

Personal best for Canberra Raiders

Past and present Canberra Raider players know what it takes to keep fit, focused and perform their best in one of Australia's much loved sports – rugby league. In a first of its kind for the AFP and for Australian professional sport, the Raiders have set a personal best after completing a tailored professional development program.

In December 2007, the AFP and the Canberra Raiders combined forces in an effort to build positive and constructive relationships and to provide players with the necessary skills to become role models in the community before the 2008 National Rugby League (NRL) season.

In an intensive three-day outdoor exercise program held in Canberra's Namadgi National Park, the Raiders gained a new appreciation of the techniques and principles used by national and international policing members in their public and off-duty roles.

Policing specialists divided the players and coaches into small teams to complete tasks such as map-reading, a 32-kilometre hike, and abseiling in mountainous terrain. Working together on the tasks highlighted the importance of teambuilding on and off the football field.

Assistant Commissioner Andrew Colvin, who was Chief of Staff at the time, said the AFP has maintained a successful relationship with the Raiders since 2001. This latest initiative was



recommended by Raiders Manager Dave Sharpe.

"Dave is actually a detective superintendent with the AFP and, while on leave from that role, was keen to devise a program for senior players modelled on principles conducted by our organisation," Assistant Commissioner Colvin said. "Like AFP officers, football players need to challenge their lateral and critical thinking, negotiation, communication and team building skills and apply those in their everyday life."

The AFP's Management of Serious Crime (MOSC) team and ACT Policing worked with the Canberra Raiders to create a professional development program aimed at mentoring and developing players' fitness and education and at providing them with the skills needed to become role models in the local community.

MOSC program coordinator Mark Johnsen and ACT Policing Sergeant Warren Williamson facilitated a camp program from 11-13 December and delivered an intensive fitness and

leadership training regime. The regime involved the International Deployment Group, ACT Policing (Specialist Response Security - Water Operations and Tactical Response), Learning and Development and police volunteers.

The exercises, which ranged from completing a training obstacle course, setting up camp in the rain after a gruelling nine-hour session, to constructing a raft, were not as easy as the players and coaching team had expected, Mr Sharpe said.

"It's amazing how you can be physically and mentally pushed to the limit by 48 hours of continuous face-to-face interaction with your colleagues while you are relying on each other to complete tasks and overcome obstacles," Mr Sharpe said.

After the program, Commissioner Mick Keelty, ACT Chief Police Officer Mike Phelan and Minister for Home Affairs Bob Debus launched the Canberra Raiders Leadership Development Program at the ACT Water Police



Top left: Sergeant Team Leader SRS Warren Williamson with Canberra Raiders; Team Deano; Commissioner Keelty with David Furner, David Bray (red jacket) and SOS Adam Sharpe



Headquarters. Key guests included Canberra Raiders Chief Executive Officer Don Furner and team coach Neil Henry.

Commissioner Keelty said the camping exercise is not a competition.

"...but rather a personal building exercise where you learn more about the skills and abilities that you have as an individual," Commissioner Keelty said. "The program was devised to identify personal skill and abilities as well as to recognise the strengths and weaknesses all members might have in order to operate effectively as a team."

In a radio interview before the launch, Commissioner Keelty highlighted the positive relationship between the AFP and the Raiders. With three former players in its ranks, the AFP is in a prime position to work with the Raiders. The AFP plans to link with the NRL to address drug problems through constructive preventive programs to benefit the players and the wider community.

"Another initiative which will complement the Raiders program is a formal



Above: Team Coach Neil Henry, Assistant Coach David Furner, A/C Mick Crawley and Strength and Conditioning Coach Sean Edwards.

mentoring program being developed by the Canberra Raiders," Commissioner Keelty said. "We hope to encourage prominent government officials, private organisations and former athletes to join this group, mentor the players and help them develop a sustainable future after sport."

National Rugby League and illicit drug program initiative

In addition to the Raiders program, the AFP will work with the NRL on its illicit drug education program and provide a senior AFP drug squad member to deliver seminars to more than 300 players in the

2008 NRL youth league.

Commissioner Keelty explained that planning for this initiative has been underway since late last year when he offered the AFP's expertise and assistance to the NRL.

"It is a key step in helping young and high profile people to be responsible role models in the community," he said. "It reflects the AFP's commitment to working with all people who can have a positive influence in the community."

Education seminars will also be delivered to all 16 NRL clubs throughout the 2008 season, involving

Photos courtesy of Canberra Raiders



Photo courtesy of Action Photographics

Right: Canberra Raiders hooker Lincoln Withers

scenarios that focus on the ramifications of drug use and the drug trade. Both organisations believe the prevention program is a worthwhile investment and that professional athletes will understand the impact that drugs and alcohol can have on their careers, their families, and on those who look up to them.

In conjunction with the AFP, the Canberra Raiders has developed a sexual awareness program which, like the education program, the NRL is now looking to adopt for all clubs, Mr Sharpe said.

“In February, an AFP officer arranged

a female rape victim to address the Raiders about her ordeal,” he said. “While this was confronting for some of the players, it demonstrated that, as a football club, we have a duty of care to educate our players about the ramifications of sexual assault.” ■

Strengthening communities through sport

On Sunday 13 April, the AFP’s Islamic Liaison Team (ILT) will partner with the Essendon Football Club to host a family event as part of the ILT’s *Strengthening Communities through Sport* project.

In 2007, the Essendon Football Club received \$7000 funding for the project from the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) and \$3000 from the Australian Multicultural Foundation (AMF).

The team’s leader, Federal Agent Sam Elmagrahby, said that a committee including Victoria Police, the Islamic Council of Victoria and six Islamic communities, met regularly to plan this family community day and was looking forward to this special football tournament.

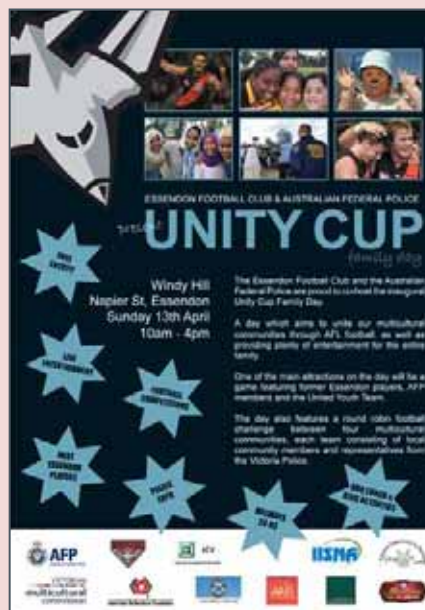
“We are planning a combined team made up of AFP members and ex-Essendon players versus the United Islamic Youth team,” Federal Agent Elmagrahby said. “There will also be a round robin AFL tournament between



four Islamic community groups with players aged from 16 to 30.”

The *Strengthening Communities through Sport* project includes other activities ranging from the *Extend a Hand* project to Islamic school visits which will also occur throughout 2008.

“The funding received from the VMC and AMF combined with the support of the AFP has enabled our team to develop positive partnerships,” he said. “These partnerships help us address and strengthen community needs in the Islamic communities. We are committed to counteracting intolerance and promoting harmonious engagement.” ■



Bottom: Essendon player Bachar Houli



Photo courtesy of Essendon Football Club