

**THE LAUNCH OF THE SOUTHERN FOOTBALL LEAGUE'S 2012 SEASON BY THE HONOURABLE PETER UNDERWOOD AC, GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA, ROYAL YACHT CLUB OF TASMANIA, WEDNESDAY, 4<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2012.**

Thank you for that introduction Mr Johnson & thank you for inviting me to the launch the Southern Football League's 2012 season. However I think that I should straightaway confess that I have but the scantiest qualifications for this task for my early years were spent in England playing that other game, and although I took to Australian Rules Football with great enthusiasm when a student at the Launceston State High School, I was always relegated to the back pocket and only given a go on the ball when there had been an outburst of injuries amongst the other players.

However, in another respect I am well qualified to launch the Southern Football League's 2012 season because I am a passionate believer in the value of community football especially for young people - boys and girls. We all enjoy watching the major league games on the television or at the Aurora Stadium in Launceston or this coming Sunday, for the first time at the Blundstone Arena. Many aspire to play in that league and a few make it, but I suspect that it doesn't offer the rewards that come from playing second tier community football.

Recently the Department of Sport & Recreation in West Australia commissioned some research into the value of Community Football and produced a document that is worth reading,

significantly entitled "More than Winning."<sup>1</sup> This research observes that although it is recognised that sport and recreation make a contribution to building national pride and improving community health, there are many other benefits that sport & recreation make to society. That famous South African, Nelson Mandela understood this well when he said, "Sport has the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Sport can bring hope. Breaks down barriers ...laughs in the face of discrimination [and] speaks to people in a language they can understand."<sup>2</sup> Of course, Mandela was speaking about his country, but the principle applies with equal force to community football which has been described as "an important thread that ties our social fabric."

The West Australian Report states that sport is particularly important in regional areas because it is one of the main cohesive elements that draw people together. This in turn boosts confidence and galvanizes communities in times of need. "Sport is all about including people in a rewarding shared experience and making individuals and ... a community stronger through the process."<sup>3</sup>

The West Australian report asserts, correctly in my opinion, "If a child stays at home in front of a games console or a computer, the likely outcome is that he or she will be more socially isolated and less motivated" and that, "Children engaged in sport and recreation do

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/assets/files/Advocacy/More%20than%20winning.pdf> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Supra at page 7.

<sup>3</sup> Supra at [age 11.

better academically and are more likely to enjoy school.” Other research is referred to<sup>4</sup> that also supports the proposition that participation in a sport like football has a positive effect on academic success.

The benefits of being involved in community sport also include diversion from anti-social behaviour, a strengthening of self-esteem as well, of course, as improved health and enhancement of social interaction and integration.

All the things that I have just mentioned are benefits for those who *play* community football, but players are not the only people to benefit from community sport like the Southern Football League. Football needs trainers, coaches, runners and the field, goal and boundary umpires. It needs Club rooms to be built and parents and friends to raise money and to provide refreshments for football events. Accordingly, whole communities are welded together by playing football, or by umpiring football or by providing off-field support for football. All of these people are volunteers and this evening - the launch of a new season - is a good time to say thank you to all those volunteers for without you there would be no Southern Football League. But, by the same token, just as the players get a great deal more than fun and enjoyment out of playing the game, so too the volunteers get their rewards for as Senator Tanya Plibersek, the Minister for Social inclusion said, “Volunteering connects us,

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<sup>4</sup> Supra at page 15.

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strengthens our sense of belonging and creates positive relationships that build stronger local communities.”<sup>5</sup>

Last, but by no means least there are the sponsors of community football – usually local businesses that have sons who play in the League, or maybe proprietors who themselves used to play community football. To each of the sponsors of the Southern Football League I also say thank you for the contribution that your generosity and support makes to our society.

Each of those sponsors, like each of the volunteers, and like each of the players is connected to, or socially included in this sporting community. It is like belonging to a tribe whose members have shared values and whose members care for and look out for the others in the tribe making each member of the group feel wanted, useful and secure.

Not a bad outcome for community sport is it? Not a bad outcome for the Southern Football League is it? And that’s why I am passionate about it Mr Johnson and that’s why I was so pleased to be asked to launch the 2012 season which I now do and wish all those who are connected with the League recognition of the benefits that flow from belonging to the League, good luck and of course lots of fun and enjoyment.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s02\\_article/default.asp?nav\\_cat\\_id=208](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/html/s02_article/default.asp?nav_cat_id=208) accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2012.