

# **Nostalgia and the Use of the Sporting Past in Periods of Hegemonic Crisis**

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The ways in which we remember the past are integral to our experiences of the present. While the past itself may indeed be “a foreign country” (Lowenthal, 1985), our conceptions of it pervade our everyday lives. We engage with the past to give use a sense of security in the present or to guide in shaping our future. Increasingly, the past has been used in a nostalgic sense to provide us with a sense of who “we” are as individuals and as members of society. Nostalgia confronts us every day from our longings for the “good old days” to our sense of insecurity in a world changing faster than many of us can comprehend.

The nostalgic use of sport and the history of sport has been one of the most significant areas in the process of sustaining identities and solidarity through shared experiences of heroic deeds in specific societies. In most societies, major sports events

have been imbued with significant cultural power and relevance. In order to better understand the role of sport as a cultural phenomenon, we need to examine closely just how sporting events present and past are used to sustain, or in some cases, create identities for particular political purposes.

This paper examines the use of past sporting events and heroes in the USA, South Africa and New Zealand and made reference to some other societies. In Australia, England, New Zealand, Canada, the USA and for white South Africans, nostalgic uses of sport have served a conservative purpose for man in political initiatives to preserve remnants of past glories or of fading social values in the face hegemonic crises generated by changing immigration patterns, ideological struggle over social values, and in South Africa, a changed political system. At times, present inadequacies in sports and other spheres are constructed with reference to the once more “glorious” past in order to ward off counter-hegemonic threats.

Specifically, this paper is part of a work in progress on the creation and maintenance of sporting traditions for specific purposes in different societies. It offers an analysis of three case studies to demonstrate how the sporting past is used nostalgically and the role that the production of those traditions plays in the present.