

**Bio: John Lamont**

*John Lamont is the current Secretary-General of the Queensland Olympic Council, although he has asked me to stress that he is not here today in any representative capacity for either the Queensland Olympic Council or the Australian Olympic Committee.*

*John is a lawyer who formerly worked in politics as a Chief of Staff for the Federal Coalition Government.*

*So, he describes himself as being partially redeemed - while he no longer works in politics, he is still a lawyer...*

*In more recent times, John has been heavily involved in reviewing sport policy throughout Australia and sees the current times we are in as ushering in a new awareness of the importance of participating in sport as a lifelong endeavour.*

*John sees these dynamics as providing opportunities for croquet in having its future.*

# Croquet - Shaping The Future

First of all, thank you David for inviting me and to all of you for hosting me today at your conference for Croquet Queensland.

When David first asked me if I would give his address today my first question was - probably not too different from the one going through many of your heads right now - "what does this joker know about croquet?"

And the answer is regrettably what many of you might suspect - not much.

And therein lies the crux of the problem for croquet - the essential question of relevance.

And I'm not just talking about partially redeemed lawyers like me, I'm talking about the need to understand what croquet's relevance is to its existing faithful and more importantly to the next generation.

As David and I spoke more about croquet, a strange thing started to happen. I started to see croquet in a different light - not as some historical anachronism that seemed to only appear in historical period drama like Downton Abbey, but rather as a legitimate sport, rich in history and offering a wide range of experiences.

I asked David what positive experiences he personally gained from playing croquet.

His answers were:

- social interaction;
- the mental challenge; and
- the great experience of being able to participate in sport outside in the fresh air

What I liked about David's answer is that he didn't just give me one.

Croquet was many things to David and I suspect it is also many things to all of you as well.

I suspect if I hadn't interrupted him David would be waxing lyrical about the virtues of croquet.

And that's the great strength of passionate advocates - they can make you a "True Believer" - or is that the slogan for the other side.

I note from the conference papers that the overarching purpose of your conference is: "to bring Croquet Queensland together",

In my view, having worked in politics - I cannot stress the importance of harnessing your collective knowledge, wisdom, experience and energy enough - disunity is death.

The other things that stood out for me like a beacon when I was reading throughout conference papers and agenda was the tag line at the top = "**Croquet Offers Open Space in a Crowded Life**".

In the world we all live in now, there's arguable nothing more important you could deliver - which leads me to the area that I believe is most relevant and which should form part of deliberations about the directions you want to take in mapping out the future for croquet - sport policy in Australia.

## ***Sport policy in Australia***

So, what is happening with sport policy in Australia and how is it relevant to croquet and the questions you are contemplating in determining your future?

On 1 August last year, the Federal Government launched the **National Sport Plan - Sport 2030** - which is a comprehensive plan to reshape Australian sport and build a healthier, more physically active nation.

The plan has five target outcomes:

1. Improve the physical health of Australians - through the benefits of sport and physical activity, including reduced risk of chronic conditions.
2. Improve the mental health of Australians - through the recognised mental health benefits of sport and physical activity, including the improved management of mental illnesses and greater social connectedness.
3. Grow personal development - from taking up a new challenge, to setting a new personal goal or striving for the podium, being active can help everyone endeavour to be their best self.
4. Strengthen communities - by harnessing the social benefits of sport including through improved cohesion and reduced isolation.

So, when I recall the three (3) positive experiences David told me about that he gained from playing croquet:

- social interaction;
- the mental challenge; and
- the great experience of being able to participate in sport outside in the fresh air

I can find very easy direct connections with the goals of the **National Sport Plan**.

On 6 August this year, the **Activate Queensland Strategy** was launched.

Its goals are similar to those of the **National Sports Plan** and it aims to:

- empower more Queenslanders to enjoy physical activity to improve their health and wellbeing in active communities;
- create partnerships that maximise the impact of the government and industry actions to benefit an active Queensland; and
- inspire activity with places and spaces that invite an active lifestyle.

Queensland's Minister for Sport, The Hon. Mick de Brenni, has stated that as part of the **Activate Queensland Strategy**, the Queensland Government will channel investment to build and activate infrastructure and social environments that support communities and inspire physical activity.

What all this means is that at both the Federal and State level, the policy environment for sport is rich with opportunity for individual sports to align with these policy platforms by delivering outcomes against government stated priority areas.

In doing thi, there are four areas of activities that I am going to suggest you consider:

1. Celebrate you past - it's an asset, use it.
2. Tell your story - EDUCATE.
3. EVOLVE - develop new variations and formats of the game to attract new participants.
4. Make it about community,

So, what do I mean about these four areas?

## **Celebrate your past**

I noticed on the Croquet Queensland website the banner = ***“Welcome to Croquet Queensland - 95 Years Young”***.

That’s impressive. It’s an achievement and it should be celebrated.

Longevity like this also provides you with that other key factor - relevance.

To be around for 95 years, you have to have had relevance to a lot of people and communities in that time.

The other things that loom large with this longevity is the power of milestones - you have a centenary coming up - plan now for how to profile such a momentous milestone and leverage it with all of your stakeholders.

## **Tell your story - EDUCATE**

This action is closely related to the first, but it is not confined to just the past.

95 years of history gives you a lot of stories to tell and a very powerful narrative can be fashioned about the connections the sport of croquet has with communities throughout Queensland.

But more importantly you have to know who to tell these stories to - which means you have to determine who are your stakeholders? And how do you make croquet’s story relevant to them?

Now whether the audience for these stories is a government minister, a Member of Parliament, a local councillor, the membership of an existing club or a six year old playing GBall for the first time - these are the stories that you absolutely have to tell.

If David was telling the truth and the range of benefits croquet can deliver are as good as he claims, then this is the message you have to should from the highest mountain top.

Put another way, when you have something good to bring to the table, don’t sit in the corner whispering to yourself. It’s a bit like the adage - man washes dishes, no-one saw him do it so no-one believes it.

You have to make yourselves heard. This is what advocacy is all about.

## **EVOLVE - develop new variations and format of the game to attract new participants**

Evolve or perish.

Many sports have developed new and shorter variants of their traditional games.

Obvious examples are cricket with Twenty20, the Rugby Sevens, Fast 4Tennis and 3x3 basketball.

I am not at all advocating here that you abandon the traditional form of your game; what I am suggesting is that you provide an easy path to your sport for people no connection to it, who are time poor - make it easy, make it fun - make them want to play again!

## **Make it about community**

You will have noted that both the **National Sport Plan** and **Activate Queensland** focus heavily on the importance of connecting with community and rightly so - sport build communities.

Croquet has been part of Queensland communities for 95 years.

The diversity of experiences croquet offers to communities throughout Queensland is a phenomenal strength for your sport.

To have a future, you need to find new ways to be relevant to those communities for at least the next 95 years.

Good luck with your conference - these are the challenges you are all here to discuss.

I hope this information has been helpful and has triggered some thoughts and ideas for you to discuss further as you shape the future of croquet.

Thank you.

***ENDS***