

# How to sort fact from fiction?

Exploring the challenges involved in uncovering the truth and getting it right when it matters most



## Feature articles

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ASADA Clean Sport app helps prevent athletes testing positive from contaminated supplements

Australian gymnasts and staff to be trained to identify child abuse

Revamped child safety section on Play by the Rules

Let Kids be Kids online mini-course

Have you completed your child protection online training?:

<https://www.playbytherules.net.au/online-courses/>



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## THE EDITOR

There would not be a sports club in the country that hasn't had to deal with a complaint at some point. Complaining is an emotional act and is often wrapped in context and history. Subsequently, it can be challenging at times to sort fact from fiction. If you are involved in complaint handling at any level, you'll understand how important it is to know the facts when an issue occurs. It's not always that people lie, but emotions can cloud judgements and distort facts. In this magazine Dr Elly Johnson, a truth, trust and deception communications expert, provides some great guidance on how to sort fact from fiction.

Also, Clyde Rathbone talks about pressure. 'Pressure' is one of the most used terms in sport and can have a significant impact on behaviour, on and off the field. And lawyer Andy Gibson has some advice for committee members and office bearers on good governance. Speaking of which, we are currently working on a new section on Play by the Rules dedicated to governance — an important topic for all sport and recreation clubs/ associations wanting to keep sport safe, fair and inclusive. I'll let you know when it goes live.



Peter Downs  
Manager - Play by the Rules

News:

## ASADA Clean Sport app helps prevent athletes testing positive from contaminated supplements



ASADA recently launched a new mobile app, ASADA Clean Sport, to help prevent athletes testing positive from contaminated supplements.

Almost one Australian athlete tests positive from a supplement every month.

While ASADA doesn't endorse any supplements, it does know that some are significantly less risky than others — which is why it developed ASADA Clean Sport. The new app gives athletes a complete list of every single supplement sold on Australian shelves which has been screened for prohibited substances by an independent laboratory.

These 'batch tested' supplements cannot give a 100 per cent guarantee that they do not contain a prohibited substance (abstinence is still the safest option) but they are significantly less risky than other products. So if an athlete chooses to take a supplement, they should ensure it is listed on the app.

In more good news, the app also lets athletes:

- check medications
- give feedback on a testing mission (if they don't want to write it on their testing paperwork)
- report doping
- complete online education
- read short, snappy information on TUEs, travelling overseas and their rights being tested.

There are lots of anti-doping obligations for athletes. This app makes meeting them that little bit easier. It can be downloaded for free on Android and Apple.

There will be a version two in the near future, so any feedback would be welcome.

[Apple Store app](#) | [Google Play](#)

News:

## Australian gymnasts and staff to be trained to identify child abuse

Australian Olympic gymnast Larrissa Miller knows first-hand how important it is to identify and prevent child abuse.

Miller was abused between the ages of five and 16, outside of the sport, and is now backing a partnership between Gymnastics Australia and child safety advocacy body Bravehearts to train staff and athletes to identify sex abuse.

'It is actually amazing to see the education that will come from this,' Miller said. 'It could happen to anyone.'

'Gymnastics is a really vulnerable sport because kids start out so young and they are told what to do. My heart is for these kids out on the competition floor ... to know and trust themselves.'

The child-friendly tools will be shared with all 600-plus affiliated gymnastics clubs and 220,000 athletes from September.

Expert training will be mandatory for coaches and officials. Information will be provided about child sexual assault, risk factors and how to avoid them, identifying grooming or predatory behaviour, how to respond to disclosures, and understanding signs of harm in children. Gymnastics Australia chief executive Kitty Chiller said at the launch that the first priority was to ensure all members — with 90 per cent under age 12 — felt safe, confident and empowered.

'We will do this and we need to get this done,' she said. 'Whatever it takes to ensure we have the safest possible environment.'

The move is in line with recommendations from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. Bravehearts founder Hetty Johnston said Gymnastics Australia has shown leadership in setting new benchmarks in child protection.

'What the royal commission has discovered is that you need children to understand their rights and when they feel unsafe or unsure to tell an adult,' Johnston said. 'But then you need the adult trained to listen to them.'

'There isn't an institution anywhere, sporting or otherwise, that hasn't had a problem in this area. Predators will gravitate to where children are gathered.'

Feature article:

## How do you sort fact from fiction?

Exploring the challenges involved in uncovering the truth and getting it right when it matters most

If you need to uncover the facts of a matter from a complaint, interview or investigation, how confident are you that you would come out with the truth?

If someone was twisting or hiding the truth or intentionally misleading you about what really happened, would you be able to notice the signs that warn you from believing a harmful lie?

In situations that involve getting to the truth of the matter, there are important considerations that can be unknown, overlooked or ignored. We like to think that we are good at getting information from people when we need it, but that's not always the case.

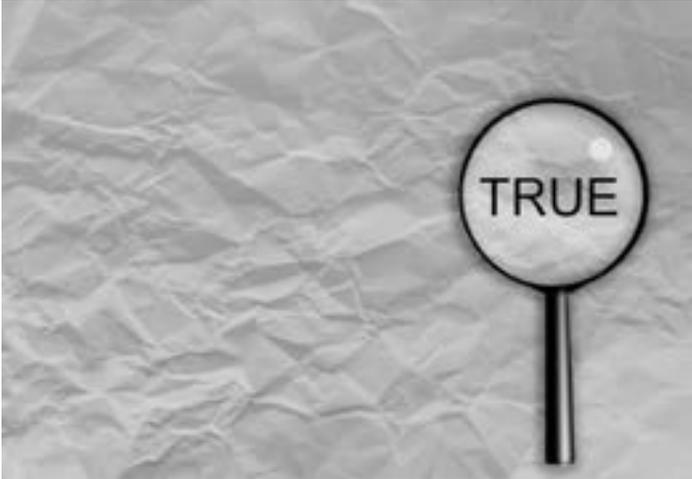
In our daily interactions we are constantly gathering and sharing information. Sometimes the information we learn is of little importance, but at other times we are tasked with making high-stake decisions based on the data that we gather.

Unless we have reason to doubt the authenticity of the person we are speaking with, we mostly trust and believe what we are being told. In fact, we generally lean towards having a 'truth bias', that is, a built-in tendency to trust most people and believe most of what we hear.

A truth bias is good in many ways in that it can prevent us from living life doubting and questioning every comment or story we are told. We don't always want to, nor should we need to, dissect and analyse information that comes our way. We just expect that it's truthful unless there is good reason for doubt.

When you chat to the person at the checkout in the supermarket, are you really that interested if it's the truth or not when he tells you he is having a great day? Probably not. And how about a colleague who announces that she went to the gym this morning before work? Does it even enter your mind to question her? Probably not. But what about in situations where uncovering and knowing the real truth is more important? How good are we at sifting through stories and data to know what is real and what is not? The concept of truth versus lies can seem quite black and white but there are many shades of grey in between.

- What if someone believes what they are telling you, but it is not the truth of what happened?
- What if other factors, such as emotion, have clouded their mind and the truth is hazy or confused?
- What if a person tells you the truth yet you interpret what they say incorrectly?
- What if filters and biases that you are unaware of impact on how you gather, understand,



process and share information?

- And if someone is intentionally lying, what are your chances of spotting it?

### **How does this play out in sport?**

Sporting organisations at all levels need to be able to respond to concerns or complaints from their members and the public about on-field and off-field behaviour, along with other incidents that are brought to the attention of clubs or officials. To be able to effectively respond, it's important to first get a clear and accurate picture of the issue, problem, complaint or incident.

One of the core responsibilities of anyone who is tasked with responding to a complaint is gathering as much information as possible in the shortest amount of time to make the best possible decision.

Being aware of the challenges involved in sorting fact from fiction is critical for anyone involved in complaint management in both junior and senior sport. The task of gathering and verifying

information requires a minimum skill set which includes:

- an ability to ask the right types of questions
- strong skills in active listening
- an ability to notice and interpret non-verbal actions
- knowledge of how to create a truth-telling environment
- skills to connect quickly and build rapport and trust
- the confidence to ask difficult or challenging questions
- techniques to de-escalate heated or emotionally charged interactions
- the ability to evaluate truthfulness and credibility of information
- understanding the barriers to obtaining accurate information.

The more developed these skills are, the better the communication flow and the fewer misunderstandings, delays and frustrations. Inefficiencies can result in wasted time, damaged relationships and can also affect organisational and professional reputations.

There are some important additional considerations when getting to the truth and sorting fact from fiction.

### **The impact of EMOTION**

In the heat of a moment, when an incident has occurred, or a complaint or allegation has been made, emotions often run high. There might be a range of immediate, short-term or lasting emotions such as shock, anger or fear.

If an allegation was made about something that broke a moral code, there could even be emotions such as disgust or contempt.

When emotion kicks in, logical reasoning often takes a back seat. Studies have shown that someone's emotional state can often result in a deterioration of reasoning performance.

With this in mind, when faced with an incident where emotions are running high, you may be hearing things differently, interpreting things through your own filters or biases, or filling in gaps to try to make sense of what is happening. This applies to the person giving the information as much as it does to the receiver.

Emotional triggers can also be connected to our preconceived views about a person or the type of incident that is being reported.

## **The impact of UNCONSCIOUS COGNITIVE BIAS**

If you have a brain, you are biased. Period. Unconscious bias refers specifically to those beliefs that reflect attitudes and stereotypes that inform our subconscious information processing.

When making a decision it would take a lot of time if you tried to think about every possible option and factor. Because of the sheer complexity of the world around you and the amount of information in the environment, it is necessary sometimes to rely on mental

shortcuts that allow you to act quickly.

We take mental shortcuts which may be accurate but expose us to major errors in thinking. Social pressures, individual motivations, and limits on the mind's ability to process information can also contribute to these biases.

Did you know that there are over 170 cognitive biases? Consider for a moment how they may apply to a situation where your goal is to gather facts to make an informed decision and take action. Here are just four examples that are common in our day-to-day dealings with other people:

- Confirmation bias: This is favouring information that conforms to your existing beliefs and discounting evidence that does not conform.
- Anchoring bias: This is the tendency to rely too heavily on the very first piece of information you learn. For example, if you learn the average price for a car is a certain value, you will think any amount below that is a good deal, perhaps not searching for better deals.
- Halo effect: Your overall impression of a person influences how you feel and think about their character. This especially applies to physical attractiveness, influencing how you rate their other qualities. The opposite of this is the 'horn effect'.
- Attentional bias: This is the tendency to pay attention to some things while simultaneously ignoring others.

## The impact of MEMORY ISSUES

Memory, or more specifically faulty memory, is one of the biggest factors to consider when piecing together the truth of something that was said, done or witnessed. Our memory can be very unreliable. Studies show us that our memories are influenced by many things and that memories actually change over time. Our brains don't like to have gaps, so without realising it we often 'fill in' the gaps with false memories. Our memories are essentially reconstructed each time we think about them. We don't mean to do it, it just happens.

When we are under pressure, our ability to recall information can be challenged. When put on the spot we can reach for an answer that may not be the truth, although it feels like the truth at the time. Once a story or a picture has filled a memory gap, it becomes our new reality.

Following on from the point about bias, there is a bias that is called the 'misinformation effect'. This is the tendency for post-event information to interfere with the memory of the original event. It is easy to have your memory influenced by what you hear about the event from others. Knowledge of this effect has led to a mistrust of eyewitness information.

One final thing to consider in this complex puzzle is what is known as a Truth Dilemma®. This is the challenge that comes with hearing, hiding, speaking or uncovering the truth.

There can be a myriad of other factors that cause people to keep quiet, get in a confused tangle or push truth away. Failing to understand this can contribute to misunderstandings and to issues snowballing.

Sorting fact from fiction is more than just deciding if someone is being truthful or not, and there are many parts to the information gathering, people reading and communication puzzle. The good news is that you can do something about addressing any skill gaps and immediately improve your ability to get the right information and uncover the truth when it matters most. The right training will ensure more effective complaint handling which in turn will save time, money and avoid unnecessary emotional stress.

### Elly Johnson



Founder, TruthAbility

TruthAbility delivers programs to address the skills and issues discussed in this article. Elly is known for transforming the way people get and give information when truth, trust and connection is vital. She consults to and trains in a cross-section of industries, applying the principles of her Unlock More Truth™ blueprint to reduce risk and save time, money and stress. She specialises in solutions to help people identify, navigate and overcome costly barriers caused by hidden truth, harmful deception, absent trust or misleading information.

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Feature article:

# Pressure - an intangible element with a palpable impact

It is said that the ability to perform under pressure often separates teams and individuals in competitive sport.

But what do we mean by pressure? Where does it come from and how does one handle it?

As a concept, pressure is fascinating. An intangible element with a palpable impact. So while it might be difficult to point directly to pressure, all of us know the havoc it can wreak on our state of mind. From sleepless nights to knots in the pit of our stomachs, pressure often manifests as physical stress.

In sport, pressure comes from many places and is aimed in all directions. For athletes it usually stems from the dreaded fear of failure. But parents, coaches, administrators and even fans aren't spared the effects of competitive stress.

And while it might be intuitive to think of ways to avoid stress, we should not lose sight of the fact that stress is an unavoidable and entirely necessary part of life. Indeed, sport itself is one way for us to test ourselves, to cope, and even thrive in stressful situations.

In my own career sport helped me understand the range of my emotional spectrum.

Winning and losing, injuries, sponsor expectations, contract negotiations, media

responsibilities, loss of form and confidence — each of these elements placed some level of stress on me. And each was an opportunity to learn and grow as an athlete and person.

With stress, as with many things in life, the poison is often in the dose. From this perspective it helps to place stress into two different categories: positive stress, the kind that leads to improved performance. And negative stress, which reliably leads to under-achievement.

It is worth noting that both positive and negative stress are often triggered by the same events. This is why some athletes perform to the highest level of their potential as the stakes are raised, while others crumble under the glare of the spotlight. What really separates one athlete from another is not the absence of stress, but the ability to harness stress and direct it towards performance



improvements.

The good news is that the ability to manage pressure, like any skill, can be trained, tweaked and improved. Early in my career I tried to manage pressure by attempting to control everything leading up to game day. This meant a near psychotic focus on what I ate, when, how and even where I trained, where I slept, how I warmed up, the lot. I was terrified of putting one foot wrong less it negatively impact on my performance.

I didn't realise that I was constructing a system bound for failure. My preparation required such a delicate level of precision that it was always open to being toppled by inevitable chaos.

As I grew more experienced I learnt to limit the number of things that I paid attention to and let go of my natural bias towards control. This allowed me to shrug off what would otherwise have been destabilising events. A poor night's sleep, a niggling injury? No problem, I'll play well anyway.

Of course, each athlete has to devise their own system of preparation, but coaches, parents and teachers can help this process a great deal by managing their own stress levels.

I've been in changerooms where the stress of a coach has rubbed off on the playing group. This is a reminder that whenever we find ourselves in a position that influences athletes, we should assume the emotional state we wish them to emulate.

Which is to say that a coach cannot scream and shout hysterically while in the same breath calling on players to remain calm and focused. As with all leadership, setting a great example is vital. James Baldwin said, 'Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them'. He may just as well have been talking about players and coaches.

Parents and coaches can also reduce athlete stress by focusing on and praising effort rather than outcomes. Effort is an element that is always under the control of every athlete, whereas the outcomes of sporting events rest on many aspects outside the control of any single individual. Rewarding effort also enables athletes to develop a skillset that transcends sport.

Trying hard, honestly dedicating oneself to a task, is often the ability which best predicts our success in any endeavour. That's why creating sporting environments that focus on the process, on the dedication rather than the result, helps athletes of any skill level to improve as people.

When I was 13 years old, my grandfather gave me a book that changed my life. The book, a strength and conditioning manual of sorts, didn't contain any particularly special information. But what my grandfather wrote on the inside of the front cover made all the difference in the world.

'To Clyde, never forget that success is one percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration.'



Clyde Rathbone  
<https://karma.wiki/app/start/landing>

Feature article:

## Playing by the rules off the field

If you are a committee member or office bearer of an incorporated sporting club or association, then you and your fellow committee members and office bearers are responsible for the success and trouble free running of your club or association. And, believe it or not, what happens in the committee room will play an important part in what happens on the field.

The issue of governance is an important topic, some would say critical, and an understanding of the Constitution or Model Rules and how they apply to the governance of your club or association needs to be understood. How well they are understood is an interesting question.

From recent experience I am inclined to think that the answer for many clubs or associations is not very well. If that is the case, then the potential for an expensive legal problem is always just going to be around the corner and yet it can be so easy to avoid by being proactive and having a working knowledge of what they say.

Remember that the Constitution or Model Rules govern the operation of your organisation. It is good management practice to ensure then that both committee members and office bearers are familiar with what the contents of the Constitution or Model Rules say about governance. Whichever set of rules you operate under, there is a need for a regular review to ensure relevance for the organisation and, perhaps more importantly, that each is up to date.

How often should the Constitution or Model Rules be reviewed? As a rule of thumb, at least once every three years because the law does change (and so might the aims and objectives of your club or association). When was the last time you or the committee reviewed your governance documentation or even read through it so you were familiar with the contents?

Familiarity with the Constitution or Model Rules will help you be aware of what you can and can't do legally. Perhaps more importantly, it will also help ensure that the correct procedure is followed. It is generally this inability to correctly follow procedure that gets most organisations in trouble. It is often not seen as being important by decision makers or just completely overlooked. But it is a great way to get into legal trouble because the party that is affected has a legal avenue open to them to appeal the decision through the courts based on what lawyers call procedural fairness and/or natural justice.

All jurisdictions have mandatory requirements embedded in their Associations



Incorporation legislation and Constitutions or Model Rules which, if not complied with, can result in trouble, usually unnecessary litigation. It is surprising how often committees or decision-makers fail to make reference to their own rules or misunderstand the meanings of words such as “must” and “shall”. They are mandatory terms and are a direction as to how the legislators expect something to be done.

A committee or decision maker must follow the rules as set out in their Constitution or Model Rules. There generally is no discretion and so if the Incorporated Associations legislation requires something to be done in a certain way and it isn't, then a member could take legal action if they were denied (on the grounds of procedural unfairness or denial of natural justice).

It can be as simple as refusing a member access to minutes and records to which they might be legally entitled to under their Constitution, Model Rules or legislation; it can be failing to give proper notice of a special resolution; it can be a problem involving a failure to comply with procedures for dealing with grievance and disciplinary matters. The list is endless.

Having a working knowledge of your Constitution or Model Rules provides a good platform for good governance. And an understanding of the use of mandatory terms such as “must” and “shall” and applying them accordingly will reduce, not eliminate as that is never possible, the chances for litigation.

Andy Gibson  
ANZSLA life member and academic, Southern Cross University

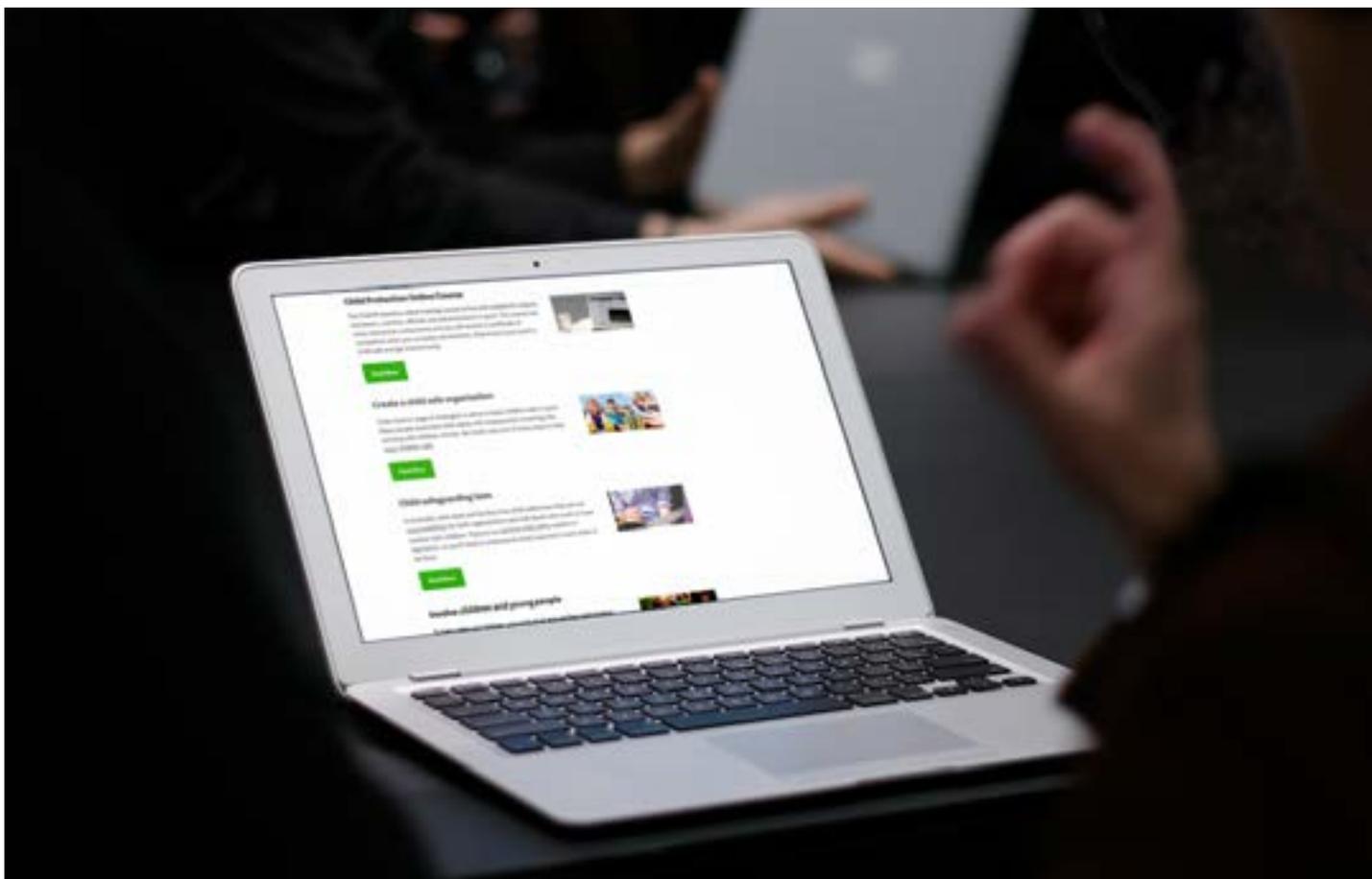
Website Update:

## Revamped Child Safe Sport section

Post the Royal Commission child safeguarding has become a priority for many organisations. It's a rapidly evolving area of work as sport and recreation clubs and associations implement policies and strategies to ensure children and young people are safe.

The child protection section on Play by the Rules has always been one of the busiest areas of the platform. We have recently reviewed and updated the child protection section under the Got an Issue tab on Play by the Rules – now called child safe sport. The changes include individual state and territory pages providing information on working with children check requirements and mandatory reporting specific to each jurisdiction. Other sections have been updated include understand child abuse, taking images of children at sporting events and creating a child safe organisation.

Check out the child protection resources on Play by the Rules - <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/got-an-issue/child-safe-sport>



## Resource Profile:

# Let Kids be Kids online mini-course

The 2017 Let Kids be Kids campaign reached over 3 million people. The message was strong and simple – stop poor sideline behaviour and Let Kids be Kids at junior sport. Poor sideline behaviour is an issue that resonates with all sports. During the campaign there were thousands of requests for further information and tools to help address poor sideline behaviour.

The latest tool for Let Kids be Kids is an online mini-course offered free on the Play by the Rules learning platform. The course is introduced by ABC journalist Paul Kennedy and uses the words and thoughts of kids profiled in the campaign to help you:

- identify the motivations for kids' participation in sport
- identify what poor behaviour at kids' sport is
- take actions that reduce instances of poor adult behaviour at kids' sport
- take actions that discover and incorporate the views of children and young people when it comes to their sport experience

You can access the course here:

<https://www.playbytherules.net.au/online-courses/mini-courses/let-kids-be-kids>



# Subscribe to Play by the Rules

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## Back Issues

You can access each back issue for this magazine by visiting [this page](#) on the Play by the Rules website. All the feature articles and significant news items are listed here.

## Share and spread the word

One easy way to keep up to date and support safe, fair and inclusive sport is to share Play by the Rules across social media. We post every day on Facebook and Twitter and have audio files on Soundcloud and an extensive collection of videos on YouTube and Vimeo.



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# BACK PAGE

## Our partners

Did you know that Play by the Rules is one of the best examples of a Collective Impact approach to addressing sport issues in the country? If not the best. Play by the Rules is a collaboration between multiple partners.



## To make Play by the Rules possible, we also work with

