**Pino Migliorino on Pillar 7 ‘Opportunities’**

I’ve got this opportunity to speak about sport and diversity, and from my perspective, it’s the aspect of diversity which is people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, migrants, refugees, and people who have been here for many generations. And it’s a really big topic. It’s a big topic because it’s part of the fabric of our society and our lives. There are so many ways but I thought I’d start by talking a little bit about my own background and coming to Australia as a child, and the roll that, say, sport had for me, and then to some extent talking about now what I think some of the challenges are for sport, generally with this growing diversity. So in terms of that background, I came to Australia in the mid-60s as a child and lived in an inner city area of Sydney, which was absolutely rugby league mad. All of my family were interested in rugby league, following the St George Rugby League team, and in fact, many of my uncles, and I had eight of them, were playing in the various ranks. One of them finally got to first grade in 1977. But for me it was interesting, too, because it was just a natural thing to do, and what I found was, through sport, the nature of who I participated with, who I socialized with was really defined around that. So my whole school experience was playing Ivy League, later on playing soccer, playing in basketball team, being the shot putter for the school athletics team. And I can’t speak enough about It, and I’ve always believed that it’s been part and parcel of why I’m comfortable in my own diversity and the diversity of the Australian population. So now, if you like, we’ve had many debates around diversity, around multiculturalism, around who fits where, and increasingly, especially over the last few years, there’s been a focus on sports to say, does it actually have a role in terms of setting opportunities into the community which then have other results, not just good sport, because we always want good sport and at a elite level, but more than that. Do we actually create sport as something which is going to bind us as a community? And I think that’s a really interesting area because different sports have attracted different people. The reality is different sports, like cricket sometimes gets a fairly poor run in this area, saying it’s all about white picket fences and the traditional society. The reality is, when Australia plays, the people in the audience are from a vastly diverse background. They are there as spectators. The big question is how many of them are actually there as players? There are a couple of big questions around sport. The first is what is the nature of sport and its relationship to audiences or indeed supporters? I think with today’s day and age, with adversity, unless sport engages with diversity, they’re basically setting themselves up to fail.

At the moment we’ve got a number of sporting organisations, national sporting organisations, really striving for improve in this area – wanting to create relationships and be seen to champion diversity – they are part and parcel of the federal governments anti-racism strategy – using the slogan Racism: It Stops with Me, which is being used by many of our leading sportspeople, and that’s fantastic so we’ve got really good examples. We have the AFL which has the Indigenous round and the multi-cultural round. Netball Australia has developed its own approach to diversity looking at its own rules and processes looking at what is it about the sport that needs to be opened up so that it attracts more people. SO the first argument is that unless w=you engage with ethnic communities you are not going to get people in the seats and in the stands to create a successful sporting activity and a sporting culture.

So that’s got to be a first one and many of our sporting organisations are doing that. The other challenge is that we just don’t want ethnic communities to be there as audiences, we want them to play, we want them to participate, we want them to be articulate in the sport. We want them to enjoy the sports and we want them to encourage their kids to play the sports. Its at that point that I think it gets a little more difficult and to some extent more technical. Because it takes sporting organisations to understand who it is they are currently attracting – what is it about what they are doing and how they are doing it which allows certain groups to feel comfortable or not comfortable. Are they able to be flexible enough to cater for parents who might be working at weekends and my not have the time to be there – all these things are stresses around interactions between sporting organisations and families in terms of where they are.

So, for me there are a number of challenges for sports. And they are, they need to understand what is the nature of the population and from that who are the people that are playing sport. What is the connection between what is possible and what is current. Secondly they do have to look at themselves in terms of what are their processes. Are there processes and rules and regulations about the way they meet and the way they train and do things – are they set up within one cultural framework – and if that is the case is that cultural framework acting to exclude people and maybe reconsidering that. I think the reality is that if you go our to the netball fields across the nation at the moment there is absolutely no capacity to very the dress code to allow people from different religious backgrounds to play. That to me is a nonsense in a modern multi-cultural society – we need a level of flexibility.

On top of then looking at the processes I think its really important to for sports organisations to outreach into communities. Work with the kids. In fact through One Netball I’ve participated in a game where the Sydney Swifts were playing there were about 40-50 kids from a number of programs which had been developed who had never been to a netball game and who had never experienced netball but who were being nurtured to experience netball and enjoy the game. Their palpable excitement, their sense of seeing those players on the court and wondering if one day that could be them was to be treasured. It really was a sense of a really positive approach. So in that case Netball Australia was reaching out to the community, going to kids who aren’t part of the netball family and saying ‘we want you in’ and I think that will certainly give dividends to them.

I think the to other aspect too is marketing to those communities. The reality is that we don’t feel comfortable marketing into ethnic communities. But the reality is that they will be very much part and parcel of our audiences. Again, just as an example, Sydney FC is a fantastic club, Del Piero coming there has absolutely blown it apart in terms of support form the Italian community. But is also need to be said that football is played in the Asian countries yet very few of our clubs target the Asian communities, Why aren’t we targeted the half a million Chinese speakers in NSW to be members of Sydney FC. Why aren’t we engaging with the Korean community? These are the big questions that sports organisations need to ask themselves. And when you have done that I think you have to ask yourself the fundamental question – why. Why do we even need to bother? And that is where I would go back to my own childhood in St Peters – we need to bother because what we do through sport is create connections, shared experiences and a sense of community. And sport has an absolute roles to play in that – a real fundamental role to play in building those links in our society that will create one harmonious society. So, the sport is the thing, diversity is the reality, and the challenge is bringing those together for the benefit of Australia.