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.

Greg Blood

This interview was conducted in 2015 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):
Greg Blood, Sport Information Consultant, Private Company
Interviewer: Professor David Rowe, Western Sydney University
Interview date: 16 November 2015
Interview location: Australian Sports Commission, Canberra
ACF field(s): Sport

START

David Rowe

Well, you agree to be identified but if there are any issues where you don't, then you'll just signal that to me. Okay, so just to start, thank you very much for your time. Could you just introduce yourself, say who you are and tell us a bit about your background in the sport field?

Greg Blood

Okay. My name's Greg Blood. In 1983 I was appointed Librarian at the then Australian Institute of Sport, and then the Institute merged with the Sports Commission in the late '80s. And I subsequently took on a broader role which is basically looking at the information needs of the Australian sports sector and how the Sports Commission could help that and I left the Sports Commission in 2011.
In the intervening period I spent a year with the Sydney Olympics in their research area and in terms of allied areas, I've always had a strong interest in sport history. So I'm a member of the Australian Society for Sport History and being interested in just

discussions, and been a convenor in the ACT for many years, a position I don't hold now, but did that for quite a while.

David Rowe

Okay. Good. So you would say that you have a deep historical knowledge of the sport field and have a particular interest in policy?

Greg Blood

Yes. Yeah. Particularly having worked at the Sports Commission, which is the lead government policy agency for sport. Yeah. Since the early '80s I've seen all the major changes and often the rationale maybe behind those changes.

David Rowe

The Sports Commission oversees and incorporates the Australian Institute of Sport. So that's useful. So, could you just start off please Greg by talking about the role of the Sports Commission as you see it and also what its founding role was, and any ways in which you see that might have changed over the years, and particularly our reference point here is say since the early '90s?

Greg Blood

Look, the Sports Commission was an outcome of the Hawke government and John Brown [Minister for Arts, Sport, the Environment, Tourism and Territories], in that the Institute was set up by the Fraser government, and it was very, solely focused on elite sport, and giving athletes the opportunity to train in an elite sport environment and maybe stop athletes from going overseas.

However, I think the Hawke government through John Brown, they saw a need that had a broader role for sport, particularly the participation side and a more coordinated approach. So when the Sports Commission was set up it was separate from the Institute, but I think the coming together of the two was a result of the two bureaucracies that were originating, but also possibly an outcome of the Drugs in Sport enquiry where the Institute ran into quite a few issues there of what I call particularly call governance. It's interesting that a lot of those same issues I see happened in the Essendon drug saga that - - -

David Rowe

That is convening today isn't it, in the Court of Arbitration for Sport?

Greg Blood

Yeah. So it was really set up to provide a more coordinated approach. It really always had two major themes and one is elite sport, high performance sport, leadership, and the other is sort of participation and/or the subsets of that relating to children, women, athletes with disability, coaching, officiating, administration, those sort of tenets that keep the system going, whereas the high performance is, to me, a very narrow view of Australian sport. So that's what its premise was. I think – personally I think the heyday of the Commission was in the 1990s in that - - -

David Rowe

Which bit, all of the 1990s?

Greg Blood

Yeah. I'd say most of the 1990s, even some of the early '80s. It sort of got a greater impetus when the two organisations merged because I think the Sports Commission benefitted probably a bit more than the Institute. The Institute at the time, most of the staff were very anti the Sports Commission merger. Myself at the time thought it was a very good thing, myself and my boss, Nerida Clarke, we saw sport as a whole, whereas people at the Institute saw a dilution of what they were trying to do.

I have changed my view over time in thinking that it's been a negative to the Institute and it's been a negative to the Sports Commission, because I think basically there's been a dilution of both their impetus and roles in that there's this bureaucracy that now surrounds it, and they're not as agile as they could be. But going back to the Sports Commission, in the '80s they set about – particularly a program like Aussie Sport – really started to get sport into schools, which is an issue now, particularly primary schools, and they were very good at working with the Education Department, developing fantastic resources and most national sports organisations created their own modified sport version, which I think quite a lot of them are still going now with some modifications.

So a lot of those are testament of time. They've actually lasted the testament of time. They started to tackle issues like women in sport, athletes with disability and also they started to improve the funding of sporting organisations so they could start to become a bit more professional because, in the early '80s, they got very limited money and it was basically still kitchen table sort of organisations and that. So, the '90s changed a bit

because the government had several major policies. One was to maintain a momentum in the early '90s and that's what - - -

David Rowe

This is under the Labor Government.

Greg Blood

Under the Labor Government and followed on from that was the Olympic Athlete program. So they put a lot of extra money into the system and they both covered – look, the majority of the money went to elite high performance sport but the participation stream got lots of good resources out of that.

Even the fact that where I worked, we were just a little thing but we took on the role of the National Sport Information Centre. So that allowed us to take a broader approach. It was also at a time I think personally there were some very good leaders within the Commission. People who I see were very passionate about a particular issue, that they would commit themselves to that issue for a period of time. So worked here for 10 years or more and continually drove that issue in the public domain, within government, to get the resources. So areas like that were children in sports. So you had a person like Mike D'Arcy then followed by people like Shirley Willis, Henny Oldenhove who really drove that agenda.

An interesting area was coaching because coaching for quite a period was separate - here on site, but it was run by Australian Coaching Council. But the Commission took that over and they ran some really excellent programs in terms of had a fairly good accreditation program running, developed excellent resources, conferences and they had lots of promotions, like Year of the Coach and to me, a program like that, there's a lot more awareness of the importance of coaching in the community at that point because of the work that they did and like I said, children in sport.

Women in sport and athletes with disability. Look, they did have programs but they were never really that overly well-funded and same with Indigenous is another group, that there are always one or two staff members, that was their focus and they were very committed. So to me, it was a period of those people really driving those programs.

David Rowe

So this period we're talking about now is - - -

Greg Blood

The late ‘80s and ‘90s.

David Rowe

Right. So we haven’t made the crossover into the Howard years yet.

Greg Blood

No. The Howard years started in ’96 and the reality is really the first – up until 2000, the Howard years really just followed on from the Hawke years because a lot of funding and strategy was already in play from the Olympic athlete program and that sort of thing, and there wasn’t a lot of fiddling with things in the lead up to Sydney.

The only change of direction – and this is where to me it comes an interesting point – is the people working in participation in some ways saw them being a bit marginalised by the Olympics and all the money and focus on that. But they believed that we needed a new participation approach and that’s where they created a program or division called Active Australia, and that program in the lead up to Sydney was really aimed at linking all the different groups, not just sporting organisations but recreation groups, peak agencies, YMCAs, fitness, saying well, participation’s not just about organised sport, it’s about all these sort of things.

So they developed a plan and were getting some traction with the government in that sense, but the real focus with Howard’s government was really primarily the Olympic Games and having a successful result, and interestingly enough John Coates, when Sydney won the bid, said that the Games won’t be a success unless Australia’s athletes are successful.

So you could have the best run games but unless you have a successful team it will be seen as a failure and I think they used the Montreal example, where Montreal they didn’t win a gold medal and it cost them a lot of money and it’s been seen as a negative. However, that hasn’t stopped Canada going down a bid process and they’ve had two Winter Olympics since then anyway.

David Rowe

Sure. So just to – just a couple of quick questions then. So, the winding back of Aussie Sport[s], that happened - - -

Greg Blood

That happened probably in the mid ‘90s.

David Rowe

So that was, I understand [under Howard] - - -

Greg Blood

Look, it’s one of those things that when I actually look there’s no defined line in the sand saying well, we’re no longer doing this. What you find with a lot of government policies is they slowly get watered down. and all of a sudden a new policy creeps in and - - -

David Rowe

This was the afterschool, the after - - -

Greg Blood

Well, the afterschools came in the early 2000s. So once Aussie Sports was sort of dumbed down, what I would call it, they – the only thing they, I think, they really did in that period – was develop a junior sport policy which is really, basically a document that sporting bodies could [indistinct], but it was not really any extra money.

What – I think early years of the Howard government, they threw some extra money at a whole range of different sports. They got another $200,000 to try and improve participation but there was no name really assigned to that and then, within a few years, that money seems to have disappeared.

So what you really see is sporting bodies get these little bits of injections of money at times and I’ve never seen a real continuity of participation policy as such. It stops and starts depending on – because elite sports seems to be very good at lobbying to get money, particular through groups like the Australian Olympic Committee, and that whereas participation doesn’t seem to have a knight in shining armour out there really pushing for that. It tends to get money when people think oh, we’re not doing so well in participation. So that’s why I think participation’s been a very ad hoc approach over the years.

David Rowe

Okay. A couple of quick questions [*off the record comment*] … there is a view that there was, in the Howard government, there was this movement away from a sport-based approach amongst children to more of a fitness and general exercise.

Greg Blood

Can I say, I suppose off the record here a little bit - - -

David Rowe

All right. This bit's off the record. Yeah.

Greg Blood

Off the record comment.

David Rowe

Off the record comment.

Greg Blood

Off the record comment.

David Rowe

Off the record comment.

Greg Blood

Off the record comment. I had a sense that people realised that to get this active living environment, sport wasn't going to be it, but that did result in some issues because when you look at the charter of the Sports Commission, it really revolves around the term 'sport', as opposed to these other things. And then the other thing was that sporting organisations started to lobby government saying that the money for sport is going to the YMCA and all these other groups and that's – we're losing money to this sort of disparate group.

So that's my reading of that scenario, but I might be wrong, that the government – but the Ministers at the time – we had Jackie Kelly, this is in the '90s when this happened, and Andrew Thomson and like I said, to me primarily the focus appeared to be really heavily on the Olympics, and that's why I saw a bit of these other areas sort of really becoming a lot softer than – they were fairly hard edged in the early days, the first 10 years of the Commission at least anyway.

David Rowe

Okay. So which bit of that don't you want me to quote?

Greg Blood

Off the record comment.

David Rowe

Off the record comment.

Greg Blood

Off the record comment.

David Rowe

So what – just to summarise your earlier comments that, in the end I think you're suggesting, it was an unhappy marriage between the Commission and the Institute.

Greg Blood

I think – yes. To be honest, the Institute people have never embraced the Commission. The Commission people have embraced the Institute because they get to work out here in the environment, but there's been very little meshing of the groups to the fact that the groups, the people here don't associate as much to each other.

The coaches never associate with the Commission staff and the sports scientists rarely associate with the Commission staff. The Commission staff won't associate with them because that's the glitzy part of sport but look, I reflected on this over time and one who is a strong believer in the merger at the time, over time what I've seen is it's not a good fit because of the philosophies.

So, in elite sport it's been very agile, cutting edge. You've got to make something happen straight away. It's a very cut throat sort of thing, the world of elite sport, because a millisecond is the difference between winning a gold medal and these people's jobs often rely – because they're on contracts and they're very much a performance-based system.

Participation is really a lot to do with society, really understanding how society works and slowly making things happen in that to get change because to increase participation as a – you have to take in lots of societal things and to make that happen needs certain types of people, and they don't have as much urgency because they realise that it's a long-term agenda, whereas high performance – so to me there's that thing and probably the Sports Commission overall has created this bigger bureaucracy.

So that's a handbrake to me on elite sport, in that it takes away the agility and that, but it does, it keeps them accountable, but when you think Australia's competing against other countries that might have more agility, and the really interesting thing is I've done some

work in the last 12 months looking at the major sports systems around the world, and in New Zealand high performance got hived off as a separate organisation.

UK Sport and Sport England are two separate organisations. Canada created Own the Podium. So the Western countries have seen that actually elite sport is its own environment, and it should operate in a distinct area and not try and be meshed with other government policy areas.

So that's sort of why I've come to that conclusion, is that I think the AIS has been hamstrung being in this bigger environment. Whereas I saw in the early days of the Institute it was very nimble because it just had to keep changing a lot. But once the Commission came along then that change was very slow or you lost very innovative good people because they just got frustrated in this iron glove environment. But is that the reason why the government did it? Because maybe the AIS paid the price of the – of its freewheeling a little bit with the Drugs in Sport enquiry, where the government came and said well, you don't have enough accountability and governance yet, we need to put on that and that's where – to be honest, that's where Ron Harvey and Jim Ferguson, two what I call bureaucrats, came in to manage that process.

David Rowe

OK. Thanks and, just on the question of what is sport and that pivotal question, I mean, where do you sit on the idea about sport's relationship to exercise, physical activity and so on?

Greg Blood

I think sport once was the exercise. If you go back in the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s, that's how people generally got their exercise predominantly. It was through organised sport. School – I think schools had a lot more organised sport in those days. I just remember one time at school, more linking the schools with clubs and stuff like that.

I mean there wasn't an existence of gymnasiums and that sort of thing. If they were it was a boxing gymnasium or something very few people went to and also in those days people did a lot of physical labour or had to do physical things to get through life, walking to a bus stop that was a long way away, and all of that.

So to me, sport had this really predominant role but I really think probably since the '90s there's this real trend away from – well, we've gone to this 24/7 work environment, weekend work. So sport's now changed in that there are still organised, but you've got

the growth of what are called commercial sporting centres where people can play at their time of choosing, on a Sunday night if that's their time.

So groups have done that. There's been some newer sports created which deal with skateboarding and even some of the biking activities that you see, less structured maybe and that. Obviously gymnasiums are a big thing. There are masses of them now and now they're going to anytime fitness.

You go in whenever you feel like it. Personal trainers, that sort of thing. People do more exercise on their own I think. I'm one of those that doesn't want to be in any organised group but quite happy to do lots of walks and other activities, bicycle riding, during the week in my structure of life.

So now I tend to do that during the middle of the day or when I feel like it and you see a lot of people moving in that sense. So that's where sport has this real issue, is that even though there's been a growth of – well, there are some groups like master's sports. They're still a very niche sort of group I think when you put the numbers in terms of the population size.

I mean, I still think – and this is where to be honest, sporting organisations and the government haven't even said to sports well, how do we help you get more mature aged people involved in your sport. It's really – a lot of it's focused on younger people. We actually did – I think in the '90s a guy called [Ron Burns] was employed by the Commission for a while and wrote a report called *Mature* – I forget the exact name now.

That's the one and only attempt for the Commission to look at this issue of what can we do to get people in mature age, and where they've missed the boat there a little bit is that mature aged people have been involved with sport. They're going to be administrators, your coaches and your things.

So you want them having this strong involvement in a sporting organisation, not departing and I haven't seen a lot really happen in the sort of Master's area and to be honest, a lot of those groups have gone on and they're distinct in the sporting body itself. So I think Master's athletics and Master's swimming aren't part of Athletics Australia and Swimming Australia.

They've sort of gone off on in their own sense because I think they perceive that the National Sporting Body was interested in the young athletics, up and coming and the elite athletes and you're past it, you're over her. So that's my sense of that area there, that sporting bodies have really let go of that and to be honest, that's where you need those people and that's where sporting bodies are now struggling to get the administrators,

coaches and officials, because that group said well, we're over here and we don't need to have a relationship.

So that's – yeah. So sport changing. Yeah. Also the working life of people. I just think you're possibly losing what I call generational families because a lot of us grew up in an era where your parents played sport and you may have watched them play sport and all that, but once this connection's been broken a lot of kids don't have a sporting role model to follow.

So, if Dad's never – you've never seen Dad do sport, well – and Dad's probably not the one that really encourages it. So you still – you'll see the really strong sporting families but you look at that family and more than likely the parents were heavily involved in sport in their thing, but ones that don't didn't have that connection – so all of this thing about spending money getting more kids to participate, in life a lot of it comes back to the parents wanting to facilitate that and also have the money to do it.

See, that's a bit of an issue now. Sport is becoming very expensive. I think there have been a few studies that show it's very difficult for some families to afford it and I know – I listened to an interview a while back, the Salvation Army actually has a program to help some families, give them money so kids can participate in sport because of equipment or just if you play hockey, you've got to pay for synthetic turf and they're trying to get the money back to pay for that turf and all that sort of thing.

David Rowe

I guess … I suppose what I'm getting at is that, sport is one form of physical activity amongst many and is that a problem for sport, that it's now to some degree lost its place amongst - - -?

Greg Blood

Definitely and it's because by the nature of what sport is – I think the definition of sport is organised and there's generally a competitive aspect about it. Well, in the new world people don't necessarily want things as organised and don't necessarily want them as competitive.

So, in the new paradigm people want, that's why it actually has become a bit less effective and other groups – that's why some of these commercial sort of things or even variations of sport come along, because it's meeting this new niche that people want, and if you looked at the true definition of sport some of them might not be regarded as sport but they're thrown into that bag. But, like I said, I think people do understand the importance

of exercise and – but sport is not necessarily going to be it and it's a lot to do with the way it's been done and I know some sports have really tried to address this.

Interestingly I came across a guy a few years back who developed a new game of golf that would reduce the amount of space and the time required to play the game of golf, but it would be radically different and Golf Australia probably wouldn't be that keen on it, but when you think of space there's a real issue now.

Golf is a very time intensive sport, then maybe they need to look at some of these new versions to think well, how does that fit into an environment? And look, the other big issue is high-density housing. You just see it everywhere, that local tennis courts disappear. You don't see those as much anymore.

Play areas and that just – they put – I think they put in a park and think that's it, but I just think kids don't have backyards to run around in, and a lot of what I call sport when we were younger is in backyards creating our own competitions because we could do that. Well, when you go to places now, the backyard might be half the size of this [*the room we're in*].

Well, how can you do that activity and also, I think, sport in schools has really declined in terms of the number of things the curriculum wants to do. One of the ideas I've had is the government has had several programs in sport in schools, like Active After Schools and now they've got Sport in Schools, but the reality is they only touch a fairly small number of students.

So what impact does that really have? And I strongly believe that every primary school has to have a dedicated employed physical education teacher. Now, I know a lot of private schools do that. So those children, three or four times a week, will have a qualified, dedicated teacher that runs that program.

In government primary schools it's a teacher. You're going on a class. That teacher may not be motivated, doesn't have the skillset, all that sort of thing. So that's where I think government money would be better spent and there's a guy here in Canberra [Dick Telford] who has done some research that's really showing that this activity in sport and all that in primary school really does have an academic benefit if it's done in a structured sort of way, but… So, and that's why sport is sort of struggling, because you're not getting this cohort coming through as you maybe once did.

David Rowe

To move to the institutional level, it's a difficult question really but, one of the things we try to do is to define what is the sport sector or the sport field. What comprises the sport field or sport sector for you? What organisations and institutions make up sport?

Greg Blood

Well, I suppose we're a federated system. That's how you really describe [it], in that we have at a national level the federal government and then national organisations that then all have State branches, or if you call it State Departments of Sport, and then that even then goes down to clubs and all that, but they all move up this pyramid and at the top of the pyramid is the national bodies and that.

So, to me that is – if you say sport, the true definition of sport, it's that group because the basis for all that is that it revolves around something that's organised, has competition, physical activity, if that's what your definition of sport is and that's – so I don't include in the sport sector gymnasiums and YMCAs and some of those, where it's got an exercise health recreation benefit, because it's not organised. So that's – if I stay with my definition of sport, then that's how I bring that sector together.

David Rowe

Okay. So what about if I said companies that make sports apparel, event management companies, marketing companies, media, are they part of – do you look at that as part of sport?

Greg Blood

They're part of the sector in that it's a – they have a symbiotic relationship in some ways in that one relies on the other. So, the media needs sport to get their stories and report but sport needs the media to promote what its activities are and the same as – and even sports facilities are part of the sports sector even though some of them might be multiple use.

So, anyone who is involved in organised sport that's touched on by anyone is – and in the sports sector it can even involve the academic university sector in that they are doing research producing the next cohort of people involved in sport, and also you would include parents and teachers.

So, anyone who says I am involved doing sport, participating. It can also include someone who goes to an AFL [Australian Football League] game, that they are participating in that

organised activity in that sense. So it's fairly – it's a fairly big step to delineate all that and some people will have a greater involvement than others.

Some people would only have a 10 per cent involvement because they might only go to two AFL games a year and watch a bit on TV, and that's their total involvement, whereas someone might coach, go to games, have kids, a whole range of things. I mean, also include sports museums and even libraries and other groups that see sport as one of their cohorts. So, if you go to the National Museum here [in Canberra], they see sport as an important component of what they do.

David Rowe

Okay. Thanks. As you probably know, for reasons of convenience we've started broadly from the historical reference point of *Creative Nation*, the national cultural policy in 1994. My first question I'd have is, there's very little about sport in *Creative Nation* if you know it, except it's regarded as a competitor for sponsorship funds and there's some mention of sports television in the Aboriginal communities, a little bit on anti-siphoning legislation but that's about it. So, where does – where do you think sport fits in or could fit into a national cultural policy? I mean, why was it largely absent from *Creative Nation*?

Greg Blood

It possibly was absent because the people who wrote it – there is a battle between the cultural institutions and sport. So, you forever see that one group's saying one group gets more money than the other from the government and so, to me, there's always been this standoff, that they don't actually work together. They see each other as opposing forces to get this bucket of money.

So, my sense is that the people who wrote it were trying to get more money for what they call traditional culture. It could be museums or getting more people doing literature or all of that, but I think the broad definition of culture sport is one of those components and it's a physical component, but it also has this emotional component of sport being important for people in people achieving things through their deeds to even – you ask people what are your favourite athletes? And it could be some local person from their town because that person has given their town a sense of importance.

Something happened in the last week, Ballarat for example. I read an article where Ballarat thought they'd found themselves on the map because the jockey and the trainer came from Ballarat, and they said this is our time and that's why, it's part of the culture of Ballarat.

So, that's why it's – I think sport has this sense of this local community, and so that's why I think it's part of the culture, because it's part of how an area or group of people have developed their life. Sport's one. It could be politics or the Council. It could be some environmental stuff that they've done. It's this whole sort of thing and that.

David Rowe

So, I mean, is it possible to argue that a sport organisation is a cultural organisation?

Greg Blood

It is and they don't see it that way. One of the things I'm trying to do at the moment is get the sporting bodies to take advantage of the cultural heritage grants, because I've just done a recent project and there's only been about 12 over 20 years that have got money from it, because they're not aware of it. Or I wonder also whether cultural heritage people actually go out for that group, but they are maintaining a history of their development in Australia or in their local area of how they've changed the community, to the deeds of people, a whole range of things like that.

If you look back at a point in time – I was at the National Library the other day and it just hit me then, someone's done a Powerpoint of – they call it popular culture. I would have said 75 per cent of photos coming up in this popular culture thing was related to sport, and sport and towns.

It was women in the 1920s playing tennis and you got a sense of what that meant for that town, but my big criticism is sporting organisations don't see this broader sense. In recent times they're now starting to realise the importance of the history a bit more, and they've done it in what I call a more narrow approach, in that they've created these Halls of Fame recognising the deeds of people, but what they haven't done is say, well, why don't we get oral histories done and why don't we do histories or do a range of things that actually document how we fit into this realm of things? But. it's a lot to do with – to be honest, most people involved in these roles, they're very much about the now and the future, and I think some of them need to have somebody put their hand up and say, 'but we need to be bringing the past with the future'.

David Rowe

Okay. So you presumably believe that sport has made a substantial historical contribution to Australian culture, it's valuable in that sense.

Greg Blood

Yeah. I mean, I suppose what you've got to look at is that in the news every night there's the sports report and it's the back page of the newspaper, not so much the back page anymore. So that tells you that there is a thirst for the community about what is happening in sport.

So, there's a lot of Australian attention that says that is important. So that to me is very tangible things. I mean, the other one is attendance at sporting events, for some events. When you look at the growth of pay television, pay television relies heavily on people willing to pay.

I have it only because of sport. So that is an industry. So people put the – why they think it's important. The question a little bit is what it actually means for people in terms of why is it important to them, and that sort of comes back to a question which I don't think it's really been ever well examined. And I've sort of said to some people here at the Commission, it's probably something you should try and do one time, is do a research study to understand why is sport, particularly international success, important to Australians, because you invest so much money on the premise that our top five gold at the Olympics is important to Australians, but is it really?

But I've heard we don't want to go down that path because what happens if we get the wrong answer? Because then governments would say, 'well, we're not going to fund sport now'. But, I still believe it is a very worthwhile question to ask, to really think – and there have been some little – I've only ever seen two surveys that sort of just touched on it, attitude surveys, and it possibly even falls into what you call…there's a group in Melbourne, I think Deakin [University], some Australian Wellbeing Index, and they've occasionally had a question on sport in that but, yeah.

So, we – but there's also you have people who have got no interest at all, but people who have got no interest at all will tell you about something that's happened because they know you're interested. I'll find out an interest. 'I don't watch sport but I did see something, did you' [laughs]? But, yeah, look, I believe we are a sporting nation, if not a fickle sporting nation at times.

David Rowe

I mean, do you think to some degree then that sport might be undervalued or even patronised within the cultural field as not really culture, for a cultural hierarchy they have sport near the bottom?

Greg Blood

Yeah. I think they do, but I think it's only on the basis they believe that sport is really well funded and well serviced. So, why would we help it move up into here? Because we believe it operates very – better than we do, because when you look at a lot of the cultural organisations and things, they really do struggle to get people to go and attend. But I think it probably has improved, but I think they do see themselves as definitely the poor cousins and they would be thinking well, 'why would we help this group that we already see is, in our sense, operating fairly fully'? So, they probably see sport as over here, not as part of them and they – so then they might move towards areas like the theatre and the arts and museums and others, where they think are less – the poorer cousins of this world.

David Rowe

I mean, to caricature it somewhat, but I have heard people say this or something like it. Sport is essentially an entertainment business. It's a commercial entertainment business in which not very intelligent people with effective bodies do something, whereas there is this other area which we call culture which is not – which isn't commercial, isn't entertaining, is about the mind and cultivating appropriate tastes and so on. Do you ever encounter that kind of - - -?

Greg Blood

Yeah. You do, but both of them to me – some culture is what I call cheap and dirty and then other sport is very…you look at a sport like cricket in Test cricket, it's a very… because it's like a game of chess in lots of ways. Most people watching a game of cricket are making decisions of what they would do and what should happen, and they go into the statistics and history and that's probably something that comes in the new media of some of those sports, is they are actually bringing in a lot more of the history and the thinking of what that game's about. And look, a lot of sport can be very aesthetically pleasing, as going to see paintings or dance and all those sort of things.

I mean, they're both on the same level as in people go to sport or a museum or an art gallery or a theatre to see a bit of unknown, and to see the human being produce something. I mean, you go to a play and you think you know what's going to happen, but you've got a different actor the next time or a different set. So, it can always be different and the same as I see sport, but there are groups.

I mean, culture often is seen as an upper-class, middle-class, and sport as a lower and middle-class in lots of ways, but I think there are people from different levels, but they do have the ability. I mean, the people who – when you see people – a Carlton supporter and they're maybe head of the Art Gallery, you think would that person…? But they can switch between.

David Rowe

Yeah. I mean, is there also perhaps, therefore, a hierarchy within sport, not just a cultural hierarchy where sport may sometimes be put down the bottom, but within sport? So are there some sports that are regarded as more cultural than other sports?

Greg Blood

Yeah. Well, cricket is. I think cricket and Australian football, to me they're real national games because they're really fairly broadly played, even though Sydney and Queensland are a bit less on AFL. I mean, cricket's regarded as the national game and that, and [is] probably a lot to do with it dominating summer. Whereas the other sports, like rugby league and rugby union, all have to compete with a range of other sports and that. You can see there's a sport that's like soccer, football, it is becoming the new cricket in a lot of ways, in that it's a national team on the world stage and it's seen – I mean, football is seen as a big international stage.

So when you're competing there you're really competing against the best, whereas when you go rugby league and rugby union and – we know cricket will not be against the best. But I've just seen that when the Socceroos play now, they seem to be able to get this bigger audience and it's a whole spectrum of people that coalesce around this national team. And the thing about the national league teams, Melbourne Victory's a very good example, that they've got a very strong supporter base. So even if you're not doing as well, they're going to have a fairly good crowd.

Some of the other teams are not like that, but their history's not that long either. I mean, we're judging spectator crowds with teams that have been around for a hundred years. So I judge those others, but I think that's a sport that is going to capture – maybe because it's a sport with an immigrant base, it's a world game and we're getting star players.

We've got another generation of good players and that's how we project ourselves, but there's a lot of sports that are very niche and only people in those sports really know what's going on. Like the hockey team, the Olympics, people prick up and think we want them to win but they really haven't. So there's probably only about five or six sports that people

really have a day-to day-interest in the country, and a lot [of] that is their television exposure.

David Rowe

Those things are related.

Greg Blood

Yeah. I think so. Yeah. If you can't get exposure you can't get a new audience, I think, but it's interesting that I don't [get] into that UFC [Ultimate Fighting Championship], but that's on pay television, and I think it's fairly big on pay television. So they could get 56,000 at Melbourne last night, or yesterday for an event. It shows you that there's that link. If it hadn't had been on pay television, in clubs or in people's homes, there's no way they would have got that many people to it because people think well, what's this sport all about?

David Rowe

So, just to follow the points a little bit further, could there be a kind of, perhaps a class hierarchy within sport? Are some sports 'classier' than others?

Greg Blood

I mean – yeah. There is because I think cricket still has a bit of class around the upper echelons of it, just the way it's organised and how you get involved in those boards, it's seen as very prestigious to get onto these groups. Other national sporting bodies are just begging for people to go on their boards, whereas cricket, it's like, I want to put it in *Who's Who* that I'm the – so there's what is called old money around some of the sports.
I mean, rowing's a sport to me that really – even though I know [*name of research student*], who is doing a PhD here on rowing at the moment, he disagrees. He figures it's a classless sport, but my reading of it is that the majority of people doing the sport come from private schools because it's an expensive sport and each private school has their own paid rowing coach and - - -

David Rowe

What about rugby union and rugby league, for example?

Greg Blood

I mean, rugby union's definitely again a class one because of the – it's a private school predominantly sport. It's changing a little bit with the Pasifika people coming in. So they're coming in and clubs are now paying for these players to play, and as we see in the Wallabies now there's quite a few Pasifika players coming through there.

So to me, rugby union has actually had that diluted a bit and maybe some of the issues that rugby union's had in player behaviour, some of the issues is that there's different standards coming now that they never had, whereas rugby league traditionally has been a working-class sport.

It has been helped a little bit by private schools, Catholic schools, but again, when you look at those schools they're predominantly in working-class areas. So you'll see in Sydney say, for instance, it's in the West, basically the same group is Campbelltown and all that, that's rugby league and the Blacktown schools and all that. It's the North Shore that the rugby union cohort are. I don't know whether that's changed a lot. So that – yeah. That's another sport.

David Rowe

Just onto rugby union for a moment, I mean, interestingly rugby union went professional a year after *Creative Nation* in 1995 and was that an inevitable move do you think?

Greg Blood

I think it was, mainly because rugby league was poaching the players. So, even though they'd done it in the past, rugby union – and look, they also – there's a bit more money in rugby union, and obviously we won a World Cup, so there's some things around that. I think we won the World Cup in the early '90s and won it again in … so that was a period of positive rugby union.

So for that to keep going they needed to sustain it, but rugby union is also probably affected by what was happening internationally as well. So, I think it was inevitable for them to keep players, but now you just see there's this movement. Players trade themselves between the codes depending on what are their values and what they want out of it, and it's not always the value of money now.

Like, Sam Burgess obviously went back to rugby union to play for England in the World Cup, but once that sort of finished he's now come back to rugby league because [there's]

more money and all that. Israel Folau is the interesting one, went to AFL and they just see – [like] Jarryd Hayne – they see themselves as a marketable commodity.

I'm going to go where the money is, but also where I might get my satisfaction. So, I think you just hear more players now thinking well – it's the new athlete or the new person that they just think – like, say, a lot of these people might have 10 jobs by the time they're 60, whereas we might have only had a few. They just think my path might change. So they will follow the dollar but I think there's also an inherentness of adventure and putting themselves out there.

David Rowe

Just to finish off on rugby union, but traditionally the difference between rugby union and rugby league was over player payments, wasn't it? That was what caused the split and rugby union would often claim a kind of moral superiority because they weren't playing for grubby reasons of pay and that kind of thing. I mean, obviously that changed over time.

Greg Blood

I mean, it's also that – going back to that Muscular Christianity sort of concept in rugby. I mean, this is what's sort of coming out against, even touches on, some of the Royal Commission into some of this stuff, that these private schools built up this sort of – it's like an army type of scenario where you go to this school and you're part of this environment, that you help each other and you see [indistinct]. And also to then transcend after school, because that's when the alumni and all this – so how many government schools have an alumni to a private school?

So, it's just – it's sport and things for life and then a lot of these players in private schools, in rugby particularly, have old boys' clubs, and so it's this sort of – I don't know and it's this sense that you're not meant to make money out of sport. You're meant to be a lawyer or a doctor or – that's what the education and our system is doing, is giving you the education but also the contacts.

So once you go into these things that's what the school's all about. I mean, that's why you hear a lot of people send their kids to these schools. It's about this – I'm positioning my child into this world, which is the middle and upper class world. And even if they're not necessarily smart they're still going to get brought along in this world, because this network will do that for them and that's rugby union, that's one of the rugby union – rowing and whatever, a few other sports.

Interestingly enough they're now devolved in these – like, I think in Sydney the Catholic, the GPS [Greater Public School] schools on the North Shore are now doing soccer and AFL. I don't know whether they do rugby league but they're – and you wonder how that has diluted the school because once there was only one sport, everyone did it. You had 10 teams and now that has been diluted a bit because the kids can do a range of things. They're not in this sort of controlled bubble. I suppose.

David Rowe

Sure and so back – just go back for a moment to, as you say, people now plying their trade in various sports and so on. What about amateurism? What has happened to amateurism? Has it been – is it now dominated by professionalism in sport?

Greg Blood

Look, there are – my – I suppose my view of amateurism and professionalism, there used to be a definition of it's based on whether you got money out of the activity or not, and I think that got very blurred in the late '60s and '70s. I was actually looking to find out well, when actually did this actually change?

It sort of – in the Olympics it really just sort of floated in and out, but the way I see amateurism and professionalism now is, say a rower in Australia, where they do get some level of funding, but it's not very much. They know when they win, like Kim Crow who is our world champion, she's not going to get any money out of it.

So she's actually doing it for the love of it and for the achievement of winning this title. So there are still athletes in some Olympic sports who, even though they're getting some money to help them train a bit and whatever, are doing it with no commercial or financial at the end, whereas the professional athletes, they're getting well paid to perform and they'll get paid for performance or they'll get paid a contract and whatever.

So that's their primary reason for doing it. It appears to be. That's why they change clubs. If they were happy they would stay with a club for life and take less money, but the moment money becomes an issue, they will seem to just change. So, I still think they're an amateur but they are receiving some income, but they don't do it for – and predominantly those people have got a job. They've – a job to support what they want to do.

David Rowe

So, professionalism, commercialisation. I mean, have those been significant processes you would see in sport? Have they advanced in sport over the last 20, 30 years you've been watching?

Greg Blood

It's hard to know whether – you've got to say that the sporting competition or sporting event through professionalism has improved in terms of a more physically capable athlete, but I'm not sure whether the contest is any better necessarily, because the reality is the contest is a contest against two well paid physical professionals or teams.

Years ago, it was two well organised amateur teams playing. So you still got the same outcome. Two groups with the same resources. Where it does fall apart a little bit is where you have inequities in professionalism, in that one group is competing against another group but they're far well – they have a lot more resources, and that's where obviously some of the major codes around the world have tried to equalise it through drafts, salary caps.

So, in Australia AFL, rugby league have tried to do that but then you look at the English Premier League, where they've just given total abandon and only four teams can be at the top and that's professionalism, but to me it's not an even contest. So, professionalism has produced a better athlete and also it's probably given a better environment to watch in that we now have better stadiums in some cases, or we have better television coverage of it.

So it's a more complex coverage than ever before, because we're paying these players. So, for instance, the AFL will probably have stipulations of what the quality of the coverage of a game's going to be, and they've created their own news journalism and all this sort of stuff to make sure that their event is more meaningful. So that's what professionalism is. All these people on the side have got a Guernsey, I suppose, and that's helped lift the thing. I mean, that's why they're multimillion dollar businesses, teams and things like that.

David Rowe

Okay. So just before we get onto some of the really big changes, just at the national level over the last, say, two decades or so, two and a half decades. What would you say have been the major changes in the Australian sporting field?

Greg Blood

Well, obviously it's – there's a lot more money coming into the industry through broadcast rights and television, and as a result of that money there's a high, at the elite level of quite a lot of sports, a high level of professionalism. So the sports that have got the money and spectators have gone ahead in leaps and bounds, and some of that has been able to then help influence community sport.

So AFL and cricket, in particular, are sports that probably get the most money, have been able to create a lot more community programs and run more competitions and put more money back into the community. However, there's other sports that have this high end, like the Football Federation of Australia and Basketball Australia, their top end might be very strong but they actually haven't got the resources to actually put money out.

So they're really – even in their top, their product at the top is the same as maybe AFL and cricket but because they don't get the money they actually can't expand their base and that sort of thing. So, there's obviously, I reckon, more haves than have nots in that period, and there's quite a lot of sports to be honest that haven't really progressed that much, that the Olympic sports predominantly rely on government funding even though the government would like [them] to become more self-sufficient.

The commercial realities are that the big sports have got all the sponsors and television marketing, and I just don't think they'll ever get there, even though the Commission as a whole says 'no, we don't want you to rely on government funding', but they still do get it. I mean, the only sport that's been able to change that paradigm a little bit for little periods is swimming.

When we had the golden era of Thorpe and Hackett and that, they had some really good sponsors. They've – one of the things they've benefitted from in recent times is what I call the philanthropic thing with Gina Rinehart–Hancock putting some money in and – but they generally struggle.

So in a lot of senses those sports haven't, but one interesting thing is that the government expects those sports to have the same standard as the top sports in terms of doping and ethical behaviour, and administration and lots of things like that, and in some ways that's a little bit unfair because they actually don't have the money that the other bodies have to reach that sort of goal.

David Rowe

So, has there been a major – over the last couple of decades – a report of the, a policy or a report that say has had the kind of influence *Creative Nation* has in culture? What would you say has been the most important policy or report in recent times?

Greg Blood

Well, I suppose there's two. One's a policy and one's a report. I think the policy, the Olympic Athlete Program, a policy that had a specific period and had an outcome. I saw it operate and it's sort of one of the things on my possible agenda actually to do a PhD on that, on the basis that I saw how that transformed a lot of Australian sport and got people going in the same direction. Even people in the Commission and that was the only period that they actually cooperated on a better basis, because they had this goal. And look, the Crawford Report, even though, I think the government acted upon that in putting more money in and an outcome of that was *Winning Edge* which is the new elite sport policy, even though I think in '99 the Howard government did a report called *Shaping Up*, the Oakley Report, but realistically that report really sat – to me it's just it was a good evidential report that just sat and never really - - -

David Rowe

This is the Crawford Report?

Greg Blood

Yeah, but I think the basis of a lot of new direction has been with the Crawford Report. Sorry, the Oakley Report sat there but the Crawford Report actually brought money with it and it – and also the London, it became – I can't remember, before or after London. It was around London Olympics and obviously that lack of success there really started people to shake the system up.

I think we might be moving back to a more federated system in that the AIS is saying to sports and State Institutes and States, you actually deliver the outcome, we'll lead in certain areas, but we want the athletes and the scientists and the facilities and the coaches to be not here in a central place, but there because – now, the guy I was talking to just before you came in, he's the Director of the South Australian Sports Institute, and I was just asking him, and so whilst that's the evolution, the money actually hasn't flowed to the States yet. But I see that – and they're suggesting this place won't exist in 10 years on

the basis that the sporting organisations will be running their sports and the State Institutes will be supporting them around the country.

The issue I have with sporting organisations is – and they often – often the mantra you hear over periods is sport runs sport. The problem is that when a sport runs sport they sometimes have very short term views. We're only worried about medals for the next Olympics because that's what our funding's based on.

So, I'm the administrator of a particular sport. So my goal is to have a very successful Rio [2016 Olympics] campaign because that's going to guarantee us money for the thing. So, they're making short term – so no one's saying but where are we going to be in 10, 15, 20 years' time, and as a result I don't know whether they actually have this foundation legacy view of moving forward.

What the Institute was able to do and to some extent the Sports Commission, is it always had this foundation behind these sports bodies. So, even if they fell over a bit there's still a foundation to move on. My worry is if the sports throw all their eggs in one basket and it all falls over, there's going to be no foundation because the Institute won't be around.

So, the Institute always have a longer term view of where we're going to be in 10, 15 years. My sense is sporting organisations, if you're a CEO your pressure is – so how do you make sure – I mean, the trick for the Commission is if they've sort of said to sport, you run sport, here's the money, how do they make sure that sporting organisations have these benchmarks that aren't about four-year periods but 10-year periods?

David Rowe

Okay. Thanks. So just finally on the Crawford Report. Obviously it was fairly controversial and it did seem to replicate the division which you described before between putting money into elite sport and putting it into grassroots. I think the government in the end gave a bit to both didn't it, but they - - -?

Greg Blood

Yeah. I think they still predominantly gave more to – I think I saw some research that the Olympic sports did very well out of it and probably off the record is the influence of [*off the record name*] is a very – it would be a very interesting PhD to do because, and people have got to understand the whole – the history and mindset behind some of that is that it all relates back to 1980, the boycott, in that the Olympic Committee after the boycott decided it didn't want to be reliant on government.

It wanted to be arm's length from government. It didn't want to be reliant on government money. So since that period it's taken very little government money. What it does do is lobby the government to give money to the agencies that can support its sports. So, [*off the record name*] was a major player in – as I mentioned, in the lead up to Sydney by putting that view that the Games would be a disaster unless we got all this money, and when the Crawford Report came out and said we'll take some money away from the high end of sport, the elite sport and we'll put it – [*off the record name*] was very ferocious.

David Rowe

[*Gendered pronoun*] went ballistic and I recall reading quotes from [*gendered noun*] in the article, some things [*gendered pronoun*] said, "Un-Australian" is one of the things.

Greg Blood

The reality is that – and the reality is [*gendered pronoun*] had strong ties I believe with the Labor Party. So when you think [*gendered possessive pronoun*] two influences were in the mid '90s when the Labor Party made that big investment in the IP [intellectual property], and the Labor Party was in power when they made a big investment after Crawford and all that, and now in the meantime you had – the Liberals did put amounts of money in, but theirs is like little blocks of money here and there. It wasn't big investments, I don't think as big investments as those two periods.

David Rowe

Okay. Thanks. Well, that's the Crawford work. I just want to talk about some big issues. Mostly we've spoken about the national scene, the national sporting field, but I just wanted to turn to – as we're kind of getting towards the last third of the interview – pressures beyond the nation and you've kind of – you've talked about that with athlete movement, globalisation first. Is globalisation as a process having a significant impact on Australian sport would you say?

Greg Blood

It is in that – in several ways. So our top athletes won't necessarily – we won't actually see them necessarily now. So, some examples. A lot of rugby union players now will go overseas. Basketball players, for instance. In the early days a basketball player would come to the AIS, go and play in the national league and then maybe – like Shane Heal

and Andrew Gaze, go and play in the NBA [National Basketball Association of the United States].

What happens now is with globalisation, the AIS trains them up to get them a US college scholarship. The US college scholarship in many cases now leads to a NBA thing. So we actually don't get to see that player unless they're in a national team at the Olympics or World Championships, and they might only come back to Australia right at the end of their career, but the likelihood these days is they don't even come back here to play.

The Australian example is in the soccer players now. They'll go overseas and we might be lucky to get them. Like, Harry Kewell played here, Brett Emerton – so they all played the last bit. Rugby's a little bit different in that players are moving backwards and forwards. Rugby league to some extent, so there is that player.

So, the only players that we can really guarantee the best players I think are the amateur Olympic sports or a sport like cricket. Still, people want to play for the national team, that is their thing, but there will still be players – but what I've noticed is very few players now play overseas. They used to go and have a county career [in the UK], the cricketers. Very few now do it because they're at the Indian Premier League or there's more national team games.

The other big influence is that does have an impact on the attendances for some Australian sports. The example is basketball. So, in the '80s basketball was very, very strong in Australia and I remember here in Canberra, we'd get 5000 to a Canberra Cannons team. Admittedly, they had a reasonably good time, but in those days there was no basketball or NBA on television, and I remember we used to have to buy the tapes in from overseas so our players could see what a NBA game was. What I've noticed now is when NBA has been on television.

So, you can watch from home the best players in the world on the NBA, the Euro League. So when you come to watch – so your choice now is you go and watch an Australian game, that is a third or fourth team, tier competition. So people now say, 'well, why would I spend money to go to this game where there's only bit players?'

The same as – that's why I think the national – the soccer league's always going to struggle a bit, is we're never going to have the best players in it. So it is a sport where you can't get the best players in it and maybe rugby's going to suffer from that, in that if a lot of our players are playing overseas, people will think well, that's not the best standard, whereas you know in cricket you're seeing a very high quality.

So that's – to me that – and the other thing is that we are breeding a new group of people into – people who love the American sports or other sports. So, I know a lot of younger people – my niece's new husband – they're just doing a sporting tour of the US because they're into ice hockey, basketball and gridiron, so all those sports, because it's now on pay television.

So – and there's a lot of content on pay television. So they now become involved and an example of that is Jarryd Hayne going to there, Channel 7 immediately bought the rights to San Francisco games – the interest in that. So we're now willing to explore other sports, global sports, if we have some sort of link or there's exciting players in it.

So, that's really changed it. I mean, the other thing is we're now – a lot of State governments are now buying in sports so we get that content here. So, the UFC thing. I'm sure the Victorian Government put some money behind that. There was a baseball game in Sydney last year.

They're talking about bringing a NFL game. Even the fact that the other week in baseball venues in America, Shane Warne and his troupe are playing games, and when you think – so in New York – Indians. So a lot of – so because of the new multicultural world you think well, if we go to this – if we bring that sport in, then we know we've got an audience and that's why – say – I was involved in the cricket World Cup just locally here.

They got the biggest crowds were Afghanistan and Bangladesh because – so I think this sport tourism – sport thing, State governments realise now well, we've got a great cohort because we're fairly multicultural, but if we bring these events in – the Asian Cup was an example here.

They were sell outs here and I was thinking who is going to go to Iraq and Iran here? But it's a sell out because, so that, but whether you can sustain – those people won't necessarily go to a weekly game, but if you bring in a particular event. So that was big tourism for the city here.

David Rowe

So, along with globalisation, transnationalism we could say comes cultural diversity in Australia. Are there changes occurring in the Australian sporting system, if you like, because of the changing population?

Greg Blood

I'd like to think there has, but I don't think there has been as much. I was just talking to someone recently, that if you look at post World War II with the migrants that came,

particularly from Europe, they created clubs and their own teams, and a very cultural thing that would then play against others, and that had a few issues.

I haven't seen that with the new generation that's come in that – the groups from the Middle East or China or Vietnam. I haven't seen their influence in sport. People will hold up Hazem El Masri or someone like that, or a few players, but I haven't seen them dominate as much in – and I just don't know whether they're actually participating in sports as much, and that's what I was saying to someone.

Maybe the government should be looking at this issue of what are the younger generation of these groups that's come – what are they actually doing in terms of sport? And I suspect they're not doing as much as another generation that came. It would be a very interesting study to do because the Chinese groups and – I don't remember a lot of Vietnamese actively playing a lot of organised sport.

Yeah. I'm not sure how – what you've seen in terms – I mean, you're in the west of Sydney. You might be seeing something there, but I think it's an interesting study that – and I just think with some of these issues we've got at the moment, that one of the approaches government should be looking at, is how do we engage new people? We engage them through sport a bit better and - - -

David Rowe

The New South Wales Government has just put out a grant round with – naming sport and physical activity directly in terms of de-radicalisation.

Greg Blood

I just think that's a bit of a – and as a result, I mean, some of those people do – I think they do attend, become spectators, but I'm not sure they're being active participants and that is where sporting bodies have really struggled to – I mean, there was some hope that the Asian sports might – table tennis and badminton, some of those - but I haven't seen that they have – their numbers haven't grown necessarily.

David Rowe

Okay. So, just in – there's one quick point just before we lose it. Another big development is the digitalisation of media – which involves, as you indicate, ready accessibility to sports from all around the world, but also social media and athletes bypassing the media by tweeting and having their own Facebook pages and Instagram, and so on. And fan groups

communicating with themselves, sports organisations and media organisations all using social media. Do you see anything of significance there particularly?

Greg Blood

I think it's bringing a new dimension to sport in that it can make your – when an event is on, a more democratic participation in that event. So, you watch a Twitter feed when an event's on and the commentary that – because people are going to hashtag and you only see a little bit because you only get to see the people who you follow generally, unless you go and search that hashtag to find out. But you'll see there's – I call it democratisation in that people can have their say and their view of what they're seeing, whereas in the past you were aligned to what the commentator had reported back to you, or the next day you read [it] in the newspaper, whereas now you actually don't need to go to those because a whole lot of – or people throw up a statistic in game of cricket.

I saw something the other [day] – I think when Warner scored his third [century] – someone started to have some statistic of the – only three players have ever done that or whatever. Just quickly and that might not have been on a television screen, and that but I mean it's got positives and negatives because people can be very vitriolic, and as a result athletes and people withdraw from social media and will just walk away from it.

So it's – and so there's a real negative, but if – there are other people that are very good at doing it but other people use it. It's a bit like being a spectator in a crowd and just yelling out abuse, you're doing that through social media, but to me it also – I follow a lot of sport historians and other groups.

So you get an interesting view from that cohort. You might have only ever had that if you go and discuss it at a meeting later on. So – yeah. It has a real positive but personally I think it's good and I think people who – I mean, I'm not someone who's had anyone who's had abuse at me, so I don't – but – yeah. You hear people [who] have that turn off their accounts or whatever.

David Rowe

Okay. I was also interested in sport's relationship to various groups within the population. Indigenous people, how do you see the role of sport and Indigenous people?

Greg Blood

Look, it's touted as one of the things that can help create a better life and community for Indigenous people, but the reality is with a lot of things, I think sport is a second cousin to

a lot of things that, unless some of the foundations are working well sport, no matter how hard it tries. So, with [the] obesity crisis, unless you get people eating well and parents helping and all that – unless a lot of those things happen sport's not going to have that influence. If those things are happening then sport can play that role.

So, my same view is with Indigenous people, that we need to get them in more healthy communities, more economically viable, all those sort of things and then sport then plays a value-added role to that. But unless that's all happening they can do sport – so Rob de Castella has got his Indigenous marathon project running, but these Indigenous people go back to a community and there's all these negative things happening. So sport really improved – and how – it would be interesting to do a – with Deeks project – a follow up study to see well, in 10 years' time, after they've been through this, what have been the health outcomes and the things for those people?

David Rowe

How about the contribution of Indigenous people to Australian sport, has that been significant?

Greg Blood

Look, I think they do play – they can be an important role model. Sadly, they're not in enough sports. So they tend to congregate around AFL and rugby league predominantly. There's been the odd [one] in rugby union and in thing. I've recently done a bit of work for the Indigenous Sports Hall of Fame and things like that, and they're very – it would be good if they were in. Look, Patty Mills in basketball – but they're so remote from these communities and look, you hear that there's things like the Red Dust tour where high-profile elite athletes go to these communities, and they're there for a day and they all touch Cathy Freeman. But they're gone and then that's – to me a role model needs to be someone in their life day-to-day or someone they're seeing day-to-day that allows them to do – if it's just someone they see on television I'm not sure that's – they have [as much of] this influence as they would like.

David Rowe

The contribution I guess of Indigenous athletes, say Cathy Freeman or whoever, to – beyond Indigenous people, to the wider culture.

Greg Blood

I take the view that we – if they're successful, we jump on their bandwagon, but it's the way of saying they're okay because, 'look at these people who have done well', but we forget there's a hundred thousand others that are in poverty. So I often think that they're put up on a pedestal.

I mean, why did Cathy Freeman have so much pressure for her to win that gold medal when every other athlete who was at those Games should have had the same pressure on them from the community? It's a bit like, if Cathy wins then our Indigenous people can do things, but she's an anomaly in lots of ways, but if we have them successful we put them up and say – but I just don't think – if you look at our history, I just don't think the same opportunities. I mean, they're at a disadvantage from being in isolated areas and the ones that often do well you've found have actually been given a scholarship to a private school or stuff like that.

So, I think we like to use them as a thing and even Adam Goodes being made Australian of the Year, I was a bit cynical of that in that the Abbott government. He became Australian of the Year under the Abbott government, but I often think Australian of the Year now is becoming very much a – they want to use whoever they select to push a cause, and I think he was put in that position and maybe he – and as a result he paid a fairly heavy price, I think, and if he had been made Australian of the Year sometime after his football career, it might have been a better solution, but I think there's a bit of political manipulation of our Indigenous athletes.

David Rowe

Okay. Thanks. I'm aware of the time, it's getting away a bit. In terms of culturally diverse groups, ethnic groups, their position in Australian sport, is it – I mean, has policy been successful do you think in engaging those - - -?

Greg Blood

I don't think so myself. Yeah. I just – I'm not sure whether – how Australian sporting organisations and that have been as – they've seen that as a place to want to be, because if you take the model of post-World War II, when people come to a new country they tend to want to coalesce in a region and do things together.

They know they might have to work and be educated in the wider mainstream but they – and I'm not sure whether sporting organisations have provided – they're still very

Anglo Saxon, that sort of way. I mean, when you look at it, with the amount of Indians and people from the subcontinent come to Australia, and you think well, our cricket team would probably be influenced by a lot of those people because they've got a real passion for it. But they don't and I'd be interested to know whether they feel that they – the way Australian sport's organised – I don't know.

I mean, the thing with the soccer and – in the '50s all different nationality groups were playing each other, whereas if you have an Indian team come in, they'd be just playing Anglo Saxon White teams every week, every second week in the summer. So maybe they find – I don't know, but I don't – even though there's been a lot of talk about cultural diversity and there's been a little bit of research and some sports – AFL has a multicultural round and they pull out names, but I think they really struggle to pull out a lot of names. They pull out the exceptions rather than - - -

David Rowe

Okay. Gender. Where do women fit into the Australian sporting landscape?

Greg Blood

Look, in terms of, I think, participation, there aren't generally, I call, barriers to participation in [that] there's probably just as many female athletes participating as males. However, it's once they decide they want to become an elite athlete. There's still a heavy bias against them in terms of, as we know, media coverage, sponsorship, scholarships, a whole range of things like that.

You've just got to look at – there's more professional male athletes by a long way and I mean, the reality is going back to the UFC thing yesterday, someone said that was one of the few events that we got 56,000 to go and see women play something competitively.

Where else would you get that many people to go and watch? So, the closest is a netball game where they might get 20,000 but – so – yeah. I think in terms of women they can participate but, in terms of other things like coaching, I mean, still a lot of women's teams are coached by men and occasionally they bring out – St Kilda club's got a female coach, but she's right down the bottom and you wonder what the influence is, and they spout that but you wonder, is it just appealing to – we're helping women rather than – is it really making a difference?

David Rowe

I suppose if you're thinking about more than one kind of variable here, participation rates amongst women from some migrant backgrounds are very low as I understand it.

Greg Blood

I think culturally, like, Muslim women, they tend to have to be covered. So they've done a few things in swimming pools where they'll block out a swimming pool, they can go and swim, but they're probably not competitively swimming. It's more of a recreation. If they decide to compete in a sport and they're – where they have to cover their body and it's 30 degrees heat, it's not conducive.

So it's not an issue for Australia. I think it's an issue for that cultural group, but then again, going back to – I'm not sure how many Chinese women you see playing sport or Vietnamese from here. Is it that their orientation coming to Australia is we need to succeed so sport is something that's taking away time for education or other things?

Interestingly enough, recently I helped someone with a concert of kids and every kid playing at the concert was Chinese, and I said – but the Chinese parents, they would – but I don't know whether it's part of this – we're going back to the rugby, the cultural thing. They believe that they have to have these things to – part of their succession plan and sport's not seen as that, so maybe sport in some communities it's not that way, that path that maybe was once – because maybe going back years ago, sport was a – if you were good at sport it did help you move up some of the ladders, but maybe some of these new groups don't see it as that thing.

David Rowe

Yes. We would say that the concert has higher cultural capital, those sort of terms, they'd say in the jargon. What about some other variables I'll maybe just throw to you. Region, where people live. Is that an issue in terms of participation and involvement?

Greg Blood

Yeah. I mean, one of the real changes is a lot of athletes came from country areas, and if you look back in the '50s and '60s country sport was pretty strong. There's examples of rugby league players, Test players in Sydney would go and play for a country town for a year or two, because they could get paid and get a job in that town.

So people in regional areas got to see good athletes. The problem is that a lot of these regional towns are really struggling financially, that a lot of athletes are forced to leave. A

lot of them go to boarding schools and so they don't stay in the community that long. The other thing is they can't maintain sporting teams.

There's a recent program on the ABC at, I think, the Wimmera that shows you how three teams have to fold into one and the issue is where was that one team going to be based, because – and how the community's going to – they supported these teams for many years and that was their big social fabric for a weekend.

So, that's been one thing that's really hard hit smaller country areas, but one of the things that could happen a little bit more is governments could invest more in the regional centres and really provide opportunities for athletes – don't have to leave there as early. So Wagga Wagga or Albury-Wodonga or Coffs Harbour, some of these where you're developing substantial hubs of people now is saying well, let's try and get some better programs and things, but there's still this drain.

Any successful player now, you know they probably left home at 15 to move. So to me that removes the social fabric. Interestingly, I've been doing this work for the Paralympic history project and we're looking into stories of all these athletes, and one of the things you notice is even though the athlete's left the town, like, just hearing a story, Katie Kelly is a – she's 40 and she's vision impaired and that.

She looks like she – well, more than certain, she's going to go to the Paralympic Games and a strong chance to win a gold medal. Even though she hasn't been in that town for a long time, there's a newspaper article recently just regaling that this athlete came from this town and the likelihood of – so it just shows the importance of that, but if they lose these athletes then that [*indistinct*] and there's been a few conferences on that area, but I'm not sure what policy things have come up to say 'how do you improve that'?

David Rowe

Okay. Yeah. Thank you. Age.

Greg Blood

Well, there's obviously the big dropout, of the adolescents' dropouts that – and you wonder whether things like – it would be a very interesting study to look back at when HECS [Higher Education Contribution Scheme] came in, before HECS, people doing sport and whether the pressure now – because I – we – part of the history program – we looked after four students, and one of the things you gather from that is the pressure on them to get good marks, but they had all these jobs and things. So they're really focused on getting through university and getting income to do all that. So I think that cohort is

interesting, whether they're really struggling, but interesting to know university sport, how strong that is.

David Rowe

What about at the other end of the age spectrum, older people, Masters and that?

Greg Blood

I think there's – sporting bodies just don't promote it well enough. I'm sort of in that cohort and you don't ever see very much people actively going to seek people to do it, and if they did that they could have those people on their fields and courts when they're vacant during the day, but they've got to be innovative and only a few sports – I think tennis have gone down that thing with cardio tennis for women a bit, but I don't see them – it seems to be their focus is, as I said before, on kids in school age, then once they've left that well, how do we get the best kids moving into the elite pool?

David Rowe

Okay. Last of the social variables, class. So class, is that an issue in terms of participation, access, equity?

Greg Blood

Yeah. I mean, class has changed a lot in Australian society. I think obviously the middle class I think is really stretched. It's widened the slope and that. So the middle class do have more opportunities, but I think their goal is often around education, employment, getting this house and all that. So even though money shouldn't be the biggest issue, they've set other goals.

The working class, I think some parents see it as a way out and then others don't have the opportunity. I often wonder how do some of these working-class kids, when you hear they're sole parents and you think well, how did they financially do all that, to get around? Because you have to – if you're in rep teams you have to travel and do all that and – yeah. I mean, the upper class, I mean it's – I don't think they've always been the biggest participator, but they've been the controllers of sport in they get on the big boards and – of sporting organisations and there's a money aspect behind that, prestige aspect behind it.

David Rowe

Okay. I guess – yes. I've got to keep an eye on my plane, a last question I suppose about – a basic question, future prospects, key challenges for the sector. Looking forward at the moment. What do you see is of most significance there?

Greg Blood

I think one of the key things in the future is keeping sport as a credible, viable option and it relates to a few things and it relates to the ethical approach to sport, that if people start having – day after day seeing in the newspapers corruption, athlete behaviour, doping, lots and lots of things, they might start to say there's enough bad stuff in the world, do we need another bad thing to look at? And that – and as I said, in the end the ultimate thing is you need a motivated parent around kids because they're going to be one of the drivers that help that child get – pay for sporting events, be motivated and do all of that.

So, if those people get turned off sport then their kids might be going to piano and a range of other activities and then the other – the big challenge is sport's got to be – really understand the new breed of people coming through and sort of saying well, what are their objectives and that? But it does have some selling points.

It has a selling point that – and they don't sell [it] enough, this concept of sport for life, that if you learn sport early on you might not play it all your life, but you can go into it all your life and maybe it's a campaign saying we don't mind if you have five years off because of different reasons, but because you've got all this skillset and you've got this knowledge, you can come back at any one time and we'll provide a range of capabilities for you when you come back in.

So the challenge then is for sporting organisations to do that, but if sporting organisations don't do it, more than likely the commercial groups will do it because they – commercial groups are better for looking for trends. They always see where money can be made.

So that's where you might – the fitness centre industry's interesting. You used to go and you had a very controlled – now you've got anytime fitness so you can do it 24/7. So they've said okay, we'll put one in so many suburbs and you can go anytime and with the 24/7 working environment that's how you can do it.

I mean, the other thing is sporting bodies have got to be very careful that they don't price themselves out of sport, and I see that through pay television and also attendances, and I often think you go – you might spend – people have to spend $70 to go to a Test match, but if they only had to spend $30, you would have probably filled out the ground.

Those people would have bought food, which are concessions. So you would have got a better – and people like to go to an event where there's an atmosphere. That's the best events, when there's a crowd. So, if they do that. Now, I'll give you a recent example here in Canberra which – interesting thing.

Hoyts here have made every one of their cinemas with reclining chairs and a place to put food on. The price is still the same but what you notice now is they're selling a lot of food. So what they've worked out is we get high numbers into the cinema, people are going to buy pizza and – you know how you couldn't take food in, in the past?

People are going to have – make this an event. So we're going to make the money not on the movie, but on the other stuff that goes around it, and I think sporting bodies should try that. I mean, you look at Twenty20 cricket. I went to a game in Melbourne last year and it was only $20 and I thought – and they're getting good crowds, because people think it's entertainment.

I think that's good value for three hours. So they're, to me, the things that sporting bodies have got to be – I'm really interested to see how this Optus move goes with the – because I think they've paid a lot of money and it will be interesting to see how they're going to do it.

David Rowe

Optus getting the rights to the EPL. Okay. Is there anything – I think I'd better – I may miss that plane if I don't get going quite soon, but are there any issues we haven't touched on that you think are really important?

Greg Blood

The only thing that I think, just from a Commission or the perspective here, is the Commission is trying to deal with all these challenges in ethical issues but also gender representation and – so I – it's interesting whether they're going to win the battle because they're asking organisations that are ill equipped to do these things.

Like – okay. You take away the big organisations and they do whatever they like really anyway, because they don't need government money, but a lot of these other groups that do hold a large percent[age] of the population, we want them to do all these things, but they're so smally resourced that there's no way.

They might have one person who does – works with inclusion. How can you do the whole country with one person and make some significant impact, and even though the Commission says unless you do all this you're going to lose your funding, but they actually

don't have the resources to do that. So to me that's a bit of a chicken-and-egg thing. You want someone to do it but they actually don't have the resources to do it. So I always believe if you want something done you've got to pay to get it done. So you put the resources in if you think it's valued.

If you don't – so that's probably my only scenario, and the other big question really is I'd really like to understand how important – how much money we need to spend to have successful teams overseas and that, and is it that value for money? Because at the moment they get 80 per cent of the funding pool as opposed to 20 per cent, and if you put – the other interesting thing, if you put 80 per cent in participation and 20 per cent in elite, you still might get the same result because the survival of the fittest might get to the top anyway. I mean, just because you have everything laid on [for] you doesn't guarantee you're going to be a success. Some of the best athletes come from just the will to get there.

David Rowe

Okay. Well, I think that's it. Yes. There's plenty to work with there. Thank you very much. I'll just turn this off.

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