

MY CRY FOR HELP



Hockeyroo starts legal battle over contract termination

EXCLUSIVE
JULIAN LINDEN & SIMON ORCHARD

ONE of Australia's best female hockey players has begun legal action against the national federation, claiming she was kicked off the high-performance program because she asked for time off to deal with her mental health concerns and senior staff didn't believe her cry for help was real.

Star midfielder Lily Brazel, 25, has lodged a discrimination claim with the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission discrimination board, alleging her contract was terminated by Hockey Australia when she requested a six-week break to deal with her mental health issues after the Tokyo Olympics were postponed because of the global pandemic.

Capped 52 times by the Hockeyroos, Brazel claims she was told by Hockey Australia staff that her request was rejected because she was mistaking legitimate mental health issues with unhappiness — even though she was never examined by a team psychologist while a national coach, who was granted

leave on mental health grounds, allegedly told her the difference between their cases was: "I actually have a problem."

Brazel said she received a letter from Hockey Australia three days later, saying: "Thank you for outlining your intention to leave the program".

Brazel told The Daily Telegraph: "I was basically put in a position where I had to choose between looking after my mental health and my position in the team and consequently my Olympic dream and so I decided to prioritise my mental health. That meant that my contract wasn't renewed and rolled over like the rest of the squad members for the end of 2020, it finished in August."

Hockey Australia told The Daily Telegraph it cannot and would not comment on Brazel's case.

Brazel said she was told that part of the reason her contract was terminated was because she had breached the rules when she asked for a break from the elite program but wanted to play club hockey to keep in physical shape.

She claims she was told she had

to prove she was worthy of reinclusion but was then left off a training camp in November.

"The main reason I'm speaking up and the reason I sought legal action is because I want Hockey Australia to be accountable for their actions because they're failing and damaging our country's best players," she said. "We're continually getting pushed out the door and I want my team mates and future Hockeyroos to have an environment they deserve and the success they deserve and they're just not getting that."

Hockey Australia has launched an investigation into complaints from past and present players about the "toxic culture" within the women's high-performance set up.

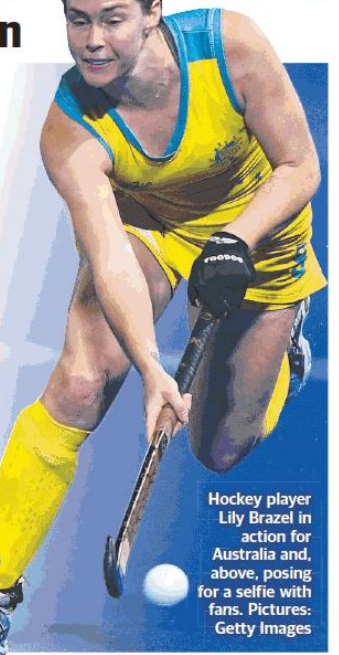
Three Hockeyroos captains have recently stepped down. One of them, Georgina Morgan, was last week dropped from the national squad. She has appealed against her shock omission, along with Rachael Lynch, who was also left off despite being rated the best goalkeeper in the world.

The Daily Telegraph has been told players have been warned

their contracts will be ripped up if they go public and lift the lid on the litany of problems — including complaints of alleged bullying within the organisation.

The Daily Telegraph has seen several letters of complaint that were sent to Hockey Australia in 2017 and 2018 as well as more recent grievances, including threats to stage a mass strike unless an fully independent and transparent investigation is carried out.

"Senior players who try and stand up for what's best for the playing group are often not liked by the staff who just want athletes who comply and are silent so they chew us up and kick us out," Brazel said. "What I'm worried about is Hockey Australia is saying this is an isolated incident because it's not at all. My experience mirrors so much of what other players have experienced. Yes, it's toxic, yes there's a cultural issue but Hockey Australia keeps defending all that by speaking to the program's success but players don't even enjoy being there and they're too scared to speak out."



Hockey player Lily Brazel in action for Australia and, above, posing for a selfie with fans. Pictures: Getty Images

UP IN ARMS OVER

Hockey Australia's promise to fix crisis comes to nothing

JULIAN LINDEN & SIMON ORCHARD

HOCKEY Australia made a solemn pledge to its best female players when the previous national women's coach was fired for misconduct at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

Investigated for allegedly exposing himself and making lewd comments to female team members, Adam Commens was sacked by Hockey Australia right before his contract was about to expire.

The message from Hockey Australia's top brass was clear: the administrators were finally cleaning up their act after years of sordid reports about the toxic culture that had infiltrated Australia's beloved Hockeyroos, including body shaming that led to serious eating disorders and a player overlooked for the captaincy because she was openly gay.

But four years later, dozens of women involved in the national high-performance program have accused Hockey Australia of renegeing on its promise, revealing explosive and shocking claims of an elite program in complete crisis.

Past and present players, as well as former administrators, coaches and medical staff, have all contacted The Daily Telegraph to lift the lid on Australian hockey's darkest secrets following the exclusive report that one of the country's best female players was dumped just because she asked for time off to treat her mental health issues.

In a statement to The Daily Telegraph, Hockey Australia said it would not respond or comment on any of the accusations.

Most of the complaints centre around the behaviour of the new women's head coach Paul Gaudoin and high-performance director Toni Cumpston (pictured), for different reasons.

The Daily Telegraph has seen more than 20 letters objecting to their management style, including one that Nicole Arroll sent to Cumpston herself, expressing her alarm at the breakdown between coaches and players shortly after she had

taken an assistant's role. It didn't go down well and Arroll resigned suddenly, to the dismay of players because she was well liked.

Another assistant who was also respected by the players, David Guest, was fired without any player consultation, while more and more staff began to fear for their job safety in the high-performance program.

Krystle Stylianou, who was a national program adviser from 2015-17, was among the many people who complained about Cumpston. She left soon after.

"I would drive to work crying, experiencing panic attacks almost daily while at work," Stylianou wrote.

"After finishing with HA, I was headhunted for a number of jobs in HP sport and turned them down because I had no confidence, was trying to cope with a complete mental and physical breakdown and lost all confidence in the industry I loved.

"It has taken me three years of therapy, medical intervention, to finally realise the issue did not lie with me but with management and poor leadership."

The team's long-serving and popular doctor Carmel Goodman also departed, as did Simone Fountain, the operations manager, and Angele Gray, the manager of the Hockeyroos.

Trish Jayallen worked with Gray when she was hired as an administrative assistant. They became friends with many of the players, who she said often confided in how frightened they were to speak out.

After Gray resigned, Jayallen decided to approach Cumpston on behalf of the players and was fired on the spot.

"It was outside the women's toilet," said Jayallen, who had to contact Fair Work to receive her full payout.

Most of the complaints about Gaudoin relate to his apparent lack of organisation and poor communication skills.

Several complained that he would often arrive at training without a practice plan and was notorious for failing to show up to scheduled meetings



Hockeyroos coach Paul Gaudoin (centre) talks to the players during a training session in Perth; and (inset) respected former assistant coach David Guest.

or answer his phone or his emails or provide feedback to players left off the team.

In a recent interview with AAP, Gaudoin admitted to missing player meetings but denied more serious complaints.

"I missed some meetings, yeah, I'm happy to say that," Gaudoin said. "There are various reasons for those and I don't want to get caught up in that. But that can happen at times. I'm not perfect, but I followed up on many occasions with those players."

One highly decorated international who wanted to know why she was unexpectedly left off the squad for the 2018 Commonwealth Games said she went eight months without being given any explanation.

Exasperated, players considered going on strike before a tournament in New Zealand in 2018 but were so fearful of the repercussions, they decided instead just to send a letter to the board of Hockey Australia.

The leadership group considered airing all the grievances after can-

vassing every player for their confidential opinions and being shocked by the replies.

In the letters seen by The Daily Telegraph, and which were mostly written by current players, the writers complained of being "spoken to like children", treated like "replaceable cogs in the machine" and having lost all faith and confidence in the programs, which are funded by Australian taxpayers.

One player described the culture as "worse than the previous program" that Hockey Australia vowed



TOXIC CULTURE



THE ACCUSATIONS

- Widespread complaints of bullying
- Players body-shamed and told they were overweight
- Players developed serious eating disorders
- Players discriminated against for being openly gay
- Surge in players requesting mental health support
- The national team on the verge of taking strike action
- A complete breakdown of trust between high performance and coaches
- Elite players – including three national captains – have quit the team
- Staff members resigning in protest
- Staff members fired at short notice – one of them in front of a toilet
- Players report being fearful of speaking out
- Players claim they were encouraged by coaches to “snitch” on their teammates
- Board members accused of not taking complaints seriously

to clean up writing: “This vicious cycle needs to stop.”

In the end, the players decided not to air all their gripes, so instead wrote a petition expressing their dismay at how badly the program was being run while pleading for help to fix it.

“We are reaching out to you directly as we feel that urgent action is required to prevent any further degradation in the team’s culture (particularly the relationship between players and coaches) and to also prevent any more players departing the program,” the players wrote.

“We have not taken the step of addressing the board lightly. We have met as a team and feel that continuing under the current structure is untenable and that the lack of trust and low morale have compromised the team’s chances of future and continued success.”

More than three months later, Hockey Australia president Mel Woosnam replied, saying that the board, led by CEO Matt Favier, had agreed to take steps to ensure the following areas were being addressed:

1. That player welfare and well-being remains a primary focus;
2. That international hockey success remains the central ambition;
3. That support services, coaching and program leadership continue to strive to be world class;
4. That a constructive and high-performing environment is re-established within the women’s program as a priority.

Or, as one current player told The Daily Telegraph: “They didn’t do a bloody thing.”

The postponement of the Tokyo

Olympics to 2021 has only heightened the tensions. Emily Smith, Georgie Morgan and Jodie Kenny have all recently quit the captaincy. Kenny has left the sport altogether, joining a mass exodus of players turning their backs on the sport.

Morgan and Rachel Lynch, two of the best players in the world, were both left off the squad for Tokyo next year, triggering the latest revolt.

Hockey Australia has promised an investigation. Now, the players are waiting to see whether it will keep it this time.

HOCKEY’S OWN GOALS

- 2016**
- **Aug:** Hockeyroos finish 6th at Rio Olympics, the team’s worst result since women’s hockey was introduced to the Olympics in 1980
- **Sept:** Women’s national head coach Adam Commens sacked after misconduct investigation over claims he exposed himself to players at the Olympics
- **Dec:** Paul Gaudoin appointed women’s head coach and Toni Cumpston appointed director of women’s high performance after review into program
- 2017**
- **Feb:** Nic Arold appointed assistant coach
- **Oct:** Georgia Nanscawen, youngest player to make 100 appearances for the Hockeyroos, quits the sport and join AFLW
- **Dec:** Arold quits, citing concerns about the program
- 2018**
- **April:** Forward Gabi Nance quits the team
- **May:** Assistant coach David Guest sacked after falling out with Gaudoin
- **May:** Squad considers going on strike before tournament in New Zealand before deciding instead to send the board a letter of complaint outlining their concerns
- **Aug:** Board replies to letter, promising some minor changes
- **Nov:** Defender Kathryn Slattery quits
- 2019**
- **Oct:** On the eve of Olympic qualifiers, players told they’re being split into two groups – one called ‘proper Hockeyroos’, the other ‘not good enough Hockeyroos’. Players told to critique the commitment of teammates to the program
- 2020**
- **Mar:** High performance closes down because of COVID-19
- **April:** Players told funding will be cut back
- **Sept:** Emily Smith, Georgie Morgan and Jodie Kenny all resign the captaincy
- **Oct:** Kenny announces retirement
- **Oct:** Morgan and star goalkeeper Rachel Lynch left out of 2021 Tokyo Olympics squad
- **Nov:** Hockey Australia announces independent review into program



HOCKEYROOS IN CRISIS

'HE TOLD ME I WAS TOO FAT' — COACH DESTROYS CAREER

RISE AND FALL OF HOCKEYROOS AT THE OLYMPICS

1984 Los Angeles	Fourth
1988 Seoul	GOLD
1992 Barcelona	Fifth
1996 Atlanta	GOLD
2000 Sydney	GOLD
2004 Athens	Fifth
2008 Beijing	Fifth
2012 London	Fifth
2016 Rio de Janeiro	Sixth

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

Australia regroup after disappointment in Rio at the 2016 Olympic Games; inset: Madi Ratcliffe. Picture: Getty Images



JULIAN LINDEN AND SIMON ORCHARD

FAST-tracked into Australia's high-performance program when she was still in her teens, Sally* was prepared to do whatever it took to represent the Hockeyroos at the Olympics.

So she trained hard, played even harder and hung on every word her coaches told her.

A prodigious talent, it wasn't long before Sally got the call-up to join the senior national team.

Then one day, unexpectedly, her coach pulled her aside and said something that knocked her for six.

"He told me I could be the best player in the world if I just wasn't so fat," she said.

Sally's world soon caved in. She stopped eating and covered up the mirrors in her home because she couldn't bear to see her reflection.

She stopped socialising with her best friends because she was scared she might be tempted to snack.

None of that impressed senior staff members, who had started ordering players to undergo weekly skinfold tests so they could measure body fat percentage.

If ever they were unhappy with the test results, those staffers would scream at players in front of all their teammates.

"What the f.ck?" Sally was asked. "Can't you control what you shove in your mouth?"

As punishment, Sally was made to run extra laps of the field after the other players had finished training. It made no difference that she was bawling her eyes out.

Sally never made it to the Olympics. She quit the sport at 21.

The final straw was seeing her father break down after he put his arm around her and pleaded with her to stop because he was so worried about her health and wellbeing.

Sally says she's fine now that she's left the program, but her story is not an isolated one.

Other women — both players and staff — have also provided disturbing, deeply personal accounts to *The Saturday Telegraph* about the culture of body-shaming that has existed in the Australian women's hockey team for more than a decade.

One team staff member who previously worked with the squad long before the current coaches took over,

speaking on condition of anonymity, saw several players develop serious eating disorders, including bulimia. This not only left players drained of energy, but some needing urgent intervention after self-harming, including alcohol abuse.

Accusations of bullying in the system are also rife. Both current and past players have complained about being belittled and pushed way beyond what is acceptable.

One player, a teenager at the time, was told by a strength and conditioning trainer that she would be "kicked in the c.†" if she couldn't lift a weight at the gym.

Another player was accused of being a slacker when she told a trainer she was having difficulty breathing at training and coughing up blood. She was told to "f.ck off and see a physio".

Days later, she was diagnosed with pneumonia and hospitalised.

She missed the 2016 Rio Olympics but made a comeback and claimed a silver medal at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, then promptly quit.

The players wrote a letter to the board that same year complaining about the management style of the new head coach Paul Gaudoin and the

high-performance director Toni Cumpston, but nothing much changed so people started walking out the door.

Madi Ratcliffe was among the players who departed. An emerging star, she was just 21.

Earmarked as a future captain, Ratcliffe had been invited into the leadership group but fell out after she made the mistake of questioning a staff member at a team meeting. "He responded by asking me how many games had I played, as if I wasn't worthy of speaking," Ratcliffe said.

Three captains have also quit and more players are threatening to leave unless changes are made.

One player officially named in the Hockeyroos squad for next year's postponed Olympics told *The Saturday Telegraph* she will pull out of Tokyo.

"I have lost faith in the board as well as no trust in the CEO, high-performance director and head coach. I can no longer pursue my lifelong dream under this regime," she said.

Many of the first-hand accounts won't even be heard by the independent investigators who have been appointed to oversee Hockey Australia's

review into the sport's toxic culture.

Under the terms of the inquiry, which opened this week, only players and staff who have been involved in the high-performance set-up since January 1, 2017, will be invited to testify, even though it's an open secret the problems within the program have been going on for well over a decade.

The *Saturday Telegraph* has obtained another letter sent to Hockey Australia's board of directors by the leadership team that addresses the deep-rooted problems with the system.

According to the letter, senior players had become so frustrated their serious complaints about the culture of the program were not being taken seriously that they were ready to walk away from the sport en masse.

"We are entitled to an environment that is free of discrimination and upholds human rights," the leadership group wrote.

"The present environment is one in which our wellbeing and performance, and thus the Australian hockey reputation and pride, is being compromised and damaged."

That letter was written in 2010.

*not her real name

HOCKEY RISKS CASH SLASH UNLESS CLAIMS CHECKED



The Hockeyroos are embroiled in allegations by past and present players of bullying and intimidation.

**JULIAN LINDEN
& SIMON ORCHARD**

HOCKEY Australia risks losing all of its public funding if it fails to acknowledge the seriousness of the scandal that has rocked one of the country's most beloved Olympic teams.

The shocking accusations about the toxic culture inside the Hockeyroos have not gone unnoticed by the Federal Government or the most powerful national sporting authorities.

Canberra has been warning taxpayer-funded sporting organisations for years they need to properly investigate any reports of abuse and intimidation of female athletes or action will be taken.

Around two dozen past and present players and staff have come forward in the past week to accuse

Hockey Australia of turning a blind eye to serious complaints about the way the women's high-performance program has been run over the past decade.

The disturbing claims include reports of body-shaming, bullying and intimidation. They have led to players developing serious eating disorders, self-harming and simply walking out on the sport they love.

Finally, their cries for help are being heard.

The Sunday Telegraph can exclusively reveal federal authorities are preparing to intervene if Hockey Australia fails to conduct a fully independent inquiry and take action on the findings.

Hockey Australia could be stripped of funding in the same way Equestrian Australia's cashflow was cut off this year because of concerns about its governance model.

That forced Equestrian Australia into voluntary administration, with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) taking over the running of the high-performance program.

Hockey Australia's review into the accusations began this week but there are already concerns about how "transparent" the process will be after president Mel Woosnam, in a newspaper report, cast doubt on some of the claims.

Chief executive Matt Favier also set off alarm bells when he revealed only people who were involved in the high-performance set-up from 2017 onwards would testify and the full findings would be kept secret.

Serious concerns have also been expressed in Canberra as to whether the review can be considered truly independent because of the ties between key figures, including Favier, who is a former director at the AIS.

Richard Redman, who has been asked to oversee the inquiry, manages the AIS Conduct & Professionalism team while Toni Cumpston, Hockey Australia's high-performance director, is also a former AIS employee.

While there's no suggestion any would not carry out their duties independently, the feeling in Canberra is the perception is not a good look.

Gymnastics Australia read the writing on the wall when it called for a fully independent investigation into claims of abuse in its sport, but the death this year of Russian-born Australian figure skater Katria Alexandrovskaya prompted an overhaul of whether sports that don't comply should be able to investigate themselves.

Big changes are coming. Three months ago, the Australian Olympic Committee, Common-

wealth Games Australia and Paralympics Australia created a working party with Sport Integrity Australia and the National Sports Tribunal to develop a fully independent framework to deal with abuse, intimidation and other safeguarding issues in Australian sport.

Once up and running, authorities will independently investigate serious sports issues – including a provision to protect whistleblowers – instead of leaving it to bodies such as Hockey Australia.

One thing that won't change though is who gets to pick Olympic teams.

There have been calls for Hockey Australia to reselect its team for next year's Tokyo Olympics after the review is finished but the AOC confirmed it will not interfere because selection is always a matter for individual sports to decide.