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Playing a waiting game

With the AFL and NRL under way we can get back to the main topic of the winter season — who was taking peptides and who tipped off who in the lead up to the release of the Australian Crime Commission Report, codenamed “Project Aperio”.

The report, released in February last year, did not name any club or person but focussed on the AFL and NRL.

It is now clear the principal source of interest was Stephen Dank, one-time sports scientist with the Cronulla Sharks in the NRL and the Essendon Bombers in the AFL.

One thing those two clubs also had in common was that I was a patron for both in the early 2000s.

I will say no more about that. I decline to answer any questions on the grounds that I knew nothing, your Honour.

The Cronulla Sharks’ coach Shane Flanagan is under a 12-month ban, as is Essendon coach James Hird.

But Hird’s wife Tania is none too happy about his treatment. She let rip against the AFL on the ABC program 7.30 last week.

It may or it may not help her case, but she has every right to say what she thinks.

We are not yet at the stage where players’ wives have to get clearance from football administrators before they can give their opinions.

It was laughable to hear the AFL chorus in the media suggest Hird should get his wife “under control”.

What is an organisation that prides itself on “progressive views” doing when it suggests that women speak only



Jason Clare and Kate Lundy called the nation’s leading sport administrators to Parliament House for the ‘Blackest day in Australian sport’ press conference on February 7, 2013. Australia is still waiting for any charges to be laid.

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Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA). No criminal charges have been laid and the man at the centre of it all, Stephen Dank, said last week he hasn’t even spoken to the authorities.

How did things become so absurd? It was February 7 last year when the chief executives of all the major sporting codes of Australia lined up behind an oh-so-serious justice minister Jason Clare and an equally serious sports minister Senator Kate Lundy to announce they had “shocking” findings which would “disgust” all Australian sports fans.

They said they had evidence that drugs in sport was linked to organised crime.

Lundy declared the government had one simple message:

“We will catch you — we are well on the way to seeking out and hunting down those who dope and cheat”.

Well, not so well on the way as to put someone away in prison, or to secure a conviction in court, or to hold a trial, or even to lay a charge.

The Australian Crime Commission is there to fight organised crime. I give the police the benefit of the doubt.

Perhaps some charges will be laid against the criminal bosses behind this shocking business. When they are I hope police call a press conference to let us know about it.

That’s the general idea — to call a press conference when you have something to announce rather than to distrib-

ute vague allegations against the world at large.

When a politician makes an announcement it is useful to have a backdrop that illustrates the point. It is good to do an environmental announcement in a forest so the camera can get footage of all those beautiful trees. Job announcements are best done on an assembly line to show people hard at work. If it is about road construction it is best to do it wearing a hard hat with a green vest and a shovel in hand.

Television is a visual medium. The footage tells the story. That is why media advisers work so hard at choosing location and backdrops.

February 7, 2013, came to be described as “The blackest day in Australian sport”. But what actually happened on that day? Was a criminal charged, or a cheat shamed out of the industry? No, that was the day when the chiefs of all the major sporting codes flew to Canberra to stand on a stage behind two government ministers as they claimed organised crime had penetrated their industry.

They were there to lend credibility to the claims. They were the backdrop, the footage, the props for the day.

Probably they had no idea they were going to be used like that. It was not the blackest day in Australian sport but it was a black day for the sporting CEOs. Since then things have continued exactly the way they started — a circus of media manipulation.

If this was a sporting contest someone would blow the final siren and declare the result.

But, unfortunately, this is more serious than that. It involves people’s lives and their reputations. Once you start a game like this people are playing for keeps.