# SAFE, FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

*SAFE, FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SPORT - 2019*

*'To many, sport is everything. Sportspeople push themselves through extraordinary physical and mental barriers every week. Coaches and officials live and breathe every detail of the game, and spectators' support is both passionate and enduring. However, when something takes on this level of importance in people's lives it is inevitably going to bring out the best and worst in everyone involved'. (Oliver, 2012)*

**Many researchers (Wearing, Swan, & Neil, 2010; Macdonald, Rodger, Abbott, Ziviani, & Jones, 2005), agree about the benefits of sport for children and adults alike, highlighting sport's positive contribution to a person's health, fitness and well-being.**

(The Australian Sports Commission ( now Sport Australia) (2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013a) suggest sport also helps develop gross motor skills, keeps people healthy, promotes cooperative play and good sportsmanship. Researchers also highlighted the positive emotional, psychological, and educational effects sport can have on individuals leading to personal growth, increased self-esteem, greater confidence and an improved lifestyle.

Bailey, Cope and Pearce (2013) contend that taking part in sport and other physical activities from an early age is important if children are to develop a foundation for lifelong physical engagement in healthy sporting experiences.

As a counterpoint to the positive aspects and effects listed above, consider the view of English writer George Orwell who wrote in The Tribune (1945) that serious sport "has nothing to do with fair play" it is "bound up with all hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words, it is war without the shooting". Orwell's point may be dramatically expressed but nonetheless valid – modern day sport is not immune from unsafe practices, inequality, exclusion of opportunity and discrimination.

The ASC's Ethical and Integrity Issues in Australian Sport Survey (2010), which was conducted to identify the most prevalent and serious ethical and integrity issues in Australian sport, surveying over 3,700 players, coaches, officials and administrators across national, state and local sport levels, found that negative coaching behaviours and practices, athletes being pushed too hard, verbal abuse and going beyond the spirit of the game were the priority issues in Australian sport. The Australian Sports Commission's Junior Sport Framework Review (2013a) came to the conclusion that people will not stay involved in sport if they don't feel safe or included.

In a 2017 NSW Member Protection in Sport Network survey, 100% said the top member protection issues was 'conduct and behaviour', followed by 'social media' (83%) and 'respect towards officials' (54%). The top challenges were 'understanding MPPs and MPIO' (79%), 'communicating to grassroots' (71%) and 'codes of conduct' (58%). The ASC's Junior Sport Framework Review (2013) highlighted how junior sport can also be a site where inappropriate values can be reinforced such as "aggressive, overly competitive and unsafe behaviour, as well as cheating, vilification, violence, physical intimidation and discrimination" and came to the conclusion that people will not stay involved in sport if they don't feel safe or included.

All levels, from national to grassroots sport, are required to place emphasis on good governance, member protection, safety, fairness and inclusion and opportunity for all, and to protect the integrity of sport. They attempt to achieve this through their constitutions, strategic plans, codes, policies, guidelines, procedures and a range of projects and campaigns, backed up by education and resources.

However, there has been relatively little research into issues around the actual reporting and handling of discrimination and abuse in sport, particularly at grassroots level. Play by the Rules National Manager, Peter Downs says, "generally speaking, things have to be pretty serious for someone to report on a discrimination issue. Much goes unreported. People do not want to be seen as a complainer for fear of being ostracized or making the situation worse. Hand-in-hand with this reluctance comes a general lack of awareness of complaint handling procedures. While most clubs and associations would have policies and codes of conduct in place, there is a great need to better educate club officials and members about proper procedures and the reasons why it is necessary to follow these when incidents occur. Having a policy or a guideline in place is one thing, understanding why it is there and how to use it, is another."

# SAFE, FAIR AND INCLUSIVE SPORT

'Safe, fair and inclusive' sport has evolved to be a catch-all phrase for all of the measures above and to encompass the elements of values, ethics, integrity and inclusion that make up Australian sport. The question of what 'safe, fair and inclusive' sport means has different connotations to researchers, practitioners and different people involved in sport, depending on their definition, experiences and the importance they give to each of the three elements. Taken as a whole, the entire phrase can be summed up to encompass a fun, welcoming, positive, friendly, non-threatening environment, where people feel respected and that they belong and are supported. Let's have a look at what each part means in isolation…

## SAFE SPORT

Safety has a range of meanings in sport. It can refer to physical safety from injury or concussion, emotional safety from harm or bullying, or can relate to cultural safety; which refers to the environment in which sport operates and the behaviours and standards adults adhere to safeguard children's sporting experience. The most serious end of the safety spectrum in sport is child abuse.

Despite protective systems in place, issues of child safety and abuse still occur across Australian sport. A recent study has found one third of Australians surveyed would not immediately tell someone if they thought a child was being abused or neglected. Of those surveyed, one quarter said they did not know the signs of child abuse and neglect while 41 per cent admitted they would need to Google how to report suspected abuse.[i]

The recent Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has shone the spotlight on child protection policies and safeguarding children strategies within the sport and recreation sector. Among the harrowing stories referenced in the Commission report, it became evident that not only is sport not immune from issues of abuse, but there were systemic failures of some sports.

The public hearings, private sessions and research of the Royal Commission gave us valuable insights into the characteristics of, and risk factors for, child sexual abuse in sport and recreation. These include: grooming - essentially where a perpetrator builds trust with a child, and often the parents, in order to exploit and abuse the child. The two types of grooming identified that were most prevalent in sport and recreation were: manipulative techniques, such as coaxing and cajoling, and; coercive techniques, such as blackmail and threats.

Sport and recreation clubs are influenced by local cultures which can lead to and create risk factors for child abuse. In some circumstances where sports over-emphasise competition and competitive contexts, violent and aggressive behaviours can become normalised and viewed as an important part of being a member of a club. Harassment can be normalised too - in the form of verbal abuse, trash talk, sledging or pranks. Two types of harmful behaviours were identified by the Royal Commission: bullying - unwanted, repeated and intentional, aggressive behaviour usually among peers (his can occur online as well as face-to-face), and; hazing - an organised, usually team based, form of bullying.

A range of recommendations resulting from the Royal Commission have directly related to sport and sports practitioners. These include having a national approach to improve children's safety by:

- implementing Child Safe Standards to guide policy and practice
- having national leadership, capacity building and support
- developing child safety resources
- state and territory oversight bodies to support the implementation of child safety practices
- improving communication from governments and peak bodies to the service delivery level
- establishing child safety officers in local government.

Overseas, issues of abuse have arisen in recent years, with more than 1,000 cases relating to child sexual abuse within football clubs in the UK reported to police.[i] The USA Gymnastics sex abuse scandal involved the sexual abuse of female athletes, primarily minors, over the past two decades, in which over 368 individuals have been sexually assaulted "by gym owners, coaches, and staff working for gymnastics programs across the country".

In 'The Experience of Children Participating in Organised Sport in the UK', which sets out the many poor behaviours young people experience in sport, it makes an alarming point: "to a great extent all of these behaviours tended to be accepted as normal by young people . . . There was little evidence of young people reporting it to adults or of adults effectively dealing with it. It provides some evidence of a sporting culture which accepts and condones disrespectful and negative treatment among young people and between young people and coaches."

The recent focus on physical safety from concussion and violence in sport has also attracted much publicity and debate. A Murdoch Children's Research Institute study on concussion showed hundreds of children have been treated for sports-related head injuries at the Sydney Royal Children's Hospital.

A study, published by researchers from Edinburgh University and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), found that although "participating in organised sport is a positive experience for most children and young people … a negative sporting culture exists, is accepted 'as the norm' and is perpetuated by peers, coaches and other adults" (Taylor, 2014). The study also reported widespread emotionally harmful treatment (75 percent) and unacceptable levels of sexual harassment (29 percent). According to Hemphill (1998), violence in sport, whether among participants or spectators, remains a central issue in local, national and international sport.

For many children sport is a chance to be with friends and experience freedom away from the confines of school or home. This has associated benefits, as children who take part in organized activities are more likely to experience a sense of well-being and achieve success. Participating in sports promotes resilience and self-sufficiency. However, the ways children experience sport is shaped by adults; who determine the content, rules and expectations (Hadi, 2014) and this can dramatically affect the experience for many children.

Another safety issue raised in various reports is the increase in doping, Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs (PIEDs) and illicit supplements in sport. While there has always been public awareness of the use of prohibited substances in sport by athletes at the elite level, both domestically and internationally, the Australian Crime Commission (2013) report 'Organised Crime and Drugs in Sport' revealed the extent to which this issue had infiltrated to the grassroots level of sport and the potential that it may involve junior sports participants.

The report outlined how new generation PIEDs, which were previously thought to be only used by elite athletes, were now widely available and being used by a broad cross-section of the sports community and community generally. The report's findings were alarming on many levels: not only because of the health implications for athletes, but the use of Performance and Image Enhancing Drugs and illicit supplements serves to undermine the principles of fair play, and acts to weaken the community's enduring faith and belief in sport.

Safety is a concern at all levels of sports, but perhaps more so for young children whose bodies are still maturing and developing. The effects of supplements and image and performance-enhancing drugs on a young person's body can be extremely dangerous and even life-threatening.

It is clear that pressure is mounting on talented children at younger ages these days (from their parents, coaches, and peers) to be the best or to make the next level in sport. This need to excel very early in their careers if they want a future in sport poses the question whether this is heightening a 'win at all costs' culture and a seriously unhealthy fear of failure or missing out in young athletes.

# FAIR SPORT

Values such as fairness, ethics, honesty and sportsmanship have special relevance to sport. Fair play can mean more than simply the absence of cheating, it also means conducting yourself in accordance with what the sport values, even when the rules do not specifically require it (Loland, 2002). "Fair play also has a regulative value within sport; only in the context of fair play can a worthwhile competition take place in which the values athletes pursue through sport have the possibility of being realized" (T. H. Murray, 2010, p. 2).

Fairness has much to do with the choices people involved with sport make – including what they perceive is right and wrong. Fairness requires a reliance on systems, practices and policies, but as Bourdieu highlights, these existing systems may be the issue in the first place, with these structures underpinning who benefits and who is included in the network. Fairness is also an 'equity' issue; there are many people that don't get an equitable chance to play sport.

While recognising that the term 'fairness' is very subjective, Roger Pielke Jnr (2013), believes that sport is governed by rules, including those governing performance enhancement, and where to draw the line on what 'fairness' is, is reflected by broad social values and the values of the sports community.

Cheating, gaining an unfair advantage and the use of performance enhancing substances to improve performance are as old as the history of sport itself. However, recent times have seen an escalation in the frequency and type of integrity and ethical issues in sports, both internationally and more increasingly in Australia, that warrant serious review and action.

The Australian sporting environment is being impacted by unprecedented integrity challenges, whether it be doping, match fixing or the use of inside information for illegal betting purposes, and the increased use of supplements or illicit drugs. Day-to-day issues around governance, poor conduct and anti-social behaviours are also considered significant integrity issues that have come into prominence and affect people involved at all levels of sport.

New laws, rules, codes and government frameworks on illicit drugs, doping, match-fixing and member protection have been established to help provide guidance on rights and responsibilities. Improved governance standards have been enforced to protect against corruption, fraud and inequity, and sporting organisations have implemented policies, programs and training to address player, parent, coach, official and administrator conduct. Yet despite these protections, integrity violations continue to occur from the elite to grassroots level.

Governance structures have a significant impact on the performance of sporting organisations. Poor governance has a variety of causes, including director/committee inexperience, conflicts of interest, failure to manage risk, inadequate or inappropriate financial controls, and generally poor internal business systems and reporting. While high-profile FIFA issues around governance and corruption have made national headlines, allegations of conflict of interest, embezzlement, fraud and theft in sports organisations, large and small, are not uncommon. These practices not only impact on the sport and individuals where they are present, but also undermine confidence in the Australian sports industry as a whole.

Several recent reports and surveys have highlighted the range of integrity issues associated with sport in Australia. The Australian Sports Commission's Ethical and Integrity Issues in Australian Sport Survey (2011), identified the most prevalent and serious ethical and integrity issues in Australian sport. Issues highlighted included those: ". . . related to: doping and recreational drug use; violence on- and off-field; racism; vilification and heterosexism and the impact these have on sports participation at all levels; off-field behaviour in relation to gender, sexuality and sexual assault and violence; institutional fraud; gambling, betting and match-fixing, and coaching and management practices". The review found "that sport is found to be a site which is both favourable to the development of integrity and, often simultaneously, unwelcoming towards integrity and ethical values".

A Corruption in Sport paper (2015) by the Australian Institute of Criminology examined events and issues that have affected the integrity of Australian sport between 2009–13 and lists the main risk factors that have been identified that ncrease the opportunity for corruption in Australian sport. The paper also proposed crime prevention techniques that may assist in framing and responding to corruption in Australian sport in the future.

A report 'Threats to the Integrity of professional sport in Australia' by the Australian Crime Commission highlights the principal integrity vulnerabilities in Australian sport. It found that "there are associations between professional athletes and organised crime groups and individuals in Australia. While the vulnerabilities are yet to be systematically exploited, organised crime groups will increasingly target professional sports as the sports wagering market continues to grow".

The Federal Government commissioned a review into integrity in Australian sport in 2017 as part of the National Sport Plan consultations. Its remit was to examine national and international integrity threats to sport, including the rise of illegal offshore wagering, match-fixing and doping, and also examine the feasibility of establishing a national sports integrity commission. The resultant Wood Review of Australia's sports integrity arrangements found that sports are challenged by a range of mounting integrity threats, which include the increasing sophistication and incidence of doping, the globalisation of sports wagering particularly through rapidly growing illegal online gambling markets, the infiltration and exploitation of the sports sector by organised crime, corruption in sports administration and growing participant protection issues.

The Wood Review warns that 'without the presence of a comprehensive, effective and nationally coordinated response capability, the hard earned reputation of sport in this country risks being tarnished' and that beyond the immediate impact of corrupt conduct of the kind identified, a public loss of confidence in the sporting contest has direct consequences for the health, economic, social and cultural benefits that sports generates, and undermines significant investment in sport. The centrepiece of the Wood Review recommendations is the formation of a single body to address sports integrity matters at a national level - a national sports integrity commission.

# INCLUSIVE SPORT

The term 'inclusive sport' is characterized as: friendly, welcoming environments to all regardless of sex, ethnicity, religion, intellectual/physical ability and sexual orientation; where everyone is included, everyone is treated equal and made to feel part of organisations.

In essence, inclusion refers to proactive behaviours that make each person feel welcome and a part of an organisation. Inclusion is about ensuring that sport caters for the range of backgrounds, cultures, ages, abilities or socio-economic circumstances of people in the community who may wish to participate in various activities or roles in a club.

Inclusion often gets mixed or interchanged with diversity. Organisations can be diverse in many ways (i.e. they can have members with differences in ethnicity, gender, age, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, education, religion or financial status), but that doesn't automatically mean that they have created an inclusive club environment. In simple terms, diversity is the mix; inclusion is getting the mix to work well together.

When we critically analyse the concept of inclusion in sport, one quickly realises that the sport is a double-edged sword. Sport may provide a basis for building of local networks and bringing different sections of the community together:

. ". . but for every community that has rallied together around an inspirational team, there is a community that has been torn apart by blind allegiances. For every individual that has been empowered by participation in sport, there is another that has been further marginalised by the ways that class, race, and gender are structurally embedded in our sportscape." (Guest, 2015).

Many researchers agree that sport can provide a level playing field and bridging and bonding connections (Putnam, 2000; Suzuki, 2007; Coleman, 1990; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008), whereby people from different cultures, genders, ages, abilities and backgrounds can come together, support each other and find a common thread. These views reflect similar ones in research by Spaaij et al. (2013) and Darcy et al. (2014) and highlight the positive aspects of sport providing a basis for individuals to form friendship bases. The ASC (2011a) has found that "an emphasis on winning and being competitive has increasingly been found to be in conflict with attitudes towards inclusiveness and community engagement".

Many sporting clubs and organisations understand that to be inclusive is best practice and brings with it many benefits. However, many give lip service to the concept and do not go out of their way to 'build bridges' and rely instead on new participants' climbing the fence' to get in. As Taylor and Toohey (2001) stress "sport providers need to open their doors to all members of the community and actively encourage inclusive practices, rather than just acting as passive purveyors of sport". If the negative aspects around these issues are not addressed it could lead to a decline in club membership and also the number of people volunteering in grassroots sport clubs (Nichols, Taylor, James, King, Holmes, & Garrett, 2004).

Research suggests that a monolithic culture is typical of the majority of sports clubs in Australia (Hanlon & Coleman, 2006) as sport participation tends to favour interaction among similar people. The entrenchment of a culture of similarity reveals an underlying system of shared values, beliefs, and assumptions that results in closed group membership.

Core values of such a club culture include  pochialism/ethnocentrism, rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, and a view of difference as deficit (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). A key challenge for those seeking to promote
diversity and equity in sport, then, is to transform ingrained organisational cultures and practices so that they come to value and support diversity (Spaaij et al., 2013).
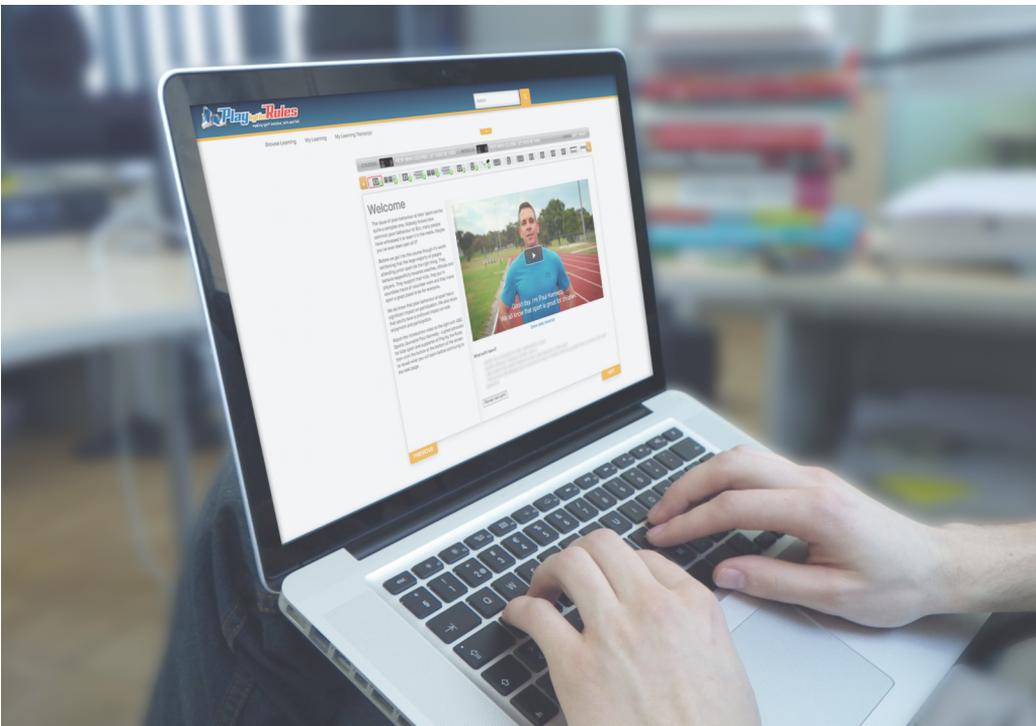
# SUMMARY - A SAFE, FAIR AND INCLUSIVE FUTURE IN SPORT?

In a fast changing, ever-evolving Australian sporting environment which is being impacted by online and technological progress, globalisation of competitions and massive incentives to perform, sport is being bombarded by unprecedented challenges from many directions, whether it be doping, match fixing, the increased use of supplements or day-to-day issues around governance, fair play or inclusion.

The pressure to succeed at younger ages from parents, coaches and sporting clubs and an unhealthy fear of failure or missing out is resulting in a 'win at all costs', 'no risk no reward', 'whatever it takes' attitude that has enveloped modern sport at all levels and has led to some recent prominent integrity issues. Many athletes, coaches and administrators would argue that the single most important element of sport is to win. While not disregarding this function, this overlooks the important meaning and purpose of sport to participants such as making friends, community connections, getting fit and healthy, improving confidence, abilities and developing positive personal attributes.

A recent study (Visek, Achrati, Manning, McDonnell, Harris & DiPietro, 2015) showed that 70% of kids involved in organised sports drop out by the age of 13. Often, the reasoning is that they aren't "having fun anymore" and they've lost interest.

The study conducted in 2014 by George Washington University asked why children participate in sports - over 90 percent of children responded that they participated because it was fun. The children were asked to describe what fun meant for them, and 81 different explanations arose throughout the study.

Trying your best, being treated with respect by the coach, and getting playing time were the most important factors that kids defined fun by. Winning was ranked by children as the 48th most important reason why they participated.

Evidence from many surveys and reports (ASC, 2010, 2011a, 2012b, 2013a; AHRC, 2007; Atherley, 2006) make it clear that the collective impact of the programs and strategies from governments, NSOs, SSAs/SSOs and clubs are helping to increase the knowledge and skills of individuals and organisations in preventing and dealing with governance and member protection issues, such as discrimination, and child safety, and promoting inclusive policies and practices. However, there is little evidence of their affect or quantifying the cultural changes that are claimed.

Sporting organisations and members at all levels should now recognise with greater clarity and resolve that when sport is taught correctly with an emphasis on safety, fairness and fun, and sporting clubs provide an environment that is welcoming to all, then people will come to participate and volunteer and social networks with occur. An enjoyable early experience in sport, whether through organised or recreational activities, will result in an increased chance of lifelong participation with that sport, be it as a player, coach, administrator or official (ASC, 2013a).

Or put another way, if social capital is positive, the commitment and longevity of participants and volunteers in a club can occur over long periods of time (Cuskelly, Harrington, & Stebbins, 2002; Nichols, Taylor, James, Holmes, King, & Garrett, 2005).

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