

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.

John Evans

This interview was conducted in 2016 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):

John Evans, Professor of Indigenous Health Education, University of Technology, Sydney

Interviewer: Professor David Rowe, Western Sydney University

Interview date: 8 June 2016

Interview location: Moore Park, Sydney

ACF field: Sport

ACF 'line of inquiry': Indigenous line of inquiry

START

David Rowe

Record, okay, here we go. So, first thank you John for agreeing to be interviewed. So could I just ask you introduce yourself? Could you tell me a bit about your background and also your involvement in the sports industry?

John Evans

Okay, so my name's John Evans, I was born in Lake Cargelligo in Western New South Wales and that's Wiradjuri country. I guess I've had an involvement with sport my whole life that I can remember, starting I guess as a four-year old kid playing rugby league and playing sport right through until I can no longer play anymore. So I've always had an involvement, an enjoyment in sport. And I guess sort of when I finished university I was involved in an Aboriginal sports organisation which I guess I had an over 20-year involvement with, but just setting up and running it.

And so I've been involved in sport across a few different areas. I was involved in the Australian Under 19s rugby team for five years as part of the coaching staff as well.

David Rowe

This is rugby union?

John Evans

Yeah, yeah. And you know, I've been involved in mentoring young boys and girls who come through the sports program with their university studies. So there's probably 5 or 6 graduates out there who have a direct hand in terms of mentoring who came through sports programs that I was involved with.

David Rowe

Thanks for that. So part of what we're doing with this project is looking at the way that sport has developed, the sports system, if you like, has developed. And we're particularly interested in what's happened since the National Cultural Policy in 1994 called *Creative Nation*. And sport didn't play much of a role in that. But if you can think of from that period, roughly the mid-90s, what sort of changes have you seen that have happened in sport?

John Evans

I think the big changes that have occurred in sport have probably been around the rise of the elite sports program and I guess the movement away from an inter-societal, community-based sport and the role that they've had in our society. Where now it's all about fast tracking the gifted athletes into one of the chosen sports that have some sort of elite development program. And I think along with that, at the same time we've become a much more sedentary society. So I think there's been a real gap in sports participation and people valuing sport for the fun and the affective elements of sport. And I think this is where elite sport has taken ground away from community-based sport in a way that probably people didn't think of at the time. So you know, I think of the sports I played growing up now, almost heading towards the American system where if you stop playing a sport in high school years, you probably don't play it after that because of the emphasis on elite sport and how those players are channelled into those systems.

Which makes it interesting because if you look at things such as the Koori Knockout in rugby league, it's not only survived, it's thrived to be one of the biggest sporting events in Australia, which doesn't really see much mainstream media support. So there are some anomalies in that as well. But I think if you go back to before 1994 you could see how that – I mean if you go back to the '56 Olympics. for instance, and you see how well Australia did in that with a predominantly White society. But that society was a society that was

much more physically active and, you know, the emphasis was on community-based sport and participating at your local clubs and being part of a sporting fraternity.

And I think that's diminished and I think from that period you talk about, the early 90s is when sports became more professional in a sense of what we pay for, and people and then that creates a new binary doesn't it also? If I'm not going to be a professional sports person why do I keep playing? So I think that's the major change that I've seen in sport over that period of time.

David Rowe

Okay, yeah thanks for that. So I mean specifically around say the Australian Sports Commission and the Institute of Sport as you probably know, there's been discussion recently about the Winning Edge program and so on, in which this question of elite versus grassroots sport has come to the fore. So have things sped up given that's a relatively new program or is that a long term trend as far as you would see?

John Evans

Well actually in some ways, see originally the Institute of Sport as you know was setup after the 1976 Olympics when we did so poorly that we needed this new system. And the new system was going to be based on the Russian or Eastern European system where we take all our best athletes and put them in Canberra. And actually it didn't work. You know, it was an unsuccessful attempt to hothouse talent in Australia, and that's because it just didn't suit the Australian culture. And you know, and then we saw the rise of State-based Institutes of Sport and Academies of Sport and things like that. So I think as a system I think it's, you know, although they would disagree because of the scholarship system that they have now. I know in the news this morning that's going to be abolished people are thinking about how they fund elite sport.

And I think that whole push about funding elite sport is kind of flawed, because there's no use winning gold medals if the broad-based society of Australia is not physically active. And this notion that, you know, if people see Ian Thorpe with a whole heap of gold medals, suddenly everybody's going to go into the pool... Well, I haven't seen any evidence to suggest that there's any long-term support for that type of ideology. So I think, you know, if we really want to think about sport in Australia, it's about how do we then – I'm not going to dismantle the Australian Sports Commission, but how can we convince the Australian Sports Commission that elite sport needs to be funded somehow by a different model, maybe by the private sector more than the public? Because I think the general health and

wellbeing of Australian society is more important than funding elite sport. And by its very nature if it is as good as what the sports think it is, then really private enterprise should be sponsoring those type of initiatives.

David Rowe

Okay. So, do you regard the Australian Sports Commission and the Institute of Sport which it oversees, so are they still important institutions in the Australian sport system?

John Evans

I think they are important. I think they do provide a valuable service. I mean, you know, I think the Australian Sports Commission and the Indigenous Sports Program was embarking on an ambitious program. I think that's been now devolved out to the individual National Sports Organisations. I wouldn't say that the Australian Sports Commission and the AIS are redundant, they still have a part to play. But I think the emphasis needs to be returned about how we get the Australian Sports Commission more focused on community sport, and how we can get people involved in not just sport but other physical activity endeavours, you know, in a way that that improves the national health and wellbeing sort of charter, I guess. Because I don't believe that just because we have the Olympics or just because we have a champion of a particular sport that it necessarily flows onto community outcomes.

I think we need to be more proactive or we need to show more initiative in those areas to get people to be more interested and to enjoy sport. Maybe not even to the health and wellbeing aid, maybe it's about how do we get people to enjoy sport for what it is and the ramifications that people become healthier, they become more engaged and they have other outcomes in their life. I don't think that sponsoring or supporting elite sport really changes that – we don't change those conditions, we just keep supporting the *status quo*.

David Rowe

So which other organisations are important in the Australian sport system do you think?

John Evans

Oh, I mean local councils are important. I think from my point of view, Aboriginal sporting organisations or Aboriginal communities involved in sport are important because they provide a focus for community people to be involved in sport. I mean all levels of government have some responsibility, but if you look at say the New South Wales

Government, since the early 90s the real budget for community sports programs hasn't grown at all, it's remained stagnant. And so you know, there's a few organisations that get funded but it hasn't really changed.

But, I think what's important in sport is what those local sporting organisations that provide access to sport and competition and comradeship and association for people, who mightn't have it in any other parts of their life and sport, you know, provides that. I've done a bit of research on the sort of cultural capital or social capital that emerges out of people being associated through sport. So any of those organisations at a grassroots level that provide that for citizens I think they're important.

David Rowe

Okay, so thinking broadly then – it's a difficult question but if I said, how do you define the Australian sport field? What are its key institutions – how is it different from other fields?

John Evans

Well I think sport in Australia is different from other countries because of the level of support it gets from government. So if you compare it say to the American sport system or a global system, you know, the government doesn't support sport like the way we do here. I think also our system in Australia is probably more like the European or the British system where we value clubs in our society and they form the focus at a local level for sports participation. I think the other characteristic is, I guess, from a top down approach is our national sports organisations, our State sports organisations, local organisations. There's a system of sport in Australia which is probably only mirrored across from us in New Zealand.

And then the other thing from my point of view that's really important in Australia are the small Indigenous communities that are able to coalesce around the idea of participating in sport. And I saw really good examples for me in New South Wales and South Australia and Victoria. So that's what, I guess, if I was to nominate sort of how the sports field is configured. I think also too there is a general view in Australia that sport is very much a part of our culture, and in different states it's more accentuated. So you get on a tram or a train in Victoria, someone will start telling you straight away about the game the night before and what happened, and you're meant to have an opinion about it or you want to have an argument or a debate.

So I think, you know, we're one of those countries that has sport as part of our culture. You know, all our major sports have got television shows. And you look at say, you know,

so in the Aboriginal space you have the *Marngrook Football Show*, you've got *League Nation*, and all those sorts of things. You know, you've got really good shows on the ABC like the *Offsiders*, those sorts of things. So you know, sport really permeates our culture and we see ourselves when we travel as people who box above our weight internationally as far as sport's concerned. The fact we've been in three or four World Cup finals in rugby, we're a very small rugby nation like New Zealand. Things like that.

We've done very well at the Olympics, I think one of the most successful countries in the modern Olympics for our population. So I think Australians like to see themselves as a sporting nation.

David Rowe

Sure. So just to follow that up in terms of – there's sport and then there's say health or physical fitness or physical activity. Why is sport so important as opposed to just say getting fit by some other means?

John Evans

Well I think it's about association, being around other people, and you know, people develop their friendships and their social networks around sport. I mean I'd have to say looking back on my own history, I'd have to say a lot of my friends that I have now have been built around sport. So I think getting fit and going to a gym can be for those who are highly motivated, you know, an easy thing to do. But those people who are more gregarious or social by nature or, you know, like the idea of being around other people, then sports organisations provide that form, that idea of association about seeing people on the weekend and seeing them during the week, and being able to have friends and relationships through sport are really important. I don't think they occur at the same level in other fields.

David Rowe

I mean is the competitive side of sport particularly important do you think?

John Evans

I think in terms of the Aboriginal community they are because of – you know, in lots of areas in Australia competitive sports have been one of the only areas or fields that Aboriginal people can compete and be successful against the non-Indigenous community or society. Competition is important. But even if you look at elite sport, you know, team

sport, you know, part of being in an elite team is an association of working with others in a sort of collective environment. Competition is important but I don't think it's the only thing.

David Rowe

So something like dancing might be or some other activities might be collective, you know, they might be social. But you think – there's something particularly about sport do you think that is effective?

John Evans

I think competition is slightly different. I mean especially in a team environment where there's so many people, you know, if you go – one of the things that really amazed me about, say, football in country Victoria is that you'd turn up and I played a little bit up in Shepparton, and at half time the whole town would be out there listening to what the coach said to the players. You know, you have a couple of hundred people at both ends of the ground listening to their coaches. So I think there is something different about sport and competition and associated competition, you know, fans barracking for their team, all that sort of stuff.

And you can't really barrack for a dancer can you? Not in the same way that you can barrack for a team or a player or people that you like. I think there's something much more sort of earthy about your team and your association with it, and going on a weekend and watching them play. And you know, obviously in a country town you know all the players and you know everybody involved with it. I think it's a different community than – for me, the way I see it, it's a different community than say, you know, like I take my daughter to her local dance group. It's different. The bonds for me are different in a sporting club or association.

David Rowe

So is there a hierarchy of sports in the Australian sport system?

John Evans

I think definitely a hierarchy of sport. I mean, I think the professional sports in Australia, the NRL, the AFL, I mean they're at the top. But I guess, you know, sports like soccer and rugby union trying to fight for their place in that as well, and if you think of the big Olympic

sports, I think there definitely is a hierarchy and then you sort of, you know, you trail down to community sports organisation. I think there is a hierarchy in Australia.

David Rowe

So tennis, golf, those kind of...? What about the more individual sports?

John Evans

Well I think one of the reasons why Aboriginal people probably haven't been as prominent or successful in those sports is because they're individual, and they also come with a class – there's a class tagged to them in terms of money. So, you know, your average person in Redfern is not going to be able to go out and buy a Callaway Golf Set and spend \$3,000 on a golf bag and then, you know, join East Lakes Golf Club or somewhere like that. I'm not saying that there's – because golf has become quite a popular sport in the Aboriginal community. But other sports like, you know, like sailing and cycling and even swimming for that matter. Like swimming is very expensive and it's now quite a middle- class sport. Even soccer and rugby union, compared to the fees to play say rugby league and AFL, they're almost double the cost, and it is associated with class and that.

So I think there are certain sports that have got class and wealth attached to them and they can at times be prohibitive for some people to gain entry into those. You know, equestrian, diving, all those sorts of things, what we would call blue-ribbon sports. Even athletics, for instance, you look at the history of athletics in Australia, you're more inclined to find an Aboriginal person involved in professional athletics, handicap running or pedestrian as they call it, as compared to amateur athletics. And that's because the pathways are different.

David Rowe

Right. So could you say a little bit more about that, the pathways?

John Evans

The pathways? Well obviously in Australia, so you look at the two big universities, Melbourne University and Sydney University, always have good athletics teams, and that's because they come from people of class and means, and so they're kids go to private schools and private schools are very big on athletics, and things like that. Where public schools or state schools don't have that same dimension to it. So you know, I think that class provides a pathway into some sports more than – so like a game like rugby league

or AFL is I would say more open and more – is not distinguished by class as much as, say, rugby union does. It's more distinguished by class and about what school you went to. And so I think that pathway for a lot of people is pretty determined by who they are, where they were born and what school they went to, and how much money their parents have got.

David Rowe

So, gender, is there a gender hierarchy too?

John Evans

I think there's definitely a gender hierarchy, although, you know, you can see in Australia now with some sports are making an effort to help women's sport rise. And I think, you know, netball's done a really good job. But again, netball's run by women, so women's sport run by women that's where they've been successful. But any other sports such as soccer, you know, cricket now has got a professional pathway for women, and AFL and soccer are moving in the same direction. But it's certainly not to the same level as men's sport and the sorts of exposure that it gets. So, I think that women's sport does sit well behind men's sport, and whether that will ever change I think is one of those sorts of big questions in our society, whether those sports will ever attract the same sorts of media attention and financial support that the big sports do.

David Rowe

Okay, I guess two other areas of hierarchy – I would like to talk about migrant cultures and also Indigenous cultures. Just take migrant cultures first, so what kind of impact has immigration, globalisation, etcetera, you think had on the Australian sport field?

John Evans

Well I think Johnny Warren's book, *Sheilas Wogs & Poofers*, was a really good book which sort of showed how difficult it was in the early days for soccer to thrive, because it was always associated with immigrants, and that the real sports in Australia were really rugby league and AFL and cricket in summer. And I think, you know, migrants have if you look at the rise and the popularity of the A-League now it's really supported by immigrant cultures to Australia and they've made a big impact. I think it's changing things but there are still some hangovers from those early migrant days in Australia. I think that's just one of things that's pervasive in Australian sport that it took migrants, the influx of migrants

over a long period of time to change the culture of Australia about where soccer is placed in sports. And so I think that's quite evident.

David Rowe

So is it then ironic that the Football Federation Australia has a de-ethnicisation policy?

John Evans

Yeah it is interesting, it is. But I think that's more an attempt to, I guess, have an impact on what they thought was ethnic violence in the game. I don't really know this for sure, but I think you would still see that the participants in the game, soccer, still come from strong ethnic backgrounds. I think the de-ethnicisation of it through having the A-League clubs was more about how they could de-escalate ethnic violence or feuds between certain clubs because of, you know, Sydney Olympic for instance was the Greek club and Marconi was the Italian club, where the emergence of the A-League has gone some way to diminishing the negative effect on the game. So I think that de-ethnicisation is really more a pragmatic step to try and stem what they thought was some of the problems between ethnic groups and violence in soccer.

David Rowe

Was it also about commercialisation and professionalisation?

John Evans

I think in order for soccer to sell itself, I would imagine it took the view that, if it could demonstrate to the wider public that it wasn't about Hakoah, Marconi or Sydney Olympic or the Hellenic club, more that it had a product that was saleable to sponsors because it wasn't sitting upon those old ethnic tensions then they would – that that was the reason for doing it.

David Rowe

So obviously you have a very deep commitment to Indigenous sport. Going back to the mid-90s, have you seen any significant changes to...?

John Evans

Well I think Aboriginal people have always maintained an interest in sport. I think at the professional level in terms of, you know, when Nicky Winmar pulled his shirt up and the real verdict came in in AFL and other codes picked up on it. I think, with the expanding

professionalism of both AFL and rugby league provided an enormous amount of opportunity for Aboriginal athletes. Now if you look at the best athletes now – arguably the best athletes in AFL and rugby league - are now Indigenous. You know, if you look at the participation rate in the national team, the State of Origin teams in rugby league, they're often at least half the team. The Norm Smith medallist in last year's AFL Grand Final was Cyril Rioli and the Clive Churchill medallist in rugby league was Johnathan Thurston.

So I think since the 90s they're just not participating, but they're the very, very best athletes in those particular sports. So, there has been a shift and I would suggest that's in part because of obviously as I said earlier, the Nicky Winmar phenomena and the idea of the expanding professionalism in some of those sports. During that same period also, you know the sport of rugby league in New South Wales has still managed to attract a large number of Indigenous people in the sport. And if you were to go to some areas of western New South Wales, if you look at those sort of – who's participating in the sport, Aboriginal people have maintained a strong interest in those sports and that's because in many of those rural areas, if it wasn't for the Indigenous population in the local areas, those competitions would be less attractive.

So look at country rugby league, you know, and all those regions, Armadale, Tamworth, Wagga, you know, the north and south coast of New South Wales, there's large numbers of Aboriginal people playing in the week-to-week competition. And the same with the Australian Rules in Victoria, you know, in country Victoria there's large numbers of Aboriginal athletes in those competitions. So the interest in those sort of broad-based popular sports hasn't waned, but I think at the sort of the top level there's been a sort of an explosion of talent being recognised.

David Rowe

I mean, could you argue that some people have the – as with African Americans, the indigenous athletes are over-represented in certain areas of sport because Indigenous people or African Americans are underrepresented in other fields of society: the law, politics, economics, etcetera, you know what I mean?

John Evans

Yeah, look, I think, you know, I can't speak authoritatively, but my first response to that is sport has been probably one of the few areas where Aboriginals have got access to, and that's, apart from being participants in the criminal justice system, when you talk about

laws, you know, it's one of the few areas where Aboriginals have gained access to. And it's from early periods of colonisation. You know, that's been a feature. So I think you know, if people were involved in the economy differently or they were involved in other aspects of Australian life, then sure that figure mightn't be as high as – or sort of the rates of participation mightn't be as high.

But sport is one of the few fields in terms of, you know, Bourdieu notion about fields, that's one of the few areas where Aboriginal people have had access to, although I would say at times contested. And it's been a struggle, and at times its been abrasive. But it is one of the few areas where Aboriginals have got access to. So I think that's for me the reason why the participation in that particular field is different to other areas of society.

David Rowe

Is there some perhaps push back to that? I mean you mentioned, of course, still very fresh in our minds is the Adam Goodes affair. So is there some resentment do you think towards Aboriginal people advancing in the elite sport domain? Or is it something that's in the wider society?

John Evans

I think it's probably become a bit of a cliché in terms of that both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal think the only thing they're good at is sport, and again I've produced an article on that along with other scholars in the area. I don't know there's been any – I personally don't detect any resentment but I would caution that we need to not move on from sport but move onto other fields of endeavour in the future so that we don't get caught in the sort of Venus fly trap of sport being the only thing that people are good at. That there's other things in life but, you know, we've got to find ways of how we can use sport as a lever to maybe achieve those things.

David Rowe

Okay, so if we just move onto developments in sport policy. I think you started off by saying you felt there was an imbalance in policy terms towards elite versus participatory sport, that'd be right?

John Evans

Well I think there's always going to be a focus on policy around elite sport because the Australian psyche is so wrapped up in the idea of being winners on the international stage,

at Olympics or other fields of endeavour. But I think we do need a change in Australia and I can't cite actual, particular policies, but I see it from, I guess, the idea of seeing kids at school over a long period of time. And since the early 80s, you know, there's been this sort of diminishing participation rate of kids in sport from when I was a kid, you know, and the opportunities to play sport or to be physically active are being eroded all the time.

So I think there needs to be a new push around how policies develop. And I don't necessarily think that elite sport is the answer and that policy needs to be – we have become, we have to have a focus on all being doers, not just the odd person in society being a champion.

David Rowe

So, I think you recall, what I would regard as an important report in this area being the Crawford Report in 2009, and I think there was quite an almost violent reaction to it in some quarters in elite sport and particularly in Olympic sport. Would you agree with that?

John Evans

Yeah I think, and that's – I think you can see when the Crawford Report came out just how influential people who have been sort of looked after by the sort of policies of the time, of the day, and they were threatened by that sort of approach. I'm not against elite sport but I think the focus needs to come away from elite sport and more attention on sort of community sport and people who want to play sport and enjoy sport, and be part of something that's not just about winning or not about who's going to be a professional sports person. But we need to collectively as a nation start looking at how we can use sport in a more open or a more emancipatory way, at least in Aboriginal communities about how we can make changes in people's lives.

I don't know that a heavily focused policy direction in terms of elite sport does that. I mean we can all cheer when there are great champions, we all get a bit of a buzz out of that. But realistically how does that translate to on-the-ground changes in human behaviour?

David Rowe

So is that connective in some way to what we might say is the diminishing of amateurism and the rise of commercialisation in sport?

John Evans

It's exactly a reflection of that. We often tend to talk about amateurism as being not good enough, quite amateur. When actual, the amateur values about sport are good for everybody and some of the values about being a professional sport, you know, win at all costs, play while you're injured, all of those sorts of things mightn't necessarily be good things in the wider society.

David Rowe

And what about the role of the media in this. Is that an important relationship for the sport field? Is the media field important to...?

John Evans

Well the media and sport field are almost the same field now. Media sponsors in the NRL, for instance, you know, in terms of the – I think one co-exists – they co-exist together and the media has a lot of influence on what happens. It influences the viewers as well as the participants and, you know, the current debate around sports gambling, for instance, can be attributed to the way it's promoted in the media and the way the sports have gotten on board with it. So I think Daryl Adair calls it 'gamblification' and the media, and there's no push back from media to say, look, this is not the right thing. So media is carnivorous in terms of it doesn't have a soul when it comes to understanding the role of sport in society, it just wants the next big story. But on the other hand it also needs to be in bed with sport to make sure that the two co-exist in a sort of like an interesting relationship.

David Rowe

Do the media have too much power in or over sport?

John Evans

Well I think media runs sport, it's like whether you can actually dismantle that... I mean we do have anti-siphoning laws that takes it away from the purely commercial selling part of the sport, to make certain sports still available to the general public. But I think, you know, media and sport and commercialism are tied together in a very, very tight way.

David Rowe

And I guess when we talk about sport and media we mainly talk about television because that's been the most powerful force. But, of course, there is this new process, digitisation,

you know, which perhaps is connecting with the gambling that you've mentioned. But is that changing the relationship do you think between media and sport?

John Evans

Well change because there's another medium delivering. For them it's another way that their product can be delivered to the person in the street and then my mobile phone says to me, look, through Optus do you want to sign up to watch the EPL on your phone? So I think the philosophy or the way they operate is still the same it's just got more ways to do it now.

David Rowe

So what about Facebook groups, fan groups, you know, Twitter, all the kind of social media side of things, is that important?

John Evans

I think it's important and I think, you know, certain groups of people can have an association through sport both in a good way and a bad way through these things as well. But I think they're just new ways for people to be involved.

David Rowe

Okay. I don't want to take up too much of your time, we've covered I guess a lot of ground. I'm interested in cultural citizenship in sport. I wondered if you had any comments about that relationship.

John Evans

I think there's still great opportunities for cultural citizenship through sport and I guess it relates to my ideas about how our central agencies need to be more aware of it. I think there's still great things for sport to do with society, but I don't want to see that compromised because we're focused on big sport, you know? And we're focused on commercial sport. I think there's lots of things a sports organisation can do for young people of all sorts of ethnic persuasions or Indigenous or non-Indigenous. But we need people to better understand the capacity of sport, to deliver on those things and how society can, not disengage itself from elite sport, but understand that the community sport and association and the civic responsibilities of sport are crucial in our society, especially if people become – well a lot of people, not everybody – become disengaged.

You know, we've got more tools of engagement these days but less and less people have a community association because we tend to live our lives in isolation. So I think, sporting organisations have still got that ability to achieve those sorts of outcomes and it's how we reframe our ideas about sport that will enable us to achieve those sorts of things.

David Rowe

So just I guess to finish up on, which is where your major commitment has been, which is in the area of Indigenous relations in sport, are you optimistic about the future of Indigenous people in the Australian sport field?

John Evans

Look, I am optimistic about that David, mainly because I see things like the Koori Knockout in our sort of society still going. It started in 1972, I think, and it's still going after all these years and it's still maintaining its presence. And it gets a bit difficult when they've got to come to Sydney because it's so expensive, but when you go to a place like Dubbo or Wagga or one of these big regional centres, just the sheer numbers of people that go there and want to be part of it. And of course they all want to win the knockout, but it is an important feature, it is about association, it's about people meeting and catching up, and it has a different vibe to it than people who might go and watch an NRL game on the weekend. And I see places like the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club in Victoria which has done amazing things since it was first conceptualised in the early 80s. It's now a source of community development, you know, in a real sort of sense that a lot of things that are generated out of that Shepparton community come through that particular sporting organisation. So I think there are enough positive examples out of those for us to affirm a positiveness in the future. But it doesn't diminish the responsibilities that others have in wider society to make sure those things are happening.

David Rowe

So, as you say that's a very successful Indigenous-run event, but is that perhaps to some degree because of having to confront racism within sport itself. Is it a problem in that type of event – or not..?

John Evans

I think the Knockout was always about – maybe it was about racism, we'll run our own competition. But then it grew as sort of – it's grown its own personality over the years. I

think it's probably jettisoned some of those ideas that racism, especially from the late-60s and early 70s about Aboriginal people's place in Australian society, to being something different now. It's an expression of success, you know, it's one of the biggest sporting carnivals in Australia, you know, it rivals things like the National Surf Titles and you know, it's run by people in the community who take on a sophisticated event like that and most years it's run very well.

So I think it may have started as sort of a push back against racism and, you know, we can compete amongst ourselves and against each other, but I think it's kind of moved on from that to be more or less an expression of success and identity, a new way of people to sort of mix and sort of congregate. And it offers different things to the community now than it did in the early 70s.

David Rowe

Has, do you think, racism itself diminished at all in the sports field over the last 20-30 years?

John Evans

Has it diminished? I think Nicky Winmar's actions really changed the discussion and the discourse around racism in sport, and it had an almost immediate effect in sort of bringing in changes to the racial vilification code and stuff like that. But I think that, you know, there is still a level of racism in sport. I think the opportunities for overt racism, I wouldn't say they're non-existent but they're diminishing over time. I think now we need to turn our attention to what are the covert types of racism, that exist in sport. So, for instance, how Aboriginal people are contributing to sport other than as, you know, physical capital and talent in the sport. Where are they in terms of coaches and administrators and powerbrokers in the sport. I think that's the next step for the sports that have been successful in recruitment in terms of AFL and the NRL. How do they then make those things happen?

But then another step from that further is how will those big sports then work with Aboriginal communities to improve things in the wider community. So, for instance, how does the NRL improve infrastructure in country New South Wales where the grounds and conditions are terrible? What can they do to improve those things out there when they get their big multi-million dollar deals through News Corp and things like that? So it's all well and good to have the large number of talent playing the game, having the All Stars game.

But how do those things then flow onto people in the community at a much more grassroots level. I think they're the big questions that sport should be asking itself.

David Rowe

Good, well thank you. Is there anything I haven't covered that is something that you think is important for us to discuss?

John Evans

No, but I'm happy to have another discussion at a further time about things you think I haven't covered.

David Rowe

Oh no, you've covered it all. Thank you very much, excellent.

END