

**EDUCATION OR REGULATION: MANAGING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE  
IN THE AFL**

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Peer reviewed paper submitted to the *Australian Association for Research in  
Education Conference*, Nov 2007

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### *Abstract*

*Amid the increasing commodification of sports, the off-field practices of elite performers are the source of considerable public scrutiny. Barely a week goes by when we do not hear about elite male sports stars behaving badly. Of course, when elite sportsman behave badly they not only tarnish their own reputations, they bring disrepute to their club and sport. To this end, there is a growing industry awareness of the need to manage and develop professional sporting identities via a variety of education and training processes.*

*This paper reports on research undertaken into the professional development activities of AFL footballers, and how they are organised, supported and practiced. Drawing on extensive interview data, the research reveals a number of tensions and contradictions between the aspirations of different players, their coaches and mentors, and a range of competing industry practices and processes. In the paper we explore the possibilities for modifying behaviours and attitudes via risk management practices that centre on the provision of compulsory educational seminars and workshops. Drawing on Foucault's later work on the care of the Self we focus on the ways in which new expectations of a professional footballing identity are being constructed and managed.*

## EDUCATION OR REGULATION: MANAGING BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN THE AFL

### Introduction

When AFL footballer Chad Morrison was caught driving his motor scooter with a blood alcohol level of .093, in May 2006, he was fined \$314 and had his licence suspended for six months. While there can be no under-estimating the importance of drink-driving as a community issue, when elite sportsmen are involved a range of other issues, outside of community safety, are brought into being. As well as having to manage the public face of the club when one of its players commits a public indiscretion, the Collingwood football club was fined \$200,000 by one of its sponsors (the Transport Accident Commission). Unfortunately for Morrison, the fallout from his action did not remain extant of his professional identity. Morrison was fined a further \$20,000 by his club, and had his contract put 'on notice' should there be further breaches of the Players Code of Conduct. Collingwood Football Club chief executive officer, Greg Swan, publicly expressed his club's intolerance of Morrison's actions;

We know that these sorts of things are potentially going to come back and bite us but we've educated our guys within an inch of their lives about the commitment we've got. We have talks and seminars, we have people come to talk about .05, speeding, we show videos before every Easter break, before every holiday break, you name it, we educate these guys. (Lyon, 2006, p. 4)

While there are really no limits to what footballers can get involved in outside of their football there are certain things that are deemed important for every player to know. As each sporting code works to put itself in a position of strength within the highly competitive sports entertainment industry, there is an increasing awareness of the need to protect and nurture their respective brands. There is no doubt that the media and public attention that is garnered around stories of sportsman behaving badly can do considerable damage to a club and their sport. Be it Ben Cousins drug taking, Shane Warne's phone messages, Boris Becker's broom cupboard or Kobe Bryant's affairs, the activities and innuendos of high profile athletes are a constant source of media and public interest. Indeed, in the early phase of Y2K, news of athletes' indiscretions can circulate at a global level.

The evidence of the last couple of years of media frenzies associated with the almost inevitable lapses in behaviour of young men with lots of money and lots of time as the centre of attention, is that there are still some players, some clubs and some organisations that really don't understand the Faustian pact they have entered into. The elevation of the sport star to the status of celebrity and Club or League to iconic brand, means that the idea that an elite performer has a *private life* and a *public life* that are separate – an idea embedded in the AFL *Players' Code of Conduct* – is one that is increasingly problematic. Drawing on Foucault's later work on the care of the self, our analysis will focus on the forms of regulation, types of knowledge, and the practices and processes developed and deployed at different levels of a sports entertainment industry, which, together, seek to develop and manage a professional identity for elite performers – and the risks that circulate around, and attach to, these identities.

Whenever there is a public scandal involving high profile athletes and sex, drugs, fighting, drunkardness, and so on, club officials go into damage control. Despite the increasing level of education and training that athletes get from their leagues and clubs their propensity for public indiscretion and unlawful activity remains a considerable concern across the global sporting industry. Drawing on research undertaken within the AFL we want to raise a number of issues around the extent to which current approaches to the provision of education, training and welfare represent engagement or compliance. One of the issues that we encountered during our discussions with AFL players about the suite of industry workshops that are rolled out for them involved the extent to which players were tuned into the messages that were being delivered. While the players generally accepted the demand for them to participate in education and training activities, the practices and processes associated with their implementation raised issues about their effectiveness.

In this paper we report on the various ways the off-field expectations of AFL players are regulated and managed within the industry. Emerging from an increasing industry sensitivity toward the need to control the off field behaviour of elite athletes is the struggle to understand and influence player's attitudes and practices. To this end, we focus here on how the AFL, as an industry, currently understands and manages the non-football dimensions of a player's overall development. Here, we focus on four key elements of contemporary industry practice that have emerged and evolved around the provision of education, training and risk management. Specifically, we explore, (1) current approaches to *industry training* conveyed through a series of cognitive-based workshops, (2) issues of player recruitment and the increasing emphasis put on identifying the attributes of 'good character', (3) the increasing emphasis placed on players undertaking education and training courses outside of football, and (4) the emergence of Player Development Managers (PDMs) to manage the off-field activities of players, at each club.

### **Data Collection**

The research that this paper reports on was undertaken during 2004-5. Data gathering was designed to incorporate the perspectives of AFL participants across three different levels of the industry. The first layer comprised representatives from those involved in the *management and regulation of the industry* (8 officials from the AFL and AFL-Players' Association (AFL-PA) Executives were interviewed); the second layer explored the perspectives of *club level coaching and football department staff*; while the third layer involved *the players* themselves. Within these levels we explored understandings of what it means to be a professional AFL player and how this identity is currently developed and managed.

One to one interviews were conducted with General Managers of Football Departments, Recruiting Managers and Player Development Managers (PDMs) while group and individual interviews were conducted with Coaching Staff, and Player Leadership Groups. In total 21 officials from three (3) clubs were interviewed about talent identification processes and practices, influences on player performance, player management issues, and the various roles of professional footballers in the contemporary sports entertainment environment. From these discussions we determined that it was appropriate to describe these phases in the following ways:

- Early Career players – zero to four years as an AFL player (some players we interviewed were in their 1<sup>st</sup> pre-season after drafting)
- Mid Career players – 4 to 8 years as an AFL player
- Late Career players – 8 plus years as an AFL player

One on one interviews were conducted with 11 Early Career Players, 13 Mid Career Players, and 12 Late Career players from across the three Clubs. Players at Clubs involved in the research were sampled by these categories. These phases provide a framework for thinking about how one to four year players, for example, may have different ambitions, hopes, needs and motivations, to players who have been AFL footballers for eight or nine years. These interviews focussed on player desires, needs, expectations, experience and understandings of what it means to be a professional player, and their understandings or experience of the ways in which their professional identity is developed - or hindered. Preliminary, pre-research discussions with the AFL-PA were important in developing our categorisations of these career phases.

### **The AFL Sports Entertainment Industry**

The AFL is a significant sports entertainment industry in Australia. The 16 team national competition has a short recent history. Australian Rules football has, however, a much longer history based on a series of State based competitions. The AFL, while successful in managing the *business of sport* (Buckley, 2002), is very much a regional brand in this globalised marketplace of brand associations - limited by the marketability of a game not readily understood by the uninitiated. The AFL industry generates annual revenues in excess of \$A640 million dollars. Corporate partnerships (with companies such as Toyota, Carlton United Breweries, National Australia Bank, Telstra), broadcast and Internet rights, merchandising, membership and gate receipts make significant contributions to the AFL itself generating revenues of \$A205 million in 2005 (AFL, 2006; Mann, 2006).

Individual clubs have turnovers that range from \$A20 to \$A40 million – there exists a wealth divide between clubs that emerges from a complex relation between location, history, social class, and increasingly, market share (Mann, 2006; Grant, 2004; McGuire, 2004; Buckley, 2002). As a consequence of this media and brand profile AFL players are well paid by Australian wage and salary earner standards. However, their incomes from playing contracts and what the AFL calls Additional Services Agreements (ASAs) place them in the minor leagues of global earning and celebrity stakes. In 2005, of the 547 AFL players who played at least one game, three (3) earned more than \$A800k; eight (8) earned between \$A600k-800k; eighteen (18) earned between \$A500k-600k; twenty-one (21) earned between \$A400k-500k; 331 earned between \$A100k-400k; and 166 earned less than \$A100k (AFL, 2006). These club based payments (excluding any individual sponsorships) are a long way behind the salaries of marquee players in the American National Football League (NFL) who are reported to earn in excess of \$A15 million a year. Even these are overshadowed by National Basketball Association (NBA) stars who are reported to earn \$A29 million per year (Hawthorne, 2005a).

However, the most significant element of a player's capacity to make a substantial living out of AFL football is associated with the durability of their body. Put simply, playing AFL football is a health hazard. In this way it is both like and unlike other

football codes. It is like rugby in that it is a full contact sport where the players wear no protective gear. It is like soccer in that midfielders can expect to run in excess of 20 kilometres in a game and in bursts of anaerobic and aerobic effort. And it is like American football in that players can expect bone-crunching contact to come from any direction. The sum of all this is that AFL football is one of the most physically demanding codes of football that is played anywhere in the world. While sports scientific knowledge in relation to preparing, protecting and rehabilitating players has played an increasing role in the AFL over the past two decades, player career spans are shortening not lengthening. Such are the playing and regulatory demands of the game that the average AFL playing career is now only 2.9 years or 34 games – less than 5% of players extend their career to 10 plus years and 200 games or more (Hawthorne, 2005b). In the world of AFL football, retirement is rarely at the discretion of the player.

### **Professionalisation and the Care of the Self**

The AFL sports entertainment business is more than a game, and the key participants in this business are more than athletes. They are professionals whose contemporary job descriptions have widened beyond the physical attributes necessary to the tasks of running, jumping, tackling and kicking. Indeed, character the traits thought to indicate one's capacities to handle celebrity, relative wealth, free time, demands from sponsors, clubs and the industry, assume more prominence in deciding who to recruit, who to keep on the list, and who to spend time, energy and resources on developing.

The emergence of the idea of the 'professional AFL footballer' – as a relatively recent phenomenon – is not without its tensions. A professional identity as a footballer does not come naturally. It is something that needs to be developed, and different authorities have different responsibilities for facilitating this development. It is, also, not stable. New demands and responsibilities emerge all the time. It also means different things to different individuals and groups within a team, to different individuals and groups within a club, to different authorities within the industry.

Professionalisation in this context is understood in terms of Foucault's ideas about the ways in which we develop a sense of Self, and the ways in which Others seek to govern us in relation to ideas about the particular characteristics that this Self should exhibit (2000a; 2000b). In his later work Foucault's concern was to situate the 'imperative to "know oneself" – which to us appears so characteristic of our civilization – back in the much broader interrogation that serves as its explicit or implicit context: What should one do with oneself? What work should be carried out on the self? How should one "govern oneself"? (Foucault, 2000b: 87)

From this perspective the formation of a professional identity can be understood as the development of a specific relationship to oneself and others. To be a professional is to be a person who must do certain, quite specific work on oneself so that one can be considered to be professional. To be professional as a police officer, or teacher, for example, means different things, requires a different relationship to oneself and others, requires the individual to do different work on the self, than to be professional as an AFL footballer.

To be a professional invokes, also, a sense of *asceticism*, a certain disciplining of the Self so that one might be, or become, more professional. This is a key element in considering the sorts of ‘sacrifices’ individuals are prepared to make to become ‘professional’. Foucault (2000a: 282), in a discussion of the ways in which people make choices about the sorts of person they wish to become, suggests that processes of self formation can be understood as ascetic processes – ‘not in the sense of a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain a certain mode of being’.

*When I started playing AFL I had a full time job and had to knock off work early on Tuesdays and Thursdays so I could train. Now we train in the middle of the day, sometimes two sessions a day, and there’s no time to fit anything else in.*

Late Career player

### **No more ‘bad boys’ – Education, training & risk management**

In this section we focus on four key elements of contemporary industry practice that have emerged and evolved around issues of risk management. Here, we draw attention to the formal processes of *industry training* conveyed through a series of workshops. Following that, we look at issues of player recruitment and the increasing emphasis put on making sure they identify players with the right character attributes to handle the demands associated with being a professional footballer. Next we outline the emergence of a paternalistic discourse wherein players are increasingly expected to engage in education and training outside of their football. This is in part propelled by the encouragement of players to adopt a prudent orientation to the vulnerabilities of being a professional footballer, and a wider industry concern that *idol hands create mischief*. Finally, we describe the emergence of *Player Development Managers (PDM)* as frontline workers in the coordination and management of the non-football activities of players.

#### *i. Industry Training*

An inevitable consequence of the high level of public scrutiny that players and officials are now subject to is that the industry clearly needs to manage its product, its players! At a number of levels the Industry demands, and financially supports, players’ access to professional development related to industry training activities and resources. A partnership between the AFL and AFL-Players Association (PA) is supported by an annual expenditure of \$1.5 million on a variety of seminars and workshops designed to equip players with knowledge about the industry and the risks, expectations and possibilities that currently attach to being an AFL footballer; and on AFL-PA administered Education and Training grants that provide financial support for players involved in industry training activities.

To facilitate this, the AFL, like most sporting industries, now run compulsory workshops to assist in the education and training of all players. In the case of the AFL a series of compulsory workshops include education around:

- Gambling
- Anti-doping Policy
- Racial Vilification and Harassment
- Sexual Harassment

One of the issues that emerged through our discussions around the industry workshops was the extent to which players engaged with their content. We referred to this as the *Shane Warne Syndrome* in recognition of the explanation Australian test cricketer and media celebrity Shane Warne gave when he was charged in early 2003 with using a proscribed substance (a diuretic often used to mask steroid use). On a number of occasions it was pointed out that he would have sat through many compulsory workshops and seminars designed to educate cricketers about drugs in sport. A player of his experience should have been well educated because of his involvement in these seminars. The problem was, to paraphrase Shane Warne, “*I sat in those seminars. But I didn't listen*”.

*Sure I've done heaps of the workshops. They were alright the first time but you kind of switch off by the time you've done them once or twice.*

Mid Career player

While the AFL has received commendation for its industry and community leadership around the issue of racial vilification, there is due recognition that these workshops are by no means a total and comprehensive solution to managing player behaviour. Indeed, the AFL Executive recognise that while they have made significant ground in the provision of industry training, the practice of preparing AFL footballers to deal with the range of privileges and enticements that will come their way is a very complex and formidable task. One of the problems here exists around the extent to which understanding and managing risk can be simply undertaken as a rational process. Despite a widespread stereotyping of athletes as practical and kinaesthetic learners, current approaches to industry training are steeped in hyper-rational knowledge transfer.

*What we don't do is one (workshop) that addresses how to deal with the notoriety of being an AFL player. How they deal with coming into an environment where they don't have to pay for things and get treated differently. They can go to the butchers and get discounted meat or get a drink card or a discount on a car. Its something we need to address.*

AFL Executive

Particular emphasis is placed on providing new AFL recruits with the knowledge and know-how to chart a smooth pathway to being a good AFL citizen. At their 1.5 day induction camp potential and new draftees are provided with information that is



thought necessary to them enacting a professional identity. The topics covered here include each of the above listed as well as:

- AFL players and the law
- Drink driving
- Speeding
- Family planning

The emergence of a concern with player development, education and training off the field is, in many respects, a positive development – but a development that is not without its tensions. Our conversations with Early Career players gave further evidence of the lack of impact that industry training appears to currently have. Compounding their general lack of energy for non-football activities was the singularity of their *focus on football*. As aspiring AFL footballers many Early Career players talked about the need to give football *everything they had*. Within this mindset, activities that took their attention away from football were generally unwelcomed and given only partial attention.

*I remember doing some workshops and getting a heap of information. To be honest it was all pretty much a blur at that point. There was so much going on I can't remember much about it all.*

Early Career player

*ii. Finding the right character*

*In this day and age you just can't afford to have rat bags at your club. They might be able to play a bit but they can drag the whole place down and before you know it the rot has set in and the club is going nowhere. I think what sort of person they are away from football is really the same sort of person they are going to be in football. The challenge is to bring these two aspects along at the same time.*

David Parkin – *Premiership coach and player (1999)*.

At a club level there is a great deal of emphasis put on minimising the risk of recruiting players who might cause trouble in the club. In talent identification and recruiting processes clubs and their officials are interested in much more than football ability. In recent years there has been a marked increase in the emphasis placed on recruiting players most likely to adhere to the professional identity requirements associated with being a modern day professional footballer. The contemporary job description has widened beyond the physical and character attributes necessary to the tasks of running, jumping, tackling and kicking. Foremost here are attempts to identify, measure and quantify the intangible elements of 'character'. Character traits indicating capacities to handle celebrity, relative wealth, free time, demands from sponsors, clubs and the industry, assume more prominence in deciding who to recruit, who to keep on the list, who to spend time, energy and resources on developing.

The identification of talent, in a football sense, is a more exact science than the identification of character. It's a more exact science in the sense that potential recruits can be identified via the AFL's talent identification processes. In these processes talent related statistics such as height, weight, reach, leap, speed, and skill related statistics concerned with possessions, disposals and tackles etc, can be collected over time and comparisons made between individuals. This scientific, objective element of talent identification reaches its peak in the environment of the annual draft camp and its barrage of testing and counting.

Alongside this amassing of data and video records and their storage, transfer and analysis within league and club managed channels, there are a variety of efforts to find out about, and make judgements about, the character of potential recruits. Interviews are conducted with possible recruits themselves, with their families, with their teachers and Principals, with people they may have worked for, with their current and previous coaches. By the time a potential recruit has made it to the draft camp, this process resembles a series of job related interviews with up to 16 potential employers that might have been going on for 2 or 3 years.

Not only is the recruiting process an extensive and prolonged one but it is an intrusive process as well. One coach we interviewed said that he got a really good sense of a player's character when he visited his family and got to have a look at the player's bedroom.

*[The Recruiting Manager] would talk to their coaches personally, go to their teachers...we'd go and talk to all the families...[The Recruiting Manager] and I would probably go into about 20 homes every year. Go and have a look at their Mother and Father, and whether they've got a clean room, whether they pull their weight around the house, whether they've got part time jobs...*

Senior Coach

Most of the Recruiting Managers, Football Department Managers and Player Development Manager's spoke of the identification of good character as a very complicated process. Many resorted to stereotypes, or generalisations to interpret the risks associated with recruiting particular individuals. Numerous comments were made about the need to be particularly careful when it comes to selecting indigenous boys. There were also numerous references to socio-economic background when discussing risk factors in identifying character. These references tended to be to suburbs/areas that families came from, schools that potential draftees attended and/or family status (good, bad, broken, close).

*Look I'll be interested to see how one young kid goes this year. Everyone knows he can play football but to be honest once you've met the old man you just don't want to go there. It's a shame, but the reality is that you don't want to bring people in that*

*have the potential to stuff up your club. The kid's got some issues himself and they're not helped at all by his old man. If there are two kids similar you're usually going to pick the one who is likely to fit in better and is going to do the right thing by the club.*

Member of Football Department

The combination of many of these situations or contexts was seen to indicate relative risks associated with recruiting a player – *good, close knit family, good school and a good suburb vs broken family, absent dad, poor area and an average school.*

*The way things are going we'll only recruit public school boys in the future*

Late Career player

### *iii. Getting an education*

In the past decade there has been a marked increase in awareness of the need to provide AFL footballers with the sort of life skills that will help them to be both a footballer, and to not be a footballer. It is this contradiction that is at the heart of many of the tensions that surround a current emphasis on professional development activities for AFL players. Players are increasingly encouraged to develop *balance* in their life – a balance that would enhance their effectiveness and performance, and thus contribute to their club/team performance. Footballers are being encouraged to develop an orientation to themselves, and their team/club, that requires them to undertake some form of training or education, get a job, do community based activities - almost anything to counter the 'Playstation Syndrome' that witnesses players struggling to fill their days with activities other than training and video games (Oakes 2003). It is claimed that developing this 'duty of care', as an aspect of what it means to be a professional footballer, would then contribute to improvements in individual, team and club performance.

The majority of these tensions emerge and get played-out at the club level. Here, the business of being a successful football club and team intersects with the push to educate players about the often risky business of AFL football. The problem in many clubs is that the development of the on-field footballer and the development of the off-field footballer are nurtured and administered independently. Exacerbating this division is the fact that the coaching department have a significantly greater influence, and authority, over players. Many of our conversations at the club level were steeped in the effects of this hierarchy. It must be said that in the day to day practices at most clubs, there was evidence of willing acquiescence to the existence of this hierarchy. Afterall, in the interest of being a successful football team, matters related to football take priority over other things.

*At the end of the day the club is only interested in winning games of football. If your form drops away they're all over you. You pretty quickly find yourself doing extra training sessions. But if you don't turn up to Uni or you fail, no one really gives a*

*stuff. If you're playing good footy you'll get away with anything!*

Late Career player

Early Career players generally understood their lack of readiness for AFL football in relation to the limitations of their body. Their physical immaturity in terms of body strength, endurance, durability and skill were seen as the overwhelming barriers to their participation at the top level. Young players generally understood the first phase of their participation at an AFL club as a time dedicated to developing the physical condition and skill level to perform at the top level. So strong was this emphasis that many found it very difficult to devote reasonable energy to other pursuits, such as study and relationships. For many draftees, keeping up with the intensity and frequency of training sessions was an all-consuming demand.

*Nothing can prepare you for the intensity of the training. The first two years I was here I just used to go home and lie on the couch between training sessions. You're just bloody exhausted. I started a course doing something, marketing I think, but to be honest I didn't give a shit about it. I was just flat out keeping up with the training.*

Early Career player

The pressure to conform to industry expectations about preparing for life after football, and for developing and maintaining some balance between football and other activities means that some AFL players – particularly Mid Career and Late Career players – can develop what some club level Player Development Managers (PDMs) and AFL-PA officials called a *portfolio of short courses*. This portfolio consists of a series of Certificate I, II or III qualifications or attempts at gaining such qualifications. By this stage some players are accessing professional career guidance and counselling provided by firms contracted by the AFL-PA. This counselling often involves extensive and lengthy psychologically based profiling designed to identify the occupations, careers or training that players are most suited to.

*In '99 I did a trainee course at (name of place) golf course. I didn't do anything in 2000. I was just concentrating on trying to get into the side. Then I think I did some work at a nursery in 2001. That sort of led into a natural resource management course. But I dropped it last year. I was only doing one unit a semester. It was going take forever to do it. Seven years or something. I just thought bugger it! I was going to do some work at a company, but it went bust. I'm just floating at the moment.*

Mid Career player

#### *iv. Managing player development*

One area of significant change in the AFL in the last decade is related to the provision of off field mentoring at the club level. Up until relatively recently coaching and

support staff were almost exclusively dedicated to maximizing the on field performances of players. The fact that all clubs now have Player Development Managers (PDMs) is evidence of an industry shift. This progression is mirrored in many other sports such as the America's National Football League, which has established the place of a Player Development Director (PDD) within each franchise/club (NFL, 2006). While the status and function of the PDMs varied from club to club, their role in monitoring and managing the off-field activities of players has become an integral part of the industry.

There are differences in the roles of PDMs at different clubs. Some PDMs, for example, also act as forward scouts or perform various other functions on match days. Media commentary on relative inequalities among AFL clubs also indicates that some wealthier clubs are able to afford to employ multiple support staff to assist player development, welfare and performance improvements. While more personnel does not automatically translate into better outcomes it does heighten the chances of delivering enhanced player development services.

*At (name of previous club) the role of the PDM was a joke. He'd say you should do this and you can do this but the coaching staff couldn't have cared less. There was a clear split of duties between the PDM and the coaching staff.*

Mid Career player

In the highly competitive environment of AFL the flow of resources is usually tied to the pursuit of increased performance and competitive advantage. Underpinning this, is an explicit acknowledgement that some clubs believe player professional development along lines that encompass non football related matters is important, and that a commitment to support this development has a range of performance related benefits. Unfortunately, in several of the clubs we visited the PDM occupied a fairly marginal position. While there is a great deal of diversity in the way clubs use their PDMs, our research reveals that in clubs where the Football Department hold the role of the PDM in high regard, the greater is their capacity to assert influence over the off field activities of players. Though the job description of the PDM was similar from club to club their effectiveness differed greatly. In contexts where matters related to football take overwhelming precedence over non football activities players' commitments to education and training was markedly decreased. Players described how they the PDM had tried to get them involved in education and training activities but the practices of being a footballer interfered – including training, social activities, energy levels and motivation.

We did, however, come across clear evidence that the division between the on-field and off-field practices of players could be brought into alignment in the context of AFL football. At one of the clubs we visited there was a strategic effort being made to bring these components into balance. Most prominent here was the respect and status that was given to the work of the PDM. The rhetoric of off-field development was backed up by the shared understandings and commitments of coaching staff and PDM. While the football and non-football activities of players continued to be

managed by different personnel both dimensions were clearly valued by the Head Coach.

*I think it's the second most important job at the club, behind the coach. He has to be a counsellor. He has to look after the transition of players into and out of the football club. He is the person that looks after all of them. Not just the new kids, but the older players as well, will use him as a sounding board to know how they're going. He has to be someone they trust and can actually relate to as a friend. It's a huge job and takes up a huge amount of time*

Senior Coach

Within this environment players were aware that their off-field activities (education and training) were monitored and supported by the coaching staff as well as the PDM. With the backing of the Football Department, the PDM was able to assert considerable influence on players and hold them to account for their non-football activities. Most of the players we spoke to at this club identified the PDM as an important member of the Football Department who was valued and respected.

*(Name of PDM) is great. I think everyone here really values his role. (Name of Senior Coach) is always saying that you must go and see him if you need advice or help with your study or course. I think once you know the coach is going to be on your back you better make sure you're doing the right things.*

Early Career player

## Conclusion

Our research reveals that the AFL is taking an increasing interest in managing the off field behaviours of its players. Acutely aware of the damage bad press can bring, the AFL is taking a proactive role in seeking to manage the demands associated with being a professional footballer. As well as establishing a punitive system of deterrence around the Player Code of Conduct, the AFL has mandated a compulsory suite of industry workshops, for all players. The key plank of these workshops involves raising players' awareness of the pitfalls and ramifications of footballers behaving badly. While there is little doubt that the education and training that is marshalled around this is well intended, our conversations with players raise questions about their effectiveness. Among these is the challenge to get players not only to attend the workshops, but to get them to actively engage with their content. Early career players appeared particularly distracted when it came to engaging with the workshops. For many of them, participation in the workshops was simply a process of compliance, rather than education.

On a day-to-day basis it is clubs that take responsibility for managing the off field activities of their players. This has ushered in an increasing expectation that players pursue education and training opportunities outside of football. Such is the

prominence of this orientation that players now need a reason not actively being involved in some sort of award, certificate or degree. Our research, however, reveals that AFL footballers face a range of tensions in trying to respond to the expectations associated with this industry orientation. While time and access are recurring issues, by far the greatest obstacle to them achieving success in these arenas is their general lack of incentive and commitment. Underpinning this is the intensity and singularity of their focus on football. This is particularly pronounced with early career players who are yet to establish themselves as AFL players. Among the key challenges that they face is meeting the physical demands associated with prepare for and recovering from games. While the emergence of PDMs has evolved to support and nurture the off field development of players, the effectiveness with which they carry out this role varies a great deal from club to club. In an industry where football related activities subordinate non-football ones, many young players participate in education and training programs out of compliance.

As the AFL evolves and adapts to take its place in the global sports entertainment industry, it is placing an increased emphasis on education and training of players.. This is underpinned by new sensitivities toward player development, wherein there is an increasing expectation that players will take a prudent orientation to their life as a footballer and beyond. Among the array of industry practices that have sprung up around managing player behaviour is an intensification around the recruiting process. At a time where clubs are trying to minimise the risk of 'bad press', there is an increasing emphasis being placed on identifying the character traits indicating one's capacity to handle celebrity, relative wealth, free time, demands from sponsors, clubs and the industry. One of the issues that emerges here, and one which requires further consideration, is that these processes may produce trends that limit the chances of certain types of person from participating at the elite level in this sports entertainment business. While the AFL has clearly done well in accommodating the cultural nuances of indigenous Australians (who currently make up almost 13% of total player numbers), there appear to be emerging issues around class. Rather than relying on education and training to instil the sorts of self restraint and regulation that are necessary to act responsibly off field, clubs employ a range of filtering strategies. High on the agenda here is a young recruits performance at school. Commenting on the lengths clubs will go to identify potential miscreants, one late career player lamented that, "soon they'll only recruit private school boys".

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