

History of the VCTA

When the Victorian Calisthenic Teachers' Association was formed in November 1958, it was the first such association in the sport in the State, even though Victorian Calisthenics dates back to at least the 1870s. The VCTA formed in time to cope with the "post-war baby boom", the huge rise in the number of young girls born after World War II, and then the second wave of "baby boomer" daughters peaking in the mid-1980s – the two waves of great growth in Australian calisthenics. The VCTA has been a potent force in Victorian calisthenics in many ways.

Competitions

That the VCTA was formed at all was the result of real difficulties teachers were having with the competition scene in Victoria. No two competitions had the same rules, so that even age cut-off dates for pupils in the various age-groups differed.

The most serious problem was with the Royal South Street Society competitions at Ballarat, since State Teams from South Australia were entered against Club teams from Victoria. Victorian teachers argued that State teams had the benefit of drawing from the best girls and teachers in the South Australian clubs. The resources of small Victorian clubs could not compare with those supporting South Australian State Teams. The VCTA soon established common rules and guidelines for local competitions, but never managed to swing the RSSS to their view about State teams. From 1959 to 1963, the VCTA entered Victorian clubs in the Novice section of the Ballarat competitions as the Victorian Combined Team, and all their points were combined to give Victoria aggregates. But in 1963, RSSS refused to aggregate their points, and Victoria's teachers could not bring themselves to boycott Australia's premier competition to bring pressure to bear on the RSSS Committee. In 1981, a later generation of teachers again proposed a boycott, but again the will was not there to carry the threat through.

However, the VCTA had considerable impact on all competitions in Victoria. Their annual consultations with the RSSS Committee and other competition committees enabled many changes to be implemented in the organization of competitions. Common age groups for pupils and pupil registration, the length of items, safety issues, rules for teachers and performers when at competitions, the scheduling of a competition season so clashes between competition dates were minimized, the timing of items, were all deeply influenced by the input of the VCTA.

In 1966, the VCTA created its own Melbourne Competition, which soon became "the" Melbourne competition. Run by volunteers from the membership, the VCTA comp. became a source of innovations. New gradings of teams were developed which eventually were adopted by other competitions. A panel of three adjudicators was introduced. By 1982, 82 clubs competed in 5 Ballarat team

grades and 5 non-Ballararat team grades. The competition continued to flourish until it was passed to Calisthenic Victoria Incorporated in the early 1990s.

The evolution of calisthenic items

The VCTA has constantly examined the work its members teach. It was the VCTA which was the sounding board for huge changes in items.

- In the 1960s, the introduction into Free Exercises of challenging gymnastic movements such as splits and walkovers
- In 1961, the change in name of “Plastic Exercises” to “Aesthetic Exercises” to reflect an evolution of the item
- The gradual extension of items such as March and Aesthetics to younger age groups
- The dropping of apparatus such as Dumbbells, Hoops and Flags, and the retention of Clubs and Rods, as calisthenic items
- The rotation of fancy items, and the creation of new forms of Spectacular items

The creation of Pupils Skills identification and testing programs

The work of Enid Feltham and Diane Synnott for the VCTA in defining calisthenic movements in each of the disciplines led to the publication of *The Handbook of Basic Calisthenics* in 1979. From this key work, Diane went on to identify the sequential development of pupil skills, and thus a testing program. In 1980, 210 girls took their first skills test, run by the VCTA. This was the basis of Australia-wide standardizing of calisthenics skills. The Pupil Skills program was handed to the Australian Society of Calisthenics in 1982. The Australian Calisthenic Federation founded in 1989 now conducts testing.

The training and development of teachers

This was from the start a major focus. Teachers were provided with lectures on body mechanics and physiology and master classes in each of the calisthenic disciplines from experts from within and outside calisthenics. Older teachers mentored the younger.

However, the coming of the Pupil Skills Program prompted the creation of a matching Teacher Training Program, launched in 1982, a systematic approach to teacher development. As with Pupil Skills, this program was later taken over by the ACF.

Marketing and Publicity

The first VCTA Publicity Officer was appointed in 1965. Calisthenic performers thereafter appeared in all sorts of festivals such as the Moomba Parade, the Melbourne Show, the opening of the Great Southern Stand of the MCG 1992, football finals and other great sporting events etc. A “Miss Calisthenics” was chosen at the Annual Dinner Dance, and frequently went on to take the title of “Miss Sportsgirl” during the 1960s to the 1980s. Annual gala concerts in aid of

Prince Henry's Hospital and other charities raised thousands of dollars from 1965 into the 1980s.

The creation of the first association of adjudicators

It was the VCTA that first set up an Adjudicators' Panel in 1972, since adjudicators came from the ranks of teachers. From that beginning, the organization gradually evolved away from the VCTA into the Australian Society of Calisthenic Adjudicators.

Key Facts

The Victorian Calisthenic Teachers' Association changed its name to the Victorian Calisthenic Coaches' Association in 2000, to bring it into line with other government-supported sports.

Membership

1959 -45
1976 -242
1985 -302
1994 -nearly 500
2007 -660, including cadets

Long-standing Office Holders

Miss Vera Hopton BEM	President 1958 – 1975
Margaret Lingham	President 1976 – 1988
Gwenda Lucas	Secretary 1975 – 1988, President 1992 - 1995
Bronwyn Lloyd	Secretary 1989 – 1992, Vice President 1993 – 1995, President 1996 – 2001