



# Are sports programs closing the gap in Indigenous communities? The evidence is limited.

- **Why is it important for ALL officials to have an inclusive mindset?**

Plus:

- National Integrity Framework
- What you say matters
- Play by the Rules audio files to download
- Complaint handling scenario with Matt Shirvington



## THE EDITOR

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## STATE/TERRITORY Sport & Recreation Play by the Rules CONTACTS

ACT - Sean Willis (02 6207 2073)  
sean.willis@act.gov.au

NSW - Shannon Dixon (02 8754 8814)  
shannon.dixon@sport.nsw.gov.au

NT - Karen Ruzsicska (08 8999 4174)  
karen.ruzsicka@nt.gov.au

QLD - Jo O'Neill (07 3338 9253)  
jo.oneill@npsr.qld.gov.au

SA - Rachel Hampton (1300 714 990)  
rachel.hampton@sa.gov.au

TAS - Sport and Recreation  
(1800 252 476)  
sportrec@communities.tas.gov.au

VIC - Tahlia McGrath (03 9096 9827)  
tahlia.mcgrath@sport.vic.gov.au

WA - Grant Trew  
grant.trew@dlgsc.wa.gov.au

NATIONAL - Elaine Heaney  
manager@playbytherules.net.au

# THE EDITOR

Welcome to 2021!

I'm very happy to announce that Elaine Heaney will start as the new Manager of Play by the Rules on the 22nd March. Elaine most recently led the Scouts NSW safeguarding education campaign 'Know it. Live it. Log It' as their Child Protection and Issues Management Officer. Elaine brings a wealth of experience and a diverse range of skills to the PBTR Manager role and I look forward to working with Elaine over the next few weeks in the transition and handover. I'm very confident that Play by the Rules is in very good hands and will continue to go from strength to strength under Elaine's guidance.

In this issue we ask the questions 'why is it important for ALL officials to have an inclusive mindset' and 'are sports closing the gap in Indigenous communities?' There's important information about the new National Integrity Framework and new program updates. Thanks again and stay safe. Over to you Elaine!



Peter Downs  
Former Manager -  
Play by the Rules



Elaine Heaney  
Manager -  
Play by the Rules

# NEWS: NATIONAL INTEGRITY FRAMEWORK

The National Integrity Framework was recently launched by Sport Integrity Australia. The Framework seeks to take a proactive approach to mitigate threats to sports integrity and provide a safe, fair and healthy environment for participants at all levels of sport.

The Framework is a streamlined suite of policies that sets out the broad expectations for the conduct of all participants in sport. These expectations relate to safeguarding children, member protection, competition manipulation and sports wagering, and the misuse of drugs and medicines.

The Framework also includes the Complaints, Disputes and Discipline Policy. This policy outlines the procedures for managing, reporting, assessing and determining potential breaches of the integrity policies contained in the Framework. Under this policy, Sport Integrity Australia will undertake the independent complaint assessment and review process.

The Framework is designed to both reduce the administrative burden on sports and provide better outcomes for sports and their members when disputes arise.

Sport Integrity Australia will work with National Sporting Organisations to establish a plan and timeline to adopt and implement the National Integrity Framework. Sport Integrity Australia will provide direct assistance on specific policies as required.

To access the National Integrity Framework and resources go to - <https://www.sportintegrity.gov.au/what-we-do/national-integrity-framework>



NEWS:

## WHAT YOU SAY MATTERS



The What you Say Matters project aims to increase understanding of racism among young people (14-17 years) and help them to respond safely to racism through youth-targeted resources.

The resources, produced by the Australian Human Rights Commission, include a video clip for the song, 'What You Say Matters', performed by Indigenous hip-hop artist Brothablack and a series of downloadable fact sheets. The fact sheets address topics such as what racism is; why people are racist; who experiences racism; where it happens; why it's a problem; what we can do about it and the laws that address it.

- [Why are people racist?](#)
- [Who experiences racism?](#)
- [Where does racism happen?](#)
- [Why is racism a problem?](#)
- [What can you do?](#)
- [What does the law say? – WYSM](#)
- [Behind the Scenes](#)

These are all part of the [Racism: It Stops with Me](#) campaign supported by Play by the Rules and an excellent starting point to generate discussions on racism with young people at your club.

## FEATURE ARTICLE:

# WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ALL OFFICIALS TO HAVE AN INCLUSIVE MINDSET?

At the 2020 National Sports Convention I got into a conversation with a colleague about the need for officials to understand inclusion and diversity issues relevant to officiating. His perspective was that it was not important for officials to have an inclusive mindset, as officials were there to interpret and apply rules, regardless of an athlete's ability, culture, sexuality, gender... While he valued diversity among officials, and in sport generally, he did not see his role to be any more inclusive than the rules allowed.

It was a very interesting conversation! And it raised a number of issues.

My counter argument was that it was important for all officials to have an inclusive mindset because, without it, sport cannot progress and truly reflect our diverse community. Officials don't just apply rules, they help set them too. They are in a unique position to see the impact of rules on participants and, in particular, when a rule is unfairly excluding someone because they have a disability, or because of their ethnicity, or their gender, or their sexuality.

But not all officiating situations are the same. Perhaps a better answer to the question, is it important for all officials to have an inclusive mindset, is it partly depends on:

### **The level of officiating and goals of participation**

My colleague (and friend!) was coming from a sub-elite/elite perspective where the goals are all about competition and winning. But what about grass roots sport? The goal of grass roots sport is primarily participation. The idea is to give as many people as possible a chance to participate fully, on equal terms and in ways that suit all people. Officials at grass roots sport should be flexible and recognise when rules are simply too exclusive to apply directly as the rule book dictates. Without an inclusive mindset, officials are less likely to see when rules are unfairly impacting on people.

Having an inclusive mindset could be important too from a legal perspective. Under discrimination law there are protected characteristics. You cannot unfairly discriminate on the basis of a protected characteristic in sport. Meaning, for example, you cannot exclude someone on the basis of their disability, or their sexual orientation, or their cultural background etc. Sure, there are exceptions under the law that cater for particular circumstances but the underlying premise is that nobody should be excluded from sport on this basis. More importantly, there's a moral and ethical imperative that, thankfully, most clubs and associations support diversity and inclusion.

Officials, like everyone involved in sport, have a part to play.

There are rules that will exclude people on the basis of a protected characteristic. And officials are in a great position to identify them and come up with solutions. Let's rattle off a few:

- The rule in football that you must throw the ball in overhead with two hands. What if you don't have two hands?
- The rule that dictates what uniforms/costumes must be worn by players that expose parts of the body that culturally are inappropriate for certain people in the community;
- Rules that dictate the size and weight of bats/balls. What if these are these restrictive for particular people?

I'm sure you can think of rules in your sport that exclude certain people. Ask yourself, is this fair, is it on the basis of a protected characteristic and is it possible to change? Generally, at a grass roots level, common sense decisions can be made to adapt and modify rules to maximise participation. For officials, understanding the way that rules can negatively impact on participation and inclusion is very important in helping identify those exact situations where common sense can prevail.

But does the same apply at the sub-elite or elite end of sport?

I would (and did) argue that the same importance to having an inclusive mindset

applies at the top end of sport even if there is possibly less of a chance of adapting and modifying to facilitate inclusion. Officials carry influence and have an important role to play in ensuring competition is fair and inclusive. Their insights and observations, that are informed by an understanding of inclusion, can help drive change and educate administrators who set the rules.

Great change has happened over the years. And they do not need to be complex and difficult (two bounces in tennis). Yet even when they are obvious and clearly exclusive change can be slow at the elite end given the stricter requirements and regulations.

Administrators are grappling with complex issues of inclusion all the time (for example, the Caster Semenya case). So, the insights of officials are important from the perspective of highlighting and identifying ways in which sports unfairly exclude people. **It's a good time to speak up and contribute toward the movement to inclusion.**

Thankfully, there are many ways officials can improve their understanding of inclusion. It's been a boom time for debate and discussion online and many sports now actively engage and implement inclusive programs and strategies. There are online courses through Play by the Rules and check out your state departments of sport and your sports governing body.

Peter Downs  
Former Manager - Play by the Rules

# ARE SPORTS PROGRAMS CLOSING THE GAP IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES? THE EVIDENCE IS LIMITED.

Indigenous Australians have a long and proud heritage in both traditional sports and games, and in modern sport through the achievements of people like Johnathan Thurston and Ashleigh Barty.

There's also long been the belief that sport can be used as a lever for improvement in outcomes for Indigenous communities. [The 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody](#), for instance, found that sport and recreation can play a role in the reduction of offending behaviour among Indigenous peoples.

And while there are a number of physical activity and sports programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today, a parliamentary inquiry in 2013 recommended that much more comprehensive evaluation of sports programs should be conducted to gauge their impact.

The report said some government sports programs are being rolled out with very little understanding of how the Close the Gap outcomes are being achieved.

Another study noted that sport has often been seen as a "panacea" for myriad problems in Indigenous communities, and this belief has led to ambitious, ill-defined and, in terms of evaluation, often elusive social outcome goals.

## **What could sport achieve?**

To better understand the impact sport can have on Indigenous communities and how government investment could be better targeted, we undertook a review of 20 Australian studies published in peer-reviewed journals between 2003 and 2018.

The research looked at how sport and physical activity programs for Indigenous adults or children improved outcomes in six different areas:

1. education
2. employment
3. culture
4. social and emotional well-being
5. life skills
6. crime reduction





Because of the low level of evidence in this area so far, we included all relevant studies. The 20 studies involved over 2,500 individual participants located in urban, rural and remote areas across Australia.

Our review, which was published in the [Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport](#), found some evidence that sport and physical activity increases Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance, improves self-esteem and can enhance cultural connectedness, values and identity.

But the studies were inconclusive on whether sport and physical activity can have longer-term benefits, such as improving educational or employment outcomes or reducing crime.

### **Education**

Eleven of the studies we reviewed examined education. Overall, most showed positive outcomes for young people involved in sport.

A number of programs were shown to improve school attendance, such as two

AFL youth programs in [Cape York](#) and the [Northern Territory](#) aimed at encouraging school attendance and improving behaviour through Australian rules football.

Other programs showed improvements in school retention and achievement rates, while two helped [Indigenous youth prepare for higher education and success beyond school](#).

### **Employment**

Only [one study](#) examined the impact of sport on employment: the AFL youth program in the NT. Almost all of the participants and stakeholders felt the program helped players to secure paid work or training, but the study didn't link to employment data specifically.

### **Culture**

Nine studies examined culture. And like education, most programs showed positive outcomes for participants when it came to cultural connections, values and identity. For example, in Victoria, the [Fitzroy Stars](#) community sports club study found that social and community connection was



an important way for participants to strengthen and maintain their cultural values and identity.

And the study on the impact of the [Swan Nyungar](#) sports education program for young people in Perth found the success of participants depended on incorporating their families and culture in the instruction.

### **Social and emotional well-being**

Twelve studies examined social and emotional well-being. Improved self-esteem and confidence were found in the participants of several programs, such as the [WA Girls Academy](#) and Indigenous surfing programs in several states.

A study of Queensland's [Deadly Choices](#) program, which aims to help Indigenous people make healthier lifestyle choices, found that participants had increased confidence and were more proactive about preventing chronic disease.

### **Life skills**

Five studies examined "life skills." The positive outcomes ranged from improved attitudes and lifestyle choices ([the AFL Cape York program]) to hygiene and health, self-reliance and fundraising skills (the WA Girls Academy).

### **Crime**

Only five studies examined the impact of sport on crime prevention and prison inmate management, and the findings were limited.

The [Aboriginal Power Cup](#), another youth football program in South Australia, was [found to have positive impacts](#) when it came to school achievement, but the study didn't directly examine aspects of crime.

A study into a prison sport program in central Australia found that it was an effective diversion for inmates, but there were only six participants in the study, which is not a very robust sample size.

Meanwhile, the impact of the [NT AFL program](#) on community safety and violence was unclear, as was the impact of a sports program in Arnhem Land that aimed to steer Indigenous youth away from substance abuse.

This is a key challenge for researchers in this area – identifying the specific impacts of sport and physical activity programs on societal problems such as crime in which many factors come into play.

### **More evidence is needed**

Substantial challenges remain in accurately measuring how sports programs like these can lead to better outcomes for Indigenous communities. Scoping reviews, for instance, do not include an assessment of study quality and therefore may overestimate the findings.

More studies are needed to track the impact of sport through a range of indicators. We also still need to know more about how programs can improve employment and crime outcomes.

With more robust evidence, a more targeted plan can be made for future programs that are better suited to the needs of individual communities.

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**Rona Macniven** (Research Fellow, University of New South Wales)

**John Evans** (Professor, Indigenous Health Education, University of Technology Sydney)

**Rachel Wilson** (Associate Professor, Research Methodology/Educational Assessment & Education, University of Sydney)

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# PLAY BY THE RULES AUDIO FILES TO DOWNLOAD

Play by the Rules has a large network of 'champion' past and present sports men and women that support safe, fair and inclusive sport. They have provided us with some great short messages in the form of audio files you can download and use on your own website and for promotional purposes, for example, at events. Take your pick from the stars below and download your copy here - <https://playbytherules.net.au/resources/audio-files>

- Kyah Symon
- Elyse Perry
- Ange Postecoglou
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- Cameron Smith
- Paul Gallon
- Archie Thompson
- Anna Meares
- Matt Cowdrey
- Jonathan Thurston
- Anna Flanagan
- Alicia Coutes
- Adam Goodes

# DEALING WITH A COMPLAINT - THE COMPLAINT HANDLING SCENARIO WITH MATT SHIRVINGTON

As a club administrator it can be confusing to know what to do when problems arise. Most people know that a sports tribunal or hearing committee deals with on field complaints, but are less sure about what to do about off field behaviour (e.g., sexual harassment) or unfair administrative decisions (e.g. unfair rules).

Increasingly national and state sporting and recreation organisations are developing Member Protection and other policies and procedures to help guide their member clubs in dealing with these complaints.

It is important that clubs respond to all complaints, follow their organisation's policies and seek clarification from their state or national sporting or recreation organisation (or an external authority) if they are unsure about what to do.

If the state or national organisation manages a complaint the role of the club is to co-operate in any investigation, manage the situation until the outcome of the complaint is decided and implement any disciplinary action if required.

Play by the Rules has a complaint handling scenario with Matt Shirvington who guides you through a sequence of videos. You will see that the scenario is not handled in textbook fashion. This is done to highlight some of the potential pitfalls of the complaint process. It also talks about the role of the Member Protection Information Officer (MPIO).

This scenario will be beneficial even if you do not have an MPIO. You can download the Key Learning Points and add your own from the scenario.

To access go to - <https://playbytherules.net.au/complaints-handling/dealing-with-a-complaint>

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## Back Issues

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## Share and spread the word

One easy way to keep up to date and support safe, fair and inclusive sport is to share Play by the Rules across social media. We post every day on Facebook and Twitter and have audio files on Soundcloud and an extensive collection of videos on YouTube and Vimeo.




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Did you know that Play by the Rules is one of the best examples of a Collective Impact approach to addressing sport issues in the country? If not the best. Play by the Rules is a collaboration between multiple partners.



To make Play by the Rules possible, we also work with

