

ASSH AT NASSH

By Wray Vamplew

Seventeenth North American Society for Sport History
Convention Clemson University : May 1989

I'm still not certain where Clemson is. but certainly you know when you have arrived there. Along with several other conferees I boarded a Piedmont Boeing for an eighteen minute flight from Charlotte to Greenville – Spartanburg jetport where we were picked up and driven for about an hour through the backblocks of South Carolina's bible-belt till we reached Clemson. There, in the middle of nowhere, was a campus which, if the athletes could find it, could host the Olympic Games. Dominating the scene was an 82,000 capacity football stadium – this in a town of some 9000 inhabitants and 14,000 students – but also featured were many other sports facilities including a soccer ground, indoor and outdoor athletics facilities, basketball stadium, baseball diamond, pool, golf-course, gymnasium and a lake for yachting and rowing. You name it, I'm sure they had it. To make certain that Clemson was not confused with any other tertiary institution, the roads leading in, out and through the campus (and even the University President's car-parking space) were painted with huge orange tiger paws, the symbol of their football team. I was left with the distinct Impression – and this is a bad case of generalising from the specific – that the American college system was based on sport.

The conference began with an identity crisis. No name tags were available which made it difficult to get to know other delegates, though a first evening cheese and wine party did assist in the making of acquaintanceships. It can, however, be suggested that, though small in numbers, the Australian contingent was far from anonymous. One of the topics of the opening session of papers was SPORT IN AUSTRALIA : HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES which featured Richard Cashman on 'Sport in Early Nineteenth Century New South Wales', Max and Reet Howell on 'Australian Gold' and Wray Vamplew on 'Sports Violence in Australia : A Historical Viewpoint.' This session was moderated by Brian Stoddart. Later Reet Howell also presented a paper on 'The Holua : Myth and Reality' and Richard Cashman starred (at least that's his word for it) at the barbecue softball game in front of Australians barracking English-style. And the conference ended with Australians to the fore as Max Howell presented the post-banquet address and the inaugural NASSH book award was won by a representative from the Australian camp. Almost as an aside the Australian delegation raised the possibility of holding a conjoint conference with NASSH in Hawaii. To our surprise the suggestion was taken seriously by many NASSH members and will be discussed by the respective executives. Such a conference will necessitate the joining of two different academic cultures. Can Australians accept papers at 8.15am,

lectures during lunch and no booze at the conference banquet? From the Australian side I would welcome a book display of the magnitude and quality of that organised by Ron Smith and certainly the idea of sessions at which a particular book or film would be discussed was a successful innovation. On the other hand I did not like the concept of concurrent sessions, particularly when the timetable was not adhered to nor did I feel it fair to schedule graduate students alongside experienced papergivers. The big decision, however, will be the nature of the traditional accompanying sporting event : will softball win out over soccer?

(Editor's Note : Wray Vamplew is currently president of ASSH, and his latest book PAY UP AND PLAY THE GAME is on offer to readers as will be seen by the leaflet accompanying this Bulletin. Wray also supports Hibernian Football Club – a fact which has nothing whatsoever to do with this article.)

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