

CREATING AN ETHICAL SPORTING ENVIRONMENT

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Introduction

"Sport can teach honour, physical skills, discipline, self-esteem, humility, the team concept and healthy lifestyles. Sport can also teach cheating, create inflated egos, give a sense of entitlement and reinforce distorted body images and poor health consequences. Ethics in sport can explain the gap between the amazing benefits sport can provide and the horrible damage it can inflict".

(Footnote 1, US Anti-Doping Agency, Struggling with Ethics in Sport – the Journey 2005)

Sport, as highlighted by this quote, can be a positive experience and play a powerful role in the personal and moral development of people – it can be inspirational and aspirational. In Australia, sport plays a major role in shaping our identity and culture. It helps to maintain the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, build personal and national pride, and bind us together as a society.

I can recall last year watching the progress of our national football team, the Socceroos, at the World Cup. This one team was united under the leadership of "Aussie Gus" Hiddink, and the Australian population had united in an unprecedented level of support. As an organisation, we at the Australian Sports Commission also united in their support, with many staff waking very early (4.00 am) to head into work to watch a game with athletes and fellow staff. This show of support was not in isolation, people around the country did the same thing; they got up early to watch a team they admired. The people shared the journey of the team through the tournament. This kind of support could not be manufactured; it was fostered by the unique sporting environment.

But for every great experience in sport, there are times when sport exposes negative aspects of society. I am sure we can all think of individual examples. If sport is not governed, managed, practiced, taught, encouraged and coached appropriately, it can compromise the integrity of sport and result in negative effects on organisations, communities and individuals, many of them long-term.

People, children and adults alike, will return to sport or almost any other activity if they have an enjoyable experience. Sport is, by definition, fun. The ultimate negative impact is in all of the children that have walked away from sport after a bad experience in their early years, and have never returned. The majority of "bad" experiences in sport are the result of inappropriate or unethical behaviour – often on the part of the coach.

Sports Ethics

Sport naturally serves as a vehicle for education, health, leadership and fair play. However, some believe that sport is "failing to achieve its potential to positively influence the moral and personal development of youth and strengthen communities." [footnote 2] The fact is that these

values are not automatically transmitted in sport. It all depends on how sport is managed, coached and practiced; on the standards that are set.

There is growing national and international concern about ethical issues in sport including doping, child abuse, spectator violence, sexual assault and misconduct, lack of respect for officials and opposing players and undue parental pressure on young children. In particular, adverse publicity surrounding allegations of sexual misconduct by coaches and athletes, as well as incidents of spectator violence and disrespect generate concerns about whether sport is engendering or tolerating violent and inappropriate cultures, and whether the conduct of sportsmen and women (particularly professional athletes) is in decline.

If sport loses its integrity and value as something worth honouring, it will have many detrimental effects, including challenging the cultural importance that sport has, in Australia and many other parts of the world. Other effects include:

- Diminishing the ability of sport to provide positive role models for young people
- Diminishing community support and respect
- Limiting the impact of sport as an agent of social cohesion
- Decreasing corporate support
- Decreasing membership
- Increasing litigation and insurance costs
- Increasing negative media coverage

It is also worth noting that many of the inappropriate behaviours occurring in sport are not only socially unacceptable but are in fact illegal and have long-term negative effects on people's lives.

Participating in sport is a value-laden experience. We interact in highly intense and emotionally charged situations with a whole variety of other people. Even though we may not consciously set out to do so, we ultimately demonstrate, teach, explain and learn values and moral lessons in sport.

Ensuring that sport remains sustainable into the future and retains its value to society means ensuring that it has a strong and continuous ethical framework and standards of conduct. It also means that participants, whether they are paid employees, players, coaches or volunteers, understand the ethical framework and incorporate it into all aspects of their sport.

The ethical standards of the sporting environment are a result of our action or inaction. Competitors, coaches, officials, administrators, spectators, governing bodies all determine what is ethical in our sporting environment, what is acceptable in international competition, national competition, within a national team or within a club team. Individuals collectively determine the ethical sporting environment and coaches significantly influence how it all takes shape. In many environments at junior and senior level, it is the coach who sets the standards of acceptable behaviour.

A coach's philosophical approach and behaviour sets the scene. How they coach within their own environment can shape the experience and destiny of people involved in sport. Jan Stirling the coach of the World Champion Australian women's basketball team, the Opals, understands the role coaches play in shaping the ethical environment for sport. Her work at a high performance level with the players and coaches highlights the value she places in the development of people. After winning the World Championships, Jan encouraged the players in the team to personally write and thank their junior development coaches. The values within the team and the commitment to live by them, highlights the benefits that sport offers in developing people.

Recent Australian and international research on attitudes about and experiences of sport indicate 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). [footnote 2]

The negative aspects most commonly experienced by a broad section of those involved in sport include [footnote3]:

- inappropriate player behaviour,
- inappropriate parent behaviour, and
- inappropriate and/or aggressive spectator behaviour.

The negative aspects perceived to have the greatest impact across all levels of sport include [footnote 4]:

- harassment
- inappropriate player behaviour
- inappropriate and/or aggressive spectator behaviour,
- inappropriate coach behaviour,
- inappropriate administrative/governance practices, and
- match fixing and/or bribery.

In contrast to these aspects, what most people want sport to be or provide is [footnote 5]:

- Elite athletes who can be successful in a fair manner and act as appropriate role models
- Participants to play not only by the rules of the game but in the spirit of the game
- Sport to be an enjoyable environment that is untainted by cheating, violence, abuse and other unacceptable practices and behaviour, and
- Respect shown by all involved in sport, especially for the decisions of officials

Coaches can influence and control these aspects and 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 is the Australian Government body that develops, manages and invests in sport at all levels in Australia. The ASC funds and works closely

with a range of national sporting organisations (NSOs), state and local governments, schools and community bodies to ensure that sport is well run and widely accessible so that everyone can participate and enjoy the benefits. Through the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS), which is a division of the ASC, and state and territory institutes and academies of sport, the ASC is also working with sporting organisations to develop elite sporting excellence.

The ASC understands that it needs to take a strong stance on the ethics in sport issue and is consciously working to set a good ethical example in areas such policy development and in the implementation of its own programs.

The ASC takes an important leadership role in working with NSOs 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 involves education and training, resources, policies, information and partnerships and is delivered through innovative programs and initiatives including; the work of the Ethics in Sport Unit, the Harassment-free Sport Strategy, Governance and Management improvement, the Anti-Doping Program as well as the various Coaching and Officiating programs.

Sports Ethics Unit

The ASC has had a unit responsible for ethics since 1987, however, in recognition of the importance in retaining and enhancing the integrity of sport a larger, separate Sports Ethics Unit was established in 2002.

The Unit plays a leadership role in assisting the sport industry to formulate policies, practices, programs and resources to enhance ethical conduct in Australian sport and address ethical issues relating to harassment, discrimination, sexual assault, child protection, inappropriate parent, coach, spectator, and athlete behaviour, and other related issues.

In fulfilling this role the Sport Ethics Unit:

- provides information and advice to national sporting organisations, the broader sport industry and government and other agencies responsible for sport ethics initiatives;
- identifies, researches and provides leadership and coordination on harassment, child protection and other ethical issues in sport;
- develops policies, initiatives and resources;
- delivers education workshops and training courses; and
- contributes to international programs and networks.

To achieve its role and assist with upholding the integrity of sport, the Unit has developed a multifaceted and industry-wide approach which includes:

- The Essence of Australian Sport
- The Harassment-free Sport Strategy
- Play by the Rules
- Member Protection Policy
- Codes of Behaviour

Essence of Australian Sport

The ethical framework for Australian sport is captured in the Essence of Australian Sport campaign. Released in 2006, the Essence of Australian Sport defines the core principles of sport. By applying these principles to all roles and decisions relating to sport, the values and benefits which sport has to offer can be realised.

The Essence of Australian Sport centres around four key principles:

Fairness – operating within the spirit of the rules, never taking an unfair advantage and making informed and honourable decisions at all times.

Respect – recognising the contribution which people make to sport, treating them with dignity and consideration, as well as caring for the property and equipment they use

Responsibility – taking responsibility for one’s actions and being a positive role model at all times

Safety – encouraging healthy and safe procedures, preventing and reporting dangerous behaviour, while demonstrating concern for others

In applying these principles, sport helps to develop the virtues and personal characteristics of: compassion, determination, integrity, loyalty, trust. In addition, sport helps to foster positive outcomes such as achievement, enjoyment, friendship, inclusiveness, opportunity, teamwork, wellbeing.

The Essence of Australian Sport is applicable to all individuals at all levels in the Australian Sport Industry (athletes, coaches, officials, administrators, spectators, etc from the grass roots to elite level).

The key to the success of the principles will be its wide adoption and application by the entire industry. The ASC is not looking to impose its ownership of the principles onto sport, nor force their compliance, rather assist sport to adopt this positive initiative.

Harassment-free Sport Strategy

The ASC condemns any form of discrimination, harassment or abuse in sport and has developed a multifaceted and industry-wide approach for dealing with such issues entitled the Harassment-free Sport Strategy. The Strategy was realigned in 2005 to provide more educational and awareness initiatives to NSOs, and empower them to be responsible for implementing the Strategy components at state, regional and local levels.

The Strategy comprises:

- Educational resources – a series of information sheets covering topics such as bullying, child abuse, various forms of harassment and discrimination, conducting investigations, role and conduct of tribunals, conducting police checks, acquiring and displaying images of children)

- Ethics in sport newsletter
- Model Membership Protection policy template and complaint procedures
- Codes of behaviour
- National education and training program
- On-line training and information referrals through the Play by the Rules website
- On-line alternative dispute resolution register
- Online national member protection information officer database
- Sport Ethics website
- Provision of information and strategies

Play by the Rules

An important element of any effective initiative is an education program to promote knowledge, understanding and education and to minimise ignorance and prejudice. A key tool of the Strategy's education program is *Play by the Rules*. This is an online learning and information resource for the sport industry on harassment, discrimination and child protection.

The ASC has been closely involved in developing and updating information on the website and sits on both the management and reference committees. A unique bi-partisan partnership has been established between the ASC, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, every state and territory equal opportunity commission, every state department of sport and recreation and several Commissions for Children and Young People to manage, fund and promote the website. *Play by the Rules* provides an effective way to educate people at the grass roots level and in remote areas of Australia.

The ASC has been, and will continue to, collate information on the range of relevant educational and training opportunities available both within and external to the sports industry aimed at equipping sports people to be positive leaders, mentors and role models and to develop and promote positive and appropriate attitudes and behaviours.

Membership Protection Policy

Given the importance the ASC places on safe, respectful sporting environments, the seriousness of child protection, harassment, abuse and discrimination issues, and the need for organisations to effectively meet their legal (and moral) obligations, the ASC decided upon a compliance approach to address these issues. Under the ASC's funding terms and conditions, NSOs must develop and implement policies and procedures to promote positive and respectful behaviours and to meet obligations relating to harassment, discrimination and child protection.

To make this an easier task for sporting organisations, the ASC developed a model policy template. The template, which is a major component of the Strategy, provides sports with a model policy and procedures to reduce and deal effectively with complaints of harassment, discrimination, child abuse and other inappropriate behaviour. It is a generic document for guidance only, designed to assist organisations to write their own policy.

Code of Behaviour

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has previously publicised a number of different Codes of Behaviour / Conduct / Ethics for the various stakeholder groups which were utilised by sporting organisations to help establish an expected standard of behaviour for their members and participants. Based on feedback from the sport industry and in an effort to help reduce the confusion resulting from multiple and differing codes for the same roles or for people involved in multiple roles or sports, the ASC has reviewed the various Codes and developed a single template Code of Behaviour that is consistent and applicable to all roles and levels within all sports. The ASC will also continue to provide the Junior Sport Codes of Behaviour for organisations and activities that principally deal with children and young people.

The Template Code of Behaviour may be used by sports as a benchmark in the development of their own code of behaviour. Sporting organisations may adopt this Code in its entirety or may adapt the Code to suit their own needs and circumstances. It is recommended that organisations gain input from those impacted upon by their code as this will assist in gaining greater awareness and ownership.

In consistently enforcing the Code, organisations will assist in providing safe and appropriate environments and quality services to their members, stakeholders and customers.

The ASC is also involved in broader areas of work which impact on the ethical environment of Australian sport.

Anti-Doping

The Australian Government has a zero tolerance policy in relation to "doping" in sport and the ASC works in consultation with the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) and domestic and international stakeholders to:

- Ensure Australia maintains its world renowned anti-doping program
- Adopt, implement and enforce anti-doping policies and programs
- Develop and implement drug education and information programs
- Support and assist anti-doping organisations to conduct doping control
- Support initiatives to stop doping in sport
- Promote anti-doping research

It is a mandatory condition of ASC funding that NSOs have adopted a World Anti-Doping Code compliant policy.

Governance

An important issue in sport is the development of transparent and honest governance to meet the rapidly changing face of sport. The ASC assists NSOs to improve their governance and management structures and processes to ensure they are operating soundly, conform to current legislation, good practice and ethical principles, and to increase their capacity and capability to achieve strategic objectives.

One of the current initiatives of the Governance and Management Improvement Program is reviewing the implications and wording of constitutions, participation agreements and codes of conduct at all levels in sport, with a view to helping sports to streamline the legal and practical requirements needed to ensure compliance with national policies. The effective adoption and application of policies such as member protection and anti doping throughout a sport, from national to local level, is essential if the policy is to have the impact intended. Often this means ensuring the policy can constitutionally be applied to and relied on by all members and participants in the sport.

All of this work is eventually aimed at having a positive influence on the sporting experience of all involved. As previously mentioned, in most sporting environments, the coach is a key contributor to the sporting experience for most of those involved.

Coaching Programs

The ASC works with NSOs and other key stakeholders in the sporting industry to ensure that the need for an ethical approach to sport is communicated and re-enforced with coaches at all levels on an ongoing basis. The ASC aims to assist all coaches behave in an ethical manner and make a positive contribution to both their sporting and broader communities. In implementing its own programs the ASC tries to ensure this outcome and take the lead in setting a strong example of ethical delivery of community and high performance programs.

Coach Accreditation

Dealing with ethical issues is now a regular part of a coach's duties. Increasingly, coaches are being required to face issues such as sportsmanship, drugs in sport, cheating, bullying, eating disorders, respect for officials, harassment and judging when an athlete should return to sport after an injury.

Given the important role that coaches play, the way a coach responds to ethical issues can have an enormous impact on athletes. The coach's actions can influence the athlete's enjoyment of sport, their attitude towards others in the sport, their self-esteem and whether they continue to stay involved in sport.

There is no question that most coaches are encouraging, supportive, competent and ethical in their activities. However, some coaches may be uncertain about ethical aspects of their role, or may encounter situations where they are unclear regarding their responsibilities. Approximately 80 per cent of the issues received by the ASC's Sport Ethics unit are focused on coaches; either complaints about the behaviour of a coach or requests from a coach wanting assistance with an issue. Many of the ethical issues that coaches face are complex issues that do not have a simple answer.

It is therefore essential that coaches operate professionally and with integrity in their relationships with those who are participating in or

associated with their sport. The ASC provides education, training and accreditation schemes that will help coaches and officials to provide safe and supportive environments and to promote professionalism.

Within the ASC's National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS), the ASC requires each accredited coach to sign a Code of Behaviour which is based on the ASC template. It is the responsibility of the NSO to ensure that their coaches have read, understood and signed the code. The code outlines the minimum standards of behaviour for coaches. Individual NSOs and the ASC have taken disciplinary action, including deregistration, against coaches who have breached that code. The Code of Behaviour is a mandatory element of any NSO accreditation program registered with the NCAS.

It is also a requirement of the NCAS registration process that issues such as privacy, harassment, discrimination, child protection, anti-doping, safety and risk management are addressed within the NSO accreditation programs registered with the NCAS.

Coach Education

For coaches who are not accredited with the NCAS, the ASC still provides a range of resources that are accessible to coaches and can form part of the training required for accreditation.

The ASC released the online Beginning Coaching Course this year, which is targeted to community coaches and is based on the entry level general principles for the NCAS. The course is available free of charge to Australian coaches, due to a subsidy provided by the ASC, as an initiative to encourage beginner coaches to undertake some initial learning and training.

The course has been developed to assist grass roots coaches to learn the basic skills of coaching. It is especially aimed at those coaching children. A major benefit of the online course is that coaches can complete it in their own time, from the comfort of their home. This is valuable both for coaches in regional areas who often have difficulties in accessing coaching courses, as well as busy volunteer 'mum and dad' coaches.

In completing the online course, coaches need to understand and explain the roles and ethical responsibilities of the coach, develop strategies to work with parents, officials and others, assess and manage the risks of coaching and how to safely conduct a training session, amongst other elements.

The ASC's tools and tips web pages aim to provide information and tools to assist coaches working at community level. These web pages have been designed so that the coach can download and print the documents to take away and use in their coaching role. Included in the tools and tips web pages are fact sheets on what is expected of a volunteer coach, keeping things safe, child protection, managing children's behaviour, working with parents, working with officials and good coaching practices

to reduce risk. The tips centre on the coaches behaviour and ability to provide a safe and ethical sporting environment.

Many NSOs have a range of resources that coaches can access via the web to assist in their ethical role. The Australian Rugby Union, for example, has a number of resources that are available online, but also have resources that can be accessed by clubs for coaches. The Smart Rugby program aims to provide a safe environment and is a requirement for all coaches to complete. The ARU also conduct their foundation program jointly with both coaches and officials- to enhance the understanding of each group to the role of the other in the sport.

The ASC works with our State and Territory Government networks to provide the opportunity for coaches at all levels to access resources and training. Professional development opportunities through the updating process with the NCAS or as part of a coach's ongoing learning journey is essential to support our coaches in creating and maintaining an ethical sporting environment.

Child Safety Legislation

Australian states and territory governments have established, or are introducing, child safety legislation which requires any person working with children under the age of 18 to have police checks to ensure their suitability to do so. These checks apply to all those working with children, including in a volunteer capacity within sport. All ASC and AIS coaches need to pass these checks as a condition of employment.

High Performance Coach Support

High performance coaches around the globe operate in a high pressure environment. The role of head coach is analysed heavily with athletes, spectators, media and the administration all evaluating the performance of the coach – often on a week to week basis.

Not many jobs are subject to that level of scrutiny. However much of the pressure is often self imposed by the coach themselves.

Coaching is not an easy role; there are many stakeholders from a range of domains and the expectations from these stakeholders can add to the pressure felt by the coach. At times these pressures may have the capacity to influence the behaviour of the coach in a negative fashion. We need to ensure that coaches are well educated, trained, supported and balanced in their approach to their demanding role. The ASC and AIS have dedicated resources to support to the professional development and welfare of the coaches and, in doing so, supporting the ethics of coaching in a pressured environment.

The ASC provides a number of development programs for emerging and existing high performance coaches.

The ASC's Elite Coach Development Program, National Coaching Scholarship Program and the Coach Career Management Program all

target the ongoing development and support of our emerging and current high performance coaches.

All coaches selected for these programs must be NCAS accredited coaches and must sign the ASC code of conduct for employees as well as the relevant code of behaviour for their sport. Each program has a specific induction process which includes information about the code of behaviour, the philosophy of the ASC and the expectations of the coach.

The ASC also conducts professional development workshops for high performance coaches which are part of or compliment the formal programs.

All AIS coaches are provided with a specific coach induction process, on top of the general employee induction, which outlines the additional responsibilities of the coaches. Further, annual alcohol and social drugs training workshops and annual anti-doping education sessions are conducted and the ASC has also conducted specific harassment awareness training for its coaches.

The Elite Coach Development Program and the National Coaching Scholarship Program provide intensive learning and professional development opportunities for the coaches involved aimed at fast tracking their progress as a high performance coach.

The ASC has established a Coach Career Management program to further support the development of high performance coaches. The coach career management program provides the coach with personal career plan and one-on-one counselling to help identify their personal and professional training and development needs. A wide range of networks and providers in the training and education arenas can then be accessed to support the development of the coach.

Within the AIS, we have also established a coach welfare officer. As well as assisting in the development of the coaches, the role for this position is to support the life balance and welfare of the AIS coaches, addressing issues such as family support when the coach is travelling internationally and assistance with personal and family commitments and planning.

Sport is not about win at all costs

Australians love to win and are proud of the achievements of our sportsmen and women. Sport is a major part of the Australian culture, but a bigger part of the Australian culture is the concept of a 'fair go' for all members of society. It is that concept which means that Australian society will not relish a victory if it is viewed as one achieved through unethical means.

One of the most infamous incidents in Australian sport is the underarm bowling episode from 1981. In an international one-day match against New Zealand, the captain of the Australian cricket team, perhaps the highest sporting position in the country, instructed the bowler, who

happened to be his brother, to bowl the ball underarm, along the ground, on the last play of the game in order to ensure an Australian victory. While this was technically within the rules of the game it was seen as against the spirit of cricket. Australia won that match but it is only remembered in both countries as a dishonourable incident.

In each of the ASC programs the overall goal is to assist the coach to become the best he or she can be and, included in this is a strong ethical approach which is consistent with the expectations of the ASC and the broader Australian community.

High performance coaches are second only to the athletes as the face of sport. They, like athletes, are the models for others and need to provide a worthy example for the rest of the community. Sporting organisations need to maintain high ethical standards and support coaches and athletes by providing appropriate training and development.

Conclusion

We need sport to be a positive environment. Everyone in sport has the responsibility to uphold ethical standards. At all levels, the coach is critical to a positive and ethical environment. However, the coach does not operate in isolation. The coach is only one part of the broader sporting environment and needs support from the governing organisations, stakeholders and individuals involved in sport at all levels.

As coach educators, policy makers and sports leaders, we should not assume that coaches know the boundaries of ethical behaviour and have the skills to make ethical decisions or create an ethical environment whether they work at grass roots or international level. We need to educate and train coaches to provide them with the skills and abilities to meet the standards we set for them.

Individually we have a responsibility to model the behaviours we want in sport – whether that be on or off the field, at the Board table, or managing or coaching athletes. Organisations and agencies, both sporting and government, have a responsibility to ensure sufficient priority and resources are given to this issue – that it isn't dismissed as a 'soft issue', given lip service or put into the 'too hard basket'.

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.

"It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen."
John Wooden

I'll leave you with a statement that Mal Speed, CEO of the International Cricket Council, made at a conference in Australia in 2005:

"There's much more to running sport. We are trustees for the public. We do not own the business. We do not have shareholders, we have

stakeholders. We are more value driven than dollar driven. Our objective is to guard and nurture the sport and to leave it in a better condition than when we entered it. If we lose site of the integrity of the sport, to us a sporting metaphor – we will drop the ball”

Footnotes

1 US Anti-Doping Agency, *Struggling with Ethics in Sport – the Journey*, 2005

2 *Good Sports On & Off the Field – A Report for the Australian Sports Commission*, TNS Social Research, 2005; *Ethical Governance of Australian National Sporting Organisations*, J Daly, 2005; *Ethics In Sport – A Report for the Australian Sports Commission*, Colmar Brunton, 2003; *The Sport We Want Symposium*, Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2003; Canadian Public Opinion Survey on Youth and Sport, 2002; UK Sporting Conduct Survey, 2001

3 *Ethics In Sport – A Report for the Australian Sports Commission*, Colmar Brunton, 2003

4 *Ethics In Sport – A Report for the Australian Sports Commission*, Colmar Brunton, 2003

5 *The Sport We Want Symposium*, Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 2003