



“AFL Today”

Disability Recognition Day

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The thrill at being at Adelaide Oval last Saturday evening to watch the pre-game Indigenous respect ceremony was enthralling

The unveiling of the Crows and Port Power jumpers for this weekend is spectacular. Both clubs have done their players and supporters proud
The Toyota /AFL television indigenous ads “Everything is Possible” are just fantastic

Can you imagine the community education, recognition and respect of People with Disability that would be generated if the AFL used the full resources of its brilliant media and marketing department to do the same and spread the disability message?

With 1.8 million Australians with a disability, with over 800,000 relying on disability payments to survive and with some 460,000 with very high support needs needing high level care this now the largest disadvantaged community in Australia.

If the AFL in supporting disability did nothing else but offered 20,000 tickets for a round so regular footy goes could "Take a Mate", with disability for an "AFL Today" experience it would be an awesome outcome.

But that would be the tip off the iceberg of what an AFL Disability Recognition Round could really deliver

The biggest buzz and the one the AFL players would no doubt engage with is the chance to tell their stories of friends, brothers sisters and people they love and how they interact with them and their love and passion for AFL as their sport The players are the stars of the AFL and many will have great personal disability stories to tell And these personal stories and associated media opportunities will deliver powerful outcomes

It would be highly emotive to read of superstar current players detailing their family challenges with their own much loved children because the reality is one in six children born in Australia has some form of disability and elite players children are not immune

The launch last week of the Disability Speaks, "AFL Disability Recognition Round" campaign has generated broad AFL and wider community support and education.

The overwhelming response to D Day has been positive, encouraging and reflected a recognition this is overdue and a let's do it approach.

Many in the local, disability and AFL Community have been fantastic in discussions so far, with AFL power brokers like Rob Chapman, Chair of the Adelaide Football Club, Premier Jay Weatherill's office and Port Power all very positive. The Adelaide Advertiser along with AFL Hall of Fame members Graham Cornes and Peter Carey have promised support. We expect local Minister for Sport Leon Bignell will also support our cause



To be successful this campaign will need to be supported by AFL stalwarts in Melbourne.

We don't know about Eddie but we think Kernas and Roosey may?

Bruce McAvaney and James Brayshaw are also on our target list.

Are Victorians as charitable as South Australians when it comes to disability?

The benefit of publicising the amazing contribution that people with disability can and do make to our community is compelling.

An AFL generated publicity and education program would deliver huge positive media exposure well outside of the scope of disability advocacy groups and the government ability to buy. The general public needs to get a positive disability message.

Can you imagine if every person with a disability BBQ'ing sausages at a community football club was recognised?

They are the backbone of so many footy clubs. Can you imagine if the National Anthem or the game day medal was sung by the Tutti Choir or presented by people with disability?

Can you imagine if every AFL club took on 4 volunteers with disability for work experience and encouraged coterie groups to do the same for a week or two?

What about if the wonderful work already being done by AFL clubs with disability groups was widely publicised and promoted. Would not more supporters and businesses follow suite?

Promotion and Education would inspire others to become disability advocates and community leaders. Inviting inspirational people with disability like Kurt Fernley to address the Presidents lunch at the MCG would turn the heads of the business elite in attendance. Having a disability focussed speaker in every function room at every ground for match day would be engaging and possible. Politicians as always would need special invitations particularly so they could announce the new programs for the disability sector that they were going to fund to generate employment and recognition. They should not just get another free lunch

The disability message needs to be respect, employment and inclusion

Filling a motorcade at each ground with prominent people from the disability community would be easy. Special Olympians and Para Olympians could be recognised and disability community leaders deserve recognition. The TV, the radio, the press and online will have a significant contribution to make and the general public will suck it in and watch and learn in awe.

There are some who would say it is tougher to be a parent of a person with disability than an AFL player

The pen pics in the Special Edition, AFL Record would be read by over 300,000 attending the matches and could be promoted via the AFL website and online.

Individual Clubs could highlight designated charity and disability groups they support and the great work done by their players the great work of current and past players could be encouraged and recognised and so many AFL Clubs already do great disability sector work as we know

Maybe a prestigious AFL Annual Club, Player and Special Disability program awards could be implemented and presented on the AFL Footy show each year on this week.

The winners of such awards would be widely applauded Rising Stars of community support around disability should be encouraged

On game day a few raffles, collection tins and major sponsor contributions at every game could generate a \$500k to keep the sector operating. Teams of champion players with intellectual disability could play the warm up match (yes such teams already exist) and a swarm of kids with disability could do Auskick at half time

A big focus needs to be on clubs and organizations that are workplace heroes promoters doing special things to give special people employment opportunities is a massive issue in the disability sector

We are delighted to see other disability sector groups supporting this push including local SA political party D4d. Rick Neagle, D4d President was a former football star. We look forward for Bipartisan political support from all political leaders this campaign has a long way to go but let's hope it gets there

Both the AFL and people with disability will be huge winners if it is successful

In the end AFL is for everybody

And so many great fans have a disability as we all know

David Holst

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