

Sex offending in sports: A whole new ball game?  
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## **Sex offending in sports: A whole new ball game?**

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## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin by offering my thanks to Keith Kaufman and his committee for their generous invitation to address you today. In the UK it took me sixteen years or so to find acceptance for my work on sex offending and prevention in sports. Keith has heard me speak only once, last Fall, but that was enough to persuade him that there was an issue here that should be shared with colleagues in the US - and for that I am deeply grateful.

Many of you will be athletes and will know the joy of sports and the potential values it offers to young people and communities. Some of you will detest exercise and follow the familiar adage that whenever you feel like exercising you lie down until the feeling passes ... or adopt the stereotype of Americans in the UK, that you pride yourselves on both keeping fit and parking as close to the stadium as possible. Whatever your views of sport, or your personal liking or loathing for it, as professionals in the sex offending world you won't have to look too hard to see that it offers the abuser a conducive climate for sex offending.

The purpose of my address today is to tell you a little about the policy and prevention work that has developed in the UK in recent years and to explore some of the possible benefits that can be shared between the sport and treatment communities as a result of sex offending research and analysis in sports. Questions of interest today include: Why has sex offending in sports only just arrived on the policy agenda? What, if anything, does research in sports have to offer those of you working in 'mainstream' research and treatment work?

Are offences in sports characterized by exactly the same dynamics as those in any other settings or is sex offending in sports really a whole new ball game? And what is being done, and can be done, to bring sport organizations and programs into the treatment and prevention fold? I shall begin with a short historical tour for it is in the history of sports that we find the answers to some of these questions.

### **The origins of a closed culture**

Sport as we know it today is derived from mid- to late-nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation. It shares both the values and the ideology of the Victorian Christian church. Indeed, 'muscular Christianity' was the name given to the missionary practice of using sporting enthusiasm to capture Christian souls. Nineteenth century sport was also used for enforcing discipline in schools and corrective institutions that adhered to the Victorian ideal of 'spare the rod and spoil the child'.

Such was the success of mass sport, however, that it spread like a rash throughout modern society and came to occupy a special place in the affections of the general public. Our passion for sport, never more strongly expressed than here in the USA, acted as a political shield, however, and prevented close scrutiny by researchers and social critics. Sport was seen unequivocally as 'a good thing' and was relegated to a fantasy world that resides outside the mainstream grind of everyday life. Because of this, it developed a kind of social immunity. For those young people, like myself, committed to the practice of sport, the time, energy and devotion it required acted like a 'social anaesthetic' that

diverted our attention away from social and political issues of inequality and led to us having a restricted social conscience. Given this, it is not surprising that no attention was paid to child abuse or sex offending in sport until very recently, following the more general moral panic about paedophilia in western society since the 1980s.

Throughout its historical development over the last two hundred years, British and American society has been politically and ideologically preoccupied with the presumed physical, social and moral benefits of sport, whether for developing and maintaining health through calisthenics, moral development and discipline in schools, colleges and the military, for leisure during the mid and post-war economic booms, or as a means of diverting young delinquents from street crime. There have always been multiple rationales for sport. The United States Collegiate sport system is seen as a sporting model for the world and the passion of the American citizen for watching sports shows no signs of abating. America without competitive sports, then, is as inconceivable as Thanksgiving without the turkey.

One of the consequences of our national sporting obsession, then, is our blindness to its faults. The world of sports, despite sometimes being desecrated as an international language, is a closed world with a closed culture. It is characterized by many assumptions about safety and by deeply-held beliefs about purity, truth and virtue. It is also a world in which the 'other' is readily ignored, whether this be women, racial minorities, disabled athletes or paedophiles. In the cosy world of sports, where physical perfection and spiritual

cleanliness are aspired to and expected, it is thought impossible for sexual violations to occur from within.

The advent of critical social theories in sport, from neo-Marxism to feminism, from the late 1960s onwards, brought about a major shift in the way that sport was conceptualized and appraised. The Civil Rights movement in the southern United States in the mid-1960s led directly to the beginnings of feminism in the early 1970s and to a spate of counter-cultural and popular critiques of sport by disillusioned athletes (Scott, 1971; Shaw, 1972; Hoch, 1972). Through these authors, the role of sport as a form of social and ethical anesthetic was exposed. Neo-Marxist analyses such as Harry Edwards' (1969) *The Revolt of the Black Athlete* lent academic weight to these popular texts and the privileged and separate status of sport was, at last, eroded. By the last three decades of the twentieth century, a flourishing critical tradition had been established in sport sociology (Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Hall, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Whannel, 1983; and Gruneau, 1999) that gradually broke down the belief that sport was apolitical and, instead, drew attention to its race, class and sex divisions.

### **Moral panic and recriminations**

One of the issues that began to radicalize sport in the UK in the early 1990s was sexual exploitation, especially in its most severe manifestation - the sexual abuse of children. Given its historical development, however, and general societal blindness to sexual abuse, it is not surprising that sex offending in sport escaped the attention of academics and policy makers for so long. This issue,

above all others, now appears to have galvanized the sport establishment because it both challenges long-held assumptions about the moral goodness of sport and also attempts to empower children through affording them legal and social rights. In recognizing that sport harbors sexually exploitative practices, including the child sexual abuse of athletes by coaches, sport administrators have been forced to confront the need for change and to consider the legal, moral and civil consequences of restricting athletes' opportunities to exercise their rights.

Initial denial of the possibility of sex offending in UK sport lasted about fifteen years from the mid 1980s. Some sports came to a reality check rather faster than others. In swimming, for example, the imprisonment of former Olympic coach Paul Hickson, for a record 17 years in 1995, caused a major upheaval. Hickson was found guilty of rape and sexual assault charges on female swimmers in his care over about a twenty year period. Overnight loss of £1million worth of sponsorship to the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) was followed by root and branch change to the organization's constitution, procedures policies and practices.

The various forms of denial expressed by UK sport administrators and others were not surprising since they are common defenses to any accusation of wrongdoing, especially one concerning the abuse of children. In the case of sport, denial of sexual abuse arises from a characteristic set of beliefs (Brackenridge, 1994):

- that sport is a morally pure category of behavior

- that fair play is a concept applicable to children/players rather than coaches
- that sport is a site of justifiable male privilege over females
- that, in the main, sport organizations are apolitical and should remain so
- that sexual matters in sport are taboo.

Such beliefs have, collectively, inhibited organizational responses to the issue of sexual exploitation in sport at all levels from the International Olympic Committee down to local voluntary sports clubs.

State agencies, especially the police, have always been reluctant to intervene in private (family) spaces (Hanmer *et al.*, 1989) with the result that violence to women has been overlooked but violence to men has drawn attention, prompted intervention and attracted state funds. Sport, however, includes both private *and* public spaces and is a *de facto* family for many athletes (Brackenridge, 2000). Public violence on the field of play is often legitimated through the ideology of 'boys will be boys' (Brackenridge, 2001) whereas sexual violence in sport takes place within the private domain of the locker room and other spaces away from public gaze (Kirby and Greaves, 1996). Just as with marital rape, there has been a traditionally high tolerance of sexually exploitative practices, such as locker room sex talk (Curry, 1991 and 1998) and demeaning treatment of women sports journalists (Kane and Disch, 1993), women fans and 'groupies' (Robinson, 1998). Suppression of individual autonomy underpins poor practice in elite coaching whereby the coach is afforded expert power over the

athlete and controls his or her entire lifestyle (Donnelly, 1997 and 1999; Tomlinson and Yorganci, 1997).

Only since the start of the moral panic over child sexual exploitation in sport, and with the help of pro-feminist accounts by men in sport, have such practices been exposed and public tolerance decreased. When the social problem of sexual exploitation in sport became associated with 'paedophile' abuse and child protection, government officials in the UK, Canada and Australia began to take notice. (Interestingly, however, that this process has not yet happened in many other so-called advanced countries, even those traditionally associated with good records on human rights and gender equity, such as Norway.)

The *laissez faire* approach of the state in the UK the early- and mid-1990s meant that accountability for addressing sexual exploitation was left to the voluntary sport organizations themselves. Child protection initiatives proliferated rapidly among front line sport delivery groups, such as national governing bodies (NGBs) and local government sports units. There was a policy vacuum, however, at the level of the state. In the UK this was partly because the minister with responsibility for sport defined sexual exploitation as a matter of law and order and not a 'sport problem' (Brackenridge, 2001).

After years of upward pressure on government sport authorities by those with little power, including community sports workers, parents and club officials, a National Child Protection in Sport Task Force was convened by Sport England (the government's sport agency) in 1999. This represented a major breakthrough



in the strategic efforts to deal with sexual and other forms of exploitation in sport. It led directly to the establishment, in January 2001, of a Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU; <http://www.thecpsu.org.uk>), jointly funded by Sport England and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) – the UK's largest children's charity. The United Kingdom was the first country to establish a dedicated centre for the protection of children in sport. As far as we are aware, this is a unique development in world sport and one that should provide a model for other countries to follow in the future.

### **The scope of the problem**

As suggested already, sport has frequently been used as a vehicle for both the development of moral and civic virtues and also as a means of building self-esteem. But without research data it is impossible to verify arguments about the relative immunity of sport from the problems of sexual harassment and abuse, or arguments about the value of engaging in sport as a protection against sexual harassment and abuse more generally.

Research on sexual harassment in sport grew out of earlier studies in the *public* settings such as education or the workplace (Gutek, 1985; Stockdale, 1996; Hollway, 1996), where it was problematized as an issue of employment conditions, gender relations (Kanter, 1985) and 'organisation sexuality' (Hearn *et al.*, 1989). The literature on sexual harassment in sport has thus tended to take a more organizational approach (Lenskyj, 1992b; Volkwein *et al.*, 1997) than research on sexual abuse in sport. The latter has drawn more extensively from studies of abuse in *private*, family locations (Brackenridge, 2000) and has

therefore also incorporated some of the literature from clinical and social work perspectives (Brackenridge, 1997b, 2001; Leahy *et al.*, 2002).

The majority of research on sex abuse outside sport has been conducted on *intra-familial* abuse, including physical, sexual, emotional and neglect, since this is the site of highest incidence (Fisher in Morrison *et al.*, 1994). Gallagher (1999 and 2000) reports that institutional sexual abuse is now a major focus of concern for policy makers, practitioners and the public but it is clear from the literature that comparatively little attention has been paid to this arena.

Fortunately, David Wolfe (in review) from the University of Western Ontario, together with a group of his colleagues from the London Family Court Clinic in Ontario, has recently attempted to review all the published work on institutional sex abuse in order to identify any evidence of similarities and differences in these various settings.

Relatively little research has been conducted on *extra-familial* abuse and even less on sexual and other types of abuse in the voluntary or not-for-profit sector, including amateur sport. One reason for pursuing more research on extra-familial abuse is to ascertain whether there are distinctive situational factors associated with abuse, and whether institutional abuse resembles or differs from abuse in the family context. Learning more about contextual and situational factors will be important for treatment regimes too, since many of these currently emphasize individual and pathological parameters. In England, the NSPCC itself focused mainly on intra-familial abuse until very recently but now, through its *Full*

*Stop Campaign*, has extended its programs to embrace abuse and abuse prevention in institutional locations.

Because of its explicitly embodied nature, sport probably represents one of the most important sites for working through the struggle of the sexual in late modernity and for reaching better understandings about how sexual moralities are constructed. To that extent, research into sexual abuse in sport may also contribute to wider research and policy debates about sex offending and child protection.

The initial focus of research into sexual exploitation in UK sport was on the development of professional codes of ethics and conduct in the organizations that have some jurisdiction over sports coaches (Brackenridge, 1986, 1987 and 1991). Within the past ten years a number of research studies have been conducted that have begun to map the extent and nature of sexual harassment and abuse in different sports and at different levels of performance (Kirby and Greaves, 1996; Brackenridge, 1997b; Cense, 1997; Volkwein *et al.*, 1997; Toftegaard, 1998 and 2001; Fasting, Brackenridge and Sundgot Borgen, 2000). Several theoretical advances have been made in examining the question of whether sport is a distinctive location for these problems (Brackenridge, 1997a and b; Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997; Brackenridge, 2001). These include: risk factors; conceptual models to try to explain the link between harassment, abuse and peaking (optimum age) in sport; models of abuse cycles; and a contingency model that incorporates athlete, sport and context factors (Brackenridge, 2001).

Given the relatively recent history of research in this area, it is not surprising that there is a marked variety of approaches to the subject, both theoretical and methodological. Theoretical perspectives adopted include: feminist and pro-feminist, psychological, constructivist, sociological, medical/health and philosophical/ethical. Variation in methods and measures includes the use of quantitative surveys, tests and scales, qualitative interviews, documentary content analysis, biography and narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. Amongst all this variety there is some common ground, however. This common ground lies in feminist politics and advocacy. In other words, all the researchers engaged in this subject up to now share a common commitment to the transformation of sport through praxis, in other words a commitment to connect research directly to sporting organizations and agencies. We lack connections, however, to those involved in mainstream therapeutic and treatment professions which is one reason why it is so important for me to share with you at this conference.

### **The hidden epidemic**

It is difficult to estimate just how accurate or distorted this view of sports is within your own country, for we have no prevalence studies of sexual abuse in sports in the US. What we do have, however, are a few prevalence studies from other industrialized nations that might offer the US some benchmarks. Data from three countries - Canada (Kirby and Greaves 1996; Kirby, Greaves and Hankivsky 2000), Norway (Fasting, Brackenridge and Sundgot-Borgen 2000) and Australia (Leahy, Pretty and Tenenbaum 2002) - are available, all of which

indicate that sexual exploitation is a serious issue for sport. I will present some of the headline findings from the survey phases of these three studies. (All three also included interview phases).

Of the 266 respondents to the Canadian survey of high performance and recently-retired Olympic athletes, 21.8 per cent (n = 58) (Kirby and Greaves, 1996) replied that they had had sexual intercourse with persons in positions of authority in sport. Experience of *forced* sexual intercourse, or rape, by such persons was reported by 8.6 per cent (n = 23). These persons included team doctors, managers and physiotherapists, not just coaches. Locations for abuse and assaults were, in order of frequency, on a team trip, at a regular training session, in a private location, and in a vehicle or hotel.

In Norway, a survey of the top 660 female athletes, aged 15 to 39, representing 56 sport disciplines, were asked about experiences of sexual harassment and abuse, using a threshold rather than a severity measure (Fasting *et al.*, 2000). An age matched control group from the general population was also surveyed. More than half of the participants had experienced one or more forms of sexual harassment. More of the athletes (15 per cent, n = 80) had experienced sexual harassment from authority figures in sport than controls had done from work supervisors or teachers (9 per cent, n = 46). This indicates that authority figures in sport may exhibit behavior towards athletes that is not tolerated or accepted in workplaces or educational institutions. The older the Norwegian athletes were, the more they reported being sexually harassed by a sport authority figure.

In a cross-sectional, retrospective survey of over 2,000 male and female, elite and club level athletes in Australia, (Leahy *et al.*, 2002) 26.8 per cent (n = 99) reported having experienced sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Of these, almost half of the elite group and over a quarter of the club group indicated that this had occurred in sport. Females from both elite and club groups reported higher prevalence rates than males, with elite females reporting the highest rates of all. This study thus supports the earlier research that pointed to increased risks as performance level rises.

Qualitative research with survivors of abuse in sport reinforces the situational risk data from the prevalence studies (Brackenridge 1997; Cense and Brackenridge 2001; Fasting, Brackenridge and Walseth 2002). The milieu of elite sport does appear to pose particular risks for women athletes. Far fewer data about male athletes are available but there are fairly extensive journalistic and anecdotal accounts of hazing/initiation rituals in some male sports that point to increased risk, both for novice males and for female fans (or 'groupies'). This is usually associated with the consumption of large quantities of alcohol (Curry 1991; Robinson 1998; Kirby and Wintrup, 2002).

Sexual violence in sport is a topic that has received relatively little attention from the world's presses until very recently yet which deserves much closer scrutiny. This is not because sport, in itself, is any more important than other social spheres but because it lies at the heart of masculine identity and because it is frequently used as a medium for socialisation into homosocial subcultures that normalise sexual degradation and misogyny. Not surprisingly,

therefore, one of the most valuable contributions to our understanding of sexual exploitation in sport has come from feminist and pro-feminist perspectives on group culture. In particular, sport sociologists (Theberge 1987; Lenskyj, 1992a and b; Messner, 1992; Messner and Sabo, 1990; Pronger, 1990; Crosset, 1986; Curry, 1991 and 1998; Benedict, 1997 and 1998) have researched the ways in which sport teams and groups develop and maintain their sub-worlds through over-conformity to particular group norms, sexual politics and belief systems, often with homoerotic content. The dynamics of these sub-worlds facilitate sexual harassment and, in extreme cases, can lead to sexual violence.

Canadian Sandra Kirby was one of the pioneers in sport research into sexual exploitation, conducting the first major survey on the issue, reported above (Kirby and Greaves, 1996; Kirby, Greaves and Hankivsky, 2000). She has recently (Kirby and Wintrup, 2002) explored how social models of 'hazing' and initiation practices in the military can inform an analysis of similar practices in sport teams . Hazing is of particular interest in the North American context since it has also been closely associated with campus fraternity and sorority initiations. College athletes are overrepresented in police records for rape and sexual assaults (Pike Masteralexis, 1995; Benedict and Klein, 1997) and professional sports are seen by Benedict (19997, 1998) as a breeding ground for the cultural attitudes that foster acquaintance rape by athletes.

Benedict (1998) describes 'The Subculture' of professional sport as a rape-supportive culture that is familiar to us through the much earlier work of researchers like Koss and Gaines (Koss, 1988; Koss and Gaines 1993). He

suggests that "... sexual indulgence has become a trademark of modern-day popular athletes". The trouble with this claim is that, whilst may have face validity, it is not well supported by empirical research and rests mainly on the analysis of three case studies – one from professional basketball, one in American football and finally the 'celebrated' case of boxer Mike Tyson.

Benedict's formula for describing each of these cases studies includes four elements:

1. 'The Profile', which details High School, College and Professional sports contexts;
2. 'The Access', describing the availability of female victims in the groupie culture of pro sports;
3. 'The Incident', which describes the details of the assault(s); and finally
4. 'The Court's Response', which examines jurisdiction that, he argues, takes a soft line against these offenders because of the public's love affair with sports.

Benedict's main thesis is that talented High School athletes become cultural icons and, because of this, are exempted from social accountability and responsibility. When they move into the ranks of professional sport they encounter a 'groupie culture' which fosters images of women as sexually compliant and of themselves as sexually superior. This culture encourages and furnishes opportunities for players with proclivities to abuse to be pursued by adoring young female groupies (on road trips, in hotels, at stadia and at post-match parties). Professional athletes are thus constructed as sexually rapacious with low/no respect for women. They experience pressure from their peers to



engage in sexual violence, often in group settings, and their team owners are under pressure to collude in silence for fear of losing revenue if their star players are removed from the team. Professional athletes can afford the best legal counsel and the sexual integrity of their victims is destroyed by virtue of their groupie status, hence the athletes are likely to escape a custodial sentence. In sum, then, the celebrity of athleticism, combined with pressure to abuse, combined with pressure to collude, results in effective athlete exemption from both moral and legal sanction.

On the face of it, this is a persuasive argument but its limitations are not made very clear. For one thing the vast majority of athletes never reach the professional ranks. Benedict leaves the impression that professional sports more generally suffer from the distorted empathy exhibited by the athletes in the book's three case studies. Since there are, as yet, no prevalence studies of sexual assaults in *professional* sport it is simply not possible to support this assertion. In addition, many professional athletes find their lifestyles circumscribed by close regulation and the sheer demands of training and competition. The 'groupie' phenomenon, by Benedict's own admission, applies only to a small number of high profile professional media-based sports. Laura Robinson's (1998) account of sexual abuse in ice hockey in Canada provides a vivid and much more analytic qualitative study of the problem. She gives numerous case studies of sexual violations within ice hockey, both by male players on female groupies of 'puck bunnies' as they are called, and by male coaches on unsuspecting young male players.

Because we have no systematic quantitative data on sexual assault by professional athletes we cannot, yet, assess the scale of this problem. Even so, the symbolic impact of sexual assaults by professional athletes should not be underestimated for such athletes are often held in high regard by adults and children alike and are undoubtedly 'role models' for others with athletic aspirations. The special status of the professional athlete has also come under scrutiny in my own country where two Leeds United soccer players were charged last year with perpetrating a racist attack on an Asian man. Defence counsel appealed to the jury at one point in the trial that one of the men should be permitted to go free in order to pursue his "dream of playing for England", effectively arguing that his athletic status should give him ethical exemption.

### **The contribution of sport to diagnosis and treatment**

I have argued elsewhere (Brackenridge, 2002) that sex offender treatment practitioners pay far too little attention to situational and contextual factors in their analysis of offending practices and, therefore, in their subsequent interventions. I won't rehearse all my arguments here but summarise them as being linked to the privileging of pathological diagnoses over social and situational ones, which is, in turn, linked to the hierarchy of scientific knowledge that affords high status to traditional positivistic science and low status to social science. Let me come clean about my biases, however. I am involved in neither diagnosis nor treatment so have little defence against those of you who disagree. I am concerned mainly with understanding sex offending in order to implement prevention programmes in sport and leisure settings. As such, I see it as imperative that we move beyond

what I regard as an obsession with the determinism of seeking only pathological causes.

Sports administrators, leisure centre managers, park rangers, community sports workers, physical education teachers – or the many other professionals dealing with sport and physical recreation - cannot intervene in the intrapersonal and pathological factors that cause someone to become sexually aroused to children or to unwilling adults. They can, however, influence risk analysis and prevention measures that might increase the efficacy of protection. To date, very little evidence-based guidance is available to these professional groups with which they can make decisions about risk management strategies and practices.

The question, then, is ‘Given what is already known about static and dynamic risk factors, what can we learn by attending more closely to situational variables or contexts within which sex offending in sport occurs?’ I think that there might be specificities of context in some sex offending repertoires and that investigating these contexts might just yield knowledge that will be of use in treatment work more generally. If I am right that situational factors have a greater role to play than is currently reflected in research then maybe - just maybe - sex offending in sport *is* a whole new ball game. In other words, there might be situational specifics that we have not yet uncovered. I think sport shares some of the situational risk factors or markers with other institutional abuse settings. I also think it may present some particular features that are conducive to sexual exploitation.

**[Insert Table 1 about here]**

I divide organisational risk factors into two types – normative, or those concerned with culture – and constitutive, or those concerned with structure (Table 1). These components have been drawn from inductive qualitative research with athletes sexually abused within the context of sports (Brackenridge, 1997). I have also developed similar lists associated with the athlete (victim) and the coach (perpetrator), some of which, again, are specific to sport. Of particular interest to me, for example, is the age at which athletes in different sports peak, or reach the optimum performance level. It is obvious that peak age varies enormously between different sporting disciplines, from the low teens to the late twenties or even older. Early peaking places strain not just on the physical but also on the social skills of the young person, for they may be expected to act like an adult – managing travel, money, hotel arrangements and competitive stress – while still a child. Oddly, elite sport often also treats adults like children, circumscribing autonomy by dictating weight, diet, relationship and other regimes. These dynamics falls outside the range of those normally associated with sex offender diagnoses yet are clearly associated with aspects of vulnerability and authoritarianism that are familiar to all of you in your everyday work on sex offending.

### **Prevention Interventions in the UK**

I am fairly confident in asserting the UK leads the world in its abuse prevention and child protection work in sport. I cannot argue for the efficacy of this program, however, since monitoring and evaluation data are so scarce and since we have very little in the way of baseline data against which to measure

success or failure. Even so, I think you might be interested to hear about a few of the schemes that have been introduced in sport and leisure settings recent years that are beginning to draw the attention of the treatment community.

I have already mentioned the CPSU. It is headed by a former probation officer who specialises in sex offender treatment. Some of its most notable achievements during its two year life include:

- **National Standards** for child protection in sport that all funded sports must comply with within five years. These standards cover policy development and implementation, equity, education and training and other core areas of prevention;
- **a national database of abuse in sport statistics** (ABISS) that is currently being pilot tested;
- A national **telephone helpline** for sport;
- **Sportscheck**, a comprehensive step-by-step guide to sport organisations on how to protect children with checklists and fact sheets;
- **support and legal advice** to individuals and case advice to child protection officers of sport organisations;

Individual sports have also taken their own initiatives. These include:

- Swimming, which has highly developed **screening and recruitment systems** for paid and volunteer staff;
- Football (Soccer), for whom I am conducting a longitudinal impact study to measure the cultural changes in the game that result from the

implementation of a **child protection strategy** (Brackenridge *et al.*, in review) By this summer more than 50,000 soccer personnel had attended the Association's own child protection workshop.

In addition, some charities, statutory and professional bodies have also developed their own schemes. Examples include:

- **Child Safe** – developed by the police as a training and policy development pack for clubs and now spread throughout Wales and the southwest of England.
- **Leisurewatch** - developed in the north west of England from concerns about sex offending in leisure centers, this scheme trains operational staff to observe, monitor and regulate undesirable behavior as an alternative to banning offenders from public spaces. The scheme organizers are now linking with the *Stop It Now!* initiative that, following its success in the US, is growing rapidly in the south of the country.
- **Fit and Safe** – is another training scheme for leisure centre and public swimming pool staff to alert them to grooming and potential offending scenarios in their facilities. One of the tasks of the CPSU will be to ensure some uniformity of approach and procedure as these kinds of schemes proliferate and to 'kitemark' the quality of education and training.

## **Summary and conclusions**

Sport has long been adopted by politicians, educators and parents as a suitable vehicle for the development of healthy lifestyles, self-discipline, citizenship and personal morality. It has held a special place in the affections of western industrial societies for its supposed virtues and its potential as a tool of economic and social development. The special status of sport has also protected it from critical scrutiny and meant that social inequalities and other problems, such as sexual harassment and abuse, have all-too-often been ignored or tacitly condoned.

The social problem of sexual exploitation in sport has been constructed differently, at different times, by different stakeholders, with different agendas. It was brought to prominence by media coverage of a number of high profile scandals involving Olympic and other elite level coaches. Since this exposure, there has been widespread panic amongst sport professionals in several countries, and among parents of young athletes, about the need to keep sexually exploitative coaches 'out of sport' (Malkin, 1999; Malkin, Johnston and Brackenridge, 2000). Perpetrators of sexual abuse are depicted as monsters and beasts: othering or scapegoating them in this way is then used to justify overlooking the social conditions which gave rise to their sexual 'deviance' in the first place. Paradoxically, illicit sexual relationships between under-age athletes and authority figures (predominantly heterosexual and perpetrated by male

coaches) were known about and condoned for years before the sexually predatory paedophile became a target for vilification and a cause of moral panic.

Research on institutional sex offending has been much slower to develop than individual, pathological analyses. There is reason to be optimistic that sport research might eventually contribute to wider understanding of institutional abuse. But for that to happen there needs to be a concerted effort by both sport and non-sport researchers to share their work more often and more openly. Those of us researching sexual offending in sport and advocating for prevention have encountered hostility for daring to suggest that sexual transgressions might be a feature of modern sport. But the evidence base is now so overwhelming that sport administrators and public bodies have had to take action.

Whether or not sport is a distinctive setting for sexual abuse has yet to be demonstrated. What is clear right now, however, is that sex offending in sport has been overlooked for too long at the level of policy and prevention work and that more could and should be done to develop prevention programs. In the UK we have made a good start, requiring all state-funded sports to comply with a set of common national standards for child protection over the next five years as a condition of funding (CPSU, 2003). In the USA, with its vast diversity of sporting organizations, it is not yet clear who will take the lead in prevention work. US Volleyball has done some baseline research, the US Women's Sports Foundation has developed a training pack on sexual harassment prevention (1994) and some of the recreational charities like Big Brothers Big Sisters have woken up to the need for child protection. But, in this land obsessed with sports



at every age group, there is no coordinated strategy for sex abuse prevention. It may be time for that to change.

**Table 1 Normative and constitutive risk factors for sexual abuse in sport**

**Normative (organisational) culture:**

- has an autocratic authority system
- involves close personal contact with athletes
- sets up clear power imbalance between athlete and coach
- gives scope for separation of athlete from peers in time and space
- gives scope for development and maintenance of secrecy
- involves mixed sexes and ages sharing room on away trips
- condones sexual relationships between all ages and statuses
- sexualises athletes' idiocultural traditions (songs, jokes, nick names, hazing rituals, pranks)
- provokes intense peer group competition/jealousy
- supports collective silence on matters of sexuality

**Constitutive (organisational) structure:**

- involves an hierarchical status system
- gives rewards based on performance
- links rewards to compliance with the authority system
- has rules and procedures which omit/exclude consultation
- has no formal procedures for screening, hiring and monitoring staff
- involves intense training regimes to acquire necessary technical skill
- makes technical/task demands that legitimate touch
- subsumes individuality within competitive structure (zero-sum/only one winner)