

The pioneering female footballers of Queenstown and Gormy

If you obey all the rules you miss all of the fun

The following story was written and illustrated by Christine Wilson a Queenstown based artist/photographer/adventurer.

“If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun.” Katharine Hepburn. Beth Fagan (nee Schulze) is still pondering how she was talked out of playing for Gormanston back in 1953. Women’s football was played on the West Coast well before many other locations and it seems the footy was not much different to the men’s game.

A report in the Examiner newspaper in July 1953 read ‘Before one of the largest crowds ever seen on the Queenstown recreation ground, a match between married women and single girls was played on Saturday. The football displayed by some of the women would put many a man to shame, their marking and kicking and play-on style bringing great applause from the large crowd. But the superior stamina of the married women proved too much for the single girls, who nevertheless played the game right out. Final scores were Married Women 8-7; Single Girls, 3.7.’

The Mercury newspaper reported that on September 26th 1953 Queenstown defeated Gormanston 13:20 to 8:22 and in the last quarter two opposing players came to blows which is probably not all that surprising given the intense rivalry that existed between the two towns over a long period.

Those contacted who played at the time have fond memories of the games. Mary Bryan (Dunlop) played for Gormy and remembered the game well as much for the gravel rash on her knees that later became infected than the 5-goal drubbing. Beth Fagan (Schulze) was selected in the Gormanston side whilst still a student at St Joseph’s Senior Girls School and it was suggested to her by the head nun that it would not be appropriate for a Convent girl to play football – she dutifully withdrew from the team - and Clare Burton (White) recalls with pride being named in the best players upholding the Burton/White footballing reputation.



Fig 7.7 Queenstown Single Ladies early 1950's; Moira Duggan, Gloria Tiddy, Mary Callow, Judith Luke, Nancy Gray, Laura Ingles, Kath Mahar, Elsie Armstrong, Margaret Davis, Dawn Hampton, Jenny Joseph, Janice Burns, Lee Jackson, Kath McCrorie, Kath Williams, Gail Shaw, Judy Smith, Gloria Smith

The games were played independently of the men's roster to raise money for charity and often attracted large crowds. The number of cars in the background of the above photograph and the number of spectators on the railway line on Scotchman's Hill suggests a large crowd.

In conjunction with the game in July 1953 there was a charity wheelbarrow race from Gormanston to the Queenstown recreation ground (about 6km.). The race was won by Norm Cook and David Peres-Stevens in 34 minutes 20 seconds, representing the Gaiety Hotel. Geoffrey Blainey the Journeyman Historian and T. Enright were unplaced representing Kelly's Hotel.

After each of the ladies games the players carried the umpire from the ground and dumped him into nearby Conglomerate Creek – in July!