



‘In governance we trust’ - sport in crisis

With public confidence and trust in sport stretched like never before, governance, integrity, culture and the capacity for sport to police itself were the hot topics at last night’s integrity in sport forum.

The **Sport Australia Hall of Fame** and **Victoria University** hosted forum, attended by over 200 Australian sport leaders, tackled the issues with a stellar panel of national and international experts - led by Australia’s most experienced sports administrator **Kevan Gosper AO**.

The conversation was broad, wide ranging and challenging, with a diverse range of opinions on key topics.

Moderator Kelli Underwood commenced by asking whether or not sport was in crisis.

The panel was split.

Jaimie Fuller, chairman of *SKINS International*, and crusader on issues of sports integrity, governance and ethics was adamant sport was in crisis - sighting issues at FIFA and IAAF.

“Most definitely, we are subject to some of the most heinous acts of abuse and corruption that we’ve seen and this has been building up for quite some time.”

“We should not be in denial and we should not be sitting here saying everything’s great. Sport is having a positive impact in some circumstances, but you only have to look at FIFA and their independent reform commission. It was anything but independent.”

“We are living in a world where sports are living in a bubble; there’s a culture that has built up over a long period of time and where sports governance claims to be autonomous.”

“There is a genuine justification that sport should be independently governed. The claim of autonomy is being used as a shield to become non accountable. This is way bigger and way worse than we could have possibly imagined and it just doesn’t stop at those two sports (FIFA and IAAF).”

“Australia is in much better shape than a lot of countries, but still the world has gotten so small, and the digital revolution has made the butterfly effect truly real. Something minor can happen in one part of the world and it can affect very quickly somewhere else.”

Caro Meldrum-Hanna, Walkley Award winning investigative reporter with ABC TV’s *Four Corners* program, with exposes on live baiting in greyhound racing and the sports supplements saga involving several NRL and AFL clubs was also clear.

“Yes – sport is in crisis. In Greyhound Racing, the level of power and influence and stature of those involved, this wasn’t just a few rouge trainers or owners, these were big names, the royalty of the sport in some states.

“That is what was so shocking - it was right up at the top power levels of this one sport so what that says is there’s a big problem, a significant cultural problem in certain sports.”

Kevan Gosper AO, former IOC Vice President and member of the 2015 FIFA Independent Reform Committee and current member of the IAAF Ethics Commission argued otherwise.

“We’ve come to believe it’s a crisis because of broadcasters and media people and some good analysis within sport but I don’t think sport worldwide is generally in crisis. I think that’s an overstatement.”

“Clearly there are some serious problems and more worryingly, it’s at the top level of a sport, where you would expect people to be in charge, be responsible and activate good governance.”

“But I don’t see that all of sport is in crisis and what worries me about that term, sport is in crisis, is the public at large and the parents of children start to believe it and it’s seriously, seriously wounding to the development of sport.”

“There are serious problems, but it’s too broad brush to say sport is in crisis. Sport at the top level has some serious problems and it must be addressed.”

Simon Hollingsworth, *Olympian, Rhodes scholar and Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Sports Commission who is driving change and innovation in the Australian sport system also didn’t agree.*

“On balance, I don’t think sport is in crisis.”

“My sense is that on the whole of the Australian sector that would be an overstatement.”

“When I look at the whole of the sporting sector, for example in Australia, we know that we have nearly 10 million people working in the sporting sector, most of them are volunteers and I think they reflect generally the passion and commitment and love of sport and we need to be careful in painting the whole of the sporting sector with the same brush.”

Nick Weeks, *Head of Integrity, National Rugby League*

“It’s complete nonsense to say sport is in crisis. Just like any other industry, the banks, or media, anything, people do the wrong thing.”

“Sport is fiercely competitive. They are there to win. If they don’t win they lose their jobs. What sports need is good leadership such that when clubs, team’s athletes are exploring different avenues to win they are not cutting corners.”

How did these crisis unfold – how where they allowed to happen. Is there one answer – greed and power? Why are we seeing more and more of these issues?

Kevan Gosper

“You have to have limits on tenure, transparency on what people are paid, and systems of integrity checking. It’s not just good enough to vote a person up, that person should be the subject of integrity testing. You’ve got to get the tone of the person at the top of the management and administration right and that’s the crisis in sport.”

So can sports police themselves? The value of internal integrity units.

The Hon Michael Strong, *Australian Crime Commission examiner and former director of the Office of Police Integrity Victoria*

“Where you have large amounts of money and gambling you will have corruption and crime.”

“I think what we are talking about tonight should be given its proper name - we are not just talking about a lack of integrity and cheating we are talking about criminal behaviour. And I’m afraid we are going to see more of it in the future. How much will depend on how much we can regulate it and in that regard, every measure of regulation must be used to prevent the gambling and the money from running ahead of our present ability to regulate sport.”

Terry Bailey, *Chairman of Stewards, Racing Victoria.*

“The crux of policing integrity is not to look away. It doesn’t matter where they are in the stature of the sport, we’ve only got one rule book, that’s what we operate under and people don’t like it.”

“I’m more than confident that our integrity department within Racing Victoria is more than capable in policing their own sport. The reason being we have quality expertise in the field. When it comes to having the knowledge and skill in policing the sport we need people that know the sport. You have to have the resources in place. We spend \$8 million on integrity each year to police our sport and we believe the proof is in the pudding that when faced with problems, we’ve dealt with them and dealt with them in a timely manner as possible without prosecuting innocent people.”

Professor Hans Westerbeek, *Victoria University Dean, College of Sport and Exercise Science and the Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living*

“There is a danger in comparing sport to other industries. Banking or other industries have similar issues and practices but sport is such an important value system for our kids and for the way we behave in communities and behave on the sporting field. Grown men go weak at the knees just meeting sporting heroes.”

Jaimie Fuller

“Banking has oversight, sport doesn’t. At the international level, where is the oversight of FIFA, of volleyball or cycling? It doesn’t happen. Banking is subject to oversight.”

“The corruption that’s at FIFA and the amount of money that should have flowed to the federations and if the federations had pushed that down to grass roots? I see families having to pay \$3500 for their kids to play representative football, now that’s because there’s so much money been taken away and hived off by corrupt people and is not flowing through to the grassroots where it should go.”

“I know I sound like a bit of a nutjob but I reckon there is a conspiracy at the governance levels to make sure the public do not understand the nature of the problems that exist.”

“Conspiracists such as me, feel that WADA is there not to eradicate doping, but to eradicate scandal. Conspiracists such as myself feel that WADA is there as a device to make sure we suppress these problems rather than root them out.”

Kevan Gosper *disagreed.*

“Many of these issues were brought to a head by law enforcement in two countries, the US and Switzerland. Sport does not operate independent of national regulatory controls.”

“If sports saw this as an improvement on oversight it shouldn’t resist it. But it would need to be introduced in a way in which it’s taken on, signed on, not just thrown at sport.”

“From where I sit, if it turned out to be well discussed, well elaborated on, the strength and weaknesses of an independent integrity oversight body, I would have no issues with and would argue for it. But I’d resist it being thrust on sport.”

“The point that has struck me probably more than anything in this discussion is the question of whether there’s a case for an international integrity oversight in sport. And I’m going to think hard about that.”

Caro Meldrum-Hanna

“The experience from Greyhound Racing shows that sports can’t police themselves...”

“With self-regulation, there is the conflict. The very people who are meant to and are responsible for policing the sport are responsible for promoting it. Policing / promoting / policy / promoting. Not the same individuals, but all under the umbrella of the one sport without anything independent. It’s the same organisation responsible for two different things, which are in conflict.”

Michael Strong

“Professions and trades, generally speaking, should have independent oversight and should not be able to regulate themselves. Self-regulation may work perfectly in Racing Victoria, I don't suggest that it doesn't, but experience has shown that generally you get better outcomes with independent oversight.”

Have we seen a change of culture in those sports most affected by scandals? How important is organisational culture and how can it be changed?

John Bertrand: *Skipper Australia II, 1983 America's Cup, SAHOF chairman, Swimming Australia president and chairman*

“Coming out of the London Olympics, the exit interviews of the Australian swimmers as a whole the conclusion was it was considered the lonely Olympics. They didn't feel part of a team, the Australian swim team.”

“So we've gone through a major revolution in many ways and the results will be there hopefully in Rio. But it will be the way the team presents itself, both in competition and outside competition.”

“What we've done, is set a vision which is exciting for young people. And in our case the hugely aspirational concept of world best practice in everything we do.”

“So we scour the world now in terms of studying the industries on what really is world best practice and if we can get to what the game will look like in five year's time faster than any other nation in the world then that's part of our thinking. That's exciting for our people.”

“Then we talk about the values, the values are very simple – it's called trust. If you don't have trust you have nothing. And with trust you talk about integrity and honesty and transparency - it's not rocket science.”

“So from my perspective, being the president of Swimming Australia my job is to just hammer this thing, right throughout the organisation of trust and integrity and honesty and transparency. I expect everyone in the organisation to be repeating that mantra.”

“We'd love to get to the point we where have no rules. Now that's an impossibility but when we say no rules, we are really saying that our people run the show, throughout the organisation the values drive the organisation.”

“Our leadership team will run the show, like AFL football. The really strong clubs in AFL traditionally is Hawthorn, Geelong and the Sydney Swans and look at the leadership teams.”

“This is one thing we think, Australia leads the world. When we benchmarked professional football in the United States or around the world we think that Australian Rules Football leads the world in leadership teams. So we've benchmarked very closely those three clubs.”

“So when things go wrong, and we'll be tested (in Rio) there's no doubt about that, we would expect our leadership team to lay down the law within the organisation.”

“We have three boys and three girls. We don't been to announce it. It's there... and don't cross them!”

Are we seeing the issues at the top end replicated at grass roots?

Associate Professor Dennis Hemphill: *(Sport Ethics expertise, focusing on grassroots community sport) Victoria University Lecturer, College of Sport and Exercise Science and Research Associate, Institute of Sport, Exercise & Active Living*

“There are vulnerabilities at junior level, at community level. I haven't seen any junior club who

state that their primary purpose is winning. Yet we have a winning ethos that is often very important. So in many cases sports integrity is living up to your stated values and principles.”

“If a community club says we value participation, inclusion, fun, team building, game sense, etc, then that’s where a community club should be held to account. So the vulnerability comes when that competitive ethos filters down.”

“There is more and more evidence of illegal betting markets operating in junior and community sport.”

“Community sport is vulnerable. It’s staffed by thousands and thousands of parent volunteers, some of the other research we are doing is showing that those at the community sport level are aware of these integrity issues but don’t know how to properly deal with it.”

The pressure to win and being cheated out of medals

Sonia O’Sullivan: Irish athlete, Olympic 5000m silver medallist, world 5000m champion & dual world cross country champion, cheated out of victories by Chinese athletes who have recently been exposed

“That was 23 years ago – 1993 - it was two gold medals, a world record, and probably many more races.”

“At the time, people didn’t think that much about athletes cheating. And so as time goes on you come to accept it and there’s nothing I can do about it. So you just go on and be the best that you can be, which I did.”

“In a sense I was looked after by a lot of the race organisers in Europe at the time, I was seen as the true world champion so I didn’t really have any financial things to worry about, so I didn’t let it bother me, I never really got bitter about it I never got angry about it.”

“Even though I was the favourite to win at the time and it was taken away from me, I refer to it as the ‘Chinese takeaway’.”

“The Chinese, they came out of nowhere and they got away with it and it was never really investigated until recently when they put their hand up themselves and admitted they cheated. A letter was found, a letter written in 1995 and presented to a journalist and the journalist kind of put it in a draw or a file and hid it away. These athletes, they wanted to clear their name.”

“There was one of the athletes was a good runner, the rest were not every good, and she wanted to compete in the 1996 Olympics and she wanted to be seen as a clean athlete, and she didn’t get that opportunity to do that.”

“We were all led to believe they were drinking turtle blood. I am yet to know anybody who has ever seen a bottle or a jar of turtle blood. We’ve all been to China recently and there’s no curious person to go out there and try it and see if it really makes me run faster or perform better.”

“It was all a bit of a mystery at the time and only now when you look back at it and kind of think the thing in the back of your mind that was not quite right it definitely wasn’t.”

“This was released to the world at the end of January this year and the Irish Federation wrote a letter to the IAAF and ask that they investigate this further and let us know, and personally I have not had a single email, text or word from anyone at the IAAF and that is pretty disappointing.”

In Summary

Jaimie Fuller on Australia’s role in the global integrity crisis

“This is about leadership and this country is in the best position to stand out there and take a leadership role globally. I think Australia has got the capacity to stand up and bring in our opposite

numbers in other countries and try and drive something towards trying to get the sort of governance reform that's needed at a global level.”

Terry Bailey

“Before you start work on integrity outside, work on your integrity inside – if there are rats in the galley, get rid of them because they're going to bring you down.”

“And at the end of the day, if your organisation is face with a drama, or it's faced with controversy, just tell the truth. Don't worry about the spin. Aussies like it better when they hear the truth.”

Sally Capp, *Board Member, The Sport Australia Hall of Fame*, provided a good summary.

“We talked about values in sporting clubs and the values of winning, and operating in the best interests of the clubs. I've been a friend of a man named Simon Illingworth (police whistleblower), who as he said, stood in front of corruption and really called it out at the risk of his own life.”

“One of his main point is that you always have people who want to break the rules, they're the people sitting on the bus.”

“There are also a few people who are willing to stand in front to front of the bus, like you Jaimie (Fuller).”

“But he said the really disappointing thing that we all need to address is that of all the people running alongside the bus that understand what is going on but aren't doing enough about it.”

“So, how do we encourage more in the value of sport to actually give people the courage to stand up and yell out because if we had more of those people, a la all the reporters that call these things out and the other people involved in sport then we may be able to deal with it earlier and bring more transparency to sport and deal with it and move on with more of the values we want to promote.”