

## **ASSH CONFERENCE REPORT**

As an 'outsider', I attended the Sporting Traditions Conference in Adelaide in July. I became aware of ASSH through research I was doing on the 'two rugbies'. Searching on the Internet can be frustrating, but for me it was rewarding, and opened up a new field in 'sports history'. I decided to find out more and am now committed to continuing the interest if not to become a true 'sports historian' after attending the Adelaide Conference.

A 'Sports Historian' is now to me a man in his 50s, in academic life and more than likely from Victoria or New South Wales. There are a few in South Australia but they probably only come out when the Conference is in their State. The chances of one being from Tasmania or the NT are one in 65, based on attendances. The 'Sports Historian' is good friends with other Sports Historians, although only sees them at the conference.

The purpose of the Conference seems to be so they can meet the requirements of academic life and 'read' a paper. Perhaps it has something to do with funding for their particular interest. If not, why do they just stand and read from the lectern with so little support or animation? Maybe it is so the paper can be published in a journal somewhere, which might also help the university. Afterwards, they will answer questions from the audience, but not for very long. There are more readings to get through in the day. I come from a scientific background, albeit one with a strong commercial bent (pharmacy), so I am used to a bit more 'razzamatazz' in presentations.

The venue was in keeping with the colour of the moment – sombre – it was an old building with gracious hallways and rooms, but cold. We are not used to that from the Territory, so maybe I can be excused for having felt it. At one of 'my' conferences they would have had a sponsor to provide the heating, but there were no sponsors to be seen. They do add colour, if not a bit of trouble in giving the credits. I suppose the university culture would not want a paper being read due to sponsorship from Kellogs Corn Flakes?

At the end they wondered how they could get some 'journos' along to take an interest in their subject. A good idea, but I do think the whole show could be hyped up a bit before they expose themselves to the wider world. Some well placed media releases during the Conference, and selected writers (readers) available for interviews would be good. The only thing is the subject has to be topical and newsworthy, and I am not sure if the cricketing prowess of 'Joe Bloggs' on a tour of England in 1935 would be of great impact in 2001! A Sports Historian in each State, available to the media for comment on how a certain event in 2001 will be seen in history would be a good start. After all, Ray Warren says every swimming world record set is 'history in the making'. The public relations potential for the ASSH is great, and small steps at a time can lead to bigger ones further in to history. A bright venue, colourful presentations, and an inviting atmosphere would be a good start. Thanks to all who made me feel so welcome, I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

**Rollo Manning**