

# THE UNASKED QUESTIONS IN AUSTRALIAN TENNIS

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## I

The importance of tennis in the sporting history of Australia can hardly be overestimated. Some Australians look back on their country's former dominance of world tennis with the same degree of nostalgia as some British remember their past empire. By analysing trends in Australian tennis history, a large, influential, important and as yet untouched aspect of Australian social history may be revealed.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most fundamental of unasked questions in Australian tennis is why have these questions remained unasked? Patently, the history of tennis in Victoria, and indeed Australia, has been neglected, especially in terms of how it reflected events in a wider social context and mirrored the values of a particular era, social group, and even a wider Australian self-image. In Australian social histories only a few casual references are made to a sport that has certainly long been an important focus for national pride and enjoyment.<sup>3</sup> Works specifically given to tennis tend to centre solely on match results, or basic chronological facts and provide mere information with little or no historical analysis or posited relationship to social context. Why is this, and why, furthermore, have working-class sports or team sports, both in terms of spectators and players, been discussed, rather than the primarily upper-middle class sport of tennis? Perhaps it is because of the ideological orientation of many sports historians and sociologists, or simply because their personal interests revolve around the more popular team sports. So, while cricket, for instance, was certainly initiated by an upper-middle class, it was also a team sport and included varieties of persons from other sectors of the community. This may partly explain why so many cricket enthusiasts have written copiously on this game. Perhaps the involvement of women in tennis to the point where they

could participate with the men was also a fundamental reason for the lack of work done on tennis. Men rather than women have tended to write about their sports. Perhaps few have the wish, need or understanding to be capable of analysing a sport which also involved women, especially since the presence of women helped maintain tennis as a recreational activity, as opposed to a sport. To add to this, the smaller number of participants involved in any one match of tennis, as compared with cricket, may also provide a reason why tennis has received little analysis. It seems also that far more tennis enthusiasts actually *play* the game than those interested in cricket. As a result, there is probably, in cricket, a much larger audience of interested enthusiasts who wish to actually read about their sport than in tennis quarters, where they would rather spend their time playing than reading about their game.

Yet there can be no doubt of the continued national popularity and wide media exposure of tennis. Traditionally the game in Australia has been played by literate middle-class people who have had the education and ability to investigate the history of tennis should they have wished. This could be expected, when one considers that the initial establishment of many Australian tennis clubs was connected with cricket clubs. However, tennis remained a recreation, while cricket had an international, competitive and far more professional aspect for a much longer period. So, while the first Australian tennis club was established in 1878 at the Melbourne Cricket Ground by a part of the Melbourne Cricket Club, and while Sydney's first tennis club was directly linked with the Sydney Cricket Club, and many of those who played cricket also enjoyed tennis, cricket nevertheless remained their first priority and enthusiasm in terms of a competitive sport, theoretical interest and resultant analysis.

Thus, in looking at the history of tennis in Australia the questions that have been unasked are strikingly evident in my own particular thesis area. This area being a study of tennis which will illuminate, first, some neglected aspects of the history of the Victorian elite and how it operated; and second, how rapid social change, upward mobility and the impingement of powerful forces came to revolutionise, in this corner of the world the

character of a game and disrupt the old authority that controlled it. This analysis of tennis, therefore, will centre around how this game, when transferred to Australia by those who thought of themselves as being something of an ascendancy, that is, superior to the bulk of the Australian society and who sought to model themselves on the only leisure class they knew of, that of Britian, became by way of social extension, first thinkable for others, then possible, then an actuality. Questions surrounding the developments in the Australian social and economic context which produced such changes, and way in which tennis reflected and illuminated these factors, must therefore be considered. Thus Australian tennis must be analysed in terms of the growth of an egalitarian spirit, the wider distribution of wealth and the absence of an aristocratic, or exclusively privileged class, or in other words, how Australia's uniquely constituted population broke down barriers to give Australian tennis a distinctly Australian flavour.

## II

The sport, like so many features of Australian life was imported from England. It is the conclusion of leading authorities that modern lawn tennis was devised in 1869 and later patented in 1874 by Major Walter Clapton Wingfield in England. He called the game 'Sphairistike' (which was the Greek word for ball game): the presumption being that those who played the game had an acquaintance with the classics. The name was both a symbol and indication that the sport would be played by a select group. Wingfield's patent received provisional protection for three years but was not extended.

However no one person can claim to have invented the game of lawn tennis. Before Wingfield was granted his patent, a game of lawn tennis was recorded as having been played by a certain J.B. Perara and a Major Harry Gem on a private lawn at Edgbaston. Indeed Major Gem became President of the Learnington Club which he founded in 1872. That was the first lawn tennis club in the world.<sup>4</sup>

The importance of Wingfield's patented game was that it

popularised lawn tennis. The five guinea tennis kit, made up of balls, rackets, rules and netting, was sold in Britain and later brought out to Australia. By 1875 Wingfield was able to provide an impressive list of notable British and European figures who had bought the equipment. This not only did a great deal to further promote the game but also made certain the elite nature of tennis. From its beginnings and indeed in its very origins tennis had been connected with and became a symbol of the civilised rich.<sup>5</sup> Its rules were a derivation (but also a breakaway) from older styles of tennis evolved from about 500BC in Ancient Greece and Rome, and also in more recent times in England and France from the games of Royal tennis and 'jeu de paume'. The degree to which lawn tennis was an outgrowth of the leisured civilisation of firstly Greece, Rome, Tudor England the France of the Sun King and later Victorian England, brings to light important and significant questions.

In Australia the popularity of tennis came later and, although this is difficult to prove, probably a larger cross section than in England actually played, although the egalitarian nature of Australian tennis, especially in its early period, has, often been overrated. By analysing many of the well-known early Australian players' backgrounds, it becomes evident that the majority were in an affluent socio-economic position. The most likely explanation for the wider social popularity of tennis in Australia can be found in the different social compositions and environments of England and Australia. Of course, the more egalitarian nature of Australian tennis was not only a result of the particular social mix, but there was far more likelihood that relatively less affluent Australians would have the available land on which to build a court. Furthermore, while lawn tennis was initially regarded as a summer pastime, providing another alternative activity for late afternoons in both England and Australia, nevertheless the differing climates and latitudes worked to produce different attitudes to the game. For instance, as the Australian evenings were not nearly so long as in England, and because the rainfall differed in many places in Australia, grass was hard to establish and difficult to maintain. The result was that prior to the First World War, and indeed to a large extent up until the present day, Australian lawn tennis was played on

surfaces other than grass, including asphalt and clay. Yet the fact that the rainfall was much less in Australia meant that the game could be played more often outdoors, if an appropriate surface was available. Perhaps also the fact that Australia was such a new settlement also meant that entertainment of any kind was rather scarce, so that sport played a greater role than in a society used to readily available professional amusement. As in England, Australian tennis had a number of players with strong enough personalities, and abilities both as players and administrators, to help establish and direct the game, in particular, Norman Brookes. It was also far easier, in the new society of Australia, which had neither traditions nor precedents, for a new sport to succeed. As a result, there was far less pressure to confine tennis to becoming a mere garden party social diversion, as it was in England especially prior to World War One.

However, as in England, tennis underwent 'a somewhat fragile growth'<sup>6</sup> period in Australia. In its initial stages Australian tennis matches practice sessions and social games occurred at the private grounds of the wealthy in both the city and country areas, on club lawns or on the larger outback stations.<sup>7</sup> This had obvious advantages to those who saw the game, as its early practitioners did, as the preserve of what could most accurately be described as an elite, a social grouping sufficiently self-contained and aware of itself so that it was not necessary to join or form a club to make up the numbers for a team. Nor did tennis players need the large expanse of land necessary for such games as cricket. A private court, which was an adjunct to a substantial house, also meant that older people, or those who felt more like watching than playing the game, could sit and watch either on their verandah or close to the court. It also had an added attraction in that they could talk casually to all participants rather than merely to the outfielders in cricket.

As in England 'there were no public courts as it was not a game for the public, but a private recreation of a particular kind and few open competitions except at the centres of the game, and it was not until after the World War of 1914-18 that it started to spread throughout the community'.<sup>8</sup> The players were usually British, or perhaps, more accurately, English, from the

upper middle class or with pretensions to reach that level. Because this was a tight-knit exclusive group, not growing at all rapidly in the late nineteenth century, interest in the game spread very gradually and only among a relatively small circle, mainly more mature, indeed even elderly people. What is now a game demanding greater athletic ability and calling on energies associated with the young, was originally seen in a quite different light as mainly a mild and quieter recreation for the middle aged. Initially it was seen - to emphasise the point by exaggeration - as mild exercise for geriatrics determined both to avoid the fate and to prove themselves as active. Furthermore it was a pastime, that is, precisely, a way of passing the time. Tennis initially was not a sport, nor a recreation, but simply a way of filling in spare time, pleasantly. This had two consequences. It was a pursuit for what could only be described as a section of the leisured class - people with excess time - and the implication is that it should be a pleasurable way of passing it.<sup>9</sup> Tennis gradually progressed from being a pastime, to a recreation, to a sport. Why and when did those phases occur?

The invention of the modern game of tennis in England occurred just prior to Melbourne's boom. In its earliest stages, Australian tennis was played by those who saw Melbourne's growth as a completion of the boyhood dreams of those born in the 1830s, who grew up in the hungry 'forties and many of whom had come to the goldfields of Victoria in the early 1850s.<sup>10</sup> In their middle age they turned in imitation to what cultural achievements and expressions they had admired in England, or what they thought would have been the modern evolution of this. It was a period whose atmosphere is nicely caught in the title of Geoffrey Serle's book, *The Rush to be Rich*.<sup>11</sup> The promotion of Tennis was partly an expression and physical illumination of this ambitious imitative impulse of Melbourne as being marvellous. It was a group of middle aged tennis players in 1880 who took the lead by conducting Australia's first tennis tournament - the Victorian Championships at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. This was a feat in itself because at this stage there was no state or national tennis association. Victoria did not establish such a body until 1892 and did not have association courts until 1908. By 1884, however,

there were seven clubs in Melbourne which were competing in the only Melbourne competition, the Men's Winter Pennant: Mosspennock, the Bohemians, Windsor, St Kilda, Trinity College, Ormond College and the Melbourne Cricket Club Tennis Club.<sup>12</sup>

The growth of tennis clubs in Victoria can be explained at least in part as a facet - or is it an imitative legacy - of the system of family patronage and inheritance characteristic of the English bourgeois family in the nineteenth century. Such clubs, like other clubs of a professional or business nature, were conceived by their founders as creating a network of contacts for themselves, and their friends and family. Tennis clubs, as distinct from city business clubs, served a particular physical purpose. The city club existed to provide the business and professional man with various services, notably lunch, and perhaps occasional accommodation in salubrious and appropriate surroundings. But the growing cult of physical fitness - a healthy mind in a healthy body - encouraged clubs whose purposes included exercise and fitness dimensions, which could be combined with a social function,

Thus, in accounting for the growth of tennis clubs, the operation of patronage, encouragement and moral coercion are extremely important. The problem of succession became more real as the business and professional men's retirement from active leadership grew closer. In the 1870s these men had denied themselves a great deal in order to give their sons a good education. Unfortunately many of the younger generation did not respond in the way their parents had hoped. Many sons expected to be given money plus a profession or partnership by their fathers. The reasons behind sons joining the same tennis clubs, and the resultant expansion of tennis clubs, was perhaps so that a certain degree of parental control or influence could be exerted. It also contrived to place the son in contact with a group of people who were considered by parents as acceptable and maybe useful for establishing social contacts and prospective business clients for their sons. They wished to establish tennis clubs partly for the formative benefits they believed it would provide for the young and also for themselves. In many cases, the sons probably saw the benefits of such an arrangement as it provided a cheap, comfortable

and socially easy niche into which they could fit with a minimum effort.

Of course tennis clubs were also a way in which citizens anxious to measure their attainments and affirm the future of leisured civilisation in Victoria could do so. The proliferation of tennis clubs reflected what might be called *hubris* - the proclamation of 'an instant leisured class, newly and aggressively emerged, and the clubs were another expression - a physical expression in all ways for the very existence of courts was testimony to spacious living - of a boundless confidence and optimism. Tennis expressed the energy and refinement, that exact blend of activity and cultivation which the colonials looked on as their very own: they had invented the blend and tennis was their ideal vehicle. The idea of colonising enterprise was intertwined into the building and organisation necessary to establish a club or even a private court with regular practice sessions. They believed that by the establishment and maintenance of such things as the English sport of tennis, progress and success would be assured and magnified. In this sense it was not only an imitation but it was also a symbol, a testament to a phase of civilisation achieved. To add to this, the mistakes and problems of British industrialism and capitalism had supposedly been learnt and recognised by the Australian elite; Melbourne, it seemed, had nothing to lose if it extracted the advantages of both the British model of economic progress and the Australian potential for economic success. The result would undoubtedly be that Victoria would be the richest and most progressive centre in the southern hemisphere, Tennis was seen as a microcosm of a brave new colonial world in which this idea of energetic progress would be dominant. That is, tennis was encouraged by, and also expressed, a particular and dynamic social atmosphere.

An analysis of the early membership of the tennis clubs reveals that the social, religious, political and cultural backgrounds of their members show much in common and may to a significant extent be broadly classified within overall social divisions. For example, Protestant, Freemason, substantial landowner and so on. This set of general categories does not, of course, apply rigidly to all clubs, members or areas.

If some player had great ability, but was unacceptable in other ways, due for example to lower social background or personal disposition, there was usually little opposition to his or her application for membership which was treated as a gracious dispensing of patronage. Another area in which the unspoken but understood guidelines for tennis club membership were suspended is particularly evident when a contrast is made between the membership patterns of the country and city clubs. As a general rule, country clubs included a much wider cross section of the public, while city and suburban clubs usually catered for, and were restricted to, the professional and upper-middle business classes. The informal and usually unspoken enforcement of various religious, regional, political and economic criteria and restrictions for the exclusion or acceptance of members is itself indicative of the tight exclusiveness of most of Melbourne's tennis clubs in this earlier period. Seen from this social perspective, tennis clubs were devices not for keeping members in, but for keeping others out. Those deemed to be the 'lower orders' or of unacceptable behaviour or religion (such as Roman Catholics) and so on were not welcomed as tennis club members. Nor, it should be said, did they often seek to join, as the unwelcoming attitudes and stance of the early elite tennis clubs were sufficiently strong and visible to deter outsiders who felt attracted to the game of tennis. One reaction of such excluded outsiders was to reject tennis, sometimes with a degree of hatred, as the badge of pretensions to social superiority; a game for 'toffs', 'nobs', the idle and useless rich, a diversion peculiar to the ruling class and thus anathema to the true worker. The other reaction was to form clubs of their own, sometimes for the love of the game, sometimes to 'ape their betters', that is, to adopt tennis as either imitation of the rich, or as an expression of upwardly mobile social impulses,

Meanwhile, the development of the technological and theoretical aspects of the game, in both Australia and Britain; the growth of the Melbourne metropolis in the 1880s and early 1890s; the initial links of tennis with gentlemen's and cricket clubs; the important role of women who were now able to participate in a sport with men, were all aspects of the game in the late nineteenth century which made tennis not only more competitive and

strenuous but also more popular. The hardening, tightening and streamlining of tennis was encouraged by both the players and organisers of the game in the hope that the sport would command greater public interest, which it began to do. While in theory, this idea of developing a competitive sport may have been the intention of innovations in tennis, a truly competitive approach to the game in the sense pursued in modern sports was hardly welcomed. This point is perhaps best conveyed by the following statement in what was perhaps the best and most accurate review of the then history of lawn tennis in Australasia up until 1912. Although it refers to the capabilities of the 1912 Australasian Davis Cup Team, it indicates clearly the then prevailing 'amateur ethos' of tennis:

I own a modest confidence in their ultimate success and an absolute certainty they will do their best, and take success or defeat as sportsmen who realise that the glory is not in the prize but in the effort.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, despite this kind of gentlemanly presumption, the issue of whether tennis should be an amateur game or a professional sport has been heatedly debated ever since the inception of the rules and competition in lawn tennis began.

Hardly less important for the future of Australian tennis was the birth in Melbourne, on November 14, 1877, of Norman Brookes.<sup>14</sup> He was to become one of the greatest international players of his time and a long-standing and influential administrator who virtually controlled, not only Victorian tennis, but Australian as well. He became the model for the stereotype of the Australian tennis player. He also exerted a great deal of influence on the international scene as well as being, and the combination is indicative of the non-specialist place of the tennis of his day, a first-class player.

The son of William Brookes, an 1852 English immigrant from Northamptonshire, Norman Brookes was the descendant of a particular type of colonist, already discussed, who made a considerable fortune after settling in Australia by building railways and bridges, buying ships, paper mills and sheep stations. Neither father nor son were ever able, or wished to forget or ignore, their English background. It was perhaps because of this, and his

father's newly found wealth, that Norman was given a tennis racket at the age of five. He was often found hitting balls on a wall of the Brookes' huge home, 'Brookwood', near Albert Park, which was the venue for many important matches and practice sessions of the top tennis players especially after. 1908. In 1896 Brookes began his rise to fame by playing his first interstate match for Victoria. Horrie Rice, renowned not only for his Australian national and state titles from the 1890s to the mid-1920s but also for his billowing white knicker-bockers and long black socks, said of Brookes: 'He makes the game extremely restful by playing so many of' his strokes well beyond my reach',<sup>15</sup> which seems, to a modern view, replete with irony and chagrin, but was in fact perfectly serious, revealing the then nature of the game, as much as Brookes' abilities. Rice's remark now appears quaint, but it draws attention to one of the attractive aspects of tennis as a new game, a feature which is easy to overlook nearly a century later. The game then had enormous and exciting potential for internal development; amazing things could be done to extend the frontiers of technique. The game as played by Brookes had the attractions of startling novelty, and of consummate excellence within that.

The popularity of Australian tennis was accidental in that Brookes emerged at just that time when Australian nationalism was needing promotion and heroes in relation to Federation and the upsurge of national consciousness from the nineties. There were few international figures, persons of international stature to whom Australians could attach a sense of national pride. Brookes, in this tiny little-known exclusive sport, emerged at just the right time and, as a Wimbledon champion, right in the heartland of the British establishment, that is, amongst precisely those whom Australians most wanted to impress and prove that they were equals or better. But for Brookes coinciding with Federation, tennis would have been perhaps not nothing, but much less.

The stage had been set for Australia as a nation to obtain independently the laurels of international tennis. The Australian domination of the sport in the pre-World War One Years resulted in tennis becoming an integral part of the Australian national heritage and character in a peculiar way, not unlike deep sea

yachting now, being the exclusive domain of the rich heralded from afar by the bulk of the Australian population.

Thus, the new social environment of Australia, lacking the traditions of entrenched old wealth, and any network of aristocracy or ancient elitist structures, was much more open to egalitarian inclusion and wider social span than the English. This resulted in shaping and influencing tennis in this country in a way that was gradually becoming distinctly Australian.

### III

Hence, the answers to many of the questions concerning Australian tennis revolve around a major question that goes to the heart of many of the unique aspects of the game. Certainly it is *like* many other sports, but it is also *unlike* them. The basic question in this regard is, what is the nature of the game? The answer to that is best expressed - in making the points of contrast vital to understanding the social role and historical development of the game - in negatives; in terms of what it is *not* as well as what it is. It is neither a body contact, nor a team game; it requires relatively small space and is exceptionally adaptable to a wide range of skills and age restraints and similarity among players, It is playable by either sex, or both, and thus of peculiar social attraction, particularly to relatively *small* groups. It is also adaptable to flexible *time* requirements for social or age purposes. It can be as active and taxing or as slow paced and relaxing as the players wish. They can play for an hour or an afternoon - at whatever *pace* they desire.

That being said about tennis, it may be suggested that one of the big unasked questions of tennis and sports history in general is - what is the cost of winning? History is about human beings as individuals as well as in groups. Sports history tends to unbalance or neglect this by concentrating on sport as a social, i.e. group phenomenon, in which team spirit is an essential aspect, or as a record of physical performance or achievement, in which the individual tends to be forgotten, Tennis highlights this problem of balanced historical assessment because it has more

recently been based on the star (indeed mega-star) system and is perhaps better understood as an aspect of pop culture than as a traditional sport. It could be argued that tennis has now approached a position in which the winners are also, in a sense, the losers. That is, so great are the demands made on the individual for excellence to achieve success that his whole life is absorbed or at best distorted by this. The consequence in many cases is a disintegration or destruction of personality as it collapses under the strain. This may be of immediate interest to clinical psychology but it is also of great importance to the humane historian. It could be argued that this is a product not of the sport but of the superstar system. The effects of such a system in fact predates the modern media period, e.g. Suzanne Lenglen and Bill Tilden's personal decline; and by Adrian Quist's own admission, he and John Bromwich were just as temperamental in the thirties and forties as present-day players. Thus, the question arises of how much of a reality was, or is, sportsmanship? Moreover, because the sporting scene demands fitness, the usual superstar escape routes of drugs and alcohol are not available (George Best in football is a good example of that way out which quickly ruined his sporting career in a way pop stars can avoid or postpone). That is, the tennis scene demands total dedication, fitness, plus ambition and drive to a degree which places enormous strain on personality and on resources of human judgement to live some kind of balanced life. Thus, in tennis we see the personality problems of Borg, the difficulties of Connors' and Borg's marriages, the tantrums and uncontrolled rage of McEnroe. Of course, the question of the degree to which society or tennis is to blame for such trends must be considered and analysed closely. Women seem better able to cope: we need look no further than Chris Evert-Lloyd who has remained at the pinnacle of women's tennis for many years and has gained the title of 'the Ice Queen' which indicates her cool temperament on the tennis court. However, even she has had her own personal upheavals. Then there is the question of lesbian players. Of course, how much these issues are symptomatic of the lifestyle of tennis circuit society or the product of the individual is difficult to ascertain.

The cost of winning therefore, in present circumstances may be to court personal destruction. The normal treatment and approach of sport, and sports history, is to avoid this sensitive area. Yesterday's champions are disposable. Hence there is a sense in which sport is anti-historical, focussing as it does on today's results and tomorrow's possibilities. There is nothing less interesting than yesterday's results. Sport is transient to a degree much more than politics because its focus and virtual entire concern is the physical dimension, or so it would seem. In fact it involves much more, but it tends not to be written in that way. Tennis, for instance, was a symbol of a certain section of English and Australian societies. By analysing the sport certain trends, reflections and insights can be gained providing different perspectives on these societies.

Thus the really major question in sports history may well be how to write a history of losers, or of that which was lost. Sports history has a natural tendency to triumphalism, but true history must exclude the totality of human experience in the area: and that is mostly of losing. How does one write a history of losing? So, what is often described as 'history from below' has recently become a popular and accepted method of historical analysis, but has not as yet been attempted in writing a history of tennis, or sport generally.

#### IV

The subject of women's involvement in tennis is a separate and a vital issue which opens up a whole field of inquiry ranging from matters of fashion and morals to why and to what extent women played tennis. The presence of women in the sport is crucial. It supports the contention that tennis is a civilised refined activity: it is a game fit for women. Essentially football and cricket are male preserves. Tennis fitted in with the Victorian period's concept of the woman; weak and dainty, yet social and refined. It fitted a certain view of refined, leisured civilisation: grass courts, summer days, whites, leisure, country houses and pretty women. Tennis was the symbol of an age, an era, a class, an attitude to life; and the female

dimension proved this point. Very little interpretative analysis of the role of women in tennis has been attempted. Perhaps this has been partly determined by social values, but also by the fact that men's tennis has for so long attracted the crowds and publicity. Women's tennis was not as popular to watch nor have there been so many women as men competing in tennis.

V

Tennis has a unique atmosphere and ethos that separates it from other major sports. The crucial points of fundamental difference are first, an absence of body contact. This means a major emphasis on skill and technique as distinct from factors of force. Second, tennis is not a team sport. This means emphasis is placed on the individual; it is a highly personalised game, though it cannot really be played alone. The question that occurs here, particularly also in the light of why a study of sport, particularly tennis has been ignored, is who or what is being written about? It appears that tennis is a graduated game which moves downward from the pinnacle of the top ten in the world to the club or social players at the bottom - a smooth pyramid analogy. Is this really so? No. At the top, the nature of the game, the environment, conditions, level of reward, standard of performance and personal demands and performance patterns are radically different from those experienced and comprehended at the bottom. Such is the enormous range of existing forms which the game takes that covering and organising this historically is extremely difficult. It is not one game, but a hierarchy of games, interacting with each other in a complex and fluctuating way. How does one write a history which can bridge the gulf in understanding between backyard and Wimbledon? The nature of the game changes from casual social pursuit, to various levels of skill and personal rivalry for recreation, to national contest and symbol, to individual pursuit of fame, fortune and excellence. Can the same historical, analytic questions be asked and produce the same answers about these different games? Patently, no.

All this raises the question of who played the game. Here perhaps a survey of those involved in tennis would be appropriate

with emphasis on the importance of family background, connections with royalty, money, politicians, education, and religion in tennis circles. This has not as yet been attempted and again the question is why not? Given that choice of sport is substantially, though not entirely, a voluntary activity, the choice of tennis is an interesting and revealing social comment. Do Australian 'tennis' people reflect or try to emulate a British social group? Indeed, is the lack of true understanding of the meaning of amateurism in the British sense the reason Australian players had such success in the tennis world for so long? The existence of tennis points to the importance in Australia of a group whose sporting expectations and attitudes contrast markedly with the football/cricket, body contact/team, yobbo/beer stereotype which tends to dominate the images of the Australian sporting world. To carry this point further, does the same crowd which watches tennis also watch football or, for that matter, cricket? It also raises the question of sportmanship: how tennis concerns itself with this and the implications it has in relation to traditionalism and later commercialism. And it also brings to light a further question. Why did overseas players attract bigger crowds when the Australians at various periods were the best in the world? Perhaps this suggests a snobbery value, that is, a maintenance of contact with the British amateur ethos and the wider world. And yet, the importance of the Davis Cup as an expression of national pride cannot be ignored.

It is not enough to assume, however, that this is simply an expression of snobbery and middle-class values. It was. But it was more than that. Why did tennis players play tennis? Because they enjoyed it? Why did they enjoy it? Because it corresponded to their requirements for a game: it was clean, without body contact, personalised, dependent not on force or luck, but on skill and technique and attracted not crowds, but small well-behaved groups. But why do tennis crowds differ from other sporting crowds in their reactions and expectations? and does the cost of entry to watch or play tennis determine the type and numbers involved? Tennis was, in a word, civilised. Its appearance was a mark of civilisation - in the British Victorian sense - in Australia. This was, of course, associated with a

monied elite. It can be questioned how often upward social mobility has truly been a reality in tennis or whether it has always been predetermined by position in society from the start, i.e. an impenetrable elite group where their reactionary policies reflect a wish to 'stay British'.

Civilizations wax and wane, grow, decline and fall - and the changes in tennis mirror the changes in civilisation and its declining fortunes. So here one must ask how much bureaucracy has helped or hindered tennis? Why do disruptions occur in tennis administration, what is at stake, and have they increased with the introduction of open tennis? The various conflicts noted in these questions reflect the disharmony between the forces of the old and new orders. The old order saw tennis as a game to be enjoyed, the new as a sport to be exploited. More recently the questions that can be asked of tennis are: who controls whom and who owns what? What is in conflict are two basically different attitudes to a particular human activity. Questions concerning America's rise as a world power and the powerful sports/business attitude to tennis that emanated from such characters as Jack Kramer and Lamar Hunt which had such an affect on Australian tennis must be analysed closely.

For the old brigade, tennis was a pleasant and appropriate outgrowth of a refined civilisation they knew and valued. So they should: they owned it. Thus, can tennis be viewed as a form of control within society or by a particular social group? The new forces have descended on tennis from outside like invading barbarians occupying the refined civilisation of ancient Rome. Like those barbarians, these new ones have immense energy and drive, and no respect whatever for the refinements of civilisation, merely a determined greed to seize its wealth. So do a certain type of people - a different type - now play tennis? For example could it be said that players of working class backgrounds or those from communist countries are forced or have greater motivation to train hard and do better? Could this be the reason that Australia has in recent years failed to produce many top players? Does the winning game now need the German Democratic Republic type of training or do Australians have to establish a distinctly Australian method to suit its national character? Is

it enough to copy others? Obviously not. The Australian Sports Institute in Canberra, however, is attempting to combine both overseas and Australian training methods.

In the past thirty years, therefore, upstarts and outsiders possessed of great power and ability to exploit a source of wealth and determined to use rather than play the game, have flavoured the tennis world. In the old order, tennis was merely an adjunct to wealth, an outgrowth of a particular refined civilised life-style. Arguably, this is why tennis administrators sometimes resent justifiable criticism. Or is it just human nature? Now tennis is a means to wealth, its whole ethos is in radical change. 'The concept of sport loses its objective social basis and becomes the vehicle of ideologies, interest, and tradition'.<sup>16</sup> It remains to be seen whether this is actually so.

So, the unasked questions about tennis are what sort of a game was it, why was it played and have the answers to these two questions changed over time and are they still changing? These questions are fundamental to all the unasked questions raised in relation to Australian tennis.

So to return to the initial point, why have these questions been unasked? Questions about tennis have not been asked because it is, or has been, a refined activity at the centre of an elite's view of the dimensions of their own concept of civilisation. That is, it is part of an immensely complex and subtle world system with unspoken values and assumptions and a rigid insider/outsider dichotomy: it is thus a mysterious and sacred preserve, more to be experienced and enjoyed than understood.

In some ways tennis has been a very *private* game: which is one reason why television, professionalism and all their adjuncts have seemed so scandalous. Recent developments have been an outrageous intrusion into the mystique, Perhaps this helps answer the question as to why tennis has been spiced with hypocrisy and bias throughout its history, especially in relation to the subtleties of amateurism and professionalism.

And this 'private' nature of the game may explain why tennis heroes are in a category different from those of cricket or even golf, neither of which have the same intensity and degree

of personal contact as tennis. Tennis endeavour is too personal, too individual to be taken to others' hearts. We watch tennis but it is too distancing an activity to identify with: the television beer advertisements recognise this with their concentration on football and cricket. It is not only a social distancing from the mob; it is something in the nature of the game which will not sell beer. Also the female preserve changes the nature of the game; so female tennis is good for advertising soap powder or fruit juice.

By raising the unasked questions of Australian tennis, it is hoped that a history of tennis between 1878 and 1939 will demonstrate both the unique nature of the sport and how it reflects and illuminates a sector of Australian society.

#### NOTES:

1. This article is an expanded and edited version of the paper presented at the History of Sporting Traditions IV Conference, held at the Melbourne Cricket Club, on August 18, 1983, in the "Work in Progress" section.
2. Basic histories of Australian tennis have tended to provide little more than match results, narrative and anecdote. An example of this is R.S. Whittington's book *An Illustrated History of Australian Tennis*, (Melbourne, 1975).
3. One example of such a social history in which tennis is mentioned F.K. Crowley, *Modern Australia in Documents 1901-1939*, (Melbourne, 1973), Vol. I, pp. 105-106; p. 237.
4. For a more detailed account of the establishment of lawn tennis in England see G. Clerici, *The Ultimate Tennis Book: 500 Years of the Sport* (Chicago, 1975) and J.G. Smyth, *Lawn Tennis*. (London, 1953).
5. In order to more clearly define the nature and meaning of such words as civilisation, culture and leisure, refer to the alphabetically ordered *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1963) under 'Civilisation' 'Culture' and 'Leisure'. Also see T. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class, and Economic Study of Institutions* (London, 1925).

6. Smyth, *op.cit.*, p. 10.
7. 'Austral' (of 'the Referee'), *Lawn Tennis in Australasia*, (Sydney, 1912) gives a more detailed account of Australian tennis in the early twentieth century.
8. Smyth, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
9. For more information on definitions of culture and leisure classes see J. Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (London, 1952); and T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (London, 1948).
10. G. Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne, 1978).
11. G. Serle, *The Rush to be Rich: a History of the Colony of Victoria, 1883-1889* (Melbourne, 1974).
12. J.W. Colville, *Lawn Tennis: Its Early History in Victoria*. (Handwritten manuscript held at the Melbourne Cricket Club Library.) The date it was written is not known.
13. Austral, *op.cit.*, p. 25.
14. *The Norman Brookes Manuscript Collection*. Held at the Australian National Library, Canberra which includes numerous letters, newspaper articles and cuttings, relating to tennis.
15. Whittington, *op.cit.*, p. 15.
16. B. Rigauer, *Sport and Work* (New York, 1981), p. 101.