

Podcast 161 – Women's Australian Rules Football in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia, with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 161 – Women's Australian Rules Football in Australia

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(This podcast is 13 minutes and 5 seconds long.)

Hi,

In Podcast 2, I talked about Australia's unique national game – Australian rules football (Aussie rules footy). The top national level competition is the AFL, which stands for Australian Football League. I published Podcast 2 just over 10 years ago in 2015. Today, Australian rules football and the AFL continue to be very popular. Furthermore, since 2017 there has been an important and positive development in 'footy' (as it is known). That important development is the starting of a top-level national competition for female players. Yes, it's women's footy! The competition is called the AFLW, which stands for Australian Football League Women's.

Women have always played a big part in footy, not only as enthusiastic members of the large crowds who attend AFL footy matches, but also as supporters and volunteers helping local junior and senior football teams in the towns and suburbs across Australia. Women and young girls love the game just as much as men and young boys do. It's their game as well, so it makes sense that they can finally get to play in their own top-level competition. These women players then become role

models for young girls all around Australia, showing them that girls and women can also be great players and sports heroes of the game they love.

Women had been playing Aussie rules matches in their own competitions for many years in Australia. While there had been many exhibition games played by women since the 1920s, it was not until 1981 that the Victorian Women's Football League was established with four teams competing in an adult women's competition. In the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, other women's footy competitions were created in Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland. In 2010, the administrators running the men's AFL competition proposed that a women's competition could be started to align with the men's AFL teams. This would mean that, for example, the AFL men's team Essendon, would also have a AFLW team called Essendon. However, this national competition was slow to get organised. In the meantime, women all over Australia showed that they wanted to play Australian rules footy. For example, in 2015, around 284,000 women and girls were playing in local football competitions all over Australia.

Finally, in 2017, the first top-level AFLW competition commenced, starting with eight teams, all aligned to an existing men's AFL team. The first game of AFLW was held in Melbourne on February the 3rd, 2017 between old rivals Carlton and Collingwood. Around 27,500 fans attended the match with an additional 2,000 fans outside the main gate, unable to get in. The ground was packed and there was great excitement for this historic day in women's football.

I can remember seeing this game on television and thinking to myself that it had all the passion and excitement of a typical AFL men's match. The players were obviously proud and excited to be playing in this first top-level game of AFLW. The pace of the game was exceptional. Players seemed to be supercharged as they went for the ball and tackled opposing

players. The intensity and the furious pace of the game was a credit to every player on the field. The huge crowd which packed the stadium were clapping, cheering very loudly and barracking for their team at the top of their voices. I was amazed at the way in which the players went for the ball. They were so determined to win every contest against their opponent. Furthermore, their ball-handling skills were impressive, specifically their kicking, hand-balling and marking skills. It was great to watch.

One particular aspect which I enjoyed was the way the members of each team celebrated after the scoring of each goal. Goal scorers leapt high into the air and punched their fist in triumph. Their team mates rushed in to hug them and congratulate them. This sort of passion and team spirit is a feature of AFL, and to my eye perhaps even more so in AFLW. It was a joy to watch.

By 2022, the AFLW competition had grown from 8 to 18 teams, so that there is one women's AFLW team to match every men's AFL team. Aligning the teams from both competitions in this way makes a lot of sense. Each AFL team already has a strong following of fans and also a strong club organisation with excellent facilities, which each AFLW team can immediately benefit from. Importantly, some of the AFL fans will decide to be active followers of their club's AFLW team.

One of the challenges facing the AFLW is the scheduling of the games. Australian rules football is not a sport that can be played easily in the summer. The summer weather is often too hot for playing such a vigorous game as Australian rules football. Many players could not last playing a whole game in such heat. Added to that is the need to minimize, where possible, any timetabling clash with the men's AFL competition. The men's competition goes for 25 weeks for the home and away season (March to August), followed by 4 additional weeks for the finals and the Grand Final in

September. The women's competition goes for 10 weeks of the home and away season (September to October) followed by 4 weeks for the finals and Grand Final (in November). This arrangement, while not perfect for the AFLW competition, minimizes the timetabling clash and allows fans to attend both the men's and women's competitions if they so wish.

The AFLW is still a very young competition and I think it is progressing well. Obviously, the AFLW crowds are not as big as the AFL crowds. However, I think that is to be expected.

The men's competition has a long history starting in the 1850s and is massively popular and central to Australian sporting culture. For example, in 2024, the average AFL attendance was 38,344 fans per game, with a maximum of 100,013 fans at the Grand Final. That's impressive! By contrast, in 2024, the average AFLW attendance was 2,692 fans per game, with a maximum of 12,122 at the Grand Final. So, you can see that it is early days for the development of the women's game. However, I don't think that attendance numbers are the critical thing at this early stage. What's important is that Australian women now have the chance to enjoy playing the game they love at the top national level. I think the future is bright for AFLW and women's football in Australia.

(For a simple explanation of the AFLW rules, see this link. <https://www.superprof.com.au/blog/aflw-rules/>)

If you have a question or comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 161 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

[Start quiz](#)

Vocabulary

- Play align = (here) to put together
- Play arrangements = how things are set up or organised, as agreed by all people involved
- Play attendance = (here) the number of fans who go to a game as a member of the crowd
- Play barracking = to cheer for your team
- Play celebrated = to join with others and be happy about something
- Play central to = when something is very important to a group of people
- Play clash = when two steps, activities or arrangements do not go well together
- Play competition = a contest or game between people or teams, where each is trying to win
- Play congratulate = to tell or show someone they have done a great job
- Play contest = (here) when one player tries to beat another player
- Play continue = to keep doing something

- Play created = made
- Play credit = (here) the praise you give someone if they do something really well
- Play critical = important
- Play crowds = a large group of people together, such as those watching a football game
- Play enthusiastic = to be positive about something, to really want to do something
- Play established = when something is first created or set up
- Play exceptional = of a very high standard, high quality
- Play exhibition = when you show or demonstrate something to other people (usually not part of a competition)
- Play female = the opposite of man
- Play furious pace = a very fast pace
- Play historic = will or has a special place in history, because it is important
- Play home and away = (here) when each team in a competition plays each other team
- Play intensity = how strong an action is, e.g. strong intensity, weak intensity
- Play junior = typically means children under 18
- Play massively = in a very large amount
- Play minimize = to reduce
- Play national = when it applies to the whole country or nation

- Play obviously = when something can be easily seen or understood
- Play opponent = the person you are playing against in a contest or game
- Play pace = how fast or slow something is done. E.g. done at a slow pace
- Play packed = (here) full
- Play progressing = when something is developing well, improving
- Play proposed = made a suggestion, put forward an idea
- Play published = when text information (e.g. book, magazine, article, podcast, etc) is made available to the public
- Play rivals = people or teams who often compete with one another
- Play role models = someone that other people respect and admire
- Play running = (here) controlling, managing, organizing, operating
- Play scheduling = planning how many things can be done together
- Play senior = typically means adults 18 or over
- Play supporters = people who are the fans of a particular team
- Play tackled = when you grab another player in a ball game to stop him/her
- Play team spirit = when members of a team enjoy being in the team and all want to win

- Play triumph = the feeling of being a winner
- Play unique = when something is unlike anything else
- Play volunteers = people who do a job but are not paid