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The Melbourne Cricket Club, with financial assistance from the state and Federal Governments, has started its three million dollar project which will result in the opening of the Australian Gallery of Sport, adjacent to the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Background

Ever since November 1959, the Melbourne Cricket Club has operated a specialised Museum in its premises at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Jolimont. The Museum is opened to the public every Wednesday morning from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., when guided tours of the MCG are conducted by members of the MCC'S twenty voluntary guides. As groups of visitors often are organised outside the regular Wednesdays, the Museum is opened at special request also.

Approximately 4,000 items have been collected for the MCC from various benefactors. The Honorary Curators (Mr. Bill Gray is the incumbent, and Mr. Rex Harcourt is the Honorary Librarian) will continue to care for the collections after the new Gallery develops a less specialised one. The MCC Museum's focus undoubtedly is upon cricket, although some other sports are represented in smaller numbers, as the MCC has developed other affiliations over the years. The Anthony Baer Collection of over 1,500 examples of superb "cricketana" from England provides the MCC with a nucleus for its Museum, which has many fine old commemorative ceramics, antique silverware trophies, artists' prints, sketches, oil paintings and watercolours, as well as numerous historically important photographs, documents, letters and diaries. Representing internationally acclaimed events and champions, it provides the richest resource for specialised sporting material in Australia.

The new Gallery of Sport will be collecting from a much wider range of activities than the MCC Museum, and ownership of Gallery acquisitions will be vested in the Government-appointed Trustees of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, rather than Club members and their Committee. Although the two collections have to function separately in law, they will, in practice, co-operate with the same harmonious aims as would two curatorial departments within one large institution. So although the displays of the Museum are unlikely to be greatly altered when the Gallery of Sport opens to the public, it will introduce local sports fans, and visitors to Melbourne, to a unique resource. The MCC Library and Museum already have been sought out by various people from all over the world, and it is anticipated that the attention given to the new Gallery will promote increased awareness of these tremendously valuable collections.

Description

The Australian Gallery of Sport will be one of the largest projects built for Victoria's 150th Anniversary, and an Official Opening Ceremony will be held when 960 square metres of display spaces are completed,

following the start of excavations early in 1985.

The location of the new building is directly in front of the MCC Member's Pavilion, separated from it by a paved courtyard with trees and seating areas. The courtyard will enable the public to see the attractive facade of the old Pavilion, which has been formally acknowledged by the National Trust. In summer, this space will provide a cool and pleasant area for small gatherings, and as such, is a useful adjunct to the new Gallery also.

The courtyard's paving continues right through to the front of the new gallery, creating an undercroft where display cases and information units will indicate current exhibitions, audiovisuals and lecture programs available in the two floors above. A combined marketing and reception centre will provide visitors with Australian sports mementoes and entry tickets to the Gallery of Sport. Gently inclined ramps lead up to the permanent and temporary display galleries, and the ramp areas in themselves may be artistically animated with sights and sounds to create a sense of excitement appropriate to the great sporting events and personalities recorded within the rest of the building.

A range of twenty "designated" sports will be pursued in the Gallery's initial collecting operations, to provide a range of semi-permanent displays and a basis for historical research.

As well as these twenty sports, all kinds of other typical or important objects, materials and data from the "non-designated" sports will be sought as short-term loans, to provide a lively program of temporary exhibitions. These temporary exhibitions, audiovisuals and education services will be a continuing feature of the Australian Gallery of Sport, which has a dynamic, rather than static philosophy.

The Gallery's objectives include assisting the general public to appreciate the, rich variety of sport available to Australians to investigate its context in historical and social terms, and to promote the general awareness of important events, institutions, selected competitors and other individuals who may be of national or international sporting interest. The place of healthy competitiveness will be duly recognised, and emphasis on fair play and sportsmanship will be encouraged, rather than obsessive rivalries or ideas of purely materialistic rewards for competitors in sport.

Documentation

Computerised registration files will assist in keeping up with pressures of accessioning and borrowing, so the experience of the Museum of Victoria's department of photography is being studied as a possible model (see footnote). Catalogue worksheets now being used in the MCC Museum were designed by the Museum Resource Service of the Victorian Ministry for the Arts (for historical collection in general). This format may be adapted by the Gallery of Sport to relate it to Canada's National Inventory Programme, as applied to their Association of Sport Heritage worksheets.

The Canadian system, of documenting and classifying all types of sports

items is very Impressive. A network of over twenty sports museums (or 'Halls of Fame") in cities across Canada have been refining such operations for two decades at least, so it is logical to learn from their experience in sports museology. The curious thing is the lack of such institutions in this country, where sport has been a foundation for many of our national attributes, from the concept of "Imperial cricket" to the Pederationists' pride in the supremacy of early Australian sportsmen overseas.

With the establishment of an Australian Gallery of Sport in Melbourne to commemorate Victoria's 150th Anniversary, gaps will be filled in our history, as well as providing an enjoyable new centre for sporting fans in general.

FOOTNOTE: Refer Euan McGillivray's "Australia As Australians Saw It" in Working Papers On Photography pps. 4-16; No. 9: July 1983