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## Time to respect the official, sport

by Ric Howes

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has launched a nationwide public awareness campaign, as part of the Year of the Official, to promote greater recognition and respect for officials and a better understanding of the vital role they play in helping to run Australian sport. A key objective of the Year of the Official is to attract, develop and retain officials in Australian sport.

Abuse and harassment of officials pose a threat to the future growth of Australian sport. The promotional campaign is driving home the key message — time to respect the official, sport — by challenging community attitudes and behaviour towards officials.

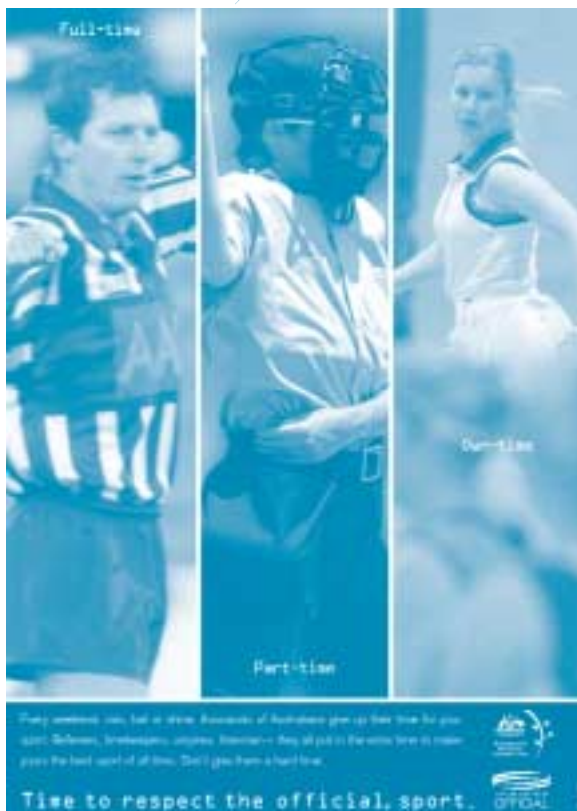
The campaign will focus public attention on controlling and checking unacceptable behaviour and actions that are not in the spirit of sport. It will also create a greater awareness of the important role of officials in ensuring that sport is played fairly, by the rules and in a fun and safe environment. Advertising will include community service announcements for television and radio, print advertisements, posters and other communication material addressing entrenched community attitudes.

ASC CEO, Mark Peters, says the entire sports industry has to take responsibility for stamping out abuse and driving a change in attitudes and culture towards officials. 'We are urging decision-makers in sport to take responsibility for promoting greater recognition of, and greater respect and protection for, officials,' Mr Peters said. 'Sports should implement practical measures in their areas of influence to tackle abuse and harassment. This is the only way they can effect lasting change in attitudes and culture.'

To this end, the ASC is urging sporting organisations to crack down on unacceptable behaviour by participants. In cooperation with state and territory departments of sport and recreation, the ASC has mobilised the sports industry towards this objective through a series of administrator education workshops held recently across Australia, and by implementing a program of grants to state sporting organisations.

The education workshops canvassed some broad management strategies to help sports administrators positively influence the behaviour of participants and to improve the competencies of officials at all levels. These strategies include changing the behavioural culture existing in sporting organisations at all levels and increasing support for the ongoing training and development of officials, to boost their skills and expertise.

For more information on the Year of the Official go to [www.ausport.gov.au/yearoftheofficial](http://www.ausport.gov.au/yearoftheofficial).



# Investing in the future

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) hosted over 300 delegates from across the country and overseas when it staged Coaching and Officiating '03: investing in the future, at the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra on 27–29 November 2003. The conference brought together national and state sporting organisation personnel, state and territory departments of sport and recreation, high performance and grassroots coaches and officials, and various members of the general public with an interest in coaching and officiating.

The conference succeeded in providing national sporting organisations and their state and regional counterparts with information and tools for developing current and future strategies, and systems for recruiting, retaining and

developing best practice for officials. Of particular interest were the issues likely to be covered in the Griffith University research paper on the recruitment and retention of officials, due to be submitted to the ASC in January 2004. In addition, the conference provided professional development opportunities for national sporting organisation staff and officials from grassroots to high performance levels.

Pierre La Fontaine was the keynote speaker at the conference. Pierre is currently the Head Coach of the Australian Institute of Sport Swimming program. He was brought up in Canada and has also spent some time living and working in the United States. Pierre provided information about how society and business affect sport, as well as about the differences between Australian sport and sport in the United States and Canada. He said he

looked forward to the future of sport in this country and proposed strategies for continued improvement.

As a result of this conference, sporting organisations will be examining themselves to determine how well they are preparing for the future. It is important for us all to consider what we are doing in our officiating capacity to invest in Australia's sporting future and ensure that Australia's world-leading sporting system continues to be a benchmark for the rest of the world. A significant challenge in this regard is ensuring that the momentum of change in attitudes to officials, initiated through the Year of the Official, is carried into 2004 and beyond.

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# Controlling emotion

by **Angie Calder**

*(originally published as part of Fitness and Recovery Training for Sports Officials, Australian Sports Commission, 1998)*

Developing the ability to control emotions and mood states through the application of a few simple psychological skills is beneficial for all sportspeople, athletes and officials alike. In particular, improving self-awareness and motivation, and decreasing reactions to stress are essential life skills.

Recognising the complex interaction and strong relationship between physical and mental states is important for recovery training. This is evident when muscle relaxation is complemented by lower heart rates and blood pressure and improved mood states.

The term used to refer to the techniques and skills employed to aid an individual's emotional and psychological state in this way is psycho-regulatory training (PRT). Relaxation techniques, meditation, autogenic training, breathing exercises, music, massage and flotation are the most frequently used PRT techniques.

## Meditation

Although passive rest is an important component of recovery practices, the time spent during passive rest can be used to include one of several PRT techniques. Meditation trains the individual to relax by controlling the parasympathetic (calming) nervous system through reducing 'noise' or stimulation to the brain. By controlling this system, an individual can lower blood pressure, heart rate and breathing rate, relax muscles and calm the sympathetic (excitatory) nervous system.

This technique is useful for controlling stresses after training or competition, particularly for an official who has had to control a very explosive game. Meditation skills take some time and plenty of practice to acquire and they are most easily learned by younger individuals.

## Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation can be done at the end of training or before going to bed. The technique involves tightening and relaxing specific muscle groups so that the individual feels the sensations of muscle tension and muscle relaxation in that body part.



This results in a reduction in muscle tension and helps to improve body awareness so the individual can recognise muscle tension and focus on reducing this. When this skill is used regularly in training it can lead to significant improvements in training and match-day abilities.

### **Autogenic training**

Autogenic training is similar to progressive muscle relaxation. This is a self-applied technique in which the individual focuses on producing sensations in specific muscle groups. The two sensations most commonly used to promote relaxation are warmth and heaviness. Warm sensations indicate a relaxed state, which many individuals find useful after stressful situations.

### **Imagery and visualisation**

All individuals have an imagination that can be developed to contribute to their training potential. Imagery relaxation and visualisation involve using the imagination to create a vivid scene. Four senses are used to generate the image: sight, smell, hearing and touch. The image created by the individual should evoke feelings of comfort and relaxation.

### **Breathing**

Breathing exercises are used frequently in the martial arts. Learning and applying breathing techniques and focusing on relaxing tense muscles can lead to a more relaxed state. Exhaling while applying static stretches also helps produce a relaxation response in the body.

### **REST and flotation**

Other psychological techniques revolve around the concept of REST (restricted environment stimulation therapy). Some techniques are as simple as closing the eyes to reduce stimulation, while others require training (meditation) or specialised equipment (flotation). Reducing the amount of stimulation to the brain enables the individual to focus more effectively on relaxing and becoming emotionally calm.

Flotation tanks provide an environment with minimal stimulation by reproducing weightlessness and removing the stimulation of sight and sound, unless the individual relaxes to music or to an affirmation tape. It usually takes two or three trials to learn how to relax completely when using this technique, but it is remarkably effective for reducing stress and preventing burnout, particularly during or after stressful sporting activities.

### **Music**

Music is underutilised as an adjunct to training. Although it is sometimes used in the weights gym to provide a motivational atmosphere conducive to hard work, it can be as equally effective in evoking a relaxation response if an appropriate style or piece is selected.

Officials may find it useful to create a bank of tapes that generate a range of emotions and atmospheres, either stimulating or calming. These can be

used in training and, because tape and CD players are portable, they are excellent tools for use before and after games and competition. They can also be used to induce relaxation when the individual is in an unfamiliar environment and finding it difficult to relax. With practice, anyone can learn to manipulate mood states for optimal arousal or relaxation.

Apart from flotation, all of the above techniques can be practised daily without the need for any specialised equipment or facilities. An ideal time for rehearsing these skills is immediately before going to bed. Learning how to switch off from the day's events will also promote a good night's sleep.

### **Emotional recovery**

At key times during the year, such as competitions and tournaments, school or university exams and Christmas, individuals are often very stressed. If the game or tournament was very intense, or an official's performance was below their expectations, considerable benefit can be obtained from emotional recovery techniques. Mood-lifting activities can include watching an amusing video or comedy show on television, reading an escapist or adventure novel or going to a fun park, zoo or light entertainment centre. During periods of extended competitions, such as overseas tours, planning these activities as part of training is essential.

# A letter to sports administrators

by **Michelle Nuske**, local official, Year of the Official Administrator Education Workshop, Darwin, August 2003

Dear sports administrators,

I umpire locally in the Darwin Netball Association and hold an A grade umpire's badge. I have represented the Northern Territory at the NT championships, officiated three times in the national 17s and 19s championships and was lucky enough to be asked by Netball Australia to officiate at the South East Asia Games. I have been an administrator in the sport as secretary of the Alice Springs and Darwin associations, umpire convenor of the Darwin association and have represented the Northern Territory on the Australian Umpiring Development Committee for four years. I have also represented the Northern Territory as a player.

I cannot remember when I started to umpire; maybe it was too long ago! I was awarded a C grade umpire's badge before I was 17, while I was still playing and representing the Northern Territory.



I love umpiring. The experiences and challenges I've shared with others have been fantastic. I've made many, many friends throughout Australia and overseas. When speaking to umpires, both beginning and experienced, I try to pass on this passion but there are only a few who see how rewarding it can be. The majority see only abuse by players, coaches and spectators and the responsibility of having to get it right all the time.

Unfortunately, on the other hand, some seem to think that once they have a whistle, they have all the power and they are right all the time. In our umpires' courses, we encourage a good dose of common sense — we advise them to be part of the game (not be the game) and be

approachable. We encourage umpires to accept that in just about every game, they will see something different. This does not mean it is wrong — we are learning all the time and so we should; players and coaches are developing continually and umpires must do so as well.

As administrators, do you budget and allocate resources to umpiring with the same consideration given to players and coaches? The way sport is developing is great, with players receiving support in development programs, travel, coaching at the institute and so on. As they develop, the game becomes faster, more skilful, sharper, stronger and more exciting. You must develop umpiring at the same pace; not doing so will hamper the development of the game.

The responsibility shouldered by officials is enormous. We are expected to officiate perfectly at each game, know all the rules and apply them correctly. Last night, I discussed with other officials the importance of accuracy. Given that I make hundreds of decisions during a game, most of which participants and spectators are unaware of, it is unfair to say that one decision means everything.

Administrators must support officials by making decisions, rather than leaving it to the umpires. When it is known that coaches are abusive, please don't just say that they are passionate and get carried away in the heat of the moment; do something. Experienced umpires may cope with such a situation, but they are becoming thin on the ground and inexperienced umpires have to deal with these issues more and more. Officials must have the support of administrators to manage bad behaviour and abuse.

Encourage participants, coaches and spectators to see umpiring and refereeing as part of the game. The game, to me, is players, coaches, rules and officials. How many clubs rotate players through umpiring at their training? I know athletes go to training to play but, if clubs do not start to take on responsibility for providing more umpires, what will their games be like? They may have no one to officiate.

Juniors are a great place to start this. A nine-year-old player can umpire at training, starting with the basic stuff: blowing the whistle to start, keeping up with play and blowing again for a goal. Why not make umpiring part of the game for them at this age, as they are moving through their sporting life? Some won't be afraid to give it a go and continue.

We have two juniors umpiring senior netball this season and one 16-year-old umpire was recently awarded a C grade umpire's badge. The other umpire Australia sent to the South East Asia Games with me was 17. I thought it was fantastic to see someone so young striving to be the best, and she was a 'cool' kid not a 'nerd', as is often the perception.

Society is having problems with respect and, though it is not going to be easy, we have to work at maintaining respect in sport. Again, juniors are the best point at which to begin enforcing this. If administrators don't act to stop bad behaviour by coaches,



players and spectators at this level, the kids will think that it is okay and the cycle will be perpetuated. My daughter plays U8 soccer and recently a 12-year-old refereed his first game. He was doing a great job. He awarded a goal to my daughter's team and, because it appeared from where we were sitting to be borderline, the opposing coach started yelling abuse at him.

I looked around expecting someone to approach him. As he was starting his second lot of abuse I decided something had to be done and approached him. He was a big guy too! After I'd pointed out a few things to him, he stopped and didn't say another word, but I was very disappointed that it happened and that no one else did anything. The referee kept going, but you could see he was shaken. I made a point of congratulating him at the end of the game and was pleased to see him out there the following week.

What happens to the elite players in your sport? Some of these elite players may make great umpires. Often, though, when I speak to them about it, they answer, 'No way! I don't know how you do it'. Think of how valuable it would be to your sport to have some elite players umpiring. Not only would it be great for the game, but their special skills would mean they would also read the play well and have a great feel for the game.

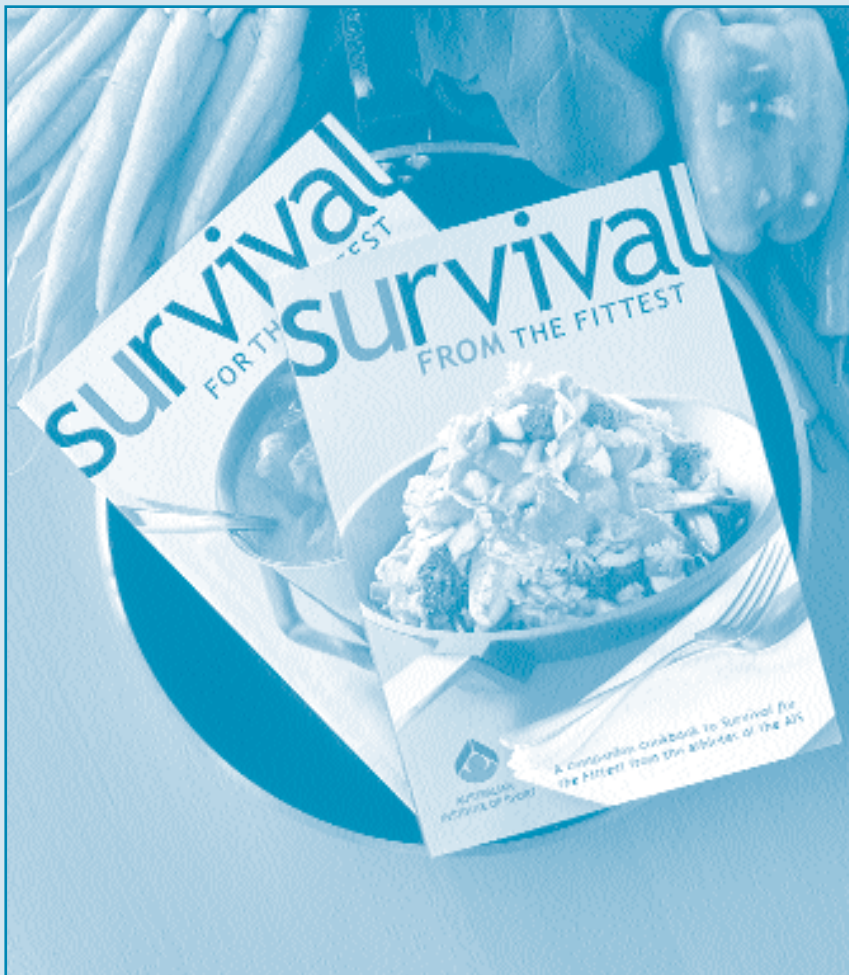
And what an impact it would have on the juniors! Think of your best and fairest player in A grade. Wouldn't the juniors love it if that person umpired their games? If these people actively encouraged junior players to have a go and learn about umpiring, it would be great for your sport.

I've talked about developing your juniors, but you must retain your experienced umpires. Without these people, other umpires will experience too much pressure and you will not have the experience to pass on to others and to coach the umpires of the future.

Administrators must support their umpires. They can do this by considering these strategies: having robust policies and procedures, supplying uniforms, promoting umpiring in the sport, allocating resources fairly, paying umpires and acknowledging their achievements as players' achievements are acknowledged — after all we are all part of the game.

I want to be the best I can and have fun. Do you think your umpires are having fun and enjoying themselves? Isn't that why the majority of us participate in sport?

Yours sincerely  
Michelle Nuske



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PROGRAM



**A TRAINING DIET SHOULD OPTIMISE ALL THE NUTRIENTS THAT AN EXERCISING ATHLETE NEEDS. THE MOST IMPORTANT NUTRIENT IS CARBOHYDRATE, WHICH PROVIDES THE BODY WITH ENERGY.**



with tomato sauce, rolls or sandwiches, baked potatoes with low-fat fillings and fruit salad with yoghurt are all good options. Experiment to find the best one for you. Make sure that you are well fuelled for every exercise session.

Recovery from exercise is one of the most important aspects of training and maintaining energy. During training or games, the carbohydrate stored in the muscles is depleted and has to be replenished immediately after exercise. Often game venues do not provide the best snacks for refuelling. Organise to have suitable drinks and snacks available after the match. Foods such as sandwiches, fruit, soup, cereal bars, yoghurt and carbohydrate drinks will get recovery off to a good start.

### **Fluid and hydration**

Sweating rates during exercise can vary considerably among individuals. Being aware of sweat losses is the first way of determining how much fluid has to be replaced. One kilogram of weight loss during exercise equates to one litre of fluid loss. Losses also vary depending on environmental conditions: the hotter the environment, the greater the rate of sweating.

Good hydration is necessary even for field officials who have low activity levels. Dehydration, the result of poor fluid intake, will affect reaction time and decision-making on the field, crucial parts of being a field official.

In many sports, officials' opportunities to drink may be limited during an event, so it is important that they begin the game well hydrated, and take every opportunity to drink during breaks in play. Sports drinks encourage better fluid intake because of their taste, as well as supplying extra fuel during a session.

Nutrition and hydration can be just as important for the field official as for the athletes themselves. Aim to stay healthy, well fuelled and well hydrated for best performance.

## **Nutrition for field officials**

by **Clare Reilly**, Sports Dietitian, Australian Institute of Sport

The energy demands of being a field official, referee or umpire vary as much as there are different sports to be involved in. Activity levels can range from an hour or two of continuous running, as in a football game, to sitting in a chair all day umpiring tennis. Specific nutrition strategies are more important for those sports with higher activity levels. However, all field officials can benefit from improved nutrition and proper hydration strategies.

This article will briefly cover some of the most common nutrition issues for a field official. If you require more information, see a qualified sports dietitian for an individual consultation.

### **Staying fit and healthy**

A training diet should optimise all the nutrients that an exercising athlete needs. The most important nutrient is carbohydrate, which provides the body with energy. Carbohydrate is the most efficient fuel source for exercising muscles. Carbohydrate foods, such as breads, cereals, pasta, rice, potato and fruit are needed at every meal and snack to help fuel the body.

Protein is another important nutrient, which contains the building blocks for our body. Be sure to eat protein-rich foods such as fish, low-fat dairy products, chicken, eggs, legumes and meat, to help maintain muscle strength and assist in muscle growth.

Other nutrients, such as iron, calcium and fibre are also important in a healthy diet. Iron is found in lean red meats, wholegrain cereals, eggs and leafy green vegetables. The best source of calcium is low-fat dairy products and fibre is found in wholegrain breads and cereals, fruit and vegetables.

Aim for nutrient rich foods at all meals and snacks to help boost your energy levels, to allow fitness to improve and to keep the body functioning and healthy.

### **Match preparation and recovery**

Ideally, a light, high-carbohydrate meal should be eaten at least two hours before a match. Breakfast cereal plus fruit, pasta

**RECOVERY FROM EXERCISE IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF TRAINING AND MAINTAINING ENERGY. DURING TRAINING OR GAMES, THE CARBOHYDRATE STORED IN THE MUSCLES IS DEPLETED AND HAS TO BE REPLENISHED IMMEDIATELY AFTER EXERCISE.**

# What is the stitch?

by **Michelle Minehan**, Dietitian, Australian Institute of Sport

Stitch is a localised pain usually felt on the side, just below the ribs. It is sometimes accompanied by a stabbing pain in the shoulder joint. The pain can range from sharp or stabbing to mild cramping, aching or pulling. Sometimes people can exercise through the pain, but usually the sufferer is forced to slow down or cease exercise.

The pain usually eases within a few minutes after exercise has stopped, however, some people experience some residual soreness for a few days, especially after severe pain. Stitch seems to be more prevalent in activities that involve vigorous, upright, repetitive movement of the torso. Activities such as running (particularly when going downhill) and horse riding may be more prone to causing stitch, but it can occur as a result of any type of activity.

## What causes stitch?

Scientists are unsure of the exact cause of stitch. For some time, stitch was thought to be caused by a reduction in blood supply to the diaphragm, a large muscle involved in breathing. It was thought that during exercise, blood was shunted away from the diaphragm and redirected to exercising muscles in the limbs. This theory has now lost favour with scientists. Both the diaphragm and the limb muscles have to work harder during exercise, so it is unlikely that an inadequate blood flow would be directed to them.

Another popular theory is that stitch is caused by organs pulling on the ligaments that connect the gut to the diaphragm. Ligaments that support organs such as the stomach, spleen and liver are also attached to the diaphragm. Jolting during exercise may cause these organs to pull on the ligaments and create stress on the diaphragm.

A more recent idea is that stitch is caused by irritation of the parietal peritoneum. Two layers of membrane (peritoneum) line the inside wall of the abdominal cavity. One layer covers the abdominal organs. The other layer (parietal peritoneum) attaches to the abdominal wall. The two layers are separated by lubricating fluid, which allows the two surfaces to move against each other without pain.

The parietal peritoneum is attached to a number of nerves. It is thought that stitch occurs when there is friction between the abdominal contents and the parietal peritoneum. This friction may be caused by a distended (full) stomach or a reduction in the lubricating fluid.

Eating and drinking inappropriately before exercise, causing a full stomach or dehydration, may exacerbate stitch. Poor fitness, an inadequate warm-up and exercising at high intensity may also be factors. A sudden change in biomechanics, such as increased stride length or frequency, may increase the risk of stitch by affecting the way the torso moves.

## How can I avoid stitch?

Eating just before exercise or consuming inappropriate foods and fluids seem to exacerbate the stitch. High-fat foods, and foods and fluids with a high sugar concentration are more



likely to cause problems. The likelihood of stitch occurring may be reduced by allowing two to four hours before exercising after a large meal and choosing high-carbohydrate, low-fat and moderate to low-protein options in the pre-exercise meal.

During exercise, it is possible that a full stomach contributes to stitch. Concentrated fluids such as soft drink and cordial empty slowly from the stomach, therefore are likely to lead to a fuller stomach. Water and sports drinks empty more quickly and are a better option. It is also preferable to adopt a pattern of consuming small amounts of fluid at frequent intervals during exercise, rather than trying to drink large volumes all at once.

Stitch may also be minimised by following a training schedule that progressively increases in intensity and duration. Sudden increases in intensity are likely to cause stitch. It is better to start at an easy level and slowly build up.

## How should stitch be treated?

Sometimes stitch eases if the athlete slows down and reduces the intensity of exercise for a period. However, the most common way to alleviate stitch is to bend forward while pushing on the affected area and breathing deeply. Sometimes this can be done while exercising, but usually the pain eases more quickly when exercise stops. Another option is lying down and elevating the hips.

## Does stitch indicate a more serious problem?

The stitch is rarely a sign of more serious problems. However, any pain that is persistent and does not ease when exercise ceases should be investigated by a doctor.

For more information on this or related topics, visit the Australian Institute of Sport nutrition web site at [www.ais.org.au/nutrition](http://www.ais.org.au/nutrition).

## Thanks e-cards for administrators, coaches and officials

The Australian Sports Commission is now offering you an e-card service that will let you say 'thanks coach', 'thanks official' and 'thanks administrator' through the ASC web page at [www.coachingaus.org/thankscard.htm](http://www.coachingaus.org/thankscard.htm).

These electronic cards contain different scenarios and pictures to suit different coaching, officiating and administration situations. Not only is there a thanks e-card to thank your coach after winning, there is also one to thank your coach even if you didn't win, if you achieved your targets or if you simply enjoyed training or the game.

Some e-cards help you thank hard-working officials after a match or congratulate them on an appointment or big game coming up. Other e-cards help you to thank hard-working administrators after a match or congratulate them on an achievement or a big forthcoming event.

There are cards for the team or for the individual. All you need is the email address of the coach, official or administrator you want to thank and your email address. It's that simple! So, take a minute now and say 'thanks coach', 'thanks official' or 'thanks administrator' with an e-card today.



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