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CREATING AN ETHICAL SPORTING ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Sport can be a positive experience and play a powerful role in the personal and moral development of individuals and communities. However, if the integrity of sport is compromised, it can have equally significant negative effects on organisations, communities and individuals. Coaches play a significant role in the sporting experience and help establish the ethical environment for their athletes and other stakeholders.

Research has shown that there is a gap between the positive experience many people would like sport to be (the sport we want) and the actual experience of sport (the sport we have). While coaches can influence these aspects, we cannot assume that they have the knowledge, skills and support to “get it right”. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) seeks to uphold the integrity of sport through an ethical framework that has evolved over several years.

The ASC takes an important leadership role in working with National Sporting Organisations to establish structures and policies that ensure a fair, safe, ethical and inclusive culture pervades sport at all levels. The ASC’s ethical framework is based on guiding ethical principles, research and a philosophy of inclusiveness and participation. It is delivered through the work of the Ethics in Sport Unit, the Essence of Australian Sport campaign, the Harassment-free Sport Strategy, Member Protection policies, Codes of Behaviour, the Anti-Doping Program and Governance and Management Improvement programs. Child-safety police checks apply for all those working with children including coaches, officials and volunteers in sport. For coaches this work is complemented by various Coaching and Officiating initiatives.

The ASC works with key stakeholders in sport to ensure an ethical approach to sport at all levels. Increasingly, coaches are being required to face issues such as sportsmanship, drugs in sport, cheating, eating disorders, respect for officials, abuse of power and harassment. Many of the ethical issues that coaches face are complex issues that do not have a simple answer. Some coaches may be uncertain about ethical aspects of their role.

Within the ASC’s National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS), the ASC requires each accredited coach to read, understand and sign a Code of Behaviour, which is enforced as appropriate. The ASC provides a range of resources to assist coaches, which reinforce the roles and ethical responsibilities of the coach.

The ASC has dedicated programs and resources to support the professional development and welfare of high performance coaches and, in doing so, support the ethics of sport while coaching in a pressured environment. All coaches employed by the ASC, including Australian Institute of Sport coaches, are provided with a specific coach induction process, alcohol and social drugs training workshops, anti-doping education sessions and harassment awareness training. The ASC has established a Coach Career Management program, which provides personal career planning and one-on-one counselling, and a coach welfare program which supports the life balance and the general welfare of coaches.

As coach educators we must work towards ensuring our coaches have integrity, as their behaviour and philosophical approach will lead and encourage an ethical landscape for sport.