

Competitive, but still Playing by the Rules!

Our league, the AFLNW, is going ahead in leaps and bounds. We have a senior men's competition in which the standard of play is improving markedly every year. We now have a senior women's competition with four teams: this year we witnessed a hotly contested and exciting finals series in the women's game. The Junior Under 17's competition has also seen considerable growth whilst the Junior ranks also saw the introduction of Under 14 footy in 2019.

This is all excellent and all the clubs are to be congratulated for the work and effort that has been expended growing Australian football in our region.

However, there is one very serious concern at the present time which could undo all of that good work.

It is not a problem that can be fixed by the President and the Senior Executive. It cannot be fixed by the drafting of rule changes, nor can it be fixed by umpires for it is fundamentally a **matter of culture** – that is the culture that we in our clubs develop and foster.

We want people to enjoy their football – for Saturdays to be the highlight of their week. And yet that is not possible if those players are subject to serious abuse and bullying when on the field - when they are taunted for their race, sexuality or physical appearance. Nobody enjoys such barbs.

However, this is **exactly** what has happened in **2019** and it is not acceptable and the league cannot and will not grow if such behaviour continues.

This is our problem. It is a cultural problem that needs to be addressed at the club level, by coaches, players and administrators – by our culture. Rules, by-laws and umpires cannot deal with the culture of our game.

Of course, we need to acknowledge that ours is a competitive sport. It is a contact sport. Tempers will fray and people will say things in the heat of the moment that they would not say in ordinary life. It is not a church picnic.

But there are things being said that go well beyond **mere banter**. There is a gigantic difference between putting someone off when they are kicking for goal by questioning their ability to kick the distance, on the one hand, and racially abusing them. There is a gulf between suggesting a player didn't deserve a free kick and slut-shaming that player.

We all know the difference between being competitive and becoming abusive – and it is up to all of us to ensure those lines are not crossed.

It is our game so let's make sure that our game has a culture of which we can be proud.

For further reading go to:

www.playbytherules.net.au/got-an-issue/bullying.

AFL North West NSW Education Roadshow RESPECT Workshop

Who: Whole of group workshop – administrators, coaches, umpires, Auskick Co-ordinators

Process: Four steps:

1. How is AFL North West perceived? (by ourselves, by those external to our sport)
2. How do we want to be perceived?
3. What are our Values?
4. What Behaviours underpin those Values?

How are we perceived?	How do we want to be perceived?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not that big ... but growing • Somewhat unknown – varies from town to town • Persistent – keep fronting up • Open and welcoming • Players tend to come and go, aren't necessarily locals • Strong support for elite game, doesn't translate to local version • Other sports are annoyed/scared that we're growing • "Gay"FL – ignorance, points for missing, tight shorts • "Clean and green" – positive image, especially around behaviour • Business community – good standing • AFLW – great exposure but we need to leverage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive – equal opportunity • Respect – let people be whatever they are • Positive presence in the community • Clean image • Social off field element • Progressive, quality League • Pathways • Standards and accountability that stands up to scrutiny • Strong media profile • Increased supporter base with links to kids (e.g. half time Auskick) • Positive relationships underpinned by strong communication between clubs • Competitive but fair

Our Values and Behaviours

The big picture:

- More clubs
- More teams
- More grades/age groups
- More players
- More volunteers (includes administrators, umpires, match day officials, etc)
- Improved standard (playing, officiating, administration of clubs and League, etc)

<p style="text-align: center;">Integrity</p>  <p>We hold ourselves and others to the highest standards of honesty, openness, and accountability.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Community</p>  <p>We are welcoming, forgiving, accepting, and have a strong, shared social element to our activities. We love the way that footy provides a positive social, physical, and mental outlet within our lives.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Culture</p>  <p>We play our footy hard but fair. Each individual owns this and is prepared to call out a teammate who loses sight of the big picture.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Respect</p>  <p>We maintain an objective perspective on things and use our passion in a positive way. Communication is the key to respectful relationships, especially between clubs.</p>