

Girls Smash

Otago Cricket
2016 - 2021



GIRLS SMASH: OTAGO CRICKET

Girls Smash is a modified, girls-only cricket programme for years 3 - 6 (going to year 8 in some areas) developed by Otago Cricket in 2016.



- 40-minute session, once a week. Short and action packed.
- Five weeks duration
- 6 a-side, 12 overs, bat in pairs, everyone bowls (or throws) one over, soft ball
- No cost to play, and each girl receives a free t-shirt
- No cricket experience or equipment needed. Everything is provided
- Delivered in one location in each DA – all girls come together
- Music, fun, festival-type atmosphere
- Quality outfield and family friendly viewing where possible
- Come along, have fun, go home – great for both girls and parents
- Delivered in each region across the MA – full commitment

THE OPPORTUNITY

The 2014/15 playing census identified there were only two junior girls-only team across the entire MA. Otago Cricket acknowledged they needed a new plan. They developed a strategy of targeted growth and developed a pathway map, specifically identifying what opportunities exist for females to play with, and against, other females.

'We needed to develop a plan. There's a void that needed to be filled'

Jess Davidson, Otago Cricket:
Cricket Development Officer

The Community Development Officers (CDOs) brainstormed ideas for a suitable cricket product which aligned with both their female strategy and the national cricket programme at the time. Girls Smash was born.

YOU'VE GOT TO START SOMEWHERE

Girls Smash was initially planned to start in Dunedin term 4 2016. However, there was little interest. The plan was reviewed, and it was identified term 1 was a better fit (around other sports and activities). Further work was also undertaken in schools to generate interest and raise awareness of the programme. In term 1 2017, Girls Smash was officially underway.



WHITE FERN & Otago Spark,
Suzie Bates signing autographs

A sponsor was secured (SBS Bank), which ensured the programme would be free for all girls, and everyone would also receive a free t-shirt. Promotional posters were created and the programme was actively promoted on Otago Cricket's social media, utilising local WHITE FERNS such as Suzie Bates and Leigh Kasperek.

As demand has grown, new locations have been added, Smiths City has been secured as the new sponsor and Girls Smash is now offered in both term 1 and term 4 each year.

'When you start these programmes, often the consensus is they can't happen....we're not a big district...we can't get girls along.

But we had some really good success. That's through enthusiasm and setting that festival atmosphere over five weeks'

Sam Bastin, Otago Country Cricket: Cricket Development Officer

GENERATE DEMAND

Targeted school visits were carried out to a broad range of schools across each DA – not just schools that were already engaged in cricket.

- Discussions with teachers to outline what Girls Smash was
- Promotional posters provided to schools
- Tasters sessions offered, to give the girls a sample of Girls Smash
- A sample of the free t-shirt shown to the girls which generated excitement
- Sign-up sheet for girls that were interested



'Knock down the resistance barriers'

Sam Bastin, Otago Country Cricket: Cricket Development Officer

The sign-up sheet was critical – CDOs were then able to go back to the teacher and the school to show how many girls were interested. This eliminated feedback from dis-engaged teachers that 'no girls want to join' – as the CDO had a list of names and already started the work on behalf of the teacher. With only six girls needed for a team, CDOs were making it as easy as possible for schools, and girls, to get involved.

No girl was turned away, with girls able to register as an individual if their school did not have enough players for a full team. This saw the creation of several combined school teams such as 'The Allstars' and 'Super Six' which allowed girls to play, and form friendships with, those from other schools.

IT'S GOT TO BE FUN. GIRLS ONLY!

Girls enjoy playing with girls, and against other girls. They are with their friends and having fun. Being held in one, central location enables girls to see other girls playing and having fun, which is a big part of 'normalising' cricket involvement for young females.

With all the girls wearing their free Girls Smash t-shirt, it also creates a fun vibe - they easily recognize each other, and it becomes an 'equalizer', as everyone is the same.

Rules and the technical aspects of cricket aren't important at Girls Smash – girls can bowl by throwing if they like. Skill development occurs through playing and though assistance from the Games Leaders, rather than drills and activities.

Game Leaders also have an impact on the experience for each girl – they are young female leaders (normally Years 9-13) who umpire and control each game, providing encouragement and assistance with helpful tips to the girls as they play.

Its important Girls Smash is a fun and easy experience for parents and teachers as well. Keeping the time to 40 minutes, starting straight after school and always at the same location helps make it an easy commitment for parents. It's important that parents and teachers also understand the philosophy of the programme – which is focused on fun, and not technical skills training.

BUILD ATMOSPHERE

Having Girls Smash based in one, central location has been critical to building an atmosphere and the success of the programme. It's optimal to use locations where several pitches can be setup on the same field is optimal. Having all girls, Game Leaders, parents, teachers and supporters together creates a lively, energetic and fun atmosphere every week.

'They've created their own identity now. They call themselves the 'Girl Smashers'
Jess Davidson, Otago Cricket: Cricket Development Officer

Large, branded tear drop flags were produced – these were great for creating brand awareness and help players and spectators locate the Girls Smash pitches each week.

The girls have an action-packed experience and leave looking forward to coming back the next week. Key to the experience of Girls Smash is music being played around the ground. Otago Cricket



Girls Smash Festival - The University of Otago Oval

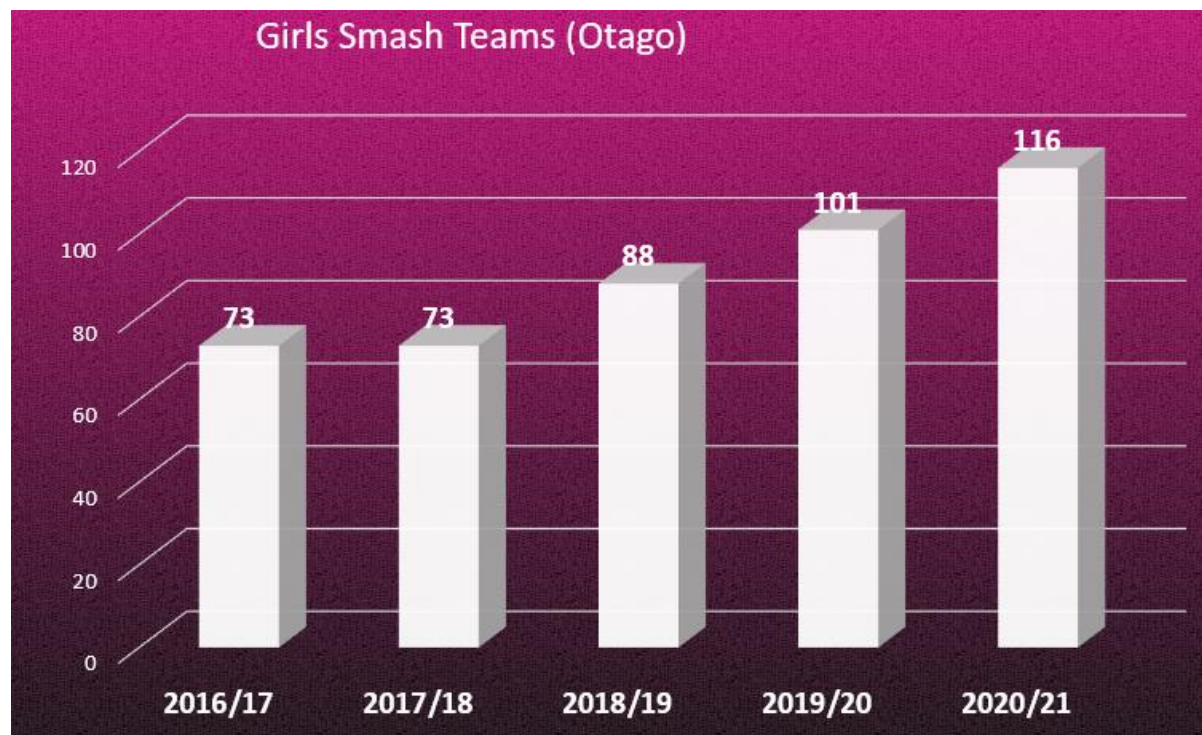
invested in high-quality speaker systems – which has resulted in girls dancing while they field, and occasional cartwheel and handstand competitions have proven a huge hit!

The last week of Girls Smash is accompanied by a festival-type evening which includes a family BBQ, lolly scramble, face painting, Otago Sparks player appearances and giveaways. This is a great way to end the season on a high, leaving the girls excited about coming back next term.

Continuity of DA staff is also a key factor. The experience gained from being involved in Girls Smash each season is difficult to replicate.

RESULTS SO FAR...

Participation has grown steadily over the past five seasons across Otago, to peak at 116 teams in the recent 2020/21 season.



Worth noting, that in the seasons where a DA has seen a decrease in participation, this has coincided with a change in DA staff. Illustrating further the importance of staff continuity.

It is also worth noting that before the 2016/17 season, there was no alternative programme that junior girls' teams were involved in. So the vast majority of the x73 teams that joined in the 2016/17 season were completely new to cricket. This represents a *real* (and significant) increase in participation – not simply girls switching from other cricket programmes or teams to Girls Smash. This was one of the key objectives of the strategy Otago Cricket developed in 2016.

Key Programme Adaptations

- Creating '**Girls Smash Plus**' – targeted at girls who have attended Girls Smash for a couple of school terms and introduce them to more traditional cricket elements. Such as introducing boundaries (not simply hit and run), wooden bats and gloves but still using the soft-ball.
- '**Skill of the week**' – starting each Girls Smash session with a quick 10minute skill focus, practicing one new skill each week. This is delivered by the game leaders prior to the game.
- **Game Leader Courses** – Providing online training (via Friendly manager) and a practical session for game leaders. This ensures they feel supported and equipped to deal with different situations during games.
- **Girls Smash Festival** – Finishing the last week of each programme by bringing Girls Smash and other female cricket programmes such as Yeah! Girls together into one location. This creates a fun festival atmosphere and shows girls options to continue participating once they are too old for Girls Smash.
- **Girls Smash Merchandise** – Girls Smash branded sunglasses and lip balms have been designed as giveaways for participants. Additionally, Girls Smash branded bucket hats can be purchased and worn by participants, helping further stretch the reach of the brand.



Girls Smash Participant – Renee Petrie, Age 10

As well as the increase in participation in Girls Smash, participation has also increased in other aspects of junior and youth female cricket over the same time period.

Greater number of females attending Otago Cricket's soft ball holiday programmes

51% increase in females registered for junior club cricket from 2017/18 to 2018/19. Participation has held steady since 2018/19.

In Oamaru, an increase in participation at the Valley Sports Club as seen the creation of x2 female only teams for the first time – participating in the intermediate and youth grades. This has created a genuine girls-only participation pathway in the rural Otago town.

Dunedin's mid-week Secondary School girls-only hard ball competition doubled from x6 teams to x12 teams within two seasons. This has seen the implementation of two pools in the competition.

In 2015, Otago had only one DA team (Otago Country) represented in the South Island Primary School Girls Tournament. In 2022, there were 6 teams from the Otago region that attended the same tournament.

In Dunedin's mid-week Intermediate girls-only hard ball competition, registrations have increased:
2016/17: x4 teams
2017/18: x6 teams
2018/19: x8 teams
2019/20: x9 teams
Participation has held steady since 2019/20 2018/19.

OTHER BENEFITS

Alongside increased participation of junior girls, other benefits have also been experienced:

- Changing the way girls and their parents think about cricket – it can be short and fun
- Significant brand awareness around the region through girls wearing their free t-shirts
- Increase in young females engaging with cricket through the Otago Sparks and Volts games
- Development of the Game Leaders – empowering a group of young female cricket leaders to confidently facilitate games and be leaders within the sport and their community
- Knowledge sharing and connections with other sports – both football and rugby reached out to learn more about Girls Smash. Subsequent cross code, girls-only, have a go days have been delivered across Otago.
- Recipient of NZC's Female initiative Award in 2019
- The introduction of the Girls Smash programme into other associations in New Zealand such as Canterbury, Marlborough and Wellington.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The objective to continue to increase participation remains, however it is acknowledged that Otago Cricket's x4 DAs have a limited population and participation can only grow so much.

Enhancing and improving Girls Smash so that it continues to be an attractive product and engage girls to stay in cricket and transition into other programmes once they finish Girls Smash is of increasing importance.

Some of the key ideas for growth include:

- **Games Leader Development** – Continue to support and develop the game leaders by providing them with adequate training and a leadership programme.
- **Yeah! Girls** – Utilize NZ Cricket's Yeah Girls programme to develop 'Yeah Girls! Smash' a visible and obvious link for girls to move on to once they reach Year 7 or older.
- **Girls Smash cluster hubs** – Make the programme more accessible by offering additional locations where travel has been identified as a barrier.
- **Resource sharing** - Develop resources and share learnings across the network to make Girls Smash a nationwide programme.



Girls Smash Game Leaders - Dunedin

