

Explanatory Note: Cultural Sector Interviews

Australian Cultural Fields researchers conducted a range of semi-structured interviews (26 in total) with key government, industry and agency professionals to enhance our knowledge of the changing dynamics of Australian cultural fields since 1994, although often encompassing earlier periods. The interviewees are individuals with deep experience and expertise in their respective fields.

Following the completion of the project, several interviewees gave their permission for these transcripts to be uploaded to the ACF project website for wide public dissemination and reasons of posterity.

Interviews were recorded and professional transcribers turned them into text. In reviewing the transcripts, interviewers checked both audio and text for accuracy as much as was feasible. There is some variation in transcription style and notation, and in many cases further editing was undertaken in consultation with the interviewee (and, in one case, the person responsible for their estate).

The interview material was checked by the interviewers, interviewees (and, as noted, a representative in one case) and other members of the Australian Cultural Fields research team for clarity and accuracy. Often these transcripts are conversational in nature, and no attempt has been made to correct the inevitable *non-sequiturs*, grammatical errors etc. of 'organic' oral communication. Some interview sections were deleted at the request of the interviewees or because of potential legal implications. These deletions are flagged where it is necessary to preserve the overall coherence of the interview. The views expressed in the interviews are those of the interviewees.

These interviews were conducted with approval of the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (H11025). Subsequent approval to publish the transcripts to the ACF website was given following a research ethics amendment request. Some cultural sector interviews were not published according to the wishes of the interviewee (or their representative).

We extend our sincere gratitude to the interviewees and their representatives for permission to share these transcripts, and for their assistance in preparing them to be uploaded to the ACF website.

Australian Cultural Fields researchers are confident that these qualitative data, alongside other data analysed in our many research publications, constitute an enduring resource for future cultural research and debate in Australia and beyond.

Tracey Holmes

This interview was conducted in 2017 as part of 'Australian Cultural Fields: National and Transnational Dynamics' (ACF), an Australian Research Council funded Discovery Project (DP140101970). The project website is <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/acf/>
The transcript was uploaded to the ACF website in November 2022.

Interviewee and position (at time of interview):

Tracey Holmes, Journalist, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

Interviewer: Professor David Rowe, Western Sydney University

Interview date: 14 November 2017

Interview location: Ultimo, Sydney

ACF field(s): Media; sport

START

David Rowe

We're off, thanks very much for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you just introduce yourself, perhaps say who you are and a little bit about your work here?

Tracey Holmes

Sure, I'm Tracey Holmes, I work at the ABC, I'm a journalist. For a long time, nearly 30 years, I've worked predominantly in sport, but looking mostly at how sport is influenced by and influences the societies that it exists in. So, I've lived overseas for 14 years and worked with different media organisations there and I've covered quite a few of the world's major sports and that's me.

David Rowe

Okay and you've also worked for sports organisations as well haven't you?

Tracey Holmes

I have yes, I actually started as a publicist, I worked for the World Surfing Circuit, the World Professional Tour. I worked for the Bicentennial Authority in 88 as a publicist for the Sport 88 Program. What else have I done, I worked in a PR company and I worked for Sydney 2000 as the Media Information Manager in the lead up to the Olympics. I left actually before the Olympics began.

David Rowe

So, you did work for the Sydney organisation?

Tracey Holmes

Yes, SOCOG [Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games], yeah.

David Rowe

So, obviously you've had quite a role in this area between media and sport. To talk about the sport field first, if I said to you describe the sport sector to me. What would you say?

Tracey Holmes

Goodness, it's a big one.

David Rowe

A big one, yeah.

Tracey Holmes

It's quite diverse, which is good becoming more and more diverse in many ways. So, the sport sector, I'd divide it into separate entities. One is the sort of communal sport and sport that is played by young people, old people for fun to be part of a community, part of a local scene, then on the other side I'd say there's professional or elite sport which is part of the entertainment industry. It's driven by profit a lot of the time, although not everybody's sure where all that money goes. It's not always given back to the people that are creating the product and it's driven a lot by television, you know, selling rights to big events.

Even you have organisations like the Australian Olympic Committee which hovers sort of somewhere in the middle, they pick out the best of those that play sport for fun, turn them into elite athletes, and use that if they go off and win gold medals or World Championships or set world records. It becomes a bit of a funding model and a funding machine for the

national sports bodies like Swimming Australia, Athletics Australia, Rowing Australia etc. etc., so there's a crossover.

David Rowe

The overall relationship between these two areas of sport, you said there's some crossover but is there a tension there? Do you see them in tension at all?

Tracey Holmes

Well, they are in that so much focus has been put on the elite business side of sport, and this idea that the success and the money will trickle down hasn't occurred, and so the tension at the moment is that there's a lot of junior sport, a lot of grassroots sport, a lot of new models like sports for refugees, and people that put programs in place find it difficult to get the funding because there's so much focus on winning at that elite end. You know, the idea that if we just fund the top end, we'll get more gold medals, that's true but the hope that that is going to be enough to get people to enrol in sport as juniors, so that we can get the next generation of world champions out of them, doesn't necessarily happen. What's happened is junior sport, for example, has just become so expensive in many ways that a lot of families can't afford it. So, then you've got a situation where it becomes sport for the rich or sport for kids that are lucky enough to go to schools that have very good sports programs, because they can afford it because they're private schools or Catholic schools with a different funding model. So, it's dividing sectors as well, you know, the haves and the have nots.

David Rowe

Okay thanks, so, it's often said that sport is, okay, a really important aspect of Australian culture, some people think that it defines it. Where would you put sport within Australian culture?

Tracey Holmes

I would say it's right up there and if you talk to most people overseas that know very little about Australia, they talk about the landscape and they talk about Australian sporting success. Of course, we achieve in so many other areas as well, probably over achieve in things like, we've got so many entrepreneurs, scientists, academics and authors that do incredible things. A lot of them have to move overseas to be recognised or appropriately rewarded for what they do, but still that sport thing, even though I do think it's a bit of a

myth, I do think it's a bit of a myth, but we're told that myth so often to ourselves and the outside world that everybody now just believes it.

David Rowe

So, if that myth is so powerful, why is sport absent from the national cultural policy, the first one created...?

Tracey Holmes

That's a really good question, I've no idea because there's also I think a bit of snobbery involved here and I get to see it quite a bit at the ABC. There's a cultural snobbery that sport is beneath a lot of people, and I think even the ABC, you know, our charter says that we are to reflect Australian culture back to it and we don't do that with sport anymore. We used to, the ABC was crucial to sport for many, many decades. That's all gone, and you try talking sport to a number of different departments and it's absent from the conversation, and if they do want to look at it, it's only to find the negative, it's almost to tear sport down to say, "see that's why we don't like it because, whatever".

There's doping, there's people that are conning the system or it's rort, it's not functioning as it should, you now there are checks and balances that are not there that should be there. That's the only side they see. But a lot of that I wonder whether that comes from - a lot of people have traumatic experiences with sport when they're at school, so lunchtimes in the playground, you're playing netball or basketball or cricket or footy, and if you don't and you don't throw yourself into it 100 per cent in that kind of Aussie grit style then you're an outsider.

David Rowe

Sorry, there's also a bit something of a cultural hierarchy you'd say and sport tends to be, certainly in some sectors or some areas, it's fairly low down, is that partly because sport is focused on the body rather than the mind as people would see it?

Tracey Holmes

Definitely, and I think that's wrong. It's so wrong in so many ways because, you know, look at countries that celebrate sport in a different way, so, for instance, even the USA, which is quite similar in many ways to Australia. So, their whole sporting system is geared towards college and you might not get a degree in quantum physics, you can if you want to, some do. But you're being educated at the same time that you're playing sport, and

you listen to so many of their athletes and that's why they get involved in other parts of society. That's why they're so conscious of the environment they come from, and knowing their rights and how they can make a difference to society through their profile as an athlete, that's only just starting in Australia.

I think there's always been the exception, but sport in Australia has been such a separate entity and if you do sport that's all you do, and yet there's a lot of very, very clever people; a lot of very engaged people in all sorts of areas, smart people and now more and more people with degrees who have an expertise in another area and I think that will slowly change the way people see sport. Even our sports coverage, you look at some of the sports coverage in the UK and in the USA, many parts of the world, there's some of the best journalism that comes from sport and yet here, I don't want to be rude, but sport's journalism can be really the bottom of the pile.

Of course, there are exceptions but the idea that you can take a sports story and turn it into something else, is still seen as foreign, even though a lot of journalists are capable of doing that. Sports journalists, there's a reluctance in the part of the media to go there.

David Rowe

If there's something of a hierarchy between sport and perhaps other forms of culture, is there a hierarchy of sports as well within sport? Are some sports higher; are some sports higher than...?

Tracey Holmes

Yes, of course, and the high-profile sports, the rugby league, AFL, cricket, they would be the top three, and then once every four years, whatever you win a gold medal in becomes quite high profile for two weeks [laughs]. And maybe a bit of a flow-on, so in that respect you know you look at sports that get a lot of the funding, and they're the ones that win the gold medals at the Olympics and then we rarely hear about them in the years in between. So, rowing, gets a lot of money, cycling gets a lot of money, and that enables them to build more of a profile, promote their athletes, yeah there's definitely a hierarchy.

David Rowe

Are some sports sort of connected to elite educational organisations? You mentioned rowing, for example.

Tracey Holmes

Yeah, they're starting to do that, oh definitely.

David Rowe

Maybe rugby union too.

Tracey Holmes

There are some sports and they say that it's wrong to say that you need to be rich to participate in these sports. That's true, you actually do [need to be rich], or you need to have the benefit of going to a, inverted commas, 'rich school', because not every school offers rowing on the program. So, what ends up happening also is that you then end up having sports that are not representative of the society they exist in. So, there's not a lot of diversity in rowing and, in fact, you look at a sport like cricket, there should be so much more diversity in the teams that represent us and there isn't. What you find, then, is that people tend to congregate together so there are teams that are out there playing as you would expect full of Indians, but they are an 'Indian' team.

That sort of mix still hasn't happened, and I've had discussions with the head of Cricket Australia, the head of Netball Australia, again, which is an extremely White team, and they know it's an issue. But they don't seem to know how to go about changing that and yet that fascinates me because Rugby League's done it, AFL's done it, they might not always get it right, but they've done it. They've done it really well and other sports sometimes, I think, they claim to want to address situations, but they don't do a lot of work to guarantee that that happens.

David Rowe

Thank you, so you mentioned there that, and I certainly find this from the work I did recently in Western Sydney, that say registration fees are a barrier. There's a class barrier there just in terms of having the resources even to play at the community level, school level, is that something that you see?

Tracey Holmes

Yes, definitely. Also, I mean I remember reading in Steve Waugh's book, former captain of the Australian cricket team, and when he was young, I think about 12 years of age, I might be wrong on the age, but he was young, and he played soccer, football. And he got picked in a New South Wales team and they're off to the national championships and he

was sitting on the bus going down with the team, and he said everybody on the bus was speaking another language, and he felt so isolated, and he said he remembers that registering in his mind, if ever he was a captain of a team, he would never let anyone in his team feel like that.

I thought that's astounding because I don't think there was ever anyone in his cricket team ever spoke another language [laughs]. So, he didn't actually have to confront that but for him to notice that and I think there's quite a lot of that. So, if an athlete, a young kid wants to go and join somewhere and they can't see anyone that looks like them, and the group is a powerful group and there's one offsider standing there who doesn't feel comfortable, they're not going to come back next week. So, even if the money's not a barrier, there are still those cultural barriers that are determined by, you know, the way we look or the clothes we wear or the colour of our skin etc.

David Rowe

Sometimes, in some areas there's a problem of dealing with cultural diversity, accommodating cultural diversity? So, is sport dominated by the Anglo-Celts?

Tracey Holmes

It has been and, you know, some sports still are, but others have broken down those barriers; you know, both of our highest profile football codes, rugby league and soccer obviously, but that came from 'the Other', you know [laughs], and now it's bringing other people in. But yeah, some sports have done remarkably well at that and others just haven't gone there for whatever reason.

David Rowe

What about the role of government in this, how important is government in the sport field?

Tracey Holmes

I think government's really important because you know policy is set, it's run through the Australian Sports Commission. The Australian Sports Commission is the one that decides which sports bodies are going to get money and for what. I think the program they're running with at the moment and these sorts of things go in cycles, they review them and change them and turn them around. So the Winning Edge program at the moment, I don't think is successful and I think what it does is it keeps rewarding the haves and it doesn't reward the have nots.

In the end, you need to ask yourself also should it be a reward system, or should it be seen as an investment system to address some of these other issues that dominate these other sports and what holds them back and why it holds them back. So, I think the thinking in that regard at the moment is not of most benefit to sport and Australians generally.

David Rowe

I mentioned *Creative Nation* as the national cultural policy as a landmark, is there an equivalent in the sport area, a major report that...?

Tracey Holmes

There was the Crawford Report, and I think the Crawford Report was quite fascinating but like a lot of these reports, it then sort of gets put out in the public domain, and those sports that have the greatest lobbyists go about lobbying on their own behalf and it's not an ideal situation where the loudest voice in the room wins every time. So, in some regard a lot of what was suggested in the Crawford Report was rejected because you had the Australian Olympic Committee seeing it as a threat to it's, you know, dominance if you like, if you want to sort of use a word like that [laughs]. So, what tends to happen is that sporting organisations are run by very dedicated people, very committed people who have been there most of their life, and have worked their way up to the top positions.

So, of course, they protect their domain like it's their family and they have every right to do that, but they're then seen as the experts and sometimes they're not when you need to look at the bigger picture. They have an expertise in their area but also they've rarely been challenged on that expertise, they've rarely been in a situation where people can say, "but here is an alternative", and I think that comes from the way sports have been administered. They're really quite autocratic institutions and the people that run them become more and more powerful, and with that seems to come less and less ability to see alternatives or another way.

I'm not saying that to be derogatory, that is just what happens. You look at the International Olympic Committee, for instance, which the AOC is a part of. And the Olympic Committee is facing all sorts of crises at the moment, the main one being relevance. They've sort of, they've become so perfected in what they do that they're almost irrelevant to the modern era and they're struggling now in how to address that, but it's very hard to tear down some of those walls that've been built.

And I think that happens a lot in sport, simply because the people who are there and I give them complete credit for dedicating a lifetime to building something up like that, but there

needs to be other people on the outside who are prepared to say to these people, maybe you do need to consider something else. And maybe instead of us taking your advice on who we should give our money to [laughs], we're actually going to offer you some advice and you can come back to us and we'll decide what's best [laughs].

David Rowe

Well in the case of the Crawford Report, the specific objection from the AOC and so on was a rebalancing of funding priorities away from the performance-based area and more towards grassroots, there's a big objection to that. Is that an example of that split that you saw in the sport field?

Tracey Holmes

Exactly.

David Rowe

Between the high end...

Tracey Holmes

And grassroots. The idea is, you know, you have sensational names and profiles and everyone will go flocking to the sport because of that person's profile, but it doesn't happen like that if you can't afford to go flocking to the sport every Saturday or Sunday.

David Rowe

I know that you yourself are involved in training or education in sports journalism, and you mentioned that there's also high levels of training and sophistication in the sport field itself. Is that something that has changed, that level of education and training, has that changed over the last two decades or so?

Tracey Holmes

With athletes?

David Rowe

In sports.

Tracey Holmes

In sports generally.

David Rowe

In this case, including sports journalists who you mentioned...

Tracey Holmes

Yes probably, because I think, you know, in years gone by lots of people would leave school in year 10. That doesn't happen so much anymore, if at all. Everybody's getting an HSC and now with lack of jobs and all sorts of other societal strains, people are going onto tertiary education or getting other training in other areas at other institutions. So, that is having an impact but interestingly what's having the biggest impact is the rise of sports player associations. I think they're having a huge influence and it's interesting because, in the rest of society, unionism is on the decline but in sport it's on the incline. Because, I think it's the first time where, because there's so much money involved now and profile and reputation, athletes have gone, "hang on a sec [laughs], we're not just the employees here, we are the product and we deserve part of that".

So, in order to be able to prosecute that case, they actually need to be quite smart. So a lot of them are getting business degrees or finance degrees, accountancy, economics and other things. We've also, because of the professionalisation of sport, sports science has become a huge area, the psychology of sport, like people are looking at every single little element, and so in that respect that kind of market, that environment has grown. The same for sports journalism, there is an argument to be had that to be a good journalist actually you don't need to study journalism, you need to study something else. Be an expert in something or just an ability to think critically and to prosecute a case, and to know how to research and sometimes the best journalists come from other fields.

So, there's also those sorts of changes are happening on the journalism side as well. Those running the sport now, rather than volunteers that manage to find their way into the top office, they're coming now with law degrees, mostly business degrees.

David Rowe

It's an interesting point, it just occurred to me when you were talking, that's one area of the Americanisation of Australian sport, which is that the athletes are being organised like they are in the major leagues, and journalists actually having a bit of a higher standing, they call them sportswriters rather than journalists over there don't they? I wonder if we can talk a little about some of the changes you've seen in the sport and media fields, either separately and together, over the last couple of decades or so, certainly since 1994.

Tracey Holmes

Well sport itself, it's probably just got better at what it's always done. There's more gender equality, it's like a lawnmower that you can't quite start, you know, people kept pulling at the ripcord and you'd hear it kind of vibrate and not quite kick over, and suddenly now it has. I think that's a great thing but that's only fairly recent, the last two, maybe three years. That's taken so long to happen and it's interesting watching the rise of, or the birth of, AFLW and the associated media around it and listening to the conversations and discussions that happen around it.

It's almost as though, I've see some critics suggest that the AFL thinks it's invented women's sport and to some degree that is what you hear [laughs] if you listen to the way it's put out there. They deserve credit because they did launch a professional sport that just kind of erupted and was on TV and people flocked to it and it was seen as a huge success, but then again to break away from the sort of mythical stories that we're fed, it's a very short season, some would argue they weren't properly funded. There were a lot of injuries that we haven't heard about because they weren't adequately prepared for such an intense battle over a short period of time.

They're all learnings that I'm sure the AFL has taken on board, you're not going to get everything right when you launch into things. So, women's sport has definitely, suddenly risen to prominence, which is a good thing. Conversations in the public have changed where, and I hope one day we get to the point where we're not saying women's sport, I hope we get to the point where we say cricket, the men's team and the women's team, as they do in the Olympics and they've done that for a very long time, which is good. Language is important, but you hear general discussions now where groups of men are talking about the performance of an Ellyse Perry or a Sam Kerr in the Matildas team in a way that hasn't happened before.

I think that's a good thing because Australian society is still very misogynistic despite what we claim [laughs]. To hear those discussions and I think a lot of it has come from the generation now who are probably, you know, 40 plus who've got daughters who are 12 plus, and they have suddenly seen the world through different eyes and I think that's really had an impact. So, those sorts of fathers have enabled a discussion that women, athletes, mothers whatever have tried to have for a very long time, the door has been opened on that, and there's been a realisation. And those are the same people that are running media organisations now and they're suddenly seeing the benefit. That's one huge shift, possibly the most major shift in the past couple of decades.

David Rowe

Yes, and as you say a significant one. What about media, changes between sport in its relationship with media, has that been subject to significant change?

Tracey Holmes

Fox Sport, Fox TV had a significant change in that all sport enthusiasts, you know, could suddenly get their 24/7 fix on sport from around the world, and there's no end of panel shows discussing sport. But, the reality is the uptake of that in Australian society was nowhere near as big as I'm sure the Murdochs would have hoped, maybe one in four Australians have access to pay TV. And a lot of sports realised that when they shifted their product to pay TV, they didn't build an audience [laughs], they lost an audience because not everyone had it and couldn't afford it again, so the idea of having sport on free-to-air TV is still very, very important.

But now there's all sorts of new ideas. I remember having a chat with the Australian Sports Commission in about 2007, I think, and they're looking at the issue of women's sport and getting women's sport coverage. And I remember saying with new technology now, you don't need the major TV, free-to-air channels, you don't need the newspapers because of social media, because of streaming, you have a good website, you put it up. And I think Australia is very slow at adopting those sorts of developments and changing technologies. So, we're starting to see more streaming now but it's 2017, that's a decade later. And that's a decade lost, which is such a shame.

Media itself, again, I don't think the media has quite worked out how sport fits into some of those larger pictures [laughs] into the picture of Australian society, into the picture of Australian business, into the picture of Australian politics, and yet sport is in all of those areas. Sport in the media is still kind of pushed off, well there's the back page or the centre page or the sports page, and here's your two minutes at the end of a five-minute news bulletin and here's, you know it's still so highly segmented. And yet that's not the reality, you know, the reality is it's in every single area of society and it's not covered in that way predominantly.

David Rowe

Except when, of course, a scandal comes along and it's...

Tracey Holmes

...Yeah, everyone wants to jump on board [laughs] ...

David Rowe

...It's everywhere as you were saying, which maybe connects with the keenest people to kind of get stuck into sport. Just going back to pay television, its relative lack of success in Australia. It's quite lucrative but, as you say, [in only] about one in four households. The government policy and the anti-siphoning regulations, do you think that's had a significant impact on...?

Tracey Holmes

Yes, definitely, but I don't think it's gone far enough and again, of course, I understand there's business pressures and political lobby groups and all the rest with hidden agendas. But, I would say probably one thing that has failed the Australian, I'm going to get killed for this, the one thing that has probably failed the Australian people more than any other when it comes to the media, is the ABC's coverage of sport and how it's almost been dismantled to the point of, you know, they struggle. Sport at the ABC really struggles now, and it should be the other way around. ABC should be the flagship if it's fulfilling its charter in the way that it should.

David Rowe

Is that a problem of it not being able to bid for rights either against free-to-air or pay?

Tracey Holmes

But that's a very simple solution, it's more than that, because you don't just have to cover live sport. Having said that, there's plenty of live women's sport, the ABC up until the last what five years or so, was doing women's basketball and women's football badly. So, of course [laughs], you're not going to get an audience, but you look at the stuff the ABC does well, why isn't sport treated the same way? Why isn't it promoted, why isn't it done in a way that's funky and modern and different? Why does it have to be that same old model the way that sport's been covered for more than half a century?

Think of something new. Look at what Channel 10 did with the Big Bash League, new modern, great, they got men and women commentating the game, it's modern and the ABC just kind of missed that boat all together, and what is left, the scraps that remain, are still covered in a way that seriously it wouldn't look out of place in 1950.

David Rowe

So, a failure of the public service broadcasting you would say then? Okay, I'm aware of the time, just some sort of broader questions, very unfair in the sense, you know, asking you to say something relatively concise. But, what about the role of globalisation in Australian sport, is it possible to talk about a national sport now?

Tracey Holmes

As far as the role of globalisation, like many of our female athletes, especially in soccer, they're playing overseas most of the year in much more lucrative competitions. So, globalisation has had an impact there and what that means is when they come back to Australia to play in the national team, they're much better players because they've been playing in fully operational, well paid positions overseas in professional clubs and teams. The other aspect of globalisation, you look at a sport like basketball and the NBA. So the NBA is seen as the pre-eminent competition for that sport and the number of Australians that are now playing there, and that's offered new pathways to young Australian athletes. I know in Victoria particularly and New South Wales, it's the sport of choice now for many, many, you know, young teenagers hoping to get scholarships to the US college system and to play basketball in college and get a degree. I have a son who's in that position, that is a huge pathway now that so many Australians are trying to get into, both men and women, boys and girls. So, in that respect, it's made a difference. We've got soccer players in China, we've got volleyball players, sports that we never hear of here, you know, handball and volleyball, we never hear about them in the Australian media, and yet we've got some of the world's superstars playing overseas in overseas leagues. Yes, so in that respect, globalisation has had quite an impact.

David Rowe

So, is that a problem, then, when you say if you want to watch football, you don't watch the A-League you watch the EPL on TV, you don't watch the NBL you watch the NBA, you lose the best domestic athletes...?

Tracey Holmes

...No, do you know what...?

David Rowe

...You don't think that way?

Tracey Holmes

I think that's overdone, I think that story is quite overdone or underdone, depending on which way you see it. So, I'll go back to another example from the International Olympic Committee. They were totally freaking about, you know, what they guard most is the broadcasters that pay their multi-millions of dollars to broadcast the two weeks of activity inside whichever domain they represent. That's what they fight for mostly because there's so much money involved, billions of dollars. They were really worried about this sort of advent of social media and that if people could see things, like a 10-second clip on somebody's Facebook page, or how that was going to impact.

And what they've found is more people have actually tuned in to watch the Olympic Games because of the other alternatives. And people are using, you look at young people now, they're not just sitting there watching TV, or going home in the afternoon and reading their one favourite newspaper. They're across everything on social media. Then, they'll watch something on TV and they'll be on social media with the feed going and having conversations with people all over the world that are also watching that game on TV. So, it's actually brought more people to it, what's probably impacted is the sort of casual observer, so if you're a casual observer and you don't really have any great love of a particular sport, but you know when there's a big game happening, you'll tune in.

So, if it happens to be that you're a casual observer and might like Cristiano Ronaldo and he's playing in a game in the Champions League, you'll watch that. It doesn't mean that you've changed from watching the A-League to watching the Champions League or the EPL, or the Spanish League or whatever, it just means you tune in for the big events. Because, if you really love that sport, you're watching everything you can about that sport, it doesn't matter where it's played and, of course, you're going to follow the Aussies that play here before they go overseas.

Now we get internationals that we attracted to our game as well, even though it might be the twilight of their career, they still carry magnetism. So, I think that sort of argument is one of those overdone arguments, those people aren't watching anyway.

David Rowe

Okay, thank you. Another area we're interested in is the role of Indigenous people in sport, and where it features in their lives and in the broader Australian context. Do you have any comments there?

Tracey Holmes

Yeah, again I think it's one of those sort of, it's split into two pools. Most Australians tend to think of Indigenous Australians as out there, as remote communities and yet most of them live in urban environments. You look at AFL superstars, how many of them are Indigenous, way over-represented compared to the percentage of the population that they make up. The same in Rugby League, some other sports fail miserably which I referred to before. But for Indigenous people, they play sport with a different mindset and I think that is part of the challenge for quite a few sports. It's definitely a challenge for coaches and I've seen this first hand and second hand and third hand [laughs], where coaches, and predominantly we see White coaches across all sport, and they're very formatted and there's a series of plays that you need to perfect.

And Indigenous players are not playing like that, they are highly creative, and you look at the superstars in AFL and Rugby League and you can see that. They are seeing it in a different way and they play so freely with so much enjoyment, they don't fit into that highly structured system. I'm not saying they can't, of course they can, but what comes instinctively and naturally to them, and that the skills that you can develop in them this ability to see it from different directions. I think they see time and space differently and then what's interesting, you have coaches like Mal Meninga, who was an Australian captain in Rugby League now coaching, and he allows that kind of freedom and his teams are almost unbeatable.

So I think that if there's any sort of clash of civilisation, it would be in that respect and you know some people would say, "oh you can't just say all Indigenous people are that talented and it's a natural instinct", and no that's not what I mean because, of course, they work as hard as anyone else to perfect their craft, sometimes harder. But I think they come with a different mindset and that mindset is not always coached into our sporting teams.

David Rowe

I've got a question, it's interesting we talked about Indigenous people, there's a theory in sociology called internal colonialism...

Tracey Holmes

Yeah, and that's what I was trying to be quite mindful of, but just to point out that I'm married to an Indigenous man and my three children are Indigenous. And I know from living and talking there is definitely, it's almost like [laughs], it's nothing to do with

colonialism. But I know there've been books that have been written about the geography of thought and Westerners sort of think in a very linear construct. Here's a start point, there's an end point and there's all these different dots on the line. There are other geographies, other people that have circular thought and their thinking's completely different, and I would think that when I see what I've experienced, and when you see Indigenous players, that space is far more circular than linear.

And so sometimes people would say, "why do they do that?" [laughs]. Because they're seeing it so differently to us and that doesn't come from a colonial perspective, it's being charted, they see time and space differently. And yeah, you know I'm White and maybe I am just thinking like an old colonial, but I don't think so because my experience has been that, yeah. You look at their art, their art it's the same as they play the game, those wonderful circular dot paintings, their music, the sport, it's all connected. I see dot paintings in the way Indigenous players play sport and the way they play their music, it's a different beat and it's a different space.

David Rowe

You're connecting three of our cultural fields that we've put in the project there, which is rather good [laughs]! I was looking at a question before wrap up about, and I'll also give you an opportunity to discuss things that we haven't covered. I'm interested in sport diplomacy and the claims made for sport as an effective agent of diplomacy. I just wonder what your views are?

Tracey Holmes

I'm interested in that too [laughs], I find it quite fascinating. I think sport lays claim to being a lot of things, I think mostly they are ideals about what sport could possibly achieve or impact. I think so many times when sport is given the opportunity to actually make some of those differences that they constantly refer to, they fail. But, you know, I look at something that's just happened recently in the USA and Colin Kaepernick. So, he's a black NFL player and he kneels during the national anthem, sets off this huge movement, both people that support him and people that are protesting against what he's doing. He started an incredible conversation that America has been trying to have for decades, has had in some respects, but he's taken it to a new level.

That's what I think sport is so good at doing, but that's not sport and in 10, 20 or 30 years' time, when the NFL claims that as one of their successes, that's where the myth comes in. Because the NFL [laughs] doesn't like what he's doing and what he's done. The NFL

has been hijacked by this single player making a statement that a lot of other players and the crowds then sort of come to. So, I think athletes, individual athletes are the ones that make these differences despite the sport. But afterwards it's always a great story isn't it? The sport can say, "look what we did [laughs]".

David Rowe

Yeah, I think there's that political dimension and there's also that idea that sport connects nations, either at people-to-people level or leaders meeting other leaders...

Tracey Holmes

Well I think it's exactly the same, I think it's the same conversation, because you speak to individual athletes and they say "yes". I was at a Don Bradman dinner recently and you hear like some of the old guys, you know, from the 40's and the 50's, and it was just after the War and it was a really different time, and playing in the Ashes. And they built great friendships with each other so that when some of the British players came out here, they would stay in the homes of the Aussies. And when the Aussies went there, they would stay in the homes and built these great family friendships. Even though, you know, that's no great challenge really between Australia and England, but there's many other stories like that.

Athletes who compete on an international circuit and become really good friends with people from other places that they may have known very little about. Suddenly, they get to understand a place because of the person that they share a bus or a plane with 50 weeks of the year. Those one-on-one friendships and understandings are the ones that are the most vital. But, the sport-to-sport thing? I think it's a rubbish claim to be honest. The same as when you march around at the Olympic Games and it's a celebration of youth and humanity, no it's not it's an overt display of nationalism, and there's the flag and our purpose is to make you understand that my flag is better than your flag because, you know, we stand for all of these things.

But that's not a celebration of humanity, that's a celebration of nationalism, and I think they're two very different things. I think that's the tug of war inside sport. On an individual level, these things are happening, people are offered the opportunity to understand each other and do get to understand each other. You can speak to any number of Australian footballers who've played against the North Korean team.

David Rowe

The under 19's have just been banned, haven't they?

Tracey Holmes

Yeah, so the athletes have a much better understanding of what life's like in North Korea [laughs] than these governing bodies do, than sometimes our politicians do. It's really quite fascinating. I don't think there's enough of those stories told in sport because it's the individual athlete...

David Rowe

...the fans too...?

Tracey Holmes

...And some fans yeah. Some fans buy into the whole nationalism thing, others don't. Yeah, I think they're almost the untold stories of sport that we really don't celebrate for all sorts of reasons.

David Rowe

Before I have to nip off and get my train to Parramatta, is there something that I haven't raised with you that you think is of particular importance that we somehow missed or underemphasised?

Tracey Holmes

No, I just think probably one of the biggest challenges that sport faces in Australia at the moment is in the same way, you know, the Olympics are searching for relevance. I think Australia has to be very careful that sport doesn't become irrelevant because the face of Australia has changed. And those who are predominantly in management roles and in positions to be able to make change, don't reflect that, and I don't think have sufficiently addressed that. And so if they're not careful, you know, that fantastic role that sport has played even though it's been probably emphasised way out of proportion because of the myth, but that essential role and that Australians like to see themselves egalitarian as well and sport is perfect for providing a platform for that.

That's going to be lost, if we, well if the sports don't carefully look at where they sit in this new society, because it is a new society and I think it's still being run by the old guard, you know at a time when Australia looked and felt very different. So, I think that's the biggest challenge sport faces.

David Rowe

Right excellent, thank you. Thanks very much.

Tracey Holmes

No worries.

END