



SPORT | Issue No. 4 | *The changing expectation of player behaviour*

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Over the course of 2014 we have seen professional sportsmen reprimanded and punished for an array of “unacceptable behaviour”. Sports and sports teams are struggling to find the right balance for the standards expected of their players and the management of these expectations and the imposition of penalties and consequences.

In the main, professional sportsmen and women (particularly professional team members) are employees. In that respect they are subject to employment laws of Australia, but layered on top of that is a whole range of different codes of behaviour and expectations.

Throughout the year we have seen penalties for alleged taking of banned substances, penalties for domestic violence, penalties for bullying or sexual harassment, warnings for participating in environmental peaceful protests, as well as an array of drunkenness, taking illicit drugs and violence.

The most recent one however, the arrest of David Pocock, has highlighted the extraordinarily difficult position which sport and professional sporting teams find themselves. For some reason breaking the law by way of peaceful protest has seemed to attract an altruistic quality and often is seen as being principled and admirable, but it seems to me that breaking the law is breaking the law.

If David Pocock breaks the law and his code of conduct requires him to operate within the law, then he quite rightly should be reprimanded and warned by his employer. He has a choice. If the terms of his employment are to operate within the law, then he should do so. If he doesn't want to do so, then he should seek alternate employment. To be fair to his employer, breaking the law is breaking the law, albeit that it hardly

fits into the same category as domestic violence or the other unacceptable behaviours. At the end of the day he is an employee and subject to lawful direction.

Who would want to be the CEO of a professional sporting team? It seems that whatever action or inaction they take with respect to bad behaviour they will be criticised quite broadly.

Are sportsmen and women held to a higher standard of behaviour than average workers? The answer is undoubtedly yes. The justification for this seems to be that they are “role models” or at least sufficiently highly paid to justify the higher expectations. With the advent of social media and everyone having a camera in their phone in their pocket, it seems inevitable that more and more players will be caught out doing the wrong thing. The challenge and the difficulty for sport will be how they respond.

I suspect that sport needs to become more intolerant of serious issues such as domestic violence and perhaps a little more tolerant of young men doing stupid things where there is no real victim.

Australians have gained a positive global reputation for being larrikins. One wonders whether our larrikin legends may well have had to front the judiciary had they been measured by the standards being expected of our young men being idiots today.



John Mullins

Partner

Mullins Lawyers

t +61 7 3224 0210

jmullins@mullinslaw.com.au