

# Faster, Stronger, Smarter

For girls, the benefits of playing sport go beyond physical fitness. A growing body of research suggests “physical literacy” contributes to a girl’s confidence, cognitive capabilities, and educational success.

Old Girl Adeleine Watson (Class of 2020) remembers her first basketball game for Somerville House with a smile. “I signed up late, I didn’t even know what basketball was, and my friend was explaining the rules to me on the bus,” she said. “Sport at Somerville was very focused on community and camaraderie; there was so much fun and laughter.”

Over her years at school, Adeleine participated in six of the twenty sports on offer: Athletics, Basketball, Cricket, Cross Country and Gymnastics, eventually focusing on Volleyball and excelling. A Sports Captain in Year 12, she captained the Opens

Team and was awarded a scholarship to the Queensland Academy of Sport Volleyball program.

While her sporting achievements are impressive, Adeleine proves girls can combine high levels of sports involvement with academic excellence. Both Dux and Valedictorian of her year, Adeleine is now studying an integrated Bachelor and Masters of Engineering at UQ, and was awarded a prestigious Liveris scholarship.

“Sport definitely complemented my study,” Adeleine said. “In Years 11 and 12 it becomes a juggling act because you have more commitment

to study, but it gave me excellent time management skills. After school I had to fit in two hours of training, then allocate time for schoolwork, then fun and relaxing. Being able to use time effectively is an asset I will draw upon for the rest of my life.”

School Captain, Hannah Syme (Class of 2004), a high academic achiever, a Rower - stroking the 1st Eight to victory in 2003 and to a National Championship podium in 2004, is a UQ Law graduate and an admitted solicitor. Hannah has worked for the past eight years at PricewaterhouseCoopers and is now a Director in their legal team. Hannah credits the discipline she gained from her involvement in elite sport as vital to her academic and professional success.

Old Girl and rower Jennifer Gilbert (Class of 2004) agrees that sport can lead to academic success. With a Masters of Sports Coaching from UQ, Jennifer has coached at both grassroots and elite rowing programs in Australia and the US, where she now lives. She’s keen to dispel the misconception that sport and academic achievement are mutually exclusive.

“Many parents discourage their child from doing multiple or heavy commitment sports because of the cumulative commitment – the number of training sessions per week; weekend fixtures; camps or competition during school holidays” Jennifer said.

“They may think their child could not achieve a near perfect ATAR if they did sport, especially during Year 11 and 12. However, in my experience, many who go on to study Medicine, Law, IT or Engineering either participated in multiple sports, or a sport with a heavy commitment while at school. Participation in even a single sport can add tremendous value to an individual’s personal and professional growth.”

International research backs this up. A recent global survey of twenty two top female entrepreneurs by consultancy firm EY found many attribute their success to the skills they learned as athletes. These include focus under pressure, singlemindedness, passion, leadership, resilience and facing their fears.

“I loved the adrenaline rush of being a little bit scared while standing on the blocks,” one media executive and former Olympic swimmer told EY. “A lot of people run away from the fear and excitement of trying something new, but I run towards it.”

These life skills and character traits are not confined to elite athletes. Research by Sport Australia finds girls who play sport at any level report increased levels of physical and mental wellbeing.

This is in sharp contrast to the many girls who give “poor body image” or “not wanting to be looked at” as reasons for not participating. Ironically, playing sport can combat these negative feelings and improve self-confidence.

This rings true for Head of the AFL in Queensland Trish Squires, a Somerville parent and member of the Somerville House School Council who’s evangelical about sports’ benefits – be it at the elite or community level.

“Our research found girls involved in physical activity have higher levels of confidence and self-esteem. This is one

of the biggest benefits to girls who play sport, and it translates to other aspects of their lives,” Trish said. “I loved playing sport as a young girl for exactly that reason – the confidence it gave me.”

As a sports administrator in a traditionally male-dominated field, Trish jokes that she has broken through the ‘grass ceiling’, but she is not alone. As AFL grows in popularity, more women are coming through the ranks as administrators, coaches, volunteers and players.

She is particularly pleased Somerville girls are playing AFL in the new Queensland Girls’ Secondary Schools Sport Association (QGSSSA) competition introduced this year.

“Team sport, where you learn leadership skills and how to work as a team – is particularly powerful, whether you become a professional athlete or not. These skills are transferrable irrespective of which career you choose.

“I think I learned a lot about leadership through sport. At an early age I was captain of my netball team, and I coached my younger brother’s basketball team. I think that sort of involvement helps you develop as a person.”

As a member of the School Council, Trish is excited about the School’s multi-million dollar investment to develop SomerFields, which will prove an invaluable asset for the School community.

“Every school needs first class offerings around sport, because there are so many physical and emotional benefits for girls, on top of the leadership and teamwork skills that can be applied everyday,” Trish said.

“SomerFields, a state-of-the-art facility, will give the School a point of difference – a place where the girls can go specifically to play sport and where parents, especially fathers, can become involved in their daughters’ competitive and athletic development. With the

Brisbane Olympics in 2032, sport is going to become a real focus for the city in the lead up to the world’s largest and most prestigious sporting event.”

While Trish agrees that not everyone will become a professional athlete or make it to the Olympics, she believes what girls learn from sport will make SomerFields an invaluable part of a Somerville education.

It was certainly integral to Adeleine Watson’s experience. Looking back on training competitively at the School, Adeleine appreciates the close and enduring friendships that she made during those years, and hopes to encourage girls who don’t consider themselves ‘sporty’ to forget ideas of perfection.

“We’re growing up with a lot of social media with altered images of perfect women and I think a lot of girls feel that pressure to be perfect. But for me, sport isn’t about being perfect. It’s about creating that environment where you feel comfortable making mistakes and being yourself.

“Joining a team or taking up a new sport is about seeing yourself grow and improve from wherever you start,” she said. ‘A lot of things in life you just have to do, even if you don’t think you’re the best at it. And it’s not about being perfect – it’s about giving it a go.”

To learn more about the Foundation, Somerfields or about various initiatives please get in touch with

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## Foundation Funded Capital Project Timeline:



1992 to 1996  
The Murray Evans Sports and Aquatic Centre



1999  
Valmai Pidgeon Performing Arts Complex (VPAC)



1997 to 2005  
The Chambers, purchase and refurbishment



2009  
The Ness Goodwin Building



2017  
The Bauer Building



2018  
Seymour Library refurbishment



2019  
Cumbooquepa Stained Glass restoration



2021  
A Block Heritage Heart restoration



2022  
SomerFields



2025  
Senior Precinct