

Be of good health

It's been an interesting off season. Daughter finished Year 12, passed and is now overseas. The last child finishing high school. Time passes. Son at home, having travelled and now ready to start uni again. I have been in repairing and cleaning mode, repairing my studio, and the back porch. So between cleaning out, renovations and repairs, and cooking up a mass of apricot jam from beautiful fruit in season, writing and painting have been on the back burner.

But not my attention to the sporting world. The start of our summer had the interviews with Lance Armstrong. Still in complete denial about what "truth" is and what "responsibility" is. There's been the cricket and the ups and downs of the Aussie team, and seeing some good new young ones come through as well as the retirement or solidity of the old guard. There's the Soccer/football and the seats of the stadiums being trashed, taking away the focus from a good soccer season. They need more goals to occupy them. Perhaps because there is heaps of scoring to let off steam, Aussie Rules supporters are never likely to be that destructive. There's too much good stuff going on at an AFL game. There has been our boys in Colorado (Saints boys that is) and the relative quiet of a football-less summer; until the last few weeks and Essendon taking over "that position" of being the team in the spotlight. (Did we hear a collective sigh of relief from Melbourne and an "oh-oh" from Brendon Goddard....)

Now the AFL are talking about "Integrity Officers" at each club, \$200,000 worth instead of another "coach". OK, here's an idea, employ some mothers. Pay them the rate, but if a suggested idea, medicine, form of training, isn't acceptable to a "mother" of a player, then it's no go. Ask a mother how she'd feel with injections of vitamins or other substances, on or off site. Ask a mother whether she'd allow "sports scientists" free range on the health and welfare of her son. There are plenty of fathers around, in whatever their capacity, but there is a scarcity of "the other" to balance the perspective on sport, life, and behaviour in such an all boy environment.

Here's a plan. If you wouldn't want to tell your mother about what you're doing, perhaps it's not the smartest plan. What astounds me is the prevalence of "group think", in a club, full of men and boys, no-one wanted to be the lone voice to express concern or a different opinion, because of the pressure that if you weren't doing what all the other boys were doing, there's that feeling of being out of the group. So slowly, the group stops challenging and thinking and having rational disagreements or varying opinions on all things inside a club, "independent" thought disappears and is replaced by group think. A very powerful force where it's hard to claim back your minds.

Some thought has come back to Essendon and they alerted the AFL to their practices and all judgements are premature until the findings. But all other teams then made sure they'd done their due diligence with their players and checked their processes. Once the horse had bolted. Once the fingers were pointed.

I wrote last year about my concern with alcohol and lack of sleep after games when Jack Stevens had been caught drink-driving. The boys are excited and awake at all the wrong hours, the alcohol both brings them down but changes their metabolism. The sugar created in the body by the alcohol also creates mood swings and so between the fitness regimes, and the sugar highs and lows created, the

mood and mental health of the boys can be left swinging. Remember, us older folk, how our parents used to say, "All things in moderation". The health profession passes this on, alcohol, sugars, protein, carbohydrates, all OK but in moderation. But we don't live in moderating times, and boys don't feel like being moderate when they are "high" or "low" after games. They feel invincible. They aren't invincible.

I guess the other more disturbing factor is the culture of "youth", when on the 7.30 program last week Stephen Danks spoke about other sporting personnel at the Essendon club taking performing enhancing substances. They are "free" to do so, they are not the athletes who have to comply with the rules of sport. But they are the mentors and teachers of young men who are following their example.

As we age, our metabolisms change, as men age, they have to learn to deal with it, their bodies slower, their weight adjustments, their immortality that is mirrored in our bodies and time. So welcome to the world of humanoids. We can adjust certain things (there are medicines to help women through menopause and allow some relief from symptoms) but menopause cannot be stopped, nor can the aging processes that affect men. Get over it. It happens to all of us and it needs to happen to all of us, and our children need to see it, to know that life is finite, that we are limited in body and soul, and to be able to learn to adjust, there are things that can be done and there is a Season. The Byrds said it best (via the wonderful Pete Seeger, Book of Ecclesiastes and King Solomon) :

Turn! Turn! Turn! (to Everything There Is a Season)

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn

And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time of war, a time of peace
A time of love, a time of hate
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time for every purpose under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time to love, a time to hate
A time of peace, I swear it's not too late!

Yvette Wroby

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