

PROTECTING THE VALUES AND BENEFITS OF REGIONAL INTER-ASSOCIATION BASKETBALL

The Objects of Basketball Victoria include ITEM 2:1(f) "provide individuals with opportunity to maximize their potential by competing at the highest level of basketball possible, given their own ability".

One aspect of this is to provide the most talented athletes in the state with specialised training (ITC and at their association), regular and intensive competition, and the chance to represent their state. It is widely recognised that as far as feasible the players just below that level should be provided with similar opportunities through the VJBL competition and high standard team and individual coaching at association level.

At the other end of the spectrum it involves a responsibility to help all young players to gain instruction in basic skills, and to receive encouraging coaching. Without this many potentially very strong players will not even reach the level from which they can aspire to be among the most talented. Of course many of these participants will never aspire to improve, and will seek competitions which are more "fun" and orientated to the immediate pleasures of participation. We have a responsibility to these players as well.

There is one more crucial category of basketball participants; those who aspire to improve and stretch their ability, but who do not belong to the two highest levels of athleticism. Many young people aged 13 to 19 understand they are unlikely to ever make elite ranks, but are very serious about improving so that they can reach the next level, and also because they want to make a significant contribution to their team. This is a group we can win or lose in their early teens.

Fortunately in Melbourne we have the lower levels of Metro and Regional competitions for such players. They flock to participate in spite of the costs, the travel, the training commitment and the ten month involvement, especially in the Under 14 & 16 age groups.

What does this involvement offer over and above domestic?

Firstly, selection sends a message to a participant that he or she is being taken seriously in terms of his or her efforts and aspirations. That alone can stimulate greater striving, more conscientious training, and in turn, much improved performance.

Secondly, the variety of opposition, the freshness of the opposition, and the depth and generally finely tuned grading of the competitions provides interest for motivation.

Thirdly, the coaching overall is more ordered, sustained and a higher quality on average than that received in domestic competition, and sometimes it is outstanding.

Fourthly, the players are more likely to be surrounded by team mates with similar aspirations than in their local club.

Finally the length of the grading plus championship phase gives more time for a stimulating "team experience" to develop.

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Such has been our success that I believe many of our higher regional team (6th to 8th Divisions) could compete reasonably with the lower Division 2 & Upper Division 3 in nearly all other states.

A lot of participants gain sense of competence, achievement and belonging that they would have missed otherwise, and every now and again a late developer, through the opportunity provided, reaches the ranks of the outstanding athletes.

Please do not under-estimate the skills and dedication of the players in this category. Compared with those in the elite, usually they cannot run as fast, jump as high, make strong skip passes or shoot as well at medium and long range. But they are capable of amazing acts of quick thinking, courage and dedication. I have coached at this level for over thirty years, and I continue to admire the creative passes, the effort to cut off offensive transition, the one percenters and the skillful offensive moves that these players, in the opposition and my own teams display in even the lower grades of regional. These players often have a more consistent work ethic and learning ability than the talented cream of the state.

There are a few domestic clubs and a scattering of individual domestic teams in various clubs, who through sustained membership, good coaching, keen parents and participation in tournaments, approximate to the experience provided by championship/representative involvement. It is not widespread and is hard to sustain.

I hope we will continue to treasure the opportunities provided by the depth of Metro and Regional basketball, and adopt policies which will support its strength.

There is "natural tendency" for the opportunities of these middle level achievement oriented players to be relegated to marginal consideration. A higher percentage of the most talented player's parents become involved in decision-making. The prestige of the top competitions absorbs a lot of attention of those in control of the sport. Some decision makers do not believe we should provide the extended competition opportunities we provide at present.

There is great value if Regional basketball which is the main provider of these opportunities, has operational autonomy and an independent voice to represent the interests of these participants.

Of course this level of competition must always remain articulated with the higher level, as it has been over the last thirty years. There can always be minor improvements in this articulation.

Fortunately Regional basketball has demonstrated a capacity to deliver excellent standards at very economical rates as there has been a large volunteer element

I hope all associations will consider these matters when exercising their rights of determining the structure and government of the competitions they own.

David Hickman

(If anyone is interested I have wrote another paper on Aspirations and Ability in Junior Basketball. Happy to send a copy).