

A whole NEW ballgame

THE TEAM BEHIND THE TEAM ...
HOW THIS SPORT-LOVING DAD ENDED
UP COACHING TEENS IN THE SPORT
UNIFYING GIRLS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.

Words Carmel Sparke Photography Frances Andrijich

Before his first game as coach of his daughter's under-10s netball team, Wayne Price experienced worse pre-match nerves than if he was playing in a footy grand final.

This sport-loving WA dad had played in, and trained, plenty of basketball and AFL teams, but he was anxious about his first gig as a netball coach.

"I was so nervous... I was scared I was going to make a mistake and of what the parents would think, especially as I didn't know half the rules. They love their netball down here," he says.

Happily, they did win that game, and the team has grown into a group of young netball dynamos under Price's guidance, learning life-long skills and making firm friendships along the way.

STEPPING UP

His journey from parent to netball coach started in 2016. Price and his wife, Janis, had just moved 400km south from Geraldton to Perth with their four young children.

Initially, their eldest daughter, Tia, then aged 10, joined a netball team with girls of different skill levels. Price and a few other parents thought it would be a good idea to start a team with girls of the same experience to help them develop as netballers.

In the end, it was some of the mums who nudged him into coaching. ▶



Wayne Price says coaching his daughter's netball team is a rewarding experience.



fast fact

34,000

volunteers, including coaches, umpires and bench officials, support community netball players around Australia.

Source: Netball Australia

"That's how it started, I suppose – when they said, 'Well, why don't you step up and coach the kids – you seem to know a lot about sports'."

The parents gathered together a team to play in an off-season competition and he took on the role of coach.

Price admits it took a while to get the hang of the finer points of the rules, but he had a good background in sport.

"At the end of the day, you pass the ball down to the other end of the court and you score. You know that's what you have to do – that's how you win a game, and so that's what I went with."

MORE THAN TROPHIES

His approach must have worked, because the team won that first competition. Once it was finished, the girls wanted to keep playing together so they formed the Lightning Strikes, a tournament team for competitions all around the Perth region, as well as a club team for their local Saturday games.

At training, the team kept focusing on the basics – spending hours on drills to help with passing, dodging defenders, spreading out and moving into open space, and shifting the ball down the court quickly. And at tournaments the team kept winning, as well as blitzing its club-age competition.

"In the last three years, we've pretty much won all the tournaments around Perth. The kids have loved it and

it's been amazing seeing how much their skills have come on," enthuses Price.

Winning games and tournaments is one thing but, even more importantly, the girls have tested themselves and enjoyed being part of a team with their mates.

"The girls are so happy together. I wanted to give them something else to do besides hanging out at the shops or being on their iPads," Price says.

"When you get the girls down here at training, they absolutely love it and they're not bored. It keeps their minds busy and they're achieving amazing things, too."

FAMILY TEAM TACTICS

Life in the Price household is a blur of netball, AFL and basketball training sessions and competitions, with all four of the kids – Tia, 13; Tjay, 9; Grace, 8; and Levi, 7 – playing sport.

Price, 36, only just gave up playing basketball last year, and also coaches his sons' basketball and AFL teams.

Running his own carpet-cleaning business has helped with the juggle to collect kids from school and fit in coaching sessions and sport drop-offs, but it's still a challenge to stay on top of it all.

"There's a lot of work involved but it's so rewarding to see their faces at the end of a game. My daughter loves me coaching, and we always get comments from other girls, like, 'I wish my dad coached [us]!'."

SOURCES: NETBALL AUSTRALIA; AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION'S AUSPLAY

Price is known for being more vocal than some of the other coaches, and the other parents thank him often for all the time and energy he's devoted to their kids' sport. But he never imagined a sideline chat would evolve into a big commitment to an activity he saw as a one-season experience.

"The parents convinced me to keep going with it because they were really happy with the training the kids were getting," he says.

GAME ON

Three years on from that first game, the team is now 13 players strong and has become a formidable side, winning 27 out of the 30 tournaments it has entered.

They've recently joined the Fury Netball Club, which has given the team the chance to play older girls to provide them with stronger competition on the court.

The girls are also sporting brand-new uniforms thanks to a local sponsor's generosity. "We'd go to tournaments and we'd be winning them, but [the team] didn't look the part," Price says. "They'd rock up wearing t-shirts and a pair of shorts and they didn't have any [team] dresses that stood out."



I wanted to give them something else to do besides being on their iPads."

fast fact

Netball is the most popular team sport for girls in Australia.

Source: Australian Sports Commission's AusPlay research

It's been a huge time commitment and, occasionally, on a wet, cold and early morning sideline, Price has wondered what he's doing on a netball court. But he says he's gained a lot from coaching, having seen the team improve and achieve so much. And the girls have got a lot out of the sport.

It comes down to "being part of a team and having a group of friends that they can hang out with, and hopefully be lifelong friends with, and an experience they'll remember for the rest of their lives".

UNSUNG HEROES

Price goes above and beyond for his daughter and community. But he's not the only one – in netball teams across the country, players might be the stars of the show, but they need the support of thousands of volunteers.

As Vicki Newby, president of the Parramatta Auburn Netball Association NSW, points out, "If we didn't have volunteers, we wouldn't have a competition".

Every week, her association's 400 registered players are supported by dozens of people who turn up to coach, umpire and run the canteen and competition.

"It's getting harder to find volunteers but I do it because I like the sport, the people involved, the friendships, and it's good to see kids doing something healthy," Newby says.

Newby has held roles on the executive committee for the past 22 years.

"We've probably got five people who have been there for over 30 years; probably two closer to 40 years," she says. "If you're coaching kids and seeing them achieve something and improve, you can get a lot out of that. It's very rewarding."

HCF recently announced a partnership with Netball Australia and is supporting the game from grassroots to elite levels. This partnership expands HCF's involvement in netball beyond its existing partner relationship with Suncorp Super Netball team, GIANTS Netball.

HCF CEO & Managing Director, Sheena Jack, is delighted that HCF is partnering with an organisation that shares so many of its own core values.

"We are two organisations that put the health and wellbeing of our members first. Together, we look forward to expanding our support for the netball family, who are the backbone of this unique and caring sporting community." 🏐



Whether you want to play netball, volunteer or coach, find a netball team near you at netball.com.au

