a new game plan
changing the alcohol focus in Australian sport
Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can... sport can create hope where there was once only despair.

Nelson Mandela
Celebrating a new game plan in sporting clubs

More people and players participating in clubs, increased membership, a boost in sponsorship revenue, and a more welcoming environment for children and families; these are just some of the benefits that come with changing your club’s attitude towards alcohol.

Around Australia, more and more sporting clubs are making a concerted effort to change the drinking culture within their club, having seen the damage alcohol can do – to individuals, to the club and to the community.

These clubs are reaping the rewards of their actions. By managing alcohol better, they experience real change in the areas of risky drinking, drink-driving and alcohol related violence.

From grassroots sports clubs that welcome their local members on Friday nights, to elite and professional sporting organisations that have a sweeping influence across the community – positive change is taking place.

Working with the Australian Drug Foundation, you too can implement programs that transform your club and create a powerful culture that benefits members, sponsors and the greater community.

Clubs are diversifying their income base, increasing their revenue from sponsorship, and more people and players are participating in their club, which is becoming the heart of their community.

The clubs prosper, the people within the clubs genuinely care about each other’s wellbeing, and a marked sense of belonging prevails.

Does your club need to change its game plan?

The statistics around alcohol misuse and sporting clubs are pretty grim, pointing to issues that most clubs would rather not see on their home grounds. Things like poor on-field behaviour, violence amongst spectators, abuse hurled at game officials, low club memberships, and drink-driving offences, are just some of the reasons that stop children and families involving themselves in sport.

In a national survey of sports clubs:
- one in five consume 7 or more drinks in a night
- 45% of men and 41% of women aged 18-30 drink at levels known to harm long-term health
- 27% of club members aged 18-30 are driving home after 5 or more drinks.

In another study of community level AFL, Australian Rugby Union, Australian Rugby League, cricket, tennis and surf life saving clubs, 34% of club members reported consuming five or more standard drinks on each club visit – markedly higher than what people in the general community would consumer.

These statistics are not exclusive to sport. Excessive drinking is having harmful effects across Australia. Recent statistics show that:
- more than 3,000 Australians die each year as a result of harmful drinking
- one in five school students aged 6-17 years are drinking alcohol at harmful levels
- almost half a million children live in homes where they are at risk of exposure to binge drinking by at least one adult
- alcohol abuse costs Australian taxpayers $15.3 billion each year from crime and violence, medical treatment, loss of productivity and death.

Drinking at risky levels has an impact on much more than just the individual. The whole club and, beyond that, the community suffer the effects of too much drinking. Families don’t want to join the club, team morale slides and community safety is threatened.
You can change the score

The good news is that we can all re-write the statistics of alcohol and sport. From the elite level right through to community sporting clubs, the Australian Drug Foundation offers a range of programs to help change the culture of drinking in sport.

One such program, aimed at community sporting clubs, is called Good Sports. Right now, more than 5,000 community sporting clubs and their one million participants are involved in the Good Sports program across Australia. In short, Good Sports reduces excessive drinking. Research shows that risky drinking among club members drops 22% on match day, short-term risky drinking drops 15% and long-term risky drinking drops 14%. Overall, research suggests that Good Sports clubs have 36% less people drinking at risky levels, compared with clubs not involved in the Good Sports program.1

Good Sports clubs also report a reduction in drink driving and aggressive behaviour. They enjoy a boost to their income streams, attracting more sponsorship and more members (particularly juniors, females and families) as a result of changing their club’s culture. More importantly, Good Sports club members report a higher level of connection within their community and say they are proud that their club has become the heart of the community.

The Good Hosts program is another example of how the Australian Drug Foundation helps organisations to better manage their events safely, inclusively and in an environment that reinforces their own values. This program is aimed at educating organisations – whether sporting or otherwise – to deal with alcohol in a more responsible way, thus minimising the risk of intoxication or harm at workplace events. In doing so, they reap a number of benefits – such as protecting their reputation, meeting duty-of-care obligations, and enhancing the overall experience for all attendees at the event.

Australian Drug Foundation also partners with sporting organisations through its Professional Sport Program. It develops tailored management programs that are based on a staged approach for change and rely on four key principles:

1. Readiness for change
   The organisation and its leaders have clearly stated the need for change.

2. Whole-of-organisation culture
   ‘The way we do things around here’ (symbols, systems and behaviour across the whole organisation) is better understood using scanning tools.

3. Personal welfare
   A commitment to safe practice is made and non-judgmental support for personnel provided.

4. Collaboration and partnership
   There is collaboration with internal and external stakeholders and experts.

Whether it is the Good Sports community club program, the Professional Sport Program, or the Good Hosts program – there are many avenues of support for sporting clubs that are ready for change.

Good Sports clubs in Australia*  
- 47 clubs in Northern Territory
- 1915 clubs in Victoria
- 200 clubs in Tasmania
- 460 clubs in South Australia
- 631 clubs in Queensland
- 47 clubs in Northern Territory
- 1554 clubs in New South Wales/ACT

Program commenced in 2012 in Western Australia

*As at March 2012
Current annual growth rate 20%
Alcohol and sport don’t mix

A ‘boozy’ culture in sporting clubs – drinking to celebrate wins or commiserate losses, rewarding best-on-ground players with alcohol, and more – is prevalent around Australia. Clearly, change is needed.

Alcohol is very much ingrained in our sporting culture. Many sporting clubs around Australia – cricket, football, rugby, netball, surf lifesaving and more – use grog to reward excellence. This may include:

- a bottomless mug for the ‘best-on-ground’ player
- all-you-can-drink president’s lunches
- a large bin filled with cans of beer on ice left in the change rooms for both teams after the game
- drinks supplied to under 18 age players who play their first senior game
- ‘hoon’ nights where players are effectively locked-in at the club to have an alcohol-based bonding session
- boat races where players line up after a game and have a sculling race.

It’s not just in grassroots clubs. At the elite level, there’s a visible link between alcohol and sport – breweries the elite level, there’s a visible link between alcohol and sport – breweries

A culture of drinking

This pervasive culture of drinking can have harmful effects on individuals, clubs and communities. For example, at the South Mildura Sporting Club, alcohol was having a detrimental effect on the club’s culture and standing in the community. Not only was there a tolerance for under-age drinking, but the club suffered from:

- poor on-field performance of players
- excessive post-match alcohol consumption
- lax attitudes regarding service of alcohol
- alcohol-related violence within the club
- high player turnover
- significant debt
- shortage of sponsors
- difficulty attracting new members, particularly females.

Similarly, the Geisborne Cricket Club in Victoria was plagued by off-field incidents and a very blokey culture that revolved around alcohol. This club’s administrators could see that the culture of the club needed to change to encourage female and junior players to participate in the success of the club.

Overcoming resistance to change

Many sporting clubs seek strategies to move away from a culture of drinking. Yet, too often, these clubs focus on player behaviour rather than the bigger picture. Responsibility cannot fall solely on the players – a whole-of-club approach to changing attitudes is required, and the entire culture of the club must be tackled at the same time.

There is little point in addressing the problem if the club does not have strong support from players, members and sponsors.

Rob Sharpe, CEO of the Eastern Football League, says “it doesn’t seek to ban alcohol. It suggests that dealing with alcohol responsibility is what is most important and that there are small things to do that over time make a big difference.”

Rob Sharpe, CEO, Eastern Football League.

Changing the game plan – with great results

Once you commit to a new game plan when it comes to alcohol, the good news is that there is plenty of support available. Sporting clubs around Australia are reporting remarkable changes to their culture, performance and overall standing in the community.

Proven programs for change

The sporting clubs that have been most successful in changing the culture of drinking are those that partner with the Australian Drug Foundation, drawing upon their resources and knowledge about how to effect change.

This means changing systems and practices to make the club a healthier and safer place for players, members and supporters. It means adopting policies, such as safe transport, smoke-free club rooms, alcohol alternative fundraising and training in Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA).

All of these evidence-based strategies are clearly having positive effects on the players, club members and the broader community.

Inspiring success across Australia

In over 5,000 sporting clubs and leagues across the country, the game plan has changed for the better since they implemented Australian Drug Foundation programs.

In Victoria, the South Mildura Sporting Club has transformed itself from a club where excessive alcohol consumption was rife, to a place where there are a reduced number of violent incidents and alcohol-related issues.

“The club is unrecognisable from the trouble spot it was five years ago. I am happy to bring my family and friends to the club with the confidence that they will enjoy the friendly atmosphere. We now have a great mob of kids and they know we are fair dinkum. It has been one of the highlights watching the way the under 15s behave and conduct themselves on and off the field. That has been very rewarding.”

Lyle Massey, 2006 Club President, South Mildura Sporting Club.

“Prohibition doesn’t work. Our game is uniquely Australian and it ought to still be OK to have a beer and a pie at the footy. That seems to me to be a very Australian thing to do. The Good Sports program works because it doesn’t seek to ban alcohol. It suggests that dealing with alcohol responsibly is what is most important and that there are small things to do that over time make a big difference.”

Rob Sharpe, CEO, Eastern Football League.
Likewise, the Gisborne Cricket Club reports significant cultural change since implementing the Good Sports program.

“Callum Jackman, President, Gisborne Cricket Club

In South Australia, more and more bowling clubs are implementing the Good Sports program. Port Elliot Bowling Club Publicity and Promotions Officer, Bob Henry, said they joined the program to benefit members and gain a greater understanding of alcohol management.

“Good Sports reassures our members who work behind the bar they are meeting liquor licensing requirements, while relieving some of the pressure from committee members. I would recommend other clubs take up the opportunity to join Good Sports. It’s free, bar staff can access low cost training, and it is good to have more club members aware of the responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with a liquor license.”
Bob Henry, Publicity and Promotions Officer, Port Elliot Bowling Club

In Queensland, the Albany Creek Junior Rugby League Club, with more than 1,300 members, used Good Sports as a means of promoting itself as a more socially responsible and family-friendly environment. In doing so, it has attracted more players, families and volunteers.

“Our club has improved significantly in a number of different areas. The feedback that I get from our members and guests is that the club has a fantastic family feel to it and our membership numbers prove that we have created a welcoming environment.”
Chris Pilat, Club Secretary, Albany Creek Crushers JRLFC

North of Sydney, the Avalon Soccer Club came up with an innovative way to overcome the drop in revenue from alcohol sales – by training members as baristas and buying a state-of-the-art coffee machine. Club President and Canteen Supervisor, Dilys Graham, believes the benefit of a well run and profitable canteen far outweighs other income streams.

“There is a demand for good food and hot drinks from 8am when we open our doors and there’s less of a mess at our playing fields to clean up from coffee cups rather than beer cans,” she said.
As Kate Palmer, Netball Australia’s CEO sums it up:

“Good Sports is leading the way in enabling sporting clubs to successfully manage Australia’s alcohol culture to provide a safe and friendly environment for families.”
Our programs at work

These case studies – from local tennis and football clubs to entire sporting leagues – are but a few of many stories that come out of the Australian Drug Foundation every year, and are great examples of our programs at work.

A champion of change

“Once everyone understood that we were not trying to remove alcohol altogether, merely be more responsible with its use, the club members and players accepted the changes. They knew that what we were trying to do was for the betterment of their club, and for every person who didn’t like it, there were three that did.”

Tony Way is a true champion of change. Having witnessed his beloved Thurgoona Football & Netball Club languishing at the bottom of the ladder – and being beaten by 200–odd points too often – he knew that change was needed. Here, he talks openly about how he managed to achieve it by committing the club to the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Sports program.

Why did you choose the Good Sports program?

Our club was in the doldrums, having not won a game for two years. A new committee identified that alcohol was one of the major causes. Good Sports seemed like a perfect fit to start to address the problems and get people back to the club.

How hard was it to get everyone – club administrators, members and players – on board with the program?

The football (and sport) culture of having a few drinks – and the idea that you’ve a bit weak if you don’t – is hard to overcome. Breaking long–standing habits and changing attitudes towards something that has always been accepted as the norm was initially very tough.

Once everyone could see that we were not trying to remove alcohol altogether, and rather sought to be more responsible with it, the club members and players accepted the changes. They knew that what we were trying to do was for the betterment of their club.

For every person who didn’t like it, there were three that did.

What partnerships within the community have helped your club on this journey?

Apart from Albury City Council, the most important partnership was with the broader Thurgoona community. The club exists solely for them, so it was important to engage them and give them reasons to believe we were an asset to the community, not a liability.

What are the keys to achieving change?

You must commit to seeing it through, and have the ability to get over the first major hurdles in the program implementation. Don’t back away from what you are trying to do the first time it becomes difficult.

How has it tested you personally and professionally?

I had been around football most of my life, and had not really thought about the drinking culture, nor its effects on others and the club in general. By committing the club to the program, I was challenged to modify my own behaviour as well.

What results are you most proud of?

We have seen a great change in the club’s reputation. We are now regarded as a leader club in many areas by various organisations, and the Thurgoona community has embraced us. This has led to both on–field and off–field success.

In the longer term, how will your club manage alcohol?

From all the work we have done, I hope that the program just becomes part of our culture. Future leaders must realise its importance in creating and maintaining the fabric of the club, and it is important that we choose our leaders carefully so they do not drift back to the ways things used to be.

What advice can you give to other sports administrators wanting to change the culture of drinking in their clubs?

Most important is to gain the full support of all the leaders in the various sections of the club, by showing them how important the program is and what a great impact it will have.

Clubs like ours are always broken down into groups – players, young ones, netballers, general members – and there are leaders amongst each of these groups. These are the influencers, the ones you really need to get on board.

I would encourage all sporting clubs to get involved with Good Sports, and commit to it. It doesn’t hold your club back – rather, it makes it grow.

Sale Tennis Club: a complete transformation

“We first few people to be refused service were openly hostile, however the broader membership began to notice the change and could see the advantages that flowed from this. Ultimately alcohol consumption has become almost self regulating as it is no longer an accepted part of our culture.”

Robin Lowe, President, January 2011

Weekend tennis was turning into long drinking sessions at the Sale Tennis Club in regional Victoria. Members were consuming more than their fair share of alcohol after matches; and the club had a reputation around town for its heavy drinking culture. Having acknowledged that there was a problem with this excessive alcohol consumption, the club’s administrators were motivated to change the culture of the club, and in doing so help to alter its members’ attitudes towards alcohol.

Knowing that support and information would be crucial to any attempts to change its culture, the Sale Tennis Club joined the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Sports program. Since joining the program in August 2001, making them one of the first ever Good Sports clubs, it has never looked back.

Creating a great game plan

Central to the Good Sports strategy is the identification of the problem. Working with the Australian Drug Foundation, the Sale Tennis Club could see a number of areas where change was possible.

Consequently, the club implemented a detailed game plan that would significantly change the way it dealt with alcohol. The changes included:

• relocating the bar area so it no longer dominated the clubrooms
• changing bar opening hours
• hosting free RSA courses for members and appointing RSA trained bar staff
• offering a wider option of drinks at the bar, including more light beers, low and non–alcoholic drinks
• shifting from tap beer to packaged beer
• increased security and monitoring of alcohol consumption
• getting rid of ‘happy hour’, BYO and takeaway sales
• no longer including alcohol as part of awards, raffles and club quiz pools
• promoting an informal ‘buddy’ system to combat drink driving.

Since implementing the Good Sports program, the Sale Tennis Club has gone from strength to strength. In 2011, it was a finalist in the Community Sporting Club of the Year award as part of the Department of Planning and Community Development’s Community Sport and Recreation Awards. It has also been made a Regional Centre Partner of Tennis Australia.

It has reported a marked reduction in alcohol consumption and, more importantly, an elimination of risky drinking within the club. The flow–on effects of this include:

• increased membership and community participation
• a positive community image
• strong relationships with, and support from, local police, council (Wellingtontown Shire) and businesses.

No longer reliant on alcohol sales for its financial viability, and having become a vital part of the local community, the club is a prime example of how altering attitudes towards alcohol can have positive effects across the board. Now, instead of dominating play, alcohol is enjoyed on the sidelines.

“The senior player who thought we ‘ruined country sport’ can now be seen drinking a Coke later in the evening as ’I’ve already had two cans and I’m driving’, ” said Robin.
Tackling the issue at the League level

“With a growing rate of alcohol-related bad news stories hitting the press, we knew something needed to change in the NRL. Working with the Australian Drug Foundation has given us this capacity to change.”

Paul Heptonstall, Education and Welfare Officer, National Rugby League

As Paul Heptonstall observes, “The social aspect of rugby league is always going to involve alcohol. It has not been an objective to ban alcohol from the game, but rather look at ways of ensuring its responsible use at every level – right through from staff and players to spectators.”

Acknowledging the role that alcohol plays in the culture of a sport is a great first step in tackling change. The next step is to do something about it.

This is exactly what the NRL and NSW Rugby League have done, thanks to a close partnership with the Australian Drug Foundation and a strong commitment to its evidence-based programs.

Seeing the problem

Having witnessed too much evidence of alcohol-related harm and a rise in alcohol-related bad news stories, the NRL sought help in implementing a program of alcohol management that was not solely player-focused.

Previously, programs around alcohol management issues were not the organisation. Those in the NRL and across the sport. Its commitment to developing an alcohol management strategy for the ‘whole of game’ and across the sport. Its commitment to developing an alcohol management strategy for the ‘whole of game’ – and results in a dramatic reduction in alcohol-related harm.

Indeed, the NSW Rugby League was the first state sporting organisation to directly fund the Australian Drug Foundation to deliver the Good Sports program. Today, it continues to work with the NRL and the junior rugby league associations in NSW to:

• increase the number of Good Sports accredited rugby league clubs in NSW/ACT
• encourage the clubs’ staff and volunteers to influence the behaviour of others and bring about change within rugby league
• engage staff and volunteers in the establishment of alcohol management ‘minimum standards’ for all junior associations and NSW Rugby League clubs.

Reaping the rewards

The NRL’s actions have been having a positive impact across the League, and across the sport. Its commitment to cultural change prompted the NSW Rugby League to influence all the local clubs under its banner to sign up with the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Sports program.

“With the Australian Drug Foundation, the NRL and NSW Rugby League has 260 elite clubs; NSW Rugby League has 260 community clubs.

PROGRAM: Tailored alcohol management program and Good Sports

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Good Hosts program scores goals at the Daily M Awards

The night of nights in rugby league is undoubtedly the Daily M Awards. It’s the one time of year that the game’s elite players, coaches and managers, sponsors, VPs, MPs and others come together to celebrate the great rugby league performances of the season.

The awards are named in honour of former Australian rugby league great Herbert Henry “Dally” Messenger, and honour the player of the year, the premier player in each position, the best coach, the best captain, the representative player of the year and the most outstanding rookie of the season.

Aligned with the rugby league’s mission to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related harm within the code, the league decided to implement the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Hosts program at the 2011 Daily M Awards.

Using Good Hosts to facilitate change

Commitment to the Good Hosts program would send a strong message to the sport and the broader community – that alcohol does not need to be the focus of an event or function for it to be a success. The move ties in with the NRL’s commitment to developing an alcohol management strategy for the ‘whole of the game’, and not just for its players.

With Good Hosts strategies in place, the NRL sought to host an incident-free function where media attention would focus on the celebration of players’ on-field performances. It also sought to demonstrate to the game’s stakeholders – such as the individual clubs and sponsors – that the whole league is committed to responsible alcohol management; and is creating new standards of best practice when it comes to running functions and events.

A successful event

Thanks to the strategies and procedures of the Good Hosts program, the 2011 Daily M Awards were completely incident-free. The NRL achieved all of its objectives, and the league’s administrators were extremely pleased with the effectiveness of Good Hosts’ methods. The NRL committed to also running the 2012 Daily M Awards using Good Hosts’ protocols.

Reflecting the general attitude of attendees at the awards night, the code’s major sponsor, Telstra, contacted the NRL to congratulate them in the days after the ceremony for the ‘best Daily M’s ever.’

Good Hosts program

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At a glance

NAME: National Rugby League (NRL) and the NSW Rugby League

SET-UP: NRL has 16 elite clubs; NSW Rugby League has 260 community clubs.

PROGRAM: Tailored alcohol management program and Good Sports

The comprehensive strategy includes tools for marketing and communications, fundraising, program evaluation, and education and training (including alcohol risk workshops); and plans have been tailored for each of the 16 clubs within the League.

Reaping the rewards

The NRL’s actions have been having a positive impact across the League, and across the sport. Its commitment to cultural change prompted the NSW Rugby League to influence all the local clubs under its banner to sign up with the Australian Drug Foundation’s Good Sports program.

“We hope to keep raising the bar in terms of the responsible use of alcohol amongst the broader rugby league community, from junior clubs and spectators right through to the general community,” said Paul.
Healthy people, strong communities

This publication has been produced by the Australian Drug Foundation, who is committed to preventing alcohol and other drug problems in communities around the nation. Celebrating more than 50 years of service to the community, its ongoing goal is to promote 'healthy people, strong communities'.

Visit the Australian Drug Foundation website:
www.adf.org.au
www.goodsports.com.au

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