

Sports Geek Nation AMA with Sophie Moore

Sophie Moore is a sports advocate and one of the most active Sports Geek Nation members in the Slack community.

Sophie was an athlete and technical official in her youth, contributing to her local communities after a career ending injury through coaching elite high school and university softball programs.

Sophie then went on to working on the business side of sports as the National Program Manager for Softball Australia to develop and implement the Sport Australia \$110M 'Sporting Schools National Grant Program' where she created, developed and implemented a program for schools and external stakeholders by utilising the Softball Australia endorsed Softball Batter Up program, along with contributing to the "School Yard to Sports Star" series to encourage junior participation and promote hero series for future Olympians.

While with Softball Australia, Sophie also became a part of the ACT Softball family as their Association Coordinator which allowed her to witness the nuances first hand of grass-roots and state based organisations, governance, athlete and technical development, event management, fundraising and volunteer activities just to name a few.

Though she has currently taken a break from work, her passion for sports still continue whatever industry she may be in.

Connect with Sophie Moore on [LinkedIn](#) and Slack [@sophiemoore](#)

Here's the full transcript:

Links to names will link you into Slack community, if you are not a member [please sign up here](#).

Q. [seancallanan](#): @sophiemoore can you please tell us how you got into sports business and some of the challenges you have faced over the years?

A. [sophiemoore](#):

Hi Sean & SportsGeek Nation,
I'm honoured to be a guest on the #ama channel.

From the age of 4 I was involved in local and state based Softball in NSW, Australia. Working my way up from T-ball into [Mod-ball](#) all the way into the Fastpitch format of Softball, I was dedicated to being a part of a team and putting my best foot forward on and off the field.

I wanted to be informed and have as many tools in my tool-belt at my disposal as possible therefore, I took it upon myself at the age of 12 to start the process of becoming an Umpire & Coach.

Going through my technical training I noted that I had many challenges ahead. I was short (4"0' at 12 yo), young, and female. I learned quickly to be confident in my calls, have the security of my knowledge to back up myself, and have high conduct standards from myself and those around me.

As I got older the game got faster and more complex, taking me around the state exposing me to different cultures and attitudes towards the game and sport in general. There were moments good and bad on and off the field that made me a stronger player, umpire and coach for myself and my teams.

In 2005 I set myself the goal of making it into the Australian Open Women's Softball Team for qualification into the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics. I pushed myself harder than I ever had before, unfortunately I hurt myself with a career ending injury which I have never fully recovered.

In 2015 I relocated to Melbourne, VIC – and was given the opportunity to work with Softball Australia as the National Program Manager for the Australian Sports Commission [Sporting Schools Program](#). The program was in its second school term funding period, with schools, the national sports commission and sporting organisations still learning the ropes. This \$110M funding grant allowed/allows schools to fund programs up to \$3,800 AUD per school term, for a maximum 3 terms a year.

Due to a lack of resources, awareness of the program and it's requirements, the program had become a little bit of a wild west. Softball was competing with 31 other National Sporting Organisations for the opportunity work with schools and create the best program for their individual needs. My time with Softball Australia ended in January 2018 however I am so proud of the program that was created with resources and options still available to schools and coaches to this day.

@seancallanan Hmmmmm, challenges. Well, where to begin!

I believe that there is a lot of misconception around sport, women & diversity in sport, and 'smaller sports' in the industry. I have found that finances, school and family awareness, as well as a lack of organisational workforce are the biggest challenges facing sport today.

An industry largely resourced by volunteers requires a lot of training, patience, and open dialogue. I have seen misrepresentation, underpaid workforce, discrimination, harassment, assault, bullying, and on many occasions program initiatives unfortunately affected by the above over multiple sporting codes.

I believe that sport at grass-roots is not at the forefront of the industry and that is a huge oversight. These are the people paying membership fees, stuck in traffic and taking the journey for training and games, fundraising for their communities, paying out of their own pockets to represent their state or country in the thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars annually, buying tickets in the stands and monthly subscriptions, purchasing merchandise and promoting franchises, all while creating the future talent of sport. Attitudes and culture need to change.

Q. [dgmackay](#): with your experience in officiating, what do you see as the key opportunities to make officiating more attractive as a pursuit or career?

A. [sophiemoore](#): Hi [@dgmackay](#), officiating is a tough one.

Something I would do (as an example) is have a 'get to know the ump' for the T20 BBL as they do with the players! Humanising them and making them a part of the game, possibly with them being mic'd up with a bit of conversation with commentators on why the umpire called that last ball a 'no ball' etc. during the game as to educate the young spectators and back up their statements without ridicule or defiance. Also for a bit of 'chat' :wink:

We are already seeing messaging towards 'let the kids play' which is a massive step in right direction.

The amount of negative feedback from players, coaches, parents and commentators towards individuals during game play has made the field under resourced and difficult to recruit.

Higher penalties for breaching code-of-conduct by all participants should also be taken into consideration, with more protections for officials. Games that require 3+ officials on the field are only being manned by 1 which causes tension, lack of corroboration of incidents and 'calls' made, creating toxic and inhospitable environments. Adult men and women approaching young trainees, verbally & physically abusing them for what they believe to be 'the wrong call' is completely unacceptable however is considered the norm at your local court and oval.

Creating a coach, umpire/referee, and statistician athlete pathway program as a part of player development from the age of 12+ creates a culture of understanding and respect, with more opportunities for athletes to continue to be a part of the game after their 'playing years' are complete, teaching others - while being accredited to do so - passing on their skillset. This pathway program should be only made mandatory for those at an Association Representative level as part of player development and optional for others.

This would mean that players will know the rules and how to use them to their advantage, analyse team and personal performance from reading the scorebook, breaking down technique and work with teammates to develop skills, develop strategy, assess opponent movements and learn how to interact with all levels of hierarchy.

Offering officiating as a way to participate in sport can also be a way for those that are not as interested in the physical component of sport to be a part of a team and community. I understand that we need more coaches and that sporting organisations are really placing a focus on this, however there is not much of a focus on the umpire and statistician which we also need for sport to occur.

All technical development in my opinion should not be at a cost to the individual, especially when most volunteer their time. Making these training resources free, part of a participation packages and easily accessible; would be very attractive to volunteers and those seeking upskilling.

Q. [joliegee](#): @sophiemoore having worked with young athletes, what are the challenges and opportunities do you see to help them become professional athletes in the future?

A. [sophiemoore](#): Hi @joliegee, young athletes are vital to sport surviving at grassroots all the way up to Olympic glory.

The challenges are not easy to fix but I believe that they are able to be improved with funding and education. As discussed with [@Ben Tripodi \(Lumin Sports Technology\)](#) during his hosted #ama, there is a massive gap in the education and training of athletes in remote communities, or just not in areas with accessibility to coaches and facilities that are creating a disadvantage to athletes and their potential to excel.

I believe talent scouting could be a way to potentially see what we are missing out on, working with communities and their councils to identify facilities and leadership to help achieve sporting goals.

Teachers are also required to complete units of professional development as part of their upskilling, this creates opportunity for face-to-face training and conversations directly to the source. Upskilling teachers with programs that align with their curriculum in junior school, while giving them the training to teach technique and understand the game rules and format allows for gameplay and safe teaching.

An example of school based program is the 'Softball Batter Up' (SBU) program created in alignment with the National Physical Education Curriculum in coordination with Sport Australia, being utilised currently as the Softball Australia endorsed participation program for Sporting Schools. Go to www.softballbatterup.com.au and register for free to access all of these resources.

Softball Australia has made this a hard copy as well as a free online resource for teachers and coaches as an entry into softball. These skills based activities each have their own 'card' with information on skills used, curriculum alignment, equipment required, questions to ask the participants etc. (**See below images of A5 card 'Gorri'**).

Online there are also videos of each activity so that teachers and coaches can see how the activity can be conducted, as well as pre-made lesson plans with 4-6 sessions each divided by grade groups. There is also the capacity to create your own lesson plan through the resources portal.

I like to call it 'Mr Miyagi style' softball. We are teaching them skills through game play that later will allow them to move and understand their softball specific training better. This kind of program is a non-scary easy option that creates inclusion, is cost effective, and gets kids active.

Front Of Card



Get into it
Gorri

Learning intention
Gorri is a target activity where the target moves. This requires a combination of throwing skills and anticipation.

3-4 **5-6** **Skill development**

Content description
ACPMP043, ACPMP061

Skill focus
Throwing, accuracy and teamwork

Equipment
1 large low impact ball or fit ball per group
1 soft core ball or bean bags per player



Back of Card

How to

1. A coach rolls the ball in front of the other players who attempt to hit the moving target with an overarm throw
2. Another player at the other end returns the ball to the roller while dispersed balls are gathered

Change it

Easier

- > Players throw or bounce the ball towards the target
- > Increase the size of the ball

Harder

- > Use a smaller target ball
- > Use a bigger playing area

Tips

- > Vary the speed of the roll
- > Use bean bags instead of balls to practise the pitching technique
- > Bouncing the target ball provides an interesting challenge

Safety

- > Make sure all players have thrown before the balls are collected.
Signal when it is safe to do so.

Questions

- > What rules can we use to make it easier?
- > What do you think is best, to play fast, or to time rolling the balls?
- > How can we change this activity?
- > What type of throw is the most accurate?



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Image credit: G. Robey Design

Lesson plan pre-made example [PDF download here](#)

Without going into too much detail, other challenges faced are;

- parents focusing more on studies and not a full-rounded education program
- cost of membership fees and levees creating unaffordable environments for families to participate
- lack of resources and education on healthy eating and lifestyle for high performance young athletes – sports nutrition needs to be affordable and accessible
- strength and conditioning to be age appropriate with education to trainers and coaches on safe practices
- coaching and officiating by uneducated persons/volunteers hinders development and will stunt the athletic growth of amazing talent
- lack of dialogue with athletes in a safe environment for bullying, harassment, assault and discussion is not great for mental stability and growth.
- lack of diverse sport options due to low resourcing and parents picking what they know, not trying something new.
- High School and Tertiary education sport models in Australia means we are ‘losing’ talent to US and other international opportunities during young years and into professional careers.

Opportunities!

- Girls make your move is a great initiative to get more girls and women playing sport and become more active. Spotlighting sports and activities that are less mainstream like hiking, rock-climbing, archery etc. is a great step forward. Before the age of 12 there are more girls playing sport than boys, however after the age of 12 the numbers drop dramatically. This needs to change to improve young women’s mental and physical health.
- College! As much as we hate to lose athletes in their prime, college scholarships are available for those that are interested. Companies such as NSR Australia work with athletes and their families to see what opportunities are out there for free or partially paid for education opportunities for sports based scholarships.
- Professional Leagues. There are so many!!! If your sport has paid opportunities outside of Australia then go for it! Don’t get me wrong, these are not some of the highest paid jobs out there, but they pay for you to do what you love.

And lastly..... community and skills.

More and more companies are looking for people who are ex-athletes as they understand that their ‘soft skills’ are ingrained in them. Strategic thinking, problem solving, conflict resolution, teamwork, training and development, stakeholder engagement etc. These skills are priceless and will do young athletes good during and after their active years. Athletes make great team players.

The friendships and relationships created in the sporting community are priceless and can last a lifetime. There are men and women still playing sport or playing for the first time with local modified versions of the game, and masters tournaments which can take them all over the world! Being a social team or more competitive doesn't matter.

Sport isn't just a hobby, it's a way of life.

Q. dgmackay: @sophiemoore what are you doing now and what are your plans/hopes for the future in terms of your involvement in sport?

A. sophiemoore: Hi @dgmackay, I am currently looking for new opportunities while also offering my services for creation, development and implementation of participation programs as well as general sports consultation.

I have also recently started working on a project for transparency within the industry, for grants and resources as well as awareness and protections for members. Currently, I am coordinating with the Sport Australia Integrity Unit as well as Play by the Rules to ensure compatibility with current projects in place and in the pipeline.

My ideal future for my personal involvement in sport is to make sport an inclusive, safe, affordable and accessible for everyone.

What is Sports Geek Nation?

Been forwarded this from a colleague? That's great we love seeing our members get credit for sharing their knowledge. Sports Geek Nation is a curated sports business community in Slack and Facebook which will help you learn from the very best in the world. Sports Geek Nation was founded by Sean Callanan in 2015 (as #SportsBiz Slack), it connects sports executives who work in digital, data and technology.

Sports Geek Nation has members from (in alphabetical order) Australia, Canada, Denmark, India, Lithuania, New Zealand, Sweden, United Kingdom and United States working in sports such as basketball, football, ice hockey, baseball, AFL, horse racing, golf, rugby league, netball and more.

You can join Sports Geek Nation by going to SportsGeekNation.com