A coaches Guide to establishing and maintaining an inclusive culture

As a coach you are in a position to ensure that the environment you create is inclusive and accepting of all who wish to participate. Here are some ways you can achieve this:

1. Initially assess the culture that currently exists within your club/team. Look at it from the perspective of others, would they feel welcomed and comfortable in that environment or would they encounter discrimination such as homophobic, racist or sexist jokes or more serious abuse?

2. Find out if your club has any existing initiatives to promote inclusivity and diversity if so you may be able to implement this as part of your strategy to foster an inclusive environment.

3. Take the time to explain to your team what you are trying to achieve. Explain that your team will promote an inclusive environment of openness and respect for everyone. Outline what this means for them; how they may need to modify their current behaviours, or highlight current positive behaviours you wish to see more of.

4. Recruit the assistance of the team captain and others with the cultural capital to influence the team. Use them to assess the team's reaction to what you are trying to achieve and to assist you in delivering a positive message about respect for all. Allowing the players themselves to take ownership and responsibility for creating a positive inclusive environment will have a huge impact on ensuring long term success.

5. Ensure that you are consistent and persistent in your efforts to achieve an inclusive culture, this will require you to challenge every incident of discriminatory or abusive behaviour you witness, including homophobia, racism, sexism or discrimination based on ability. Challenge such behaviours as appropriate to the situation and severity of the incident. You do not want to make enemies by being heavy handed, the best approach is to modify behaviours by educating the team and informing them of the harm that insulting others does. However in cases where this is ineffective it may help to:

6. Establish a protocol listing sanctions that will result from disrespectful behaviour or discrimination towards any member of the team. If necessary resort to dropping players who undermine the culture of respect you are trying to create from the team, making clear that they have an opportunity to win their place back by

showing they are capable of behaving by showing courtesy and consideration to all of those around them.

7. Achieving a positive inclusive environment may mean reassessing the way you and the team measure success. For example you may as many do measure success with a win, loss or draw. This should become secondary to other factors such as inclusivity: did everybody get to play or only the strongest, cohesion: were the team supportive of each other or were they arguing? Enjoyment: did everybody have fun, if not ask yourself what the point really is? Fair play: did the team demonstrate good sportsmanship or were they deploying underhand tactics?

   Sport can be used to develop good positive behaviours in participants, though often this is overlooked in favour of winning, though promoting these behaviours will ultimately improve any teams success by creating an environment in which participants can achieve their potential free of the fear of recriminations from team mates for failure along the way.

8. If discriminatory or negative behaviours persist then challenge them, taking time to explain why they will not be tolerated and why they are unacceptable and harmful to others. Make these challenges in front of the entire team if necessary to demonstrate to everybody that it is not acceptable.

9. The use of homophobic language by members of your team may have become habitual and may used without intentional reference to ones sexual orientation. However in being used in this derogatory manner it is associating being gay with negative connotations. Therefore you must endeavour to challenge this language whenever you hear it, ask the culprit why they use such words to insult; they probably will have no argument to justify their behaviours. Be aware that your response should be proportionate to the intent of the language.

10. Always lead by example. Think about how your behaviours and actions may be interpreted. Ensure you are seen to follow the principles of inclusivity and tolerance you are teaching to others.