**Spectator racism at Australian football codes**

**ABC Radio Sydney Drive (27 May 2024)**

**Transcript**

**Richard Glover**

On ABC Radio Sydney, this is Drive with Richard Glover.

**Richard Glover**

Well, I wonder if you've ever been a spectator at a sporting event and seen an outbreak of racism? Maybe it was one of those infamous moments like the booing week after week of Adam Goodes?

**Richard Glover**

These are the sounds that Adam Goodes has had enough of. The industry has run a campaign to stamp out the booing of Goodes at football matches.

**Richard Glover**

Now, maybe it was something smaller that went unnoticed by most, but still struck you as pretty awful. Either way, a new study finds that this sort of spectator response is still rife in Australian sport.

**Richard Glover**

In fact, it may be getting worse. We'll talk in a second to Daryl Adair, who is Associate Professor of Sport Management at the University of Technology in Sydney. They've sat down with about 2,000 sports supporters, sports spectators, who identify as part of a European or white tradition and asked them about these events, asked them how often they've seen a racist abuse, how they felt about it, whether they felt it was just a bit of banter to use the terms of some or whether they were deeply embarrassed about it.

**Richard Glover**

Anyway, he'll be here to tell us about that, but you might have some experiences. I'd love it to know if you've seen it in action. Did you say something? It's very hard to say something, isn't it? What did you feel about what happened and what the players went through?

**Richard Glover**

1-300-222-702, or on the text 0467-922-702. And Daryl Adair is with us here on Drive. Good afternoon.

**Daryl Adair**

Good afternoon, Richard.

**Richard Glover**

As I was saying, Daryl, you spoke to about 2000, we'll call them white spectators. It's across league, AFL and soccer, basically asking them about what they'd seen. And also, here's an interesting thing, whether they thought it was getting worse.

**Daryl Adair**

That's right. So, in essence, what they observed is that over the past two years, there's been an increase compared to, say, five to 10 years. So, for example, the AFL is now up to 30 per cent over the past two years.

**Daryl Adair**

The NRL...

**Richard Glover**

30% is 30% of the people you interviewed said they'd seen it.

**Daryl Adair**

Exactly right. Yeah. Yeah. And 40% in the NRL and 50% in the A-League. So the trend is certainly with the A-League because 10 years ago, it was about 5%. So, the increase there has been quite substantial.

**Daryl Adair**

I mean, if you look five years ago, all three codes are about 30%. And 10 years ago, the AFL was the highest about 35%. So look, they're all bad. We shouldn't sort of get too obsessed with comparing them.

**Daryl Adair**

But I mean, that the whole, the whole reporting of this surprised us in terms of the, the volume of observations, but then the, the lack of appetite, really, for people who actually turn them in. So, there are mechanisms today, as you'd be well aware, where you simply, you text security and say, look, you know, somebody is behaving inappropriately.

**Daryl Adair**

And racism is one of those measures that they're interested in. And so security can come along, they can observe, they can make their own judgments, and you don't need to get involved. So, there is no, if you'd like, retribution for putting your hand up.

**Daryl Adair**

But in Australia, we don't have a great history, shall we say, of dobbing in people.

**Richard Glover**

It was interesting your data, wasn't it, because it said it found that most people actually understood this system and understood how to access it but had chosen not to.

**Daryl Adair**

Exactly. And so it's the old turn a blind eye scenario. And what we want to do with our next study is actually ask people, okay, why have you chosen this? Because we actually were a bit naive. We hadn't anticipated that if people observed this, that they would actually do something about it.

**Daryl Adair**

And the overwhelming proportion of people just haven't, even though many of them reported that they were quite upset by it.

**Richard Glover**

There are kind of three groups, aren't there? There's a majority who are upset by it and think it's wrong. There's a small group who say, oh, look, it's probably not great, but it's just banter, really.

**Richard Glover**

And then there's a small amount who say, oh, no, well, you know, I'm a bit racist myself.

**Daryl Adair**

That's right. Some of our respondents were quite happy to admit that they went to the footy and also on social media to exercise what they understood to be their God-given right to abuse other people.

**Daryl Adair**

It didn't matter whether they were sort of African migrants, Pacific Islanders, Aboriginal or whatever, because from their point of view Australian society is, shall we say, normatively white and that other people here are the guests, and they should be looked upon in a secondary manner; or in fact, you know, they're people who “aren't as good” as whites.

**Daryl Adair**

I mean some of the comments that we received were quite horrendous really.

**Richard Glover**

It's important to say that's not the majority, the majority do think this is awful.

**Daryl Adair**

They do, that's right. But obviously, when you have a minority that are using, whether it's social media or whether it's the sports stadium, to vent these kinds of attitudes, it's really up to the rest of us to sort of say, OK, we're not going to give you a free kick here.

**Daryl Adair**

What we're going to do is actually text the hotline and you're going to face some consequences for these behaviours.

**Richard Glover**

Daryl Adair here, Associate Professor of Sport Management at UTS have been asking spectators about how often they've seen racist incidents and the surprising finding you may think is lots have and in fact it seems to be getting worse over time.

**Richard Glover**

You talk a bit about in your piece, Daryl, about the impact on players because it's quite extreme isn't it?

**Daryl Adair**

That's right, particularly if an athlete has faced this on more than one occasion and so it becomes repeated harassment. And also, you've got to remember some of these players are very young and they're coming into sport, being in the public spotlight in ways that they hadn't in the rest of their lives. And they get very excited about the opportunity to perform in a big crowd, but when they are basically dehumanised for simply being who they are it can be very hurtful, particularly given that many of these young people have actually experienced racism during their junior years and through the young adult lives.

**Richard Glover**

Well, they're there with a lot of emotion, peak fitness, giving their all for their team and into that sort of emotional atmosphere comes this abuse. It must be so, so difficult to deal with. Jennifer says on the text, I went to my first NRL game in Sydney last week and I'm amazed that people would consider being racist at a game, considering how very diverse the crowd is, how abhorrent the people would even consider acting in this way.

**Richard Glover**

Surely even their own team is made up of many nationalities. It's not a bad point from Jennifer. Do you think, Daryl, that the efforts, for instance, of the Indigenous rounds that have been established by both the AFL and the NRL, do you think they're helping or, for a small minority, are they kind of rubbing salt in the wound?

**Daryl Adair**

Well, I think two things are happening at once, and that is that for people who are fair minded, progressive, who welcome a diverse Australia are happy to celebrate the contribution that Indigenous people make both to the NRL and the AFL.

**Daryl Adair**

I mean, let's face it, there are about 10% of the playing group notwithstanding the fact they're about two and a half to three percent of the population. So, for many people, this is a wonderful opportunity for celebration.

**Daryl Adair**

But some people get really upset at things like, you know, Welcome to Country, [during] Indigenous Round somehow in their mind. [For them] This sort of accolade is not warranted and it's some sort of woke commentary, and that essentially you should just get on with playing the game and forget about this sort of kind of stuff.

**Richard Glover**

Yeah. I'd like to see, I like to see them trying (those people), I'd like to see them try to do any, anything at high skill whilst being, having abuse shouted at you. You know, whatever your trade or profession, you might be a plumber, you might be a radio announcer, you might be a singer, you might be a carpenter.

**Richard Glover**

Imagine trying to do your job whilst people are screaming racist abuse at you. You wouldn't go well. You wouldn't like it. I guess.

**Daryl Adair**

Of course not. No. And look, it's the weakest form of commentary, isn't it? Because if you're on social media, you're hiding behind a keyboard. If you're in a crowd, you can try to be anonymous because there's thousands around you.

**Daryl Adair**

But it really is up to the rest of us to call this out. And as I said in the article, let's not give a free kick to racism. Let's point it out where we say it because there should be consequences.

**Richard Glover**

Daryl, thank you so much for your time this afternoon.

**Daryl Adair**

Yeah, my pleasure.

**Richard Glover**

Darryl is Associate Professor of Sport Management at the University of Technology in Sydney and has been asking around 2,000 supporters about the things that they've experienced and the beliefs they have when it comes to racism in sport.

**Richard Glover**

Yes, someone says on the text, we were walking into the soccer at Acore Stadium where there was an announcement saying no to racism as you go through the turnstiles and a white man said loudly, “Say yes to racism”.

**Richard Glover**

No one said anything. My kids are not white. It's not a joke. For them, that now becomes a very unsafe space for them. So maybe the guy thought it was a joke. Oh, you say yes to racism, not saying the impact on these young ears that are sharing the turnstile with him and what it might do to their sense of safety.

**Richard Glover**

Yeah, not a joke, as our texter says. Apparently Andrew Moore blasted a person who was being racist on the tech service during the weekend when he was calling the football. So good on him. Yeah, Andrew Moore called a guy out on the text line, says quite a few people.

**Richard Glover**

He did so without swearing, says Mark. So good on him for that as well.