



Going for goal ... men's teams play netball during a competition night at Lidcombe. Photo: Brendan Esposito

There is no skirting it, men love netball

Clare Barnes

IT IS Australia's most popular team sport for women, but now men's netball is catching on.

The number of men playing the sport in NSW has doubled over the past two years, with almost 80 per cent of players new arrivals to the game.

"I've been surprised with how much momentum the men's game has picked up in recent years," said Darren Kelly, the president of Men's and

Mixed Netball NSW. "There's plenty of new faces coming through and we've had to increase the number of teams for next year's competition."

Mr Kelly said there are about 5000 men playing netball across Australia, which is double the number three years ago.

Part of reason for the jump in numbers is the changing social expectations and awareness about men in the sport.

"When I first started playing in 1986 people would ask me if I

wear a skirt, but it's completely different now," Mr Kelly said.

The captain of the NSW men's open team, Daniel Sommer, said the growing popularity was also linked to the availability of mixed teams.

"Many guys start playing because they get dragged along to games with their girlfriends and friends and then realise they can play competitively in the men's teams."

Despite not having the same numbers as the women's com-

petition, Mr Kelly said the men's league is just as competitive as its female counterpart. "We'd give the Swifts a run for their money."

"I think many people are genuinely surprised with how skillful the men's game is, it's a real spectacle to watch," he said. "It's faster, more aerial and more athletic, but admittedly we do have some six and seven-foot players."

The sport also provides the opportunity to travel inter-

state, leaving many players with "PND".

"It's called post nationals depression, the come down after being away with teammates," Mr Kelly said.

The association is hoping the growing numbers will draw funding from the state government, which only supports the women's game. "It's all self-funded so even when I represent Australia overseas it's all out of my own pocket," Mr Sommer said.