

**REVIEWS OF THE SPORTING TRADITIONS VI CONFERENCE**

In my capacity as Editor of the ASSH Bulletin I solicited some reviews of the Conference - those from John Deane, Sonja Lillienthal and Shayne Breen are presented.

**SPORTING TRADITIONS CONFERENCE VI**

**MELBOURNE, MAY 18-22, 1987**

John Deane  
Secretary to ASSH  
and Conference Organiser

The delightful informality of a hybrid football match organized by the perennial enthusiast Bill Murray on the turf in front of the Melbourne Cricket Ground's Southern Stand concluded the proceedings of the Sixth Sporting Traditions Conference on Friday May 22. As local, interstate and overseas visitors departed I paused to reflect on the preceding week and the months leading up to the Conference.

In June, 1986 the Co-ordinating Committee, comprising Tom McCullough (Australian Gallery of Sport - AGOS), Rex Harcourt (Melbourne Cricket Club Library), Dr. Ray Crawford (Phillip Institute), Dr. Richard Stremski (La Trobe University) and John Deane (Victoria College) began a series of regular and frequent meetings on the organization and administration of the Conference. Support was given by curatorial staff of the MCC and AGOS, Dr. John Lill, President of the MCC, and administrative, media and graphics staff of Phillip Institute and La Trobe University.

The Committee experienced some difficulty in finalizing the formal program of the Conference as some late withdrawals of papers, the near co-incidence of the HISPA Conference in Rome and the turmoil of differences in the academic calendars of Australian tertiary institutions had their effect.

The Committee was delighted with the news that Professor Charles Korr of the University of Missouri was to attend the Conference. Professor Korr had been the keynote speaker at the Sporting Traditions V Conference in Adelaide in 1985.

ASSH Vice-President, Ray Crawford officially opened the Conference and welcomed the delegates on Monday afternoon of the 18th. Sadly, he informed the gathering of the tragic and untimely death of Barry Andrews, a beloved colleague and founding member of ASSH.

The Conference venue was principally the John Landy Room, overlooking the MCG. With the MCC Library and Museum and the AGOS adjacent, it was an appropriate and conducive setting. Seventy-five registrants and four guests attended sessions of the five-day Conference, twenty-four papers were presented by speakers from a diversity of backgrounds, stimulating much interactive discussion at question time.

The Conference proceeded as scheduled with highlights being the invited responses of Lionel Rose and Sid Jackson to Colin Tatz' opening address of the Conference, the Future of Sports History Symposium and the Annual General Meeting.

Media interest in the Conference was shown by all major Melbourne newspapers and some radio stations. Several articles appeared over the duration of the Conference, taking special interest in the presentations by Colin Tatz and Colin Davey.

The social program of the Conference was particularly successful with the Conference Dinner on the Monday evening at the MCG, visits to the Caulfield Racing Museum and the Royal Melbourne Tennis Club on the Wednesday afternoon, visit and dinner at the Collingwood Football Club, wonderfully hosted by Richard Stremski and a cocktail party hosted by the MCG on the Thursday evening.

At the conclusion of presentations on the Friday morning the ASSH Annual General Meeting was held. The President expressed his gratitude to the organizing committee, the outgoing executive and the speakers. The Treasurer and Secretary expressed their satisfaction about the current status of ASSH and optimism for its future. Nominations for election to the new executive were called for and positions were filled as follows:

**President:** Dr. Ray Crawford (Phillip Institute)  
**Vice-President:** Dr. John O'Hara (Tasmanian State Institute)  
**Secretary:** John Deane (Victoria College)  
**Treasurer :** Bob Paddick (Flinders University)

Co-opted members to the executive were Richard Stremski, Greg Bowen and Chris Harte.

I feel that the Conference was a fine example of co-operative effort and indicative of the growing maturity and standing of the Society.

**IMPRESSIONS OF SPORTING TRADITIONS VI**

"THE WATCHTOWER ABOVE THE TURF"

Sonja Lilienthal  
University of Sydney

Prior to the first session of Sporting Traditions VI it was the commanding view of the hallowed turf that caught my immediate attention. The organizing committee could not have chosen a more appropriate setting than the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Australian Gallery of Sport for its biennial conference. Throughout the week the sessions were informative and dynamic. All papers were presented and analysed with a genuine conviction for the areas of study and, as a naive undergraduate' this impressed me.

I followed the discussion after the papers intently and learned much from the questioning. I discovered an almost familial atmosphere existing among the conference participants and this extended to all the social functions. The conference dinner was great fun although our table did not reach its full potential in the Sporting Traditions Quiz.

My attendance at the conference has certainly whetted my appetite for further study into sports history and I plan to encourage other students to attend Sporting Traditions VII. If I have any criticism of the conference it is only to comment on the noticeably small number of women in attendance.

Certainly the most memorable experience and the crowning glory of the conference was the traditional game of Football/Aussie Rules played on the MCG. Some likened it to the Eton wall game when those from the Mother country took on the Colonials.

On the whole, I had a brilliant time. Thanks!

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**THE CONFERENCE**

Shayne Brown  
Tasmanian State Institute of Technology  
Launceston

The recent conference of ASSH was held at the MCG in the very comfortable John Landy Room, a dining room complete with bar and an excellent view of the playing arena. Nestled under the top tier of the Northern Stand, the room is clear evidence of the changing nature of Australian sport, especially at the elite level.

It seemed ironic, therefore, that Ray Crawford, in his opening address, suggested that sport history should be seen within the broader social history movement which has prospered in Australia in recent years. This irony was further compounded by the fact that many conference papers bore faint resemblance to social history.

Of the 23 papers delivered at the conference, slightly more than half constituted legitimate social history, if social history is defined as sound scholarship which works to locate historical developments in the narrow focus (sport) within broader social developments, in the process making a critical analysis of the society in question.

Four papers in particular stood out as quality contributions to social history. Colin Tatz's 'Aborigines in sport', Rosly Otzen's 'History of Victorian Calisthenics', Reet Howell's 'Sport among the squattocracy in Queensland' and Max Howell's 'The games ethic in Queensland grammar schools' were all thoroughly researched, persuasively presented and very illuminating of the issues and periods with which they dealt. Reet Howell convincingly showed, through the focus of sport, the gradual transformation of a diverse range of imported values into peculiarly Queensland values. Colin Tatz left his listeners in no doubt that the Aboriginal experience of sport has been essentially racist; and Roslyn Otzen provided a fascinating historical insight into the absence of any public face or voice for women's sport in Victoria despite widespread sporting practice by women.

Several other papers which constituted social history and which are worthy of mention include 'Sport in Australian painting' by Maureen Nagel, 'Pleasure and profit: sporting tours in Victoria's empire' by Dave Brown, 'The Brisbane Golf Club: social and sporting values' by Murray Phillips and 'All-Australian netball: a sporting opportunity for all Australian women' by Ian Jobling.

What of the others? A number of papers were sport-related but had little to do with history. J. Neville Turner argued that elite sportspersons ought to be moral exemplars. While this issue no doubt warrants debate, such a debate, especially when not located within any historical context, does not fall within the scope of either sport or social history. Other papers were uncritical historical reviews.

A sport-related paper which has nothing to do with history or which is an uncritical historical review threatens the credibility of ASSH as being representative of serious historical inquiry. In addition, such papers occupy time and this often meant that legitimate papers were delivered in haste and that insufficient time was available for questions.

Other papers stood well outside the field of social history. Stephen Alomes, in his lively and very contemporary paper on the political and business uses of sport, argued that 'High profile businessmen and large corporations and their advertising agencies, as well as politicians, have used the language of sporting competitiveness and professionalism to sell not only consumer products and acceptable images but to celebrate a "competitive Australia", the world of winners, not losers'. The view from the John Landy Room at the plethora of advertisers' slogans which haunt the vast MCC stadium render disagreement difficult.

The point about Dr. Alomes paper which needs stressing is the inter-disciplinary nature of its approach. Historical, sociological, economic and political perspectives informed his approach. Papers by Bob Stewart and Tom Armstrong, though less convincing, respectively stressed economic and political approaches. Significantly, each of these papers was concerned with contemporary issues.

In view of the academic diversity of the papers presented at the conference, perhaps the identity of ASSH as an historical society needs re-evaluation. Certainly the emergence in recent years of inter-disciplinary courses in Australian Studies indicates that some believe the traditional divisions are anachronistic. The social history approach which seems quite comfortable in the colonial period may not be so appropriate for the recent past.

A large part of the 3 hour session on the future of sport history was taken up by a discussion about the use of theory in sport history. The rather laboriously reached consensus was that theoretical concepts are used in sport history and should continue to be used; there seemed little dispute with the argument that no theory is neutral and that we ought to be critically aware of the concepts that are used.

Other points stressed were the need for sound scholarship and the need to tell, analyse and criticize a story. Charles Korr suggested a need exists to stake out the territory for sport history and Richard Cashman suggested ASSH members should lobby their institutions for jobs for post-graduate students who undertake research in sport history.

The question of what, if any, public educative role the ASSH might adopt was briefly discussed. Colin Tatz's lead on this issue seems most appropriate. Dr. Tatz has been a frequent contributor of critical articles to major newspapers on sport-related issues such as racism in sport and this seems to me the most effective way of reaching a wider audience.

If nothing else, the conference demonstrated that legitimate historical inquiry into sport is not only valid and worthwhile but extremely healthy.