

# Chapter 10

## Using Developments in Sport in Australia to Promote Cultural Competence in Higher Education Courses at CSU



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**Abstract** Engaging higher education students in experiences related to cultural competence can be challenging for educators in the sports and exercise science-related disciplines. However, in the last decade, a number of sporting and accrediting bodies in Australia have recognised the importance of education in this space for athletes, coaches, sport journalists and exercise professionals. One example has been the implementation of Reconciliation Action Plans by sporting associations (such as the AFL, NRL and the 2018 Commonwealth Games). An examination of the importance of cultural competence in sporting spaces provides a pertinent context for student engagement at the tertiary level in the discipline of sport and exercise science. Both of us identify as non-Indigenous individuals. However, we have both been tasked with carrying out course-related work relating to ‘cultural competence’ in sports contexts. We have been active participants in cultural experiences and immersion programmes inside and outside the university environment, and have close connections to Indigenous Australians as colleagues, research partners and friends

### Introduction

As non-Indigenous university educators, teaching content relating to Indigenous Australians to a cohort of undergraduate Exercise Science, Sports Management and Sports Media students presents a number of challenges. For the most part, students need some convincing that the content is relevant to their careers. In the opinion of some students, learning about Indigenous Australians and their struggles and triumphs is not deemed useful, practical and/or (as) important<sup>1</sup> as other facets of

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<sup>1</sup>This is outlined in the Student Experience Surveys completed after every teaching semester.

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their university degrees. As such, teaching in this space has been and remains a challenge. However, once case studies related to sport are incorporated into class content and discussions, most students begin to start engaging with the content and gradually understand the relevance for them as future professionals.

The need for continued cultural competence education is evident in and around many sports in Australia. Despite their best efforts to eliminate racism against Indigenous Australians from the sporting competition, the Australian Football League (AFL) has seen a number of cases of racist abuse and discrimination aimed at Indigenous players over the last decade (see Hallinan & Judd, 2009; Judd, 2010). In particular, former Sydney Swans premiership player and Australian of the Year in 2014, Adam Goodes, received racist abuse from fans, football personalities and one President of an AFL club (see Ashton, 2019). Similarly, in the National Rugby League (NRL) competition in Australia, several instances of racism have been reported in the last decade (see Byrnes, Newton, & Gould, 2018; St John, 2019).

Indigenous South Sydney Rabbitohs player, Greg Inglis, has recently spoken publicly about the racism that he encountered as a player in the NRL for many years (see St John, 2019). In sports commentary in Australia, Indigenous athletes are often described in different ways to non-Indigenous athletes. In the AFL in particular, Hallinan, Bruce, and Bennie (2004) explain that Indigenous players are often stereotyped as having ‘...breathtaking flair, inventiveness, exquisite touch and wizardry, magical football ability, instinct, natural talent and a different sense of time and space’ (p. 5). As such, Indigenous athletes are stereotyped by sports commentators as having natural ability and they ignore or devalue the training and commitment required by athletes to play at the elite level.

Recently, a number of sporting organisations, clubs, committees and accrediting bodies have recognised the problem that racism still poses in sport in Australia and the importance of education in this space for athletes, coaches, sport journalists and exercise professionals. As such, this chapter investigates the work that is being carried out by three specific sporting organisations and committees to promote cultural competence and combat racism, including the Australian Football League, the National Rugby League and the 2018 Commonwealth Games. Recognition of the importance of cultural competence in sporting spaces provides pertinent context for teaching cultural competence at the tertiary level in the discipline of sport and exercise science.

## **Racism in Sport in Australia**

In a speech to the United Nations in 2011, retired AFL footballer Andrew McLeod claimed that racism in the AFL was a ‘thing of the past’. Despite such a bold claim, McLeod also explained that while racism on the field from opposing players or from spectators has been eliminated from the sport, the AFL has much work to do to achieve equity in the areas of coaching and governance roles (Daily Telegraph,

2011). Unfortunately, McLeod was mistaken about the culture of racism and the AFL, both on and off the field.

Since McLeod's speech, the AFL has been entangled in several racially motivated discriminatory incidents from a variety of individuals involved in the sport. As mentioned earlier, Adam Goodes was regularly racially abused between 2013 and 2015 (see Ashton, 2019). This abuse was perpetrated by spectators, an AFL club President (Eddie McGuire) and select media representatives (Ashton, 2019). Most famously, Goodes was also 'booed' by opposition fans at football matches for several weeks in 2015 after performing an Indigenous war dance during the Indigenous round match (Coram & Hallinan, 2017). Coram and Hallinan (2017) suggest that during the latter stages of his career.

Goodes was represented as a polarising figure in the tabloid press for calling out his racial vilification and for showing his pride in his aboriginality and Indigenous culture. The booing drew extensive commentary, ranging from support to abject hostility, in the public domain (p. 99).

This extensive commentary included a call from the Prime Minister of Australia to treat Goodes with 'civility and respect' (see Bourke, 2015). More recently, Adelaide Crows player Eddie Betts and Port Adelaide player Paddy Ryder have both been subjected to racist abuse by rival spectators (see Larkin, 2017).

Similarly, NRL players have repeatedly reported racism in the last decade. In 2018, Greg Inglis spoke about the racist abuse that he received by a spectator after a match in Penrith (Byrnes, Newton, & Gould, 2018). Fellow Indigenous NRL player Ben Barba was also racially abused on social media in 2014 (ABC News, 2014). These two examples provide a snapshot of this culture. Other sports that have been embroiled in purported racial discrimination over the last decade include athletics (Jon Steffensen), cricket (Andrew Symonds) and basketball (Patty Mills) (see ABC News, 2014; Dutton, 2018; Knight, 2012).

## **Tackling Discrimination Aimed at Indigenous Athletes: Three Case Studies**

In response to racism against Indigenous athletes and people in Australia, most sports in Australia have developed strategies and policy to confront these issues. Reconciliation Australia recommends that all sporting clubs and associations develop a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to inform strategies and policies and to ensure sporting organisations are accountable for change that addresses and aims to eliminate racism in sport. RAP provides a '...framework for organisations to support the national reconciliation movement' (Reconciliation Australia, 2019) and is a strategic document that includes a set of actions that a business or organisation commit to carrying out. According to Reconciliation Australia (2019), RAP's provide a framework for organisations to contribute to reconciliation in Australia in the following ways:

- ‘building and encouraging relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, organisations, and the broader Australian community
- fostering and embedding respect for the world’s longest surviving cultures and communities
- developing opportunities within your organisation or services to improve socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities’

There are four different types of Reconciliation Action Plans. These four plans focus on ‘reflecting’, ‘innovating’, ‘stretching’ and ‘elevating’. A ‘Reflect RAP’ sets out clear steps that are required to prepare an organisation for reconciliation initiatives. An ‘Innovate RAP’ details the actions that will be undertaken to achieve a vision of reconciliation. A ‘Stretch RAP’ is focused on the implementation of longer-term strategies and working towards set goals. Finally, an ‘Elevate RAP’ is developed by organisations with a ‘track record of embedding effective RAP initiatives’ and aims to advance national reconciliation efforts (Reconciliation Australia, 2019). All RAP’s need to be developed in consultation with Reconciliation Australia, the national body in Australia. Reconciliation Australia provides consultation, insight, support and guidance from Indigenous representatives to organisations (including sporting organisations) to develop a RAP (Reconciliation Australian, 2019). Therefore, a RAP provides a useful framework for organisations around Australia and is being utilised by several sporting organisations to outline goals and strategies for Indigenous inclusion and growth in sport.

In the following sections, we discuss the work being carried out by two of the major sporting associations in Australia (the Australian Football League and the National Rugby League) along with the reconciliation work engaged in by the 2018 Commonwealth Games. These three examples are also used to show students (studying cultural competence), the importance of reconciliation to sport in Australia.

### ***The Australian Football League (AFL)***

The AFL is usually perceived to be at the forefront in relation to policy and action in the space of anti-racism and reconciliation in sport in Australia due to the high ratio of AFL players who identify as Indigenous. The AFL states that 11% of all players on AFL lists are Indigenous (AFL Community, 2019), compared to 2.8% of Indigenous people that make up the Australian population (ABS Census, 2017). On the field, the AFL hosts an Indigenous round (called the Sir Doug Nicholls round) where clubs wear specially designed Indigenous themed football uniforms (afl.com.au, 2019). One particular match during this round of the AFL season is labelled the ‘Dreamtime at the G’ match between Essendon and Richmond Football clubs. The ‘Dreamtime at the G’ also features an extensive pre-match Indigenous celebration, gifts exchanged

between teams and a celebration of Indigenous identities and cultures (afl.com.au, 2019).

Off the field, the AFL has a detailed ‘National Vilification and Discrimination policy’ (2013), along with a number of other initiatives to promote the Indigenous players involved in the sport. One example of these promotions is the AFL Players Association map that provides information about all Indigenous identified players in both the men’s and women’s national competitions (AFL Players, 2019). In particular, this map provides the details of which ‘mob’, social group and geographical location Indigenous players identify within Australia. Such a map provides an acknowledgement and promotes awareness of an Indigenous player’s identity and history.

The AFL also launched its inaugural Reconciliation Action Plan in 2014. This plan aimed to improve participation in the sport, build partnerships, create employment opportunities and acknowledge and celebrate Indigenous culture (AFL Reconciliation Action Plan 2014–2016, 2014, p. 5).<sup>2</sup> As a result of this plan, the AFL’s Indigenous Advisory Group was formed to ‘provide advice to the AFL Executive and Commission on the implementation of the AFL’s Indigenous strategy and policies’ (afl.com.au, 2015). The Indigenous Employment Strategy was also developed by the AFL to offer traineeships and junior positions, and to demonstrate the potential for Indigenous leadership in all areas of Australian football business including coaching and senior management (Indigenous Employment Strategy, 2014). In 2018, *The Age* reported the first Indigenous woman voted onto the Collingwood Football Club Board—Jodie Sizer (see Niall, 2018); however, there is minimal information available that outlines the effectiveness and progress of these groups and strategies over the last five years.

### ***The National Rugby League (NRL)***

According to Judd, the NRL has had many more Indigenous coaches, board members and leaders compared to the AFL (Judd, 2010). In 2014, the percentage of NRL players who identify as Indigenous was 12% of all players and 24% of the national team, the Australian Kangaroos (NRL Indigenous Fact Sheet, 2014). Similar to the AFL, the NRL holds an Indigenous round during their home and away season. The Indigenous round aims to highlight ‘significant social issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’ (Indigenous Round, 2019). The NRL also hosts a ‘Festival of Indigenous Rugby League’ where an Indigenous All Stars team compete against another (every two years). In 2017, the Indigenous All Stars team competed against the ‘World All Stars’ (see Gabor, 2017).

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<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that the AFL do not have a current Reconciliation Action Plan registered with Reconciliation Australia. However, a number of football clubs do have one, including Melbourne, West Coast, North Melbourne, Port Adelaide, Gold Coast, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Richmond (Reconciliation Australia, 2019).

According to the NRL, the week-long festival ‘highlights the significant contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make in rugby league, both on and off field’ (NRL Indigenous Fact Sheet, 2014).

Australian Rugby League (incorporating the NRL) boast a current ‘Elevate’ Reconciliation Action Plan (2018–2022). In fact, the NRL released their first RAP in 2008, ‘becoming the first national sporting body to commit to a Reconciliation Action Plan with Reconciliation Australia’ (NRL.com, 2010). Emerging from the previous RAP (2014–2017), the current document highlights the key achievements of the NRL in this space. These include, but are not limited to:

- ‘Employment of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ambassadors to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’;
- ‘Delivery of cultural awareness training to staff’;
- ‘Development and implementation of a cultural protocols policy’;
- ‘Development and implementation of an Indigenous Employment Strategy’;
- ‘Establishment of the Indigenous Employee Network’; and
- ‘Increased the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to 5%’. (NRL Official Reconciliation Action Plan 2018–2022, 2018).

As such, the NRL continues to support an impressive list of strategies and initiatives that aim to provide an inclusive and empowering space for Indigenous people involved in the rugby league. However, Stronach, Adair, and Taylor (2014) explain that while Indigenous people are admired for their sporting skills and prowess, they ‘struggle to preserve economic or social capital’ once they retire (p. 43). In their research that focused on the retirement experiences of Indigenous NRL players, AFL players and boxers, Stronach et al. (2014) found that sporting organisations needed to provide additional support via coaches and managers to Indigenous players to complete education and training (in preparation for retirement) and to support access to a wider range of career pathways that ‘complemented Indigenous values of “giving back” to community, such as teaching, health, police work and so on’ (p. 54). As such, there is still work to be carried out by the NRL and other sporting organisations.

### *Commonwealth Games*

The 2018 Commonwealth Games provides a pertinent case study and addition to teaching cultural competence relating to sport. The organising committee released the first ‘Elevate’ Reconciliation Action Plan for any major sporting event in Australia in history for the Commonwealth Games in 2018 (see Gold Coast, 2018a, b). This RAP was developed ‘in consultation with members of the Yugambeh language group and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Queensland (Gold Coast, 2018a, b). In fact, a variety of community members and Indigenous elders were invited to be part of the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games Corporation (GOLDOC) Indigenous working group to help develop the RAP (Gold Coast, 2018a, b).

The Commonwealth Games RAP had a number of key commitments, including:

- ‘Increased procurement opportunities for Indigenous businesses...’;
- ‘Increased employment and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’;
- ‘Increased Indigenous participation in healthy active lifestyle initiatives’;
- ‘Increased awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language, culture and histories’; and
- ‘Improved connections with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities’ (Gold Coast, 2018a, b).

The effectiveness of this RAP is yet to be established. Therefore, the success of this plan will no doubt be investigated and provide a point of interest for sport scholars in the future.

## Methods of Teaching, Sharing and Providing Evidence

The developments in sport in twenty-first-century Australia provide pertinent histories and contemporary content for students to learn about how sport can embrace and promote cultural competence. Additionally, carefully considering and choosing how to deliver content to undergraduate students in the field of cultural competence is paramount to engaging students.

From our combined 42 years of teaching exercise science, sports management and sports media students in a tertiary environment, we found the choice of a case study approach provides a sound method of delivering this content.

Herreid (2011) suggests that the use of the case study approach in delivering educational content allows the lecturer to become a storyteller. Such an approach also allows for both a wider classroom discussion and smaller group discussion, whereby the input from students provides a ‘collaborative and cooperative learning’ space (Herreid, 2011, p. 32). A sample of the case studies delivered in our teaching include the following:

- Marngrook and the cricket tour of 1868 as case studies in the history of Indigenous sport in Australia;
- Jim Thorpe, the All Blacks Haka and Indigenous games worldwide as case studies in Indigenous sport internationally (North America and New Zealand);
- Cathy Freeman, Nova Peris and the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games as case studies relating to the media representations of Indigenous athletes;
- Indigenous history of the Homebush bay area (Sydney Olympic Park), Olympic events and contested land and Indigenous athletes and links to country;
- Indigenous Sports Program, Considerations for coaching Indigenous athletes and young Indigenous footballers’ pathways to elite sport;
- Rugby League Indigenous Knockout event media reports and promoting community;

- Racism experienced by Indigenous athletes and enlightened racism and Australian rules football; and
- The use of RAPs, promoting Indigenous involvement and reconciliation practices of sporting organisations in Australia.

This case study approach benefits both the educator and learner. The use of case studies allows the educator to use a variety of resources and learning materials. Traditional resources such as books and journal articles can be easily combined with less traditional learning materials, such as documentaries, current affairs programmes, news reports, mainstream media and social media platforms. Using a variety of resources allows the student to learn in a way that suits the individual and provides a flexible teaching space for the educator. Reflecting on the actions and decision-making in the case studies which affect the meaningful participation of Australian Indigenous individuals in sport is one way that students can engage theoretically with the content. Students are encouraged to consider and discuss alternate (culturally safe and sensitive) ways of approaching situations. By considering both the obstacles that Indigenous athletes face and the role that culture plays in sports participation, students can reflect more critically on their own cultural competence journey.

Case studies can facilitate directed learning towards specific outcomes and assessment. As such, the use of an individually chosen case study assessment item allows the student to tailor their research and learning to a specific topic. We utilise this for one of the larger assessment items that all students complete, entitled the 'Sport and Community' essay. This task asks students to choose one Indigenous Australian sporting event or team and explain how the event links to kinship and community. Students are able to choose a sport, team or competition that personally interests and engages them.

Finally, using the work of scholars to frame the storytelling (delivering content) further assists student learning and understanding. Colin Tatz's work on Indigenous Australian athletes through history (see Tatz, 2000), Edward's work on the traditional games of Indigenous people (see Edwards, 2009), Hallinan and Bruce's work on AFL Indigenous players (see Hallinan, Bruce, & Burke, 2005; Hallinan, Bruce, & Bennie, 2004) and Judd's work on race relations and enlightened racism in sport (see Judd, 2010; Hallinan & Judd, 2007, 2009) provide just a small sample of the work of scholars used in teaching. Utilising such important work in the space of Indigenous identity in sport has also been carefully and respectfully approved by the Indigenous Board of Studies at Charles Sturt University, which provides another layer or level of validation that this method of teaching (and the teaching resources used) is both relevant and justified.

## **Conclusion: Reflections as Researchers and Educators**

As educators, we understand that there is no one perfect way to teach content relating to Indigenous cultural competence and, at times, the feedback received from students can be conflicting. During the teaching semester, it is obvious that at times, some



students remain resistant to learning about Indigenous identity, communities and culture relating to sport. We feel that this resistance is not unique to students studying sport-related content, or to students at Charles Sturt University as it is evident that such resistance is pervasive in society more broadly.

The use of sports examples (particularly related to the successes of sporting organisations in promoting reconciliation) gives us the opportunity for the subject to not only simply celebrate Indigenous athletes but to expose and explore the spaces around those successes which often reveal the obstacles they faced, and the racism they have endured, along the way. It is fortuitous that the nature of twenty-first-century sport in Australia celebrates Indigenous athletes and regularly highlights examples of racism in sport in the media and social media. This approach also allows the educator to encourage students to highlight their own experiences of racism and cultural understanding. This approach is non-confrontational by design and provides a basis for further self-reflection for students as they continue their education and begin to enter workplaces and sporting contexts. Also, as non-Indigenous educators, we are able to engage students using our own experiences and journeys towards cultural competence and demonstrate, through our own language and behaviour, appropriate cultural sensitivities.

Sport is moving towards a situation where sporting organisations and event committees (want to and are expected to) embrace systematic and informed RAPs. This means that as educators in this space we can more easily engage students with material that is current and emerging, and which teeters between positive and negative. Sporting organisations and events such as the AFL, the NRL and the 2018 Commonwealth Games reveal themselves as spaces where there is a clear indication of movement towards genuinely inclusive policies for Indigenous athletes. From this positive position (which readily engages students), we can more easily lead exploration and understanding of the resistance and the stereotyping that athletes encounter, not only in the past but also in the present. The merits of such policy can then be debated in relation to real outcomes and inclusion of Indigenous people in Australian sport.

We understand that it is difficult to engage every student, however our aim is to engage as many students as possible. This, of course, can be difficult as each student begins from a different point as a result of influences from outside the university space, with family, friendship groups, choice of media and social media and religion all playing a part. As educators, we can never 'ensure' that students fully embrace all aspects of what we hope to impart in any subject. We can however, create favourable circumstances and safe spaces for students to explore such higher level self-reflection. Nevertheless, we are fortunate that we have the time and space to try to achieve this goal. Our content is not divided (or lost) in a number of other subjects, it is delivered in a stand-alone full semester subject that follows on from an introductory and non-sport specific subject that explores Indigenous Australian cultures, histories and contemporary realities. Finally, we are also fortunate that our students are sports fans. For the most part, they respect and admire sporting competitions and athletes. Additionally, the use of sporting case studies can show how sport policy has moved from being *reactive* to *proactive* in addressing racism and promoting inclusion. This

approach highlights how sport can lead the way in inclusion for Indigenous people, and can provide an effective and thought provoking method in teaching towards the goal of cultural competence.

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