

Play by the Rules – Kate Jenkins

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Facilitator: Okay, today I'm with Kate Jenkins and Kate Jenkins has been the Victorian Equal Opportunity Human Rights Commissioner since 2013 but is currently the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner and very importantly she's also Co-Chair of Play by the Rules as well so welcome Kate.

Kate: Thank you very much.

Facilitator: Kate, maybe we'll start off by having a look at the big picture issues you're involved in and try and perhaps hone in on sport a little bit and then the influence of sport so although you're new to the role of Sex Discrimination Commissioner, you're certainly not new in terms of discrimination and issues of gender inequality, what do you think are some of the big picture issues of gender inequality that really we'll come to talk about how sport manifests on that – what do you think are some of the bigger issues that impact on gender inequality at the moment?

Kate: Yeah so as I start the role the key areas that we seem to be not doing very well on in terms of gender is we're certainly having terrible results on violence against women. Women also suffering financially so economic security for women and finally that we don't have many women in leadership roles so those are the buckets where Australia broadly is not doing as well as it should be.

Facilitator: Yeah and do you think that's reflected in sport? Do you think sport has ---?

Kate: I do so what do we see in sport? We see real gendering of who does sport and who doesn't. That's often about boys getting out and playing sport and girls being really more focused on how they look and what are they doing and doing more passive activities, being directed towards that so I think there's been a history of boys are sporty and girls are more crafty and in practice when we see boys and girls out on the sporting field we know that women and girls are starting to get involved more and more and that's a really exciting development but we also know as they develop, girls drop out of sport at a much younger age and Vic Health has done some really good research that looks at girls and women are much less active than they should be.

Then we go to the elite end and we hear all the time about the lack of sponsorship for women, the equal pay issues or the lack of equal pay so sport in all parts of it does have a reflection of the same gender inequality issues.

Facilitator: I'm trying to put myself in the shoes of a local club for example, now I'm sure if I said to local clubs, "Do you regard yours as discrimination-free? That you give women opportunity?" 99% of the time they'll say, "Yes, we do. Yes, we do" so I'm asking the question then,

“Why does this inequality still exist?” We know it exists. We’ve got evidence to say it exists but most people kind of deny it.

Kate: Yeah, look I think you get a really mixed response. I just saw someone the other day at a conference I was speaking at and she’s a mum with a 13-year-old son who played AFL and she has played AFL herself and she has always been involved doing first aid or coaching his footie team but this year it was only dads who were asked to participate and she came to me and she said, “Look, am I being overly sensitive?” so I actually think – I guess to take it back a step, it’s not the fault of grassroots organisations and it’s not the fault of these sporting organisations but they are part of our community and they are where so many of us are involved; families, parents you know as supporters, as players, grassroots is such a community activity and it just reflects a broader problem but it also when done well reflects a place that we can get huge steps forward. So, the AFL Women’s Team I think is really exciting. It’s really changing people’s view of women being active and it’s also changing the views of what we’ll watch on television. I think everyone was shocked when people turned on to watch that AFL Women’s footie match last year and I know lots of sports, cricket and soccer – they’re all focusing on trying to get more women involved.

Facilitator: And these things have a good influence on culture don’t they over time because that’s what really, we’re talking about here. It’s the culture of inequality that grows but it’s not in your face but these sorts of initiatives like the AFL, like that do actually start to influence culture over time.

Kate: I absolutely agree and I think it wasn’t deliberate we introduced laws many years ago but our culture still has stuck to a pretty traditional view of what boys and girls do and what men and women do but over time we’ve realised that’s not necessary and particularly where you’ve got kids, I think lots of people are looking at kids and the campaign of ‘Let kids be kids’ is fantastic and parents often say, “Well, I want my girl to have the same opportunities as my son” and so that’s got lots more people interested in making sport good for everyone.

Facilitator: Yeah, I also wanted to talk to you briefly as well about harassment issues so more the dark side really of discrimination issues. We still have incidents of that at elite, sub-elite and at grassroots too. At Play by the Rules we do come across issues of harassment and discrimination based on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Intersex and particularly at the moment. What do you think? Does sport play an active role in fostering that kind of culture or what can sport do? Why does it manifest itself in sport?

Kate: Yeah, it is really interesting because the research says that for young people, LGBTI or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender young people 80% of the abuse or harassment that they experience is while playing sport so it is true that in that environment people seem to behave differently. My perspective on this in terms of racism, sexism and homophobia is sport has been a place where we’ve seen the very worst but it’s also a place where we’ve seen some amazing change and to see that is really inspiring.

I don't know why that happens, whether people think the rules fall away, that kind of idea that you say anything to win. Win at all costs and I know Play By The Rules is really clear. Making sport safe, fair and inclusive means that everyone can enjoy it and win at all costs isn't the mantra.

Facilitator: Yeah, it's like sport shows the extremes almost of both ends, the really positive which we want to make this obviously a very positive influence it can have on culture but also it can expose the real negative, poor discrimination and harassment issues at the same time.

Kate: It can. I think what's happening at this moment in time though is some of those negatives, when they're exposed through the media our community is saying, "That's not okay" and so I think when you look at a lot of sporting codes and when you see comments in the media, they get very quickly circulated, you know, sexual harassment of Journalists as elite sportsmen are coming off the field, I think in the past that wouldn't have even been noticed but now, not everyone agrees but lots of people agree that women should be treated respectfully. They're professional and it's not okay so the moment in time we're at is I think there's a preparedness in our community to change.

Facilitator: Yeah, certainly I think you're right and I think that sport can play a real important role in that. I want to also ask you about the violence against women issue which in particular at the time of the recording of this podcast, there's been some major Federal Government announcements around that. Again, what role do you see sport playing in terms of influencing that?

Kate: Yeah so, the thinking is that to get community change on equality, race, sex, whatever you need to look at key locations where we can change our attitudes. We can't change everything so let's look at key locations. What has happened is there's a COAG or a Joint Federal/State Government initiative looking at violence against women and particularly prevention so everyone is looking at response, how we're responding but there has been a huge investment of \$30 million in a proactive campaign that's out now called 'Let's stop it before it starts' and that campaign is focused at parents, teachers and coaches in particular and it looks at how young boys and girls and how behaviours can be excused or minimised so there's pictures of a boy treating a girl badly and the Mum says, "Oh, it's just because he likes you" and there's always these excuses so the idea and then it draws the line between that idea of forgiving or minimising sort of mildly violent but aggressive behaviour from boys and telling girls what did they do, is it their fault is creating a blueprint of a gender stereotype that says boys can be aggressive and girls should take it and that campaign has really hit home and I understand that certainly coaches are one of the targets and I think that's really good.

I also think young people are some of the targets because I hear that the response to that has been really positive, that they actually can see the subtlety that they see it.

Facilitator: It's difficult to measure the impact of campaigns like that but no one disputes the need to have them. In your role now as Sex Discrimination Commissioner, where do you see that going in the next couple of years on sport-related kind of issues? Do you think the domestic violence issue or the cultural change? What kind of changes would you like to see happen in the next couple of years?

Kate: I think that right now there's a big momentum about looking at violence against women and domestic violence in particular and so I think that we'll see across the country a lot of initiatives. When you look at combatting that issue there is a focus on the response but there's more of a focus on prevention and I think sport is going to be a very important part of what we call prevention which is changing those attitudes and realising the subtlety so for me, I'm really interested. I know there are so many codes that are trying to look at involving more women and they're not just doing it because they want women to be respected. Some of them are doing it because they know there's money and there's a whole market out there that mightn't have been tapped and more volunteers and more participants and that's a fantastic reason as well so I think in the next period, people who look around and feel very upset about the violence issue might in their day to day life, in their grassroots sporting organisations be able to turn that into something positive and I think that's what we'll see but I'm also really interested to talk to people and hear what other initiatives might be around because I think there's lots of passion and commitment and I'll be really interested to see where we go over the next five years.

Facilitator: Are there any particular sports that you think could really play a lead role in this? There are some already I know are doing things but the power of those, certainly the big sports initially in getting those messages out is really strong?

Kate: There's no question that sport is important at grassroots right to elite but the quickest way to change attitudes is to get those big powerful sports who have so much media attention and so much of the corporate Dollar, if they change then the speed of the change will be much faster.

Facilitator: Yeah, in the meantime if you're at a club level and you possibly are already at that club level, what are some practical things at least raising a bit of awareness that clubs can do especially around gender issues?

Kate: Yeah, I think at all clubs you can look around and start asking questions. If you notice that the only parents are the dads helping with the sport, that's not necessarily desirable. If you notice that in for example, my kids are soccer kids so that's where I know quite a lot and I know my daughter at seven is one of two girls in the squad of 14 and I do question why is there not more girls at that age? There's no physical difference. I know there's lots of different choices but other sports doing something themselves that are not encouraging the boys' and girls' participation so this isn't one-dimensional. The gymnastics, I know there's not many boys and the boys – again my son decided to do that and he had a great time so there's this idea

that sports are gendered I really push against that but I think lots of people are really getting involved. Part of the things about grassroots is getting involved and everybody ends up, whether you want to be or not and that's exciting but think about what you're doing and what messages you're saying to kids.

Facilitator: Yeah, everybody can have an impact regardless of what level or state of involvement you're in really.

Kate: Yeah and I guess at the really practical side given that it gets focused on, when you're standing on the sidelines what you're yelling out matters so encouragement is really good but if you're picking on kids – boys or girls, that's obviously not going to help anyone.

Facilitator: Yeah and we've got the 'Let kids be kids' campaign coming up at the time of recording this around those sorts of issues but thank you very much Kate Jenkins. We would just like to draw it to a close there. You know, you're fairly new into the position here. How long is your term? Do you get a term – is that how it works?

Kate: It is five years and as of this time I am four weeks in so I've got a lot of enthusiasm and probably some more work to do.

Facilitator: I'm sure you have and we wish you all the very best of luck and thank you very much too for your support because you are Co-Chair as well of Play By the Rules.

Kate: Thank you.

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