



Professional Learning
Research
Innovation

Learning in Practice

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About the Barker Institute:

- Provides a centre for research, reflective practice, professional learning and innovation in education
- Is a resource hub that facilitates the ongoing development of learning for teachers, allowing them to stay abreast of emerging practice, constantly striving to refine the quality of teaching and learning
- Looks to develop collaborative ventures with other institutions and providers, initiating research and innovation combined with the implementation of new projects and programs for the benefit of students, staff and the broader community
- Shares current research and issues with parents, professional bodies and educators around the globe through ongoing symposia, forums, lectures and conferences

About the Learning in Practice Journal:

As a leader in Christian education, Barker College aims to both demonstrate and inform best practice. This journal was developed to showcase a range of initiatives and research projects from across the School. It explains the rationale behind innovations in practice and archives pivotal developments in Barker's academic, co-curricular and pastoral realms.

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Alison Cox is Currently Director of Girls' Sport. Within this role, she has had the opportunity to influence a change in the perception of Girls' Sport not only for the Barker girls, but also the broader Barker community. Alison has a clear passion for the promotion and development of schoolgirls' sport and her ability to do this at multiple levels is evident in her appointment to a variety of administrative positions across the ISA and NSW CIS representative sporting pathways.

Barker Girls' Rugby Sevens Trial: Breaking Stereotypes



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Abstract

The inclusion of Rugby Sevens in the 2016 Rio Olympics combined with the Australian Women's team achieving the coveted gold medal has been instrumental in significantly increasing exposure, and hence interest in, Rugby Sevens participation. However, the social acceptance of girls being involved in full contact sport is still developing. Injuries will remain the number one concern with a lower tolerance within the community to see girls with "traditional contact injuries" such as concussions and broken noses. Barker, in conjunction with NSW Rugby, conducted a trial competition for girls in Term 1, 2017. The program was thoroughly enjoyed by students and resulted in substantial media coverage identifying Barker as leading the way in this developing sport. Despite the positivity around the trial, it is also important to analyse all aspects of the program – in particular the injury risks.

Background

In 2016, Rugby NSW approached Barker to be part of a Rugby Sevens Pilot program involving the hosting of an Inaugural Schoolgirls Rugby Sevens Competition. On the back of Olympic success and increasing interest in the sport, Barker jumped at the opportunity to be involved in this developing sport. Prior to being involved, students were required to participate in either 5 development sessions run throughout Term 4, or a Development Day held in the January holidays to ensure all students had the minimum necessary skills for safe participation. These sessions were conducted by Rugby NSW with a total of 37 students participating in the development sessions.

For Barker students, Rugby Sevens was an additional sports choice meaning that they had to participate in their chosen summer sport and then commit to 2 additional trainings and weekly fixture. Despite this, 26 students selected to continue with the sport throughout Term 1, leading to the development of two Barker Rugby Sevens Teams (Red and Blue).

A development competition was established, with 6 teams from Barker, St Ives High, William Clarke College and Gordon Rugby Club. The competition was run concurrently with the Barker Invitational Touch Football Comp run on Friday evenings with each team participating in 2 × 14 minute games (7 min halves). Referees were supplied by Rugby NSW.

Despite a significant amount of wet weather, all teams participated enthusiastically in the competition. Barker Blue showed great dominance against more experienced teams finishing 3rd overall in the tight competition. The Barker Red Team had a stellar debut, remaining undefeated throughout the season. The grand final was played on Number 1 Oval, with Barker Red securing the first Rugby Sevens Premiership against Gordon narrowly 2-1. Fox Sports was also there to film the event with a 5 minute segment being run on the national "Kick & Chase" program.

Future of Women's Rugby Sevens



After a 92 year absence, Rugby was reintroduced into the Summer Olympic Games in Rio 2016. The combined new sevens format and Olympic inclusion has seen a substantial increase in participation numbers worldwide. The World Rugby Sevens Series allows for a professional pathway for athletes (male and female) and has also been adopted as part of the USA College program and in 2017 a national Australian university women's competition will also be established. The Australian women claiming the inaugural Gold Medal has also ensured maximum media coverage for the sport leading to increased awareness and appreciation of the skills required for participation.

Sevens is still in its infancy and The HSBC Future of Rugby Report (Curry & Warwick 2016), highlights that Women's Rugby is the fastest growing sport in the world. It is estimated that in 2026, approximately 40% of Rugby players worldwide will be female (leading to approximately 6 million female players worldwide).

Locally, women's participation has increased by approximately 1/3 from 2015 to 2016. Most Rugby clubs now run a separate sevens program with many clubs having Junior girls teams (U10-U18) involved in the "sizzling sevens", a Saturday evening competition run by Sydney Junior Rugby Union throughout the year. It should be noted that most Rugby is often played co-ed up until U12 with a gender split for U14-U18.

Injury surveillance

The biggest concern with Rugby participation is the higher injury risk from being involved in a contact sport. Currently, there is not a lot of data around for the injury incidence rates of sevens competition, particularly for school-aged athletes. Cruz-Ferreira et al (2017) and Gabb et al (2014) both found that injury incidence in sevens was higher than those reported for 15-a-side variant. It should be noted that muscle-tendon injuries were significantly higher possibly due to the greater speed of play leading to increased energy transfer during tackles and more running and turning manoeuvres that can possibly cause more severe injuries.

Interestingly, Peck et al (2013) found that males had a 30% higher injury rate than females in Rugby. Females had higher rates of lower limb injuries and were 8 times more likely to suffer a serious injury, particularly non-contact ACL injuries however this is consistent with other sports such as Football and Netball.

Rizi et al (2017) looked at injury incidence for Rugby Sevens university players identifying 59.3 injuries per 1000 player hours and noting that hip flexor tightness, speed and agility were important components with slower and less agile players 2-3.5 times more likely to sustain a serious injury. Tackling is obviously the primary source of injury and although the injury rate is considerably high, it should be noted that schoolboy injuries in 15-a-side game occur at 16 per 1,000 playing hours compared with 43 per 1,000 playing hours at the elite level. It would be anticipated that based on those predictions, we would expect the incidence for Sevens to sit around 18 injuries which is comparable to Football on 18 injuries per 1000 players hours but higher than Netball and Basketball on 14 per 1000 player hours.

In terms of the Barker Sevens Program injury surveillance, although injury incidence was similar when number of participants were taken into account – Sevens injuries were predominantly Head/neck injuries and of greater severity when compared to Touch Football. As a contact sport vs non-contact sport this would not come as a surprise.

In comparison to other Barker Sports, Rugby 15s has a 3 fold risk of injury when compared to Basketball however similar incidence of injury when compared to Football. Being noncontact does not eliminate the risk of injury although does tend to reduce the severity risk of the injury, particularly in regards to head injuries. It should also be noted that cross field games are also likely to have higher injury rates than full field games – once again linked to the higher number of tackles occurring in a game.

Sport	# Injuries	Severity of Injury		
		Low	Moderate	High
Sevens	3	1	1	1
Touch	7	5	2	0

Low = First Aid
 Mod = Hospital
 High = Ambulance

Sport	Injury Site				
	Ankle/Foot	Knee/Hip	Upper Limb	Face	Head/Neck
Sevens	0	0	0	2	1
Touch	1	2	0	0	4

Changing nature of female sport

There is no denying that women’s sport has come a long way in the last 10 years. The unprecedented rise in the popularity of women’s sport in the last 12 months particularly has given women’s sport a huge boost at both a national and international level.

Increased professionalism, media coverage and sponsorship dollars have resulted in sport now being a feasible career choice for women. Traditional gender stereotypes have been smashed with the introduction of the Women’s Big Bash, AFL and Rugby Sevens competitions.

Unfortunately, there remains an underlying social bias against females playing contact sports. Perceptions that females are fragile or inferior lead to increased sensitivity around injury rates. However, female contact sport is pushing the boundaries and providing an environment where gender norms and accepted conceptions of masculinity and femininity can be renegotiated.

Our students will take inspiration from the determination and dedication of female athletes. It is important that as these athletes inspire the next generation of girls to participate in sports, Barker also needs to continue to challenge barriers which exist in society and demonstrate that girls can excel in any manner of activities if only given an opportunity. Traditionally, male dominated sports such as Rugby Sevens do empower our girls and give an undeniable self-confidence and respect from the majority of the male members of the community.

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