# Play ball: kids start hitting alcohol advertising out of the park

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### The youngest players and fans in Australian sport are showing the big boys how to behave. Baseball Australia’s Little League Championship is underway – the first competition to promote the code’s pledge to shun alcohol advertising.

Australian youngsters are “livin’ the dream” and emulating their sports heroes in a game that is the fastest growing in the world, and the first in Australia to ditch alcohol advertising.

Australian Baseball’s Little League is rapidly growing towards 15,000 boys and girls, playing in around 1,000 teams across the country. The Little League Championships are now underway, and the winning team will head to the USA to compete in the World Series competition which is broadcast to more than 45 million people worldwide.

What makes this newsworthy is not only the League’s unprecedented growth, but the fact that its parent body Baseball Australia is making sure their junior program stays true to its values of developing kids to be first and foremost, citizens of good character.

They’ve locked this down by being the first professional code to partner with the national campaign *End Alcohol Advertising in Sport* (EAAiS).

Baseball Australia’s CEO Cam Vale is proudly on record saying the Code’s administrators are protecting Baseball’s young players by being the first competition to never allow alcohol companies to penetrate their game, all the way up to the representative level.

Baseball Australia is proactively building a more family-friendly and healthier sporting environment, fully aware that the kids and families who support baseball in Australia are the future of the code.

The Australian Little League Championship is the first competition to put this pledge into play, with an on-field promotion running at this year’s annual events across NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

One of the EAAiS campaign’s biggest supporters is rising baseball hero Mitch Edwards who is over in the States making a name for himself as a catcher with Major League club Philadelphia Phillies, and who plays for Adelaide Bite during the home season.

Today, baseball’s youngest fans look up to the likes of Mitch who is leading the way as a true role model – becoming a talented, elite athlete and at the same time living the values of citizenship, discipline, teamwork and physical wellbeing.

Mitch holds a special place in the heart of the Little League family and is vocal about the responsibility of individual athletes to role model the right behaviours for a healthier sports environment for kids to thrive, both on and off the field.

*“When I signed on with the Phillies, it made me think about how I was following in the footsteps of my childhood heroes. I remembered how much I looked up to my baseball heroes and how I would imitate whatever they did and how they played,”* Mitch told reporters when he helped launch the EAAiS campaign.

*“This made me really conscious of the effect I now have on young fans of the game, and I want to set a good example. So when I heard about the End Alcohol Advertising in Sport campaign it made sense to me as an idea, and it was something I really wanted to get behind to be a positive role model.”*

Alcohol is the major contributor to the three leading causes of death among Australian teenagers: unintentional injury, homicide and suicide. And there is extensive research showing that exposure to alcohol marketing, including ads on TV, leads kids to start drinking from an early age and drink a dangerous amount of alcohol more frequently.

Mitch agrees that it’s near impossible to successfully perform competitively at the highest levels of sport while indulging in unhealthy habits, such as binge drinking.

*“It’s not good for you physically, it’s not good for your brain and it’s bad for recovery – all things you need to be in peak condition if you want to succeed in sport. So when I watch a game of footy and see all these alcohol ads that are showing sporting success together with alcohol, I just think it’s wrong.”*

*“Personally, I would like to see sports promoting a healthy culture and setting a good example to kids. I know firsthand how much influence sports and sportspeople can have, and I think we have a responsibility to use this influence the right way. So I believe that sports need to stop promoting alcohol and begin promoting healthy brands instead.”*

Standing in for Mitch who is currently in the USA; a life-size Mitch cardboard cut-out is being displayed on the ground at the Little League Championship games at Lismore, Adelaide and Mildura as part of a EAAiS campaign promotion, with a private baseball training session with Mitch up for grabs for the lucky winner.

https://www.instagram.com/p/BxqFPO2Jxgb/?utm\_source=ig\_web\_copy\_link

Mitch is one of many high-profile supporters of the EAAiS campaign, which is encouraging sporting codes to end their strong reliance on the revenue from alcohol sponsorship, saying that the future of any sport rests in the development of young players.

The campaign is targeting regulators to scrap a rule that lets alcohol companies bypass all protection against advertising harmful products to children and funnel their alcohol ads straight to kids during TV sports coverage in children’s viewing hours.

The alcohol industry claims that its advertising is targeted at drinkers of legal age, but the industry’s own documents reveal a different story where brands have used market research data on 15 and 16 year olds to guide campaign development, target their products and advertising to attract new drinkers, and encourage people to drink early and drink often.

There is indisputable evidence that children’s exposure to alcohol advertising encourages them to start drinking earlier, to binge drink more often, and to start a journey toward alcohol-related harm.

Baseball is to be congratulated over and over for calling out this behaviour and showing the broader sports industry in Australia that every code is responsible for doing its bit to stop perpetuating positive links between alcohol and sporting heroes.

Step by step – game by game – it is easily achievable to reduce the risk of harm to young Australians.

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