

# OPINION PIECE

## The Mess at Essendon

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The recent imbroglio surrounding the Essendon Football Club is a mess of their own making. The punishment is fair

The Club tried to push the limits, and were caught out doing so. The officials knew, and were silent, the coaches knew, and apparently encouraged it, and the players knew, and agreed to it.

The argument that the players deserve some sympathy falls on deaf ears. They are adults, and they are professional players. Not even the argument of peer group pressure washes, as they all signed waivers in order to allow third party “experts” to inject them. They knew what they were doing, and that what they were doing was suspect.

These are elite players, the best of the best, and they are role models for their fans, to their community and to a younger generation. They are heroes on the field, and the club gains sponsorship dollars because of them.

So it is incumbent on them to play the game, fairly. They didn't. They crossed the line. They chose the pack over personal responsibility. Once clubs engage professional players, they are subject to a range of commercial pressures. Pressure to perform on the field, even pressure from the gambling fraternity which come in a variety of ways. They must resist such pressures. Peer group pressure held sway. So now does penalty.

Clubs such as Essendon are more than just a football club. In fact they are more than just a sports club. They are, or should be, an integral part of the community. So many clubs and teams do accept this role, and have a range of outreach programs to engage with youth and the wider community.

All those people throughout the country who have been trying to help young kids become responsible adults through sport should be appalled at what has happened. It doesn't matter what code they train in, they have been sorely let down. Elite teams such as Essendon should set a shining example, instead they have become an embarrassment.

This is bigger than just Essendon. The AFL itself must review its policy on drugs to ensure that it does not lose credibility, and make an unequivocal statement that it condemns the use of drugs, it condemns those that take them and those that sanction them.

Clubs in regional and local leagues are reaching out into their communities, and are obtaining support from them. It is going to be that much harder to encourage an engagement when things like this occur.

As to the question whether Jobe Watson should lose the Brownlow, of course he should. It is awarded to the best and fairest player in each year. Watson may well have been the best, but he certainly wasn't the fairest.

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Julian Amos is on the Board of the Glenorchy District Football Club. These views are his own.