



VicHealth

LETTER

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The gold medal
for participation
A new role for sport



The Roxy Women's Surfing program, run by Surfing Australia, has been a tremendous success in getting young women out onto the waves.
Image of Stephanie Gilmore: STEVE ROBERTSON

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COVER IMAGE: The focus now for many sports organisations is on creating new opportunities for ordinary people to participate. Cartoon: RON TANDBERG

Playing on the same team Public health needs sport and active recreation



When the 1956 Olympic Games were held in Melbourne, television made its debut in the homes of many Australians, with coverage of the magnificent athletic feats of speed, endurance, power, flexibility, grace and balance. Since that time television has shown us the best achievements of sportsmen and women, and made stars of many. Those telecasts have fuelled many a child's dream of sporting fame.

Since that time too, more sports options have become available to children and adults in the community. Back in the 1950s there were few choices for schoolchildren to participate in sport. Boys could play football in the winter, cricket in the summer and perhaps a little tennis. Girls might play netball, softball and also tennis. Athletics and swimming were usually end-of-year events only.

Now schoolchildren are offered soccer, basketball, volleyball, hockey, and many more exotic sports such as inline skating, lacrosse and water polo. Adults too have more options, with Masters teams and more community-based facilities than ever before.

Sports associations of all kinds have emerged in the last 50 years, and attracting membership at the grassroots level has been a focus for sports administrators throughout the country. In parallel, however, we've seen a decline in the amount of time allocated to sport and physical activity – whether due to fewer compulsory physical education sessions in schools or busy working lives compromising the time available for adults to coach, umpire or play. People are less active than they were, and this is playing havoc with our health.

There are many reasons for reduced levels of physical activity in the population (much of it to do with the increased mechanisation of work and travel, increased passive recreation, and demands from work and school on our time). However, participation in sport and recreation surely is one element of a healthy plan for getting people moving. Well-managed sports are also valuable sources of good mental health, providing belonging, self-esteem and links to community life.

Public health strategies should include sports and active recreation as an important element in tackling obesity and other health issues related to insufficient physical activity, and improving social connection. Unfortunately, this generally doesn't happen to the degree necessary. Rarely do the health and sport and recreation sectors deliberately work or plan together for population-wide participation strategies.

VicHealth's experience of working with sport and active recreation organisations has shown the great potential of cooperative strategies. Understanding the barriers to participation many people face has been an eye-opener for our sports partners. And we have seen them embrace the possibilities for increasing their club membership through changes in policy and practice that have a health benefit.

In this issue we explore some of the challenges of a public health/sport partnership. We also highlight some of the best examples of how sport is attracting more participants and promoting healthy environments.

Lindsay Gaze
Board Member



Cartoon: RON TANDBERG

The gold medal for participation

A new role for sport

There are all sorts of good reasons why sport should be a part of any health-promoting strategy. But often the public health sector does not acknowledge sports organisations and partners in improving overall health.

While there are some well-founded misgivings about working with sport to promote health, especially the way sport is portrayed at the elite level, public health strategies stand to benefit if they are planned in partnership with peak sporting bodies and local representatives. This kind of collaborative work also gives the public health sector an opportunity to influence those aspects of sport which it sees as being potentially damaging to health.

Why sport should matter for public health

The Victorian Premier Steve Bracks recently commented that, "Obesity and diabetes have replaced smoking as the major health challenges facing our community". In response to this, the State Government has committed \$129 million over the next five years to promote greater health and fitness. This includes spending \$46 million to increase the number of pools across the state, \$30 million for local councils to develop new sporting facilities and a range of other initiatives to encourage more participation in sport.¹

This investment reflects the government's view that sport is part of the solution for tackling 21st-century public health challenges like obesity and diabetes. The benefits of physical activity for health are well known: 30 minutes of moderate activity five times a week can help to reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases, some cancers, strokes and obesity. The role sport plays in helping individuals to achieve this is obvious.

Sport can also help people overcome substance misuse and keep mental health problems in check. For example, the Homeless World Cup was set up to give homeless people and people living in poverty a chance to participate in a global sporting competition, as one way of helping them to change their lives. The *Big Issue* magazine has won the right to host the Homeless World Cup in Melbourne's Federation Square in 2008. Steven Persson, CEO of the *Big Issue*, believes that the Cup promotes positive choices that are associated with being physically active. In order to train and play in the competition, people choose to stop taking drugs, eat less junk food and take their medication.

St Kilda's Sacred Heart Mission has an adult sport and recreation program that offers daily activities for up to 100 people. Sacred Heart's 2003 evaluation of the 17-year-long

program found that the health and wellbeing benefits among participants included people reducing their drug use, stopping smoking, losing weight and decreasing their levels of aggression and hostility. Mary Bartlett, who manages Sacred Heart's program, says, "Many of these people have only ever viewed themselves as a failure. When someone kicks their first goal, it is impossible to evaluate that sense of achievement."

There are also broader benefits for a society which has a high level of involvement in sport and physical activity because of what individuals can learn through their participation. This includes important social skills (such as teamwork) and attitudes (like resilience) as well as broader lessons: for example, the value of having a goal and receiving affirmation, developing motivation and the benefits of interacting with other people.

In 2003, Dr Jeff Walkley, an Associate Professor at RMIT and President of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, won 12 months of seed funding from VicHealth to set up a program called *Creating A Sporting Chance* to give people with an intellectual disability the opportunity to participate regularly in physical activity.² The initial project began with six participants. Today, the project helps hundreds of intellectually disabled people across Melbourne. Focus groups run in 2006 found that making friends was the highest priority for participants.

"Participation in sport offers people a microcosm of life's experiences because it involves cooperation, sharing, overcoming disappointment, elation, worthwhile use of time, support, sense of cohesion and a sense of being included. This is particularly important for people who are not always included in day to day society," Dr Walkley says. "But it's just as important for the general population because a strong community is one that embraces diversity."

Sport on the sidelines

With these potential benefits on offer, why has the public health sector been cautious to date about making links with sporting bodies?

Perhaps part of the answer is that not everybody has positive experiences of the benefits sport can bring. For every person who ever won a ribbon at a school sports day, there are many more who

were probably left wondering what the benefits were of all that huffing and puffing. It was more likely to be an early lesson in 'be in it to win it' rather than simply 'be in it'.

The element of competitiveness that has traditionally been built into sport at all levels can create a perception that sport is exclusively for those who are good at it (both those who play it and those who govern its administrative organisations). It can therefore come with an elitism that is anathema to the inclusive public health agenda of promoting good health for all.

Some are suspicious of the potential health benefits of sport because they see sport as abusive, aggressive and divisive. What sort of example does the intimidating practice of 'sledging', so beloved by the national cricket team, set for an inclusive, participative and positive sporting experience?

Others in public health also point to the associations between sport and alcohol through sponsorship, as explained in this issue by Tom Noble ('Sponsoring a culture'). Given that almost 3000 Victorians a year die from alcohol-related causes,³ the public health sector has perhaps felt that unhealthy sponsorship has undermined the potentially healthy outcomes of sport.

Lindsay Gaze, former Olympic basketball player and coach and current VicHealth board member, argues that the public health sector perhaps overlooks sport because it requires a long-term strategy to improve health, rather than being a quick 'magic bullet' solution. He acknowledges that "it is a very difficult decision for most in public health working with restrictive budgets to have strategies which will only be recognised as being beneficial in the long term". Nonetheless, most successful public health campaigns – such as reducing tobacco use and exposure to the sun – take years to come to fruition.

Jumping the hurdles

These shortcomings have been enough for the public health sector to keep sport at arm's length in its pursuit of good health for the wider population. However, there are many in sport who understand these challenges and have been setting out to solve them, with some success.

VicSport is the peak body for sport and recreation clubs in Victoria. It provides material resources, advice and workshops for clubs throughout the state that are grappling with everything from cultural diversity to governance. VicSport has developed policies and strategies to help clubs create safe environments and to become more inclusive, such as safe drinking policies, *Adult Behaviour* and *Junior Sport Management Strategies*, as well as *Keeping Sport Safe and Fun*.

In regional Victoria, Regional Sports Assemblies (RSAs) have been active for some time in developing successful programs that attract people who are isolated or not interested in structured sport but understand the health benefits of physical activity.

There are many instances of RSAs across Victoria working with clubs to increase participation in physical activity at every opportunity. For example, organisers at a junior football club in Ballarat, part of the Central Highland RSA, noticed that lots of mothers dropped their children at training and stood around the fence talking. The club started a walking program that has developed into a strong and sustainable social network among parents.

Di Trotter, Executive Officer of the Wimmera RSA, says funding opportunities from VicHealth (Active Participation and Active Club Grants) have spurred many of the 450 sporting clubs in her region to try to bridge the gap between the inactive

Newly arrived refugees and migrants have some big issues to deal with. Playing sport gives them time out: a chance to play, make friends and have fun. It's a positive way to overcome the barriers of language and cultural difference.



population and sporting clubs. This has meant working with clubs to be more diverse and inclusive. The shift came as many country clubs faced dwindling numbers because a generation of school leavers and young adults was leaving farms and country towns seeking employment. She says small country areas, with these unique challenges, have responded well, determined to encourage participation among those who are not considered to be traditional members. For example, tennis clubs that only ran an all-day Saturday competition now offer mid-week tennis under lights, mid-week tennis for mums with young children and a Masters competition. This has a spin-off for them of increased membership, which is also important for developing the success of upper levels of any sport.

Sport and public health – playing on the same side?

Sports administrators and organisers are facing external pressures which collaborations with public health could help to overcome. For example, Kate Palmer, Chief Executive Officer of Netball Australia, believes increased physical activity has become something of a political mantra which is not being matched by significant enough investment in resources and facilities by government, the corporate sector or sports organisations.

She argues that “Grassroots providers are expected to be the panacea to the country’s growing childhood obesity, diabetes and other health issues, yet they are left to do the best they can using a mostly volunteer workforce. I think we need to spread the onus of increasing participation, rather than shift it onto the sport and recreation industry alone.”

Kate suggests that sport and recreation needs to be included in public health planning. There should also be a greater focus on sporting ‘environments’ which would include building the capacity of coaches and administrators to create inclusive and welcoming clubs to help retain young participants.

Sport is also facing up to internal pressures, not least overcoming the bad press that can arise from the charges of exclusivity and competitiveness described above. Again, links into a public health approach could help overcome these pressures.

Jim Stynes, a former Melbourne footballer and co-founder of the Reach Foundation, uses sport and active recreation (such as dancing and drama) at camps to help build self-esteem in at-risk teenagers. At these camps, sport has to be slowly reintegrated into the young person’s life because in most cases they have abandoned sport because of failure to excel or poor body image. Importantly, the sports used by Reach are modified to take the focus off winning and onto participation, fun and teamwork.

The Victorian Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation cooperative (WAYSAR) holds regular sporting carnivals around the state. Richard Young, CEO of WAYSAR, points to research based on the 2006 carnival in Hamilton which showed that survey respondents repeatedly mentioned the importance of the games for facilitating community and family togetherness. As he says, “There are physical benefits of participating in the carnivals, but winning is a low priority – it’s about coming to be with your mob”. This taps into the wider health benefits of participation that public health practitioners are keen to promote.



Set up in 2003 to improve the cardiovascular fitness of people with intellectual disabilities, the Sporting Chance Program has expanded to nearly 300 participants who enjoy the physical and mental stimulation of playing netball, and the social interaction and camaraderie that being part of a team provides.

Image: DR JEFF WALKLEY

Everyone’s welcome

While there are encouraging examples of the work going on within sport to connect to the wider agendas of inclusiveness, participation and healthy communities, a more structured approach is needed. For example, in the UK the national sports funding bodies have launched an Equality Standard for Sport.⁴ The standard is a framework to help sports organisations widen access and reduce inequalities in sport and physical activity by including under-represented individuals, groups and communities. The standard has four levels, and organisations are obliged to progress through each level as a mandatory condition of receiving government funding.

A sporting community that is focused more on equitable participation and less on competitive elitism could be a significant ally for public health as the latter looks for ways to overcome current leading public health concerns like obesity, diabetes, mental health problems and cardiovascular disease.

The public health sector needs to recognise that sport is heading in the right direction and should look to make links so that sport can play a valuable part in developing public health strategies. That means working collaboratively to help each other meet what ought to be common aims and objectives through mutually reinforcing policies. Anything less will represent an ‘own goal’ for both sectors.

Andrew Ross is a freelance writer who specialises in urban planning, sustainable development and public health. Rosie Hoban is a Melbourne journalist particularly interested in writing about people, and the social issues that concern them.

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What position is sport playing on the public health team?

Sport could be playing a larger role in public health strategies.

No-one would disagree with the following statement: 'From a public health perspective, physical activity is important for good health.' It would seem logical then that the connection between sport and public health would be as tight as a rugby scrum. In fact, although mutual understanding between the sectors is increasing, there remains much work to be done to close the existing gap. Victoria's Health Minister, Bronwyn Pike, concedes the link could be stronger. "Absolutely, I think it's something we just have to keep working at," she says.

It's not that public health advocates don't recognise sport's important role in determining community health. Professor John Catford, Dean of the Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences at Deakin University, sees sport's involvement in public health as obvious. "We need an active population and the sporting industry has much to offer. People can remain fit without adopting a formal sport, but clearly people who do maintain a sport will often remain physically active throughout their life." Pike, while emphasising that organised sport is not the only game in town, is clear about the sporting community's contribution to public health in ways above and beyond its role in engaging people in physically active pursuits. It gives those involved "that sense of belonging, of community engagement and the opportunity to collaborate, work together and be part of a team."

So why does Pike insist that organised sport is not the only way to achieve public health objectives? "The whole task of increasing the community's physical activity is much bigger than getting people involved in sporting clubs," she says. Some sporting clubs' activities are still not always appropriate for increasing physical activity. Public health advocates say that, for many, organised sport is inaccessible: It's too expensive, unwelcoming or a middle class enclave. For others, the thought of competing in a sport is not their idea of fun; while some sporting clubs foster unhealthy off-field cultures, with excessive alcohol consumption and unhealthy eating. Although progressive sporting clubs are waking up to these issues, much needs to be done. Catford, who is also chair of Kinect Australia, argues that the most successful sporting clubs and bodies will "recognise their position as a resource for good health, adopt health promotion as a mission and ensure that all their actions are geared towards this."

The truth is the health landscape has changed quickly. The big public health challenges are now obesity, diabetes, and mental health and wellbeing. Such a massive change of focus, for a sector where many have a background in disease prevention, is not easy. Tackling such health issues through sport is a complex process, one that requires a new way of doing business. "It's only in the last few years we've been making a much stronger connection," says Pike.

"We always intuitively knew that if you played sport it was good for you. What we didn't fully appreciate was the depth of the public health crisis that we were facing, and the role that those bodies (such as VicSport and Kinect Australia) can play from a health perspective. We've certainly tried to engage with them, but there is a lot more work we can do."

Closer to the grassroots, dialogue has grown strong relatively quickly. At Mitchell Community Health Centre, the Program Manager for Community Wellbeing and Development, Margie Ware, says engaging with the wider community, including the sporting sector is no longer the challenge it once may have been. "We always try to approach initiatives from different perspective, being considerate as to what would attract partners to the table, while at the same time being inclusive. We have developed a rapport with the community." Don't think it has always been easy, though. It's taken three years of being committed to making a difference, as well as agency dedication to the social model of health, and the establishment and further development of partnerships within the Mitchell Community.

Enthusiasm and timing remain the keys to success at the local level. "You can plan for something and it looks great on paper, but it's not that easy," says Ware. "It's got to be the right time, people have to be receptive." It's a sentiment Pike agrees with: "A lot of people have very good ideas but translating them into practical programs is not always simple."

Deanne Drage, Manager Health Promotion with Upper Hume Community Health Service says dialogue is the key. "Acknowledge where the expertise lies, but don't just make it 'you do your job; we'll do ours'. It's got to be a true partnership with a win-win result". Drage says in small communities, health professionals must engage the managers and owners of local sporting clubs and centres. "Public health arguments can be ignored if you haven't built a good relationship or put it in plain language. We find most clubs are enthusiastic once we put the issue to them clearly, say what we're trying to achieve and ask: 'how can we work together to make it happen?'"

It's getting together that may be the hardest part. Catford thinks greater levels of cooperation are not too far away. "We are seeing physical activity becoming much more centre stage in health discussions and the flipside will be health promotion becoming a core goal of sporting programs as well."

The Victorian Government's *goforyourlife* strategy is aimed to that end, says Pike, who is determined to bring the sectors closer: "As lead minister on *goforyourlife*, it's my role to create those bridges between public health and sport."

Peter Ryan is a writer with AFL Publishing.

Sports for ALL SORTS

Warren Burford, a 31-year-old Melburnian, is part of a growing crew of people getting their physical activity fix playing new versions of traditional sports. They're not sportspeople necessarily. They just want to get fit, and have fun doing it. They might be 10-year-olds, or pushing 60. They could be 30, groovy, and appear, at first glance, less likely to play sport than a trumpet. They could be from a background with no historical tradition of playing a particular sport, or fans that thought their time to live out their sporting dreams had passed them by.

Burford plays with Bullets FC in one of Football Victoria's Recreational Football competitions. After work every Tuesday night between October and December, Burford and seven friends, male and female, play the non-contact version of traditional footy at Sandringham Oval, a windswept ground on the bay's edge. The game is competitive or chaotic, or a mix of both. Burford admits "there's a bit of talk out there", but mostly it's in the spirit of the contest: all part of the fun. "This is our competition footy, this is it for us," laughs Burford.

Sport is facing a new reality. Only 44% of Victoria's population participate in some form of organised sport.¹ That percentage is static overall, but in many sports, numbers are declining. Some of the population is moving to non-organised sport (41.5% only play non-organised sport), but not enough. And of the 85% of the population that engage in some form of physical activity, only 57% do enough regularly to gain a health benefit. That trend looks set to continue as sport competes with many sedentary entertainment options, work commitments, a changing demographic profile as the population ages, a diverse culture and a perception, held until recently at least, that sporting clubs were culturally outdated. Some sports, whether they are willing to admit it or not, have reached a mature stage in their life cycle and are an old model not suited to modern needs. In the business world, such stark numbers as those above would require a desperate reassessment of strategy: A presentation of a new face, more in touch with its potential markets, that asks not 'why aren't we attracting participants (customers) as we used to', but 'how can we attract them in the future'. Sport, in many cases for its very survival, needs to do the same.

Recreational football is a perfect example of the shifts required by sports to lower some of the barriers that stop people from engaging in sport: affordability; geographical access; rigid drills and skills; social aspects such as low self-esteem and

associated perceptions about body image and fitness; a lack of friends or connections; and little enjoyment. Recreational football fulfils Burford's needs: limited time commitment, low risk of injury, a social dimension, enough level of competition to keep interest levels high but rules that make the sport open to anyone from any background with any level of sporting prowess.

Lawn bowls, a sport until recently thought to be played only by 'oldies', has found the marketplace opening up to a broader population through the success of its barefoot bowling and *Get on the Green* programs. Shannon Ryan, *Get on the Green* State Coordinator in Victoria, says the strategy has aimed at groups looking for a social, largely informal competition to play after work. Now, after a couple of years, the relaxed, helpful atmosphere of bowling clubs is well established in local communities. They are places young people want to gather, to socialise and to play. In fact, even those who were previously not drawn to sport are finding bowls clubs perfect places to bend, stretch and roll. "The next challenge is to accentuate the positives so the social players can become regular players," says Ryan. The evidence that bowls is meeting that challenge is good so far – the stereotype is breaking down and a new generation of bowlers are finding their way into local bowls clubs.

Tennis Victoria's *1st Serve Program* has an even higher retention figure than bowls has managed. Aimed at young people, the February 2006 pilot program attracted 1096 enrolments across the state, with 71.5% of participants enrolling in the next term's coaching lessons. The introductory tennis program has been successful because it looks to teach participants more than just how to hit topspin lobs that land on the line. The holistic, eight-week program, run by professional tennis coaches at local clubs, teaches behaviours such as sportsmanship, teamwork, perseverance and healthy eating as well as tennis skills. "Health and fitness challenges happen between each of the lessons," says Tennis Victoria's Access Executive Manager



LINKS

The *Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey* provides information for both organised and non-organised exercise, recreation and sport, for all states and territories and for a variety of demographic variables. Conducted quarterly throughout Australia, the full report is available at www.ausport.gov.au/scorsresearch/research.asp

Tamatha Harding. “Sportsmanship, teamwork or encouragement are reinforced to participants during the tennis lesson. The children are then given a challenge to meet between lessons. For example, in fruit fiesta week children are asked to eat at least seven pieces of fruit between lessons.” It’s engaging, relevant and parents love it. It also introduces young people to a sport they can play as a five-year-old, and continue until they’re 85.

Such numbers are good, but they come with a warning. Sports are consciously trying to keep a lid on the growth so change is managed properly. Each experience needs to be a good experience for the participants, and each program needs to, eventually, become self-sustaining, both financially and with personnel.

Inline Hockey Development Manager, Hugues Deraps, would love big numbers playing the sport he was reared on in Canada but he is realistic. His sport does not have the history in this country other sports do, so he has turned things on their head to spark interest. Deraps threw away the skates to expose young Aussies to the sport. He introduced *Thunder Hockey* (a form of inline hockey he calls minimal hockey) to Active After Schools Programs. “It’s the game all Canadians would play at school so it already existed. [In Canada] it’s like backyard cricket,” he says. Played in school grounds, *Thunder Hockey* demonstrates the rules and offers an alternative for students normally served up the standard fare of football, cricket, basketball, soccer or tennis. As children understand the game, the skates and skating rinks become part of the picture. Deraps says it’s not hard to convince participants to persist once they’re on the hook: “When kids play, they often get the bug. It’s a fairly addictive sport.”

New age sports are not alone in giving traditional modes of thinking a shake-up. South Mildura Football and Netball Club has demonstrated in just three years that even seemingly entrenched cultures can change. No one hides the fact that it was the near death of the club that forced the sidestep. Lyle Massey became president when the club recognised the depth of its troubles. A straight-shooter and former player, with the guts to take on a job few others would have wanted, Massey tossed and turned in bed for many nights to come up with an escape plan. One of the most significant changes he made was to enforce a culture of responsible

drinking. It encouraged families back to the club and strengthened its ties to the community. “I enjoy a beer as much as anyone,” says Massey. “But I had to straighten that part of the club out.” He has banned alcohol from being brought into the ground, created a dry area for adults at the ground, and suspended a junior player for drinking, forging an atmosphere families and young people are happy to be part of. Membership has grown from 17 to 400 members since Massey took over.

Facing a population bombarded with choice but often pressed for time, many sports are coming up with new and successful ways to attract participants.

It’s enabled other moneymaking ideas to be supported: A house was built and sold for a profit; the ground is turned into a caravan park to accommodate visitors during a local music festival. This year the club has turned a profit, is building light towers and recently won the Good Sports State Club of the Year Award for 2006 in recognition of the significant achievements the club has made in managing alcohol responsibly and making the club family friendly. “You have to tread on a few toes,” concedes Massey. The club made some tough decisions and regained the values that clubs have been built on for generations: As places to gather, as places that cater for different lives and life stages.

Football, lawn bowls, tennis and inline hockey are just a few of the sports changing to meet the current needs of potential participants. It’s an outward-looking approach that works.

Peter Ryan is a writer with AFL Publishing.

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WANT TO TRY IT YOURSELF?

ORGANISATION	PROGRAM	AIMED AT	DESCRIPTION
Tennis Victoria www.tennisvic.com.au	1st Serve	Primary-aged children	Holistic program teaching children tennis and life skills
Inline Hockey www.vilha.asn.au	Thunder Hockey	14-years-old and under	Played in schoolyards without skates
Royal Victorian Bowling Association www.getonthegreen.com.au	<i>Get on the Green</i> program, barefoot bowling	Ages 18–44, specifically ages 25–35	Modified weekly competition, can enter as team or individual, no equipment required, coaching available
Football Victoria www.recfooty.footballvic.com.au	Recreational Football	Anyone who wants to play	Modified rules, non-contact, females and males play on same side
Keenagers www.keenagers.org.au	Recreational Table Tennis	Older demographic, available to anyone	Table tennis played as recreation, not competition
Croquet www.croquet-australia.com.au/Gateball/Gateball.html	Gateball	Accessible to anyone	Team game, 30-minute games

SPORT

A universal language and force for change

Sport has a powerful hold on our imagination, but can it also create meaningful social change?

When Cathy Freeman took her famous victory lap in the 1994 Commonwealth Games resplendent in the red, black and yellow colours of the Aboriginal flag, she created an iconic image of Aboriginal pride. She was also heir to a long tradition in sport of making powerful statements about society, and even working to change things for the better.

Sport has always had a knack for knocking the wind out of people's ignorance and prejudice – think of African American athlete Jesse Owens' multiple victories in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, for example, which put to rest the Nazi delusion of 'Aryan' superiority. Occasionally it can even become a front in the struggle for political justice, as in the 1971 protest campaigns against the Springboks, South Africa's apartheid-era rugby team, which took a stand against the racism of the apartheid government and raised the profile of Aboriginal justice issues in this country.

While elite sport provides a good platform for drawing attention to social ills, sport at a community level – whether in a sporting club or just mucking about in a local park – can also really make a difference. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan put it, "Sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status". As well as offering many physical and mental health benefits to the individual, a healthy, inclusive sporting culture can be a training ground for a healthy society.

Overcoming barriers to inclusion

Everyone deserves to have the chance to play sport and to experience its benefits. But unfortunately, sport is not always as inclusive as it could be.

Despite some encouraging progress in recent years, racism is still a problem in sporting clubs, and with around 44% of Victorians either born overseas or with one or more parent born overseas,¹ a large chunk of the population is at risk of being put off playing sport because of it.

To help deal with the issue, Football Victoria's campaign *Bouncing Racism Out of Sport* provides training and education about racism to clubs and leagues around the state. According to Michael Daniher of Football Victoria, the program is largely about educating people about racism and the harm it causes. "In years gone by, making a racist comment about a player, for example, might have been seen as a way of putting a player off his game, a legitimate tactic. That's no longer good enough in today's society," says Daniher. The anti-racism program targets players, managers and club officials, and includes an educational video presented by former AFL player Michael Long. Alternative versions have been made for netball and tennis clubs.

Dealing with the issue is important not just for the clubs themselves, says Daniher – it has flow-on effects beyond the realm of sport. "In a lot of cases our training programs are the first time people are exposed to [information about racism] in a formal setting, so we're finding that the skills and knowledge they gain also transfer to other environments. So it has a wider community benefit," he says.

There are other, more subtle forms of discrimination that can discourage certain groups from playing sport. Only 2% of people with disabilities play sport in Australia, for example, though they make up around 19% of the total population.²

According to Jacinta Baldwin, a project manager from the Disability Sport Unit at the Australian Sports Commission, the problem is all the more critical because people with a

The AFL is creating opportunities for people from diverse communities to get involved. Welcome to the AFL ambassador Angelo Lekkas invites a newly arrived Sudanese family to a Hawthorn game in Tasmania. The AFL round 12 (2006) was dedicated to inviting emerging communities to an AFL game across Australia. Image: GETTY IMAGES



LINKS

Dr Bill Jonas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, speaks about sport and how it can help us correct our social and political inequalities. Go to www.hreoc.gov.au/speeches/social_justice/how_to_play.html

disability stand to gain so much from playing sport, “not just in terms of the obvious physical and mental health benefits, but as a more proactive form of reconnecting”.

In collaboration with the Australian Paralympic Committee, the Disability Sport Unit is developing a national sport plan for people with a disability to try to correct the disparity. “While the provision of sport for people with disabilities has evolved a lot over the last 10 or 20 years, it’s still pretty ad hoc and people don’t really have true choice,” says Baldwin.

More funding and research are needed, but even more important are education and a culture shift, says Baldwin. “There is a lack of awareness among people with a disability about what resources are out there, and a misapprehension on the part of sporting clubs and associations about how to provide facilities,” she says. “We’re keen on getting mainstream sport to provide [these facilities] as standard. But we also want people with a disability to take ownership and help educate mainstream sport about what they’re after.”

“Sport is a universal language that can bring people together, no matter what their origin, background, religious beliefs or economic status.”

Access for all

Other barriers to accessing sport are social and economic. In order to give disadvantaged people a chance to play – and realising that “sport has enormous power to create real and lasting change”³ – two men came up with the idea for a Homeless World Cup soccer contest in 2001. The competition has since grown into a huge annual event involving teams from 48 countries, and will be hosted by Melbourne in 2008.

The Street Socceros, Australia’s side, is managed by the *Big Issue*, a fortnightly magazine sold by homeless and long-term unemployed people. The team has competed in Cape Town and Edinburgh, and George Halkias, Street Socceros coach and a regional development coordinator for the *Big Issue*, has seen first-hand how much the players have gained from their experiences. “The biggest change is the boost in self esteem, the sense of belonging, the sense of purpose,” he says. “But also it alleviates social isolation. For people who don’t have many friends or maybe have trouble communicating, just the commonality of being part of a team takes them a long way.”

These benefits don’t stop at the last whistle. A study has found that after competing in the cup, 38% of players had found regular employment, 40% had improved their housing situation and 28% had opted to develop their education.⁴

Max Wells, Executive Director of Surfing Victoria, has also seen the benefits that sport brings to people who do not usually



STREET SOCCEROOS IN TRAINING: Melbourne has overcome fierce competition to host the Homeless World Cup in 2008. This annual event will take place in Federation Square and will be contested by 50 national teams.

Image: GEORGE HALKIAS

take part in it. Supported by VicHealth and Play it Safe by the Water, Wells runs the *Indigenous Surfing Program*, which provides coaching and resources to Aboriginal kids from around the state. He also organises an Indigenous surfing contest once a year.

Surfing is not common among the Indigenous community, largely because of the high level of disadvantage among Aboriginal people – “a big reason why there aren’t many Aborigines in lots of sport”, according to Wells. The success of the program, according to Wells, relies on people having a sense of ownership and participation, rather than just having money or equipment thrown at them, and it has brought participants a wealth of benefits in terms of fitness, commitment and self-esteem. “A big growth area has been girls in the 15–18 age group, an age group that usually has a lot of body image problems, so it’s often hard to get them into bathers or wetsuits,” says Wells.

There is an increasing acceptance of the idea that the benefits of sport should be accessible for all and that, at its best, sport can be a model of tolerance, respect and inclusiveness. Reaching that ideal means removing barriers to participation and encouraging groups who do not usually take part – and thanks to the work of some pioneering people, we are getting closer to this goal.

Adam Ferguson is a freelance journalist specialising in social justice issues.

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3. The 3rd Homeless World Cup Edinburgh 2005 Impact Report: see www.homelessworldcup.org/content/impact-report.
4. *Ibid.*

MODEL CITIZENS

They may be grandmothers or elite sportspeople or living with disability, but out in the community everyday role models are helping people get active again.



LINKS

Find out more about the *Aspire to be A Champion Foundation* at www.aspire.futureit.net.au

It's no secret that our society is becoming increasingly sedentary. If the image of childhood a generation ago was of playing street cricket until dark, today's image is of children playing computer games. We've moved from active to passive.

What's also new is our society's obsession with celebrity. It's well known we learn by observation, but the 'negative' role modelling of a celebrity culture keeps us shallow and inactive; there's little sense of the effort and simple pleasures of daily activity that make for health and wellbeing in life.

Fortunately, there's also a swag of positive role models and mentors in our communities helping people overcome barriers to participation in sport and recreation – including low self-esteem or confidence, physical challenges, isolation, lack of fitness and issues of access.

The title 'role model' does not always sit easily. Some reject the notion they're doing anything unusually worthy; others shrug it off because of the perceived burden. The positive efforts of many local community role models, however, are redefining what our sense of a role model is.

“Everyone's a role model”

Olympian Andrew Gaze has played basketball at the highest levels around the world and he willingly accepts that the role model tag goes with the territory. “If anything, it is a privilege to be in a situation where people admire or respect some of the things you do on a basketball court,” he says.

But Gaze believes that everyone's a role model. “Sometimes people may not be aware of how their actions may have an influence on others – both positively and negatively.”

As a coach, author and parent, Gaze wants to pass on what he's learned from his own experiences. “In many team sports, there might be some limitations there, but you can still find a way – provided there is that desire, determination and work ethic – to get to the elite level and compete at the highest standards.”

He also acknowledges that access and support are vital. “I was lucky at a very early age – particularly having my dad [coach Lindsay Gaze] there to help me out, and to get the fundamentals right.”

“Family is a big part of it all”

For four years, former Aboriginal triathletes Shaun and Ryan Braybrook have run *try-a-triathlon* squads especially for Koori people in Melbourne. “It wasn't just for kids, it was for everyone, and that's what made the program successful,” says Shaun Braybrook. “We'd have one member of a family come down, and the next week, two sisters and an uncle would come down and participate. When you're talking to Koories, family is a big part of it all,” he says.

According to Braybrook, Koori-specific sport and recreation programs are the way to go. “Koories are comfortable around Koories, that's no secret,” says Braybrook.

Braybrook believes that formal community role modelling programs – such as those previously run by Victorian Aboriginal



A major component of the *Victorian Indigenous Surfing Program* is the involvement of Koori role models. Learn-to-surf classes are conducted with Koori kids who otherwise have little opportunity to participate recreationally or competitively, due to little equipment, funding, transport, coaching and education.

Youth Sport and Recreation (VAYSAR) – are essential for building community capital. “We've got lots of role models in our Aboriginal community and people don't realise they're role models,” says Braybrook. It's not about being a celebrity or a sports champion,” he says. “To me, a role model is someone who is achieving in their own life, whatever their goals are.”

The program involved both elite sportspeople and local community members visiting schools and telling their stories. “It was fantastic,” recalls Braybrook. Kids realised that ‘success’ meant many things: “Sometimes it's about getting a job, and doing the right thing and achieving your own little goals.”

“To me, a role model is someone who is achieving in their own life, whatever their goals are.”

We also need to encourage and support the older members of the community, and not solely youth, says Julie Phillips, Regional Sports Assembly support worker with VAYSAR. “At our carnivals over the last few years, we've had quite a few family teams in the netball or basketball,” she says. “The kids were champing at the bit, because they were going to be playing with their mothers and aunts, or fathers and uncles.”

Parents...and priorities

At Maroondah Rugby Club in Melbourne's outer east, it's club policy to model diversity in its ranks. There are more than 13

The *Whitelion Sports Role Model Program* uses high profile sports personalities to run a range of community activities with young people in custodial centres. This builds self-confidence and a sense of self-worth for participants, who never imagined that such people would give them time and attention. Go to www.whitelion.asn.au

LINKS

different cultures, men's, women's and junior teams, and every possible shape and size on the rugby field. "We believe there's a position for every build," says President Ross Saunders.

He believes that increasing children's participation in sport is about getting parents involved, whether by joining a team themselves or actively helping their children's team. "It's about priorities," says Saunders. "We need to set the right example."

"If I can do all these sorts of things, so can you."

The club also upholds a code of conduct for spectator behaviour and has a sideline manager for each team. There have been problems in the past with the way parents and supporters support their team, he says. But not any more. "Rugby is very strong on respect for officials," he says.

At Waverley Little Athletics in Melbourne, the emphasis is on participating and having fun, says President and coach Lindsay Harrison. While everyone loves to win a race, the system of 'personal bests' potentially makes winners of all the children.

Handling competition in positive ways

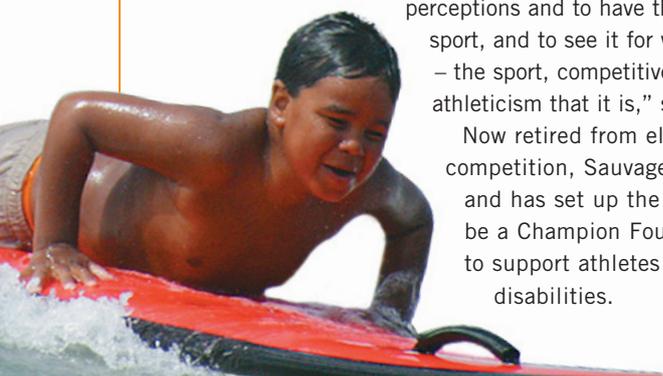
The vexed issue of 'competition' – and claims it puts people off participating in sport – has been an issue that sport has had to grapple with. It does not bother Gaze, however. "One of the things I don't quite understand is when you talk to experts and they try to discourage competition, or say that competitive sports are part of the problem."

"I think that competition in itself is not the issue; it's the consequences or the way we respond to winning and losing which perhaps need a little bit of attention. Competition is one of the more enjoyable parts of activity and getting involved in a contest," he says. "I loved competing."

"You see what's possible"

Paralympic gold medallist and former world champion wheelchair racer Louise Sauvage also loved competing. For Sauvage, it wasn't medals that defined success: It was seeing how far she could push herself – and to have no regrets. Leading up to the Sydney 2000 Paralympics, Sauvage was on a mission: "I really wanted to change people's perceptions and to have them enjoy our sport, and to see it for what it was – the sport, competitiveness and athleticism that it is," she says.

Now retired from elite competition, Sauvage is coaching and has set up the Aspire to be a Champion Foundation to support athletes with disabilities.



She made a conscious decision at the beginning of her international career to find a leading role model in her sport. "I really wanted to be like my hero," she says. "You see what's possible."

Even now, having won a record number of medals and titles, Sauvage still draws encouragement from other sporting heroes, such as Switzerland's Heinz Frei. "Not only because he is an amazing athlete – he's won medals at both winter and summer Paralympics – but for his attitude, the way he presents himself and his willingness to share his knowledge."

Sauvage is now a role model herself for athletes with disabilities all over the world. "You don't set out to be a role model – it just kind of happens. But if I inspire someone to get out there and do something, that's great."

Out and about

In the rural city of Horsham, nine walking groups now get out and about each week. The *Clubs Offering Walking* program links with existing community groups – whether it's community houses, sporting clubs or students enrolled at the local U3A. "We wanted to build on existing community connections," says Di Trotter, CEO of Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly.

Trotter is a big believer in grey power. "They're the ones with the good sense of community who encourage us to persist," she says. She speaks of grandmother Dorothy Adamson, a breast cancer survivor known in the community through her swimming classes, who spoke at a local diabetes group about the benefits of working out in the gym. "If I can do all these sorts of things," she told them, "so can you."

"Every possible shape and size is out there on the rugby field. We believe there's a position for every build."

Another Horsham grandmother, Lynn Smith, is the main force behind the success of the community walking program, says Trotter. Smith, now in her eighties, became a convert to regular swimming and walking when recovering from a serious illness 20 years ago. "I could see the benefit, so I recommended it to everyone else I came across from then on," she says.

For 12 years she has led a regular walking group of older citizens in Horsham. "Instead of just being exercise, it's become social," she says. "For many, it's their only activity outside the house."

While Smith is reluctant to call herself a role model – "I'm doing something I like doing" – she is a staunch advocate for participation. "The sooner you start the better you cope with older age," she says.

Krista Mogensen is a freelance writer and editor specialising in education and health.

LINKS

Mass media plays an important part in building role models. Consistent and positive media coverage should be a prime goal of all (particularly women's) sports administrators and players. See www.ausport.gov.au/women/fsmedia.asp

Planning for sport and recreation

Authorities must plan developments carefully to encourage greater community access to sports and recreation.

The vision of neighbourhoods where residents can walk to local sport and recreation facilities is a compelling one. It underpins a number of strategic planning projects: for example, *Melbourne 2030* and the City of Wodonga's *New Urban Initiative*. However, this approach presents a challenge: How can planners and administrators provide enough sporting and recreation facilities to go round – especially when participation rates are on the increase?

Kate Roffey, CEO of VicSport, says that it is important to anticipate what needs communities are likely to have: "We must look not at what we need now, but what we will need in the future. Strategic urban planning is the key to providing more access opportunities."

Michael Cahill, Group Manager, Policy and Sector Development at Sport and Recreation Victoria, agrees that planning is fundamental to increasing the number of sports and recreation facilities. Traditionally, councils used land subdivision applications as the basis for developers' open space contributions. However, higher population densities are often a result of building in existing urban areas rather than new subdivisions. Cahill believes this must be addressed: "There is a clear indication that as population densities rise, the per head population access to open space declines. So perhaps open space contributions should now be driven by increases in population density," he says.

In response, the Victorian Government has developed its *Active Cities Strategy*, which aims to better coordinate the land available for recreation, review planning provisions for increasing access to facilities and examine what else the government can do to support local councils to meet growing demand.

One way that councils can improve provision of recreation facilities is to better assess community need to justify contributions from developers. The City of Whittlesea undertakes broad assessments of active and passive open space needs, based on projected population growth and the demographic profile of future residents, as part of its preparation of strategic and local plans.

Chris DeSilva, Whittlesea's Strategic Planning Manager, says, "There is obvious rigour to the information we collect, and this has helped us to achieve open space contributions of up to 13.2%. Developers are willing to implement these plans if they are well-founded, have regard to commercial considerations and can be progressively implemented to benefit the whole community."

Another challenge is access. Once again, better planning is needed, as Kate Roffey explains: "Traditionally, the facility and associated infrastructure tended to develop independently." She says that "comprehensive integrated planning linking

sport and recreation facilities, public open spaces, schools and community centres is an essential part of building stronger and more active communities".

The City of Yarra has recently approved its new open space strategy. This attempts to overcome inequities in access that were identified in the preparatory work. Fiona O'Byrne, a landscape architect at the council, says that the strategy "encourages pedestrian and cycle access to reserves to minimise car use. It identifies a number of locations for small, local, open-space reserves connected by pedestrian-friendly streets."

Existing facilities also can be better used. Kate Roffey argues that "the traditional luxury of having one sport per venue is obsolete. New facilities need to cater for a range of activities and be able to sustain extensive use over long periods". The State Government seems to agree with her: Labor's recent policy committed the government to spending \$30 million to build more community-based, multi-sport facilities that will provide for "a range of sporting options".

Lindsay Gaze, VicHealth board member and legendary basketball coach, worries that provision is driven by sports and recreation managers who apply "economic rationalist principles to ensure financial viability (and profit)". However, he acknowledges that there are positive ways in which administrators can better use facilities, such as the cooperation between netball and football in rural Victoria: "This is a great example of how sports have been able to attract more participants by combining their respective resources." This success has in part been made possible by financial support from the State Government, which invested \$10 million in upgrading football and netball facilities.

Lindsay Gaze also points to innovative time scheduling as another way forward: "In the USA there is evidence of a large participation rate for indoor sports that commence at midnight and continue until daylight. One of the boroughs in New York experimented with basketball programs and found large numbers attending. The concept was to encourage youths to participate rather than roam the streets. Crime declined considerably and some went on to change their attitudes and return to studies."

Philip Saikaly, Project Officer for Community Facilities at Sport and Recreation Victoria, believes that in the next 10 years increasing provision of sports and recreation facilities will include going 'back to school': "Community facilities in schools will receive greater attention as the demand in suburban areas increases and public land availability decreases."

Anyone up for a game of basketball at the local school court at 2am?

Andrew Ross is a freelance writer who specialises in urban planning, sustainable development and public health; www.fidconsult.co.uk

Sponsoring a culture

Within minutes of regaining the Ashes in Perth on December 18, 2006, Australia's cricketers were celebrating in their dressing room with grins, laughter – and beers – all round.

On television and in the next day's newspapers, players Andrew Symonds and Michael Hussey were pictured shaking stubbies of beer onto teammates, clearly showing the brand in question, Victoria Bitter. For the sponsor Foster's, it was gold. *The Age* sports section carried the picture on its cover under the headline *A Hard Unred Thirst*, a play on Victoria Bitter's advertising slogan.

For some, however, the images of the drinking team – some with their own personalised stubby holders, presumably an essential part of a professional cricketer's kit – are deeply troubling.

"They are automatically given a beer because their sponsor is an alcohol company," says John Rogerson, the National Director of Good Sports, an initiative of the Australian Drug Foundation. "It simply gives a mixed message to the whole community that sport and alcohol go hand-in-hand."

The modern phenomenon of corporate sports sponsorship began about 1975, with a substantial surge ahead of the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.¹ Today, sponsorship at the elite and grassroots level in Australia alone is worth hundreds of millions of dollars each year.² While research on the effects of sponsorship is limited, sponsorship must work because each year companies queue up to sign multi-million-dollar deals – and the sponsors exchange money, goods or equipment for benefits that can flow to their corporate, marketing, promotions and media strategies.

But are those strategies always in the community's best interest? Is there such a thing as

'irresponsible sponsorship'? And where else can sporting groups raise funds if a particular sponsor is deemed unacceptable?

"There is a lot of rhetoric from the alcohol industry about how responsible it is, but at this stage, they are simply not being responsible," says Rogerson, highlighting the marketing push in the past two cricket seasons that has focused on former player David Boon.

Boon, a fine opening batsman, also holds an unlikely binge-drinking record. In 1989, when he flew to England as a member of the last Australian team to regain the Ashes, Boon drank 53 cans of beer en route, eclipsing a 'record' set several years earlier by Doug Walters. The 'drinking record' has evolved into an urban legend, oft-repeated at sportsman's nights. With 'talking Boony dolls' – you need to buy a slab of beer to get a code that allows you to buy one for \$12 – and other 'Boony' merchandise, Foster's has tapped deeply into the David Boon cult.

"The right companies have been crucial for us, and that means not just taking the dollars on the table."

So for the Good Sports organisation, which encourages hundreds of grassroots level sports clubs with liquor licences to use alcohol responsibly, Boony messages and the Ashes celebrations in Perth are, simply, unhelpful.

The program, which has 1270 clubs in Victoria and is rapidly spreading interstate, has prompted more female and family involvement, and increased membership. Many clubs rely on bar receipts for two-thirds of their income and, in many cases, higher membership has led to increased bar receipts (often through lower-alcohol or non-alcoholic drink sales). At the local level, where clubs are often sponsored through businesses such as the local hotel, Good Sports has encouraged a change in 'rewards' for best on-field



LINKS

Our Community publishes a fundraising newsletter and develops other resources that can be helpful for clubs looking for innovative money-raising ideas. Visit www.ourcommunity.com.au/funding

performances, replacing slabs or free drinks with prizes such as a free counter meal.

Good Sports aims include curbing binge drinking (stopping boat races, for example), eliminating drink-driving (home from the club) and cutting the cultural nexus between on-field success and off-field drinking.

"It often takes four to five years to change the culture at a club," says Good Sports Victorian representative Rod Glenn-Smith. "It takes commitment to make those changes."

Local sporting clubs also need to raise their own funds, says *Our Community's* chief executive Rhonda Galbally. "All community groups need independent revenue streams and need to be able to raise funds themselves. Boards and committees of management have to take fundraising to heart, and make an individual responsible. Fundraising has to be on the agenda, with targets set."

Galbally says money sources can vary widely: membership, alumni, friends, local authorities, online advertising (which *Our Community* can provide for free), local sponsors, events (such as a dance), selling goods and merchandise, better marketing and grants. "There are grants galore suitable for sporting clubs."³

Good Sport's Director John Rogerson says cricket authorities are not alone in promoting the big boozing-elite sportsman link, taking money from an industry they then find hard to criticise. He is strongly critical of the Australian Football League, which he says heavily promotes drinking even at its premier events, such as the Brownlow Medal night and the Grand Final.

"That's the market where they can get to their target audience – young men," says Rogerson. "When are they going to take these issues seriously, especially role modelling at the elite level, where alcohol is so encouraged?"

AFL Media Relations Manager Patrick Keane says the AFL has no issues with its sponsors, which include Foster's, Coca-Cola, Kellogg's and gambling groups Tatts Tipstar and TAB Sportsbet. Sponsorship relations, says Keane, are "a long way past being about money".

"Most partnerships between a sponsor and a sporting organisation

that last five or 10 years are about similar values and similar goals." And Keane adds that alcohol products are not marketed towards children. "There is no pairing of alcohol sponsorship with junior programs."

And while alcohol sponsorship is seen as an issue at the elite end, questions in junior sports are being asked about the appropriateness of other sponsors. Junior cricket is sponsored by Milo, while Basketball Victoria has McDonald's.

In some junior sports, 'rewards' – even for simply participating – can be fast-food vouchers, sending confusing messages about healthy activity and healthy eating.

Netball Victoria Marketing Manager Melanie Dow says the organisation is conscious of the messages it sends through sponsors to its 110,000 members, especially as more than half are under 18.

"The right companies have been crucial for us, and that means not just taking the dollars on the table."

Netball Victoria's sponsors include Worksafe and First National Real Estate, at both elite and local club levels (where a local real estate agent will buy team uniforms). Would Netball Victoria take on a fast-food sponsor? "It is not something we would go out and seek because we believe there are other partners that have greater synergy with our brand and organisational values."

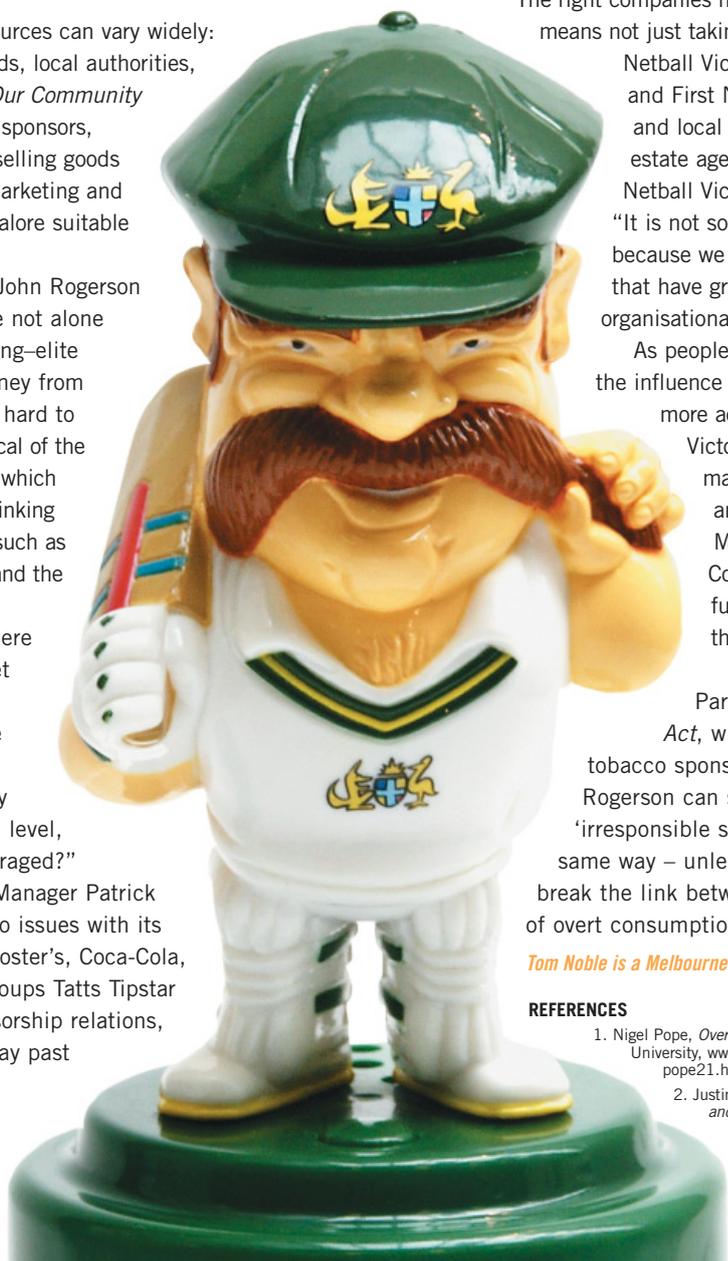
As people become increasingly aware of the influence of diet on childhood obesity, more action by authorities is likely. The Victorian Government recently acted to make school food choices healthier, and in November Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott attacked Coca-Cola and hinted at a government-funded public health campaign on the dangers of soft drinks.

Twenty years ago, Victoria's Parliament passed the *Tobacco Act*, which led to the phasing out of tobacco sponsorship of sport in Victoria. John Rogerson can see a time in the future when 'irresponsible sponsorship' in alcohol goes the same way – unless the industry takes steps to break the link between elite sport and the culture of overt consumption.

Tom Noble is a Melbourne journalist and media consultant.

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2. Justin Madden, *Understanding Sponsorship in Sports and Recreation*, www.ausport.gov.au/fulltest/2000/vic/binfo3.pdf
3. There are a range of fundraising pointers at www.ourcommunity.com.au



The first [modern] commercial approach to sponsorship in sport has been traced to the placement of advertisements in the official program of the 1896 Olympic Games and the product sampling rights purchased by Coca-Cola for the 1928 Olympics.

FACT

Rural recreation – Working with the drought

Local communities are creating imaginative water-wise solutions to deal with the drought's impact on rural recreation.

The impacts of Victoria's drought on sport and recreation in my community cry out from my local newspaper. The lead story describes the fall in visitor numbers at Lake Bolac in Victoria's west, from 2000 visitors in 2005 to a handful over this summer break. The inland lake normally attracts campers, water skiers and anglers, who also provide an economic boost to the local economy.

Earlier, the cancellation of a three-day speedway championship over Easter dominated the back page of the same local paper, another victim of the prolonged dry conditions. The two caravan parks had been booked out by families for the event, but all bookings had to be cancelled.

Cricket competitions have been shortened, the start of football seasons delayed, bowling clubs have closed rinks within their greens, water sports have been abandoned where lakes have dried up and public pools in both metropolitan and provincial Victoria have been closed. Great Western's famous annual Australia Day race meeting has been transferred due to the hard track. In many centres where no water is available, the annual *Relay for Life* walks have been cancelled.

Our driest year for 24 years and hottest decade on record has impacted on recreational facilities in both Melbourne and regional Victoria. Grass-based sports have been forced into quick responses, to protect facilities and those using them.

Many people I speak to share a concern about the immediate impacts of the drought on sport and recreation. What is the impact on people's lives? Will people feel disconnected? Will their activity levels drop? If clubs go into recess, will their members return? What is the impact on farming families facing diminished social opportunities through declining income and commitments to feeding and watering stock? Families and individuals under stress may withdraw from friends, their community and others around them. Yet this is when they need their support network the most.¹

This long, dry period has forced everyone to think about water; to think about its importance for sport and recreation. In response, sports groups are working together to ensure physical activity remains integral as a community-strengthening tool.

In the Wimmera and Ballarat, where Stage 4 water restrictions are in place, the cricket season will be completed due to judicious watering of cricket wickets, but not the fields. Clubs with bores or tanks are also watering their wickets, but the outfield remains dry and hard – and ill-prepared for the football season.

Many country football leagues will delay the start of their seasons. The Bendigo, Horsham and Ballarat leagues fear the rock-hard ground surfaces and lack of grass will increase risk of injuries. But solutions have been found to ensure the completion of football competitions – central to the social and sporting lives



The golden days of backyard cricket are back in Dunkeld.
Image: MELISSA POWELL, courtesy of *The Age*.

LINKS

Do you think you could do a better job than the weather man? Go to Forecasting the weather (www.bom.gov.au/info/ftweather/index.shtml) on the Bureau of Meteorology website and learn how to interpret the weather maps presented in the media.

in many country towns. Clubs are considering ground sharing, possible mergers, and changing match times and days in order to maintain fewer grounds.

Horsham and District Football League Football Operations Manager Stephen McQueen says that his league's creative rescheduling will ensure the continuation of the competition. Games will begin later in the year, and the worst grounds will have minimal use in the first half of the season. 'Byes' have been rostered to minimise ground use until later – when rain will have hopefully fallen, and games may be played on Sunday "to keep the league alive". Keeping football 'alive' in rural towns is vital. "If football dies, the town dies. Our league is family-based and, in these towns, if the sports teams disappear, there is nothing else left to do," Mr McQueen says.

Creative solutions to training ensure that fitness levels are maintained. Swimming and gym work can replace outdoor skills training where hard grounds increase injury risks. Players are using other sport and recreation options and the clubs might find that cross training is a valuable long-term fitness option.

State Government funding through the *Drought Relief for Country Sports Program* supports the two approaches being sought by communities – short-term solutions to assist the continuation of outdoor competitions and maintenance of facilities, and the long-term approach which is a deeper response to the role of water, recreation and health of communities.

The installation of tanks, carting water and putting down bores are being funded to keep pools open and sports fields usable, but many see the drought as an opportunity to seek alternative methods to water our parks and ovals.

Golden Plains Shire's Community Services Director Lenny Jenner said his council had responded to calls to implement sustainable watering alternatives. Bannockburn Bowls Club has converted one rink from grass to synthetic surface, which has reduced their water usage by up to 90%. With funding from the council, the club and the Federal Government, tanks were installed to water the new rink, which then recycles the water back to the tanks, Mr Jenner explained.

Down the road at the golf club, the fairways are watered by treated sewage, pumped from the treatment plant; while back in town the Victoria Park Recreation Reserve development highlights how water saving can be an integral component of planning. Water collection will be a priority. Run-off from the large car park will be directed to a dam, as will water from the roof line of a new community centre. The dam water will be used on the oval, providing both cost savings and ensuring the uninterrupted availability of a focal point for the community.

A lot of people's eyes have been opened by this drought, according to Dean Frank, Recreation, Planning and Development coordinator at Ballarat City Council. "We have to proceed with long term sustainable solutions, even after it rains," Mr Frank says.

Deb Howcroft lives in Hamilton and is a Community Development Specialist currently working in the health sector.

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In the shadow of the Grampians, they're doing the hard yards

As rural cricket pitches suffer in the drought, small towns find community pride in their backyard warriors, Kate Hagan reports.

Dusty turf wickets and rock-hard outfielders – it's just not cricket. So residents of Dunkeld, at the southern end of the Grampians, are taking it to the backyard in a competition less about a deft delivery and more about the barbecue afterwards.

Organiser Steve Field, 40, had long dreamed of bringing back the golden days of one hand, one bounce, tippetty-runs, and six and out. With water restrictions biting, there's a need for the community to get together and have a laugh. Locals young and old have rushed to sign up to represent their street in the Friday night competition to be held in a rotating roster of backyards in February.

It's a concept Cricket Australia hopes to take to towns around the country. And it helps if you have a backyard the size of a paddock, which is what *The Age* found when it visited some of Dunkeld's budding backyard cricketers during the week.

"We all need to be having these gatherings and getting the men out and having a bit of fun," said Dunkeld sheep and cattle farmer Celia Blackwell, who is in her fifties. Mrs Blackwell will captain Corea Lane, one of eight streets taking part in the competition, despite a lack of natural sporting ability.

"I'm pretty hopeless with balls," she laughed. "The spirit of the day will be to make as many runs as you can, and the drink manager will be there to keep the fluids up."

Greg Fisher, 43, acting principal at Hamilton's Gray Street Primary School, will captain the Glass Street team and has cooked up a few home street rules in conjunction with his 10-year-old son, Lachlan.

Mr Fisher's street is so keen they're fielding two teams. "Just about everyone in the town is interested," he said.

Not a bad effort in a town whose cricket club nearly folded about eight years ago. But that was before Steve Field, the father of backyard cricket and Cricket Victoria's western region manager, breathed new life into the sport locally.

Even he has been surprised at the interest in backyard cricket, which comes as most towns in the region face Stage 4 water restrictions. Competition cricket is continuing but concerns about players injuring themselves may lead to a curtailed season if conditions worsen.

"It's amazing," Mr Field said. "We've had other towns ringing up asking how they can get involved."

Kate Hagan is an Age journalist. Article courtesy of The Age.

A welcoming, inclusive atmosphere encourages people of all ages, gender and fitness levels to participate in sport or active recreation.



Health enhancing CLUBS

The atmosphere around the Sunshine Heights Cricket Club is relaxed. The “no train, no play” rule has no place in this club. If work, health or family commitments prohibit training, players can still participate in the game. But when it comes to the health and wellbeing of members, particularly children, club officials remain steadfast on the rules.

The club has adopted many of the strategies recommended by VicHealth in two resources it developed to help all sport and recreation clubs foster the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of participants (see box). Both Sunshine Heights Cricket Club and Lara Swimming Club are terrific examples for other clubs to follow.

Sunshine Heights Cricket Club, in Melbourne’s western suburbs, has banned the drinking of alcohol or smoking near junior cricket. The bans are part of a culture at the club which encourages family involvement and creates a safe environment for children. Fortunately, the rules are supported by Brimbank City Council and at junior association level.

LINKS

Physical activity is ranked second only to tobacco control in being the most important factor in health promotion and disease prevention in Australia. Find out more at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/physicalactivity

Club Vice-President and President of the West Metropolitan Junior Association, Chris Hatzistavrou, who at 44 is the club's oldest player, says children need to see that sport and physical activity can be enjoyed without the help of a stubbie of beer in one hand and a pie in the other – an all-too-familiar image promoted by product advertisers. The fact that 6500 Australians die each year from the effects of alcohol is another reason the club wants children to see that alcohol can be consumed responsibly and in a way that will not harm the drinker or others.

The banning of cigarette smoking near children provoked more resistance, but was finally introduced this year. If adults want to smoke while watching junior cricket they must move away from the vicinity of the game. Smoking by adult players during their training sessions is now also banned.

Chris considers the club's inclusive attitude one of its greatest strengths. With 19 nationalities involved in the club, different cultures are respected. "We had a Muslim player who asked if he could leave the field to pray and we said 'of course' and allowed a 10-year-old to take his position on the field," Chris says.

"I think one of the keys to creating a friendly club that includes everyone is communication. It's a simple thing to achieve. When a new child starts playing in the side, I make sure I spend time with the family watching the game, getting to know them and bringing them into the wider group. Before long one of the parents is putting their hand up to help when we need a job done."

Every Saturday morning Kevin is on the loudspeaker announcing birthdays, keeping people up to date with social news and building a sense of community within the club.

This year a club member started a weekly newsletter to further improve communication. It keeps everyone up to date as well as taking pressure off coaches and club officials who traditionally ring around with details of games and events.

Kevin Nolan, President of Lara Amateur Swimming and Lifesaving Club, says finding people to take on jobs is the challenge facing most club office bearers, but it is made easier if people feel a part of the organisation. The club began in 1963 and Kevin, who learned to swim there as a child, has been involved on and off since the early days.

A few years ago Kevin decided the best way to get people involved was to encourage them to stay at training rather than drop children off to classes or carnivals. So on Saturday club mornings he pushed around a trolley, offering tea or coffee. It was an ideal way to get to know the parents. Today, as another volunteer pushes the trolley, Kevin is on the loudspeaker announcing birthdays, keeping people up to date with social

A Sporting Chance...The inside knowledge on healthy sports clubs highlights the characteristics of what makes a healthy, successful sporting club and gives a handful of case studies.

A basic guide to creating healthy environments provides strategies for organisations wanting to:

- Create smoke-free environments
- Enhance participation and inclusion
- Manage alcohol responsibly
- Offer healthy food choices
- Protect participants from the sun
- Prevent sport-related injuries

news and building a sense of community within the club. His 9am Saturday 'announcements' are now a vital part of the club's morning ritual and an important communication tool. Another Saturday morning 'social and health' initiative is the breakfast program, which provides a healthy meal to children before the swimming starts. And it's a great opportunity for people to gather and talk to each other.

Many Lara Swimming Club initiatives are aimed at protecting swimmers from sunburn as Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. The club has erected a sun shelter near the marshalling area, chosen a uniform which includes a wide-brimmed hat and long-sleeve shirts, and provides free sunscreen to all swimmers.

The club's swimmers range in age from six to 80 years old and events, such as a Masters race, are scheduled at carnivals to embrace all ages. This means everyone in the family can participate – and there's no reason to drop off and go home!

Rosie Hoban is a Melbourne journalist. She is particularly interested in writing about people, their lives and the social issues that concern them.



Cartoon: RON TANDBERG



VicHealth News

LEAD ROLE IN PARTNERSHIP WORK AWARDED

Innovative work by the Planning Institute of Victoria and VicHealth was acknowledged in November 2006 when Lee Choon Siau, VicHealth Senior Project Officer – Built Environments, was cited as an Honorary Fellow of the Planning Institute of Australia.

Lee Choon's vision and work led to a successful and productive partnership between PIA and VicHealth, and consequently the birth of the Planning and Health Project, which integrates health into urban planning.

Lee Choon accepted the award, saying the support of the leadership teams in PIA (Vic) and VicHealth and fellow workers had contributed significantly to the success of the project.

VICHEALTH AWARDS 2006

VicHealth's annual Health Promotion Awards are presented in recognition of outstanding achievements and innovative contributions to health promotion through VicHealth-funded projects. This year's awards were presented at VicHealth's Annual General Meeting at Parliament House Gardens on 13 December 2006.

Congratulations to all the winners and runners-up!

For projects primarily promoting physical activity with a budget under \$15,000

Winner Viets on Bikes – Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association

Runner-up Newhaven Primary School Riding School Bus – Newhaven Primary School Council

For projects primarily promoting mental health and wellbeing with a budget under \$15,000

Winner My Favourite Place – St Mary's House of Welcome

Runner-up Health Promotion and Preventing Violence Against Women – Women's Health West

For projects primarily promoting physical activity with a budget from \$15,000 to \$75,000

Winner Play On – Hastings Tennis Club, Rotary Club of Hastings Western Port and Frankston/Mornington Peninsula LLEN

Runner-up Creating a Sporting Chance – RMIT University and Victoria University

For projects primarily promoting mental health and wellbeing with a budget from \$15,000 to \$75,000

Winner Workplace Stress in Victoria: Developing a Systems Approach – Centre for Health and Society School of Population Health, University of Melbourne

Runner-up Refugee Relocation Guide Dissemination Project – Warrnambool City Council

For projects promoting other health issues with a budget from \$15,000 to \$75,000

Winner WaterMatters – The Centre for Continuing Education Wangaratta

Runner-up Women's Health Matters: from Policy to Practice – Women's Health Victoria

For projects primarily promoting physical activity with a budget over \$75,000

Winner Women's Developmental Project: Advocating for Change – Womensport and Recreation Victoria Inc.

Runner-up Healthy Lifestyles Program – Rumbalara Football Netball Club

For projects primarily promoting mental health and wellbeing with a budget over \$75,000

Winner The Ambassador Newspaper – Horn of Africa Communities Network

Runner-up Metamorphosis – Women's Music Theatre Project

For projects primarily promoting other health issues with a budget over \$75,000

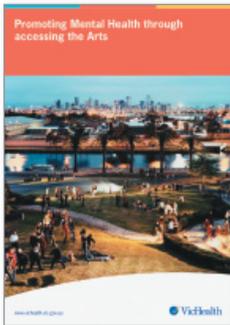
Winner Good Sports – Australian Drug Foundation

Runner-up Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation – Stephanie Alexander and Anna Dollard

SUBSCRIBE TO THE WEBSITE

If you are not already a subscriber to the VicHealth website, we recommend you sign up. You'll get regular updates about what's new on the site, including latest data, open funding rounds, new publications, upcoming seminars and learning events, and lots more. Go to www.vichealth.vic.gov.au, click on 'subscribe' in the top right-hand corner and follow the prompts.

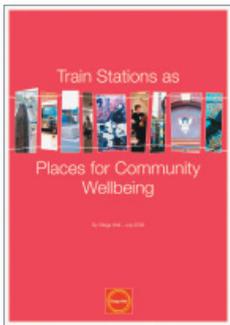
NEW PUBLICATIONS & RESOURCES



Promoting Mental Health through Accessing the Arts

Sixteen Victorian organisations have been funded under the Major Arts Partnership Scheme (2001–2004) and the Audience Access Scheme (2005–2006). This publication is a reflection on the experiences of the organisations in these schemes. It captures some of the major learnings and places them in the context of VicHealth's commitment to the promotion of mental health and wellbeing. Copies are available from the VicHealth website:

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/audienceaccess



Train Stations as Places for Community Wellbeing

In 2006 VicHealth commissioned the development of a scoping paper focusing on existing arts practice designed to develop railway stations as community hubs. This publication investigates the possibility of railway stations becoming places that are inclusive and safe, facilitate social inclusion and cohesion, and contribute to the development of strong communities. Copies are available from the VicHealth website:

www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/transport

FUNDED CONFERENCES

Through the *Conference Support* program, VicHealth provides limited support to conferences held by other providers. Check the online events calendar (www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/events) for more information about individual events listed below; entries are updated when more information comes to hand. Visit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/conference to find out more about the program.

26–28 February 2007

Thinking Drink II: From Problems To Solutions

Organisation: Australian Drug Foundation

Venue: Rydges Melbourne

Contact: Geoff Munro, munro@adf.org.au **Phone:** 9278 8108

1–3 March 2007

Deadly Arts Business Conference

Organisation: Gasworks Arts Park

Venue: Gasworks Arts Park

Contact: Crusader Hillis, chillis@gasworks.org.au

Phone: 8606 4210

20–25 March 2007

Cities Feeding People – grow it where you live!

Organisation: Cultivating Community

Venue: Collingwood Town Hall

Contact: Ben Neil, ben@cultivatingcommunity.org.au

Phone: 9415 6580

13–14 April 2007

Changin' It, Lovin' It – Young Women Living Life, Career & Community

Organisation: YWCA Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

Venue: Hotel Y Conference Centre

Contact: Karen Gray, ywca@ywca.ne **Phone:** 9349 5788

25 April 2007

Older Men's Health – A Policy Priority

Organisation: Council of the Ageing

Venue: Darebin Arts & Community Centre

Contact: Sue Hendy, exec@cotavic.org.au **Phone:** 9654 4443

2–5 May 2007

Accelerate Now! local government: sustainability: ICLEI: oceania

Organisation: Local Governments for Sustainability – ICLEI – A/NZ

Venue: Grand Hyatt Melbourne

Contact: Maria Simonelli, maria.simonelli@iclei.org

Phone: 9639 8688

15–16 May 2007

Leadership in Health Promotion in the Grampians

Organisation: Grampians Pyrenees PCP

Venue: Astor Cinema, Ararat

Contact: Chantal Price, chantalp@grampianspyreneespcp.org.au

Phone: 5352 6200

29 May 2007

Women's Sport & Physical Recreation Conference

Organisation: Womensport & Recreation Victoria Inc

Venue: RACV Club

Contact: Kate Don, kate@womensport.com.au

Phone: 9654 7545

15 June 2007

Schools, Communities and the Arts

Organisation: Cultural Development Network

Venue: Conference Centre, Victoria University, Sunshine

Contact: Kim Dunphy; kim.dunphy@culturaldevelopment.net.au

Phone: 9658 9976

26–29 November 2007

Asia – Pacific EcoHealth Conference: Sustaining people & places in a changing world

Organisation: Deakin University

Venue: Deakin University

Contact: Mardie Townsend, mardietownsend@deakin.edu.au

Phone: 9244 6261

