

During the recent international cricket series between Australia and India we were alarmed by the sight of our Australian cricket players prominently badged with the logo of the fast food giant KFC.

Australia is experiencing an epidemic of overweight and obesity, a problem which is especially affecting children, adolescents and young adults¹. This epidemic is worsening as a direct result of unhealthy eating habits and low levels of physical activity. Obesity is associated with chronic and costly diseases which lead to premature death and ill health. These include diabetes, cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, sleep apnoea, certain cancers, mental illness and osteoarthritis which start to appear in adolescence¹.

Cricket in Australia enjoys considerable popularity and has a strong national following. Our cricketers are national sporting heroes who enjoy widespread support and respect throughout the community, particularly younger members of the community who aspire to emulate them.

Against this background we are increasingly concerned and disappointed that Cricket Australia has a sponsorship agreement with, and consequently promotes, KFC going as far as publicly declaring the company the “*Official Fast Food Restaurant of Cricket Australia*”². This advertising uses the standing of cricket and its players to endorse and promote unhealthy eating habits, one of the major root causes of obesity in Australia.

KFC products have caloric and fat contents which are well above that recommended for a healthy and nutritionally balanced diet². It is ironic that Cricket Australia, while having done so much for the sport, regrettably encourages the promotion of unhealthy, high fat, high calorie KFC products which more than negate any benefit of the increased physical activity associated with playing cricket.

With the explosion of obesity related illness, we need champions to encourage health promoting behaviours, particularly healthy eating and increased physical activity. The enthusiastic encouragement of unhealthy and undesirable eating habits should have no place in sporting sponsorship. Not so long ago similar sentiments were being expressed about tobacco sponsorship of sport, which fortunately has been eradicated.

Cricket Australia should consider its responsibilities to Australia’s children and youth and review its sponsorship by KFC. Not only would this benefit the health of the community but it would also demonstrate leadership and social responsibility by Cricket Australia and Australia’s elite cricketers.

References

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