

PLACE, SPACE, AND THE PRODUCTION OF MODERN SPORT

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Homebush: Site of the Clean/sed and Natural Australian Athlete

This paper examines the relationship between “nature” and sport and their contribution to Australian identity within the context of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. When Sydney won the bid in 1993, its success was, in part, based on its commitment to an “environmentally friendly,” “athletes’ games,” that is, a Games that was unpolluted and unpolluting. Selling the 2000 Olympic Games as the “Green Games” clearly linked athletic bodies through sport to a bush mythology that regards the “Australian spirit” as intimately connected with the bush and thus with the natural/national environment. The Olympic vision promulgated by the Sydney Bid team was of Australia as a natural and unpolluted environmental paradise, where the youth of the world could gather to celebrate in play without the threat of contamination. This “freedom to play” in a healthy, natural environment forms the basis of efforts to “clean up” not only the dioxin contaminated Homebush Bay Olympic site, but also the wider Olympic movement through the removal of the corrupting influence of Phil Coles in particular and other IOC members in general as well as other “scourges” such as drugs. By removing these “snakes” from the Olympic “Garden of Eden,” the unpolluted home/bush is in turn reproduced in assurances about the purity and naturalness of those Australian athletic bodies that intend to occupy this site. By constructing the nation as “clean/sed” and “natural,” Australian athletes are signified as rightful heirs to the utopian psychosocial space of the home/bush. The significance of the bush, the environment and nature is thus magnified in efforts to present Australian athletes as unproblematically “natural,” that is, representative of the purified nation/nature.

This paper will provide a detailed coverage and analysis of Australian political and media discussion regarding the years of promotion for the Sydney Olympics and the struggles around the

selection and development of the Homebush site. It will examine the play of identity politics and spatial practice, showing how spaces come to symbolize particular ways of (sporting) life and how the spatial practices associated with those symbols become a resource for challenging a range of issues and practices within society.
