



YS UP GOVERNANCE AND BOARDS PODCAST

Episode 19 – Managing Governance in Sport with Pat Howard

Transcript

Intro:

Welcome to YS Up Governance and Boards podcast brought to you by 3YS Owls Governance Consultants. Covering hot topics in governance, risk, latest regulatory changes and issues keeping directors and executives awake at night. Here are your hosts Ainslie Cunningham and Deb Anderson.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Welcome to another episode of YS UP. Today we're joined by Pat Howard. He is the CEO of MSL Solutions Limited, and Pat is a current board member of Queensland Rugby Union, formerly performance director of Leicester Tigers from March to December 2005, and formerly the executive general manager of team performance of Cricket Australia. Pat joined Cricket Australia back in 2011, and during the period Pat has overseen World Cups and Ashes in the men's and women's program. Number one in all formats, but Men's T20 currently ranked second and seen developments in coach education, pathway changes and restructuring of domestic competitions.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Pat started his sporting career while studying a pharmacy degree at the University of Queensland. He went on to become a rugby union international at 19, winning numerous awards as a player and later as a coach. Pat has a full blue from the University of Queensland. In 2004, he became director of rugby at Leicester Tigers, considered the leading professional rugby club in Britain. Pat was 2007 European director of Rugby and the first person to be European coach in 2007 and player of the year in 2001.

Ainslie Cunningham:

In 2007, he moved back to Australia to become general manager of the high-performance unit of Australian Rugby Union, where he was responsible for the recruiting of the 2007 to 2013 Wallabies management. Pat spent three years as COO of Cromwell Property Group ASX 200, one of Queensland's largest listed companies with three operating segments, property investment, funds management, and property development. He was responsible for the day to day management of the business, including HR, IT and administration. For a period in the role, he was also head of property services. Pat is also joint founder and director of a pharmacy management business, which now has 18 pharmacies in three states. Pat is married with four children. Welcome Pat.

Pat Howard:

Wow. It is funny when you're reading those things. They're very pitched at a very different audience but look it's lovely to hear it back at yourself sometimes but thank you for having us.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yes, no, definitely.

Deb Anderson:

Very varied section of sport and pharmacy and property.

Pat Howard:

Yeah, it's been a schizophrenic career. But no, and it's funny, isn't it? One of the first roles I had in leaving Cromwell was to be in charge of the National Cricket Centre when it got developed. So, it's amazing that whilst it may seem on the surface no continuity, it's amazing what every role you learn something for your next role. And cricket has had many instances, very public crisis management. It's amazing the environment we're in today is very much dealing with situations that are new and you have to be able to plan for it and react to it. It is a really interesting, you learn something from every role you do.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Absolutely. Being the executive general manager for team performance at Cricket Australia at the time, were you around at the time of Steve Smith and Dave Warner?

Pat Howard:

Yeah, so I was in the room when ... I'm the one that told Steve and Dave what their punishments or sanctions would be. I had to deliver that to the team as well. I was both in Johannesburg when you delivered those, and in Cape Town, when the issue happened, I had to get to Cape Town very quickly. I'd been with the women's team in India at the time, so I flew across and dealt with that in my role. And that was quite common in sport. You have very public issues and so you have to deal with things relatively quickly. You have to be able to balance public perception with boardroom sentiments. You need to be able to deal with precedents that may not always be obvious to the external. It's a really interesting process that you get better at over time.

Deb Anderson:

I think as Australians being so passionate about sport, it's very disheartening, isn't it? You have to deal with those sorts of issues, it's quite challenging.

Pat Howard:

Yeah. Look, it can be. And look, I think you have a challenge in when it's ... Look, I think actually every country is quite passionate about their sport. I lived in the UK. I lived in Ireland. When you're listening to certain accents on this call, we know that not everybody's from Australia as well, so I understand that. But look, every country has the issues in sport,... I know in New Zealand they've had challenges over times as well. I know both CEOs that were previous CEO of New Zealand Rugby, and the current CEO of New Zealand Cricket, and there's challenges all the time.

Pat Howard:

And because they're public, you have to be able to deal with public sentiment. It's never in the middle. It's rarely balanced. It's either elation or depression. It's just usually sit in the middle and you've got to be able to be fair and balanced to the individuals that it's affecting. You've got to give a calm response that's fair and reasonable. And you've got to expect to be criticised at the end of it, because you will have people that either don't know the precedents or don't know the issues and having gone through the layers of governance to be able to get to an ultimate answer.

Ainslie Cunningham:

And how do you cope with that, Pat? Do they give you media training and things like that? How do they build resilience for public facing roles like yourself?

Pat Howard:

I have had plenty of media training. I don't think it's particularly helped. I started playing for Australia, my first time I was 19. So, you have to face the cameras over a long period of time. There's a good part of ... I think it was black and white TV at the time, but it was 25 years ago + that I first started doing interviews. And the complexity of your interviewing gets more difficult as you get out of talking about yourself as a player, then you might be a coach, you have to talk about your team.

Pat Howard:

Then as an administrator, you have to start talking what's in the best interest of the game and what's in the best interests of the community and you might have international components. You might have to be concerned about how it affects other countries, and you've still going to be strong enough on your principles. So even though it will offend some people to make change, because self-interest will obviously play a part in a lot of change management, you have to still be able to have an opinion.

Pat Howard:

So, I think getting there, dealing with the core issue and whilst there might be a lot of noise around, you've got to be able to differentiate the core issue and the core problem. You mentioned the Steve Smith and Dave Warner thing, in that period from that time. And Cameron Bancroft, Cameron's often forgotten out of this process. But because he's not as big a name as a consequence. And that's not fair on any of us. But there was a precedent set, a couple of months before where two female cricketers had been banned for six months for a very small bet on this day cricket, and they got six months ban for betting on cricket.

Pat Howard:

So, automatically the sanction had to be fair and reasonable to those people. And then that automatically set a bar that had to be played with. And there was other people that wanted people sanctioned for life. And I didn't think that was reasonable either. And you then had ICC governance rules where the sanctions were one match, and that didn't seem fair and reasonable either in the circumstances due to the impact it had on the game and the country. And that's not the time those sorts of things has happened.

Pat Howard:

You deal with deaths in sport. How do you deal with those? They've happened often both in rugby and in cricket, and they are very tragic for those that are around, very tragic for the families. And you want to show care and concern, and you've also still got to be able to give continuity to those that need to be delivered on. Being able to be reactive and responsive is really important. And I think trying to drill down to what is core in that versus what is noise, genuine white noise, and everyone wanting an opinion is a skill that you have to learn over time.

Deb Anderson:

You've got a strong paternal line in Rugby Union. What was it like growing up with a famous father and grandfather?

Pat Howard:

An honour to be honest. I am far less proud of playing for Australia myself personally than I am of being a third-generation Wallaby. It's a lovely thing to link in with your father and your grandfather. Also, my grandfather didn't see me play from Australia, but I was lucky enough that dad was an assistant coach for Australia when I first started playing. It is a very, very fond memory for me to be able to do that. My mother is, and was a Rugby Union coach, there's a very strong theme. So, I'm not quite used to this #metoo, I've been involved in that for a very long time when my mother was coaching me and telling me to get closer and get tougher and quit being sucky and she was absolutely brilliant. And so, she in her own right is a very famous female coach or coach, just a coach, no gender required. And I'm very lucky to have been involved in a family that was so passionate about something.

Ainslie Cunningham:

So, from pharmacy degree to cricket, how did that transpire, Pat?

Pat Howard:

Yeah, it's interesting. And you talk about my father, my father has got a law degree. He was once company secretary of an ASX listed company. He's also been a rugby coach. And so, it's not a path that I've tread on my own. It was a little bit of a challenge; I think he laid down to me. But no I got my pharmacy degree, finished pharmacy and I was already playing, I'd played a few tests for

Australia, at that time, I definitely hadn't cemented myself in the team. But was in and out and moved down to Canberra and the game went professional at the time.

Pat Howard:

Because I was fortunate enough to play when the game was amateur, I had a tendency to keep studying while I was playing and collecting qualifications during that period. Whilst I was ... it looked good on paper by the time I'd finished. I didn't have any experience at all. But sport does teach you a lot, it does teach you teamwork. I don't think it's just a line. I think it deals with resilience. I do think players even today, their lives are played out on Instagram, they are very resilient. They have to deal with open criticism far more than my generation had to. And I've got a lot of empathy for sportsmen today and how they have to be judged. They are a lot better than the generation before and probably the generation before that, they have to be, they're just larger in a microscope.

Pat Howard:

But I bought my pharmacies, I'm still director of Rx Management Group. And my daughter turns 17 today and we formed on the day she was born. I know they're 17 years today. And so, we own pharmacies in Sydney, South Australia, Victoria. And I did that while I was playing. As you noted, I was director of rugby at Leicester once I'd finished playing. I came back and headed the high-performance unit in rugby. And I missed the birth of my fourth child, I was based in Sydney, and had to look for a career change based in Brisbane. That's when I became Chief of Operations at Cromwell. And that was a fantastic role.

Pat Howard:

I'd studied a bit of applied finance and investment. I had my MBA, so it was a nice fit and they wanted someone from outside to deal with performance and try to bring accountability into the organisation. And it was a really good lesson that I said, "Look, I understand property from a retailing side." And it was a really interesting perspective that I thought it was just a line to get a job in an interview. What I found out is that external experience and looking at things from a very different perspective has been very, very handy. The property was very, very handy in cricket. And even today in a new organisation, MSL, you come in with a different perspective and I think your collection of ideas that form good decisions is really important. Can't be your decision, but you listen to technical experts from different variations and different degrees and you can come up with better solutions at the end.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. And you briefly touched on before, Pat, about governance in sport and managing deaths of players and things like that. Were you part of Cricket Australia when Phil Hughes death happened?

Pat Howard:

Yes, I was. Obviously out of respect for the Hughes family I don't want to talk about it too much. But look at dealing with the period post that where we had to negotiate with the players to get them back out and play, which was very, very difficult on them. But you also, it was a very important thing to get back out and play, and to keep the game going, but also for the players just to get out and enjoy the game again, there was no expectation. And so yeah, it was a very challenging period for everyone. I think that the head of the player's union had joined only a month before. So that was a really difficult period for him, he didn't really, he'd say today was a pretty big initiation.

Pat Howard:

And obviously incredibly tragic for those that are on the pitch, those around, it was New South Wales versus South Australia at the SCG. I was talking to Michael Clark at the time and it was ... Michael was, you better get in the car and off you go. You don't want to trivialise it. And look, by coincidence, when I was working at Cromwell, there was a death. In Rugby Union I've seen a little bit of it as well with injuries, and you see it in sport, you see it in other walks of life. And dealing with ... imagine working in the aged care sectors now, as a few of my mates do. It's a really challenging environment to be able to be incredibly respectful of what is happening in an environment and sort of try and minimise the effect for everybody that survives. It's really tough.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. And when you're dealing with human life as well, it's such a heightened sense of responsibility and for everybody involved and probably from your yourself, from your own perspective, having been various stakeholders throughout sport yourself, a player, a coach, a leader, how has that kind of helped you I guess rise into your leadership in that space?

Pat Howard:

Yeah, look, I do think it's helped, being able to say, "I've sat in your shoes." I sit on the QRU board and you're talking to the coaches and you can say, "Look, I've been a coach and it does help." Or you're speaking to a player and you go, "I've been a player, I get it. You're not trying to make mistakes, I understand." There is a very difficult thing from a media commentary where they'll say that player X or player Y is terrible or hopeless or wonderful. And the truth is they make mistakes and they don't mean to, and they want to be the best they can be. And yes, they might get paid X, but someone else might get paid Y, and it is incredibly transparent period. It is wonderful when you get back to sit back on your life and go, "Someone paid me to do what I love to do. That's brilliant." I actually played in the period where they didn't pay you and as well, and that was also brilliant.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Well, it's for the love then, isn't it?

Pat Howard:

It was. And I played in both, so I was lucky to earn an income from playing at the second half of my career, the first half I didn't get paid. And I loved both, I absolutely loved both. And my father, as we talked about earlier, didn't get paid and my grandfather before him didn't get paid, so that's all good too. I don't think pride or success necessarily has a lot to do with the level of remuneration you get paid. And it's something that I probably disagree with in governance, that money drives all the outcomes, you need them to drive. I still believe when a sportsman walks onto the field, regardless of what he's paid, he will genuinely care about winning and losing for his team and the people he plays with.

Pat Howard:

And I think very special businesses and organisations can get to that point where they care so much about the outcome that they're working towards. That really the remuneration becomes an afterthought rather than a driver of performance, and it's not always easy. Some products are really hard to do that with, there are some things you might be in a business that's pretty bland or something that's really generic and you go, "Oh." And that you may need a remuneration to drive you, but I've always found that you can ... Now working in sport was lovely. I've really enjoyed MSL has kind of nice ability to work around sport.

Pat Howard:

And I think working in an environment at the moment where you're driving new products to actually cope with COVID outcomes and these sorts of things, it's been amazing how exciting that's been for people to produce things that can help people open and get them started again. And I think if you can see what you're creating, gives you tangible outcomes, sometimes remuneration is not always the number one answer. That's what I found over time.

Deb Anderson:

In your experience as a player and as a coach? Have you seen any sort of long-term effects of concussion in terms of short-term and long-term memory loss particularly in retired players?

Pat Howard:

No. Look, I don't, I haven't. And look, this is the pharmacist in me speaking as well. And I think obviously once again there's been a movie made and we've all got to understand that the rules around concussion have changed. And I think we'll know a lot more in about 10 more years and a lot more in 20 more years, but it's very interesting to watch a sport which has got helmets when you're playing a football game is the one that most of the concussion has been talked about. I haven't found that the people I played with have had any serious effects, and obviously I had a father and a grandfather that had very healthy lives and both passed away in their seventies. And

it had nothing to do with concussion. But I'm not arguing the science, it would be hypocritical of me to do so.

Pat Howard:

But obviously you have to be careful of it today. You've got to play with your ... Now if you have a concussion, you take the player, the child, I coach under twelves and under thirteens and coach in other areas. So, you get a hit, sorry, right, you're away for another couple of weeks and you come back when you're right. I think there is a degree of danger in lots of things you do. And every New Zealander would love to go down snowboarding. These days we all make sure we stick our helmets on when we do. And I'll go cycling as well, and it's a very dangerous sport relatively in terms of ... but I'm not going to stop doing that either.

Pat Howard:

And so, trying to balance out risk versus making sure you have a mental health that is worthwhile. I think you'd take reasonable precautions and then I think that's sensible and match your decision making to the knowledge you have at that time. I do have some benefit of 25 years down the road. And my wife may argue I'm not all right, but generally I'm okay.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, you have very much a unique perspective and almost even the right balance between EQ and IQ coming from such a varied background. And so how have you I guess used some of that in your role presently as CEO of MSL, and how have you managed through this coronavirus epidemic or pandemic I should say.

Pat Howard:

Yeah, so I joined MSL in August 2019. On the board of MSL are two directors that I've dealt with before, one chairman of Cricket Australia. So, we had a relationship where I was exited and brought back in as a little bit of a change agent. And David Usasz was on the board of Cromwell when I was there. And this was very much MSL, had some really great products. It is effectively the IT provider to Golf Australia, golf management systems. So, it had a lovely sport side to it. And then it also is got point of sale and analytics in some of the best stadiums all around the world, the Manchester United's and Manchester City's and all these great sporting stadiums.

Pat Howard:

There was a lovely bit where I could bring my property bit together with my sport bit and making sure that the oversight that I'd had in previous C-suite roles and management to bring it all together. But they had worked a little bit like some listed ASX businesses work, where it was all revenue driven, but the bottom line was ignored. MSL lost sort of best part of \$5.8 million in FY19. And if we had continued going down that track and COVID hit, it would have been an absolute nightmare. Fortunately, we've been making decisions to turn it around well before that.

Pat Howard:

Still the stadium base is excellent, but the first bit was to try and get your cost base right. We were well down that route by the time coronavirus hit, and much like the QRU board which I sit on. And even the pharmacies that I work on. Our pharmacies, a lot of them are in the Sydney CBD, there's nobody in the Sydney CBD. And as a consequence, every one of those three businesses has to look at cashflow. They have to look and making sure they manage their cash flow through this period, and try to drive sensible outcomes making sure you can look after your staff if you can.

Pat Howard:

Many of our UK staff are furloughed. And the hope is that as we come out of this at some stage, that they will have jobs to come back to. And you want to be able to look after your staff. You don't want all that IP going out the window, you want continuity. But you also have to be pragmatic. You might have to lose some people to save the majority of people. And that is a ... you stop worrying about expanding or growth and you talk about, let's make sure we're here next month, make sure that we're driving, make sure we look after our customers survival. Make sure we help them open. And if we help them open, then we can help them drive revenue. And then we help our own

sustainability. And I think one of the great things about this period is shown how interconnected and reliant so many businesses are on everyone else's business. That was a long-winded answer.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Absolutely not, that answer was perfect Pat. So QRU, tell us a bit about I guess the hot topics of conversation around the board table at present with challenges with not being able to play games and players having to be in different places and all those sorts of things.

Pat Howard:

Yeah. The games have just started again and about two or three weeks into the games. I think getting people back out and playing is wonderful and being able to have a small crowd base. I went and watched the Reds play the Western Force last week at Suncorp Stadium. But we also have got some great opportunities, Ballymore, which is the big facility in the middle of Brisbane. I've got some government grants, both Federal and State opportunities that are coming their way to make sure that this is a facility that can be a hub for not only rugby union, it's in a really unique part in Northern Brisbane where you've got so many sports just there with Downey Park across the river. And so many sports that can sort of work together.

Pat Howard:

And you need to do that, you need to work with other sports so that everybody can be integrated. Rugby stadiums could be used for hockey. And when you work towards Olympic bids and those sorts of things, there's so many exciting things that you can do collectively if you think, don't just park your sport on your own, actually work with other sports together. Because if you believe in your sport or the sports you play, you back it as an opportunity to play it and you're not defensive or hoarding your players from other sports.

Pat Howard:

Now dealing with Ellyse Perry who was a wonderful cricketer and soccer player, trying to be able to help her manage through her multiple sports was a great learning, and trying to help her maximise her talents through that period, gave great affinity to want to be working with other sports. QRU currently, rugby in Australia is a second-tier sport compared to say New Zealand where it's the number one sport, it's a national game. And we've got to be able to make sure you can have a competitive advantage and find your place. A lot of the staff have been stood down at the moment. They're still working their backsides off. I'm sure that's a technical term. But the grassroots of the game where I get to go and coach under twelves or under thirteens, or on Sunday, I was coaching down at Wests, where all past players come down and we coach for free any aspiring young kids, any age between 12 and 15.

Pat Howard:

And so, there's some really lovely things to be involved in. I feel as though I owe the game as a father and grandfather before me. It doesn't owe me, I owe the game, and as a consequence if I can give back, I do. And that's my general philosophy on supporting Rugby Union. I appreciate some people are critics at the moment, but I've been through the highs and lows of sport too many times to get too worried about the highs and lows. Just keep helping, keep trying to be supportive and try and look for solutions rather than problems.

Ainslie Cunningham:

That's really lovely to hear. And it's lovely to hear you giving back to the community Pat, that served you for a long period of time as well. And it's nice to hear that those kids are getting out there and have some really great role models to look up to

Pat Howard:

No, I do, I love the game. And it's always going to be part of my life, and it's a wonderful thing to be able to support the game that's been so good to you. And I can trace so many of my opportunities back to my sporting opportunities. When I worked in cricket, I used to say I loved cricket, but I owe rugby. And it's true, I love cricket, I genuinely love it as a sport. I think it's fantastic. It is our national game in Australia in my view. But I also view I owe rugby and I'll continue to have those beliefs until someone convinces me otherwise.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Pat, tell us a bit about like, having been a player yourself and having to be able to successfully transition into a career in your own right now. How do sporting bodies support players who want to transition out of sport when they retire and how do you ... do sporting clubs actually help facilitate some of that for the players?

Pat Howard:

Yeah. The best way I put it forward is there's a buffet of support now, probably so far in excessive of where it was in the past. In saying that the reliance is still on the player, and it should be, to step up and take those opportunities. I've seen some sportsmen in both cricket and rugby do it very, very well, and transition incredibly well. And lots of the players that I've played with have done exceptionally well after playing sport. And in cricket I saw some States drive it very, very well. In other States it wasn't the priority.

Pat Howard:

And you can see the differential, you have a champion ... George Bailey who's a player at the moment in Australian cricket or just retiring. He's also now a selector. He was doing his MBA out of University of Tasmania. He sends a message to all those players he played with that it's really important on how you transition out of the game. And you don't have to ... People sometimes focus on the top three or four players and all that sort of stuff. It's more about the people that have a 10-year journey and their names aren't ... they weren't the best player. But they're really great, they gave so much of their time and how do they transition out?

Pat Howard:

Because they're often those that can offer so much perspective and so much value because they've had to endure the highs and lows of sport. I think some people that are the absolute best, they've had less of the bumps that a few of the rest of them have, and as a consequence probably seeing it from other perspectives is harder, I don't know. I wasn't one of the really good players. I found the similarities far more common than the differences across sports.

Deb Anderson:

Tell us a little bit about women's cricket in Australia. Pat, we've got some exceptionally talented young women cricket players.

Pat Howard:

Yes.

Deb Anderson:

You must have seen that progress quite a lot in the last few years.

Pat Howard:

Yeah. I'm really proud of it. And I sort of saw it, and it was a long time ago now, but I was part of putting Meg Lanning in as head coach. I put the current coach of the women's team in and they've ... and I oversaw wins in 2012, 2014 and 2018 in the world T20s and a World Cup in 2013, it's hard to remember all the years. But even sort of the crash of the Women's BBL which was ... gets really good viewing audiences, more than the Men's Rugby Union does as an example, but more than soccer does and all, it does really, really well. And I'm exceptionally proud to see that MCG game, just get up before COVID-19 or coronavirus and where they nearly packed out the MCG, which was amazing.

Pat Howard:

But look, we talked about it a little bit earlier. I've always found that the very best players, regardless of what they get paid, train very, very hard, and that has been the case the whole time. There's incredible depths in Australia Women's cricket. They're really this world-class players and there's talent elsewhere. There are some very good players in a lot of other countries that are probably not known to the players and it's people in Australia. And I'm incredibly proud of seeing those players come through. And even the talent pathways we've seen in the world T20 squad. I think

there were one, maybe two, three, maybe teenagers in that squad. There's more depth coming through and there's a lot more talent and exceptional players are all the way around. It's been incredibly positive to see it's growth. And I think it's a wonderful thing.

Ainslie Cunningham:

How have you seen governance in sport evolve over that time as well, Pat?

Pat Howard:

Yeah, look, I walked into ... and Australia, you're talking about New Zealand and New Zealand don't have that federated model in governance anywhere near much as Australia does in the federated model. I've worked under both and I much prefer that far degree of independence rather than a membership board. It's the challenge. I saw the change of the Carter Crawford review in cricket. And you were reporting to a board at that stage prior to that, where there were lots of conversations regarding, where is my player from my State? Why aren't they getting ... versus the changing conversation straight away went to, what's in the best interest of Australian cricket.

Pat Howard:

And that might be facilities in South Australia or facilities in Queensland or indigenous support through Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Cricket Advisory Committee (ATSICAC) in Northern Territory or WA or, it became ... I really enjoyed reporting under a new board structure where it was in the best interest of game and State borders were lost, and it was lovely. You got to be able to invest in the places that needed investment, rather than if I give \$10 over here, I need to give \$10, five times over to someone else that may or may not need the money. I've seen federated boards in sport, and I've seen non-federated boards and I'm far bigger fan of that centralised and nationalized approach. That's not a popular view because obviously there are six States and they will disagree with you.

Pat Howard:

But I do love being able to go look if State X needs, not even State, an area, the Karratha needs the most support, let's put the most support in the Karratha, for example. And it's a very difficult thing that Australia has grown up in that federated system. That's something that we have, and it'd be a great thing to break down over time. And the sports that have had to do it under best practice, corporate governance guidelines related to Australian Sports Commission a few years ago.

Pat Howard:

Yeah, so what's happened is the Australian Sports Commission has put out and it's couple of years old now around best practice and corporate governance guidelines. And it does talk about breaking down federalism. And it does talk about working in the best interests of the national body, of how to put the right resources in the right States. Some sports are very centralised to one or two States and others are quite national, and it's very hard for those States that aren't strong in one area to put their case forward. But the biggest sports, there are three or four, very, very big sports. And my budget in cricket was bigger than the whole of Rugby Union's revenue just in my division, so it was the biggest division. But it is something that they could work.

Pat Howard:

I'm a strong believer in a nationalised approach. New Zealand has it, New Zealand Rugby has it, Ireland Rugby has it. And they're the best two Countries thereabouts out of the smallest populations. But they've got centralised approaches, nationalised approaches.

Ainslie Cunningham:

So, having worked under sport and governance in sport, and obviously with your position at Cromwell board of QRU, and now MSL, how have you found the difference or similarities in terms of governance?

Pat Howard:

The way I best described, so I've been asked about this many times. I've obviously had a big period in sport over multiple different sports in couple of different countries. And then I've had two C-suite

roles in listed companies. The difference I find comes down to a simple thing is that when you work in sport, the directors read the newspapers more than they read the board papers. And you don't have that issue in other situations. So, what I mean by that is, and it's not a shot to directors by any means. But it's when you haven't lived a life of public exposure, they're not used to their decisions being questioned on a daily basis, even though they meet monthly, they're not used to it. And I've seen very, very high profile chairmans' and CEOs find the exposure in sport far more difficult because they criticised when they go down to their golf club. And they're not used to that.

Pat Howard:

It does take a significant amount of resilience. People still today don't know that I work at MSL. They assume I either work in cricket, or am I doing something else related to sport. And I've had to explain I'm not. Because the public exposure is not there. So, you can just get your job done and you continue to grow your role and you do it while you've got time to be able to execute. Sport it's really like that. So that's the bit that I find different is that you have to help directors through on a month to month basis, the highs and lows of media speculation, which they are unfortunately, they're not used to it. It's really hard for them to deal with.

Deb Anderson:

So Pat, in preparing to have a chat to you today, I went onto the internet, the source of truth for everything. I'm just going to read a quote out from Wikipedia and just get your comment on it. "Howard has received some criticism for this role with cricket Australia. Shane Warne said in 2013, "Cricket Australia should please put current cricket people in charge to run the game, select teams, not ex rugby or any other sports people," and called Howard a Muppet. It's a compliment, isn't it?

Pat Howard:

It's funny.

Deb Anderson:

Kermit the Frog would say, that's a compliment.

Pat Howard:

Well, I think three months after that we won The Ashes five nil. And then Shane actually, funnily enough, ended up ... we brought him in as consultant coach at the end of that 2013 series. And he was fantastic when we beat South Africa just the early 2014. So, snapshots in time, you are going to be criticised, and I think the fact that I was an outsider was ... as I said earlier in this interview, I actually believed it really helped. And I had some fantastic, great players that were reporting to me. And as I said to them often, "If I can't convince you internally of these changes or these ideas, please call me up on this." Because I'm not going to take them outside this room, if you don't believe in what we're doing.

Pat Howard:

And great names like Greg Chappell and Rod Marsh, these guys said I cannot put on a higher pedestal, are just wonderful, wonderful people. And I loved working with them. And I really like Shane, I've got a lot of time for him. He's a character, as you would imagine. And I really, I would ... if he rang up and wanted to go to a rugby test match somewhere, I'd be happy to help him, he's a really nice bloke. I hold no ill towards any of those commentary. I understand things are said and you take them all with a grain of salt. And I've always had that attitude. And I really enjoyed my seven years in cricket. It was a great experience of sort of very strong relationships with those that I worked very closely with, the previous CEO, some of the general managers, some of the coaches, selectors. I just really, really enjoyed their company.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah. You've got a fantastic outlook Pat, and a really amazing attitude. Before we wrap up today, is there any sort of top three tips you want to leave our listeners with, or just some lasting thoughts from your perspective?

Pat Howard:

Oh, I think ... The 3YS Owls and dealing with governance itself. The ability to have calm heads in a crisis I think is something that I've always enjoyed. It was amazing to deal with sometimes when a public perception had one of you, and a sporting team might have a different view and the board might be going, "Well, where do we land here? How do we have an appropriate answer?"

Pat Howard:

And it's amazing to see directors who are calm in that situation. You come out of that with incredible respect for those people who can speak up when the room is turning. And so I think for directors, for chairmen, for nomination committees, getting the balance and diversity of your board, and I'm not even talking about gender diversity, while I've found that to be incredibly important, I mean just diversity of thought, diversity of age, diversity of backgrounds, anything that's going to stop people coming from just one singular mindset.

Pat Howard:

I care that people care about what they're doing. I think that's always important, differentiating between people on a board that are doing it for a CV build versus someone that genuinely cares about making a difference, helping, guiding, sometimes it might be making money and that's okay too. So, there's a couple of things that I have found more in reporting to boards to sitting on boards. But I love the challenge of governance. I love being able to convince a room that this is a good idea, even when you're going to cop criticism, even when you know that it could be unpopular but it's right. I've really enjoyed that challenge. And even being hauled over the coals when it goes wrong later on, that's okay too. And that requires courage from directors, and it requires courage from a room. And it's wonderful when you see an alignment between directors and management that achieve really great outcomes.

Deb Anderson:

That's music to our ears.

Ainslie Cunningham:

Yeah, absolutely. All right. Well, they're really great tips, Pat, and thank you so much, really such a great leader. And I think it'll be really exciting to continue watching your journey going forward. Thanks for joining us today and sharing your insights with our listeners. And yeah, it's been great talking to you. Thanks very much.

Pat Howard:

Thanks for asking me. I really appreciate it. Thanks guys.

Outro:

That's all for today. Until next time, happy podcasting. And remember if you're enjoying the show, check out our other episodes and all things governance at www.3ysowls.com.au.