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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025: KITTY CHILLER (AUS)

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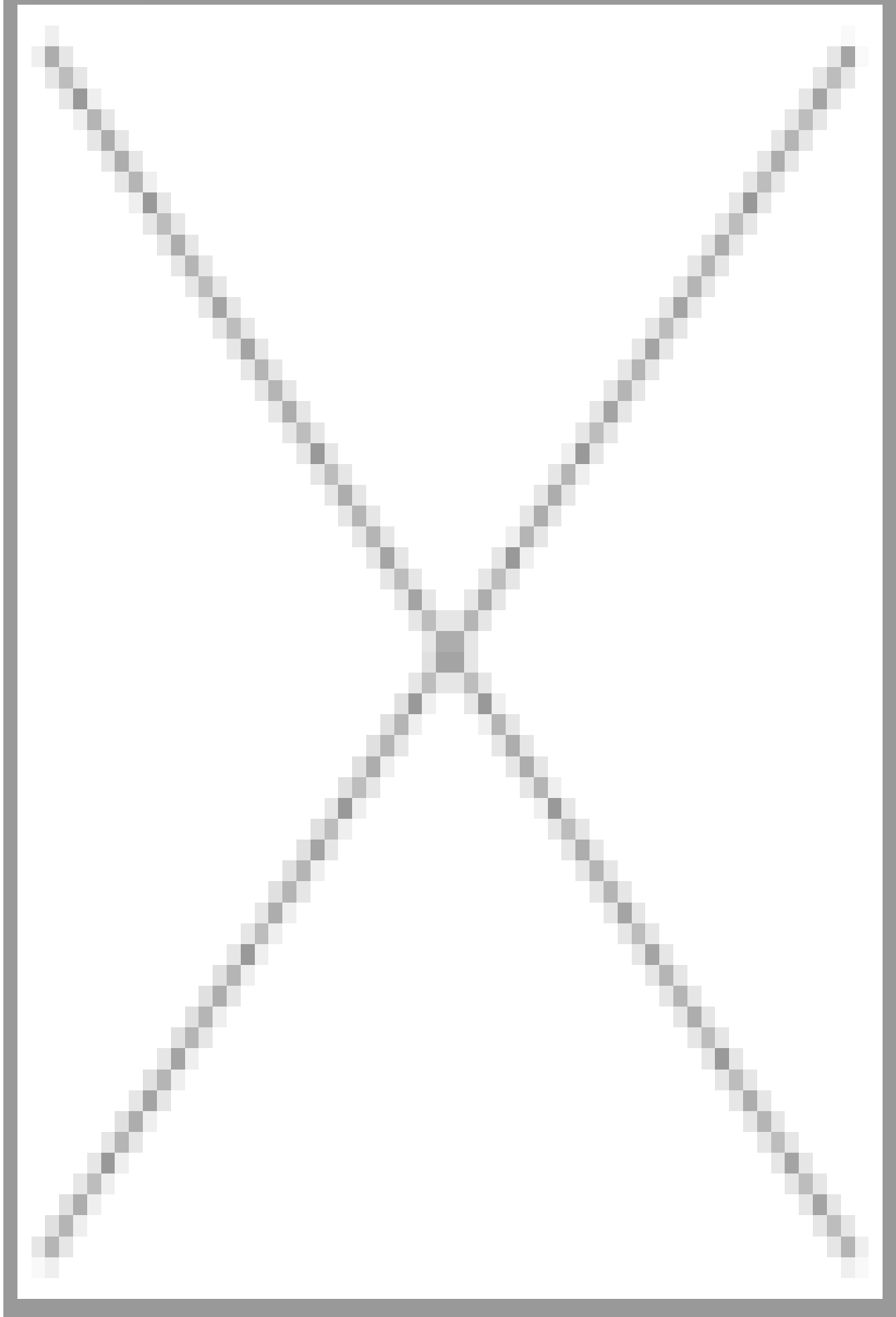


The International Olympic Committee's theme for International Women's Day 2025 is #SportForAllWomenAndGirls. Why is it important to provide equal opportunities for all women and girls in sports worldwide?

Participation in sport and physical activity should be a 'right' of everyone – regardless of gender or geography. The benefits of activity and movement have far-reaching effects on general and mental health, and for longevity.

Access to and involvement in sport can also enhance broader opportunities for women and girls – showcasing their abilities and promoting themselves as role models to encourage others to participate. Equality of access and opportunity is essential to place men and women on a level playing field in sport, and in life.

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Reflecting on your own time as an athlete, how far has the gender equality movement come

since then, and how far do we still have to go?

I started competing in Modern Pentathlon in 1982. At that stage it was an Olympic sport for men but not for women (one of the few Olympic sports that did not have both genders at the Games). It took 18 years for my Olympic dream to come true, when I was fortunate to compete at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 – the first time that female Modern Pentathlon was on the Olympic programme.

When we were finally admitted to the Olympic arena, the landscape improved considerably for female pentathletes, in respect of media and sponsorship opportunities. Now of course we have equal participation in the Games for men and women and equality of representation opportunity at all levels of the sport. This has been a much-needed and fantastic change.

As a sports leader, how much are you motivated to show other women and girls that there are pathways in this field?

There is a saying that “you cannot be what you cannot see”. I believe it is essential that not only is there equal representation on the field of play, but also that women are represented in leadership positions and have a say at the boardroom table.

Only then will we have an informed environment that encourages equality of access for all.

In 2013 I was appointed as Chef de Mission of the Australian Olympic team for Rio 2016 – the first time a female had been appointed to this role. Prior to that I was Deputy Chef de Mission for the Team in London 2012.

Currently Australia, one of the strongest Olympic nations, has female Chefs for both the Summer and Winter teams and also our Commonwealth Games team. We have come a long way in under a decade. Having females in these leadership positions shows others that it can be done.

What do you see as the main inequalities affecting women and girls in sport at the present time, either in your country or worldwide?

While there is now (very close to) equal representation on the field of play in most sports, and many national and international federations have quota requirements for leadership positions, one area where there is still a big imbalance is amongst the coaching ranks.

My country has made great inroads in equality of access and opportunity in recent times, but the balance in coaching still has a long way to go.

At the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, only 9% of accredited coaches in the Australian team were women. Tokyo 2020 saw a slight increase to 13%. At Paris 2024, the number was still under 20%.

Engendering an increase in the percentage of female coaches will only help in boosting female participation in sport. Ensuring flexible and supportive workplace environments for female coaches is key to boosting the number of female coaches, and in turn encouraging greater participation by women and girls.

Do you have any suggestions for policies or actions that might address these inequalities?

As I mentioned above, ensuring that women have equal opportunity to fill leadership and management positions is a much-needed step. Having females in these positions will ensure equal representation of contribution around the decision-making table, which will lead to more informed and equitable policies and practices.

Another key action required is equality of accessibility – in respect of female change rooms and facilities at sports grounds, and also programs to identify, develop and support female coaches.

About the author

Name: Kitty Chiller

UIPM position: Vice President

Other professional / elected positions:

- Australian Olympic Committee, Executive Member
- Strategic Adviser, National Sports Tribunal
- University Sport Australia, Advocacy Committee member

Biographical notes:

- Former President, Oceania Modern Pentathlon Confederation and Modern Pentathlon Australia
- Olympian, Sydney 2000
- Chef de Mission, Australian Olympic Team 2016 and Deputy Chef de Mission, 2012