



# **Bannockburn RFC**

**The importance of male advocacy in  
growing the Women's and Girl's Game**

# The importance of male advocacy in growing the Women's and Girl's Game

## Introduction

In 2020, Bannockburn RFC made the decision to create a Women's Rugby Team, followed in 2021 with the decision to create an U13 Girls Team. Since 2020 we have seen our Women's Player base grow to over 40, with 21 players representing the club in at least one fixture in the 2022/23 season and 14 players playing in at least 5 games. Our U13 Girl's section is about to grow into double figures in its first year from the 2 x U13 Girls which is began with.

This presentation will show the importance of male advocacy in empowering female leaders and growing the Women's game through 3 key areas we defined as the 3Ps:

1. **Presentation** as a driver of success.
2. **Policy** as a structure.
3. **Perseverance**. Equity over Equality.

## Presentation as a Driver of Success

At the beginning of our Women's and Girl's game journey, we felt it important to set out our criteria for success. We discussed what 'good' looked like, what 'great' looked like but overall, what 'success' would look like, and agreed that **growth of the female player base**, would be our key measure of success. To achieve this, we had to put in the correct structure. It was important that we had the best person to deliver success, and as growth was our key criteria, **presenting a 'by women, for women' environment** was important to achieving this. We began by recruiting two female coaches for the Women's team, spending time to support them with senior coaches until they were ready to take on the role independently. In addition to 'on field' representation, we believed it was important to have more female representation in our committee with a view to have 50/50 parity men/women in the committee to **present** a balanced and inclusive club to new players and staff. As noted by the numbers provided earlier, this has been a huge success with over 40 women registered with the club and heading into the 2023/24 season, we have a 70:30 split in our executive committee women over men, with senior roles such as president, secretary and treasurer held by women. Following this success, we have also implemented this approach in our U13 section with women leading young women, employing a female coach to lead the U13 Girls team.

This application of **policy as a structure** has helped us lift up and **present** our female leaders to the world.

## Policy as a Structure

In addition to having a policy of actively recruiting women coaches for the Women's and Girl's teams, we felt it was important to provide representation at the committee level to attract female talent and show empower female leaders. Similar to our success criteria of growth in the female player base, we selected a success criteria of 50:50 parity men:women across the committee. To achieve this, we one of the policies we created was the alternating of the President role between Male and Female incumbents. This was for two reasons. The first is that the 'top job' in the club would alternate between men and women to **present** the parity to which the club was striving and secondly, present to the world our inclusivity. This has (in my opinion) had a significant impact in creating and surpassing our target of 50:50 parity of men and women in the committee with 5 of the 7 roles on the executive committee being held by women going into the 2023/24 season.

Yet these policies have not been without their challenges, especially around promoting **equity over equality**.

## Perseverance: Equity over Equality

To grow our Women's and Girl's section we decided to actively employ **Equity over Equality**. This saw us putting arguably more effort, resource and time into the Women's and Girls section in their early years. Unfortunately, had the perception of reducing the time and effort which used to be directly apportioned to the men's team. I would argue that this was not the case, but it was the perception, nevertheless. This was not without its challenges. There were several occasions where dissent was voiced from members of both the player base and committee about the amount of time and effort being afforded to the Women's section specifically.

To resolve this, we listened to the concerns of the individuals and where possible, accommodated their concerns. However, there was an occasion where the opportunity for the women to **present** themselves to the sponsors became available at a Men's game and the decision was made that the women would be showcased at the event also. Although some of the men believed this was incorrect, it provided the opportunity to show the sponsorship group the inclusivity of the club which was particularly important with 5 of the visiting sponsors being women. Although this did create some friction, we do believe that this helped secure some key sponsors for the club.

It is important to realise therefore that in the early stages of growth, there needs to be **equity over equality**. As noted previously, we strive to achieve 50:50 parity across the club to give true **equality** in the future, but we must invest in **equity** in the short term to achieve this, and it is important that this is **advocated** by the more developed elements (in this case the Men's section) to raise up the less developed (the Women's team).

## Male advocacy across the 3Ps.

In the case of Bannockburn RFC, it is important to recognise the important role Male advocacy has had across the 3Ps and the success of the Women's section. In 2020, the club was all male. In 2023, we have a committee which is female dominated and a player base which is reaching 50:50 parity (currently at 36:64). Without the buy in of those male committee members in the early days to not only accept, but actively advocate for the women's and girls' team, we would have been unlikely to **present ourselves as an inclusive club** to the world. Without the backing of the male members, we would have been unlikely to create **policies to promote inclusivity** such as alternating Presidents, but most importantly was creating an understanding of the importance of **Equity over Equality**.

Most successful of all with regards to male advocacy has been the touchline support for the women's game. Perhaps the simplest form of Male advocacy has been that Women's home games are well supported by the Men's section, and we have on occasion had travelling support for Women's games also. But we still have work to do. I believe that we can state that we have been successful over the last two years, but we must not be complacent and continue to work hard to maintain this over the next 5 years whilst we build a player pathway for female rugby players U13-Adult.

## Recommendations and next steps

The 3Ps provided us a philosophy on which to grow the women's and girl's game at Bannockburn, underpinned by male advocacy to empower our female leaders.

My challenge to you is to think and discuss the 3Ps of **Presentation, Policy and Perseverance** and how you could apply them to your club to help grow the women's game. I would also challenge you to think how males within your club advocate the women's game. Do they support games? Do they support women on social media etc.

## Resources and Further Reading

You can read more about our work in the women's and girl's game, and about all the other good work we are doing at Bannockburn RFC via our website at: <https://bannockburnrugby.co.uk/>