

The logo consists of the letters 'BN' in a stylized, white, outlined font, set against a solid blue square background.

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BUSINESSNEWS

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a person's legs from the knees down, wearing athletic sneakers with red and grey details. They are running on a dirt path, and the scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise, with a hazy, orange sky in the background.

Business of sport

SPECIAL REPORT





\$4.3m

HOCKEY WA
REVENUE (FY20)

Fabian Ross has strong ties to WA's hockey community.
Photo: David Henry

Ross pursues passion for hockey

Fabian Ross aims to use his experience transforming businesses to lift the profile of hockey in WA.



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Roberts joined the West Australian Football Commission from Tennis West in December and was recently replaced [at Tennis West] by commentator and Tennis Australia board member Brett Patten.

Mr Ross told *Business News* his passion for hockey was a major factor in his decision and that he aimed to leverage his strong corporate background to lift the sport's profile in WA.

Having played hockey from a young age and being a member of the Whitford Hockey Club (where his sons play), Mr Ross said he was fortunate to run a business that reflected his passion.

"I could've gone into another role in financial services or into another corporate environment, but ... I'm at a stage in my career where I can make choices," Mr Ross told *Business News*.

"The choice I wanted to make was, 'How do I give back to the community and give back by adding value to something I'm really passionate about?'"

"When you can get to a point in your career when you can help administer a business that is a passion of yours, you're in a pretty fortunate position."

Before joining Hockey WA, Mr Ross spent four years as chief executive of WA Super (now Aware Super), during which time he helped grow the fund

manager's assets from about \$2.8 billion to more than \$4 billion.

And despite a strong financial services background, including executive roles at BT Financial Group and GESB, Mr Ross believes the skills he has learned are transferable.

"I think a lot of the business disciplines are similar ... such as building a positive culture or adopting a change mindset," he said.

"The world is moving so rapidly; you can't just set and forget strategy."

One of the most important business strategies, Mr Ross said, was developing member-client focus, which he believed would be vital for Hockey WA.

The association generated \$4.3 million in revenue in the past financial year, making it WA's eighth-largest sporting and recreational association, according to *Business News*' Data & Insights.

Mr Ross said Hockey WA's job was to ensure people knew the role the sport played in the community, as well as providing a platform for players to make it to elite-level competitions.

Despite a crowded sporting environment, hockey had not yet sold itself as a unique and differentiated sport, he said.

"You can play hockey whether you're a young person all the way through to your 70s and 80s," Mr Ross said.

"But what it's always traditionally been able to do is, whether you're a female or a male, you've been able to play the game in an equal way.

"All the rules are the same, the game time is the same.

"We've always had this equality, but we've never really sold it in a way in which it is a clear differentiator."

Still, he said the sport's growth was in an upswing.

Mr Ross said Hockey WA had experienced a spike in engagement across all its social media channels, as well as garnered more corporate interest, including from Maddington business All Flags Signs and Banners, which is sponsoring the state's premier league.

Other major partners include government-run Healthway, Lotterywest, and Curtin University.

"There are a lot of great ideas that we have, and you can't do all those things without sponsorship dollars," he said, noting Hockey WA's interest in doing more with its school and regional programs.

"It's around community involvement, it's around wellbeing, it's around that family time.

"This is about lifting the profile of hockey, and for people to realise what hockey can deliver."

THE appointment of Fabian Ross as chief executive of Hockey WA early this year came as a bolt from the blue to many in the state's business community.

After all, the former WA Super chief executive had only recently steered the fund manager towards a successful multi-billion-dollar merger.

His lack of experience leading sports organisations made the move even more noticeable.

Generally speaking, sporting organisations and clubs tend to recruit across codes. For example, Michael

Data & Insights

WA'S LARGEST SPORTING AND RECREATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Ranked by WA revenue - most recent financial year (\$m)



Rank	Association	Senior executive and title	Year est.	Number of Participants	Balance date	WA revenue - most recent financial year (\$m)	WA revenue - previous financial year (\$m)	Operating revenue (\$m)
1	Racing and Wagering Western Australia	Mr Ian Edwards Chief executive	2003	24,000	31-Jul-20	332.4	327.8	310.2
2	Western Australian Cricket Association	Ms Christina Matthews Chief executive	1885	180,000	30-Jun-20	38.3	37.2	
3	WA Football Commission	Mr Michael Roberts Chief executive	1989	93,000	30-Oct-20	23.3*	31.7*	19.1*
4	Surf Life Saving Western Australia	Mr James O'Toole Chief executive	1909	22,427	30-Apr-20	13.6	12.9	6.5
5	Football West	Mr James Curtis Chief executive	2004	96,000	31-Oct-20	9.6	7.9	4.7
6	Netball WA	Ms Simone Hansen Chief executive	2007	237,000	31-Dec-19	8.7	6.6	2.7
7	Baseball WA	Mr Lachlan Dale Chief executive	1936	1,000	30-Jun-20	5.6	2.5	
8	Hockey WA	Mr Fabian Ross Chief executive	1928		31-Dec-20	4.3	5.2	3.6
9	Basketball WA	Mr Rob Clement Chief executive	1946	50,000	31-Dec-19	4.2	3.7	3.1
10	Tennis West	Ms Olivia Birkett A/Chief executive	1903	113,000	30-Jun-20	3.4	3.5	1.0
11	Swimming WA	Mr Darren Beazley Chief executive	1902	12,000	30-Jun-20	3.4	3.6	1.9
12	Rugby WA	Mr Bob Hunter Chief executive	1893		31-Dec-19	3.1	2.6	1.7
13	Equestrian Western Australia Inc	Mr Dwight Pedlow Chief executive	1951	2,300	31-Dec-20	2.3	2.0	1.9
14	Gymnastics WA	Ms Emily Randall Executive director		18,000	31-Dec-20	2.2	2.5	1.9
15	Surfing WA	Mr Mark Lane Chief executive	1964	148,000	30-Jun-20	1.8	4.3	1.2
16	WestCycle	Mr Wayne Bradshaw Chief executive	2012	26,000	30-Jun-20	1.5	1.4	.50
17	Golf Western Australia	Mr Gary Thomas Chief executive	2011	30,000	31-Dec-20	1.4	1.5	1.0
18	Athletics West	Mr Vince Del Prete Chief executive	1897		30-Jun-20	0.8		0.3
19	Diving WA	Mr Steven Rose Chief executive	2015	352	30-Jun-20	0.4	4.1	0.2



Buti hits the ground running

Opportunities are on the field for WA's new sports minister.



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“I see a great synergy that sport can have with education, health and multicultural interests

- Tony Buti

SPORTS law may not make for the most scintillating read, but that didn't stop newly minted sports minister Tony Buti from writing a 157-page report on the subject in the late 2000s.

A self-professed Fremantle Dockers tragic and frequent marathon runner, Dr Buti's professional career before entering parliament focused on social issues such as Aboriginal rights and the fallout from the Stolen Generations.

Growing up in the 1970s, however, his love of sport conquered all, influencing his decision to go to university and become a PE teacher.

By the time he went to law school in the early 1990s, Dr Buti had developed an interest in regulation of doping and drug use in sports, coming out the other end after working as an AFL agent and government regulator with significant knowledge of the subject.

“It started off as just an innate love and interest in sport,” he told *Business News*.

“Marry it with my legal career, and that's where my interest came in, and remains.”

It's a passion that puts him in good stead for what is otherwise a lower-profile appointment for Dr Buti.

His assignments are at once wide-ranging and significant for a first-time minister, having taken finance and lands from outgoing treasurer Ben Wyatt.

Sports, though, is generally seen by commentators as a portfolio given to party veterans and former athletes, with Labor's Mick Murray and the Nationals WA's Colin Holt and Terry Waldron among the more notable figures holding the position in recent years.

Behind half-page stories on grant funding for minor sporting associations and community groups, however, is a state government department that employs more than 900 people, controls more than \$500 million worth of assets, and oversees revenue of \$182 million (per Data & Insights).

The breadth of its partnership is exceptionally broad, too, from the Perth Glory, Wildcats and Scorchers, through to entities associated with

archery, canoeing, parachuting and bocce.

Dr Buti's love of sports appears inexplicable at first blush. Equal parts bookish and a policy wonk, his resume is replete with a PhD from Oxford University on Aboriginal rights alongside teaching stints at the University of Western Australia, Murdoch University and the Australian National University.

His inaugural speech to parliament contained numerous references to and quotes from Michel Foucault, Robert Reich and Friedrich Nietzsche.

In between those words, he offered his thoughts on policing, poverty and education, opining on the benefits of embracing the non-traditional, aspirational qualities of the arts and sports as a way of improving outcomes for disadvantaged students.

For kids who grow up playing Australian football, he saw an opportunity for them to learn about history, stay fit and take on leadership roles at an early age.

Dr Buti admits those ideas do not strictly pertain to his job as sports minister. Still, he sees the ability to promote opportunities in the community as fundamental to the role.

“I see a great synergy that sport can have with education, health and multicultural interests, and making kids who may feel marginalised part of the mainstream,” he said.

“For instance, The Clontarf Football Academy is not there to make people into AFL footballers; it's there as a vehicle to get Aboriginal kids to go to school.

“I hope to work with a number of ministers, including the education minister, to facilitate sport as a vehicle to help education retention rates and hopefully be part of preventative health and improve the mental health of our society.”

For all his talents and accolades, Dr Buti's journey from backbencher to minister has come in fits and starts.

First elected in 2010 to the seat of Armadale to replace Alannah MacTiernan, Dr Buti secured a 5 per cent swing on the way to victory that year before going on to comfortably win re-election in 2013, 2017 and 2021.

And while his electoral performance is impressive – he's never won less than 50 per cent of the primary vote – his lack of factional backing before now left him to languish on the backbench during Mr McGowan's first term as premier.

Dr Buti's work leading the public accounts committee's high-profile inquiry into the WA Football Commission earned him bipartisan applause and widespread attention amid reports the commission had sunk unusually large amounts of money into executive salaries.

His preamble and commentary tackled these concerns in, at times, withering terms, with one exchange with West Coast Eagles chief executive Trevor Nisbett calling into question the latter's view that millions of dollars in state government funding for the commission was “football money”.

Overseeing those reforms will be integral in the coming months, not least of all fixing the commission's convoluted election process.

“It comes down to the focus on grassroots sport,” Dr Buti said.

“WAFC's major focus has to be on community football, whether that's the WAFL, Perth Football League, Metro League, Integrated Football or Country Football.

“Through the inquiry, I had concerns about whether that was the focus at the time.

“I'm more confident that's become their focus, and I want to ensure that the WAFC goes down the path of community football being a number one priority.”

Few doubt Dr Buti's acumen as the committee's chair, as well as his decision to align with Labor's disjointed right faction, were major factors in his promotion.

For a politician whose adolescence and professional career has almost always tangentially related to sports, though, it's his focus on the opportunities accorded by community and fitness that will remain paramount in the months ahead.

“I love sport, and I think participation in sport is important on a number of levels,” Dr Buti said.

Tony Buti became sports minister in March.
Photo: David Henry



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CBA partners with Football Australia

with Football Australia. The sport 's governing body, which ... our bold new vision for the sport coming to life and the new ... largest supporter of women's sport in the country. The bank ...

Henderson departs Carabiner

award-winning WA Institute of Sport , State Rugby Centre, Cockburn ...

Get inspired for good mental health

to attend the school's sports carnival that day - very ... event. It doesn't have to be sports based - just something ...

Making YOUR Mark - Reflections on the AFL docuseries

year was like nothing the sport had ever seen before and ... doubt that the professional sporting teams are interacting and ...

FIFA Women's World Cup coming to Perth

host the tournament. The sporting facility is set to be built ... rooms, training facilities, a sports medicine centre, a kiosk ... morning, newly-appointed Sport and Recreation Minister Tony ...

Focused Harmanis has his mind on the job

states, and potentially into sports to help athletes prevent ...

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