Commercialisation of sport has emerged from the interplay of basic market forces including large-scale spectacles, media rights and advertising. Commercialisation has provided unprecedented financial rewards for some groups, especially male athletes involved in high-profile sports. This has raised equity issues for other groups participating outside commercially broadcast sports. Additionally, particular challenges exist for high-profile athletes, especially young men, who are inadequately prepared for the pressure associated with media attention and intense competition.

Historic beginnings

To understand the underlying cause of the commercialisation of sport we need to go all the way back to Rome in AD 80, when the building of the Colosseum was completed. It held 50,000 people. Here we see the ingredients for what was to follow in popular sports up to the present day. These are:

- a large-scale event delivered to a mass audience
- money changing hands between the event’s organisers, participants and spectators
- public promotion and subsequent sponsorship of participants, together with shared publicity by wealthy individuals and promoters
- a training school involving coaching staff to prepare participants professionally for events.

In AD 80, the Colosseum was the home of spectacles in which gladiators pitted their skills in barbaric fights to the death with fellow gladiators or with
wild animals. These ghoulish encounters were relished by an audience for whom death was a form of entertainment. The gladiators were a mixture of slaves, and free men and women. A slave gladiator could earn their freedom if they pleased the Colosseum crowd or the Emperor. Once freed, they then had the right to fight professionally. The Emperor Tiberius paid 1000 gold pieces to each gladiator for one performance at the Colosseum. This was the beginning of professionalism and commercialisation.

What occurred at the Colosseum had all the basic ingredients of professional sport today, though in differing contexts! While Russell Crowe played his famous role of Maximus in the film *Gladiator*, now he is a co-owner of the South Sydney Rabbitohs Rugby League franchise, with businessman Peter Holmes à Court. This is an interesting connection, because it underlines that while modern professional sport is more organised, and on a larger scale, the basic market drivers are the same as in AD 80.

**Learning experience**

1. Watch the film *Gladiator* starring Russell Crowe.
2. Discuss some of the scenes from *Gladiator* that portray the:
   - commercial aspects of the gladiatorial sports
   - relationship between the ‘athletes’ (gladiators) and the ‘administrators’ (event organisers)
   - role of politics in sport
   - similarities and differences to modern sport.
Sport and the British Empire

While Roman society quickly cottoned on to commercial sport as a natural combination of market forces, it was in later centuries that the British Empire developed sports that are still popular all over the world. Modern forms of golf, tennis, cricket, football and rugby all began in Britain, some of which were promoted by the interest of early monarchs like Henry VIII, the 16th-century King of England. Leisure time was very important in the court of Henry VIII, as it was expected that the king be entertained when not attending to matters of state. An early form of tennis was popular with Henry VIII, as was hunting and other equestrian sports. At this point in history it was only the privileged classes who had leisure time in any quantity, as other classes were exploited and poorly paid. For this reason, the cultural idea that sport was only an amateur interest for men of wealth replaced the idea of professionalism.

Similarly, the present-day ‘world sports’ of football, rugby and cricket had their beginnings in the British public school system of the 18th and 19th centuries. A ‘public school’ was actually a private school. Schooling was not universally available, and British society still ran on a two-tiered system made up of the ruling classes, and the lower working-class poor. The predominance of the upper class in sports strengthened the concept of amateurism. Culturally this was very significant, because it would take a great shift in thinking for those in power to support the commercialisation of sport. Indeed, in the case of world cricket, this kind of commercialisation came from the last place the British establishment could stomach, their former colony, Australia!
The rising profile of commercialised sport

Key to the development of professional sport was the new mass audience that emerged with the advent of television in the 1950s. By the 1970s, broadcast rights to sports meant large 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>British Football Association allows match payments and transfer fees for players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Rugby bans player payments and forms Rugby Union. Rugby League is formed to allow players to receive compensation for lost work hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td>British Professional Golf Association founded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>US Professional Golf Association founded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Promoter CC Pyle established professional tennis tour for US and French players. (These ‘pro’ players are banned from ‘amateur’ tournaments.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>Hershey Chocolate sponsors Hershey Gold Open in USA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>Open era of tennis established allowing professional players to compete in all tournaments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Channel 9 Network owner, Kerry Packer, launches first professional competition based on commercial broadcast rights (World Series Cricket).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Kerry Packer acquires rights to all forms of television broadcast of Rugby League until 2000 for $80 million. News Limited approaches Australian Rugby League (ARL) to acquire rights to broadcast pay television. Legal battle over rights follows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Rugby Union allows complete commercialisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>After financial losses from both ARL and SL, National Rugby League (NRL) is formed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Hyundai-sponsored A League formed as Australian National Soccer Competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Football Federation Australia signs $120 million A-League broadcasting deal with Fox Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Indian Premier League formed based on 20–20 cricket. Australian players auctioned for up to $1.47 million.</td>
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Social influences

Historically, Australia’s British heritage meant inheriting Britain’s social values. The class system was deeply embedded in early colonial Australia, with the upper class—those with financial and social power—creating rules to restrict the working class from sharing their leisure pursuits. The idea of amateurism excluded the working class from the clubs and sports of the upper classes, and ensured sport remained free of the ‘commercial stain’. However, horseracing, like chariot racing at the Colosseum, was a key part of colonial society, and it was allowed to operate as the centre of betting and winning purses (cash prizes). Events like the Melbourne Cup drew together both privileged and working classes around a sporting spectacle that was too powerful for amateurism to contain.

It has one specialty; this must not be jumbled in with those other things. It is the mitred Metropolitan of the Horse Racing Cult. Its raceground is the Mecca of Australasia. On the great annual day of sacrifice, business is suspended over a stretch of land and sea as wide as from New York to San Francisco, and deeper than from the northern lakes to the Gulf of Mexico; and every man and woman, of high degree or low, who can afford the expense, put away their other duties and come. They begin to swarm in by ship and rail a fortnight before the day, and they swarm thicker and thicker day after day, until all the vehicles of transportation are taxed to their uttermost to meet the demands of the occasion, and all hotels and lodgings are bulging outward because of the pressure from within. They come a hundred thousand strong, as all the best authorities say, and they pack the spacious grounds and grand-stands and make a spectacle such as is never to be seen in Australasia elsewhere.

It is the ‘Melbourne Cup’ that brings this multitude together.

From Following the equator by Mark Twain (1897)

Learning experience

1. List the commercial elements that are evident in Mark Twain’s account.
2. Comment on the effect the Melbourne Cup and other horseracing events may have had on Australian attitudes to other commercial sports.
3. Discuss the role of betting in commercial sport.

Australian media and sports administrators

Media companies, in particular the Packer family’s Australian Consolidated Press (ACP), were key to the development of commercial sport in Australia. Under Sir Frank Packer from 1933, ACP traded successfully in magazines, as well as creating the TCN 9 Network television station in 1956. In 1974, when Sir Frank died, his younger son, Kerry Packer, took control of the network. Kerry, a keen follower and player of sport, was ambitious to make a success of his young network.
The introduction of colour television to Australia in 1975 was very popular, especially with Channel 9, whose profit rose considerably. Significantly, colour television changed the marketability of sport, which was brought to life on screen. Channel 9 dramatically increased its sports coverage, broadcasting golf, tennis and rugby in colour, and spending millions on improving outside broadcasting, raising prize money and marketing events.

**World Series Cricket**

Channel 9 decided to bid for the rights to the cricket in 1976. These rights had been held by the ABC since television began in 1956. The Australian Cricket Board (at that time led by Don Bradman, the most successful amateur athlete in Australian history) headed off the bid, and signed the ABC on for another three-year contract. Kerry Packer was affronted, and after unsuccessfully offering several times the amount of money and still being knocked back, he started to plan an alternative cricket competition. After offering professional-level money to key players, including the then Australian and England captains, Ian Chappell and Tony Greig, Packer signed up 13 of Australia’s top cricketers. The ABC’s hand was forced. The two competitions merged, and Channel 9 has had the television rights ever since.

This situation in which a key media player forced a change from amateurism to commercialisation created the pathway for commercialisation of all mass-market sports in Australia. Kerry Packer, a sports lover, horseman, business baron and keen punter, came to embody the new ethos of sport in Australia. Channel 9, and its competing networks, now feed hundreds of millions of dollars into televised sports. This money has led to unprecedented salaries and endorsement earnings for athletes who now operate as both players, employees and open-market commodities.

**The advent of pay TV**

Free-to-air television dominated the commercial broadcasting of sport until the advent of pay television in the mid 1990s. At this time, Kerry Packer owned all rights to broadcasting cricket and rugby league but then pay TV provider News Corporation approached the Australian Rugby League (ARL), the sports administrator of the code, to split the rights between free-to-air and pay TV. News Corporation was a multi-billion dollar business owned by Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer’s rival in media assets, so naturally Packer objected to News Corporation’s proposal.

However, News Corporation was used to breaking competitive deadlocks. They approached the ARL clubs to lure them away with the promise of funding deals in order to form a new rugby league competition to rival the
AL. In 1995, about half the ARL clubs accepted News Corporation’s offer and formed the Super League. The clubs that remained in the ARL continued to compete with each other. But the game was terminally damaged by the split in revenue, and with millions of dollars in losses on both sides, the National Rugby League (NRL) was formed in 1997.

Soccer Australia becomes Football Federation Australia

Soccer (football) has been played at a high level of competition in Australia since 1921. However, with only one World Cup appearance in 1974, and no clear strategy from the administration to develop its popularity as a mass spectator sport, Soccer Australia was nearly bankrupt in 1993. At that time an ABC report suggested mismanagement was rife in the Soccer Australia board, and this prompted the Australian Government to commission the Crawford Report. This report was conducted by a committee of business and financial leaders. It made a series of recommendations to save Soccer Australia, but when the changes were resisted, the Australian Sports Commission (the government agency responsible for the financial support of national sports organisations) withdrew its support. The subsequent collapse of Soccer Australia led to the appointment of one of Australia’s richest business leaders, Frank Lowy, as a caretaker of the newly formed Australian Soccer Association. In 2006, when Australia qualified for the World Cup, a new mass audience was established, and Football Federation Australia (FFA) was formed under Lowy. The FFA secured commercial sponsorship for soccer with Foxtel and Hyundai to finally ensure the commercial future of soccer.

Taken together, the stories of World Series Cricket, the NRL and the FFA demonstrate some key aspects of the development of commercial sport in Australia. These include:

- Broadcast rights provide the revenue base for commercial sport, by selling advertising on free-to-air TV and subscriptions (and advertising) through pay TV.
- The values and traditions of a sport are not considered of primary relevance when making commercial decisions. If the sport is popular, it can be sold to a mass audience.
• Financial losses are not tolerated, and any trend leading to financial losses will soon be corrected, or avoided.
• Even popular world sports (for example, soccer) will not achieve full commercialisation if sports administrators fail to attract a mass audience.

WebConnect
List the merchandise available.
Comment on whether commercial aspects of the site detract from or enhance the focus on football.

Positive and negative impacts

Commercialisation offers unprecedented earning power for male athletes in most popular sports and for female athletes in a more limited number of sports. It also creates a raft of employment opportunities in media, coaching, sport and event management, as well as stimulating businesses related to sport, and benefiting the economy overall. However, the direct benefits tend to be restricted to the western world, where infrastructure exists to support the commercial sport industry. Some questions exist about the impact of commercial sport on:
• psychological pressure on high-profile athletes through excessive media attention
• the emphasis of ‘win at all costs’ which can lead to drug abuse
• equal opportunity for women and athletes with disabilities.

The price of big money

Today, professional athletes earn higher salaries and have access to endorsement opportunities that amateur athletes never did in the past. This is a positive for the individual athlete who may necessarily have a short career. In cricket, the Indian Premier League (IPL) has recently provided unprecedented commercial opportunities for Australian athletes.

Andrew Symonds to earn $1.4 million with IPL

By Ben Dorries

February 21, 2008 12:00am

ANDREW Symonds has been rated the second most valuable cricketer in the world – with more than a million reasons not to tour Pakistan – as he scooped a $1.47 million Indian Premier League payday.

Symonds yesterday refused to tour Pakistan with the Test side – for security reasons – a decision that inflated his IPL price tag as he will be available to play in more of the lucrative 20-over tournament in April.

Symonds, who was signed by Hyderabad, was the big Australian winner from the auction and will link with retired teammate Adam Gilchrist, whose decision to retire netted him a cool $765 000 IPL contract.

The big IPL bidders held no grudges against Symonds for his racial spat with Harbhajan Singh, who last night picked up $927 000 from Mumbai.

Symonds was second only to Indian posterboy M. S. Dhoni in the bidding.
Dhoni netted $1.65 million from the Chennai franchise.
Fast bowler Brett Lee was snaffled for $981 000 by Mohali but other Aussies were out of favour, which could put some noses out of joint.
Skipper Ricky Ponting was sold for $436 000 and Matthew Hayden went for $408 000.
Retired greats Shane Warne and Glenn McGrath fared poorly, with no bidding war for their services.
Warne went to Jaipur for his reserve price of $492 000, ensuring he will avoid former coach John Buchanan at Kolkata. There were no takers for McGrath in the first round of bidding and he went into the reserve pool along with batsman Mike Hussey.
Veteran Sri Lankan batsman Sanath Jayasuriya was another million-dollar man, going to Mumbai for $1.06 million.
That meant ‘icon’ player Sachin Tendulkar also cashed in, picking up $1.22 million because ‘icons’ must be paid 15 per cent more than the next most valuable player in the franchise.

The signs from the frantic early bidding were that subcontinent players were in demand.
Dhoni went for more than double the money that Gilchrist fetched, with the popular wicketkeeper-batsman accounting for 30 per cent of Chennai’s $5 million salary cap.
The big-ticket Kolkata franchise, owned by Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan and to be captained by Sourav Ganguly, added another big personality through controversial Pakistani quick Shoaib Akhtar for $464 000.
In other signings, Sri Lankan spin whiz Muttiah Muralidaran was sold for $655 000 and will link with Dhoni at the big-spending Chennai franchise, Sri Lankan skipper Mahela Jayawardene went for $518 000 and Kumar Sangakkara picked up $764 000.

But is there is a price attached to the media spotlight that comes with being a highly paid athlete? Andrew Symonds, for example, was subjected to ‘monkey’ taunts by Indian crowds in the 2007 tour of India. This kind of theatrical crowd involvement seems closer to the style of the Colosseum in Rome in AD 80, where athletes lived or died to some degree by the...
crowd’s wishes. Is $1.47 million enough to compensate for perceived racism? Perhaps it is. But the cultural shift back towards treating athletes as objects of fun does seem to suggest that commercialisation results in the loss of the basic values of mutual respect and fair play. In the 2008 Indian tour of Australia, fair play and the value of respect in sport came under discussion as both Indian and Australian teams were criticised for verbally abusing (‘sledging’) each other.

**Learning experience**

1. Explain what you understand by the phrase ‘the price of big money’.
2. Comment on whether you think the IPL cricketers are overpaid.
3. Write a paragraph discussing arguments for and against the following:
   - player-to-player sledging is an acceptable part of high-pressure sport
   - spectators pay for tickets to attend games so they should be able to shout whatever they want at players.
4. Debate the issues in question 3 as a class.
5. Give your views as to whether athletes should earn high salaries to compensate for the short duration of their careers.

With increasing salaries and endorsements for athletes comes increasing psychological pressure. Managing pressure and life in the media spotlight can be challenging in commercial sport. The following article looks at some of the implications for mental health in the ‘tough man’ sport of rugby league.

**Andrew Johns supports Smith’s bipolar confession**

**By Barry Toohey, James Phelps and Dean Ritchie | April 15, 2008 12:00am**

ANDREW Johns yesterday lauded the courage of troubled Parramatta halfback Tim Smith for going public about his bipolar disorder, declaring: ‘It took me 10 years to do what Tim Smith did.’

On the day Smith announced he was taking leave of absence from the game to seek further help for his illness, Johns pleaded with the public to ‘give him some space’ to sort out his problems.

A bipolar sufferer himself, Johns said he understood what Smith was going through.

‘When I first heard about his decision, I felt sick for him,’ John writes in his exclusive column in today’s *Daily Telegraph Online.*

‘Tim is a fantastic bloke and a young player with a lot of potential. But I knew he was struggling and it has really hit home how hard a time he has been facing.’

Smith flew home to the Gold Coast after revealing he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder 18 months ago and is taking prescription medication, with his distraught mum making an emotional plea for her son to be left alone so he can attempt to get his life back on track.

‘She just told me to get him home,’ Smith’s manager David Riolo told *The Daily Telegraph.*

‘She was in tears … Tim spoke to me on Friday night after the game and said: ‘I can’t do this any more’. ‘And that was it.’

A rugby league tragedy just three years in the making.

*The Daily Telegraph* can reveal Smith will see counsellors at the same rehabilitation centre he checked into late last year, amid serious fears of self-harm.
It was first revealed in December that Smith suffered from depression and yesterday he bravely confessed to his bipolar diagnosis.

Choking back tears, a clearly devastated Smith fronted the media to read a prepared statement.

‘I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder 18 months ago and in this time have been seeking professional advice and taking prescribed medication to try and help me deal with the day-to-day life of someone with bipolar.

‘I am not using bipolar disorder as an excuse for anything that has happened in the past or my decision today.

‘However I am not coping with the constant media pressure and public scrutiny.

‘The hardest thing about this has been telling my teammates, who have been extremely supportive and understanding, as well as the Parramatta club, and my family and close friends.’

And as for his days of playing rugby league again, well, right now it remains a long way off.

Manager Riolo revealed Smith had broken down in tears after the announcement.

‘It’s the best he has been for ages when he went into the club and said, ‘Hey, I have got bipolar … I’m out of here’;’ Riolo said.

‘It was like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He broke down in tears at one stage but he even managed a smile late this arvo.

‘He just hasn’t been himself.’

An emotional Michael Hagan described Smith’s shock decision to stand down indefinitely as ‘brave yet sad’.

Hagan spoke passionately about Smith’s announcement – while revealing his former halfback’s fragile mental state.

‘I think it’s sad but Tim has made a very brave decision,’ Hagan said.

‘He isn’t coping with the demands of our game because of what he is suffering from.

‘Tim has had on-going pressure and has felt down for a long time.

‘The pressure and criticism has been the culmination of things. We have to deal with it and what it means to Tim and the team.’

Hagan stressed Smith had made the right decision for himself – and for the Parramatta club.

Asked did media scrutiny affect Smith’s decision, Hagan said: ‘I think the pressure and criticism placed on him has been totally unfair. Now that Tim has spoken about his bipolar, it may allow people to understand that he needs on-going help. We’re not looking to blame anyone.’


**Learning experience**

1. In the article ‘Andrew Johns supports Smith’s bipolar confession’ on pages 177–8, who did Smith have to ‘front’ to read his statement. How is this significant?

2. Identify what Smith ‘had trouble coping with’.

3. Explain what was the ‘hardest thing’ for Smith. Why would this be the case?

4. Identify the three people mentioned who supported Smith. Explain the importance of their roles in his life.

**Webconnect**

Go to [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au). Make a list of five symptoms associated with bipolar disorder.
Drug abuse

Pressure to perform, not only for your country but also for an employer or sponsors, is not easy to handle. When large sums of money are involved, pressure to perform, either legal or otherwise, usually follows. Performance-enhancing drugs have been a feature of amateur athletics, particularly among athletes from nations that were desperate to prove their ‘superiority’ (such as East Germany in the 1970s). The increased financial power of highly paid professional athletics has also led to systemic drug abuse.

THE Australian Olympic Committee has applauded the jailing of disgraced American sprinter Marion Jones, saying it sends a clear message to drug cheats in the lead-up to this year’s Beijing Olympics.

AOC spokesman Mike Tancred said Jones had brought dishonour to herself, her family and her sport and did not deserve sympathy.

‘She will not be remembered as the star of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. She will just be remembered as a drug cheat,’ Tancred said.

‘We feel sorry for the drug-free athletes who raced against Marion Jones. They raced in the true Olympic spirit and she has deceived them. She’s the new Ben Johnson.’

Jones, 32, was jailed for six months on two charges of lying to US Federal investigators. She was also given two years’ probation and ordered to complete 400 hours of community service.

Jones, a mother of two, will begin her prison term on March 11. When leaving the Federal Court in New York, she said: ‘I respect the judge’s order and I truly hope that people will learn from my mistakes.’

Victorian athlete Lauren Hewitt, who hopes to compete in the 200 metres at the Beijing Olympics, said she did not feel sorry for Jones because she did the wrong thing. ‘Her jailing certainly sends a loud message to drug cheats and hopefully they’re listening,’ Hewitt said.

Former triple Olympic silver medallist Raelene Boyle said Jones was lucky to get only six months’ jail.

‘You’ve got to look at the number of people in the sport that Marion has let down,’ she said. ‘I think it’s a good reason for those entering the sport not to take something.’

Boyle said it was sad Jones did what she did purely because she wanted to run faster and jump further. ‘And I hope it shows the rest of the world and particularly others that are playing sport that drugs and sport don’t mix and honesty is a virtue.’

Jones was jailed after pleading guilty in October to lying about using performance-enhancing drugs, and for lying to federal agents about her knowledge of a cheque-fraud scheme run by Montgomery, father of their son, Tim jnr.

She had been taking a drug known as ‘the clear’ or THG – a synthetic, undetectable steroid-like derivative, tetrahydrogestrinone – from early 1999. She says she was given it by former coach Trevor Graham, who told her it was flaxseed oil. THG was developed by Balco, the Illinois-based drug firm run by Victor Conte, who came to the Sydney Games as Jones’ ‘nutritionist’.

(continued next page)
By 2004, Conte faced drug charges and told how he had shown Jones how to inject steroids and that she was a drug cheat.

World Anti-Doping Agency president John Fahey said Jones’ jailing should act as a deterrent to doping in sport. ‘I think we need to be clear that she was sent to jail for a breach of the US criminal code,’ Fahey said. ‘But it is an example of how the work of WADA is making it more likely than ever that those who cheat in sport will be caught.’

Jones, the first woman to win five athletics medals, three of them gold, at a single Olympics, has been stripped of her Sydney 2000 medals. All her results since September 2000 were wiped from the record books after her admission to steroid use after years of denial.

With AGENCIES
The Age 13 January, 2008

Learning experience

1. Read again the opening paragraph of the article ‘Jones’ jailing “a message to drug cheats”. It is stated that the AOC ‘applauded’ the jailing of Marion Jones. How does this set the tone of the article?
2. Name two athletes quoted in the article. What were their responses to the news of Jones’ jailing?
3. What is ‘the clear’?
4. What do you think should be done with the medals of athletes who test positive to performance-enhancing drugs?
5. As a class, discuss whether the jailing of Marion Jones helps the cause of drug-free athletics.

Equity issues in sport

The broadcasting of sport has been dominated by men’s competitions, which means that other groups do not receive the same, if any, level of financial reward. The commercial world, however, operates for the most part on an economic basis rather than a values basis. If, for example, a major media organisation tips $100 million into a sport, as Foxtel did for the Australian Football Federation in 2007, the return on the investment is expected through pay TV subscriptions and advertising revenue. If women’s or disabled sports do not bring the key commercial ingredient of a mass audience, it is clear that revenue opportunities are limited, and so investment is limited. This seems unfair, and perhaps it is, but that is the nature of the commercial world.

HotSpot

In small groups develop a PowerPoint presentation to pitch a disabled sports segment to a television network. The segment is to be 15-minutes long and would be broadcast as part of an existing TV sports program. Your PowerPoint presentation should include:
- the name and purpose of the segment
- a list of possible sponsors
- suggested presenters
- the format of the segment (number of minutes for any sections).
Pay day for the women’s game

But it’s come a little late for the Matildas captain, writes Michael Cockerill.

When a sportswear company rang Cheryl Salisbury late last year and offered the Matildas captain her first full-time job, she responded: ‘When do I start?’

When her first pay packet arrived a few weeks later, she went on a shopping spree. Salisbury has been giving herself plenty of retail therapy ever since. She even goes out to lunch, instead of packing her own. ‘I have to keep reminding myself I’ve got a bit more money these days,’ she says.

These are all understandable reactions to the novelty of being paid for a living. Most of us experience it. But there’s a difference. Most of us experience it fresh out of school or university. Salisbury experienced it a few months ago. She’s just turned 34.

That’s the sacrifice she’s made for playing football, her labour of love. She’s had a lifetime of odd jobs, so many she can’t count. ‘I’m in that many super funds it’s not funny,’ she says.

Salisbury has twice been included in FIFA’s World XI, has played in four World Cups and two Olympics, and is the most capped Matilda (142).

Fourteen years after her Matildas debut, she’s still going strong, described this week by coach Tom Sermanni as ‘the heart and soul’ of the team. By any standard, it’s been an illustrious career. But, aside from a couple of stints in Japan and the US, it’s never been a paying one. Will that ever change?

As women’s football in Australia reaches another threshold, there are plenty of encouraging signs. This year, player registrations will nudge 100,000. At the 2000 Olympics, they were less than 40,000. Australia now has the fifth-highest number of female footballers in the world.

At the pointy end, the Matildas’ gutsy display in last year’s World Cup in China – where they posted their first ever victory in the tournament and earned a place in the quarter-finals, going out with dignity against eventual finalists Brazil – reignited interest in the team and the sport. A behind-the-scenes documentary, ‘Never Say Die Matildas’, will be broadcast on SBS in June.

On the back of that performance, the Federal Government has earmarked funds to re-establish a national league, to kick off in spring, and five players – Collette McCallum, Caitlin Munoz, Sarah Walsh, Lisa de Vanna and Heather Garriock – are either playing, or are about to play, for money overseas.

And, of course, all the excitement of the World Cup led to Salisbury’s getting her first offer of a ‘proper’ job.

Boom times, it seems, and there’s no doubt the foundations are in place. But will the goodwill translate into something more tangible, like a genuine career path for our best players? Salisbury reserves judgment.

‘There’s no doubt everything in the sport has gradually changed for the better, but there are still a lot of things that make it seem like you’re banging your head against a brick wall,’ she says. ‘You still think, Is it ever going to change? Where I come from, in Newcastle, there’s players in the local first division who are earning $500 or $600 a week, and they’re only part-time. Sometimes that’s a bit hard to take.

‘We’re trying to become the best players in the world, but we’ve got so many struggles to contend with.

‘The goal has got to be for our best players to become fully professional so they don’t have to work, so they can put the time into their game that they need to.

‘The World Cup did open a lot of eyes, and it did create some opportunities, but we’ve still got a long way to go … to be honest I don’t hold my breath any more, I don’t believe anything until it actually happens. I’ve been promised a lot over the years.’

(continued next page)
Football Federation Australia chief executive Ben Buckley isn’t promising the world, but he is committing the governing body to the ideal that women’s football deserves better.

Last month, FFA management held a think tank in the Hunter Valley, and one of the strongest views to emerge was the need for women’s football to have its own staff and budget within the organisation. Proposals will be taken to the board, which these days includes ex-Matilda Moya Dodd. Maybe things are moving in the right direction.

‘There’s no doubt women’s football has been elevated in its importance, it’s definitely moved up the list,’ says Buckley.

‘We are one of the few sports that can offer young girls and women the opportunity to progress to a professional career. If the new pro league grows here, and other leagues continue to grow around the world, then there is a potential career path there. Of course there is a long way to go to have an income level which will allow our players to go full-time. But over the next five to 10 years, that’s got to be our goal.’

As it stands, the FFA has Australia’s best 22 players under contract, paying them retainers of between $11000 to $22000 per year. When you consider that the new, high-profile trans-Tasman netball league – which starts this weekend – offers a pay scale of between $12000 to $50000, then football isn’t that far behind.

The new national league, which is expected to be a six-team competition initially, offers the scope to start bridging the gap. While the teams will be partly funded by the various state academies and federations, they will bear the names and colours of A-League clubs to capitalise on that brand. Buckley says corporate interest has been ‘positive’, while SBS is keen to televise the league. It could be the start of something big.

Salisbury, for her part, accepts she has missed the boat but is consoled by the belief that when she does hang up her boots, the sport will be in better shape than when she started.

‘At the [2000] Olympics, when we had all that publicity, when we did the [nude] calendar, nothing really came of it, so I probably knew then it [full-time professionalism] wouldn’t happen in my career,’ she says. ‘It’s still a little while off, but hopefully we’ll get there. The main thing is we have to have a go.’

*Sydney Morning Herald* 5 April 2008

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### Learning experience

1. Investigate the prize money awarded in different national and international sporting tournaments.
2. Are the financial rewards offered to males and females the same? Do athletes with disabilities receive financial rewards?
3. What arguments could you pose as chairperson of the national sporting body to support differences in prize money between men, women and athletes with disabilities?
4. Write a list of ten ideas to help promote television coverage of women’s sport.
5. In small groups, write a script for an advertisement promoting the Paralympics. Your advertisement should be around 30 seconds long.

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### Addressing the negatives

Psychological pressure on athletes can be alleviated by education and self-management techniques. Most professional sporting teams employ sports psychologists, but their role is mainly centred on improving performance, rather than coping with personal pressure. Some professional sports clubs
employ minders to accompany athletes on nights out, as well as alcohol counsellors for athletes who develop problems in this area. However, many high-profile athletes, including Andrew Johns, Wendell Sailor, Ben Cousins and Wayne Carey, were reported in the media for (recreational) drug and alcohol problems. Both Sailor and Cousins lost their contracts as professional athletes as a result of their association with illegal drugs, and bringing their employers into disrepute. Essentially, while athletes sign codes of conduct within their contracts, as adults they make their own decisions independently.

As far as detecting drug use, either performance-based or otherwise, most commercialised sports run their own routine tests on their employees, the athletes. At a government level, the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency (ASADA) operates with police and custom agencies to eliminate drug use. However, the value of ‘win at all costs’ seems intrinsic within the culture of commercialised sport. Similarly, equity in terms of financial reward for athletes other than males in high-profile sports continues to be a fundamental facet of commercialised sport. Equity has never been the concern of commercial sport and until groups other than men in high-profile sports attract a mass audience, this inequity seems likely to continue.

**Learning experience**

1. Visit <www.asada.gov.au>. Summarise the mission of ASADA and two key practices currently used to reduce drug abuse.
2. In class, discuss the basic ethics of competitive sport. Make a list on the board, and if necessary reduce your list to five key values.
3. Research any Australian laws related to protecting these key values (for example, laws about drug use).
4. Design a code of conduct that uses the five key values of sport to create ten rules about behaviour in sport.
5. Identify a commercial sponsor of a popular sport. Research both the sport and the sponsoring company values on the internet. Write a 200-word report that compares the company’s values with the values of the sport.

**Commercial sport in the future**

Currently commercial sport supports four strong football codes: soccer (football), AFL, rugby league, and rugby union. There is also a range of other team and individual sports in Australia that include men’s and women’s tennis and golf. However, women’s sport and sport for other groups have not attracted significant commercial investment. This raises ethical questions about the role that the commercial sector should play in promoting national sport more equitably (alongside the Australian Sports Commission). While the national broadcaster, the ABC, televises some women’s team sport such as netball, commercial broadcasting, which depends on advertising for revenue, has not backed women’s sport, or that of any groups other than elite male athletes. Until a mass audience is established for women’s teams sports and for other groups, it seems that this pattern will remain in the future.
Chapter close

The _____________ of sport has emerged from the interplay of _____________ ___________. _____________ to _____________ sport in either free to air or pay TV are key to this process. While more sophisticated than the kind of situation seen around AD 80 at the _____________, the basics are much the same.

In recent history, sport was dominated by the British idea of _____________ as a way for the privileged to spend _____________ ___________. Commercial sport now is a major way of raising _____________ through advertising and _____________.

Sponsors seek sports with large audiences to maximise the value of their investment. This works against the idea of ________ where all sports are treated equally, regardless of gender or social status of the players.

Review questions

1. Explain why the competitions held at the Colosseum can be seen as an early form of commercialised sport.
2. Suggest two measures being undertaken to combat drug use in sport.
3. Outline the role of one media organisation in the development of commercial sport in Australia.
4. List the positive impacts of commercialisation on soccer (football) in Australia.
5. Evaluate the negative impact of commercialisation on some groups in the sporting community.