Racism in Sport

Racism in sport for Indigenous people is not limited to a specific sport or gender. Many Indigenous athletes experience barriers in sport based on their race. Despite this, Gorman argues that sport becomes a way to break down the barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Indigenous AFL player Michael Long has stated “[s]port has been our greatest ally.”

Direct, overt or structural racism

Indigenous people were historically excluded from participation in sport, particularly representative sport. This resulted from direct, overt or structural racism. “[I]n the late 1800s and early to mid 1900s, rations, curfews and reserve life created massive everyday hardship and poverty” for Indigenous Australians.

However, those who had sporting abilities added to their income by boxing or racing, often locally. “[T]hese people were able to become more socially mobile and gain some … acceptance in the broader community, which then afforded them some degree of status.” This did not change broader racial barriers though.

It has been suggested that these forms of racism no longer exist in sport but there are some contemporary examples.

Examples of direct, overt or structural racism in the AFL/Aussie rules

Sir Douglas Nicholls

In the 1920s Doug Nicholls was persuaded by a Carlton football talent scout to try out for Carlton. He was successful, however, was only allowed to train with the team not play. The other players didn’t want an Indigenous person to play on their team and “it was claimed his ‘smell’ was intolerable to players and trainers alike.”

Gorman argues “[i]n other words, he smelt because it was an accepted ‘truth’ amongst others.”

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5 Ibid.
6 Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd, ‘Race relations, Indigenous Australia and the social impact of professional Australian football’, *Sport in Society*, vol.12(9), 2009, p. 1227.
non-Indigenous Australians that Aboriginals were dirty and choose to live in squalid conditions. For many ‘Blackfellas’, they had no choice ... as the local tip or sewerage depot were the only places they were allowed to live”9.

Nicholls switched teams from Carlton and successfully played Aussie rules. He also ran competitively and boxed. He went on also to achieve a lot outside of sport.

For more information go to http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/heroes/nicholls.html.

Jim and Phil Krakouer

Jim Krakouer “was suspended for a total of 25 games, over a season’s worth, due to retaliating against the racialised verbal and physical attention that was shown to him and his younger brother Phil”10.

For example, Phil Krakouer describes how he regularly shook opposing player’s hands before a game as a sign of sportsmanship. He recalls one instance where after putting out his hand and saying “Good luck, mate”, the opposing player refused his hand claiming that he did not shake hands with Indigenous people because they smelt11.

Chris Lewis, Troy Ugle, Michael Long and Derek Kickett

Chris Lewis, Troy Ugle, Michael Long and Derek Kickett, Indigenous AFL players, received hate mail which included death threats12.

Chris Lewis and Troy Ugle both played for the West Coast Eagles who organised counselling for the players13. Lewis also received counselling for racial abuse by other players14.

Nicky Winmar

In 1993 Nicky Winmar and Gilbert McAdam, both Indigenous players for St Kilda were reserves entering the field at half time. Upon entering the field through the tunnel they were racially abused by Collingwood fans15.

9 Ibid., p. 17.
11 Jon Anderson, ‘Trailblazers Phil and Jimmy Krakouer are proud to see Aboriginal players getting a fair shake’, Herald Sun, 26 May 2013, p.
In response, they decided to play well and earn “first and second best on the ground”\textsuperscript{16}. Their team won. It was the team’s first victory at Victoria Park in two decades.

After winning, when passing the Collingwood crowd Nicky Winmar pulled up his guernsey pointed to his skin and said “I’m black - and proud to be black”\textsuperscript{17}.

It was printed as front page news the following morning with racist remarks condemned by senior columnists and writers\textsuperscript{18}.

Winmar’s gesture opened eyes, suggesting Indigenous disadvantage and experiences of racial discrimination cannot be ignored.

If you would like to hear McAdam talk about this day go to the following links: \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMTADkpH7ZA} and \url{http://www.heraldsun.com.au/sport/afl/four-match-ban-for-western-bulldogs-justin-sherman-for-racial-abuse/story-fn8ymmuy-1226083095002}.

\textbf{Michael Long} was racially abused by another player in the 1995 ANZAC Day AFL game\textsuperscript{19}. In a tackle the opposing tackled player, said “someone get this black **** off me”\textsuperscript{20}.

By highlighting racial abuse by another player the AFL introduced “Racial and Religious Vilification laws”\textsuperscript{21}.

However, Gorman suggests that “to some non-Indigenous people [he was] … nothing more than a trouble maker, a ‘jumped up’ darkie who did not know his place”\textsuperscript{22}. This was perhaps because using racist comments was accepted as part of distracting an opponent off their game\textsuperscript{23}. If one couldn’t handle racist comments then they were seen as ‘weak’ and did not belong in the game\textsuperscript{24}.

\textbf{Adam Goodes} 

In 2013 Sydney Swans player Adam Goodes was “verbally abused”\textsuperscript{25} by a Collingwood fan.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{18}Ibid., p. 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{19}Ibid., p. 15.
  \item \textsuperscript{20}Ibid.
\end{itemize}
in the Indigenous round of the AFL. Goodes was called an ‘ape’. The comment came from a 13 year old girl.

Upon hearing the comment Goodes pointed to the fan who was removed by security.

Rather than being angry Goodes suggested that the girl needed to be educated on why such a comment was hurtful and unacceptable.

**Racism in Rugby League**

Until the 1960s race was not considered in rugby league because it was “a white man’s game”. “Institutionalised racism meant that few Aboriginal men played rugby league at the highest level.” The only exceptions were “outstanding” players.

Despite this, David Huggonson’s research reveals that rugby league became an outlet to racism in Queensland from 1908-1958. “In Queensland, the 1897 Aboriginal Protection Act had segregated Indigenous people onto reserves … Rugby league had a presence on these reserves, with many of the communities forming their own rugby league teams.”

Although, this did not break down structural barriers.

**Frank Fisher**

Frank Fisher was a talented rugby league player, “who was selected to play against a touring Great Britain side”.

The touring side’s manager suggested he play football in England. However, “because he was constrained by the Aborigines Protection Board and [was] not … seen as a ‘citizen’ he would never have been granted a passport.”

**Dean Widders**

In 2005 in a club match between Parramatta and Souths, Indigenous player Dean Widders was called a “black ****” by Souths captain Bryan Fletcher.

Fletcher lost his captaincy.

Examples of direct, overt or structural racism in other sports

**Eddie Gilbert**

Eddie Gilbert was a cricket player. While a talented bowler, “bowl[ing] Bradman for a

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26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., p. 3.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
duck’\textsuperscript{36}, he was criticised for his bowling technique in a similar way to other Indigenous cricketers before him\textsuperscript{37}. Some argue that this was a product of racial discrimination.

After leaving cricket he became mentally ill part of which Gorman suggests resulted from the racial discrimination he experienced.

Gorman states: “Gilbert was on many occasions made to take his meals away from the team whilst on tour with the Queensland state side. Some of Gilbert’s team mates even refused to shake his hand after he had taken a wicket”\textsuperscript{38}.

Enlightened racism

Some discussions of Indigenous people in sport construct them as super human with ‘special’ and ‘natural’ sporting abilities. While this is positive because they support Indigenous participation they can also be negative. Jhally and Lewis call this ‘enlightened racism’.

Enlightened racism is the idea that coverage focuses on positive images of Indigenous people hiding Indigenous disadvantage and inequality\textsuperscript{39}.

These positive representations of Indigenous athletes, construct them in these limiting ways. It confines them to being super human and having ‘special’ sporting abilities\textsuperscript{40}.

Enlightened racism then ignores all the hours of training put in by Indigenous players\textsuperscript{41}.

This type of racism is a problem because it is an indirect form of accepted racism.

Enlightened racism in the AFL

Hallinan and Judd argue that for the AFL using positive representations of Indigenous athletes means that they can avoid structural hierarchies in the AFL. This is because Indigenous AFL players are often excluded from “leadership and decision making positions”\textsuperscript{42}. They state:

“[d]espite the increase of [Indigenous players in the AFL] … Indigenous players [are] assigned into non-central field positions that


\textsuperscript{39} Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd, ‘Race relations, Indigenous Australia and the social impact of professional Australian football’, \textit{Sport in Society}, vol.12(9), 2009, p. 1227.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}


place an emphasis on speed and quickness and away from positions widely believed to require leadership and intellectual skills”.

“Furthermore, despite comprising approximately 10% of AFL players (as compared to 2% of the national population), Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are still absent from team or club management positions.”

**Enlightened racism in rugby league**

Similarly, differences in sporting abilities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous athletes have been attributed to evolution and biological differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous bodies. This assumption carries across into contemporary discussions of Indigenous athletes because Indigenous sporting abilities are spoken about as ‘natural’ and ‘magical’. This divides Indigenous and non-Indigenous people which is a problem and enforces racist stereotypes.

Although Cottle and Keys suggest that enlightened racism, like in the AFL, hides the fact that Indigenous rugby league players only occupy playing roles, Hallinan and Judd disagree.

Hallinan and Judd suggest that unlike in the AFL in the NRL Indigenous people hold coaching, commenting, managing, recruiting and selecting positions. Examples include Arthur Beetson and Gorden Tallis.

**Inferential racism**

Inferential racism is the idea that the beliefs people hold about others of a certain race impact on the way they see and think about the abilities of certain races.

Hallinan and Judd discuss examples of inferential racism in the AFL and how perceptions of coaches and journalists impact on the roles offered to Indigenous players.

For instance, some managers spoke about how Indigenous players don’t know how to manage money and weren’t interested in it. They were suggested to live day to day and they didn’t know if Indigenous players would want to be in leadership positions.

Therefore, they were assumed to not want to coach or manage.

Others were more positive about Indigenous players coaching or managing a team. However, one manager suggested that because the skills of playing come “naturally”

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43 Ibid., p. 1225.
44 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 4.
48 Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd, ‘Race relations, Indigenous Australia and the social impact of professional Australian football’, *Sport in Society*, vol.12(9), 2009.
49 Ibid., p. 1228.
50 Ibid.
to them as Indigenous people they may find them difficult to teach\(^{51}\).

**Controversial race issues and proud Indigenous Australians**

One incident of controversy was when Cathy Freeman after winning gold at the 1994 Commonwealth Games draped the Aboriginal flag around her shoulders as she paraded around the arena\(^{52}\).

Her actions were condemned by some.

Another similar controversy, more recently, was when boxer Damian Hooper wore an Aboriginal flag t-shirt at the 2012 London Olympic Games. He was warned about his actions as the t-shirt was not official uniform. He believed it was a way to represent Australia and his people\(^{53}\).

**Positively**

There are some examples of positive action in both football codes and the media.

Indigenous player numbers have increased in rugby league since the 1960s\(^{54}\) and there is an Indigenous All Stars team as well as an Indigenous Team of the Century.

The AFL has also introduced Indigenous initiatives symbolising the AFL’s support of reconciliation and Indigenous participation. For example, events like “Dreamtime at the G”, the bi-annual Indigenous All-Stars games, recognition of an Indigenous ‘Team of the Century’ and institution of the ‘Marn-Grook Cup’\(^{55}\).

However, Hallinan and Judd argue that the AFL through requiring players to move from their home towns and embed themselves in the team culture still uses techniques of assimilation and integration\(^{56}\).

Hallinan and Judd argue that the AFL needs to create “Indigenous leadership opportunities off the playing field”\(^{57}\). This can be achieved through an all Indigenous led team.

In the media on NITV there are two shows which are “produced, managed and hosted entirely by Indigenous staff”\(^{58}\). These shows are similar to the Footy Shows (NRL and AFL) and are called ‘The Marngrook AFL Footy

\(^{51}\) Ibid.


\(^{55}\) Chris Hallinan and Barry Judd, ‘Race relations, Indigenous Australia and the social impact of professional Australian football’, *Sport in Society*, vol.12(9), 2009, p. 1229.

\(^{56}\) Ibid.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., p. 1230.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.
Questions

1. Whose actions triggered the AFL to introduce Racial and Religious Vilification laws?
   a. Sir Douglas Nicholls
   b. Adam Goodes
   c. Nicky Winmar
   d. Michael Long

2. If an Indigenous player is described as having a ‘natural’ sporting ability what type of racism is this?
   a. Overt
   b. Direct
   c. Enlightened
   d. Structural

3. Why can enlightened racism be more of a problem than direct racism?
   a. Because enlightened racism can hide the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people and is an indirect form of accepted racism.
   b. Enlightened racism is not more of a problem than direct or overt racism.
   c. Because enlightened racism is more academically informed.
   d. Because enlightened racism directly and overtly targets Indigenous people and can hide the disadvantage experienced by them.

4. Why do Hallinan and Judd suggest that the AFL encourages assimilation?
   a. Because Indigenous players sometimes come from remote Indigenous communities and have to move and integrate themselves into a team culture.
   b. Because the AFL laws reproduce government assimilation policies.
   c. Because Indigenous players, unlike non-Indigenous players need to learn to behave appropriately, for example, spend their money correctly.
   d. Because the Indigenous players have to integrate themselves into a team which is primarily Indigenous.

\[59\text{Ibid.}\]