

Defence force

When Dr Claire Lowy of Brandon Park Vet in Glen Waverley, Victoria, is umpiring a netball game, you play by the rules or suffer the consequences

"IT'S NOT UNCOMMON TO BE ON the receiving end of a bit of aggro when umpiring netball. I remember a mixed competition where one man wasn't a very good player. He was making contact and stepping so I kept pulling him up. Eventually, he just lost it. He stormed over and waved his fist in my face trying to intimidate me. I was only 18 at the time and, although I was terrified, I sent him off the court. As far as I know, he never played netball again. Some people just don't have the right temperament for the game.

"I had just turned 16 when I started umpiring. I saw an ad at an indoor sports centre and, even though I was barely old enough to be eligible, I applied and got the job. Back then it paid \$15 an hour which was a really good rate for a 16-year-old. The money allowed me to save for a car and pay the running costs right through university.

"I've been playing netball since I was 11 years old and been umpiring for about 10 years. At present, I'm playing with a mixed team in a local competition at Hawthorn. It's very social but once we get on the court, the team definitely becomes competitive.

"I've played in all-women teams but mixed netball is faster paced. Sad to say, but ladies netball tends to be more bitchy. On the other hand, when guys have been playing netball for a while, they can be like some female players in their fiery competitiveness. Mixed netball is more physical—you need a tough skin and take some knocks.

"I play once or twice a week. Not only is it a great sport but there's evidence it's good for fighting mental ageing. It engages a part of your brain that controls reflexes.

"I've been involved in all aspects of netball for 20 years now and I really like the focus that you have to bring to the game. You're competing against other people while constantly trying to improve, and your effort shows on the scoreboard. When I'm playing netball, I don't think about anything else." ➤

