

## CONFERENCE REVIEWS

*27TH CONFERENCE OF THE NORTH AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SPORTS HISTORY  
PENN STATE UNIVERSITY, STATE COLLEGE, PA, USA  
MAY 1999*

### TWO VIEWS

#### 'The View from Underneath'

While only four antipodeans made the trip to the twenty-seventh annual convention of the North American Society for Sport History at Penn State University, their presence was well noted by their Canadian and American counterparts. Likewise, the few from 'Down Under' absorbed all that was on offer during their short stint in the world of American academe. Douglas Booth, Tara Magdalinski, John Nauright and Annemarie Jutel were the only Southern Hemisphere representatives at the three day long conference.

For your faithful scribe, a newcomer to the world of academe, this was only her second conference. The most effective, nay the only, way she can think of sharing her views is to compare the 27<sup>th</sup> NASSH to the 12<sup>th</sup> ASSH – more than a letter makes the difference between the two.

Unlike the multinational affair that was Queenstown, this conference was governed largely by its locale. Let's just say that it had a strong "North American" flavour to it. Yes, there were few Australians and even a mis-placed Brit or Scot or two, but it was, if I may coin a term, a distinctly Canadio-american event. The variation in accents depended more on whether the participants came from North or South of the Mason-Dixon line, and less on what their native language might be. None of the delightful linguistic flutters that we so enjoyed hearing in Queenstown were present – There were no Pers. No Gerds. No Swantjes. No Floris.

But it was not just linguistic purity that was a feature – there was a cultural uniformity as well. Norrie Baker, a displaced ex-pat Brit and lecturer at SUNY-Buffalo, presented his paper on netball. Not only was some explanation of the nature of the game required for his American audience, he also had to take his clarifications a step further. In the course of his presentation, he mentioned the "after-match teas." Intrigued, and anticipating an amazing insight into the sexually-loaded practices surrounding this all-women sport, his presider opened the floor for questions by asking Norrie to first "tell us about the after-match 'tease'!" It took some moments before either party understood what the other meant, but rather uncontrolled laughter in the audience confirmed that everyone else had "got" it. The occasion was one of many which underscored the cultural isolation of the North American continent.

Of course, for the few visitors from outside, the highlight of the conference was, as it always is when one is “up north,” the visit to Barnes and Noble. The dreadful book store chain that is closing independent book stores right and left is still a treasure trove for the literature-starved from Down Under. (You may have thought Queenstown was wonderful, but did you check out its book stores?). I suspect each one of the Australasians wrestled with the “Oh, if only we had these kinds of resources back home! What we wouldn’t be able to do!”

But resources aren’t everything, as the non-north Americans were quick to prove. For, the twelfth session, “Sport and nationalism” presided by Steve Pope, and including papers by Mike Cronin (Sport and Nationalism), John Nauright (The (re)Generation of Nationalist Discourses) and Douglas Booth (Sport and Nationalism in South Africa and Australia), was by far the best session of the conference. And, it was one of our own that stole the show at the final banquet. A surprised Douglas Booth received the 1999 NASSH book award for his excellent *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa*.

It wasn’t Queenstown, and the coffee wasn’t very good, but the bagels were, and this impressionable scribe was ecstatic to present in front of the ‘gods’ and ‘goddesses’ of North American Sports History (Pat Vertinsky, Roberta Park, Allen Guttmann and so on...). That, and the quality of the presentations from Down Under, were enough to ensure that this was a good conference, and your reporter, for one, won’t miss Banff next year!

Annemarie Jutel  
University of Otago

## 'Living the American Dream': NASSH 1999

NASSH 1999 at Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania offered yet another experience of being in an American college town where the university and its football team reigns supreme. The setting for the conference was superb and a large international contingent mixed with the locals in both sessions and informal discussions.

As always in such a large gathering of sport historians there was a mixed bag of papers on offer, though several papers and sessions stood out. Tina Parratt's paper continued her impressive run of NASSH presentations over the past several years. Roberta Park's excellent work on science, the body and movement continues to develop the history of human movement studies generally. I was struck by the high quality of two papers on young women's basketball in Iowa, particularly the one by Shelley Lucas, both early career postgraduate students working with Parratt at the University of Iowa. Their work and the history of girl's basketball in Iowa generally (which was for most of its history a six-on-six version of the game somewhat resembling netball in its modified rule structure) suggests fruitful ground for comparative exploration of women, sport and culture, as I suggested in a review of Jan Beran's history of Iowa girl's basketball that appeared in *Sporting Traditions*. Papers dealing with sport and nationalism by Doug Booth, Mike Cronin and Tara Magdalinski were also a feature of the conference and pointed to a revitalisation of the discussion of the role and use of sport in nationalist projects. Those who attended the ASSH conference in Queenstown did not miss too much in Tony Mangan's paper, which reiterated many of the arguments he made in his keynote talk in January. As always, lively debate followed his presentation.

The conference ended with the banquet and awards and for only the second time in the eleven year history of the NASSH book award, the winner came from outside North America. Wray Vamplew won the inaugural prize at Clemson in 1989 for *Pay Up and Play the Game* and Doug Booth took the honours in 1999 for *The Race Game: Sport and Politics in South Africa* (Frank Cass, London). We can be proud that both have been major figures in Australasian sports history and ASSH. Let's hope that we don't have to wait until 2009 for the next Australian prize winner!

I am looking forward to the 2000 NASSH conference, partly for its location in Banff, Alberta, but also because there will be a larger Australasian contingent at the conference with Charlotte Macdonald, Murray Phillips and Ian Jobling joining last year's delegates who will be returning to enjoy an exciting NASSH program that includes a session on Australia and New Zealand.

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