ICS Occasional Paper Series

Volume 4, Number 3

http://doi.org/10.4225/35/57a96b01f7e8f

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November 2013

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Publisher:
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Sport: Scandal, Gender and the Nation[1]

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Abstract

Sport generates and attracts intensive media and public attention, including through highly-charged scandals, because it is a social institution characterised by a deep contradiction between its noble mythologies (most conspicuously evident in the philosophy of Olympism) and some of its more ignoble practices. Sport is also routinely treated as integral to national identity. For example, *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, the official information booklet for the citizenship test, states that "[t]hroughout our history, sport has both characterised the Australian people and united us" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013: 43). If this proposition is accepted, a crisis of sport is also a crisis of Australian national identity. This occasional paper addresses and analyses the sport–nation nexus, paying particular regard to two issues: the relationship between sport, gender and citizenship in view of the male domination of Australian sport; and the meaning of sport-based national identity in an increasingly demographically and culturally diverse Australia where identification with the nation through sport cannot be automatically assumed, and may be problematic. Discussion of these subjects seeks to encourage sociologically informed public debate on one of Australia's most cherished and flawed social institutions.

Keywords: Sport, nation, citizenship, culture, gender, scandal

Introduction: Birth of the sporting nation

In 2004, the Summer Olympics took place in Greece for the first time since 1896, when their chief revivalist, the French aristocrat Baron Pierre de Coubertin, 'brought the Games home' after an extended hiatus. Banned as a pagan ritual by Christian Emperor Theodosius in AD393 (Horne and Whannel, 2012: 67), there had been a cool millennium and a half between races. The Opening Ceremony of Athens 2004 made much of the Ancient Games at Olympia as the spiritual birthplace of sport, but this twenty-first century instance of combining the professional and the Olympic as "prolympism" (Donnelly, 1996) had little in common with what took place between Greek city-states in antiquity.

In the intervening period, the reward system for Olympic and other athletes had radically changed. Although the Ancient Games were never strictly amateur, and most sportspeople today do not make a handsome living, it might be observed that the contemporary event had substituted Mammon for Zeus as its honoured god in creating this multi-billion dollar

[1] This paper was originally delivered as a TASA (The Australian Sociological Association) Annual Lecture at Parramatta Town Hall on 12 September, 2013.

spectacle. A critical component of the economic infrastructure of contemporary sport is the media, which funds and popularises it with extraordinary synergistic efficiency (Boyle and Haynes, 2009; Wenner, 1998) through the workings of what I call the "media sports cultural complex" (Rowe, 2004). The media have turned sport events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup into global phenomena, but they have done so through the pivotal mobilisation of competitive nationalism (Rowe, 2011a). Before it became *international* sport had to become *national*, and national public and commercial media, in tandem with emergent sport governing bodies, played a key role in turning folk play into nationally organised competitive sport. Although major contemporary sports such as association football (soccer) and basketball constantly assert their global reach, their prime league products, such as the English Premier League and the (US) National Basketball Association, retain deep roots within individual nations. It is this sport–nation–culture nexus that is the principal focus of this paper.

In short, what we today call sport – regular, rationalised physical play – is a social institution that is the product of modernity and of interaction with other major institutions of modernity, especially the capitalist economic apparatus, organised media and the nation state itself. Sport is a remarkable example of cultural diffusion – although out of the British Isles rather than the Western Peloponnese – but it is always manifest in particular contexts. The context in question for my purpose here is Australia – a country widely held to have a special affinity with sport and promoted as such by its own national government.

Sport and the 'nationing' of Australia

It is not difficult to find official declarations of the elevated place of sport in Australian national culture. For example, the 'Society and Culture' section of the glossy *Australia in Brief* document produced by the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2012: 45, 47) declares unequivocally that:

> Australians love sport. Australia is the only nation besides Greece to have competed at every modern summer Olympic Games. Almost 70 per cent of Australians take part in some sort of physical activity at least once a week. Australia has over 120 national sporting organisations and thousands of local, regional and state sports bodies. Community-based sport across the nation underpins Australia's remarkable sporting achievements at the elite level where we have produced many international champions across a diverse spectrum of sport. The nation unites when Australians succeed on the international stage. Sport is a powerful force in creating social harmony in a nation made up of people from so many different countries.

Sport is officially held to be so important to Australian national culture that its most important events are protected for free-to-air television by the world's most stringent anti-siphoning regime (Rowe, 2014). These are deemed to be "events of national importance and cultural significance" under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (as amended) – and they are all sports events – because "[t]he popularity and prominence of sports broadcasting can be seen as a natural extension of the place of sport in Australian society and culture" (Australian Government, Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, 2010: 9).

Perhaps the most explicit official articulation of sport to 'Australianness' is found in *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, the official information booklet for the citizenship test, which opens its section on 'Australia's identity' with 'Sport and recreation', stating that:

> Many Australians love sport and many have achieved impressive results at an international level.
>
> We are proud of our reputation as a nation of 'good sports'. Australian sportsmen and women are admired as ambassadors for the values of hard work, fair play and teamwork.
>
> Throughout our history, sport has both characterised the Australian people and united us. From early settlement, sport provided an escape from the realities of a harsh existence. Even during wartime, members of the Australian Defence Force organised sporting competitions to help relieve the stress of the battleground.
>
> Sport also provides a common ground that allows both players and spectators to feel included and a part of something that is important to Australian society (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013: 43).

While such pronouncements may be seen as unremarkable and even bland, they can be contentious, as is illustrated by the political controversy over a sample question about the cricketer Sir Donald Bradman ("Name Australia's greatest cricketer of the 1930s?") in *Becoming an Australian Citizen* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007), the version of this document that was issued under the Howard Coalition Government.[2] Although the sample question was deleted by the succeeding Rudd Labor Government (Ryan, 2011), Bradman is still featured in the non-testable part of the later booklet, with a dedicated breakout section describing him as "an Australian sporting legend" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013: 44), while sport retains its pride of place as a foregrounded feature of Australian identity.

Of course, Australia is not the only country that relates sport explicitly to citizenship. For example, the study guide for *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship* (Canadian Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, 2012: 26, 39) also describes under 'Arts and Culture in Canada' and 'Canadian Symbols' the popularity of sport and of some sports people. But it is notable that it follows literature, visual arts, performing arts, film, and television in the case of the former, and, among others, 'Parliament Buildings' in the case of the latter. In *Australian Citizenship: Our Common Bond*, 'Sport and recreation' precedes 'The Arts' and 'Scientific invention and achievement', while *Discover Canada* makes no comparable claim definitively connecting sport to Canadian national identity. *Life in the United Kingdom: A Guide for New Residents* (United Kingdom Home Office, 2013) does contain information on sport – indeed, it has been described by one critic Brooks (2013) as like a "bad pub quiz" and "impractical, inconsistent, trivial, gender imbalanced, outdated and ineffective" (*Guardian*, 2013) – but it similarly does not emphasise sport to the same extent as its Australian equivalent.

[2] The other specimen multiple-choice options related to Sir Hubert Opperman (cycling) and Walter Lindrum (billiards).

In broader terms, while many nations display a commitment to sport, Australia is widely regarded as a (perhaps *the*) sporting nation *par excellence*. Australia's reputation as a *Paradise of Sport* (Cashman, 2010), noted in the late nineteenth century colonial era by visitors such as Twopeny and Trollope, is ironically invoked in Donald Horne's (1964: 40) much-cited aphorism that "[s]port to many Australians is life and the rest a shadow", and in Keith Dunstan's (1973) historical critique of sport as Australia's "obsession". Adair and Vamplew's (1997: ix) opening proposition in *Sport in Australian History* is that "[s]port has long been a feature of Australian popular culture – so much so that enthusiasm for sport has been described widely as characteristic of *being* Australian" [emphasis in the original].

Although ascriptions of such "sports madness" to Australia can be challenged in various ways (Ward, 2010), not least by closer examination of actual sport participation, levels of obesity, and paid attendance at sports events, there can be little doubting its symbolic significance. Sporting mythologies are particularly potent because they vividly capture the nation both in motion and in contest, giving shape to its often formless abstraction; invite connotatively heroic war metaphors without, in usual circumstances, people actually dying; temporarily paper over the cracks of internal social division in the case of international sport, and stage manage many of those divisions as relatively harmless suburb, city, state, and regional rivalries united by affiliation to a sporting code. This is, no doubt, a rather functionalist account of sport's role in Australian society, but stressing its social solidaristic role immediately simultaneously invokes its place in the dynamics of hegemonic power and conflict. What happens, we might ask, when the cosy routines of sport begin to unravel, when what "has both characterised the Australian people and united us" in fact fosters a collective image of dissent, distrust, and division? If sport is indeed integral to national identity, does it then follow that a crisis of sport in Australia is also a crisis of Australian national identity?

Crisis and the scandalous sporting nation

Crisis is, no doubt, an over-used term in many domains, including parliamentary and pressure group politics, the news media, academe – and sport. Declaring a state of crisis seeks to draw attention to a problem represented as both deep and demanding urgent action. Etymologically (deriving from the Greek *krisis*), it refers to the imperatives of exercising judgement and to making a decision at a pivotal, dangerous moment. Crises of major institutions are generally difficult to contain because they are caught up in a web of relations with other institutions, so that a crisis in one institutional sphere is quickly transferred to another, which in turn affects other institutions. Then, through a series of feedback loops, problems originating in one domain mutually modify the conditions and practices in another. This interconnectedness explains the language of infection that pervades crisis talk, which is also prone to invest the discourse of institutional *malaise* with the *frisson* of scandal. A crisis that is a scandal is one in which it is not only the workings of institutions that are compromised, but their morality and ethics. While crises provoke anxiety and even dismay, scandals are characterised by outrage and indignation in their attribution of moral and ethical flaws to institutions and their actors.

With specific regard to sport and, especially its orientation to nation, this is a social institution that, as outlined earlier, was formed through the application of modernist principles of rational organisation and, of particular importance, the development of binding rules (or even laws) with carefully quantified measurements of performance (Elias and Dunning, 1986; Guttmann, 2004). A constellation of quasi- and non-governmental

organisations (such as the International Olympic Committee [IOC]; Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA], International Cricket Council [ICC] and the World Anti-Doping Agency [WADA]) administers sport at the international level, with various linkages to national bodies such as, in the context in question, the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) (within which is the Australian Institute of Sport [AIS]), the Australian Football League (AFL) and Australian Rugby League Commissions; and the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA). Additional control, organisation, and funding is provided by the Federal Department of Health (Sport) (which came under the Regional Australia, Local Government Arts and Sport until the September 2013 change of government), and state- and territory-based Departments of Sport and Recreation and Institutes of Sport, as well as by local councils and the school and university systems. In addition, a range of corporate and lower-tier sponsors exercise considerable influence over sport, as do the various components of the sport goods and services industries. Among these, the media stand out, in Australia and elsewhere, as the most important in terms of funding, display, and dissemination of sport (Rowe, 2004; Whannel, 2008).

While media exposure has unquestionably helped to embed sport in national consciousness and heightened affective responses to it (Whannel, 1992), it has also served to create the conditions for recurrent, high-pitched sport scandals. The media play this key role because the rationalisation and professionalisation of regulated physical play has created increasingly exacting standards for sport, which has historically relied heavily on secrecy and in-group defensive dynamics. Greater accountability has been accompanied by closer scrutiny and media visibility, which applies both on the field of play (in terms of multi-angle, multi-speed capturing of athlete conduct) and off the field, where round-the-clock surveillance now includes both professional media organisations with advanced technology, investigative resources and budgets to remunerate sources, and "citizen witnessing" (Allan, 2013) that enables anyone participating in the night-time economy with a smartphone instantly to relay the intoxicated transgressions of sportspeople – principally of sports*men* (as is addressed below) – to the world at large. The aforementioned officially and popularly sanctioned celebration of sport and sportspeople in national culture, as well as the "celebritisation" that in its most advanced form has made sport figures such as Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, and David Beckham globally recognisable even by those who do not follow golf, cycling or association football (Andrews and Jackson, 2001; Smart, 2005; Whannel, 2002), has created perfect conditions for the germination of rolling cycles of sport scandal – thwarted expectation, regular transgression and frequent detection.

Marital infidelity and performance-enhancing substance use among global sport celebrities garner enormous media and public attention. For example, Tiger Woods's scripted televised apology on 19 February 2010 was, somewhat controversially, the lead news item of the day across all platforms of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) (Rowe, in press), and the scandal surrounding his private conduct was voted by US news organisation members of the Associated Press (AP) news agency as its 2010 'Sports Story of the Year' (Cohen, 2010). Lance Armstrong's two-part televised interview in January 2013 with Oprah Winfrey and 'doping' confession attracted an audience of 28 million in over 190 nations in 30 languages (*Telegraph*, 2013). The Valentine's Day shooting by South African Olympian and Paralympian sprinter Oscar Pistorius of his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp and his subsequent trial for murder made global news. These major media moments draw in diverse audiences through the process of what Whannel (2002) calls "vortextuality" and may involve little more than the voyeurism and prurience of media spectacle. But their affective resonance is greater where there is a close or at least potential identification with them. As noted, sport is a readily

available vehicle for identification with a national "way of life" that, in turn, can be thrown into sharp relief by a major sport scandal. A striking example of this articulation of sport and nation through scandal is the release of the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) (2013) report, *Organised Crime and Drugs in Sport*, on the 8th February 2013.

Vividly described by the former head of ASADA, Richard Ings, as "not a black day in Australian sport, this is the blackest day" (in Gordon, 2013), the report was launched by (then) Home Affairs Minister Jason Clare and Minister for Sport Senator Kate Lundy at a joint media conference with ASADA, the ACC and the male representatives of the main Australian sport codes – cricket, Australian rules football, rugby union, rugby league, and association football. ASADA's investigations of, especially, Australian rules football and rugby league, and the punishment by the AFL of the Essendon club (including senior staff suspensions and fines, forfeitures of a 2013 finals place and draft selections in 2013 and 2014, and a $2 million club fine) for its lack of duty of care towards players involved in its sport supplements program, have been the basis for continual debate about the ethics of contemporary Australian sport. An editorial in *The Australian* was typical of the media response to the ACC report:

> Australian sport has been shaken out of its complacency by a year-long Australian Crime Commission investigation that discovered banned drugs were being widely used by sports professionals across major codes and that there were links to organised crime.
>
> The report will alarm a sport-loving nation that prides itself on the prowess and fairness of its athletes. For years, Australians watched with disdain as East Germans, Chinese and others doped to the gills cheated our swimmers and runners of medals, and scorned the deceitfulness of Ben Johnson, Marion Jones and, recently, Lance Armstrong. Now, however, the integrity and reputation of Australian sport are on the line, challenged by the widespread abuse of peptides, hormones and other illicit substances, some of which have not been approved for use by humans (*Australian*, 2013).

Similarly, a *Sydney Morning Herald* article lamented:

> Australia's international reputation as one of the great sporting nations, as one of the loudest anti-drugs campaigners, as one of a land built on a fair go, is in tatters. We are industrial-size drug cheats prone to match fixing through organised crime (Wicks, 2013).

Indeed, 2013 has been notable – although by no means unique – for a large number of sport scandals and controversies that question pride in "our reputation as a nation of 'good sports'". The independent Bluestone Review (Grange, 2013: 8) for Swimming Australia into *Culture and Leadership in Australian Olympic Swimming* described "culturally toxic incidents…such as getting drunk, misuse of prescription drugs, breeching curfews, deceit, [and] bullying". Another independent review (chaired by former Howard Coalition Government Sport Minister Warwick Smith) of what it describes as this "quintessential Australian sport" by the Australian Sports Commission (Independent Review of Swimming, 2013: 1) found that:

> a broad lack of understanding by athletes around the privilege of representing Australia. Where athletes do not appreciate the privilege, they do not give it due respect. This can lead to behavioural challenges (ibid.: 50).

There followed in February 2013 the now-familiar routine of a televised media conference and apology by male members of the London 2012 Australian Olympic swimming team who acquired the nickname, after the prescription sleeping drug, the 'Stilnox Six'. In such instances, comparative performance failure to emulate "Australia's remarkable sporting achievements at the elite level" – in the London 2012 Olympics, the Ashes, international rugby union, tennis, and in other sports – has prompted anxiety not only about institutional competence and efficiency, but over national character, especially among the young. For those who see reverence for national representative sport as an index of the "national health", the suggestion of degraded sport performance caused by declining intergenerational fealty to the nation through sport is a matter of considerable concern. This anxiety is evident in the independent Australian Sports Commission report on swimming, where the section on 'Current team culture and leadership – Olympics' complains that:

> The disappointment of a 20-year low in performance outcomes for swimming was compounded by a number of instances of questionable behaviour. Many of these played out publicly in the media during and after the Games. Throughout the Review the Panel became aware of examples of the following behaviours within the team:
>
> - abusing a system designed to assist preparation
> - not attending competition to support teammates
> - acting in a manner elevating themselves above teammates
> - celebrating the underperformance of teammates
> - expecting special treatment
> - giving preferential treatment
> - not acting on reports of poor behaviour
> - being satisfied simply with selection rather than focussing on further improved performances on the Olympic stage, and
> - an attitude of 'What's in it for me?' (ibid.: 49).

The contributing factors to "poor behaviour" include "individualism" and "the challenges of a generational shift in the athlete cohort" (ibid.) towards "Gen Y athletes [who] have grown up in a completely different world to their parents, their coaches and their sport's administrators" (ibid: 50). The image painted here of athlete instrumentalism and self-centredness contrasts sharply with the collectivist imagining of national sport that pervades much sports discourse.

However, not all sport is like the Olympics, and not all sport scandals are about the same issue or involve the same sport and sportspeople, being united only by a persistent if elusive regret that sport has not lived up to the Corinthian ideal of shaping all associated with it into ethically whole persons. Without trying to describe a full list of sport-related scandals and controversies in the Australian context in which sport has been central or implicated, there have been many recent eruptions that have continually foregrounded sport as a space of ethical contestation. These include the racial abuse of Indigenous footballer Adam Goodes by a young female spectator and the subsequent likening of Goodes by Collingwood AFL club President Eddie McGuire to King Kong (Heenan and Dunstan, 2013), and the racial abuse of rugby league player Frank Pritchard's wife Raima during a match against Manly; the televised accusation by a young Brisbane woman Katie Lewis that she had been punched in

the face by rugby league player Ben Te'o (which she maintains despite the police declining to pursue charges against him) (Sangster, 2013), and other accusations against rugby league players Ben Barba for spousal abuse and Blake Ferguson for indecent assault. Among the usual alcohol-related incidents, St Kilda player Clinton Jones set fire to a so-called 'dwarf entertainer' Blake Johnston's clothes during a 'Mad Monday' celebration, and Brisbane Lions footballer Daniel Rich was accused of tipping Robert Partridge out of his wheelchair, throwing food at him, and taking his cab. While many of these accusations have not been formally proven, they are indicative of sport's proneness to scandal involving intensive media and public attention. It is inescapably obvious that the perpetrators are mainly men. Setting aside the issue of problematic male fan behaviour in the form of hooliganism (as is covered in works such as Armstrong, 1998), I focus briefly here on the relationships between sport, gender, and nation as they pertain to sportsmen.

Sport, the masculinist nation and demographic change

It is unremarkable to observe that sport is a male dominated institution in terms of organisational control (for example, the IOC has never had a woman President); athlete earnings and media production and representation (see, for example, Aitchison, 2007; Scraton and Flintoff, 2002). Nonetheless, women have made considerable advances in the Olympics, for example, between de Coubertin's prevention of them taking part in 1896 to them constituting over 40 per cent of total athletes in London 2012 (although the Olympics is something of a special case given its multi-sport and intermittent nature). The most prominent sports in Australia receiving most media coverage (and rights fees) are the male football codes and men's cricket, enabling celebrated manifestations of masculinity to embody, literally, the nation. Thus, the image of nation that is produced and reproduced through sport is a predominantly masculinist one. Sport, especially male contact sport, can readily symbolise a masculinised nation by means of its compulsive resort to war metaphor. George Orwell's (1945: 10–11) famous essay, 'The Sporting Spirit', is most remembered for his famous characterisation of sport as "war minus the shooting". But it contains a sharper general critique of its nationalistic uses:

> At the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare. But the significant thing is not the behaviour of the players but the attitude of the spectators: and, behind the spectators, of the nations who work themselves into furies over these absurd contests, and seriously believe — at any rate for short periods — that running, jumping and kicking a ball are tests of national virtue…
>
> There cannot be much doubt that the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism — that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige…
>
> …I do not, of course, suggest that sport is one of the main causes of international rivalry; big-scale sport is itself, I think, merely another effect of the causes that have produced nationalism. Still, you do make things worse by sending forth a team of eleven men, labelled as national champions, to do battle against some rival team, and allowing it to be felt on all sides that whichever nation is defeated will 'lose face'.

Orwell's polemic against competitive sport applies particularly to what he calls "young countries", and in the essay he does not only mention the 1932–3 "bodyline" controversy in cricket, but also "the rough tactics of the Australian [cricket] team that visited England in 1921" (ibid: 11). If he could have visited Australia in the twenty-first century, Orwell would have no doubt been struck by the use of the ANZAC tradition in Australian rules and rugby league football, and its unsubtle comparison of "bravery" and "sacrifice" on the sport and battlefields, as well as the more routine references to "heroism", "battle", "generalship" and so on that permeate sports journalism (Rowe, 2004).

Apart from such hegemonically masculine alignments of sport and military combat, with its implied transference of responsibility for national defence from the soldier to the sportsman, sport's commercial iconography is saturated with images of active sportsmen and of other men engaged in mundane sport-related activities, such as the group consumption of sponsored beer brands in heavily gendered advertisements (Wenner and Jackson, 2009). Thus, here the nation as sovereign territory to be marked out, defended and celebrated, and as favoured way of life, is given a distinctly masculine flavour through its close association with sport. But this entanglement of sport, nation, and masculinity becomes problematic when, as noted, sport may be felt to be in crisis or, at least, to be subject to disruptive scandals. If the proposition is accepted that a crisis of sport is to some degree a crisis of national culture, and that both sport and nation are dominated by men, then it follows that sport scandals, especially when they involve transgressions such as violence against women, are also in part a crisis of masculinity (Tomsen and Donaldson, 2003). It is for this reason that controversies over the conduct of sportsmen consistently stimulate public debates about how representative they are of all men, thereby laying bare tensions between conceiving sportsmen as in some way exempt from prevailing rules of conduct, or viewing them as largely indistinguishable from other men and so subject to the same rules, or expecting them to exceed the usual masculine observance of social conduct by acting as 'role models'.

Viewed from this perspective, the apparently secure sport–nation–masculinity triad is rather more fragile than it at first appears. But scandal is not the only pressure point regarding sport's privileged place in Australian cultural life. Less dramatically but perhaps more profoundly, change to the demographic composition of Australia, and especially an increase in the numbers of people from Asia, challenges received notions of sport-based national identity. The position of Indigenous people and sport in relation to a 'White Nation' (Rigney, 2003) has long been a point of tension, and in a more culturally diverse Australia characterised by higher levels of Asian immigration, sport may not figure as prominently in the cultural landscape as it does, for example, among those of Anglo-Celtic or southern European backgrounds. Or the types of sport that citizens from other source nations favour may differ from those, like Australian rules football or rugby league, with a much smaller global footprint than, say, association football or basketball. Of course, this does not mean that sporting orientations and tastes remain static, nor to deny that sport can work as common cultural ground among diverse groups of people. Indeed, the *Australia in the Asian Century White Paper* (Australian Government, 2012: 268, 269) argues that sport, such as in the shape of "football diplomacy", can help position the nation more effectively in its region:

> Australia is a growing part of Asia's sporting culture. Many Australian sporting groups are strengthening their partnerships with regional groups, including in sports that have larger followings in parts of Asia than in Australia, such as badminton and table tennis. Australia is an active member of the Asian Football Confederation, and three Australian teams compete in the annual Asian

> Champions League. The Australian Open tennis tournament is the most watched tennis event in the Asia–Pacific region (…) and the Northern Territory has hosted thousands of athletes from the region every two years since 1993 as part of the Arafura Games. India is a main driver of Twenty20 cricket.
>
> Our sporting connections can open doors and create links between people in the region. Industry leaders in Australia and Asia often have close connections to sport through board appointments or team ownership, providing unique business networking opportunities. Sports in which Australia shares a connection with particular countries in Asia (such as football and cricket) provide obvious opportunities for businesses to develop links with Asian markets. This already occurs through sponsorship or team ownership. In the other direction, businesses and business figures from the region invest in Australian sport and the broader Australian economy through similar mechanisms.

Apart from the many cases where international sporting relations have caused or reflected conflict rather than amity (Jackson, 2013), identification with the nation through sport cannot be automatically assumed. This is not a new concern – for example, anxiety about European association football fans retaining a primary affiliation with teams from their countries of origin led Football Federation Australia's predecessor, Soccer Australia, to adopt a policy of "de-ethnicising" that sport in the 1990s (Baker and Rowe, 2012; Hallinan and Hughson, 2010) – but it is one that is likely to become more conspicuous as more people with a wider range of national cultural affiliations settle in Australia. Under such circumstances, national sporting affiliation can be used by those demanding loyalty to the Australian flag as a "test" of committed citizenship. As noted earlier, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's *Australia in Brief* contends that "[s]port is a powerful force in creating social harmony in a nation made up of people from so many different countries". The meanings and uses of sport, though, are not so one-dimensional, as was revealed by cricket's 2008 'Monkeygate' affair in which accusations of on-field racial abuse by Harbhajan Singh of Andrew Symonds during an Australia–India cricket series (Rowe, 2011b) saw a sporting dispute feed into wider tensions in the relationship between India and Australia that, later, deteriorated into a major controversy over racially motivated violence towards Indians in Australia.

It is possible that more social tensions of this and related kinds will emerge in which sport is at least implicated because sport events are characterised by large groups of people and intense, live media coverage. This is not a pessimistic projection of sport-generated community conflict in a multi-ethnic, -cultural and -national society (with nightmare 'rivers of blood' visions), but a recognition that sport is, in sociological terms, complex and multi-dimensional, and cannot be automatically controlled and contained. Indeed, the passionate affectivity that animates sport for some people can be turned to destructive ends, including racial and physical abuse. The incidence of such behaviour should not be exaggerated – nor should it be discounted. Of wider significance is the assumption in official proclamations like "Australians love sport" that it is always benignly integrative. But can this official sanctioning of sport also be a tool of exclusion, a subtle way of rendering "un-Australian" those who do not acquire the approved national cultural taste? I am in the early stages of research in Greater Western Sydney, Australia's most diverse region, into the role, meaning and practice of sport in relation to cultural citizenship in Australia. It is too early to proffer detailed results, but the fieldwork so far is revealing that sport remains important at community level, but is in the process of significant change – and that sport fan affiliation to multiple national teams is common and flexible. With particular regard to participant

perceptions of the place of sport in Australian culture, it is apparent that the sport–nation nexus remains potent in the midst of social transformation – indeed, perhaps because of it.

Conclusion: Public sport sociology

In the 2013 Federal Election a new political force – the Australian Sports Party (motto 'Supporting Australia's sporting culture') – appeared on the political stage. Its vision, according to its modest website, is "[f]or every Australian to be involved in sport and recreation to assist in living a healthy and enjoyable lifestyle in a strong community" (Australian Sports Party, 2013), elaborating that:

> Involvement in sport results in participants leading a healthier lifestyle. Australians are passionate about sport, and it forms a major part of our country's culture, with the enjoyment sports provide through participation and spectating. Sport has long played an important social and cultural role in Australia, providing a form of social glue which binds communities and creates broader communities.

While still Prime Minister Elect, Tony Abbott said in a morning current affairs interview in answer to a question about the problems of the Australian rugby union team:

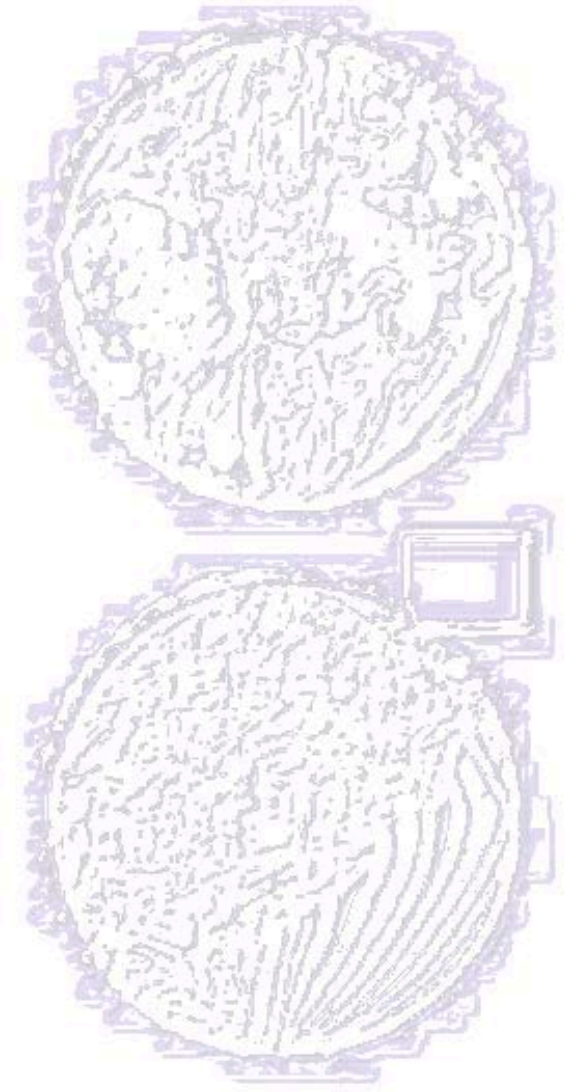
> Well, if I may [say] so, happy the country which is more interested in sport than in politics because it shows that there is a fundamental unity, it shows that the business of the nation is normally under reasonably good management if we can be as excited as we usually are about sport (Liberal Party of Australia, 2013).

Once again, sport's place in Australian national life has been affirmed (Kitney, 2013). Although subjected to the forces of globalisation and transnationalism like other institutions, including its fellow products of modernity, sport remains resolutely wedded to nation (Rowe, 2013) – and with particular enthusiasm in Australia. The sporting nation, it should be emphasised, does not always map onto the nation state (Bairner, 2001) – for example, the West Indies only exists to play cricket, and the United Kingdom is disunited in order to play association football but reunited to participate in the Olympics. But the *idea* of nation remains crucial to sport, even where it does not formally exist – for example, in Catalonia.

I have here sought to explain how the sport–nation nexus was formed, persisted and in many respects strengthened, not least from the entry of new nations in the sporting arena (such as East Timor at the 2004 Olympics) in order to signify their nationhood. The recent announcement that Tokyo will host the 2020 Olympics is a reminder of the importance of the 1964 Games to Japan's post-war rehabilitation in world affairs (Mangan, Qing and Collins, 2013). Indeed, every mega sport event – the Beijing 2008 Olympics, Brazil 2014 FIFA World Cup and Rio 2016 Games, Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics and Russia 2018 FIFA World Cup, Qatar 2022 FIFA World Cup, and the impending 2015 Asian (association football) and Cricket World Cups in Australasia, and so on – is a festival of nation, even if it is technically hosted by a city.

Sport and the nation have in common a cleavage between noble mythology and often-ignoble practice. Sport has often been promoted as representing the best that a nation has to offer, but has then failed – as it inevitably must – to live up to its romanticised billing. A key reason for

the continual exposure of sport's flaws is its reliance on the media to insinuate it into every available cultural crevice, only for its saturation coverage to rebound whenever a scandal flares as a sport administrator is found to be corrupt, an athlete is violently drunk, a sports doctor is detected administering a prohibited or experimental drug, and a match-fixer bribes athletes, coaches and match officials – even when a national team consistently and 'innocently' fails to win. Sport has been shown to be an institution in much need of reform in terms of gender equity, and to come to terms with the changing nature of the nation that it is monotonously depicted as embodying. There are many topics I have not been able to discuss satisfactorily here – social class, femininity, sexuality, textuality, ability, mobility, political economy, and so on. These all offer rich avenues for exploration. In the spirit of the 'public sociology' advocated by Michael Burawoy (2005), I have attempted to stimulate sociologically informed public debate on one of Australia's most cherished and flawed social institutions, not to bury it as irredeemably oppressive or compromised. Given that we all have, willingly or otherwise, a stake in sport and nation, debating sport might be regarded as a civic duty. This is one game that we can all play with some knowledge and skill – and without recourse to metaphors of war.



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