

## **Play by the Rules – David Simpson**

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Peter: Okay, welcome. Today I want to welcome David Simpson my friend and colleague from the Sports Commission here. Now I wanted to talk to Dave because he's one of those rare people who has experience in sport at a local, State and National level and Internationally across different environments, so across a school's environment, across a club's environment and also working nationally at a State level in different sorts of roles there, which we'll get to, so welcome Dave.

Dave: Thank you Peter. It's nice to be here.

Peter: Well, straight off Dave, like I said, you've worked in all different levels of sport from top to bottom in different countries for many years now and I want to ask you how many years?

David: I don't know, probably nearly 25 years working with sport across all levels now.

Peter: Okay, so we're going to focus around member protection issues because your local role right now in this moment is as a President of a local football club and also a member protection information officer as well locally---

David: That's correct.

Peter: ---so we'll get to that, that's the bit that I want to talk about most but what do you think are some of the ongoing major, major member protection issues that you've seen throughout your career in sport?

David: I think probably the main one that keeps cropping up all through whatever level of sport is really the harassment issues, some of the bullying sort of issues, discrimination, punishment, ridicule of athletes are probably the main ones that I've seen.

Peter: Where's that coming from do you think mainly?

David: I think it comes from all directions; at junior sport level, probably more from parents, harassment of officials, referees and the like. From a coaching perspective as well towards athletes as well, I suppose that's the punishment and the ridicule, the mistreatment of athletes as part of training squads and similarly with the discrimination of omitting children or omitting people from teams as well.

Peter: It's been 25 years your career, do you think we've got any better at handling these sorts of things?

David: Oh, I think we have definitely got better at handling these things. I think the implementation of the MPIO is a really good step forward. Having much better access to resources and guidelines and definitely at a local level, clubs actually understanding what processes are out there has certainly improved the way we handle all sorts of member protection issues.

Peter: What are some of the challenges of getting out to members? You're the MPIO, you're the President so you're keen and committed to this area but I'm guessing a lot of people in your club are volunteers?

David: They are.

Peter: They come in and out of a club. Perhaps some have been there for years.

David: That's exactly right. Everyone in our club is volunteers, we have no paid staff and everyone is trying to do the right thing by the club but everyone is doing it on their own time so it's having the time to actually sit down, explain processes to people and actually get it out to members to say "look, if you have an issue, this is how we address that issue".

Peter: Are there some things you've particularly put in place, say at your local soccer club now that you're working at to just create that awareness that member protection is important and things like child safety is important at your club?

David: Yes, so at the moment we don't have junior teams. We have a junior team coming in next year. We do have junior players but we do make sure that where people need to go so if they need to come to me for an issue they know that I am the point of contact so we put that out there within our newsletters, on our website and the like that if you do have an issue this is the person that you need to come to.

Peter: It's a reasonable-sized Club yours I think?

David: About 150 players.

Peter: In your role, you're President and you've been there for a few years I'm guessing?

David: At the start of the club!

Peter: Well there you are, so wouldn't you have a conflict of interest in terms of dealing with some of the issues perhaps you might be dealing with within a club?

David: At times and that's where we rely on our governing body to step in and assist us. I don't actually handle complaints. As the MPIO I provide information and support but I don't actually handle our complaints. I have another person within our club that as the first point of call for handling a

complaint takes that responsibility, in that way there's an arms length between myself as the MPIO and the complaints manager but then if required we would then escalate it up to our governing body.

Peter: Mm, that's led me into my next question there because you know as much as anyone, you've worked nationally, you're working nationally right now in fact so you know the challenges of the connections between Club, State and National level so what do you think are some of the challenges of doing that from a Club perspective now? You've got all the experience right through the spectrum but what do you think from a Club perspective?

David: I think the challenge is aligning processes all the way up the chain, so making sure our processes at local club level align and feed into processes at State level so if there is an issue at a Club level it can be escalated to a State level or there is that next step of progression and then similarly State to National level it's making sure that if there is an issue at a State level there is some sort of process or some sort of policy that says it can be escalated or this is how it is escalated up to the next level.

Peter: How important are relationships in that? You're here in Canberra and it's a fairly small town really compared to a lot so you probably know who is, and you've been involved yourself at a State level, so how important is building that relationship with your governing body?

David: I can't stress how important that is. It's very important to make sure that you do have that sort of relationship because very easily these things can slip through the cracks just due to poor relationships between the levels.

Peter: Sticking with the member protection-type issues, do you think as the MPIO that you've got adequate support and encouragement in your role from within your Club and also from outside it as well?

David: I think from within my Club I definitely have support in my role as MPIO. We try and ensure that all of our officials in the Clubs are aware of what my role is and how the role works to ensure that I'm not being put in a complaint management position, so from within the Club I believe plenty of support. Further up the chain, yeah, I think there is adequate support there.

Peter: You're fairly experienced and you're in what seems like a really well organised Club, what advice would you give to people who are starting out or perhaps haven't heard of the member protection information officer role? What's some of the basic key things to remember from a Club perspective?

David: From a Club perspective I think making sure that the MPIO does not get involved in complaints handling. It's probably the big one. You need to be able to stay removed from the actual complaint to be able to provide the right level of advice to the complainant to be able to deal with it. I'd also say make sure that you have your processes documented so people are very clear on what the processes are and then you can provide that correct advice so there's never any conjecture over what the process is or how it operates.

Peter: So in theory there should never be a conflict of interest because you're giving the same process?

David: That's correct.

Peter: We know in a practical sense sometimes that is difficult, is there some advice you could give around that?

David: Just making sure that you have contingencies for it. Being able to take the complaint to an alternate party or an independent party to adjudicate over or to an independent MPIO to provide that advice, so making sure that there is an alternative in the rare instance that it becomes a conflict of interest that you can't avoid.

Peter: Excellent. I want to quickly shift to around child safety issues. In your role as a President and your experience prior to that as well, one of the things that's most challenging about this is to keep that level of awareness around child safety within a Club. Everyone, 100%, I think agrees that we need to create safe environments for kids in sport. I know you're acutely aware of it so how as a President do you keep that more or less front of mind or the Club aware that these are important issues?

David: I think from our perspective it's making sure we have controls in place so it's things like Codes of Conduct, Working with Children, Working with Vulnerable People checks and people having to go through those processes. It keeps it in front of mind knowing that we are doing those sorts of screening checks on people within our Club, any volunteers that are working with children and just being aware of issues around inappropriate conduct, putting yourself in a one-on-one situation with children, that sort of thing, that we make our coaches very aware of those sorts of scenarios especially with younger children.

Peter: It's kind of like identifying some of the potential risks and trying to somehow fill that gap isn't it?

David: Yeah, that's exactly what it is. It is about risk mitigation and making sure that no one puts themselves into the position where there may be accusations, avoiding it at all costs.

Peter: And finally, just to wrap up Dave, you've had experience in football, in Formula One and Motor GP and within the schools environment, within \_\_\_\_\_, within UK, within Australia, National and State level and all that kind of thing, if someone's a volunteer in a local club situation there's a lot to potentially get your head around. Is there any words of wisdom you can come up with – I'm putting you on the spot here – to help people coming into these sorts of roles, there are a lot of demands on people these days and not much time.

David: I think trying not to get overwhelmed by it all, making sure that you're not being overwhelmed by the role and just knowing what you need to know

and if you don't know you can always find out. There are resources around to find out what you don't know so just making sure that you can provide the advice and if you can't provide the advice don't try, try and find out before you provide that advice back up the chain.

Peter: Terrific. Thank you David Simpson for your time on this particular podcast and whatever roles you take in the future I wish you luck with that.

David: Thank you Peter.

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