

## **LOCATION, LOCATION! SPORTS HISTORY AND ACADEMIC REAL ESTATE**

**Daryl Adair  
Centre for Sports Studies  
University of Canberra  
Visitor, History Program  
Research School of Social Sciences  
Australian National University**

Property agents are renowned for stressing the location of real estate. The assumption is that buyers who can afford to reside in a 'fashionable' or 'highly respected' neighbourhood ought to do so. A person's address suggests much about their social status; so too does the stature and style of their residence. In terms of academic real estate, sports historians usually reside in less fashionable universities, and they have little status within the discipline of history generally. Put crudely, sports historians are generally not in positions of influence in universities, an increasing proportion are now located outside faculties of humanities or social sciences, and they tend to have rather limited prospects for career advancement.

In the late 1970s, as academic sports history in Australia was taking shape, the leading figures were (or went on to become) people known for teaching and research within their respective disciplines (i.e. history, sociology, politics) and the new sub-discipline of sports history itself. In thinking this through, eleven Australian-based sports history 'pioneers' crossed my mind, eight of whom pursued careers in generic discipline areas (Richard Cashman – History, Roy Hay – History and Politics, John O'Hara – History, Bill Mandle – History, Bill Murray – History and Politics, Brian Stoddart – Sociology, Colin Tatz – Politics, Wray Vamplew – History). Another three 'pioneers' who crossed my mind (Max Howell, Ian Jobling, John Daly) pursued careers in a specific sub-discipline of Human Movement Studies: the socio-cultural aspects of sport, exercise, and fitness. All of these people have contributed substantially to the development of sports history in Australia.

The first key group of sport-sensitive academics, located within humanities and social sciences environments, had a proselytising role – giving colleagues the message that sport is a subject worthy of academic analysis. And they won some recruits; not in the sense of historians or political scientists abandoning their existing specialities, but in terms of encouraging them to add sport to their various ways of understanding Australian society. Renowned Australian historians such as Ken Inglis, Geoffrey Blainey, Stuart Macintyre and Richard Broome have since used sport as a means of explaining Australian colonialism, nationalism and racial difference. And while they may have arrived at this approach independently of specialist sports historians (i.e. even Manning Clark gave recognition to sport in his now dated, but seminal six volume *A History of Australia*), the embryonic ASSH collective could surely take some credit for helping to make

sport a subject of serious historical inquiry. By the early 1990s sports history, it seemed, had 'arrived' in Australia as a sub-discipline, and, just as importantly, was also recognised by a small number of researchers who cast their intellectual nets more widely – whether in history, politics, or sociology.

The second key group of sport-sensitive historians, located within human movement studies or their equivalent, have been well known in specialist sports studies and kinesiology literature, but virtually unknown in other discipline areas. Their foundation point has been physical culture; their focus either sport, fitness or physical education. There are two powerful reasons for such a concentration. First, the likes of Max Howell, Ian Jobling, and John Daly were trained and employed as experts in the socio-cultural significance of sport and physical activity; it was the *raison d'être* of their academic careers. Second, these academics have been fighting a rear-guard action against the marginalisation of socio-cultural teaching and research within human movement studies. A combination of government interest in sport-as-performance, plus funding arrangements that have privileged scientific research in human movement, has meant a diminution of the 'value' of socio-cultural perspectives in Australian sport and physical culture. And this has been reflected in employment prospects. For example, in 1999 Murray Phillips left the University of South Australia for a similar role at the School of Human Movement Studies, University of Queensland. He had moved to Adelaide to succeed Emeritus Professor John Daly. But the loss of Phillips resulted in a diminution of sports humanities at U of SA; he was replaced not by a person with like skills and interests, but by an exercise physiologist. No wonder sports historians working in science-oriented sports studies or human movement departments are anxious about their job security; they are regularly asked to explain their ongoing 'relevance' to the teaching and research program. As a consequence, very few of them stray from what they are *expected* to do – sport-focused research.

Compare this situation with the academics in group one. As examples, Bill Mandle and Colin Tatz have moved fluidly between Australian history, Irish history, Aboriginal history, South African history and sports history respectively. History and politics were their discipline areas in terms of teaching and research; sometimes sport figured in their classes and in their publications as one of a portfolio of academic interests. There is, however, a worrying trend for those of us who are concerned about the vitality of sports history in academia. In Australia, several influential sports history academics either have or will soon retire, and it is unlikely they will be superceded by teachers and researchers with the same skills and interests. As examples, Roy Hay, Bill Murray and John O'Hara are each with history, politics and arts faculties respectively, but there is no reason to assume that these longstanding champions of sports history will have like-minded successors. Indeed, in the current academic employment climate, positions opened up by their retirement may be made redundant. In sports history terms, this would be lost property.

Tara Magdalinski, in her capacity as ASSH membership officer, has kindly provided me with location details of academics in the society. Some of this has involved guess work, since several members use home, rather than university, addresses for contact purposes. However, from Magdalinski's records it appears that ASSH currently has 52 Australian-based academic members, only 9 of whom are located in history departments. Of the remaining ASSH academics, 15 are positioned in faculties of arts/humanities, politics, cultural studies or education, 15 are located in human movement studies or sport/leisure studies environments, 12 can be found in business, management and law departments, while a further 4 are in mathematics/science fields. This means that only 24 of ASSH's academic membership cohort of 52 are based in history departments or arts/humanities/social sciences environments – both of which are, arguably, the 'natural' domain of sports history. This conclusion is not intended to discount or discredit ASSH academics in kinesiology and sports studies programs, or those positioned in business/law. But it is fair to say that academics in these areas (among whom I include myself) face something of an ongoing battle to convince many workplace colleagues that the study of sports *history*, both in teaching and research, is an important and valuable enterprise. That said, sports history also has a meagre sense of 'place' in history departments and Australian Studies programs in Australian universities. Perhaps the immediate future of sports history relies on its ongoing inclusion in teaching and research within broadly based humanities and social science environments, where the study of sport is fused with analysis of popular culture, gender, media and so on.

Perhaps the only secure, ongoing position for academic sports history in a history department is that of Richard Cashman, who, despite retirement in a few years, will leave a legacy that UNSW seems unlikely to abandon. Cashman's establishment of the Centre for Olympic Studies at UNSW, combined with an assembly line of able post-graduate students and research assistants, is unparalleled in the Australian context. In my experience, only De Montfort University's International Centre for Sports History and Culture matches the humanities based, sport-sensitive environment and infrastructure at UNSW. Both, too, are part of flourishing History departments, with research expertise in a variety of sub-disciplines and thematic areas. Hence the study of sport complements research and teaching in the wider discipline of History. It is not a 'stand alone' subject. Nor, as I will now argue, should it be.

Much has been achieved in Australian sports history since the late 1970s. Its pioneers are to be congratulated, and those who have taken up the baton since ought to be encouraged. *Sporting Traditions* has evolved into a journal showcasing both Australian and international research, and, by accepting submissions from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, the editors have displayed a welcome sensitivity to the fluidity of historically informed, sports humanities research. My worry, though, is that many Australian academics in history or humanities/social science faculties are unaware of *Sporting Traditions* and a host of international sports history journals. Certainly, very few non-ASSH academics have produced work that has been

published or reviewed in *Sporting Traditions*. From another perspective, it is pleasing that some ASSH academics have published their sports research in generic Australian history journals, such as *Australian Historical Studies* and *Journal of Australian Studies*. This improves general awareness about sport as a subject of inquiry, and reveals the identity of key practitioners.

It seems to me, however, that it is now very important for ASSH to reach out to the vast number of historians, sociologists and so on, working in varied research areas around Australia. One approach is to invite highly respected scholars who are *not* specialists in sport, to speak at Sporting Traditions conferences – as happened with the keynote address of Graeme Davison at the 2001 Sporting Traditions conference in Adelaide. This brings outstanding historians into a sports history environment. A second approach is for ASSH academics to move beyond sports history/sociology symposia, presenting their work to major conferences of the Australian Historical Association, the Australian Society for Labor History and so on. A third approach, which may sound heretical, is for sports historians to research and publish in areas beyond their traditional focus. Whether we like it or not, there is little status or respect accorded to the study of sport in history or humanities/social sciences environments. We therefore need to demonstrate that we are, first and foremost, accomplished historians, sociologists, and the like, people more than capable of shaping scholarship and historiography in their broadest senses. In order to do this, we need to show how sport intersects and informs other areas of research (i.e. amateurism versus professionalism, player unions and player agents as ways of understanding the history of labour relations). We also need to develop new areas of research outside of the traditional sports rubric (i.e. history of education and gender roles in schools, where sport tells *part* of the story). This approach is, admittedly, very difficult for academics in sports studies environments to follow. It is hard to see how they will be appropriately recognised for research in, say, the history of insanity in Australia; such an enterprise has no obvious sporting context. And in human movement studies, although socio-cultural scholars might conceivably pursue a range of non-sport activities, such as the social history of dance, acrobatics, pageantry, procession, aviation and motoring, the overwhelming expectation is that researchers ought to work on sport, fitness and exercise. To my way of thinking, this devalues the academic real estate in which socio-cultural scholars of human movement operate. Equally, though, I am also of the view that history/humanities programs that do not incorporate sport as an *aspect* of their teaching and research portfolios are themselves deficient. There needs to be new academic tenants on such properties.

Finally, this article is not a call to abandon the sports history ship, as though it were sinking. Rather, it is an assertion that we need to raise the anchor, making sports history a more explicit part of the history/humanities fleet.