

AFP tackles the League

An AFP initiative to educate National Rugby League players about the pitfalls of using illicit drugs and unsecured social media sites is generating interest from other sporting codes.

In 2007, the AFP approached executives at the National Rugby League (NRL) about running an education session with players about the ramifications of using illicit drugs. Based on an earlier pilot program that the AFP ran with the Canberra Raiders, the initiative has expanded and has been delivered to all 16 NRL clubs.

Since that time, the project has evolved to include the AFP's High Tech Crime Operations (HTCO) team who deliver modules on the pitfalls of using electronic and social media, such as Twitter and Facebook.

And, it's not just the NRL who are interested in the AFP program, the Australian Football League and Cricket Australia are keen for similar ones.

The social media presentation has been delivered by the AFP to a variety of other sporting codes and groups including rugby union, Swimming Australia, Hockey ACT, Tennis Australia and various sports commissions.

To date, more than 450 first grade players have received the training, but the focus is now on educating rookie players in November and December before the Under 20s NRL Toyota Cup competition starts each year. Before the start of the 2011 season, the social media education session will have reached both first grade and 220 Toyota Cup players.

AFP Manager Corporate Communications David Sharpe was the driver behind the Canberra Raiders pilot program and said the

arrangement between the AFP and NRL is a win-win for both sides.

"These players are seen as role models and the potential influence that they can have on the public also benefits community policing," he said.

"This initiative is a new way of approaching crime prevention. The community benefits from public figures such as NRL players delivering key messages to target audiences. The NRL also benefits as this form of education is delivering

01: NRL training session. **02:** From left, NRL Welfare Group Manager Nigel Vagana, Brisbane Broncos player Corey Parker, AFP High Tech Crime Operations project officer Melissa Sevil and former National Coordinator Child Protection Operations Brad Shallies in Brisbane.



strong messages to their players and assists in their development as young men and potential role models.”

As part of the NRL Education and Welfare program, it is compulsory that all Toyota Cup and NRL players attend the AFP social media and illicit drugs presentations.

Presented by AFP Federal Agent Nigel Ryan, the drug education session gives the raw facts about illicit drugs in a very confronting manner. The legal, social, psychological and physiological aspects are the focus, while the social media component looks at safe social networking, mobile phones, ‘sexting’ and reputation management.

A former player himself, NRL Welfare Group Manager Nigel Vagana oversees the delivery of the sessions in addition to providing players with information on cultural

awareness, behaviour towards women and alcohol consumption.

He said that working with the AFP had added credibility to his program.

“The sessions are not only relevant but presented in a very raw and uncensored manner, which the players not only appreciate but relate to. They are being developed and presented by people who are at the forefront in these areas in terms of information, education and technology,” Mr Vagana said.

“The fact that the presenters can speak from first-hand experience adds significant weight to the workshops and the players’ awareness and understanding of these issues.”

Federal Agent Ryan said that that was the impact he had hoped to achieve, and Mr Vagana confirms that it is working.

“If a player walks away from the presentation not deterred from involving himself in any illicit drug activity, then nothing will deter that player,” Mr Vagana said.

NRL Chief Executive David Gallop is satisfied his organisation’s pairing with the AFP on illicit drug education has been crucial for the success of its internal welfare group initiatives.

“The AFP has made a very important contribution and one that we are very appreciative of. They have been supportive from a long time back, through former Commissioner Mick Keelty and also

03: AFP Media and Production team members talk to Brisbane Broncos Corey Parker after Melissa Sevil’s social media presentation. **04:** Melissa Sevil talks to the media after her presentation in Brisbane. **05:** A Toyota Cup player during the electronic and social media presentation.



Quick actions, long consequences

The AFP social media education session is comprehensive and designed to be confronting for professional athletes.

Many of the players are of similar age to the presenter, HTCO project officer Melissa Sevil, which allows them to better relate knowing that they're not being educated by someone unfamiliar with the web applications being discussed.

"Players in every session have shown respect and paid attention to the presentation. Even those who begin the session thinking that it doesn't apply to them leave with new knowledge and an improved perspective on their obligations," Ms Sevil said.

"Engaging and educating athletes and public figures on the responsible use of digital technologies is an opportunity to reach a broader audience with the crucial messages around cyber safety and security."

"Often, players choose to save their questions until after the session, away from their teammates, or will speak to their welfare manager privately", said Ms Sevil. Club and coaching representatives tend to ask questions on dealing with the wider ramifications of misusing social media, while players often ask questions related to personal issues.

"Many of these players have children or young relatives who they are now able to better guide in the safe use of technology," she said.

"Engaging with sporting codes in the future may also allow the AFP to reach the millions of Australians who watch sport with important information on how they can stay safe online."

The feedback from an NRL club representative after one session sums up the impact the AFP is having on players:

"After the session yesterday I overheard one of the players on the phone asking for a photo to be taken down, and rumour has it that a few of the boys were straight on the laptops after you left."

through Federal Agents David Sharpe and Nigel Ryan and High Tech Crime Operations Coordinator Crime Prevention and Missing Persons Dr Jenny Cartwright," he said.

"Not only have they seen the potential to make change in the community through the influence of sporting role models, they have taken a personal and passionate approach to educating our players."

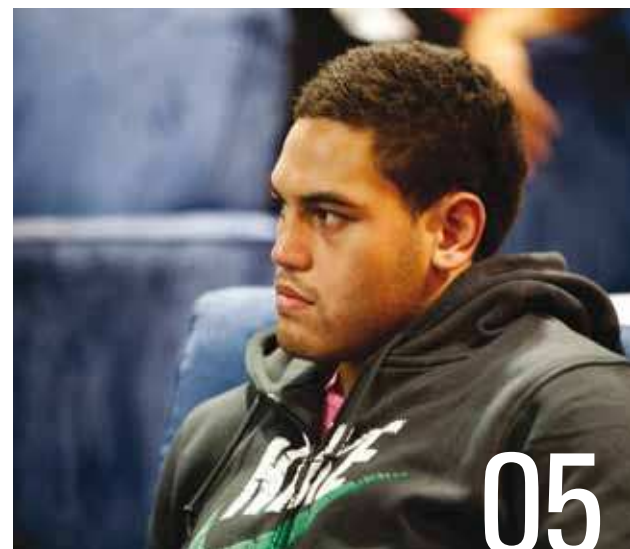
He was equally impressed with the addition of the social media module, delivered by HTCO Crime Prevention project officer Melissa Sevil since 2009.

"I sat in one of the first social media sessions delivered at the Toyota Cup rookie camp and was so impressed with the content and delivery of the message that I insisted it be delivered to a much wider audience within the NRL," Mr Gallop said.

Drawing upon their considerable experience in delivering cyber safety and security presentations to community members, the HTCO team has developed a comprehensive social media presentation.



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It covers the important information which technology consumers need to be aware of, as well as information for people in the public spotlight on how they can manage their online reputations and privacy.

A recent social media incident involving former Canberra Raiders player Joel Monaghan has brought this issue into the spotlight.

"After the Monaghan incident I started including a brief video of his apology and accompanying news item as part of the presentation," Ms Sevil said.

"Reactions from the players indicate that seeing how it has affected a player known to many of them shows them that it can really happen and adds that human element to the session."

"I think it shows them that they do need to be more careful, as one silly mistake can ruin an entire career."

And David Gallop has no doubt that players are now responding to such strong messages. "That doesn't mean that there won't be issues in the future. But the pitfalls out there are real and our players have big public profiles. What we can be sure of is that our players are better prepared than ever before."

06: National Rugby League Welfare Group Manager Nigel Vagana.



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Social Media: What players are told

Safe social networking

Emphasises the importance of using privacy settings when on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Players using unsecure social networking are often shown pictures of their wives and girlfriends that have been easily collected from their personal sites.

'Think before you post'

This module shows players that once images, posts, texts or comments are shared, they are virtually impossible to take off the net, sometimes with severe consequences.

Mobile phones

Outlines the vulnerabilities associated with using smartphones and mobiles, including taking and sending pictures and using modes of transmission including Bluetooth. Often, players are shown how easy it is to be tracked via unsecure Bluetooth connections.

Child abuse images

Alerts young players to the potential pitfalls of dating and texting a person under the age of 18. Players can unwittingly be involved in child pornography-related offences when they send 'sext' messages.

Reputation management

Reminds players that they need to ensure they manage their interactions with fans and the community appropriately to protect their personal and club reputations.