

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER 2016

BALLARD, MS ABBIE

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:06): I rise to speak about a young gun footballer whose name is Abbie Ballard. She happens to live on a property next to us at Coomandook, and she is only 14 years old. With so many exciting opportunities arising in female football, it is great to see so many people taking part. Recently, the under-15 schoolgirls' state team returned home to South Australia after a week in Maroochydore competing at the School Sport Australia National Football Championships. The team had a great week both on and off the field, also seeing great individual success with two all-Australian selections.

One player in particular had an outstanding week gaining further accolades. Abbie Ballard was not only one of the two South Australian players selected as an all-Australian representative; she was also named runner-up player of the championships. Please keep in mind that Abbie's first appearance on the national stage was at Maroochydore. Abbie first came to the attention of the SANFL female talent and pathways manager when she attended the under-12 summer academy in 2011-12. She has continued her football at the Peake Football Club. That is where my boys play, and she is as good or better than anyone in the under-16 teams right throughout the Mallee League.

Last year, she rejoined the female talent pathway, representing West Adelaide in the SANFL Macca's Talent Shield. We all certainly look forward to following Abbie on her football journey for many years to come. With the talent player pathway taking shape with more opportunities than ever before, we hope to see more players follow in Abbie's footsteps by taking part in the various programs presented to female footballers.

I would certainly like to acknowledge the way Abbie approaches her football. When she is out on the field, she can give as much as she gets and, don't worry, the boys do not hold back because they know how skilled a footballer she is. She is a left-footer who can sneak around the packs. She is a good little rover who can drive forward and kick goals. Her brother Campbell kicked over 80 goals to be the leading goalkicker in the Mallee League this year, so the family are certainly formidable footballers, including her father, who recently turned 40 and only recently came back to playing football to bolster the reserves side at Peake.

I have watched Abbie flourish as a footballer out in the Mallee. The girls are allowed to play in the mixed football side in the under-16s as long as they qualify for that age group. Abbie is an absolute gun footballer. As I said, she can outplay and outfox pretty well everyone in the Mallee Football League. It is certainly good to see how well she did on the national stage at Maroochydore recently. I know she still plays in Adelaide at an elite level. We were talking about AFL women's teams earlier and I certainly think that in the not too distant future we will see Abbie on the national stage doing a great job representing not only the Peake football club but also our little town of Coomandook.

It is great to see girls who can do this and put all their ability into the sport they want to play. Not everyone wants to be a basketballer, a netballer or play some other sport. I think it is great that football has been able to embrace women in the mixed leagues and has allowed them to play at this young age so they can get their skills up and going. Into the future, I can see that Abbie Ballard's name will be up in lights. I would not be at all surprised—in fact, I think it is a certainty more than anything—if she is playing at the senior AFL level not too many years down the track.

