

# Football-as-War, Coach-as-General: Analogy, Metaphor and Management Implications

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## Abstract

Sporting terms have been used as metaphor and analogy to describe and prescribe life experiences. It has been suggested that the use of sport terminology can assist in the general understanding of complex terms and situations, however, the use of sport as metaphor and analogy for many aspects of social understanding can have negative consequences. The analogy of sport and war seems to be particularly prevalent within football, irrespective of the code or culture in which it is played. This article demonstrates the popular understanding of Australian Rules 'football as war' through two complementary studies. The first study investigates the representation of Australian Rules football as war, specifically through the analysis of both images and text on the front covers of the sport 'lift-out' sections of two prominent Melbourne newspapers, *The Herald Sun* and *The Age*. The second study examines whether people interpret non-war-like images of Australian Rules football in war-like terms. Forty-five undergraduate sport marketing and management students were asked to write about one of four different images of football players and coaches interacting, which revealed that football is understood as war. Further, when prompted by an image of football players and coaches interacting, people in this study interpreted the interactions as consistently war-like. Coaches were portrayed as militaristic generals and the athletes as soldiers. Implications for management, education and practice are discussed.

## Introduction

In order for one's social world to function, it is argued that one must share particular meanings and understandings with others (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Geertz, 1973; Shweder, 1986). It is well documented that the use of sport terms as metaphor and analogy for everyday occurrences may promote clarity of meaning and precision of communication in everyday language in the form of 'sportstalk' (Coakley, 1994; Leonard, 1993; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1989). Another way to observe the use of sport terms as analogy is to see sport as an institution that extends beyond play, to a level of the sacred (Rowe, 1991; Slusher, 1967), where sporting arenas have been described as 'cathedrals' (Cashman, 1995: 206). Sporting terms have also been used to describe the ways in which political parties should be organised (Rowe, 1991) and to prescribe appropriate ways of running an organisation (Carling & Heller, 1995; Martin, 1993a; 1993b; Miller & Brown, 1993).

The use of sport as metaphor and analogy may be advantageous. Not only can sports idioms and phrases be used in non-sporting contexts to clarify

meanings, we understand other concepts through their connection to sport. Sport has been used as an analogy to describe and to prescribe life experiences. For example, several authors have argued in the past that politicians rely on creating analogies to make important social decisions relatively innocuous (Hardaway, 1976; Helmes, 1981). In business, others suggest that the manager is analogous to, and should behave like, a sports coach (Evered & Selman, 1989; Orth, Wilkinson & Benfari, 1987).

Raymond Gozzi (1990) suggests that the game metaphor is used in society without reflection and has become so pervasive that in time, we will not be able to see any differences between life and games. Francine Hardaway (1976) expresses similar concerns. The rhetoric that is transferred from the playing field to everyday life (such as in advertising, business and politics) have created a function that Hardaway (1976: 78) calls 'public doublespeak', which serves to manipulate its users as well as its audiences and which, she argues, can allow conscience to be ignored.

A more specific demonstration of the use of sport metaphor and analogy can be seen in football. Many authors have shown that war has been used as an analogy for football regardless of the particular code, or the culture within which it is played (McKay, 1991; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Trujillo, 1995). The football-as-war analogy can be observed overtly in media presentations of football, and more covertly in social relations and organisational structures.

Jim McKay (1991) analysed the telecast and presentation of Super Bowl XXV, at the time American (and other) soldiers were involved in the Gulf War. He suggests that this presentation was intricately linked with war through both overt and covert means. The opening ceremony included four jet-aircraft flying overhead while the crowd sang the national anthem and waved their complimentary American flags. Footage of the American armed forces in the Gulf was shown during the half time ceremonies, and fight songs, as well as emotional war-related songs were sung. It was as if 'Operation Desert Storm' was to be re-enacted on the football field that day. McKay (1991) argues that the boundaries between sport, news, war, politics and show business are blurred by media presentations such as this.

Similarly, Nick Trujillo (1995) found that militarism and violence featured in *Monday Night Football* (National Football League in the US) telecasts in several ways: direct comparisons between football and war, descriptions of players and plays as war-like, comparisons made to weapons, and particularly violent clashes were re-played and explained using a militaristic narration.

Given the overt use of the football-as-war analogy, it is not surprising that football is frequently cited as a sport that is most effective in preserving hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 1995; McKay, 1991; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Messner, 1992; Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Trujillo, 1995). When discussing American football, Don Sabo and Joe Panepinto (1990: 115) state

that 'football's historical prominence in sport media and folk culture has sustained a hegemonic model of masculinity that prioritises competitiveness, asceticism, success (winning), aggression, violence, superiority to women, and respect for and compliance with male authority'.

The overt representation of sport may bear consequences for both participants and spectators alike (Sabo & Jansen, 1992). It can explain a way of life and a way of understanding that is flawed (Connell, 1990; Messner, 1992; Weiss, 1996). Football-as-war is not immune from such consequences. Sabo and Panepinto (1990) suggest that the relationships that develop between men in the social structure of football, and the relationships that the football culture 'allows' these men to have with others in society, serve to validate social dominance. The organisational structure of football is patriarchal and as such contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic masculinities. During interviews, male athletes described their coaches as military officers or drill sergeants. Deriving from the broader football-as-war analogy, athletes become warriors or soldiers, whilst coaches are regarded as generals.

When one looks to the Australian context, it is evident that sport has historically been a male-centred institution, celebrating masculine strength, fitness and skill (Cashman, 1995). In particular, the various football codes are high profile sports that have been, and remain, virtually exclusive to men (Adair & Vamplew, 1997). Jim McKay and Ian Middlemiss (1995) found militaristic themes in the media's representations of rugby league football in the Australian state of Queensland. Content and semiotic analysis allowed them to conclude that the contest was framed as war. Rugby league was portrayed as a violent war, and commentators capitalised on militaristic terminology. Local heroes emerged as loyal soldiers, and athletes were celebrated for their manliness in participating and winning the spectacular battle.

It is not only mediated images that promote and maintain understandings of football-as-war; the participants, who understand and comply with mediated images, act in ways to assist in its maintenance. It seems that they too have accepted the associated analogies and derivative metaphors, which maintain masculine hegemony.

One might expect that Australian rules football is not exempt from the social and institutional forces that have been discussed above. Men dominate the Australian Football League (AFL), the largest national football league in Australia. There are sixteen teams from different states, in which there are no female coaches at a senior or head coach level or players, nor are there women in high level administrative positions. One might expect that participation in, and the portrayal of, the AFL celebrates men and, in turn, promotes and maintains hegemonic masculinity.

A number of key questions emerge. First, is there a tendency to see Australian rules football as war? Second, do people interpret non-war Australian rules football images in war-like terms? Third, if football is

understood as war, what are the possible impacts of derivative metaphors for those in the sport? This article focuses on two studies. The first examines mediated images of Australian rules football as war. The second study asks respondents to write stories about non-war like photographs of Australian rules football in order to determine whether popular understandings do reflect mediated images of football-as-war.

### **Study 1**

In order to study the use of analogy and metaphor, one must look to the popular, and in particular the popular press (Brummet, 1991; McKay & Rowe, 1987; Wenner, 1989). The AFL receives substantial coverage in newspapers through both text and photos (Hess & Stewart, 1998). In order to study the football-as-war analogy, two Melbourne newspapers that are distributed nationally, *The Herald Sun* and *The Age*, were chosen for analysis. These newspapers are owned by different media corporations. The *Herald Sun* is a popular tabloid paper, while *The Age* is a broadsheet and considered to be a 'quality' newspaper. Examination of the unpublished Roy Morgan data confirmed that these papers are widely read by AFL fans. Around one third of the readers of *The Age* and nearly half of *The Herald Sun* readers watch AFL games on television. Further, over twenty per cent of the readers of *The Age*, and over a third of the readers of *The Herald Sun* watch the AFL version of the *Footy Show* on Thursday evenings.

Each newspaper contained sports pages and a sports 'lift-out' section. The sports lift-out was typically found in the centre of each edition, and had a distinct, usually colour, cover. Ellen McCracken (1993) notes the importance of the front cover of popular printed publications as a form of advertising and as an element of positioning that helps the reader to shape their reading process. The front cover is a system of both photograph and text in interaction. One sees the principal image on the page whilst reading the textual messages. Individually and collectively, the verbal, and non-verbal elements of the cover frame the material within (McCracken, 1993). If the front cover is both an advertisement and a frame from which to view the material inside, then it seems appropriate that one should examine the front covers of newspapers to understand if Australian rules football is indeed portrayed as war.

### **Results**

Four front covers were selected for this study. The first cover was from the *Herald Sun* on 26 April 1997. The reader's attention is first drawn to the text, which includes a large headline in yellow capital letters reading 'AT WAR' and a secondary text stating 'Pies pound Bombers'. The 'Pies' (Collingwood) and the 'Bombers' (Essendon) are opposing AFL teams, and a Collingwood player was pictured about to hit an Essendon player. From the text alone one identifies a 'military' battle, with one team 'pounding' or beating another.

The photograph over which the text is laid reinforces that theme. Two players are pictured; one is featured in the centre of the page, poised with clenched fist ready to strike the other player. The second player is on the right side of the page. He is side-on to the camera and the posterior part of his body has been cropped from the picture. His hands are outstretched toward the featured player. The players are about to engage in a fight, with the Collingwood player captured on film. This player, who was engaging in the most aggressive behaviour, is featured in the centre of the layout and is thus the focal point. The opposing player, who appears to be more passive, is secondary within the image. The text and photograph combine to produce a powerful battle metaphor, thus to compete as opposing football teams is presented as being akin to being 'at war'. Below the image are headlines of the stories inside the lift-out section. There is a 'man with the golden gun', and the inclusion of weaponry further reinforces the militaristic metaphor.

This metaphor was also manifested in other ways, with different combinations of text and image on other front covers. On the front cover of its 'Sports Friday' football publication on 30 June 1997, *The Age* pictured, in full colour, an aeroplane in flames, crashing to the ground. One's attention was drawn immediately to the image, whilst the stark white text, which was overlaid in the dark sky above the crashing plane, indicates a particular way of interpreting the photograph. The inclusion of text and graphic on this cover suggested that the Essendon Football Club had been shot down in its effort to reach the finals at the end of the season.

The third front cover was from *The Herald Sun* on 20 September 1997. It features the head coach for the Western Bulldogs Football Club, Terry Wallace. He is pictured in the foreground of the photograph, on the left hand side. His photograph is not overlaid with text; the headline text is on the right hand side of the page. One might argue that this gives the impression that the coach is on the 'front line' of the battleground, obviously the leader, whose image is clear and not to be overshadowed. The text reads: 'The darkness before the dawn: How Terry Wallace and the Bulldogs came back from the brink'. The 'darkness before the dawn' is a phrase associated with war, as it represents the moment when surprise attacks would occur. The text states clearly that both the coach and the team have returned 'from the brink' of disaster, suggesting to the reader that an account of that comeback is available inside.

The photograph of the head coach is taken on a field that resembles filmic representations of a battlefield. He is standing with tree-lined rolling hills behind him and mist in the valleys, reminiscent of battle scenes in *Braveheart*. Furthermore, he is wrapped in a blanket, reinforcing the impression that it is cold, as it would be at dawn. What is important in this cover is the implication is that the coach leads his troops to battle, and in this case, can bring them back from the brink of disaster. The analogy of football to war has been played out, complete with a derivative metaphor; the coach is the battle leader.

The fourth cover is from *The Age* on 30 May 1997, and provides the most explicit reference to war. The headline in capital letters reads 'HOW MELBOURNE FELL APART', referring to the poor performances of Melbourne Football Club and the demise of their coach. The photograph is most striking. It pictures a skeleton in the centre of the page wearing a Melbourne Football Club jersey. The skeleton is lying on a beach, complete with shells, with a football beside it. This time the photo overlays the headline text. The photo takes precedence in this layout due to the potency of its message. Skeletons on a beach are reminiscent of a specific war theme for Australian audiences. A 'beach burial' was the way that many soldiers ended their lives in Gallipoli during World War One.

### ***Summary of Study 1***

The game of football is depicted as a war-like battle through front pages of the sport lift-out section. The militaristic imagery can take on many forms, and the battle theme is manifested through different combinations of image and text. Further, the football-as-war analogy is widespread as evidenced by its similar representations in both a tabloid and a broadsheet newspapers. From this analysis, the portrayal of Australian Rules football is consistent with the way in which other codes of football have been framed (McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Trujillo, 1995). Nevertheless, it is insufficient to conclude that war is used as an analogy for Australian Rules football without investigating if this popular tendency is indeed interpreted by people in a consistent way. Do people interpret non-war images of football in war-like terms?

### **Study 2**

According to Terry Barrett (1990), to interpret a photograph is to tell someone else, in speech or in writing, what one understands about the image, especially what one thinks it is about. As such, one is asking the interpreter to extract meanings that he or she forms from the image. It is not uncommon to use photos as a research technique to examine complex issues that surround emotional or controversial matters in sport. For example Timothy Curry and Richard Strauss (1994) produced a photo-essay to inform others about the details of approaches to sport medicine in collegiate level wrestling. Curry (1986) used the same photos during interviews with wrestling participants in order to elicit their verbal stories about wrestling injury. By the use of photographs, they found that they could elicit responses that may not have been possible without the images. Projective techniques have been shown to be extremely powerful (McGrath, Sherry & Levy, 1993).

This study is interested in the cultural understandings of non war-like football images. As seen in Study 1, Australian Rules football has been intricately linked with various war-like messages through pictorial images and written text designed to attract audience attention. Photographers must also

capture other photos of football, such as images of athletes and their coaches. After all, they are the people who create the contest that the audience watches and interprets. Further, as the literature suggests, there may exist derivative metaphors from the football-as-war analogy. The coach as militaristic general has already been implicated (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990). It is appropriate, then, to ask respondents to tell a story about what they see in photographs of players and coaches. This is akin to the standard Thematic Apperception Test format, which has been found elsewhere to be a useful technique for eliciting respondent evaluations (Haire, 1950; Oliver, 1998).

### **Materials**

Four newspaper photos were chosen for analysis. Three of the photos appeared in *The Herald Sun* and one appeared in *The Age*. The photographs that were analysed were chosen in consultation with an expert panel, which consisted of two senior faculty members in the school of Marketing and Management at Griffith University. The chosen images were judged to be representative of photographs from the two publications that showed a football team interacting with their coach. The photographs used were of players and coaches from the same teams that were depicted in the front cover images in Study 1. Each of photographs represented a different type of team interaction. The photos were assigned an identification number. The photos are described below, however, the description refers only to the physical attributes of the photos. The interpretation of the photos was left to the participants in this study.

Photo 1 (*The Herald Sun*, 20 May 1997: 77) was chosen because it depicted a coach interacting with an individual team member without other team members in the photo. The photo pictures the coach central and focused in the frame, and he is giving the player instructions and is using hand gestures. The coach is looking at the individual player, who is pictured with his back to the camera and is facing the coach to receive instructions.

Photos 2 (*The Herald Sun*, 3 June 1997: 69) and 3 (*The Herald Sun*, 7 April 1997: 88) were selected because they showed the coach speaking to a particular individual within a team environment. In photo 2, the coach is pictured in the centre of the frame, surrounded by a team of players. In the foreground of the picture is one player, with his back to the camera, seated and paying attention to the coach. Beside him is a trainer or official who is also seated and is also focusing his attention on the coach. The remaining players are standing around the coach, some face the camera, whilst others have their backs turned to the camera. As in photo 1, the coach is giving instructions to a player; in this case his instructions are directed to the seated player in the foreground. The coach is looking directly at this player and gesturing. Some other players, who are standing, are also looking directly at the seated player.

Photo 3 features a coach in the centre of the frame. There are players in the frame, though they are not gathered around the coach as in Photo 2. The

coach is interacting with one player in the group and is physically touching him. The coach has placed his hand under the players' jaw line, at the base of his neck while looking directly into his eyes.

Photo 4 (*The Age*, 10 May 1997: B31) was selected because it depicted the coach interacting with many team members, rather than an individual. Again, the coach is pictured in the centre of the frame. There are players around the coach; some face the coach, others have their backs to both the camera and the coach. The coach is holding a football and is pictured with his mouth open, perhaps in the middle of giving some instruction to the gathered players. One player is looking directly at the coach, but the coach is not looking at that player. Other players have their attention directed elsewhere.

### ***Procedure***

A standard set of instructions for a projective technique was adapted from Anne Anastasi (1988), and revised after initial pilot testing. Each participant was given an instruction sheet and a piece of paper. They were told that they would be asked to write a story about a photo they would be given. Each of the four photos was then handed out alternately to each participant. It was explained that they would have a different photo from the person sitting next to them, and that they should not discuss their stories with their fellow students. It was further explained that the exercise would be used as the basis for further discussion in class the following week. The instructor read through the instruction sheet with the group, and provided the following verbal instructions:

Some of you may know the identities of the people in the photos that you have been given. If you do not know their identities, it does not matter because this exercise is not about your knowledge of sport. You can make up names for the people in the picture if you like, and remember your stories are anonymous so don't put your names on them. I will collect the stories when you have finished, but they will not be marked or assessed in any way.

Students were told that they had the entire class period (50 minutes) in which to write their story. At no time was it mentioned that this was a coach, or an AFL football team, so that previous knowledge of either coaches or AFL football was not prompted.

### ***Participants***

Forty-two first year sport management students in three different tutorial groups wrote projective stories. The exercise was completed in tutorials during week five of their course. Tutorial groups ranged in size from ten to nineteen participants, and respondents worked individually.

### **Results**

The stories were coded using NUD\*IST software package (Qualitative Solutions and Research, 1997). Each story was given a number and letter for identification and filing. Quotes from the stories are preceded by their identification label in square brackets [#]. The number refers to the number of the photo whilst the letter labels each different story.

The situation depicted in the photos was recognised by all participants in the study as an interaction between a coach and player(s) in the AFL. The situation was recognised as being either at training or during a match on competition day. It must be noted that for the purposes of this paper, not all quotes can be included, however, the quotes included below are a representative sample of all of those that demonstrate the thematic content.

#### *Football is war*

Overwhelmingly, stories were written as if it is accepted that football *is* war. In fact, football-as-war seemed to be so commonly understood that stories did not reference football-as-war directly; stories were written as if the whole concept was self-evident. Stories specifically outlined what both coaches and players were thinking, doing and saying in order to maximise chances of winning the war. Stories depicted the coach-as-general, and the player-as-soldier. In other words, the football-as-war analogy was accepted, understood and unquestioned. The following section discusses each of these themes.

#### *Coach-as-general*

The interaction between coach and athlete in the photos was recognised as either a training or match situation. Thirteen of the 45 documents reported that the situation occurred at a training session, and the coach and players were portrayed consistently. The coach was thought to be a force to be reckoned with, both in terms of his physical presence and behaviours, as well as the way he interacts with his players. Respondents told stories about the kind of person the coach was and the image he projects. It was clear that the coach is tough, uncompromising and purposeful; he is militaristic: 'He had always maintained an army officer approach' [4h].

Two respondents gave their coach a name, which have associations with war and battle, most notably with reference to Nazi dictator, Adolf Hitler: 'Coach Sampson' [2i] and 'Coach Adolf Puma' [1g]. The reference to Hitler is perhaps an indication that the coach has become a symbol for an authoritarian personality. Symbolically, that is just the way the coach is, and the image he wants his team to project: 'The coach is asking the player sitting down to stand up as it is a sign of weakness that the opposition could pick up on' [2e].

It was evident that coaches lived up to their symbolic names and reputations within these stories. The understanding of coach-as-general is perhaps more explicit when one analyses the way in which respondents

understand the way a coach interacts with his players. Communication was overwhelmingly portrayed as authoritative and oppressive.

A large proportion of the stories proposed that the coach was giving instruction and/or information to the player(s) and further indicated that his approach was authoritarian. For the following quotes, specific parts of the quotes have been italicised to highlight this point:

John [coach] proceeded to *impress on* Michael that it was up to him to inspire the rest of the team, and he *dictated* a few tactics which would help him [1c].

... followed by some instructions *laid down* by the coach in order to generate a stronger team effort [1j].

'This quarter we must focus on our attracting [sic]' *ordered* the coach [2f].

... coach Stan Alves lost his cool while *barking his instructions* to utility Jason Cripps.

From the language used in these stories, it is apparent that there is an assumption that coaches use dominant, almost tyrannical forms of communication. It seems that there is no room for an open discussion; the coach is decisive and directive, with few opportunities for a player to be involved in the interaction. The coach is perceived to be an enforcer of discipline, who will not tolerate poor performances from his 'troops'.

Most of the 45 stories indicated that the team was losing or performing badly leading up to the interaction depicted in the photographs. Stories described how the coach dealt with poor performances from his 'troops' by using threats, physical or verbal abuse. Not one of the 45 stories indicated that the coach would provide reward for performance. Punishment and the threat of punishment appeared in a number of different forms. In the first example it seems that the coach offers a threat in order to gain a better performance from players, though the nature of the threat is not clear:

Don't worry, you won't make that mistake again. Or you better not anyway' the coach said to the player [3f].

David Parkin is sick of this attitude from his players and is giving many of them their last warning [4k].

... and the players knew that their necks would be on the line if anyone dared to go against him [the coach] [4h].

Perhaps physical abuse is what these players have to look forward to if they fail to please their coach: ‘The coach is not happy, he’s about to head butt the captain’ [3k].

Stories also indicated that the coach sets physically gruelling training sessions as a method of punishment for his team:

The coach feels that the players are not working hard enough and are too lazy and is using this session to try and change the players’ attitudes [4b].

As a consequence [of poor performance] all the players are going to be put through a rigorous training session [4k].

Overwhelmingly, the stories suggested that athletes were expecting to be punished in their proceeding training session after a loss. It seems that this sort of treatment is normalised: ‘A 60-point defeat at the hands of Sydney on the weekend was a disastrous result and the players knew the coach was going to give them plenty today’ [4i]. Respondent stories suggest that it is accepted for coaches to punish players with verbal abuse. In some stories, the coach singles out an individual player:

The coach turns slowly to #15, and lets him have it with all barrels blazing [2b].

The coach is pointing at #15 and saying what he’s done wrong [2h].

The most explicit of all was the following story, which featured verbal abuse, followed by almost physical punishment:

While Alves [coach] was verbally abusing his charge, Cripps [player] refused to make eye contact with Alves, who swiftly belted Cripps’ drink out of his hand and went eyeball to eyeball with Cripps for some minutes [3i].

From the above quotations, it is apparent that respondents perceived the coach to be exhibiting negative behaviours towards his athletes. There were some stories, however, that indicated that the coach was not all bad. Two stories indicated that the coach provides support for his players. The manner in which he communicates his support for players is of interest. Specific terms are again italicised in order to clearly demonstrate the point:

Words of encouragement were *placed onto* this player [1j].

Coach, Joe Baker congratulating the youngster says ‘Good one son’ as he slaps the kid around the neck [3c].

Although the coach is seen as providing support and encouragement, the manner in which he provides it is very much in line with his tough and dominating demeanour. One gets the impression that the coach ‘controls’ the interactive situations with his players, even in the act of providing support. How do respondents perceive athletes to interpret the war, and the coach-as-general?

#### *Athletes-as-soldiers*

Some of the stories indicated how athletes were feeling towards the coach. Many stories indicated that the athlete’s main concern was to please the coach:

Losing the match would devastate the coach so all the players congregated into their traditional huddle and perform their war cry [2K].

It’s 3/4 time of our AFL match against Essendon. . . . We are slaving away playing the game we love. . . . I listen carefully to every word, thinking that I am already giving 110% and most likely leading the possessions tally. Yet the only thing I can do is find another 10 per cent to please the coach [1e].

The player will probably try too hard [after coach intervention pictured] and as a result will play worse than he did in the first half [2h].

Thus, the coach has a role in motivation, however, only in the sense that the player wanted to please him.

The team was exhausted, yet the coach was right - for if they won this match they would make the semi-finals. The team was ready to win and make the coach, themselves and the supporters happy [2k].

The need to please the coach may be similar to the notion of victim dependency on an authoritarian captor. It is an acceptance of the authoritarian role, and almost being submissive to it. This is a notion that will be further developed in the discussion section.

#### *Summary of Study 2*

Through an analysis of the thematic content of respondents’ projective stories, this study found that there are consistent understandings about football-as-war. Regardless of the non-war interactions pictured in the photographs, the meanings that were attributed to the coach, the coaching tasks and the reactions

of the athletes were surprisingly similar. The coach was perceived by respondents in this study to be an authoritarian, 'general-like' figure who uses militaristic ways of communicating with his athletes.

### **Discussion**

This study has shown that there is a general tendency to see football-as-war. This cultural context has been demonstrated in two ways: first, through an analysis of media images of football-as-war, and second, through analysis of popular interpretations of football images as if they were war.

It has already been discussed that the single most dominant influence on the way in which sport is experienced in society is through the media. In other words, our knowledge about sport, and in particular the roles of participants in it, is mediated. The respondents' interpretations of the photographs of coach-athlete interactions in Study 2 suggest that there was a shared knowledge or way of understanding football-as-war. Each of the photos elicited similar suggestions about what was occurring in the featured scene. Those shared understandings of what it means to coach and to play football corresponded to popular presentations of football-as-war, as seen in Study 1 and as found by other authors (McKay, 1991; McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Trujillo, 1995).

### **Implications of Understanding Football-as-War**

This study is concerned with Australian rules football, specifically the AFL. As in other codes of football, it is clear that there are masculine archetypes in the symbologies that underpin the mediated presentation of AFL football. AFL football is presented as war, and coaches are presented as authoritarian and militaristic, who lead their troops to battle. From this study, it appears that sport management students are comfortable with interpreting football in those terms.

The notion of sport being themed as war and evoking nationalistic and militaristic ideologies as well as both promoting and maintaining hegemonic masculinities is not unusual, and has been discussed by other authors (McKay & Rowe, 1987). Others have also recognised that themes of conflict, aggression and force are useful tools in terms of marketing sport, and are indeed themes that spectators enjoy (Chalip & Chalip, 1989; Bryant, 1989; Zillman & Paulus, 1993). In fact, sociologist John Carroll (1998) argues that sport answers some crucial needs of the individual in society, one of which is to fight and win.

The war theme and the way it influences sport management practices, however, have not received much attention, even though sport managers need to be aware of and understand the necessary separation of popular beliefs from sound management practices. Logically, the coach, and the portrayal of the coaching identity, is an important part of the marketing mix of a team and can be a successful advertising tool. The fact that presentations of football-as-war and coach-as-general seem to have popular appeal may warrant the application of these metaphors when marketing a team.

Managers must understand that these metaphors may indeed be myths, and if carried forward to management, may have serious consequences. I interviewed twelve professional head coaches from the AFL (Kellett, 1999) the same people and/or teams that were depicted in the images analysed in this study. Evidently, popular media presentations are inconsistent with my findings about coaches' own experiences and practices of coaching. I suggest that coaches facilitate and empower both their players and assistant staff, which is in contradiction to the media representation, and consequent popular perception, of football-as-war and coach-as-general. Sport managers need to understand more about coaching than mediated representations. In my study, coaches regarded themselves as nurturing and supportive, which contradicts popular interpretations of the relationship between coach and athlete (Sabo & Panepinto, 1990). This relationship represents a structure that might serve to minimise hegemonic masculinity, rather than maintain and promote it. It can be argued that armed with knowledge of the popular, sport managers have the opportunity to disturb the traditional conservative social institution of football (McKay & Middlemiss, 1995; Sabo & Panepinto, 1990; Trujillo, 1995).

There is reason to believe that the football-as-war and coach-as-general stereotype may also have a detrimental impact on the retention of young athletes. It has been found that, as they mature from childhood into adolescence, some athletes report that they prefer an authoritarian coach (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983). Yet, other research shows that authoritarian coaching styles are, at least in part, responsible for athlete drop out (Hyde, 1978). Why would athletes state a preference for a style of coaching likely to drive them out of sport? Perhaps stated preferences for autocratic styles derive from popular images of elite coaches as autocratic. If so, then what these young athletes are really saying is not 'be autocratic'; what they are really saying is 'be good', which may be the same as saying 'I want a style of coaching that is similar to what the best athletes obtain'. Thus, it is not necessarily that they want a style of coaching they will choose to abandon. Rather, they are reflecting a popular image which is not merely inaccurate, but whose realisation in practice risks discouraging their continuation with the sport.

Given a stated desire for a militaristic style of coaching, and the mediated presentations of good coaches as militaristic, is it any wonder that Sabo and Panepinto (1990) found coaches in their study of a youth football team to act in such a manner. They found that coaches manipulated control over athletes, used tactics such as ridicule and organised training sessions that would result in painful experiences for athletes. They also found coaches to talk about upcoming competitions as war. What drives coaches to be militaristic? Perhaps, just as athletes state a preference for coach behaviours based on popular understandings of what it is to coach, coaches too base their understandings of coaching on the similar stereotypes.

Clearly then, coach education and training programs at all skill levels would benefit from an understanding of the popular beliefs about sport and particularly about football-as-war, and about what football coaches, at least at elite levels, do (Kellest, 1999). At the very least, it might assist coaches in choosing their behaviours and social discourse in ways that do not treat the archetype of authoritarian as an essential image to project.

Popular belief systems are powerful in forming our basic assumptions about the people that we study and the areas within which we work. Adherence to popular belief systems may not always end in negative consequences, however, from the current study it appears that in the world of sport, the analogy of football-as-war has serious repercussions that educators, researchers, practitioners and sport participants themselves have a responsibility to understand.

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