



We need leadership – in sport and society

Jaimie Fuller

I had an interesting experience towards the end of last year. It occurred when I visited the CEO of a prominent local sporting team to brief them about a forthcoming social marketing campaign supporting LGBT individuals in the sporting environment, known as [#RainbowLaces](#).

By way of background, our campaign, supported by SKINS and done in conjunction with local advocacy group Pride in Diversity. They have developed a [Pride in Sport Index](#), under the auspices of the Australian Human Rights Commission and the Australian Sports Commission, focused on anti-homophobia measures in sport and which benchmarks the progress of major sporting codes in improving the environment for LGBT individuals.

The campaign was an unashamed extrapolation of the United Kingdom's [Stonewall Foundation's](#) #RainbowLaces campaign, for which we received their agreement before embarking upon it. I was also aware of a Melbourne campaign conducted by Zaidee's Rainbow Foundation to support organ donation awareness, and we received their agreement also.

We picked a weekend at the beginning of April in which all four football codes plus netball were playing. We dubbed it the 'Rainbow Round of Sport', and invited the governing bodies, clubs and their athletes to take part. We also made available for free 125,000 pairs of #RainbowLaces to grassroots sporting clubs and individuals through our retail partners.

In explaining all this to the CEO, I thought the CEO would say "Fantastic, Jaimie. We're in."

What he actually said really floored me. "What would you bother doing that for?" he asked me. "You're throwing money away! You must be crazy!"

He went on to give me the benefit of his view that we would be better off simply not doing it as no-one is interested in 'Mother Theresa moments in sport'.

This CEO wasn't the only one in Australian sport who failed to show any leadership by joining us in the #RainbowLaces campaign. In fact, he may well have been one of the more honest of them in his reaction, because what some others did was to hide behind the cloak of "commercial considerations". They closed-off the opportunity for their sport or their club to participate.

To be clear, we were not asking any individual sportsperson to 'come out'. We were not asking any sporting team to wear something that had SKINS branding – our Rainbow Laces were unbranded. And it didn't matter to us if they had a partnership with Nike or Puma or any other sports brand.

Yet, here we were, an Australian brand partnering with a local non-profit advocacy group helping to raise awareness about an issue that should matter to sporting CEOs – anti-homophobia in sport – and we were met by quite a few (not all) with, if not resistance, then at least a dead-hand.

It shouldn't have surprised me, however.

If ever there was an example of how sport is a microcosm for broader societal values, this is it.

Regrettably, too often in recent years, we have also seen serial examples of our political leaders who are less concerned about doing the right thing for the country than self-advancement.

If we consider, for example, the issue of anti-homophobia in sport with which #RainbowLaces was concerned, the extension into broader society gets us to one of the significant moral injustices of our time – marriage inequality. Just as the sporting CEOs could not get past their "commercial considerations", many politicians cannot get past either their personal view of love and marriage – as if they have the right to decide it for others – or worse, the need to compromise their values and *what they know is right*, to get through the politics.

Sport and society are riddled with examples of people who play it safe, and who fail to stand-up for what is right. Yet sport has the power to represent everything that we value and which we hope would shape society. However, the good traits, such as integrity, team work, fair play, respect and hard work, are constantly confronted and compromised by corruption, greed, injustice, a sense of entitlement and self-interest. In sport, we only have to look at the IAAF, IOC or FIFA to enumerate countless examples. Worse, when people do stand-up for what is right, they are greeted pejoratively as 'whistleblowers' and treated abominably.

No wonder there is a continuous erosion of trust – in sport and in society.

I rail against this. I believe that, in sport and in society, we shouldn't have to lower expectations, but raise standards. Sport can and should be a leader; sport can and should play a role in advancing civil society.

Our vision is a world in which sports inspires society. What we stand for is championing, affecting and influencing all that we value in sport as an example to the society in which we live.

Jaimie Fuller is an Australian businessman who is Executive Chairman of the international sports compression wear company, SKINS. He is an integrity and governance in sport campaigner and will speak at the Sport Australia Hall of Fame (SAHOF) and Victoria University Sport Integrity.

In partnership with the Sport Australia Hall of Fame (SAHOF), Victoria University is hosting the [second Sport Integrity Forum](#) on Monday 9 May at the Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne.
