

Racism in Football in Aotearoa

RESEARCH REPORT

MANUKAU UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

2022

He aha te mea nui
o tēnei ao?
He Tāngata,
He Tāngata,
He Tāngata katoa!



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We thank and acknowledge the individuals who participated in this research who have trusted us with their precious gifts of knowledge, experience and wisdom.

“Racism is entrenched in New Zealand Sport”, says Tama Fasavalu, a former football player¹.

Sport is often held up in popular discourse as an increasingly post-racial, meritocratic and egalitarian space where ‘race’ no longer matters and where racial inequalities are a thing of the past². As a colonised country the organisation and practice of sport in Aotearoa is informed by a series of historically inscribed and deeply racialised power relations³. Given this, it may come as no surprise that people of New Zealand European descent are more likely to be in leadership roles in New Zealand sport⁴. This inequity is consistent with New Zealand being colonised by English settlers starting in the 19th century and Pākehā New Zealanders doing better than Māori today across nearly all measures of wellbeing⁵.

Ibram X Kendri defines racism as ‘...a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas...that argue that the inferiorities & superiorities of racial groups explain racial inequities in society.’⁶ In sport, these racist dynamics

impact on and shape the opportunities, experiences and outcomes of minority groups participating across the different tiers of sport as players, coaches, spectators and fans. Indeed, several football players who participated in this project speak about how racism has negatively impacted their experience and enjoyment of the sport.

This report on racism in football in Aotearoa has been prepared by the Manukau United Football Club to support the wider UNESCO “Tackling Racism in Sport” project, which is a programme for resources and communication tools in order to reduce racism and promote meaningful and sustainable social cohesion within a sporting context. It draws on qualitative data from 18 self-selected participants (72% male, 33% NZ Māori, 28% Fijian Indian, 22% Asian, 11% Pacific, 6% Persian; age groups 5-15 16%, 25-35 16%, 35-45 27% 55-66 16%) to understand what racism in football looks and feels like. Their experiences have generated a series of emerging insights and opportunities that will be used as a basis to design initiatives during stakeholder workshops with communities in Auckland.

¹ [Racism rife in NZ sport says banned footballer | Stuff.co.nz](https://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/football/123456789/racism-rife-in-nz-sport-says-banned-footballer)

² Steven Bradbury, Jim Lusted and Jacco van Sterkenburg (Eds) (2020) Race, Ethnicity and Racism in Sports Coaching,

³ Ibid.

⁴ www.sportnz.org.nz/resources/diversity-and-inclusion-survey

⁵ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/wellbeing-statistics-2021>

⁶ Kendi, Ibram X. (2019) How to Be an Antiracist, 2019. New York, NY: One World, 2019 (p.20)





Introducing Hikurangi

Hikurangi is a club administrator. He is also involved in junior football through his two children. This is his story.

“ I didn't know much about football when I first got this job. I'm more of a rugby union player. But when I first came and watched football, I was impressed by the freshness of it and how different it was to union. Now it's really important to me and I spend up to 20 hours a week at the club.

I like the cultural nature of our club. Everyone comes together and appreciates each others' differences and where they come from. There is this sense of whānau here and it's really enjoyable. We call ourselves the United Nations because we are full of different cultures and we're all proud of it and look after each other.

But not all clubs are like ours and I was amazed when I came from rugby to football just how racist football was. There are always comments when our teams play, like little digs about what part of Auckland we're from. Sometimes our teams have been called racist and horrible names. I've heard the n-word used regularly, it's used as a weapon against us, especially if we're winning. There's also a little bit of prejudice there with the kids. Not as much as the men, the men are different. That's a real, real problem I think. It really gets to our players. One of our players lashed out once and was given a red card and we had to play a man down for the rest of the game.

Even though I always talk to the boys and tell them to let the captain know if they are called racist names they tend to just take it on the chin and carry on playing because they don't want to cause a problem. A few times we've let the referee know what's going on but they just say they didn't hear a thing so the players get away with it.

One of the hardest things for us is that it's not just players. It's spectators as well, calling us monkeys, saying things like 'who do they think they are.' This happens from premier level all the way down through the league. Sometimes during kids' games the parents make racist comments. You can see this gets pushed down to the boys, who then say racist comments as well - maybe less on the field, and more like when they are walking away back to the car park.

To be honest, it feels like football is perceived as more of an English game, more of a Pākehā sport than rugby, and the racism is definitely more pronounced. I think we need a whole lot more education, from the top at NZF, all the way down to the officials that run the game on a Saturday. We need zero tolerance, maybe penalties like fines or losing points because this stuff is horrible, it's just horrible.

”



Emerging insights

Results from surveys and interviews



Football is more than a sporting activity. Belonging to a team is about connection, friendship and bringing different cultures together.

We heard about a "sense of whānau" that comes from participating in a football team with people from different backgrounds and walks of life.

As a global game with a universal set of rules, football is relatively easy and enjoyable to participate in. Participants told us football helped them learn new skills, and whilst winning is always a good feeling, they appreciated the character building that came with losing.

We also heard, however, that whilst players enjoy the camaraderie and connection that comes from playing a team sport, for some teams, competition and the drive to win creates environments that are marred by bias, racism and prejudice. Several players had experienced bias both on and off the field as a result of their gender, ethnicity and body size. These players found that football culture was not inclusive, was unwelcoming and dogged by small mindedness.

15 out of 18 participants (83%) who participated in this research have either experienced or witnessed racism in football, both on and off the field.⁷ For two participants, the experience was more than a decade ago. Thirteen people, however, have witnessed racism towards others or experienced it personally within the last five years.

Racist attacks during football games came from the side lines, players and coaches. They came in the form of belittling slurs or derogatory names designed to provoke and aggravate. Racism was not just the domain of adults; one interviewee was subject to racist taunts from players whilst refereeing a children's game.

Those who experienced or saw blatant racism during football matches said it went unpunished by referees, match officials and competition administrators.

Outside of match play, several interviewees experienced racism during team practice or meetings. They spoke of Black or Brown players being told to "smile so that we can see you" during night practice, teammates singing "brown boys in the ring, shalalala" if people of colour were in the middle whilst playing circle ball or being told by coaches they'd had "too much curry tonight" if they made a mistake during practice. These racist microaggressions were both ongoing and normalised.

Racism was not just confined to the field or the changing sheds. Several interviewees believe that deeply entrenched racist policies are behind the lack of management and coaching opportunities for people of colour and the lack of equitable resourcing of ethnic-specific teams at a national level.



We'd hear things like "f**k off back to the slums of South Auckland where you belong", or people who have settled here from overseas being told to go back home to where they're from.



I was called a black piece of s*** from a player in the opposition team during play.

[I hear] the N word used really regularly



⁷ Of the 3 respondents (17 %) who hadn't experienced or witness racism, one hadn't been playing that long, the other was a young child who responded to the questionnaire (and answers were minimal), and the other commented about noticing subgroups (Pacifica, Asian & Pakeha) not mingling.

The football players in this research informed us that racism - whether it's in the form of small scale microaggressions, overt displays of abuse or institutional prejudice and privilege embedded within decision-making structures, detrimentally impacts their enjoyment of and participation in football. They feel undermined and unwelcomed in a sport they love to play.

We heard from several interviewees that good players and referees have left football as a result of racial abuse. Many people (particularly non-White) feel a sense of being “othered”, voiceless and powerless, leading to reduced involvement and participation at all levels of football. Moreover, racist harms are not restricted to the people who experience them directly. We heard that teammates are often frustrated and upset when racial abuse is directed towards one of their team. There is a significant amount of frustration from interviewees when racism goes unpunished as complaints to referees or match officials are dismissed because they say they didn't hear it.

One player that told us that in their experience, racist harm is "felt by an entire community and the young people and whānau of that community are harmed as well." The harm is further exacerbated when nothing is done about it by the people and policies that are in place to protect people.



It's horrible. [Racial abuse] doesn't just last the 90 min on the field. They take it away and it sits with them for weeks, months, years.

Why would people want to referee and get racial abuse? We are losing people. You pay money to play the game you don't deserve to be racially abused...!



Racist behaviour on the field – where players are driven to win by any means possible, is a manifestation of a more complex issue.

Interviewees told us that racism in football in Aotearoa is rooted in colonial ideologies which uphold and reproduce racial inequities within all our systems of power. They see this play out as:

- a lack of Black or Brown bodies around decision-making tables,
- White referees and match officials who cannot or will not hear racial abuse on the field,
- leadership at club, federation and national levels that does not reflect the ethnic make up of those involved at the player level.

Many of those we spoke to believe institutional racism also results in resourcing inequities. For example, Māori Football Aotearoa – a nationwide community and player development organisation - received just \$20,000 of a grant pool worth more than \$1.8m in 2022, whilst the six other regional recipients received between 60,000 – 800,000 each.⁸



Racism exists in football when people think they're better than others by birth right and if others are not playing the way they want.

⁸ <https://www.footballfoundation.org.nz/grants>.



Opportunities for change



Opportunity 1

*How might we...***Tackle racism in football at a policy level**

As acknowledged in Appendix One of this report, New Zealand Football (NZF) is currently working on creating a more inclusive footballing culture. As part of this work, interviewees would like to see the following changes at a policy level:

- A commitment to Te Tiriti by NZF, which includes a more equitable funding model for Māori Football Aotearoa and meaningful participation of Māori at a leadership level;
- More ethnic diversity in the leadership of NZF;
- An end to discrimination against non-citizens of New Zealand;⁹
- A commitment to examining how NZF and its people and policies can become anti-racist;
- An equity lens to be placed over policies and player development, which recognises that different players with different levels of social and economic advantage require different approaches and resources; and
- Ethnicity data for registered members of NZF to be made publicly available and reported on as an equity indicator.

Support that interviewees would like to see includes:

- Funding and leadership support for club-level initiatives to celebrate diversity;
- Clubs, federations and NZF to ringfence resources and commit to anti-racism education and training



"Diversity and Inclusion" has been narrowed (by Pākehā in power) to essentially mean "more inclusion of Pākehā women."

We need more resources into facilitating more ethnically diverse referees and coaches.



Changing the name from the 'All Whites' is a good start. That's a subliminal message that football is a white sport.

⁹ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/voices/audio/2018832789/it-s-ironic-not-inclusive-footballers-on-the-foreign-player-regulation>

Opportunity 2

*How might we...***Initiate the design and delivery of a no tolerance for racism policy at club level that covers player, referee, coach and spectator behaviour alongside a complaints process.**

This opportunity is informed by the insight that most participants felt one of the primary ways to tackle racism in football is to institute a 'no tolerance for racism' policy for players, referees, coaches and spectators at all levels, from children's sport through to professional levels. Additionally, all players should be informed on what to do if they are subject to racism, and the penalties for racial abuse on and off the field should be communicated widely.

A complaints process and anti-racist training should support a no tolerance policy.

To speed up the process, it may be worth designing and initiating such a policy at club level. Note that New Zealand Football already has a lengthy [code of conduct](#)

Design considerations

- How might we design a simple streamlined policy and complaints process that can be accessed by all members of society.
- The participants in the research also acknowledged that sexism and homophobia were also issues alongside racism. In what way might these be addressed through a no tolerance policy?
- When thinking about anti racist training, consider: What does it mean to be an anti racist? What helpful constructs do you need at the fore front of your thinking in order to navigate a racist space e.g. how does a referee respond as an anti racist during a football match when faced with racist behaviour from players and spectators?



Opportunity 3

*How might we...***Unleash the significant cultural capital already available in many football clubs to celebrate cultural differences at club, federation and regional levels.**

The research also provided insights into the diversity of teams in South Auckland. The teams were comprised of players from several different cultures and ethnicities, particularly at the junior levels. The participants informed us that the diversity of players made them more stronger and united.

We heard that some of these teams refer to themselves as the “United Nations” and see their difference as a strength and a reason to celebrate.



There might be a culture night, just basic things they can actually change within their club.

Design considerations

- How might we build on existing work around celebrating diversity in football (e.g. Christchurch)
- How might we ensure that any labour involved in celebrating cultural differences doesn't reinforce existing stereotypes (i.e. women do the cooking, Māori and Pacific peoples do a cultural performance and do the set up and clean up, Pākehā are on the organising committee and attend the event).

Opportunity 4

*How might we...***Raise awareness of the prevalence of racism in football, and the impacts of racism on footballers and their families, whānau and communities**

Those we spoke to suggested:

- At an individual level: speaking up, 1:1 conversations
- At a team level: create awareness among players about their rights, celebrate team diversity and embrace the contribution each player brings to the team
- At a wider level: initiate and/or join existing racism in sports campaigns
- Invite sports stars including footballers to champion anti-racism in sport

Alongside raised awareness, strategies should also be provided for players of colour on how to manage conflict on the field, particularly when provoked.

Lastly, there was support for an Aotearoa version of The Kick It Out¹⁰ resource, which supports organisations, clubs, communities to stamp out racism and actively promote social cohesion / justice in a football context.

Design considerations

- What might we learn from other sports and/or countries who have tackled racism in football?
- What would it take to establish a “Kick it Out” campaign in Aotearoa? What would this entail?

¹⁰ <https://www.kickitout.org/>



Opportunity 5

*How might we...***Normalise cultural inclusion and representation in all facets of the game**

Some of the participants shared that they felt unwelcomed and excluded when they play football. Whilst overt racism is a major contributor to this, it was noted by interviewees that there is very little positive cultural representation with language used, uniforms, club rooms and other facilities eg changing rooms.



In our club rooms when we welcome people, saying "Kia ora e te whānau", I notice [some of the visitors] look at each other and pull faces.

Design considerations

- What might cultural inclusion in football look like in terms of:
 - Language, both spoken and signage
 - Uniforms eg considering religious or cultural needs of players
 - Graphic representation in logos for example
 - Inter- and intra-team communications
 - Clubrooms and other physical facilities
 - Food in the tuck shop



Summary



SUMMARY

This report can serve as a catalyst for change by calling to action people at all levels – from the community, to federation and national bodies.

This piece of work has brought to life the varied realities of New Zealanders across ages, ethnicities and gender as they talked of experiences of racism in their relative roles in football – players (community and top level/representatives), administrators, fans, referees, parents and grandparents of young players, and physiotherapists.

The incidents of ongoing racism spoken of indicates a critical need to address this phenomenon at a deep level in order to achieve meaningful change for all – something that can only benefit the code, our relationships and society as a whole.

This report will serve as a catalyst to activating responses at all levels –national, regional and local; including policy, protocols, and practices to begin much needed development and enacting of anti-racist, multicultural communities.



Appendix One

Media and Literature Scan



In Aotearoa conversations around racism in sport are ongoing, however, more work still needs to be done.

According to Sport New Zealand “every person in play, active recreation and sport, in every role, has the right to participate in an environment that is fun, safe and healthy, and to be treated with respect, dignity and fairness”¹¹. In 2020, Sport New Zealand conducted a Diversity and Inclusion Survey across various sporting bodies (clubs, regional) and found that 14% of respondents had experienced or witnessed discrimination, harassment or bullying in their role or workplace in the last 12 months (of all types, including racism)¹². This is higher than the 10% reported by Stats NZ in its Survey of Working Life in 2019¹³. No one sporting code was reported as having more discrimination, harassment or bullying than another.

Our research suggests despite the lack of surveys and/or limited reporting of racist incidents, New Zealand media continues to address some of these issues. A high-profile example reported by the media was racial slurs being hurled at England fast bowler Jofra Archer during the test at Mount Maunganui prompting New Zealand Cricket to launch an investigation and officially apologise to him.¹⁴

Jofra Archer tweeted about his experience following the match which brought the incidence to light. Football Fern Sarah Gregorius, Louisa Wall MP and others on a panel discussing the incident¹⁵ said “...we shouldn’t have to rely on player activism to deal with this. Coaches, managers and other sports administrators, stadium managers, spectators and security – everyone - needs to help deal with the issue”.

New Zealand Football has admitted historical discrimination against Māori players¹⁶. Gordon Watson, a football broadcaster of Ngāpuhi descent, said football was often not a safe environment for him and others when he was playing. New Zealand Football Legacy and Inclusion General Manager, Paula Hansen agrees, saying “Football has historically had a very clear feel to it, and that is being Pākehā and male led, what has happened in the past has got us to the position we're in now, we recognise the mamae (pain) in the past. To have Māori feel excluded, if they take the jump to get involved and then feel excluded, that's not good enough.”

¹¹ www.sportnz.org.nz/resources/discrimination-harassment-and-bullying

¹² Sport NZ Diversity and Inclusion Survey report, pg 76.

¹³ www.stats.govt.nz/news/one-in-10-workers-feels-discriminated-against-harassed-or-bullied-at-work

¹⁴ www.rnz.co.nz/news/sport/404445/how-racist-is-new-zealand-sport

¹⁵ Extra Time for 29 November 2019. https://www.rnz.co.nz/audio/player?audio_id=2018724684

¹⁶ www.1news.co.nz/2022/03/15/nz-football-admits-historical-discrimination-against-Māori-players

What does racism in New Zealand sport look like? Journalist Ashley Stanley offers some examples:

- What may seem like small, one-off opinions or incidences are actually significant in maintaining white supremacy.
- It looks like commentators making fun of Pacific players' names on air and doubling down when called out on it.
- It is voicing opinions like Brown players are in teams for the brawn work and White players for the brains.
- It is having governance boards and senior management teams not reflecting New Zealand's communities or playing groups.
- It is having a voting system to determine the game's global strategy, but certain countries are given more weight while others are not even at the table.
- It is making racial remarks and saying sledging is part of the game.
- It is saying the Black and/or Brown players speak well after an interview.
- It is hearing comments in the crowd telling Black and/or Brown players to go back to where they come from but staying silent to avoid a scene.

Source: [Calling time on racism in sport \(newsroom.co.nz\)](https://www.newsroom.co.nz). Accessed 26 July 2022

There are currently several initiatives underway in Aotearoa New Zealand to tackle racism in sport.

New Zealand Football

New Zealand Football is working with Māori Football Aotearoa to create a more inclusive footballing culture¹⁷. They have initiated change to encourage more Māori and minorities to take up the sport which will require creating a safer, more inclusive environment, including more tikanga Māori within the organisation. New Zealand Football Legacy and Inclusion General Manager, Paula Hansen said, "there's a deep, deep drive to that, it is not going to be a token tick-box exercise". Māori Football Aotearoa chairman, Phillip Pickering – Parker has said "sometimes timing in life is what the universe asks of us, I think as a nation and a sport we weren't ready for something like this when I was coming through in the 80s and 90s,". New Zealand Football admits there's a lot of work to do.

Broader diversity and inclusion initiatives

Our scan suggests racism is being tackled within the broader context of respect for individuals and communities regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender and sexuality. Sport NZ commissioned a report¹⁸ into building cultural inclusion in active recreation and sport in

response to the 15 March 2019 Christchurch Attack. The report was informed by two separate studies exploring the experiences of 50 individuals across two separate studies. The first involved focus groups and interviews with 38 Muslim women aged 16 or over in Waikato, Auckland, and Wellington involved in a wide range of sports. The second involved focus groups and interviews with 12 sports policy makers, coaches, and administrators all aged 18 or over involved in providing sport and active recreation opportunities for Muslim girls and women in the Waikato, Auckland, and Wellington regions. The study found that cultural competency training and education is urgently needed to help those working in the sector better understand the diverse needs of Muslim girls and women. The report made both short- and long-term recommendations to make sporting environments more inclusive of Muslim girls and women. Looking at inclusion more broadly, the report recommended sporting bodies see the Ministerial Group on Family Violence and Sexual Violence cultural competence guidelines, which have been adopted by various sectors in Aotearoa and can be applied to the sporting sector¹⁹.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ sportnz.org.nz/resources/building-cultural-inclusion-in-active-recreation-and-sport.

¹⁹ <https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Documents/publications/family-violence-workforce-capability-framework.pdf>. Pages 16-17.

In 2016, New Zealand’s Rugby undertook a “Respect and Responsibility Review”, “to understand how NZR can lead, develop and support people within rugby to be better people and create better rugby players, teams, volunteers and experiences. Six recommendations were made and the theme of each is focused on: Inclusive Leadership, Better People, Wellbeing, Gender Equality, Engagement and Communications and Accountability and Independence”. The “Inclusive Leadership” theme named positive changes such as more Māori and Pasifika in leadership roles, increasing engagement of Māori and Pasifika in participation and performance pathways, and continuing education of coaches and team managers throughout the rugby system about their responsibilities and approaches to model and uphold respectful and responsible behaviours. Ultimately, New Zealand Rugby aims to create an environment that is attractive and welcoming, a game for all .²⁰

²⁰ www.nzrugby.co.nz/about-nzr/what-we-do/our-initiatives/respect-and-inclusion/



Appendix Two

Anti-Racist Matrix

MONOCULTURAL → **MULTICULTURAL** → **ANTI - RACIST** → **ANTI-RACIST MULTICULTURAL**

Racial and Cultural Differences seen as Defects		Tolerant of Racial and Cultural Differences		Racial and Cultural Differences seen as Assets	
1. Exclusive A segregated institution	2. Passive A 'club' institution	3. Symbolic change A multicultural institution	4. Identity change An anti-racist institution	5. Structural change A transforming institution	6. Fully inclusive A transformed institution in a transformed society
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intentionally and publicly excludes or segregates Maori, Pasifika, Asian, African, Indian cultures Intentionally and publicly enforces the racist status quo throughout institution Institutionalisation of racism includes formal policies and practices, teaching and decision-making on all levels Usually has similar intentional policies and practices towards other socially oppressed or minority groups* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tolerant of a limited number of Black & Brown people with 'proper' perspective and credentials May still secretly limit or exclude Black & Brown people in contradiction to public policies Continues to intentionally maintain White power and privilege through its formal policies and practices, teachings and decision-making on all levels of institutional life Often declares "we don't have a problem." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes official policy pronouncements regarding multicultural diversity Sees itself as "non-racist" institution with open doors to Black & Brown people Carries out intentional inclusiveness efforts recruiting "tangata whenua" on committees or office staff Expanding view of diversity includes other socially oppressed groups or minority groups* <p>BUT...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Not those who make waves" Little or no contextual change in culture, policies and decision-making Is still relatively unaware of continuing patterns of privilege, paternalism and often control. Often tokenistic approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Growing understanding of racism as barrier to effective diversity Develops analysis of systemic racism Sponsors programs of anti-racist training New consciousness of institutionalised White power and privilege Develops intentional identity as an "anti racist" institution Begins to develop accountability to racially oppressed communities Increasing commitment to dismantle racism and eliminate White advantage <p>BUT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional structures and culture that maintain White power and privilege still intact and relatively untouched 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commits to process of intentional institutional restructuring, based on anti-racist analysis and identity Audits and restructures all aspects of institutional life to ensure full participation of Black & Brown people, including their worldview, culture and lifestyles Implements structures, policies and practices with inclusive decision-making and other forms of power sharing on all levels Commits to struggle to dismantle racism in the wider community, and builds clear lines of accountability to racially oppressed communities Anti-racist multicultural diversity becomes an institutionalised asset Redefines and rebuilds all relationships and activities in society, based on anti-racist commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Future vision of an institution and wider community that has overcome systemic racism Institutions life reflects full participation and shared power with diverse racial, cultural and economic groups in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies and practices Full participation in decisions that shape the institution, and inclusion of diverse cultures, lifestyles and interests A sense of restored community and mutual caring Allies with others in combating all forms of social oppression <p>© Crossroads Ministry Adapted from original concept</p>

* e.g. women, people with disabilities, LGBTI+, takatāpui, MVPFAFF+ and other rainbow people, elderly and children, migrants