

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

**Sporting Traditions XIV  
Australian Catholic University  
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'Marginalised or Mislaid' was the inspired choice of theme by the conveners for Sporting Traditions XIV Conference held at the Australian Catholic University in North Sydney in July – inspired because mega-events and mainstream sports often dominate the attention of scholars and the public alike. This conference gave primacy to issues relating to sports studies that often remain on the periphery of sports scholarship, and of society in general. The outcome was a programme of high quality papers from local, national and international presenters, from a range of academic and lay backgrounds. The eclectic nature of these papers added to the success of the conference, which was well planned in every detail from programme, venue, show bag with gifts, and accommodation for visitors to Sydney.

Conference participants were welcomed to the Australian Catholic University by Vice-Chancellor Peter Shean, before Jennifer Hargreaves (Brunel University) gave the keynote address 'Investigating the marginalised and mislaid in women's sport across the world'. Hargreaves' address focused on her book *Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity*, and she honed in on the conference theme of the marginalised through her discussion of women and sport in South African, Muslim women, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women. As one of a number of postgraduate students attending the conference, I found the discussion of her research methodology particularly valuable. It was instructional to learn from an acknowledged international leader in the field about the rigours of research through methodology and fieldwork. Hargreaves was a generous and gracious keynote speaker, who attended sessions and provided participants the opportunity to meet with her and discuss their work.

Two further major addresses were delivered during the conference. On Friday evening Tony Collins gave the Annual Tom Brock Lecture "Ahr Waggy": Harold Wagstaff and the making of Anglo-Australian rugby league culture' at the North Sydney Oval. In The Reet and Max Howell Address, Clare Simpson drew participants back to their childhood by asking them to reminisce about their first bicycle. In her presentation, "A New Sports History: Cycling in New Zealand" Simpson illustrated the history of cycling in New Zealand that both influenced and was influenced by social relationships, fashion and engineering. She outlined how the popularity of cycling paved the way for the automobile in New Zealand because cyclists had campaigned for the development of road systems.

A splendid conference dinner was held at the Kirribilli Club with wonderful views of Sydney Harbour. It was a memorable occasion with the ABC's Jim Maxwell acting as Master of Ceremonies. During the evening ASSH inducted two new Fellows. John O'Hara and Colin Tatz were acknowledged for their contribution to sports history in Australia with tributes from Richard Cashman and Douglas Booth respectively.

Nearly five days could be considered a conference marathon, especially as some sessions went beyond 8.00pm, however, because of the varied presentations and events, the delegates' interest never seemed to wane, though with parallel sessions, one often wanted to be in three places at once.

Two books were launched during the conference; Ian Warren's *Football, Crowds and Cultures*, the thirteenth book in the ASSH Studies Series, and *How Many More are Coming? The Short Life of Jack Marsh* by Max Bonnell. The Sports Practicum took place at the rugby, in lieu of the traditional soccer match. Devotees of Australian Rules Football, especially those with vested interests in the Sydney Swans and West Coast Eagles (me!), lamented that their presentation coincided with the match. The outcome of the session was, however, more successful than the match, from my perspective, so any perceived conspiracy from rugby and Victorian sectors of the conference was quickly disregarded.

It is difficult to single out presentations for particular congratulation, but two sessions do require a brief mention, because the presenters are not seasoned scholars, yet their work contributes to the ethos of ASSH. The last session on Sunday featured the film *Women's AFL* followed by a panel discussion, with some of the players in the audience. Rommel Lenon produced a film that explored the growing area of women who play Australian Rules. It was quite a feat for an undergraduate to place his work before senior practitioners, and he rightly triumphed. The presenters of "Celebrating the Centenary of the AFL in Sydney, 1903-2003", Ian Granland and Paul Feain, are businessmen and lay historians who have carried out remarkable research on Australian Rules in Sydney. It would not be an understatement to say that some of the attendees of this session were left in awe of their efforts in collecting significant artifacts relating to Australian Rules Football. The presence of Rommel, Ian and Paul at the conference also demonstrated that ASSH fulfilled its aim to liaise with individuals and institutions that have an interest in the aims of the Society". Sport is not an esoteric subject like many of the hard sciences and therefore ASSH's aim became tangible to all those interested in sport.

Finally, at the Sporting Traditions Conference, collaboration and collegiality abounded amongst the participants and while 'marginalised' was the topic, it was not practised. While we may be at the 'Crossroads', the Sporting Traditions conference provided the opportunity to meet new friends or catch up with old ones. Congratulations to the organisers of the Sporting Traditions XIV on a successful conference. See you in Melbourne in 2005!

[To see photos from the conference, check out the ASSH website at [www.sporthistory.org](http://www.sporthistory.org)]