



Steps towards reconciliation in community sport clubs

How to support athletes who transition out of sport

Parents - can't live with them, can't live without them!

PLUS

Sport-related Concussion: Why government should enter this field of play



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THE EDITOR

I'm now six months into my new role as Manager of Play by the Rules and I have to say it has flown by. I have met people from across Australia and from all walks of life, and have had the privilege of talking about diversity and inclusion in sport with so many amazing athletes, policy makers, club administrators, government employees, parents and general sports fans.

The one thing that I think connects everyone I have spoken to is their shared passion for sport and the amazing impact it can have on our community. So many people see sport as a way to enhance community spirit, create a welcoming environment and promote kindness and respect as key cornerstones of sport in Australia. I can't tell you how much that warms my heart.

Sport is almost like a common language that speaks to everyone who takes part. It's a shared experience that provides challenge, interest, excitement and fun to everyone who is involved. Any type of recreation can only be a good thing for humans, as the health benefits of moving our bodies in any way, shape or form are clear. Add in the social benefits of having a common purpose or goal and enjoying time spent with other people, and you can see why so many people love it so much.

It is also interesting to see what happens when that ability to move and spend shared time as part of a team is taken away—because of a pandemic, lockdowns or even an injury or issue which means you can no longer take part. Is it possible that you lose a small piece of your identity when you don't have access, even temporarily, to something you love? One of the articles we bring you this month looks at this issue and explores the mental health impact of a change in circumstance.

In general, the pandemic has been a period where mental health has been recognised as a more prevalent issue than ever before. So what can we all do? In the spirit of RUOK day, make sure you're checking in on your team-mates, family, friends and

neighbours. If sport is about community spirit, do we need to throw a ball to another human to keep that spirit alive, or is it something that exists no matter the environment?

Also, don't forget to rely on resources from professionals. There are so many amazing websites out there that can help anyone who is struggling. Some of our favourites are:

[*Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 | Crisis Support. Suicide Prevention*](#)

[*Welcome to ReachOut.com | ReachOut Australia*](#)

[*Resource library | Beyond Blue*](#)

And finally, even if you can't play yourself, you can still take part by encouraging others as a spectator or even a coach. The Olympics and the Paralympics were a long time coming, but they were so worth the wait. Watching so many incredible athletes come through such struggle to achieve so much was an incredible show of human strength, resilience and perseverance.

With the Brisbane 2032 Olympics ahead, there is so much great sport to look forward to, and the next generation of Olympians needs role models, mentors and guidance more than ever. If you haven't volunteered yet, is it time to sign up? And can you encourage all the parents at your club to use their power for good and become a mentor/role model for the youth members at your club? Read on to see how you can harness that power for the greater good.



Elaine Heaney
Manager, Play by the Rules

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and other First Nations people from around the world and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

2021 diversity & inclusion in sport FORUM

**OCTOBER 27, 2021
9:30AM - 1:00PM**

The 2021 event will focus on issues affecting Multicultural Youth and Indigenous Youth across Australia. Panels will discuss how we can build a brighter and better future for our future Olympians and Paralympians on the road to Brisbane 2032.

**Click here to
REGISTER**

The forum is FREE – but attendees are encouraged to instead make a contribution to charity to acknowledge the work involved in putting this forum - please do so by donating to our partner Lifeline Australia.

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to make a donation to Lifeline -
Lifeline Australia : Play by the Rules

Proudly Supporting



Your generous donation will help the Australians that are turning to us in greater numbers than ever before;

Lifeline is receiving over 3,300 calls a day to 13 11 14

That is a call every 30 seconds

More than 500 people a day are reaching out to Lifeline via Text

Calls have increased by 25% over the same time last year

Record high of 3,641 calls in one day

Let Kids be Kids

stop poor sideline behaviour in junior sport



Aussie kids love sport!

1.7 million
aged 5-14 years participate¹

that's
60%



Here's
what
they want
from
sport



1. To have fun.
2. To do something they're good at.
3. To improve their skills.
4. To stay in shape.
5. To get exercise.²



Sport is generally a
positive experience
for most kids, but...

75%

A UK study showed that 75% of children who participated in organised sport up to the age of 16 had been criticised for their performance, had been shouted or sworn at or had been embarrassed or humiliated by a coach, parent, peer or sports administrator.³

"Mum and Dad, I sure love sports, but it seems like my sports make you guys angry more than they make you happy."⁵

How to
recognise
poor
behaviour

1. Emphasis on winning/results
2. Abuse/intimidation of coaches/officials
3. Excessive instruction from the sideline
4. Putting down children in front of others
5. Criticise performances on the drive home



Poor sideline
behaviour
causes kids ...

Undue pressure
2

To lose confidence
3

To lose motivation
4

To feel threatened
5

To avoid making mistakes
6

To drop out of the team/sport
7

Embarrassment
1

Positive
things
we can do

Respect all athletes,
coaches and officials

Support, encourage
and praise efforts

Be enthusiastic
and positive

Emphasise fun
and enjoyment

Be quiet
and listen

Free
resources
to help



CLICK HERE FOR THE FREE TOOLKIT:
<http://playbytherules.net.au/let-kids-be-kids>



making sport inclusive, safe and fair.

www.playbytherules.net.au

¹ 4156.0 – Sports and Physical Recreation: A Statistical Overview, Australia, 2012.

² Clark, M. A. (n.d.). Winning! How Important Is It in Youth Sports? Retrieved November 11, 2004.

³ Kate Alexander, Anne Stafford, Ruth Lewis (2011). The experiences of children participating in organised sport in the UK. The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre.

⁴ Samuel Elliott and Murray Drummond. "Parents in youth sport: what happens after the game?" Sport, Education and Society, May 6, 2015.

⁵ O'Sullivan, John (31 January 2017). 'An open letter from the back seat' in Sports Parenting.



Steps towards reconciliation in community sport clubs

Originally published on the Club Respect website

Culture within community sport can take on a variety of meanings. We have the culture within the club environment itself. This can include the practices, rituals and general 'vibe' around the club created by members, participants, coaches, families and the like.

Another aspect is how culture can relate to our norms and ways of being as a society. This may include cultures of people from a variety of backgrounds, including the traditional owners of our lands, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Sport is often an outlet and safe haven for many people from a diverse range of backgrounds. As we work towards ensuring clubs are safe spaces for people of all backgrounds, there are ways we can work both as individuals and together to create more inclusive clubs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while also learning to understand and celebrate culture.

Community sporting clubs have an opportunity to become allies or, even better, accomplices for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

As individuals, we should reflect on our own relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander peoples and actively take steps to re-learn histories and understand what it means to be Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in today's world. For myself, this is learning and reflecting on the structure and education that have contributed to how I see the world and steps within myself to understand these histories.

As part of this reflection, here are some small steps we can take to embrace culture within our sports clubs.

1. Include an Acknowledgement to Country that is unique to your club and the land that you are playing on, prior to the commencement of training, games and club functions. Creating an Acknowledgement to Country can provide an opportunity for you to reflect on and acknowledge your past and current relationship to both the land and communities of the traditional owners. If you are unsure of which land your club is on, [AIATSIS provides an excellent map based on traditional land ownership](#).
2. Ensure your facility commemorates the traditional owners. This may be achieved through a plaque or signage paying respects to and acknowledging the traditional owners. Some other options are displaying signage that

demonstrates your club is friendly and welcoming for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. [To understand what it means to be an ally or an accomplice in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, read this article by Summer May Finlay.](#)

3. Have your committee and leadership teams attend a cultural competency workshop. This is a great place to start learning more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories. [In Victoria, the Koorie Heritage Trust provides half-day cultural competency workshops which can also be tailored for large groups.](#) Across Australia, there are many Aboriginal-led organisations that deliver similar training.
4. Include a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in the strategic planning for your club committee. This can ensure your club is acknowledging the broader role it plays in embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and have a sound framework to achieve goals around reconciliation and inclusion. [Reconciliation Australia provides some further resources on RAPs and strategies](#) that your club can utilise in this space. Alternatively, your national or state sporting body may be able to provide you with some preliminary guidance on developing this within your committee.
5. Community elders and senior members of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are respected. Your club can engage the local elders and have them do a Welcome to Country and educate your members and participants on the local culture. This is a great starting point to provide an opportunity for all members of your club to reflect on and learn more about their own relationship with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, connecting with local community groups such as [Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.](#)

I respectfully acknowledge the Woiwurrung People of the Kulin Nation and Elders past, present and emerging who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which this article has been written. As such I take this acknowledgement as an opportunity to reflect on my own relationship with traditional lands. I also acknowledge Elders and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples across Australia, their ancestors, cultures and histories. I would also like to thank Dr Andrew Peters for his guidance, advice and input.

Chelsey Taylor



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How to support athletes who transition out of sport

When the COVID-19 pandemic sent athletes home from the field, players of all ages and levels were left unable to practise or play sport for months. Some were even forced to retire early. For many players, leaving a sport also means leaving behind a set of routines, access to a support system, and a sense of identity.

Sport undoubtedly dominates a player's lifestyle. Without the opportunity to play, many athletes are left with confusion, anxiety and grief over the lifestyle they have lost.

But athletic careers aren't just for players who pursue professional sports. 'The term career is not simply a job or occupation. It is an individual's journey through life,' says [Dr Michele Kerulis](#), member of [Counseling@Northwestern's](#) core faculty and member of the United States Olympic Committee Sport Psychology Registry.

When counsellors have a nuanced understanding of the mental health implications of leaving a sport, they can effectively help athletes transition out of sport in a healthy way and renew their identity, self-worth and purpose in life.

Why do athletes transition out of sports?

Making the choice to leave a sport at any age—especially after investing years of practice and competition—can be a complicated and difficult decision. But it may not always feel like a choice. Dr Kerulis says that most decisions fall into one of two categories:

- **Voluntary:** Choosing to stop playing or practising a sport or activity
Examples: change in personal interests, career changes, family circumstances
- **Involuntary:** Feeling forced into leaving a sport or activity
Examples: injury, being cut from a team, contracts, global pandemic, age

While every person's individual response depends on their unique circumstances, Dr Kerulis says that people who have involuntary transitions out of sport can feel a lot more taken aback by an interruption in their life that they didn't plan, so that can feel a little bit more traumatic.

She says that in many cases, athletes may struggle to find purpose, motivation and identity from other activities, especially if they haven't been encouraged in the past to explore other interests, talents and aspirations.

Without that exploration and encouragement, athletes are at risk of developing a 'foreclosed identity', which means a premature commitment to an athletic identity without considering the value of other interests or aspects of identity, according to developmental psychology theorists including Erik Erikson and James Marcia.

'Their entire identity rests in being an athlete, whereas other people who are just as committed to sport still might have other things in their life,' Dr Kerulis says. '[Those who] make time for family and friends and volunteering or other activities tend to adjust better than those with a high sense of athletic identity.'

Dr Kerulis says that self-reflective questions can help athletes of all ages to consider additional areas that might provide a sense of purpose and identify ways they can apply their learnt athletic skills to new opportunities.

Self-reflective questions to prevent a foreclosed identity

- What is it that I love about sport? Is it just this sport or other sports too?
- In addition to sport, what else do I like to spend time doing?
- What else am I looking forward to in the near future?
- Where do I find validation and affirmation (externally and internally)?
- What skills have I learnt from my sport, and how can I use them off the field?

These questions can help athletes frame their transition in a positive way, by approaching the change with curiosity, abundance and creativity. Dr Kerulis says that some people may feel excited about opportunities for a new chapter in their life.

It is important, however, to make space for grief.

'When somebody is invested physically and emotionally in their sport, and then they're not participating anymore, they typically go through a grief process,' Dr Kerulis says. 'Even if they made

the choice to leave the sport, they're walking away from something that used to be an entirely encompassing aspect of their life.'

Regardless of the reasoning, it's important to remember that transitioning out of sport is not an event, but a process.

When leaving a sport, athletes of all ages may be at risk for mental health concerns that need professional attention from a licensed mental health counsellor.

The following are the mental health risks posed by transitioning out of sports:

- **Anxiety:** fear and uncertainty about future plans or career paths
- **Depression:** loss of identity and motivation, feelings of purposelessness
- **Grief:** loss of activity, purpose, structured routines, and team-mates' support
- **Disordered eating:** changes in diet and exercise in a non-athletic environment
- **Insecurity:** loss of confidence or external validation from coaches and team-mates.

Dr Kerulis says swift departure from years-long routines can lead to confusion about purpose and the meaning of one's own life. Some people experience an existential crisis, especially younger people who might think, 'my whole purpose in life was to play sports, and since I'm not doing that, I don't know what to do'.

Counsellors can help athletes of all ages address a foreclosed identity and transition out of sport with sensitivity and cultural awareness.

'There is an older way of thinking that things have to be all or nothing, meaning that you must commit 100 per cent of your time to one thing, or you are not going to be successful, and that's just not the case,' Dr Kerulis says. '[counsellors] help people understand that you can be an awesome athlete—a recreational, professional, or college athlete—and still enjoy other areas of life.'

When helping people explore other interests or deciding to fully terminate their athletic participation, Dr Kerulis says counsellors should make developmentally appropriate recommendations for athletes.

'Student-athletes who understand how to terminate their sport careers in a healthy way can better transition into the next stages of life as well-balanced individuals with goals and direction for personal excellence,' she says.

When athletes are beginning to realise that career termination may be in their near future, a clinician can help support them through the process to establish support and goals for a healthy transition.

To be culturally sensitive to the sports community, counsellors with athlete clients need to spend time learning about the world of sports, cultural and community considerations, and the unique mental health risks for athletes. Dr Kerulis offers these tips for counsellors to be an effective and helpful support to their clients:

How counsellors can help athletes transition out of sports

- **Identify** the student-athlete's current stage of development and utilise appropriate interventions to help them successfully pass through that stage.
 - **Encourage** student-athletes to create a well-rounded identity at each stage of development.
 - **Listen** to athletes' experiences and concerns to learn about the nuances of their sport.
 - **Consider** how gender identity and cultural identity affect development and experiences playing sport.
 - **Collaborate** with athletes, parents, educators and athletic departments to create a plan for the future.
 - **Consult** with experts in sports, listen for information about athletic culture when talking with athletes (e.g., rules of the game, rituals and expectations), attend sporting events, and watch sports on television.
 - **Combat** academic corruption and encourage student-athletes to have high integrity in the classroom or place of work.
 - **Build** a network of medical professionals and other providers specialising in sports injuries, sport psychology, athletic nutrition and kinesiology.
 - **Learn** about common types of injuries that athletes experience in a specific sport and, in collaboration with their medical team, help athletes understand the future of their career in sport due to the injury.
- **Suggest** that younger student-athletes engage in play outside of their sport to help familiarise them with multiple groups of friends and styles of play.
 - **Receive** supervision from a qualified clinician who has experience working with athletes and navigating the intricacies of sports culture.



Counsellors should also be aware of behavioural changes that result from transitioning out of a strict athletic schedule and into new routines. The dietary and fitness practices that may be common in weight-focused sports such as gymnastics, wrestling, bodybuilding or ballet are often perceived as disordered eating in non-athletic environments. Becoming familiar with the symptoms and [risks of these behavioural addictions related to former athletic routines](#) will be crucial for identifying and preventing harmful behaviours.

Dr Kerulis also emphasises the importance of a non-judgmental and individualised approach to supporting athletes through their grief and transition. Though each person responds to emotional events in different ways, many athletes are subject to the pressure of performance and may fear being judged for their feelings or reactions during their process.

'The responsibility lies on adults to help children understand how to have a conversation,'

Dr Kerulis

How coaches, family and team-mates can help

While families are typically the ones guiding student-athletes through their younger years, Dr Kerulis says that from a family-systems theory lens, their team-mates are often viewed as siblings and their coaches as surrogate parents in their sport careers.

The relationship between athletes and their coaches can be pivotal to a player's process in career transition because coaches can be a meaningful source of support during times of confusion, grief and stress. Because of this, Dr Kerulis says coaches should pay close attention to changes in a player's demeanour and be willing to foster open communication. Once players know their coach is genuinely invested in their wellbeing, it becomes easier to turn to them for support.

'Coaches are such a vital part of athletes' lives,' Dr. Kerulis says. 'Just like they develop skills to help athletes excel on the field, they can also help athletes develop skills off the field.'

While each member of a team is a crucial part of the athlete's support system, they each play a different role. The older team-mates help set expectations and can be seen as mentors or big brothers and sisters to the younger student-athletes, and the coaches set rules, expectations, schedules, and curfews while student-athletes are away from home.

Family, friends and team-mates should:

- **Validate** the individual's feelings and experience
- **Make** space for candid discussions about grief
- **Be future-focused** for new opportunities
- **Schedule** activities to do together or look forward to
- **Ask** them how they would feel best supported.



Coaches should:

- **Develop** healthy supportive relationships
- **Invite** players to openly discuss their feelings
- **Offer** examples of other athletes' post-career success
- **Practice** empathy and withhold judgement about players' emotions
- **Ask** players what they want out of their next chapter of life.

Open dialogues are especially helpful for teaching young athletes about the value in expressing their feelings, especially for learning the importance of giving more than one-word answers to questions.

'The responsibility lies on adults to help children understand how to have a conversation,' Dr Kerulis says. She suggests modelling open communication and expressing genuine interest in children's thoughts, ideas and interests.

She also says it's important for adults to show young people that perfection and high performance are not the only avenues to self-worth. When kids and teens learn that it's okay to fail, they become more resilient and willing to explore new areas and interests. Additionally, they will be more willing to learn valuable lessons from their failures.

'We want kids to learn that they can explore and can try different things and if they don't like them that's okay, but at least they tried.'

Counseling@Northwestern. (2021 June, 7). How to support athletes who transition out of sports. Counseling@ Northwestern, the Online Master of Arts in Counselling Program. Published with permission from The Family Institute at Northwestern University.



Parents - can't live with them, can't live without them!

Originally published on the Club Respect website

If you ask most people about their greatest fear, the most common answer is public speaking. If you ask a junior sports coach what their greatest fear is, they will tell you it is parents. This can be for a variety of reasons and not all of them bad. The media shines the spotlight on aggressive parental behaviour, some events more dramatic than others, but that is the minority group of parents.

Parents are an important part of the junior sport scene and cannot be ignored, but sometimes that is exactly what happens.

Parents provide considerable logistical, financial, organisational and emotional support for their child. They also perform coaching, officiating and administration roles in the club. There is always a minority that behaves badly, giving junior sport and the local club a bad name, and negatively influencing their child's and other children's experiences of sport and physical activity. On the other hand, parents can bring an amazing amount of positive energy to a club. Clubs need to harness this energy, as parents through their volunteer roles make sport affordable and have a major impact on whether their child comes back the following season. However, harnessing this energy and

investing in the parent experience is easier said than done. It requires time and energy in an already time-challenged environment.

Research that shines a light on parents' experience in sport can help us optimise their contribution to sport.

A study exploring the parent experience in British tennis highlighted several areas of stress common to this cohort. Time commitments impeded parents' work, social and family life. Investment in a high-performance pathway for one child can be at the expense of other siblings. Many parents struggled with the financial cost of the sport, particularly as a child progresses through the pathway and specialist coaches are required. Although these parents are involved in a high-performance pathway, many of the stressors would be the same for community sport.

An issue often ignored is parent identity and status in sport.

Using the tennis example, parents felt judged by other parents. There was a belief that good parents attended all games. Team selection can be as

stressful for parents as it is for athletes. Where parents land based on their child's selection can impact their status. A lot can be at stake for some parents and can be very uncomfortable unless managed well within a club. Knowing this may not make the selection process any easier, but it will help make sense of some of some parental behaviour. A level of empathy is required for the parents as well as the athlete as they find their new place in the team ecosystem.

Parents can also become frustrated with what they observe in interactions with coaches and officials. Parents watching their child play sport engage in an emotional experience. Some are good at self-management, others demonstrate a range of responses which are situation dependent. In a US study exploring parental experiences in youth sport, the researchers identified events that led to an anger response. Triggers included behaviours perceived by parents to be uncaring, unjust and incompetent. The offenders were referees, coaches, participants and other parent spectators. Parents believed there was a sense of wrongdoing and failure to care in an environment that should nurture youth.

A better understanding of parents' experiences can lead to creating more effective interventions that can improve the experience for everyone.

If we want junior sport to thrive and engage all club members, including parents, processes need to be developed. The following list provides some examples that might work in your club.

- **Hold a pre-season meeting** with parents to explain club direction and code of behaviour.
- **Spend time teaching parents** about the game, especially those new to the sport. For example, many 'non-contact' sports are actually 'contact', so the nuance of contact needs to be explained.
- **Have the coach** meet with parents to explain the approach to training and competition, parent roles and responsibilities, code of acceptable behaviour, and give all parents a copy of the code.
- **Develop a communication process** for parents to meet with the coach. For example, no parent interaction on game day or for the next 24 hours.
- If the club has clubrooms or a training venue, have **posters** produced that list **values and code of behaviour** and place them strategically around the venue.
- Include a copy of the above in **new member packs**.
- Some clubs have parents sign a document accepting the **behavioural conditions of membership**. Explain what those represent at the start of the season. Do not assume that people have invested time reading the document.
- **Develop positive parent-coach relationships**, be honest and open and work on building trust.
- **Communicate** consistently and often.
- **Move beyond hearing, listen to parents**. They know more about their children than you and have a wealth of information.
- **Look for opportunities to celebrate as a team** with family members.

Sport should be a great experience for everyone, not just those that are playing on the floor or field.

Julia Walsh



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Sport-related Concussion: Why government should enter this field of play

In two earlier Play by the Rules articles, a call to action was made for governments to take a more proactive and coordinated role in addressing sport-related concussion concerns (Greenhow, Play by the Rules Magazine issues 22 and 29). The heightened risks associated with these concerns continue to attract attention in the media, sports administration, and medical research and clinical practice in Australia. From publicly available sources, the regulation of sport-related concussion remains one primarily entrusted to sporting organisations in Australia to self-regulate. But things appear to be shifting slowly, with governments starting to recognise the vital role they play.

Government Report on Concussion in Sport

The July 2021 release in the United Kingdom of the House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Parliamentary Committee Report on Concussion in Sport (the UK Report) identified an opportunity for government to adopt a more proactive role in regulating the issue, raising concerns that not enough is being done by sports to address the risk of harm. The UK report is timely to consider and once again returns us to the question: is there a role for government in

Australia to take a more proactive, facilitative role in addressing concussion concerns?

On 22 July 2021, the 38-page UK Report chronicled the written submissions and oral evidence gathered during the inquiry to examine how the issue of sport-related concussion had been addressed across sport within the UK. After reviewing evidence from each level across grassroots, professional and elite sports, the report concluded that not enough is being done.

The UK Report makes several recommendations about how the government could assist the sports community in addressing the issues associated with sport-related concussion. The recommendations addressed three levels of sport—grassroots, elite, and professional—and several recommendations applied to the ‘whole of sport system’.

On the issue of data collection and injury reporting in grassroots sport, and education and professional development, the UK Report recommends:

‘NHS England to review the way in which it collates data about concussion and concussion-related



brain injury and ensures that doctors have a full history available to better inform patient treatments' and 'that within the next twelve months [July 2022], the NHS England and Faculty of Exercise and Sport Medicine develop a learning module on the best practice for treating and advising those who present with concussive trauma' and 'that all General Practice and Accident & Emergency practitioners take this module within the next two years [by July 2023]. The module, and the updating of practitioners, should be repeated every 2 years thereafter'.

Where elite sports received government funding, the UK Report recommends that UK Sport: 'take a governance role in assuring that all sports it funds raise awareness on the dangers of concussion effectively. Those sports should not only have good protocols to mitigate the risks of such injury, but also proactively implement those protocols' and 'fund a chief medical officer to attend events, like the Olympics, who will hold over-arching responsibility to assess the application of protocols and make decisions on who should be allowed to continue to compete in the event of injuries, including head trauma, sustained in practice and competition'.

In professional sport, recognition as a workplace underpins reforms to establish a national framework and mandatory reporting system with recommendations that: 'the Government immediately mandate the Health and Safety Executive to work with National Governing Bodies of all sports to establish, by July 2022, a national framework for the reporting of sporting injuries'. And 'within a year of the framework being published, all organised sports should be required to report any event that might lead to acquired brain injury'.

Other 'whole of sport system' recommendations recognise the government's role to 'establish a single research fund' and ensure that 'all research funded in this way should be required to return all results and analysis to a central database that should be freely and publicly accessible. Significantly, the UK Report recommends that:

'By July 2022, develop and implement a coherent UK-wide protocol across all sport for concussion' and that this protocol 'should be used by National Governing Bodies as the minimum standard in creating the rules for their sport and should take account of, and be consistent with, the national framework'.

The UK report does not provide a roadmap addressing the next steps or how these recommendations translate into practice. Indeed, the design and development of these policy initiatives need to be carefully crafted, and the entire regulatory policy lifecycle considered, especially regarding implementation, enforcement and review. But the fundamental premise of the UK Report provides clear recognition that government plays a vital role in addressing concussion concerns and has a central role to play in facilitating access to an optimally safe sports system.

The role of government

My PhD dissertation, 'Why the Brain Matters: Regulating Concussion in Australian Sport' (Monash University, 2019), identified several reasons for a more proactive government approach to address Australian concussion concerns. After reviewing the UK, the US and the Canadian

responses, a key finding from the research was that in Australia ‘state actors can play a more significant and facilitative role in regulating sport-related concussion’. As guardian of the public’s health, governments have tools available to collaborate with sport to assist in addressing concussion concerns and enhancing trust that Australian participants, at any level, can access a safe sporting system.

Australian governments traditionally adopt a ‘hands off’ or laissez-faire approach to regulating sport; however, recent initiatives suggest the capacity to build further engagement in response to the concussion issue. The March 2020 Meeting of Sport and Recreation Ministers (MSRM) Committee identified concussion and the need to explore opportunities to improve outcomes, ‘which may include the exploration of model legislation for consideration to establish consistent, minimum health and safety standards across sports and recreation to protect participants’ (MSRM 54 Communique, 13 March 2020).

In developing options and a broader package of measures addressing concussion concerns, the first step is to establish a comprehensive stakeholder and community consultation process designed to develop understandings of the barriers, constraints, opportunities and capacities within the sector. Clearly defined policy priorities and objectives are central to the regulatory policy lifecycle.

While the UK and Australia share some sporting traditions and similar systems, they represent two unique jurisdictional settings, so it would be unwise to suggest the UK recommendations would apply in the Australian context. However, cross-jurisdictional analysis can enhance understanding and establish a platform to assess how Australian policymakers can achieve their objectives to improve access to a safe sports system.

A collaborative governance approach

Collaborative governance—where government and sport work together to achieve mutually desired outcomes—(this approach) has the potential to build capabilities and share information and resources. In the current context, the common goal could be a coherent approach to ensure access to an optimally safe sports system and to reduce barriers to participation for the benefit of all Australians.

It now appears from the March 2020 Communique that concussion is on the radar for the Australian Sport and Recreation Ministers Committee. However, in October 2020, the Australian National Cabinet decided to disband the MSRM (<https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/msrm>), but there still exists a perfect opportunity to build a collaborative governance framework where government participates within this field of play, and the sports sector contributes the depth and breadth of capabilities as experts within this unique regulatory domain.

Dr Annette Greenhow
ANZSLA Director;
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Editors note – The opinions expressed within this article are solely those of the author, a recognised expert in their field and a member of the Australian and New Zealand Sports Lawyers Association (ANZSLA). PTBR remains a resource hub dedicated to the promotion of safe, fair and inclusive sport. The article raises important issues surrounding safety in sport and potential routes towards resolution, based on learnings from other international jurisdictions. For more information about PBTR please click here – [About PBTR](#)

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