

'A female journalist's worst nightmare': The collateral damage of Tom Morris and Luke Beveridge's AFL egos



Alex Blackwell, left, says women still face too many barriers in the male-dominated sports industry. Picture: Getty Images.

Kristy Williams

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Thursday was an utterly exhausting day for female sports journalists. Well, all women.

What started as male egos colliding in an AFL press conference - where [Western Bulldogs coach Luke Beveridge attacked Fox Sports journalist Tom Morris](#) - ended with a female sports reporter as the collateral damage.

[Beveridge was angry after Morris reported team news](#) before it was announced, labelling it "gutter journalism" and calling Morris an embarrassment before the coach was forced to apologise and fined \$20,000.

Seemingly in retaliation against Morris, someone leaked the audio of a private group chat where Morris effectively outed one of his prominent colleagues, and then objectified her with abhorrent, misogynistic and homophobic language in a group chat. Morris was sacked on Friday by Fox Sports.

It was every female journalist's worst nightmare. Female athletes and journalists, particularly those that belong to the LGBTQIA+ community, have long hidden, or even repressed, their sexuality for fear of being ridiculed.

As a female sports journalist, a gay woman and a former (very average) semi-professional cricketer, I have experienced these attitudes for 30 years.

When I was coaching a cricket side once, a mum found out I had a girlfriend and pulled her child from the side because she didn't want her daughter to be "preyed upon" at a time when I was severely struggling with sexuality myself.

When I wrote about that experience as a journalist, someone sent me a message asking me why I could write so openly about my "dyke lifestyle"; and this is just one heartbreak example.

For a prominent, talented and hard-working journalist to be dragged into a spat between two men and have the video dominating conversations is disgusting.

We've chosen not to name that journalist because she doesn't deserve to be in the middle of this. For her to be treated like a piece of meat and have her sexuality vilified is even worse.

Some people might be under the illusion sexism doesn't exist these days. Well, let's hope that illusion is shattered. If you hear something, say something.

One can't help but think of a famous quote that can be linked back to philosopher John Stuart Mill: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

We have to be clear here. The Beveridge v Morris clash is a very different one to the fallout controversy: Morris v women. But it shouldn't just be Morris v women. His comments should offend men, too. Because a lot of the people defending Morris when he was attacked by Beveridge disappeared when Morris's messages were leaked.

We have to be clear about this as well: Morris isn't just a bad egg. He is emblematic of a much wider attitude to women, particularly in sport.

Australian cricket great Alex Blackwell gave countless equally heartbreaking examples in her recently-released memoir Fair Game, which she wrote with female sports journalist Megan Maurice.

She explained during the height of her career, a colleague's behaviour pushed her to the brink of quitting cricket.

"During some down time while people were eating, a Cricket Australia employee wandered over for a chat. 'Hey guys, how's it going?' he asked. We chatted for a bit and

he got talking to Mitch (Starc, Australian fast bowler), whose partner Alyssa Healy was part of our Australian women's team," Blackwell wrote.

"So what's it like being one of the HABs (husbands and boyfriends) on tour with the women?" he asked. 'It's great but there aren't too many of us!' Mitch responded with a laugh. 'Yeah, it's getting better though,' the employee laughed.

"Mitch looked uncomfortable and I fell silent, shrinking into my seat ... in the eyes of this man, women's cricket was getting better because there were more women like Alyssa with male partners, and fewer people like me."

Starc, and wife Alyssa, are themselves fantastic advocates for the LGBTQIA+ community, but this Cricket Australia employee clearly isn't.

On Friday, as part of her role as a co-patron of Pride in Sport, Blackwell weighed in on Morris's actions: "These sorts of examples are why so many LGBTQ+ people do not come out - whether they be athletes or working in the sport industry more broadly.

"For so many, being LGBTQ+ is a source of fear and is still considered a risk - for them, their careers and for those close to them. Add being a woman journalist in a male-dominated arena, these barriers are even higher."

[**Canberra Olympian Gracie Elvin this week told Australian Community Media**](#) she only came out towards the end of her professional career and said in some ways she wished she could have been that role model in the sport earlier.

"Sport is really interesting in regard to sexuality, because I think a lot of people that are trying to find who they are as a person, and what their identity is, get drawn to sport but maybe, ironically, feel afraid to fully be themselves because of the culture that they find themselves in," Elvin said.

For every man, woman and non-binary person in sporting and media industries, enough is enough.

You are essentially condoning this behaviour if you aren't calling it out.

[**Damning research**](#) conducted for International Women's Day on behalf of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership in London (led by glass ceiling breaker Julia Gillard) indicated Australia was above the global average in almost all of the categories which essentially rated the sexist and misogynistic attitudes of 29 countries.

Morris is just one of many; don't let your outrage stay in this situation. You'll need to call out this behaviour again and again.

Major networks, media organisations and sporting clubs routinely continue to employ men convicted of assault or domestic violence again women.

If you can kick a ball well, who cares what kind of person and example you are setting for the industry, right?

What some may think of as off-the-cuff comments from Morris help perpetuate the continuing belief that women are objects.

Female athletes and sports journalists are not surprised, but we are still heartbroken - so please, do better.