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News release

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HECS For Elite Sports Stars

High-income sports stars including Lleyton Hewitt, Cathy Freeman and Shane Warne would be required to repay the costs of their publicly funded training under a new HECS-style scheme for elite sports developed by The Australia Institute, a public interest think tank.

The scheme would require sportsperson who sign up to AIS programs to begin to repay their debt once their incomes reached \$100,000. (University graduates are required to begin to repay their HECS debts when their incomes reach \$24,365.)

“Among the top 50 sports income earners last year, sports stars who were trained by the AIS earned more than \$50 million”, said Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton.

“Lleyton Hewitt alone, who was supported by AIS funds in 1993 and 1994, earned \$18,800,000. Without the kick-start funded by Australian tax payers some of these sports men and women would not be earning such big money and it’s only fair that they pay back what the public put into them if they become wealthy as a result.”

The Institute estimates that, on average, AIS scholarships are worth at least \$23,000 a year, with the funds providing for training, competition and travel costs. The sports that receive most funding from the Australian Sports Commission are swimming, athletics, basketball, hockey, cycling and soccer.

Apart from Lleyton Hewitt, last year’s biggest earning sports stars who had attended the AIS were Mark Viduka (income \$7,500,000), Craig Moore (\$3,750,000), Josip Skoko (\$3,000,000), Cathy Freeman (\$1,720,000), Shane Warne (\$1,700,000), Glenn McGrath (\$1,500,000), Adam Gilchrist (\$1,300,000) and Michael Klim (\$1,000,000).

The report notes that Mark Viduka, who attended the AIS soccer program in 1992 and 1993 and now has an income of \$7,500,000, would pay off his debt in less than a year.

“The huge incomes available to elite sportspeople and the high repayment threshold proposed in the new scheme would ensure that no athletes were discouraged from pursuing sporting excellence”, said report author Richard Denniss. “And the funds raised from the scheme could be poured back into sport at all levels.”

The report can be viewed under “What’s New” on the Institute’s website.