

## Robyn Shrestha (Doyle)

1978-81



It was a grey winter's morning when my sister Jenny and I arrived at Beischer Oval. We exchanged dubious glances as we reluctantly left the warmth of my car.

Did we really want to do this? Sunday mornings in winter were for staying cocooned in our beds for an extra hour or two followed by hearty breakfasts with hands wrapped around steaming mugs of hot choc. We'd never played before or even watched any games, not even on tv. We didn't know any of the players and I'm not even sure now who had asked us to make up the numbers for the BCAE Women's soccer team. They were short of players and without us, they'd have to forfeit. Just this once right(?), and all we had to do was stand on the field and make up the numbers.

With fingers and toes turning numb from the cold we soon discovered jumping up and down and running around a little was warmer than just standing around. We both played competition basketball so really this wasn't too different except you used your feet not your hands to pass the ball, and there were a few more players on the field. For the next 90 minutes, we ran up and down the field. If we got anywhere near the ball we'd attempt a clumsy kick vaguely in the direction of whoever the player was who kept yelling at us to give her the ball. It was all a bit of a kick and a giggle and we had no intentions of becoming regular team members. Someone suggested we might want to get some proper soccer boots before the next game so yeah, we did, and we turned up every Sunday morning for the rest of the season and every season after that until I swapped my soccer boots for hiking boots in 1984 and set off to climb mountains in far-flung corners of the world. Jenny kept playing for a few years after that but for a different team after the BCAE team folded.

Jenny was always a better player than me. She won the Bendigo Women's League Best and Fairest Award on more than one occasion and was even selected to represent Victoria in the state 5-aside competition. During our time

playing together for BCAE, we honed our skills by training with the men's team, which now when I think about it, must have been really annoying for them but it paid off for us. I've got a swag of trophies tucked away somewhere in a box.

The BCAE Women's team regularly won the league championships and 5-aside championships and we both played representative soccer for Bendigo as well. I also took up coaching and in addition to coaching the team I played for I also coached my younger brother's U/16 high school team for two seasons. They never lost a match and some of those players, including my brother Chris, moved up to play in the BCAE men's teams. I coached the Bendigo U/16 boy's rep team too, and I got involved in the administration of the game, becoming a committee member for the Bendigo Junior League and the Bendigo Women's League. My time as the President of the Bendigo Women's League earned me my nomination as a Life Member and that is something I'm immensely proud of.

By default, I'm now a life member of the Victorian Football Association. They send me two season passes every year for matches in Melbourne but I live on the NSW south coast and don't use them so if anyone lives in Melbourne and wants to use them I'd be happy to forward them on to them.

My son played junior soccer for a while. His coach wasn't very good and the competition was poorly run but I resisted the temptation to take over coaching his team or get involved in the league administration. I didn't have time but I did get involved through business sponsorship and even after my son stopped playing soccer (he preferred tennis) I still continued to sponsor junior soccer teams because I remember how hard it can be for sporting teams to attract sponsorship.

Now as I settle into the autumn years of my life, I'm not sure if the twinge in my knee is from playing soccer all those years ago or from falling down too many mountains. Maybe it's simply old age catching up with me. The most competitive thing I do these days is beat my husband at a game of backgammon but I do still like to keep fit and we're planning another epic trip to Nepal. Maybe just to sit back and look at the mountains, not climb them. We'll see.