

INCLUSION & GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH SOFTBALL

IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS

1. Offering multisport programmes for the younger age groups has the benefit of increasing the rate of participation, as well as of developing the participants into complete athletes.
2. When teaching any sport skill, better results are attained if this is done in progression with one drill building on the previous one. Coaches should employ different drills to practice the same skill. Incorporating fun games helps to keep practices fresh and interesting for the players.
3. The psychological aspect of playing should be given as much importance as the physical aspect, as often enhancing core human characteristics such as self-confidence, can help athletes achieve their full potential.
4. More importance should be allotted to the administration of clubs. A more professional approach would help the growth of the sport.
5. Personnel shortages are hampering growth. The efforts to encourage volunteering should be intensified and taken more seriously.
6. Clubs should be geared to identify and take advantage of local, regional, national and EU funding opportunities. More importance should also be given to fund raising activities.
7. Coaches, clubs, associations and federations should periodically make a self-assessment to determine if there are processes, procedures, approaches, methodologies or policies within their organisation which hamper gender equality.
8. Policy makers need to be made aware that their decisions related to projects or policies, might have a negative impact on gender equality. They should consider the gender equality implications during the decision making process.
9. Although the drive for improving gender equality should not leave anyone out, the efforts should focus on the younger segment of the population who are more open minded, and have not as yet been saddled by the local perceptions, traditions and cultures which tend to propagate gender imbalances.
10. Sport has been proven as the best way to reduce gender inequality in society. Sport, especially softball, is empowering, and girls who grow up participating in sports tend to develop qualities such as self-confidence, resilience, motivation, determination, and leadership, which, once they grow up, put them in a better position to face, and successfully overcome, barriers which limit women in achieving their career objectives, whether these are sport, or work related.
11. Apathy begets gender imbalances. The apathy which surrounds female sports is not only rendering the efforts to reduce the prevailing gender imbalances in sports ineffective, but it is making them worse. In most cases, female sports have become a participation sport rather than a spectator sport. This scenario is hampering the growth of such sports.
12. For a sustainable reduction in the gender imbalances in sports, there need to be an increase in attendances at competitions involving female athletes. Once attendances become significant, the media would be more inclined to cover these events as there would be interest from the general public. Better media coverage would generate more interest from participants to play the sport and from the public to follow it. There would also be interest from corporate sponsors to fund the growth of the sport. By filling the stands with spectators, gender equality in sports will be achieved.

13. We need to generate interest from the relatives and friends of those associated with female athletes. The general apathy towards female sports can be overcome by increasing awareness, making people conscious that by attending games they would be helping improve gender equality in sports.
14. Clubs should occasionally replace a practice session for the younger age groups with an activity that involves having the players on the stands to watch the senior team of their club compete. This would (a) help to build a culture of attending softball games with the younger members of the club; (b) get them to learn from watching games; and (c) make it more attractive for others to attend. The activity could be (i) lunch at the game, (ii) to work on the songs of the team, (iii) lessons on how to score a game, or (iv) a team building activity. If this takes place once a month, and if parents are encouraged to accompany their children, it would have a positive impact on attendances.
15. Support from policy makers renders the efforts to reduce gender inequalities more effective. The government needs to step in especially where significant capital investments, such as the construction of sport-specific facilities, are required.

IGETS is a two-year project co-financed by the European Union. The Ġhajnsielem Redcoats received assistance from the Ministry of Education and Employment through the Parliamentary Secretary for Youth, Sport & Voluntary Organisations to meet its co-financing obligations.

Disclaimer: This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

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