

Edited speech to ALP Victorian State Conference, 19 June 2010 by Stephen Paul, Chairman of the Culture, Sport and Tourism Policy Committee.

Recently we have seen the best and worst of sports people in the media.

I was one of the few people who sat up late and watched the Australian Women's Soccer team win the Asian Cup. That game was as fierce and brutal as any sporting contest could be. The Australians defeated a team that played with the fear that only having to return home to a totalitarian regime can bring.

The Australian team was captained by an outstanding goal keeper and brilliant leader in Ms Melissa Barbieri. The winning goal was kicked by a young aboriginal woman. This was a triumph for Australia and our broad, free, multicultural society.

But where was the blanket media coverage?

Where were the home coming parades?

Where were the State receptions?

On the other side we have seen where it is wrong to use black but alright to use the c-word when describing an opponent.

We have seen the 'good bloke' defence trotted out to ameliorate Mal Brown's comments. He may have spent years working with aboriginal people but clearly he doesn't respect them or their culture. He doesn't get it – it isn't a joke if someone isn't laughing.

At least Dipper understands and hopes to grow from the experience. And this is important because it is not the making of the mistake that is the issue. It is learning from the mistake, apologising, drawing a line in the sand and moving forward.

John Howard use to say he didn't have a racist bone in his body. But it is not the bones in your body that makes you a racist, a misogynist, a bigot or a homophobe. It is the thoughts in your head, and the words from your mouth and the deeds that you do that determine that.

There are those who push that when the Browns, the Johns and the Akermanis' of the world are held to account that somehow this is all part of a political correct agenda. There are those out there who wear political incorrectness as a badge of honour.

The question I ask is when did being wrong become something we should be proud of. Fairness and respect is something we should all be striving for, at a personal level, with our friends and families and in the broader community.

Stephen Paul, 21 June 2010