 2017.

Ceased 18 July 2020.



CHERYL MCCORMACK | DIRECTOR

Cheryl McCormack is a former Australian and NSW representative in netball and touch football who brings to the Board a wealth of knowledge and experience in commercial, marketing, finance and governance for sporting organisations. Cheryl's experience in holding senior executive positions in the key professional sports of AFL, NRL, rugby union, racing and cricket mean she has an extensive understanding of the social, economic, technological, regulatory and commercial factors influencing sport. She also has experience in major global events, having been a Project Director for the ICC Cricket World Cup, during her time working for Destination NSW, and the Rugby World Cup, whilst at the Sydney Olympic Park Authority. Cheryl played nine Tests for Australia during 1985 and 1986, making her International debut against Trinidad and Tobago in Melbourne. She served as a Director of Netball NSW from 2013 to 2015 and was the General Manager of Oceania Rugby – one of six regional associations of World Rugby. Cheryl is also a Director of Sportscover Australia. She currently operates her own sport business consultancy.

Director elected 3 May 2015.

Director re-elected on 13 April 2018.

Ceased 18 July 2020.



PETER LEGG | DIRECTOR

Peter Legg is a Chartered Accountant who has spent over 20 years as a Senior Finance executive in the sporting industry. Starting as the Chief Financial Officer for Sydney Turf Club, then one of Sydney's two metropolitan horse racing clubs, from 1998 and leading to his current role as the Chief Finance Officer for the South Sydney Rabbitohs in the NRL competition. The Sydney Turf Club as well as being a sporting club was a major venue operator and Peter was part of building and refurbishing two racecourses, including grandstands and exhibition spaces. He was then the Merger Integration Executive tasked with combining Sydney's two racing Clubs into one, forming the Australian Turf Club. After 13 years in Racing he became the Chief Finance Officer for the NRL at the time of the formation of the new Commission structure which now runs the game of Rugby League in Australia. His time at NRL included the game's first billion dollar broadcast deal. Peter has spent the last five years at the Rabbitohs helping the Club to being profitable and highly competitive on the field. Peter's passion for netball comes through his daughter's involvement at grass roots level. Peter is a member of the Audit and Risk committee since his election and is currently the Chair of that committee.

Director elected 13 April 2019.



JOHN LEE | DIRECTOR

John Lee has enjoyed a highly successful career working in Tourism, Professional Sport, Major Events, and Transport. He has extensive experience in leading organisations in areas including Operations, Asset management, Venue Leasing and has a detailed understanding of both the private and public sectors.

Lee's leadership experience includes previous CEO roles at Australian Sailing, two NRL Clubs (Rabbitohs & Roosters), and the Tourism & Transport forum (a national advocacy body).

John has previously held a number of senior positions at the State Government level including as Director-General of the Premiers Department, Department of Commerce & Transport for NSW from 2003 -2010. In 2018, John chaired the Queensland Government's Stadiums Taskforce which reviewed the hiring practices for all major venues in Queensland. His interim and final reports contained a series of recommendations which are being implemented by the Government.

John is a former Australian Sports Commissioner, who has extensive experience in governance having served on the Australian Advertising Standards Board, Events NSW Board, and the Queensland Cross River Rail Authority Board.

He is currently a Director of Melanoma Patients Australia and the North Queensland Cowboys.

Director appointed 29 January 2020.



TERRI MEADMORE | DIRECTOR

Terri Meadmore is a marketing executive with more than 20 years' experience with building brand and sponsorship strategies across multiple industries. Terri joined the board with experience within the marketing and sponsorship disciplines, working across a diverse range of executive roles including sponsorships, brand, content strategy and customer experiences for the entire Suncorp network of brands over the past decade.

Sport has remained a constant throughout Terri's career and has given her extensive insights and experience in negotiating commercial rights across multiple sporting codes and broadcast partnerships. Based in Brisbane, Terri is currently an independent consultant working with brands and sporting bodies on their strategic approach in optimising sponsorship portfolios and partnerships. Terri has a Bachelor of Business, majoring in Marketing. She is a Director of the Confident Girls Foundation and is a member of Netball Australia's Audit & Risk Committee.

A true believer in the significant role sport plays in people's everyday lives. Growing up in regional Queensland she felt lucky to have a family who valued sport and all the benefits that come with it.

Director appointed 9 March 2020.

Director re-appointed 26 July 2020.



MITCH CATLIN | DIRECTOR

Mitch Catlin is a former journalist who has worked across the media, marketing and government landscape for 25 years. Prior to starting up his own company in 2020, Mitch held a number of senior executive roles with global and national brands.

In 2014, Mitch created Catchy Media Marketing and Management which provides strategic marketing, brand and media consulting services, and he continues his weekly spot on 3AW analysing major issues and "news of the day."

Mitch is also the Founder and Chief Marketing Officer of 'Buy Aussie Now' which launched at the height of the pandemic as Australia's first marketplace for Aussie owned businesses selling Aussie made products.

Mitch is a taskforce member of the proposed 2030 bid for regional Victoria to host the Commonwealth Games and a member of Netball Australia's Audit & Risk Committee and Broadcast Media Rights Steering Committee.

Mitch grew up with the sport of netball with his late aunt, Carole Sykes, an award winning coach. The Swifts and Giants play annually for the honour of holding the Carole Sykes Memorial Trophy. He is thrilled to be giving back to a sport he, and millions of Australians love.

Director elected 18 July 2020.



JANE SEAWRIGHT | DIRECTOR

Jane has extensive experience as a corporate, commercial and sports lawyer, in private practice and in-house in the sport, health, research and technology start-up and not for profit sectors. She is also highly qualified in marketing, and has previously run a marketing consultancy offering specialist advice to professional service providers across a wide range of sectors.

Jane is highly respected as a sports administrator and company director, having led netball at every level of the sport in Queensland. Prior to joining the Board of Netball Australia, she was Chair of Netball Queensland for five years, and was the QSport Volunteer of the Year in 2018. She is currently a non-industry Board Member of Racing Queensland and a Cricket Australia Conduct Commissioner, and an inaugural Member of the National Sports Tribunal.

Jane's other current board roles include the Australian Festival of Chamber Music and QCN Fibre Pty Ltd, a Queensland Government-owned communications technology provider. Jane is a member of Netball Australia's Audit & Risk Committee.

Director elected 18 July 2020.



ELIZABETH HUNTER | DIRECTOR

Elizabeth Hunter has a business background across ASX listed, private founder and consulting businesses. With professional expertise in human resources, she has more than 15 years senior leadership experience, working with executives, Boards and Board Committees as a member of the Executive Team of ASX 100 companies. In those corporates, she held cross functional roles providing strategic and operational leadership, including major whole of company change programs in a range of complex business contexts. She has deep understanding of people, culture and organisation development, risk management and the shift to digital environments across multiple industries.

Elizabeth has worked internationally, including as an expatriate in the UK/Ireland. She is a Partner at Dealseide, a specialist firm dedicated to the people dimensions of Mergers & Acquisitions, and also Executive Director of Domus Private Clients.

Elizabeth holds a Masters of Business Administration and is a Member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Elizabeth is a member of the Netball Australia Governance Committee and Chairs the Netball State of the Game Review Steering Committee.

Director appointed to fill casual vacancy on 25 September 2020.

PAINTING THE BIG PICTURE

Amid the immediate challenges presented by COVID-19 the imperative to keep aiming high, thinking big, and driving positive change for 2020 and beyond remained. Bidding to host Netball World Cup 2027 was a priority given the growth it would catalyse, the historic Declaration of Commitment united the sport in pursuit of positive social impact and the State of the Game Review created a blueprint for future prosperity.

Netball Australia's outgoing CEO, Marne Fechner, believes the difficult day-to-day decisions forced on the organisation by COVID-19 required the sport to pinpoint its mission-critical priorities, given reductions in human and financial resources as the pandemic unfolded.

"Securing the Netball World Cup in 2027 in Sydney sets up a really exciting program of work over the next five years and is one of the great legacy pieces that ties in with our strategic priorities," says Fechner,

who departed in December after a 25-year involvement with netball.

Despite multiple pauses, delays and frustrations, 2020 was no time to sit still. What Tim Klar, Netball Australia's Executive General Manager, Strategy and Impact, acknowledges as an extraordinarily testing year for sport in general clearly impacted netball's ability to pursue its ambitions and sustain the momentum the organisation and the sport was building.

"Both at Netball Australia level, and as a collective with Suncorp Super Netball clubs, Member Organisations and the Players' Association, it was hard to continue to find the resources that we needed to match the energy that we have to pursue those things," says Klar. "Even so, netball, as it does, found a way to continue to push forward."

Among the key projects was the quest to secure Netball World Cup

2027 as the centrepiece of Netball Australia's centenary celebrations, with the support of the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments. Netball Scotland ultimately did not submit its bid to host the sport's pinnacle event, with the International Netball Federation acknowledging the compelling vision Netball Australia developed for the event.

"This is a very special opportunity to stage a game-changing Netball World Cup, and to celebrate Netball Australia's centenary with the global netball family that will join us for the event," says Klar. "Netball World Cup 2027 will catalyse significant new support for women and girls, and their families and communities within Australia, across neighbouring regions and for the game internationally".

While the successful 2015 edition in Sydney still looms large in the rear-view mirror, the chance to look ahead to the prospect of the Diamonds playing before 17,000 fans at Qudos

Bank Arena shone brightly through the COVID-19 gloom. Netball's quadrennial highlight - with three primary competition and training venues in the Sydney Olympic Park precinct, and the opportunity for games to be played in regional centres - will be far more than just a sporting spectacle.

"Our vision features a festival of netball that brings together the game's best players, coaches, umpires, administrators and volunteers for the World Cup alongside an event that provides significant support for the progress that we and many others are trying to make towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals in 2030 - and particularly goal No.5 which is focused on gender equality and ensuring equal access and opportunity in a broader sense for women and girls," says Klar.

"Our plan for the event is a natural extension of the work that we've done over the past couple of years around setting out an agenda that is aligned with our purpose in terms of empowering girls and women to shine, and enriching and connecting communities. We've got a 5-6 year runway to lay down the foundations of what will be a fabulous event, but also set ourselves up to have the legacy of that event power us into the 5-10 years that follow."

Not just, Klar stresses, from a profile and growth perspective - both here and abroad, and with a focus on growing the game's footprint in Asia - but to create "step-change in fandom for the game and the love of the game". Recalling being captivated by the Diamonds' skill and prowess during their 2015 home triumph, Klar is excited by the possibilities the 2027 return to the Greater Western Sydney corridor will create among communities that have not traditionally been part of netball's cultural heartland.

"Netball has the power to transcend a lack of heritage in or knowledge of the game because of the product itself and the way in which our Diamonds carry themselves," he says. "Watching netball live cuts through and creates an emotional resonance; it's something

really special. We want 2027 to be the opportunity for as many people as possible to be close enough to experience the event, see the contest and feel like they belong to netball and what it's creating in 2027."

Before then, there is much to be done. Among the smaller steps taken was a full product evolution that has been dubbed NetSetGO 3.0, which contains a more social element designed to retain the "tweens" in the 10-14-year-old age group. A culture review of the game's elite umpire workforce delivered an operating action plan across multiple areas for 2021.

More prominent in the bigger picture was the sport's Declaration of Commitment, which was prompted by responses to the lack of court time given to Suncorp Super Netball's sole indigenous athlete, Queensland Firebird Jemma Mi Mi, in the competition's annual Indigenous Round.

Netball's peak organisations united in pledging to take significant collective action to break down the barriers that have prevented players, coaches, umpires and administrators from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from flourishing in the sport. That includes just two former Diamonds, Marcia Ella-Duncan OAM

and Sharon Finnan-White OAM, and one IUA-badged umpire, Stacey Campton.

"The Declaration of Commitment is a very public and very transparent commitment to dealing with a significant challenge that all sports, including netball, need to own and deal with," says Klar.

"The media coverage that followed Jemma Mi Mi not taking the court in Indigenous Round was the catalyst for a conversation that was really important, and the sport is fronting up to the broader systemic challenges that athletes, coaches and umpires from our country's First Nations face."

The sport's 20 peak entities co-signed a declaration committing the sport to genuine systemic change, to understanding the experiences of, and barriers faced by, First Nations peoples, and examining how roughly 5% of participants at grassroots/community level shrinks to near-zero representation in pathway and elite programs.

Yet the biggest piece of work in future-proofing netball came through the largest research project the sport has undertaken: the one examining the State of the Game. "We listened, we heard, and we commissioned a

State of the Game Review which will help us reimagine and restructure the business. There's so much that's come out of the year that sets us up well for the next five."



Securing the Netball World Cup in 2027 in Sydney sets up a really exciting program of work over the next five years...

MARNE FECHNER
CEO, Netball Australia

STATE OF THE GAME



The State of the Game Review is the largest scale independent review ever conducted into netball.

PAOLINA HUNT
Chair, Netball Australia

As a former Diamonds captain and Australia's most capped player, Liz Ellis admits her life has been shaped by her involvement with netball. In 2020, the high-profile commentator, columnist and advocate added a new role as a key player in a transformational initiative that will help to plot the sport's course.

Ellis headed the four-member State of the Game Review panel responsible for eight strategic recommendations that earned the united support of the Australian netball system - specifically, Netball Australia, its state and territory-based member organisations, all eight Suncorp Super Netball clubs, the Australian Netball Players' Association and the Confident Girls Foundation.

After more than 100 hours of consultation with over 60 cohorts from within the diverse Netball Nation, the detailed report released in November called for:

1. Strategic system alignment
2. Governance reform
3. State-led participation growth
4. Fully integrated performance pathways for athletes, coaches and umpires leading into the Origin Diamonds
5. Suncorp Super Netball as the vehicle to drive commercial growth for netball
6. System wide operational efficiencies
7. National digital strategy
8. Implementation of resources.

"The State of the Game Review is the largest scale independent review ever conducted into netball - carried out over five months and integrating the voices of over 10,000 netball stakeholders - and the insights gained provide an accurate and current data set from which to launch the panel's recommendations," Netball Australia Chair Paolina Hunt said.

"We have a great opportunity, leading into Netball Australia's centenary year in 2027, to set the sport up for the next 100 years, and I'm very much looking forward to working together with key stakeholders as we align for growth and success as an outcome of the review process."

Ellis, who was joined on the panel by Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins, non-executive director and former MP Wendy Machin and experienced media executive Joe Pollard, said the extensive consultation confirmed a desire at all levels to see netball evolve to become a major player in Australian sport from grassroots through to professional and elite.

The former champion defender is keen to see the sport aggressively focus on new opportunities and increasing diversity and inclusion strategies instead of just defending its position as the leading Australian participant sport for women and girls. She has also warned that netball must act in the face of a slow but obvious decline in numbers and growing competition from other sports.

Suncorp Super Netball, "the commercial jewel in netball's crown", should have twin mandates as a premium entertainment product and essential brick in Australia's High Performance pathway, while netball's leaders need a collective vision, purpose and strategy in order to reform and modernise outdated governance arrangements.

"For me, and for my fellow Review Panel members, our critical objectives have been to identify the ingredients required for a strong and sustainable strategy for the game, the preferred structure(s) to drive this strategy and the development and implementation of the best systems and processes to serve and enable the game and its participants," Ellis wrote in the Review's foreword.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant financial impact on the netball ecosystem and comes at a time when the competition to own the hearts and minds of women in sport is at an all-time high. When Australian netball emerges from this major disruption, key partners (government, commercial and philanthropic) will expect the Australian netball ecosystem to be responsive to the changed environment and evolving consumer sentiment."

Netball Australia's Executive General Manager, Sport Melonie Lowe led the research project, with over 10,000

responses to 500,000 invitations to participate. A piece of work so huge that it would normally take a year to complete was run over 77 days. Data gaps were filled and overlaid into segmentation, including input from marginalised and minority communities. "It was probably one of the largest undertakings in terms of getting the voice of netball to understand how we shape netball into the future," Lowe said.

Ellis praised Netball Australia's brave dive into self evaluation during a year of unprecedented external challenges and Hunt congratulated the Review Panel for mobilising and capturing the sentiments of the Netball Nation.

"This represents the largest ever research project into the views of our netball family and has served as a true listening post at a critical time for the sport," Hunt said.

"Importantly, it's given us accurate and current data sets on which to base the panel's recommendations, which will help shape the sport's prompt response. At a time when the sports industry has been thrown on its head as a consequence of COVID-19, these insights are gold."

"Equally, all external stakeholders - corporate, broadcast, government, and those currently outside the traditional netball framework, yet actively engaged with netball - took time to work one-on-one with the panel to share their views, insights and suggestions."

"What's critical is that netball has agreed to support the eight core recommendations to look for the best solutions for netball as a whole. We've agreed to approach this work with great care and through a lens of longer-term custodianship. I'm incredibly excited about the opportunities that this review has identified for netball."

The focus is now on the execution. Interim CEO Ron Steiner identified the two most pressing priorities as aligning the netball community behind united strategic priorities and accelerating the transition to a more digitally-based platform.



DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT

During the drafting of the landmark State of the Game Review, another important document was being signed by 20 of Australian netball's peak organisations: the Declaration of Commitment.

One common theme was shared by these two historic initiatives; the lack of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander athletes in netball's elite levels.

First, the numbers. Registered players in 2019 who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent totalled 20,849 (or approximately 5% of the total 2019 netball participants; compared with the nationally identified parity of 3.3% in the Australian population).

As explained in the State of the Game report: "This significant

representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander players as grassroots participants continues in Australian netball's under-age pathways, but it all disappears in the High Performance programs."

"Of the 315 pathway athletes across the system, 5% (18) of these athletes identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This drops to 1% in Suncorp Super Netball, where there is currently only one Aboriginal athlete. In the Australian team, the Diamonds, there has not been an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander athlete since 2000."

The issue gained momentum as Suncorp Super Netball's Indigenous Round drew closer and several former netballers - all members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

Islander community - revealed the difficulties they had faced at various levels of the sport.

The result, was netball's first unified response to this critical issue, when a coalition of netball's peak organisations pledged to take significant action to break down the barriers that have prevented Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander players, coaches, umpires and administrators from flourishing in Australia's leading sport for women and girls.

A Declaration of Commitment was signed that requires the entire netball system to understand and then resolve the under-representation at elite levels, and to commit to the pathway changes required from grassroots to the Origin Diamonds.

It acknowledged that change will only be achieved in true partnership with netball's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

The only two indigenous Diamonds since 1986, trailblazer Marcia Ella-Duncan OAM and Sharon Finnan-White OAM, along with umpire Stacey Campton, and coach Ali Tucker-Munro, agreed

to play key leadership roles in supporting netball to develop the necessary strategy framework.

The independent State of the Game review, which included research into the structural and behavioural barriers that limit opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to reach their full potential in netball, also called for major change.

"The Panel expects this Declaration of Commitment to be brought to life as a matter of urgency and notes that work is underway to do so. The Panel supports the importance of Australian netball playing its part in Australia's broad commitments to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander self-determination and social justice," a statement from the panel declared.

"Whilst the Declaration of Commitment relates to increasing the representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander athletes in netball's representative pathways and High Performance programmes, it will be a hollow, tokenistic commitment if Australian netball cannot attract and retain Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander girls and women to participate in grassroots netball, driven by strong relationships forged by the communities and netball associations across this country."

The Netball Australia Declaration of Commitment can be viewed on our [website](#).



"The Panel expects this Declaration of Commitment to be brought to life as a matter of urgency and notes that work is underway to do so."

STATE OF THE GAME REVIEW PANEL





SUNCORP SUPER NETBALL FROM THE HUB

When the potential impact of COVID-19's deadly global march began to crystallise in mid-March, initially forcing the cancellation of the pre-season Suncorp Team Girls Cup, it was soon apparent that far greater disruption was to come. "We started going into worst-case scenarios," said 2020 Suncorp Super Netball chief executive Chris Symington. "We asked; 'what does it look like if there's no season at all?', and we worked from there."

On March 23, it was announced that the Suncorp Super Netball season would be deferred until at least July 1, with a decision to be made by May 31, when the picture would be clearer. Meanwhile, drastic measures were required, through staff and pay cuts - including pay reductions for the athletes - as engagement with stakeholders including clubs, the Australian Netball Players' Association and broadcast/commercial partners reached an unprecedented level.

wellbeing of those within the netball community, the sport's financial viability, and the integrity of the competition.

The ideal, for cost and player preference reasons, was a fly-in, fly-out model - requiring open borders. "At that stage, people were still reasonably optimistic that the COVID-19 threat might diminish, because the numbers were starting to trend in the right direction," says Symington.

"But then things started getting worse - especially in Victoria, and there were some outbreaks in NSW, as well, so the situation really escalated because borders started shutting. Relocation became more and more likely and our options were starting to diminish."

So, in the event of a hub, where to hub? After much consideration and negotiation, NSW was pencilled in, and a quarantine location for the two Victorian teams identified. But government approval did not arrive on June 13 as expected, while security fees being quoted were prohibitive. With Queensland not yet locked in as an alternative, it was time to get nervous and Netball Australia Deputy Chief Executive Officer and key "fixer" Nadine Cohen clearly was.

Two days later, with the Melbourne group's bags packed but travel plans back on hold, a key teleconference call with Queensland's Chief Health Officer Dr Jeannette Young prompted some adjustments, and a new course was set. Finally, late in the evening on July 17, government approvals came

“

We started going into worst-case scenarios. We asked; 'what does it look like if there's no season at all?'

CHRIS SYMINGTON
Suncorp Super Netball
Chief Executive

Daily online meetings and the guidance of Netball Australia's Chief Medical Officer Dr Susan White helped to develop safe training protocols, while negotiations with the Australian Border Force ramped up to permit the return of six athletes from overseas, even as the challenges of the different state health regulations added an extra layer of complication. Then, the big question: if there could be a season, how would it be run? There were too many contingencies considered to list, and a landscape changing so frequently that some scenarios were altered or discarded within hours of being raised. As cases spiked, government policies changed and borders closed. Symington said the decision-making process was guided by three key priorities. In order: the health and



from both potential hub states three minutes apart. Queensland was chosen, the Victorian teams were re-routed further north and a two-state fixture released for the opening rounds.

But then, with NSW declared a hotspot, there was a mass migration north before the border closed and, with season-saving financial support from the Queensland Government guaranteed, a single hub in the Sunshine State became the only viable option - although the possibility to play several games elsewhere remained open under a fixture released in phases and condensed by the staging of mid-week games.

“That final week literally just felt like I was walking in concrete, and I was sinking,” says Cohen. “Everyone asks ‘how did we pull it off?’ Part of it was about just trying to pre-empt what was going to happen in the community and the environment, but also do it on the smell of an oily rag.”

“It goes to the fact that there were some really hard decisions taken early on, and to the commitment of those involved, because we didn’t have

family in the hub unless it was absolutely essential. Netball was able to not only run the competition but bring the hub in without having a 100% lockdown facility throughout, and under a very different financial model to a lot of the other sports.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever in my professional career experienced such relief when those plans were approved... because of the time frame and the potential impact on netball if we couldn’t get the season away, this was really time-bound and critical to the future viability of the sport, and to the income of the athletes.”

The shortage of appropriately badged umpires in Queensland meant that officials, too, needed to be imported. Only at the airport were they - and the Vixens - told their time away was likely to stretch to many months.

“The level of anxiety across the whole system was something I’ve never experienced before because no-one’s experienced it before” says Symington. “But there’s so many different stakeholder groups that you need to bring on the journey and all of them - probably apart from the Queensland teams who were lucky

enough to stay at home - have to do something that’s completely foreign.”

“There were quite a few moments when it felt like the challenge was too big. The goal posts kept shifting so much and because of our financial constraints, we needed to be a bit smarter than some of the bigger codes with bigger budgets who were able to secure massive loans and access huge amounts of money.

“So, there were times where it felt like the expense and the hardship that we were putting our people through, we really needed to weigh up whether that was worth it or not. In the end we just continued to persist. You’d get knocked down and you’d do a lot of work and you’d throw it in the bin, and then start again.”

The media team, too, faced unusual challenges, given the difficulty of making plans while so much uncertainty swirled around Suncorp Super Netball’s delivery. Thus, the strategy between May and August was essentially one of creating athlete-driven content to keep fans engaged and connected while the season was on hold.

When it became clear it would begin on August 1, Spencer Retallack, Netball Australia’s Executive General Manager, Media, switched to a new operating model. With minimal Netball Australia staff on the ground in Queensland, the emphasis was on co-ordinating and maximising the resources and content being produced by the clubs, collaborating on plans, themes and narratives to minimise duplication.

Shifting from the usual four games a weekend to eight games each week for the middle 12 rounds of the season meant the content cycle shifted from seven days to three - becoming heavily match focused through previews and reviews. So fast was the churn that there was a greater focus on video and output across social channels than on lengthy written pieces.

“The behaviour of fans shifted a little bit,” Retallack says. “We did see a strong increase across social media, and we were able to align a lot of our content back to our commercial partners.”

“So, while we weren’t able to deliver on some of the physical entitlements

in their agreements, we shifted a lot of our focus through content and digital and we were able to keep our partners happy through that level of engagement. The main aim was to make sure fans were tuning in to either Channel Nine or the Netball Live Official App, and I think the results really showed that.”

Through all this, a behind-the-scenes documentary was being filmed, produced on a skinny budget but showcasing the sacrifices being made by the athletes, coaches and support staff plus the fierce, intense nature of the competition. The centralised location provided a unique opportunity for cost-efficient access to all eight clubs and material for a six-episode series, with negotiations underway to secure a distribution deal on a streaming platform or, alternatively, use of the footage as a marketing tentpole for Suncorp Super Netball in 2021.

On August, 2, the Vixens and Magpies played their relocated Victorian derby while still in quarantine - game four of what started so stressfully but eventually relaxed into a full 60-match season. While attendances were significantly impacted by the

coronavirus restrictions, as were the non-Queensland teams’ abilities to service their members and clubs’ general revenue streams, there were 34 matches completed in Brisbane, 19 on the Sunshine Coast, three in Adelaide, and four in Far North Queensland for the annual Indigenous Round.

With no COVID-19 protocol breaches, and the admirable commitment of all concerned, the season culminated in a memorable Grand Final at Nissan Arena on October 18 in which the Vixens defeated the West Coast Fever 66-64. Nine’s free-to-air broadcast reached more than 930,000 viewers, the Netball Live Official App audience soared by 30% compared with 2019, and there was a 37% increase in streaming numbers on 9Now.

Yet if the numbers - including QI media value - point to the most successful Suncorp Super Netball season of the four completed, the sense of relief and accomplishment is harder to quantify. Against the odds, the season that almost wasn’t, safely, innovatively, quite remarkably, was.

SUNCORP SUPER NETBALL: *THE DIGITAL GAME*

47,407

Average streaming views per game

143,259

Average free-to-air viewership per game



32%

Increase in live streaming of matches via the Netball Live Official App



727,326

users visited the Suncorp Super Netball website

3,912,048

page views

20%

Netball Live subscriber growth

894,633

Web & Media Traffic up 10%

TOGETHER APART

Physically distant during COVID-19 did not mean disconnected, as Netball Australia's continuing close engagement with its vast community simply took a different form.

"COVID-19 gave us the opportunity to pivot really quickly into digital," says Melonie Lowe, Netball Australia's Executive General Manager, Sport. "It meant we could build a suite of new digital offerings which allowed us to communicate directly, more easily. It allowed us to stay connected, and it forced us to be a bit more nimble."

First and fastest was the remarkably successful partnership with NETFIT Netball - an existing platform run by former national league player Sarah Wall - that was launched with the first Suncorp Online Netball Clinic on April 13.

The live program ran from 9am to 3pm three days a week over nine weeks and was designed to keep young netballers entertained, healthy, active and engaged during lockdown. Also available via replay, and actively evolving through customer feedback, it included such offerings as a "wake-up workout", skills and drills, mindfulness and wellbeing, and nutrition classes.

"It was a pivot into a different space," says David Lee, Netball Australia's Chief Commercial Officer. "We went out to our entire participation base

and effectively said 'while you can't be physically together, you can't be on a netball court, and you can't be in the change rooms, you can still maintain your levels of fitness and you can still have fun doing netball-type activities from home'."

"That was our first foray into delivering physical netball content in a digital format - when no other sport was doing that. As digital delivery is becoming such a focal point for all industries, we were really proud we were able to mobilise such a significant partnership with NETFIT, because it was an opportunity to engage with an audience in a way that we've never had the capability to do before."

In the absence of community netball, it also provided points of activation and lines of communication for the sport's commercial partners such as Suncorp, Woolworths and Origin who all actively invested additional funds to be integrated into the program that commenced on April 13.

The fact that customers were overwhelmingly positive about their experience was borne out by the numbers: 79,000 total sign-ups across six countries, including 58.3 per cent aged 14-and-under; 203,872 live views and 488,100 on replay. Particularly notable was the dedicated TikTok campaign and competition developed as part of the Suncorp integration

known as the #TeamGirlsChallenge.

"Our first foray into TikTok through the Team Girls promotion was a huge milestone for us," says Lowe. "We saw over 118 million views, so it gave us the exposure and the opportunity to really push the boundaries in a new social digital environment."

"That program was so successful that Suncorp extended us for another eight weeks. It was originally supposed to be a six week program, but we ran it from July to September in the end."

It took, meanwhile, just 39 days after competition was placed on hold to build a new digital offering, NetSetGO Playground. The on-demand version of the popular physical product for children aged 5-10 arrived a year ahead of its scheduled delivery, prompted by the twin necessities of keeping netball's youngest family members involved and active and helping Member Organisations with their retention strategies.

"We set up Suncorp NetSetGO as the first truly agile product in netball," says Lowe, explaining the provision for a live loop of customer feedback every eight weeks that was incorporated into a rolling product review with updated delivery every three months.

Families who had signed up for NetSetGO in early 2020 were provided with login details to access the NetSetGO-exclusive environment on the Netball Australia website, with fresh video content provided throughout the COVID-19 compromised year.

As with Suncorp Team Girls Online Netball Clinics, elite players - including past and present Origin Diamonds - helped to spread the message in what was another important tool for both engagement and retention. The 4,696 unique registrations represented an uptake of around 10% from the invited cohort, and the positive response to the content identified a sweet spot for 6-8 year olds.

"The kids were crying out for content to keep active at home, and this was something you could do in your kitchen, in your backyard, you could do it anywhere," says Lee. "We were also able to bring partners through that process, given the focus on delivering entitlements in a digital environment, so that became another platform for us to talk to a really important audience - including parents."

Just as that product did, and will continue to evolve, so does the work of modernising the grassroots and participation systems through a new registration and competition

management platform. The migration to a centralised platform, PlayHQ, will take place in 2021 and involve four of the eight Member Organisations - Victoria and Queensland having chosen a different provider. PlayHQ will replace the incumbent MyNetball platform for the 2022 season as Netball Australia joins the AFL and Cricket Australia as the founding national tenants of the revolutionary new grassroots platform.

The broader vision is to make it easier for customers to engage with netball by improving the customer experience and reducing the barriers to entry regardless of their location or their role within the system. Providing greater operational efficiencies and future-proofing the sport will be delivered through greater collaboration and the economies of scale this brings with it, timely and accurate data and insights and investment in further technology.

"This is an opt-in scenario, and we're pleased we've got the commitment of all Member Organisations who see the value in working together on a truly integrated and seamless ecosystem," says Spencer Retallack, Executive General Manager, Media. "Whether you are a participant, volunteer, fan or social follower of netball, you deserve a more personalised and contextual experience that can only be delivered through the collaboration of each netball entity."

Other 2020 Community Sport participation initiatives included:

1. Sporting Schools: Netball Australia took the opportunity to test a digital platform for the schools market, through the addition of a "Teacher Lounge" on NetSetGO Playground site. The response to the resources housed there will provide valuable feedback and insights into the digital requirements of teachers and schools to be developed in 2021.
2. Coaching Hub: An agile team was launched in the latter stages of the year to start the build of a Pacific Coaching Hub while reviewing and developing a framework for a whole-of-sport Coaching Hub and resource development in 2021.
3. Umpire Cultural Review: An independent review into the culture within the elite umpiring cohort was completed, a series of Zoom briefings conducted, and an action plan developed and circulated to enable current umpires and coaches to consult and collaborate.



While you can't be physically together, you can't be on a netball court, and you can't be in the change rooms, you can still maintain your levels of fitness and you can still have fun doing netball-type activities from home.

DAVID LEE

Chief Commercial Officer, Netball Australia



DELIVERING DIAMONDS

Although it was a rare calendar year without Test matches, 2020 did not lack significance for the Origin Australian Diamonds. A new head coach was appointed, a successful charity game heralded the start of the new international cycle and a squad camp with a difference launched preparations for a busy 2021.

The famous gold dress was seen just once: when the Origin Diamonds, under outgoing coach Lisa Alexander, played the Suncorp Super Netball All-Stars in a Bushfire Relief fundraiser at Sydney's Qudos Bank Arena on March 1.

The next big event, unfortunately, would be the escalation of COVID-19, with pandemic-related travel and quarantine requirements initially causing the cancellation of the four-nation Quad Series and the postponement of the 2020 Constellation Cup from its usual October timeslot.

Combined with player wellbeing considerations, especially given the demands of a delayed and condensed Suncorp Super Netball season, the annual four-match trans-Tasman series was re-scheduled into March 2021 in New Zealand. And with three Tests proposed against the England Roses in Australia set to precede the 2021

Constellation Cup in its traditional time of year, the Diamonds' diary is bulging with 11 potential Tests in eight months – COVID-19 permitting.

At the time, few could have predicted that the Bushfire Relief game – a happy occasion that raised over \$400,000 for bushfire-affected communities and also served as a send-off for Alexander after 101 Tests and nine years in charge of the world's top-ranked team – would be netball's sole international event in 2020.

"We really rallied around the opportunity to bring the Origin Diamonds brand into play, bring the group together, farewell an icon in terms of her years of service, legacy and contribution to the sport, and then tie that up with a commitment to fundraising and doing well for a community of fire-stricken people," says Stacey West, Netball Australia's Executive General Manager of Performance.

"It was such a lovely event, but the minute the Diamonds put that dress on, there's a really competitive edge, which is what they brought against the All-Stars. So it had a real feeling of warmth and generosity but also ferocity in terms of the way that they attempted to dominate on the court."

Later that month, as everything was closing down, the search for a new coach opened. Expressions of interest called for in March were placed on hold by COVID-19 before moving to phase two in late June. A five-person selection panel then narrowed a high-quality field to a shortlist of three, before, on October 29, Stacey Marinkovich was announced as the 15th Diamonds coach.

The 39-year-old has led the West Coast Fever to two Suncorp Super Netball Grand Finals since taking over in 2014 and was named the 2018 Joyce Brown Coach in the Year. With over a decade of experience, the native Queenslander and former Australian 21-and-under representative has been a specialist centre court coach with the Australian Development Squad and took the Australian Fast5 Flyers to third place at the 2017 Fast5 Netball World Series.

West described Marinkovich's recruitment as a key piece of work for 2020. "It is the primary leadership role we have in Australian netball," she says. "This role leads not only the Diamonds to benchmark events such as Commonwealth Games and World Cup, but also leads our whole pathway."

“The Diamonds are the benchmark, and everything through Australia’s pathway is fed upwards towards that goal, so the head coach has a significant footprint and role in building the Diamonds brand, building the Diamonds way of playing, and then sharing that knowledge through all our pathway programs.”

Marinkovich, says West, brings a range of qualities crucial in the modern game.

“Stacey demonstrates an excellent approach to building partnerships, capability in managing complex stakeholder relationships, and a strong ability to influence and lead and leverage a systems approach for success,” says West. “Stacey has a focus on achieving goals, which she approaches with consistency and a commitment to follow-up and follow through, enabling all involved to be aligned for success.

“Stacey is thorough and articulates a clear vision and plan for performance. She has a good ability to leverage the system, to lead and maintain relationships in a complex netball landscape, and will seek to bring many on the journey to drive outcomes and results.”

Marinkovich’s first taste of Diamonds leadership came when the full squad gathered in Noosa for six days in November. Suncorp Super Netball’s Queensland hub quickly became



Diamond-central, minus any on-court component in recognition of the athletes’ heavy recent load. “The purpose of the camp was totally around ‘new coach, new squad’ and we stripped it right back,” says West. “We wondered if it would be enough. We wondered whether they would get enough out of it. But it was incredible.

“It was a chance to slow everything down. It was a chance to really connect and consider all the

planning and build from scratch. So Stacey spent a considerable amount of time meeting with the players individually, meeting with small groups, talking about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities. Talking about the way they want to play. Talking about the way they work. And talking really openly.”

Those discussions included the ramifications of Marinkovich’s unique dual roles as coach of both the Fever and Diamonds for the 2021 Suncorp Super Netball season, before the full-time move into the national position ahead of the next pinnacle events: the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and the 2023 Netball World Cup in South Africa.

Australia’s next generation of elite netballers is also being considered following the cancellation of all 2020 pathway events – a decision made reluctantly after much consultation and reluctance. Casualties included the National Netball Championships in Tasmania, and the eight-week Deakin University Australian Netball League. The latter will be replaced - temporarily - by the tournament-style Australian Netball Championships for 2021 and redefined as an event for

talent identification, selection and development, designed to bridge the gap between junior netball and Suncorp Super Netball.

All athletes named in national junior squads in 2020 retained their positions for the year ahead despite the lack of activity in the one just past, as the International Netball Federation pushed the World Youth Cup back from June 2021 by at least six months.

In summary: so much that so few saw coming has occurred, and the impact is still being felt. “There’s been some great pockets of innovation and delivery, and there’s been some moments of nothing, so there’s just been an inconsistent year in High Performance netball,” says West, who was appointed in April.

“There’s been some highlights and some incredible performances, and there’s also been some moments where athletes were really lonely and home alone. So the energy and enthusiasm for 2021 is tenfold. Everyone just wants to get going. If anything, this renewed energy might be a real benefit.”

“
*The Diamonds
are the
benchmark,
and everything
through
Australia’s
pathway is fed
upwards towards
that goal...*

STACEY WEST
Executive General Manager
of Performance



COMMERCIAL CRUNCH

The uncertainty over the timing, format and viability of the 2020 Suncorp Super Netball season as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic posed twin commercial challenges for Netball Australia; finding creative ways to engage fans and participants and delivering value to key commercial partners.

"It was a commercial crunch," says Netball Australia's Chief Commercial Officer, David Lee. "Around 50 per cent of our revenue is derived from our commercial partners, and if we weren't in a position to deliver Suncorp Super Netball - and particularly the broadcast component of that - then we had a significant issue."

"Everyone understood that, and I think that was also why we were able to come together within the system and collaborate with so many stakeholders to deliver the season that we did."

Ultimately, a successful 60-game season was played in unique circumstances from August to October. What was delayed, threatened, condensed and eventually centralised in a Queensland hub with essential state government backing was - uniquely among major Australian national leagues in 2020 - also completed in full.

Indeed, the Melbourne Vixens' famous Grand Final triumph was just one win among many. Relationships with

commercial partners helped to ease the pain of COVID-19 on the bottom line, even if delivery approaches and models required adjustment to protect and bolster revenue.

Despite the Origin Diamonds' international program being postponed until 2021, Netball Australia retained 94 per cent of budgeted commercial revenue from its joint venture with Nine Entertainment, while a further \$900,000 was generated from new assets to invest in digital programs and help fund content creation.

Rewinding to March 1, how positively it had all begun, as the netball community united for the Bushfire Relief Match between the Diamonds and Suncorp Super Netball All-Stars team in Sydney. An opportunity to engage with commercial partners and showcase the marketing possibilities of the two-point Super Shot also delivered a strong social responsibility message as more than \$400,000 was raised for distribution to netball communities impacted by the summer bushfires.

But tragedy was soon to arrive in a different, far more insidious form. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic included the postponement or cancellation of multiple netball events, and thus the swift pivot to focus on digital engagement and delivery.

With the assistance of additional investment from Suncorp, Origin Energy and Woolworths - in particular - a strategy designed to build brand attachment with netball's audience base. This included:

- A joint venture with NETFIT Netball to provide virtual netball skills clinics, nutritional and other well-being tools - an initiative targeted primarily at 10-16 -year olds that attracted over 68,027 online registrations from May to August.
- Accelerating the launch of Netball Nation, an emotive content aggregation hub focusing largely on Origin Diamonds athletes, as part of the quest to create new digital assets.
- The new Suncorp Super Netball Rebound: Fun content to engage the national league fan base in the absence of competition, much of it produced by the athletes themselves and including insights into isolation training during lockdown, which was built into a portal on the Suncorp Super Netball website.
- Accelerating the introduction of Suncorp NetSetGO Playground - a digital delivery alternative offered to the 41,000 10-and-under who had registered for the traditional in-person physical version. Using technology developed in-house at Netball Australia, around 14,000 children took part.

According to Lee, "It was a way of us being able to try and deliver in a very difficult situation and, commercially, ensure that we were able to retain NetSetGO fees while, importantly, giving kids an experience they could do at home."

After many changes of direction, the main event that was season four of Suncorp Super Netball arrived in a new-look form on August 1 at Brisbane's Nissan Arena. The Sunshine State hub hosting all eight clubs received crucial financial support from Tourism Events Queensland - critical to allowing competition to begin.

This was netball as it had never been seen before - and, eventually, it was watched by more viewers than ever before.

Among the highlights:

- Across the full season, a 5 per cent increase in gross TV viewership on 2019 - particularly notable because, among declining free-to-air numbers, it was the second consecutive year that only Suncorp Super Netball and the AFL recorded increases. Netball ranked No.1 among women's codes and No.4 across all major codes for gross viewership. Despite one less match on Channel Nine in 2020, average TV viewership was up 8 per cent year on year, peaking in the early Sunday slot.
- A 32 per cent increase in live streaming of matches via the



Across the full season, a 5% increase in gross TV viewership on 2019

Netball Live Official App. "That's representative of the changing demographic and of the netball demographic as a whole in terms of wanting to watch on their devices," says Lee, noting that, pro-rata, the average viewing length on the Netball Live Official App was longer than both the AFL and NRL.

- The creation of new commercial assets that helped fan engagement grow by more than 1.1 million on metro free-to-air metrics. These included the two-point Suncorp Super Shot and the Rebel Power Five.
- An 84 per cent increase from 2019 in Nielsen QI Media Value (the value the sponsor derived from the brand). The total of \$26.9 million reflected new court assets, building exposure and additional social media tracking. Management also worked with the teams to provide new signage exposure assets.
- While trailing AFLW for total fan numbers, netball ranked number one among the women's codes for those (33%) who consider themselves "avid" fans.

Lee cited the Suncorp Super Shot and Rebel Power Five as "two good examples of new branded assets that delivered some real value for our commercial partners and, importantly, engaged our fans in a different way".

Research showed that the public sentiment around the Super Shot



A 32% increase in live streaming of matches via the Netball Live Official App.

also softened during the season, with acknowledgment that the controversial change to the scoring system for the last five minutes of each quarter helped to extend interest in some games.

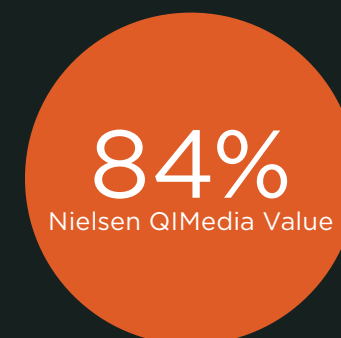
The critical contribution of Tourism Events Queensland helped to make the league viable, and the efforts of all involved ensured it remained so. From a challenging commercial environment came an Suncorp Super Netball season to remember in a year that few will ever forget.

#1 Sport

among the women's codes for those who consider themselves "avid" fans.

\$400,000

raised for distribution to netball communities impacted by the summer bushfires.



An 84% increase from 2019 in Nielsen QI Media Value (the value the sponsor derived from the brand).

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

REVENUE

2020	\$28,741,639
2019	\$29,835,698
2018	\$29,308,680
2017	\$26,830,272
2016	\$15,853,286
2015	\$27,563,112
2014	\$16,358,596
2013	\$20,584,663

INVESTMENT IN NETBALL

2020	\$31,549,842
2019	\$29,788,538
2018	\$29,242,770
2017	\$27,222,383
2016	\$18,974,228
2015	\$27,185,587
2014	\$16,124,443
2013	\$14,648,148

Government Grants \$11,071,100

Sale of Goods \$1,388,503

Sponsorship \$13,380,718

REVENUE SPLIT

Other Income \$1,075,168

Suncorp Super Netball \$1,523,996

Events \$302,154

Governance \$956,140

Other Expenses \$960,109

High Performance \$1,353,633

Employee Benefits \$7,256,800

Administration \$480,248

Engagement and Social Impact \$408,381

Sport Development \$608,202

Cost of Goods Sold \$626,883

INVESTMENT SPLIT

Depreciation/Amortisation \$793,341

Media and Sponsorship \$9,393,187

Events \$389,415

Coaching \$184,533

Umpiring \$106,930

Suncorp Super Netball \$8,032,040

NET FUNDS AS AT 31 DECEMBER

2020	\$4,527,554
2019	\$7,332,216
2018	\$7,269,311
2017	\$7,182,553
2016	\$7,546,484
2015	\$10,598,412
2014	\$10,220,887
2013	\$9,986,734

EXECUTIVE REMUNERATION

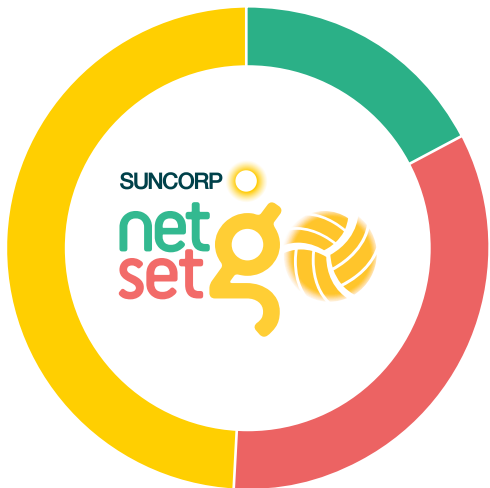
2020	\$2,433,787
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OVERALL RESULT

Deficit of \$2,804,661

**Netball Australia supported Member Organisations by waiving \$2.4m of amounts due.*

***Netball Australia funded the Hub operations for the duration of the Suncorp Super Netball Season.*



63,056 TOTAL PARTICIPANTS

10,938 NET PARTICIPANTS

21,179 SET PARTICIPANTS

30,939 GO PARTICIPANTS

4,334 TOTAL SUNCORP NETSETGO CENTRES

MEMBERSHIP

411,987

Total registrations

89,147

SENIOR REGISTRATIONS

11,960

OTHER REGISTRATIONS

171,520

JUNIOR REGISTRATIONS

BENCH OFFICIALS



115 STATE BENCH OFFICIALS

108 NATIONAL BENCH OFFICIALS

UMPIRES



10,176



1,653



107



17

COACHES

16,645

FOUNDATION

251*

ADVANCED

3,587

DEVELOPMENT

55*

ELITE

1,335

INTERMEDIATE

45

HIGH PERFORMANCE

INCLUSION

PARTICIPANTS FROM CALD COMMUNITIES

22,325

PARTICIPANTS WHO IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

15,973

PARTICIPANTS WHO IDENTIFY AS HAVING A DISABILITY

462

PRINCIPAL PARTNERS



SUPPLIERS



MAJOR PARTNERS



MAJOR EVENTS PARTNERS



ASSOCIATE PARTNERS



OFFICIAL BROADCAST PARTNERS



HIGH PERFORMANCE PARTNERS



GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS





COMMONWEALTH GAMES AUSTRALIA PROUDLY SUPPORTING OUR NETBALLERS

CRAIG PHILLIPS

Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth Games Australia

Whilst not a Commonwealth Games year, 2020 was a busy one for Commonwealth Games Australia as we built on the legacies of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games

Without question though the first half of 2020 was unprecedented in our times and we recognise the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for netball clubs in many parts of Australia the preceding bushfires which devastated many communities.

These times, highlighted for many of our member sports by the postponement of major championships and events, required us all to review and re-write, and then review and re-write again, our plans and activities.

Despite having the benefit of time, with the next edition of the Commonwealth Games not occurring until July 2022, the pandemic impacted the Commonwealth Sport Movement in Australia. The 2021 Commonwealth Youth Games were postponed and the calendar of events for 2021/22 dramatically altered. These changes to the calendar will no doubt continue and whilst a compressed international schedule will deliver an unprecedented opportunity for Australians to cheer for the Green & Gold in international competition, it will also provide challenges in what our Birmingham Chef de Mission Petria Thomas has described as a 'bumper year of sport' in 2022.

The pandemic has also impacted the organisers of the Birmingham Games,

with the most notable change being the decision to not proceed with the build of new accommodation that was planned for the Games Village. Instead, three smaller villages will be used in existing accommodation throughout Birmingham, in addition to Cycling and Lawn Bowls accommodation closer to their respective venues. This will result in a different Games experience, but one our Team Executive of Petria, Anna Meares, Sharelle McMahon, Katrina Webb and Tim Mahon will creatively overcome.

Despite all this, Commonwealth Games Australia continues to focus on our 'refreshed' Strategic Plan – First Among Equals – as we embrace the future beyond Birmingham 2022 to the 2026 Games.

With a strong focus on our dual vision of 'Pursuing Sporting Excellence' and 'Connecting with Communities', the Plan incorporates five strategic priorities: Delivering Team Success; Connecting with Communities; Presenting a Powerful Brand; Leading the Way; and Hosting Great Games.

To help achieve our goal of 'Delivering Team Success' Commonwealth Games Australia has been a significant financial contributor and partner for Netball Australia, delivering \$590,000 to the sport and our netballers in the lead up to the Gold Coast Games.

On the road to Birmingham 2022 our financial support continues and during the 2022 Games cycle we

have earmarked \$13m in funding to member sports through programs ranging from youth to the elite and direct athlete support. That is a significant contribution to Australian sport, for which we are proud

Commonwealth Games Australia has already invested \$120,000 in netball in 2019 to support National Talent Camp participants and assisting with the costs of establishing a data analytics and evaluation project for Netball Australia.

We look forward to continuing our work together to deliver team success together in Birmingham and we thank Netball Australia and our netballers for their continued efforts and support.





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