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Introduction: the AFL’s Rule 35

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This introductory paper lays the foundation for this important work. This is the first time that a multidisciplinary, systematic study has been conducted into the Australian Football League’s (AFL) Rule 35\textsuperscript{1} – the first code of conduct introduced by an elite sporting organization in the world to deal with racial, religious and sexual vilification. Social and sport history in Australia will be discussed to further contextualize the importance of the research.

Introduction

Michael Long said: ‘The AFL’s racial and religious vilification rule doesn’t just cover Indigenous players; it’s for everyone of all colours, races, and religions. It doesn’t only apply to football: it’s the way we must live’. (Demetriou 2005)

On 25 May 2013, the AFL\textsuperscript{2} had scheduled the Indigenous themed round to take place in Round 9. For the AFL, themed rounds have become big business as they promote key Australian dates such as ANZAC day,\textsuperscript{3} as well as the contribution women, Indigenous and multicultural players have made to the code of Australian Rules Football over time. In 2013, the Indigenous round was a special fixture for a very simple reason. It was the 20th anniversary of Nicky Winmar famously raising his guernsey in 1993 to a hostile Collingwood crowd at Victoria Park, Collingwood’s home ground (Klugman and Osmond 2013). Just as the photograph of Liverpool champion John Barnes kicking bananas off the pitch at Everton in 1987 has historically come to represent race issues in the English Premier League, the image of Winmar raising his jumper has provided Australians with a starting point in regard to race relations. It quite simply is the watershed moment in Australian sporting history regarding race relations.

For the 2013 series of Round 9 matches, the AFL had spent weeks in the lead-up promoting the Indigenous round. It seemed that everywhere one looked, be it on television or in the print media, there were advertisements of current Indigenous AFL players emulating Winmar’s stance by raising their jumpers with pride. It was a powerful tribute to Winmar personally, a homage to his bravery as a player and strong recognition as to how far the AFL, as a code, had come from the days where gratuitous verbal abuse was ‘part of the game’ (Gorman 2011, 1–10; Hess and Stewart 1998, 242–243).\textsuperscript{4} With the traditional flagship game at the MCG, the AFL’s hallowed turf, scheduled for the following night, Saturday 25 May, between Essendon and Richmond with the ‘Dreamtime at the G’, the Friday night game between Collingwood and Sydney was guaranteed to set the tone for the anniversary. The game had all the hallmarks to be a great showcase and celebration of the contribution of Indigenous Australians to the Australian game. Furthermore, it was also an

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opportunity to acknowledge the AFL as arguably the biggest agent for social change in the country – because it literally is the biggest game in town (read: the biggest game in the country).

Late in the game, with Sydney all but having won, the two-time Brownlow-medal winner and AFL superstar, Adam Goodes, kicked the ball along the boundary line right in front of the Great Southern Stand at the MCG. Goodes was so close to the crowd that they could almost touch him. What happened in the next few seconds would change the tone of the Australian sporting and political landscape as discussion, argument and debate would rage for the next few weeks to determine what actually took place and, more specifically, what it meant.

The footage shows Goodes stop and momentarily look towards the crowd. Just as quickly he looks down to a member of the ground staff who has been sitting against the fence. Goodes then beckons the employee to get to his feet and then points to the crowd again. He is clearly agitated. He gesticulates some more and goes to run off. He then stops and turns back, again pointing, clearly saying something to someone.

Goodes then ran off and headed for the bench, removing himself for the rest of the game. He did not take his place in the on-field team celebrations or the team song, which become a feature of televised games. Goodes had starred with a best-on-ground performance, making his absence all the more telling. News reports several months later would detail how Goodes was feeling at the time.

It just sort of all hit me once I was on the boundary line … yeah I just didn’t want to be out there anymore. (Dalton 2013, 15)

The drama, captured on television, continued deep in the bowels of the MCG change rooms. Goodes remained agitated. The room started to fill up with players and Sydney coaching staff. Collingwood President Eddie McGuire, in an unorthodox post-game act, can be seen moving through the Sydney dressing room and making a beeline to Goodes. McGuire’s body language is that of a man who is determined. His gaze is stern and fixed on Goodes. Goodes and McGuire then walk around and out of sight of the camera.

It came to light in the hours after the game that Goodes had been called an ‘ape’ by a 13-year-old Collingwood supporter and he felt deeply aggrieved. He had requested her removal from the oval by security staff, to which they complied, and she was held for questioning by police for a few hours. It should be noted that while Rule 35 deals directly with player-to-player vilification or people employed by the club, such as coaches and trainers, spectators also are subject to rules and regulations regarding racial abuse and anti-social behaviour. In the aftermath, McGuire understood that a transgression had taken place and he assured Goodes that the opinion expressed was that of a minority, something Collingwood had moved on from. Over the next 48 hours, the Australian media went into hyper-drive. What was meant to be a celebration had turned into a fiasco and a farce. McGuire was interviewed, saying he had spoken to Goodes and placated him, imploring Goodes not to let one ignorant supporter undo all the good work he and his club had done regarding racism in sport. McGuire reiterated to the public that Collingwood has a ‘zero tolerance for vilification’ and that ‘we have come such a long way’. What McGuire meant was that football and Australian civil society’s understanding of issues around racism have become more enlightened and, as a consequence, we are better off for it.

Four days later, McGuire was wearing his other hat – as media man and co-host of Triple M radio’s ‘Hot Breakfast’ panel. Ex-AFL player Luke Darcy was with him on air. General banter ensued until discussion turned to the greatly anticipated stage musical King Kong that was about to premiere in Melbourne. As part of the promotion, a huge fake
gorilla hand was suspended outside Melbourne’s tallest building, the Eureka Tower, which had certainly got people talking, including those in the Triple M studio:

Luke Darcy: What a great promo that is for King Kong.
Eddie McGuire: Get Adam Goodes down for it, you reckon?
Luke Darcy: No wouldn’t have thought so . . . No absolutely not.
Eddie McGuire: You can see them doing that, can’t you?
Luke Darcy: . . . Who?
Eddie McGuire: Goodesy?
Eddie McGuire: You know, with the ape thing, the whole thing. (Wilson 2013)

Needless to say, the ‘joke’ fell flat and all of the good work McGuire had done in the aftermath of the supporter’s transgression on Friday night, not to mention his long record in promoting reconciliation and Indigenous causes, was quickly compromised. Goodes tweeted: ‘Morning Australia this is what I have woken up to’, referring to McGuire’s King Kong gag, as his aggrievement took another turn, making a complex situation even messier. As the day wore on, McGuire tried to qualify himself and repeatedly apologized but this just seemed to make matters worse. Even AFL CEO Andrew Demetriou was forced to reconsider the AFL’s position: earlier in the day, he had tried to play things down by stating:

He knows he has said the wrong thing because he has apologised. It is very ‘un-Eddy’ and you saw it on Friday night and his actions straight after the Adam Goodes’ incident. He is the last person with a racial bone in his body. (Thompson 2013)

By that afternoon, the AFL had reconsidered their position and charged McGuire under Rule 35, the AFL’s anti-vilification rule. With this, McGuire became the first club president in AFL history to be cited under Rule 35 (Dampney and Noakes 2013).

Daniel Southern was by any measure a tough footballer. An uncompromising defender for the Western Bulldogs and known for his ‘rough and ready’ look, Southern had a football style that befitted it: rugged and reliable. Despite this, Southern’s career was beset with injury and he finished his career in 2000, after being recruited by the Bulldogs in 1994, having played just 103 games. After training one night, Southern drove two of his teammates home. One was Mark West, a brilliant young Torres Strait Islander recruit, who, like Southern, would have his career cruelled by injury. The other was a young Anglo player who remains anonymous. As they drove through the streets of Footscray, a Melbourne suburb known for its predominately Asian working class, the Anglo player said, ‘Look at all these Asians. What are they doing here?’ (Lane 2011).

In 2011, an incident occurred during the AFL home and away fixture involving the Western Bulldogs’ Justin Sherman and Joel Wilkinson of the Gold Coast Suns. Wilkinson, who is of Nigerian heritage, was playing his first game in the elite competition. At some stage during the second quarter of the game, Sherman (a forward) kicked a goal on Wilkinson (a back), who was playing on him. Inexplicably, Sherman then proceeded to racially vilify Wilkinson. Astoundingly, Sherman kicked another goal while playing on Wilkinson and repeated the insult. By Saturday night, a complaint had been drafted by the Gold Coast Suns and by Sunday morning it was lodged with the AFL. By Monday, the
conciliation process had been successful and Sherman was fined $5000 dollars and suspended for four games. The last reported incident of racial vilification of an on-field nature was in 1999, where St Kilda’s Peter Everitt abused Scott Chisholm of Melbourne. Everitt was found in breach of Rule 35 and donated $20,000 to a charity of Chisholm’s choice and voluntarily stood down for four weeks. When asked how he felt when he was abused by Everitt, Chisholm said: ‘I felt like I didn’t want to be there’, a sentiment echoed by Goodes 12 years later.

But in order to understand these incidents, one needs to understand the two previous events that set the scene regarding race relations in Australia particularly in relation to sport and especially in the AFL. The first reported incident culminated in 1993 from a hard fought victory by St Kilda at Collingwood’s home ground, Victoria Park. Spectator anger from Collingwood supporters saw this Round 4 fixture become famous when Indigenous St Kilda player, Nicky Winmar, contributed a best-on-ground performance along with fellow Indigenous teammate, Gilbert McAdam, and was a key catalyst in St Kilda winning the match. Both players had experienced significant crowd abuse over the course of the game, and so it was that, after winning the game, Winmar raised his jumper to a hostile Collingwood football crowd and pointed to his body (Klugman and Osmond 2013). For the broader community, this pivotal incident sparked great debate about racism in football and society at large. Collingwood President Allan McAlister said at the time that Winmar and teammate Gilbert McAdam would be respected, ‘As long as they conducted themselves like white people’. This spoke largely of the paternalistic attitudes that many non-Indigenous Australians harboured towards Blackfellas.

Another critical incident occurred in 1995, with the vilification of Michael Long. During a highly anticipated ANZAC Day match, Collingwood ruckman Damian Monkhorst, who was being tackled by Long at the time, implored that, ‘Someone should get this black cunt off me’. Long and fellow Indigenous teammate Che Cockatoo-Collins could hardly believe their ears. Long refused to let the media spotlight drop and pursued the AFL on its lack of protocols. Ross Oakley, AFL CEO at the time, tried to gloss over the incident by appearing at a press conference with Long and Monkhorst, refusing to let either speak, and declared the incident had been resolved (Klugman and Osmond 2013, 75–76). Yet, Long was not satisfied with this glossing over and continued his fight over this issue, which ultimately led to the introduction of the AFL’s racial and religious vilification rules: Rule 35 (Gorman 2011). Now, because of Long, all who play the game have it legislated that abuse on the grounds of race or religion will not be tolerated and they are protected from it. All the players undergo education and awareness programmes as part of being a professional sportsperson.

**Intent of this collection**

What this volume aims to address is the importance of the AFL’s Rule 35 as a policy designed to protect, respect and value the involvement of footballers from across a range of social, cultural, religious, ethnic, racial backgrounds, as well as sexual orientations. During the past 20 years in Australia, the AFL has been at the vanguard of institutional change designed to eliminate racism and intolerance, in all of its forms, from its code. It has done this with the introduction of the Racial and Religious Vilification Laws, more generally known as Rule 35. The AFL’s Rule 35 states:

No person subject to these Rules shall act towards or speak to any other person in a manner, or engage in any other conduct which threatens, disparages, vilifies or insults another person.
Rule 35 provides the legal and administrative framework that assists in the regulation of harmony in the AFL, which is one of Australia’s largest employers per capita of Indigenous (10%) and multicultural (14%) people. This framework enables the players, coaches, administrators, members, fans and spectators to come to terms with, and understand the impact of, racism and intolerance in the community more holistically.

To reinforce its message to the football community that such behaviour is not acceptable, the AFL updated Rule 35 in 1997. This was done to include new conditions for conciliation, education and confidentiality. The rule had new penalties, and its provisions extended to employees of AFL clubs with on-field access, as well as players. In 2009, this rule was expanded from prohibiting vilification on the basis of race, religion, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin to also prohibit vilification on the basis of a special disability (which includes a disease or illness) or sexual orientation, preference or identity. Subsequently, the new areas covered by the rule were added to the AFL’s vilification education programme. Under the amended rule, an umpire, player or club can raise a complaint. Initially, the matter is dealt with through confidential conciliation between the persons involved, but if it cannot be resolved in that way, it is referred to the AFL Tribunal or the AFL Commission for determination. After a first offence, the AFL Complaints Officer may send any complaint about a player straight to the Tribunal or the AFL Commission.

Specifically, Rule 35 enables the AFL to refine its professional development and support processes for its players and clubs by providing cross-cultural education and by integrating the principles of that education into daily work practices. This is done in the hope the players will transition out of the game with greater awareness and tolerance and clubs become more than just sites of elite sporting pursuits but social centres of excellence.

Rule 35 was implemented by the AFL in 1995. At that time it was called Rule 30 and basically dealt with issues around race and religion; since then, it has been broadened to include a range of characteristics. The basic premise of this collection and the research that has informed it is to gauge the efficacy of Rule 35 in combating racism and intolerance in the AFL. Ostensibly, this has been in regard to player-to-player vilification, but more nuanced forms of racism and intolerance have also been considered. To do this, the project considered the role of education in professionally developing the players and what they took away from this education process in relation to their clubs, their teammates and their everyday lives as professional athletes. Consideration was also given to what the players individually brought to their clubs in terms of their domestic backgrounds and lives before football. We were not specifically interested in the implementation of the rule itself; our primary consideration was in what understanding the players have of Rule 35, given the evolving nature of the game and the fact that players have different social, ethnic and racial backgrounds.

The perspectives of the players about these issues and the rule itself were crucial to an assessment of its impact in addressing these significant issues. This was important because the AFL has become, and continues to be, a major agent for social change in Australia. As the AFL’s CEO Andrew Demetriou’s quote implores, ‘It is the way we must live’; with these words, he positions the AFL in the vanguard of that social and cultural change.
As previously mentioned, there are now several themed rounds that the AFL promotes to highlight issues around multiculturalism, diversity, community harmony and reconciliation. Furthermore, one has only to go onto the AFL’s website to see just how active the AFL has been in raising awareness of a number of community-based issues. In this way, the AFL ceases to be just a game but becomes a conspicuous organization at the forefront of cultural, social, racial, sexual and ethnic acceptance and understanding in Australia. Perhaps one of the major highlights for the AFL in this regard was their recognition in 1995 by the United Nations Association, and in 2001, their winning of the National Corporate Anti-racism Award (AFL 2005). As a trickle-down effect, football can provide for many of us a means to deal with and mediate complex and difficult issues. Whether it has been the rise of migrant and Indigenous players in the game or issues around the treatment of women or gay rights, drugs or gambling, the AFL is perceived to be at the vanguard of the big discussions in Australia. These positive messages of social and economic responsibility are filtered through the game and its identities; millions of people in Australia are engaged by these messages for one simple reason: football means something to them.

If football can be such a force for good in the social and cultural landscape of Australia, how effective has Rule 35 been in influencing and educating the players and its employees, in this regard? How well do the players understand issues around intolerance and prejudice and what do these things mean to them in real terms?

The AFL’s Rule 35 is such an intriguing starting point for a project like this because one can see how effective it has been in the most popular football code in Australia over time. In this way, the AFL is a unique organization that has made significant changes and has led the way for many other sectors to follow suit. More specifically though, one can ask hard questions of players and coaches who have the benefit of playing/working alongside teammates from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds and who benefit from the AFL’s and AFL Players Association’s inductions and professional development around these issues. In many cases, this is the perfect space to conduct this type of research given the professional development and education the players receive but also because of the outside societal pressures and individual choices that elite AFL players will make. This type of research with this specific cohort of people is therefore a unique opportunity to measure the efficacy of the rule and the understanding of it by the AFL’s employees to see what has worked under the auspices of Rule 35 and what needs improving.

**Reviewing Rule 35**

Rule 35 was a groundbreaking innovation in Australian sport designed to stop on-field vilification and negate negative attitudes towards ethnic minorities playing the game at the elite level. By way of comparison, since the introduction of Rule 35 in 1995, there have been 85 Indigenous players in the AFL. In 2008, Indigenous players made up 10% of AFL team lists (Harcourt 2008). In 2009, the figure rose to 70 players, with the inclusion of 12 rookies making a total of 82 AFL players (McGrath 2009, May 25, “Personal Correspondence.”). According to the AFL’s Community Development website, there were 68 Indigenous players listed in the 2013 and 2014 seasons. This represents 9% of AFL players, significantly higher than the national population of Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people, which stands at 2.3% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2014).

With this in mind, the AFL is the highest non-mining corporate employer of Indigenous Australians. In addition to the growing Indigenous cohort, increasing numbers of players from a variety of racial and religious backgrounds are becoming involved in the
game. These include Irish and Muslim players (most recently Zach Touhey [Carlton] and Bachar Houli [Richmond], respectively, who are now AFL players), as well as growing numbers from the Horn of Africa refugee and Pacific Island communities. The AFL has also recently launched the Multicultural Ambassadors program to help highlight community engagement across Australia. Some of these players include Nic Naitanui (West Coast), Majak Daw (North Melbourne), Alipate Carlile (Richmond) and Lin Jong (Western Bulldogs) (AFL Community Club 2014).

However, despite this, questions emerge from a more open dialogue about race, identity and football. These include: has the AFL successfully addressed the issue of racial vilification? Does the AFL have the resources and programmes in place to deal with an increasing diversity of players from a wider range of social, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds? What has the AFL learned from its experience of combating vilification that might benefit the broader Australian community? Furthermore, has the collective player body learned from the programmes that have been introduced by the AFL not just to combat on-field vilification but also to introduce those guiding principles from the game into its players’ everyday lives? In part, the answer to these questions lies in the extensive way that Rule 35 is now applied as a formal management policy throughout all tiers of the AFL. This is an important consideration due to the status and agency that AFL footballers have in the Australian community as elite athletes, public figures and celebrities.

It is our contention that AFL players occupy a unique position in society to instil positive racial perceptions, interactions and behaviour into the broader community. However, it is also through the players’ experiences that many of us can perhaps take stock of what it means to be a person of colour or ethnic difference in Australia. For many, the issue comes down to the difficulties in changing people’s general perceptions about the suite of racisms that are manifest in society from direct, overt, institutionalized, systemic, enlightened and casual racism. As ex-Richmond and Collingwood small Indigenous forward Andrew Krakouer recalls:

I have walked into a shop and a lady has walked in with her trolley and she has a bag and she grabs her bag tighter, or something like that, like I might be trying to steal her bag . . . There is a security guard and I walk into a shop and all of a sudden they start following me around because of the colour of my skin. I don’t see any other reason why they would follow me.

(Pierik 2013)

These sentiments echo the experience of Krakouer’s ex-teammate Leon Davis, who is also Indigenous, who reflected on his time as a footballer, where his identity was a constant issue for others:

There is a level of racism that is constant. Even in Melbourne I felt racism every day . . . You would go in a shopping centre and the security guard would come straight up and follow you around, or shop attendants would watch you. I was playing for Collingwood and I was an All-Australian and it was happening. But then they would realise who I was and they’d ask for an autograph or for photos and I was always like, ‘Five minutes ago you thought I was going to steal from you, now you want my autograph’. (Pierik 2013)

The implementation of Rule 35 in 1995 has arguably been the single biggest act of reconciliation by any sporting code in Australian history. Perhaps more important is the manner in which the introduction of Rule 35 and associated media campaigns have directly fed into a number of debates about tolerance and diversity so that there has been a discernible shift in public opinion in the Australian community. This is not to suggest that things cannot be improved upon but we have seen great progress in public awareness.
For example, culturally and linguistically diverse footballers are no longer a novelty but a feature of game at the highest level. The Indigenous and multicultural rounds are now a highlight of the annual AFL and Australian sporting calendar, and Australian society is moving towards a more mature understanding of the need for racial and ethnic harmony in the community.

Despite conscious moves by the AFL to address racism in Australian Rules Football, there continue to be incidents of direct and indirect racial vilification and intolerance. The most problematic example of that intolerance in recent times involved Adelaide Crows Football Club’s recruitment manager, Matthew Rendell, in 2012. Rendell commented to the National Community Engagement Manager for the AFL, Jason Mifsud, and AFL Multicultural Manager, Ali Fahour, that he would only be prepared to draft an Indigenous player if the player had one white parent (Pierik and Kokher 2012).

This, as a comment, is one that smacks of deficit theories, paternalism and layers of intergenerational ignorance. The comment by Rendell shows how opinions can influence decision-making based on the most fraught of all characterizations: the stereotype. This can have major ramifications for all stakeholders, not the least Rendell, who lost his job for his utterance.

In terms of the Rendell issue, the AFL were correct in following up on indigenous welfare officer Jason Mifsud’s claim … The reason why the AFL needed to do this was because the comment strikes at the heart of what any sport in Australia relies upon: opportunity and participation. (Gorman 2012a, 2012b)

It is these two concepts of opportunity and participation that drive junior sport, which is the incubator and nursery that leads to elite competitions. If people abandon these sports because they believe that inequity or prejudice, either perceived or real, is a prevailing feature and they cannot tolerate it, then that sport will become socially diminished and culturally impoverished. For example, there has only been one Indigenous player to play at test level cricket in Australia, Kamilaroi man Jason Gillespie. It would be impossible to think that the AFL would have a near total absence of Indigenous players playing in its elite competition, yet for cricket, the reality is that at a certain point, Indigenous players at junior levels turn away from Australia’s national summer game.

By way of comparing AFL and cricket, the Western Australian Imparja Cup captain Matt Abrahamson, a Yamatji man, spoke of moving through the cricket grades in Perth, Western Australia, and the challenges he faced. For him, cricket ceased to be just a game but a contested site where race and identity played a major part.

I played A Grade WACA cricket at Gosnells and we were playing another team in the pennant competition. The other side had a particular player (who was Indian) and his nickname was ‘Boonga’.

If you walked up to an umpire and say, ‘I am taking offence at that’, you don’t know how the system is going to respond if you raise it as a concern. So you think, ‘I might be best keeping my mouth shut’. (Gorman 2011)

In this way, we can see how issues of intolerance and abuse can manifest to make a totally negative experience, with the addressee humiliated and the addressor morally diminished.

**Conclusion**

The implementation of Rule 35 in 1995 has been the single biggest act of reconciliation by any sporting code in Australian history. It has seen changes in participation rates, which is indicative of the institutional change that has taken place throughout the AFL. Since 1990, when the Victorian Football League (VFL) became the national AFL, the game has had many challenges, but racial vilification presented itself differently from the myriad
financial and administrative issues that the new competition faced. The reason for this is that vilification was seen as an intrinsic part of the game.

Despite conscious moves by the AFL to address racism in Australian Rules Football, there continue to be, at worst, incidents of high-profile vilification and, at best, ignorant racial stereotyping in the code. These range from Sherman in 2011 to the Rendell incident. Both of these incidents are revealing but it was Rendell’s comments that are a subtler and much harder issue to read given they are of the institutionalized variety. Rule 35 also covers issues around sexuality and other issues, and therefore other aspects of difference. The recent coming out by champion Olympic Australian swimmer Ian Thorpe and the recent change of AFL clubs of Heritier Lumumba due to his concern about homophobic comments within his club highlight that Rule 35 may indeed be very important in influencing when the first AFL player does indeed come out – which at the time of writing this collection of papers still has not occurred, but no doubt will at some point in the future.

Despite the official policy of racial harmony and tolerance in all major football codes in Australia, there remains a long way to go in eradicating racial vilification and changing attitudes within sport and throughout the Australian community. These issues are not confined to Australia but are discursive constructions that seem to play out as the backdrop to professional sport globally. Thea Lim (an American journalist who has written about racism) observed that despite America being racially aware, ‘The response remains the same’ towards minority sportspeople who are, in effect, essentialized because of their talents but still subjected to racist epithets (Lim 2012). Which brings us back to the question: how far have we come?

Perhaps we need to consider the actions of significant sporting figures to answer that question. A great example is the American champion Jesse Owen, who ran in the 1936 Berlin Olympics, winning four gold medals. Who can forget the calm look of resolve on Owens’ face as he was surrounded by Nazis at a lost to explain how their Aryan ‘supremacy’ could be beaten by an ‘untermenschen’, the son of a sharecropper whose only means of improving his lot in the world was to run faster and jump further than anyone else. But if we think that the lot of Owens was to be improved on his return to his homeland, with his Olympic triumph, the sad reality is that his skin colour was still seen as problematic. On Owens return to the USA, he was reported to have said:

> When I came back to my native country, after all the stories about Hitler, I could not ride in the front of the bus … I could not live where I wanted. I wasn’t invited to shake hands with Hitler, but I wasn’t invited to the White House to shake hands with the President either. (Lapchick et al. 2008, 426)

The same aching irrationality can also be observed in modern Australia where, despite government policy and landmark initiatives by key sporting codes (particularly the AFL), racism and intolerance are still prevalent in many forms. The challenge remains to change not only institutional policies towards minority sportsmen and women in key codes but also attitudes in the wider Australian community and across sectors. It is only when this is done can the question of ‘how far have we come?’ be truly answered.

This collection

In the remainder of this collection, we present a comprehensive analysis of Rule 35 as it is understood by players, coaches and other staff in nine, and thus half, of the teams in the AFL. Our data comes from in-depth interviews and surveys in an attempt to understand what sort of impact Rule 35 has had. We interviewed 99 people and surveyed some 370 players and staff to this end. We present some overall findings of what we found
in paper “Overarching findings” (doi:10.1080/17430437.2014.1002974, in this collection), followed by nine case studies, one for each of the clubs, in separate papers. Paper “Understanding the importance and context of vilification” (doi:10.1080/17430437.2014.1002973, in this collection) gives some further contextual and historical background to the issues surrounding Rule 35.

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Notes
1. In 2013, due to the expanding nature of the initiative to encompass a range of themes and issues around vilification, the AFL updated the rule, known as Rule 30 since its inception, and in 1995, it became Rule 35. The difference between AFL ‘Rules’ and AFL ‘Laws’ is this: the rules relate more to the administration of the game, whereas the laws refer to the actual game itself (i.e. umpiring decisions).
2. The AFL is the administration body for the game generally known as Australian Rules Football or Aussie Rules.
3. ANZAC stands for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps. Anzac Day is commemorated on the day ANZAC troops landed at Gallipoli in Turkey, 25 April 1915. ANZAC Day is a day of national significance, afforded a national public holiday and is equivalent to Remembrance Day in Europe.
4. At AFL matches across the county today, electronic broadcasts to all patrons are played before each game stating that racial vilification at the ground will not be tolerated and will result in fines and/or ejection from the arena.
5. The authors Gorman and Lusher have made multiple requests to the AFL to supply this information over the last four years, asking only for a listing of the number of incidents that had gone to mediation and the number that had been successful and that needed to be arbitrated. This information had not been provided by the AFL at the time of going to press.
Aboriginality. It is not an insult or a pejorative term.

Boong is a highly derogatory word aimed mainly at Indigenous Australians; it is similar to the use of the pejoratives coon and nigger.

The Australian state of Victoria, in which the VFL was based, was the premier state for Aussie Rules in Australia. In 1990, it changed to become the AFL, incorporating teams from Victoria and also other states of Australia.

References


