

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

A Nation of “Good Sports?”

Professor David Rowe of the Institute for Culture and Society is examining sport’s dynamic relationship to Australian national identity and cultural citizenship. This project is funded by the Australian Research Council through its Discovery Projects grant scheme.

‘Australians have an international reputation as a sport-loving, even sport-obsessed people’, says Professor Rowe, ‘The nation is widely regarded as both characterised and united by sport. According to a federal government report, sport brings the country together “in mutual joy and celebration”. It reaches across the whole society in ways that affect even people with little or no interest in sport. Its positive side is usually emphasised. For example, how sport can promote tolerance and mutual respect, foster volunteerism and civic virtue. Sport’s cultural significance means that even broadcasting policies ensure access to free-to-air coverage of major sporting events as a right of national citizenship. But sport also has a negative side, sometimes encouraging violence, racism, sexism and social exclusion. Its relationship to national culture is also changing in response to shifts in both sporting participation and spectatorship, and in the nation itself. These changes challenge sport’s taken-for-granted national mythologies. Questions arise over where loyalties lie with multiethnic teams and spectators, and the potential to spark xenophobia and national chauvinism. This project will advance understanding of the making of a national sport culture and contribute to academic, policy and public debates surrounding Australia’s sport and media coverage.’

The greater western Sydney region is a prime area to look at these issues, having a relatively young, highly diverse demographic mix that has stimulated some anxiety around social cohesion. Three sub-regions will be researched, drawing on cultural, communication, sport and media studies, and cultural sociology. Individual interviews and focus



group discussions of sports players, spectators and other stakeholders will be analysed. Site-based observations at sports stadiums, public spaces and streetscapes will examine the nature of spectatorship and participation.

With a global sports scene and a diverse Australian population, national identity and cultural citizenship are in flux. Prior assumptions about sport participation, spectatorship and meaning need to be re-examined with some critical scepticism. Project results will inform policy, and encourage debate among academe, media and the public on the role of sport in Australian society today and tomorrow.

Project Title: A Nation of 'Good Sports'? Cultural Citizenship and Sport in Contemporary Australia
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