

ADVANTAGE AUSTRALIA: DAVIS CUP TENNIS 1950-1959

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Lawn tennis has enjoyed popularity in Australia virtually from the invention of the game. Over the years, Australia has produced its share of world class tennis players. Yet one period stands head and shoulders above all others in the game's Australian history: the decades 1950-1970 when staging the Davis Cup Challenge Round almost became a fixture on the Australian sporting calendar and Australian players dominated the major championships. It goes without saying that Australia was blessed with a crop of extremely fine players during these golden years. Yet, as in other areas of life, success in sport rarely springs from natural talent alone. The organisation of the sport and the playing opportunities available are often as important, if not more so, in determining if individual players and countries succeed in top competition. This article seeks to explain how Australia established a stranglehold over the trophy which, more than any other, symbolised supremacy in men's tennis. Further, it explores the nationalist significance which Australians attached to this success in the light of its post war shift towards America.

II

It is generally acknowledged that the modern game of tennis was first played in Australia in 1878, four years after the Englishman Major Walter Clapton Wingfield had devised the first rules and court specifications for the game. The inaugural Wimbledon championships for men was played in 1877. This idea of a championship was first tried in Australia with the Victorian championship in 1880. Women's championships were introduced at Wimbledon and Victoria in 1884. The first New South Wales championships, men's and women's, were contested in 1885. Thus, as with other new games

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of the Victorian era, the beginnings of lawn tennis coincided with a period of rapid expansion in Australia and the sport was readily accepted into the colonies. At first tennis in Australia was played largely as a social game but in 1905 Australasia (Australia and New Zealand) challenged for the Davis Cup. Antipodean tennis first made its mark in 1907 when Victoria's Norman Brookes became the first non British resident to win the Wimbledon men's singles championship. He then teamed with New Zealander Anthony Wilding to win the Davis Cup.

The Davis Cup had been the brainchild of the American player and tennis administrator, Dwight F. Davis who in 1900 donated a cup, known officially as the International Lawn Tennis Challenge Trophy, for men's international team competition. The rules governing competition remained virtually unchanged for almost seventy years: participation was open only to amateurs; teams would consist of four players plus a non-playing captain who could sit courtside during the match and advise his players; each tie would be decided over five matches (two singles, a doubles, and two reverse singles); and challenging nations would contest an elimination series for the right to challenge the cup holder. The holder had the right to choose the venue for the challenge round, hence it was invariably played on the courts of the holder nation and on a surface of its choice.

Australasia's 1907 triumph was the first time the trophy had been won by a country other than Britain or the United States of America and meant that the world tennis powers had to travel south if they were to regain the Cup. Three challenges from America (there was no challenge in 1910) were repulsed before Great Britain defeated the Australasians 3:2 at Melbourne in 1912. Brookes and Wilding regained the trophy in 1914 at Forest Hills, New York, and retained it in 1919 when competition recommenced after the Great War. The following year two fine American players, Tilden and Johnston, took the Cup 5:0. Australasia's golden age of tennis seemed to have passed. In 1923 Australia and New Zealand decided to enter the competition separately. Australia reached the challenge round on five occasions before World War Two but won only once, when Adrian Quist and John Bromwich defeated the Americans 3:2 in September 1939. So, as was the case 25 years earlier, the

Davis Cup rested in Australia during the war years. When play resumed a powerful team from the U.S.A. led by Jack Kramer crushed Australia 5:0, winning four of the rubbers in straight sets. Australia contested the challenge round in 1947, 1948 and 1949 but was soundly beaten on each occasion by the Americans.

It seemed that Australia was to be ever the best man, never the groom. Only one victory had come from the nine challenge rounds (eight against U.S.A.) it had contested since breaking with New Zealand, The record was somewhat analogous with that in yachting's America's Cup (until *Australia II*, that is!). Both contests employed a similar challenge system, in which Australia was an habitual, if gallant loser to the powerful Americans. This sentiment is aptly expressed in the programme notes for the 1939 zone final, Australia versus the Philippines, played at Long Beach, California:

The saga of Australia in quest of the Davis Cup is one of the greatest records of persistence and sportsmanship in the history of the famous trophy. For twenty years they have sent teams half way around the world, manned by great players who have earned the respect and friendship of all tennisdom. Year after year they have been turned back by the inspired play of their opponents, by illness and even sheer bad luck, but always they leave with a hearty handshake and a parting, "We'll be back after you next year?"¹

All this changed in August 1950 when Frank Sedgman and Ken McGregor defeated the Americans 4:1 at Forest Hills. In the following decade Australia won the Cup eight times, all these victories being against the U.S.A. The Americans twice broke the sequence (1954 and 1958) but on both occasions the Australians regained the trophy at the first attempt. Australia produced a seemingly endless stream of champions: Frank Sedgman, Ken McGregor, Rex Hartwig, Lew Hoad, Ken Rosewall, Mervyn Rose, Ashley Cooper, Mal Anderson, Neale Fraser, Rod Laver and Roy Emerson. These players won more than half of the decade's grand slam championships (the Wimbledon, French, Australian and U.S.A. titles).² No nation had so dominated men's tennis at any time in the game's history.

Not surprisingly, the success generated great enthusiasm amongst Australians for tennis. When the trophy was brought back in October 1950 thousands flocked to see it and exhibition matches

between the Cup heroes.³ Tennis players and their families became public celebrities. The mantle did not always sit easily. When, for example, Sedgman played so large a part in winning the Cup at Forest Hills, the local press turned to his family for the seemingly obligatory human interest story. His somewhat bewildered father, a carpenter, said from their house in the Melbourne suburb of Coburg: "You'd think we had had a Royal baby, or quads, or something. All this talking about Frank makes us feel like kings. Really we're a humble family, so it's a bit over-aweing".⁴ Three thousand curious onlookers gathered outside the church when Frank married a former Australian girls' junior champion and a public subscription fund raised £5,474 for the newly weds; 5,000 jostled for a view outside the church where Ashley Cooper married a former Miss Australia in what the press described as "Brisbane's biggest, most boisterous, and sometimes brawling wedding in memory".

The reasons for this adulation seem twofold. Firstly, tennis as an individual's game is more likely to generate a 'star' system than team sports such as cricket or football. Secondly, the Davis Cup represented the pinnacle of team tennis and thus of international tennis supremacy. Davis Cup success probably counted far more with Australians than any individual's victory at Wimbledon. Also, victory in the Davis Cup meant the next challenge round would be played in Australia; success at Wimbledon would not bring that great event any nearer Australia.

Year after year the challenge round aroused intense public interest. The venue was rotated between the four major capital cities, with one of the others hosting the inter-zone final as consolation. Huge temporary stands were erected to accommodate the largest crowds ever to watch tennis. The world record tennis crowd is still the 25,578 spectators who watched play at White City, Sydney, on 27 December 1954. Even these facilities could not meet the demand and ninety thousands pounds had to be returned to disappointed mail applicants.⁶ This story was repeated at every challenge round. The unlucky applicants and millions of others followed the preparations of the teams and the tie itself through the enormous press, radio, newsreel, and later television coverage. Tennis fever seemed to grip the nation during those three days after Christmas when the challenge round was staged. In 1951, for

example, with the tie deadlocked at 2:2 and Sedgman playing Vic Seixas in the deciding singles "wherever a car parked [in Sydney] with its radio turned on, a crowd gathered. Drivers could get away only by switching off their sets and apologising to the encircling listeners before starting their engines".⁷ Tennis news filled the newspapers, often occupying most of the front page as well as the sports and social pages. When challenge rounds coincided with cricket test matches generally the tennis took pride of place. Admittedly, Christmas is notorious in the newspaper industry as a slow news period and sport was clearly used to fill the pages but, nevertheless, tennis did seem to generate passionate involvement. Very full coverage was also given to the challenge rounds played in America.

This popularity peaked in the 1953 challenge round played at Kooyong, Melbourne; arguably the greatest Davis Cup contest of all time. Australia had easily retained the Cup in 1952 but her two top players, Sedgman and McGregor, then joined Jack Kramer's professional troupe. The burden of defending the trophy fell on Australia's 'tennis twins': Lew Hoad and Ken Rosewall. Both had just turned nineteen and it seemed unlikely that they could defeat the more experienced Americans led by Tony Trabert (1953 United States singles champion). The 'twins' had toured extensively in 1952 and 1953 with Harry Hopman, winning the 1953 Wimbledon doubles title, but neither had played in the Davis Cup. For once the contest lived up to the pre-series ballyhoo.

Hoad won the opening singles comfortably, then a nervous Rosewall was defeated by Trabert in straight sets. The Australian selectors panicked and dropped Rosewall from the doubles. The untried Hoad-Hartwig combination lost and Australia went into the reverse singles 1:2 down. Only twice in the Cup's history had the trophy been won from this position. Public interest was intense. Progress scores from the tennis were posted on the scoreboard during the Sheffield Shield cricket match at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. This, and the many radios tuned to Kooyong made following the cricket almost impossible, or so claimed the *Herald's* cricket writer.⁸

On day three Hoad defeated Trabert in five hard fought sets. The match was played in near continuous drizzle, so the deciding

rubber was postponed to the next day. That morning, large crowds gathered outside the players' hotel hoping to catch a glimpse of Rosewall and his opponent, Vic Seixas, as they set out for Kooyong. Thirty year old Seixas was a vastly experienced player and the current Wimbledon champion. The tension and enthusiasm was felt across the nation. In Sydney police were called out to control crowds flowing on to the roads outside shops and hotels with radios. Perth and Adelaide reported that the only sporting event to create such scenes previously was the Melbourne Cup. In Melbourne itself, work stopped in many offices "as radios drew clerks, typists - and executives?"⁹ When Rosewall hit the winning shot the Kooyong crowd erupted, throwing thousands of seat cushions into the air in a most un-Australian display of emotion. The front page of next morning's Melbourne *Argus* carried a half page colour photo of the wonder boy with the headline "Giant killer Ken" and the tennis drew editorial comment in the *Argus* for five consecutive days during and after the tie.

III

The most common explanation offered for Australia's incredible success in the 1950s is that the climate and great abundance of courts gave the Australians a natural advantage over other countries which was further enhanced by the comparatively light losses she had suffered in World War Two. There is certainly some truth in both claims but they scarcely seem to suffice. Australia was not the only nation to emerge relatively unscathed from the war, indeed the U.S.A. received fewer casualties proportionate to its total force than did Australia, Similarly, other countries also enjoy warm climates. It was true that tennis in Australia enjoyed a popularity probably unmatched in any other country. A 1948 Gallup Poll showed that tennis in Australia was by far the most often played of all outdoor sports.¹⁰ Studies in the early 1950s of the recreational activities of Sydney adolescents (aged 13-18) found that tennis and swimming were by far the most popular activities for both sexes. Convivial mixed play on courts at school or at the local church was encouraged. Tennis was popular with boys and girls (although more girls than boys played) of all ages and from all types of schools. Moreover, when asked what they most liked to discuss, the majority of both boys and girls put

sporting topics on or near the top of their list.¹¹ As there are no similar studies for the pre war years it is impossible to assess how long this pattern had prevailed.

Australia had the highest ratio of courts to population in the world in the 1950s¹² but this had also been the case before the war when only three Australians had won Wimbledon and Australia had enjoyed only sporadic success in the Davis Cup. Certainly living standards were improving and leisure time increasing. Further, the advent of regular international air travel in the 1940s greatly expanded the opportunities available for Australian sportsmen and women to compete in world class competition. But these changes, significant though they were, scarcely seem sufficient to explain the incredible turnaround in Australia's tennis fortunes. One also needs to consider the rules and conditions governing Davis Cup and international tennis generally, in particular the use of grass courts and the enforcement of the amateur code. The structure of top tennis worked unwittingly to Australia's advantage while, at the same time, the Australians consciously strove to maximise any advantage that might be gained through a liberal interpretation of the rules and conventions of the sport.

As already mentioned, the Davis Cup rules gave the host nation the right to choose whether the court surface would be grass, or some natural or artificial fine gritty material (it was forbidden to play ties on wood, stone, concrete, asphalt, cement or similar, or indoors). Grass generally provided a much faster, lower bounce than grit or clay courts. In the 1940s the U.S.A. produced a string of powerful players all with the fast service so effective on grass. "I win fast, or I lose fast", Kramer once remarked jokingly.¹³ Sedgman, McGregor and other Australians soon emulated this American serve and volley strategy (often termed 'the big game'). Thus, when it came to hosting the Davis Cup, both countries opted for grass in the belief that it was the surface best suited to their team. Aside from England, U.S.A. and Australia, practically all other countries played on clay courts and their players based their game around the slower, spin game. So long as Australia or the U.S.A. retained the Davis Cup and hence dictated that grass be the surface for the inter-zone final and the challenge round, it was unlikely that their dominance would be

broken. This point was appreciated only too fully by players from other countries but there was little they could do about it as few tennis associations had either the desire or the money to instal and maintain the luxury of grass courts. Yet so long as they adhered to clay it seemed Australia and the U.S.A. would in all probability continue to dominate the competition. As one exasperated Italian player said after being humiliated on court by an American:

Australia and America don't care who wins the Davis Cup, just so long as it is one of them. They're getting all the money between them and don't care about us. Ninety-nine per cent of top tennis is played on hardcourts and its absurd to play for the Davis Cup on grass. It's big business for them..Until somebody busts the Australian-American monopoly and the Cup is played on hardcourts, we have no hope.¹⁴

This comment goes to the heart of the matter. Australian tennis in the 1950s was tied to financial considerations in a way that made the Davis Cup both the deliverer and the devil of the sport in Australia. In one respect it was money that despatched the Cup to Australia in 1950: ironically, American money. Had the United States Lawn Tennis Association's (USLTA) rules on amateurism been less strict, America's two leading players of the immediate post war years, Jack Kramer and Pancho Gonzales, might not have turned professional and thereby given the Australians the chance to take the trophy. Kramer had not dropped a set in any of the four singles rubbers he had played in 1946-7. His dominance was so complete in 1947 that Australia's Dinny Pails was left feeling "He was definitely better than I, and this was the only occasion on which I have ever felt uncomfortable on a court".¹⁵ Kramer turned professional shortly after but his place was soon taken by Pancho Gonzales, "big and brawny...with an explosive service and severity everywhere".¹⁶ In his only Davis Cup appearance (1949), Gonzales beat the Australians Sedgman and Sidwell, in straight sets. He then turned professional at the then almost unprecedented age of twenty-one and, if one can judge from his domination of the professional circuit over the next fifteen or so years, he would clearly have been a major stumbling block for the Australians had he remained an amateur.

Once the Cup had come south, the very success of the Australians continually threatened to undermine the country's place at the top of amateur tennis as leading Australian players were the target of stupendous offers from Jack Kramer to join his professional tour. Eight of Australia's top players turned professional during the decade and thus were lost to Davis Cup play.¹⁷ This should have torn the heart out of the Australian team but, illogical though it seems, the Davis Cup (and more particularly the challenge rounds) greatly blunted the impact of these defections. Again, the explanation centres around money.

Australian tennis reaped huge profits from the challenge rounds staged locally. Not only did the matches draw world record crowds, admission prices were generally set higher than in America.¹⁸ The net profit from gate takings, the sale of advertising, broadcasting rights and the like were divided equally between the two competing nations. Not reaching the challenge round spelt financial disaster for the governing body of Australian tennis, the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia (LTAA). Even an unsuccessful appearance in the final generally brought some profit. The balance sheets for Australian Davis Cup squad tours overseas between 1947 and 1950 are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Profits from Overseas Davis Cup Tours

Year	Net profit for entire tour £	Share of profit derived from challenge round £
1947	-448	6,630
1948	688	4,153
1949	4,363	6,745
1950	2,795	7,064

Source: *LTAA Annual Reports*

Clearly, if any of these squads had failed to reach the challenge round the LTAA would have had to draw heavily on its financial reserves to defray the loss. Repeated failures in early rounds would almost certainly have forced the LTAA to cut back on such tours. On the other hand, staging the challenge round constituted a financial bonanza. Australia's share of the gate receipts from the 1946 Kooyong final was £7,745. Table 2 shows that

these profits improved dramatically in the 1950s.

Table 2: profits from Davis Cup Finals in Australia

1951 (Sydney)	£ 23,510	1956 (Adelaide)	£ 20,279
1952 (Adelaide)	22,263	1957 (Melbourne)	30,310
1953 (Melbourne)	26,777	1958 (Brisbane)	30,037
1954 (Sydney)	32,594		

Source: *LTAA Annual Reports*

These monies were distributed through the State associations to improve facilities and pay the expenses both of top and promising players. The host club was paid a handsome rental fee. Thus, success in the Cup flowed through the entire sport in Australia.¹⁹ The 1949 New South Wales Championship had made a profit of £976. In 1950, after Australia had won the Cup, this profit leapt to £2,022, the treasurer attributing the rise to the "growing attraction of tennis as spectator sport in Sydney?"²⁰

Perhaps most importantly of all, the healthy profits from the challenge rounds allowed the LTAA to send more of the nation's promising young players overseas. In 1935 the International Lawn Tennis Federation (ILTF) introduced a rule limiting a player to receiving travelling and other expenses for a maximum of eight weeks in any year unless he was travelling as a member of an official national team? The LTAA circumvented this rule by sending away an official team each year to prepare and play for the Davis Cup. Some of these tours lost upward of £4,000 when Australia was eliminated in an early round.²² Traditionally a four man team was chosen for the tour. From 1950 onward, the new wealth within the LTAA allowed it to select a six man touring team. Moreover, most of the overseas players coming to Australia to play in the inter-zone and challenge rounds also competed in the various State championships and thus helped improve local standards of play.

A new deal had thus emerged for promising Australian boys as young players were groomed to fill gaps as they occurred at the senior level. This system relied, however, on continued success in the Davis Cup. Hence, when the jaded Hoad and Rosewall lost the 1954 challenge round, it hardly came as a surprise to hear the President of the LTAA tell critics of the Australian tennis 'machine': "But we just can't find time to give the boys a rest...

Tennis is really big business now".²³ The LTAA was so aware of the importance of revenue to Australia's tennis development that in 1953 it contemplated arranging a regular series of matches against the U.S.A. aside from the Davis Cup "in a bid to prevent a serious drop in revenue should Australia lose the Cup this year",²⁴ This proved unnecessary as Australia continued to dominate the competition until the late 1960s and the advent of open tennis.

The explanation offered so far accounts for why Australia and the United States held an advantage over the rest of the tennis world. To understand how the Australians gained their supremacy over the Americans, we must investigate the relative social status of tennis and tennis players in the two countries, and the rules on amateurism.

Tennis in the U.S.A. was traditionally a sport of the wealthy. This surprised young Lew Hoad when he first visited America in 1952. He later wrote of it: "Tennis in America is a socially conscious game, played mainly by the sons of wealthy parents".²⁵ It was generally not felt appropriate to devote one's undivided attention to the game. American tennis was largely the province of the true amateur amongst both its players and administrators. Jack Kramer reflects in his autobiography that "so long as tennis remained the only amateur game in a sea of professional sport, it was only natural that natural athletes sought sports other than tennis".²⁶ Neither Kramer nor Gonzales had wealthy parents. Both came from steady, lower middle class backgrounds,²⁷ and their comparatively humble origins might explain why both turned their backs on the amateur game when still quite young.

The USLTA was the most conservative of the world tennis powers, blocking all attempts to bring the game's amateur code more in line with tennis reality and the conventions of other popular sports. Its hardline attitude dated from 1919 when ten of the leading thirty American amateur players were employed by sporting goods manufacturers who gave them ample opportunities to play the tournament circuit. In that year the USLTA introduced a rule forbidding any man who worked for a sporting goods firm from competing in tennis tournaments unless he was at least thirty-five years old and had worked with the company for at least ten years. An historian of tennis in the U.S.A. asserts that "the USLTA was the

only country that prevented its tennis players from having this type of employment".²⁸ It closed another loophole in 1925 by decreeing that any player who received payment for writing on tennis in the press would be banned from competition. This regulation was introduced specifically to shackle America's leading player, Bill Tilden, who was then receiving about US\$ 25,000 each year to write for the press.²⁹ Tilden turned professional in 1931. So did the next great American player, Don Budge, the first player ever to win the four major singles titles in one calendar year,

Faced with Budge's defection in 1938, the ILTF next year discussed introducing some form of play open to amateurs and professionals alike. The British, Australian and French associations were sympathetic to the idea but it floundered on the total opposition of the USLTA.³⁰ The intransigent attitude of the American administrators was demonstrated yet again in 1941 when they legislated to control the flow of free equipment from sporting goods manufacturers to top players, some of whom were receiving over forty free racquets each year. New USLTA regulations restricted any player to receiving four free racquets a year (raised to six in 1946) and he would have to pay for strings and stringing.³¹

Only after the Americans had received repeated drubbings from Australia did the USLTA ease these conditions. In 1953 it abolished the eight weeks rule; the United States having been the last country to retain this restriction.³² The next year it finally permitted amateur players to work for sporting goods firms, but still with the restriction that such employees must be at least twenty-one years old to be eligible to compete in sanctioned tournaments. In 1955 the rules were again eased so that a student or teacher of physical education who coached professionally, or a professional from another sport did not automatically lose his amateur status in tennis.³³ These changes came too late, however, to overcome Australia's supremacy, at least in the short term.

The game in Australia was less hidebound by class than in the U.S.A. The ready access to courts meant that tennis was freely available in both the cities and country areas and promising players emerged from widely varying social backgrounds. Sedgman's father was a carpenter, McGregor's a furniture removalist and champion Australian Rules footballer, Rosewall's a grocer, Hoad's

a tramway's employee, Hartwig's a farmer, Laver's a farm manager and Fraser's a Licensing Court judge and Labor State parliamentarian. The children of the depression years such as Frank Sedgman grew up hungry for success and with a keen money sense which ranked with the Americans. When one leading American professional was asked to cite his single biggest thrill in tennis, he replied: "The night Frank Sedgman bought dinner". Jack Kramer found the Australians had "short arms and deep pockets".³⁴ Australian tennis officials saw nothing improper in paying handsome expenses to recompense so-called amateurs for the time they devoted to the sport. This difference in attitude between the two countries is a reflection of their rather different sporting traditions. Horse racing aside, fulltime professionalism in sport was rare in Australia before 1950. Even in the highly popular sports of cricket and football top players were no more than semi-professional, receiving some money for playing but still retaining fulltime jobs outside the sport (although sometimes the employment was organised through the sporting club or association). The distinction between amateur and professional was much clearer in the U.S.A. where fully professional leagues had operated in sports such as football, baseball, and ice hockey for many years.

When Frank Sedgman received tempting offers to turn professional after his brilliant performance in the 1951 challenge round, an Australian businessman stated quite openly in the press his readiness "to sit down with others interested to work out a plan whereby Sedgman would be partly compensated for his financial sacrifice".³⁵ After he and Ken McGregor finally did join Kramer's professional tour, the President of the LTAA publicly disclosed that he had offered them jobs with an insurance company which would carry salaries rising to £5,000 and the chance to purchase "a string of service stations" at a very low interest rate if they remained amateurs.³⁶ A similar scheme was devised for Neale Fraser in 1959 which the press pronounced would make him one of the biggest money earners ever in the amateur ranks.³⁷

'Shamateurism' was taken a stage further by the Australian sporting goods manufacturers, Slazengers, Dunlop, Spalding, and Alexanders, which since the mid 1930s had provided jobs for the country's best young tennis players. Lew Hoad, for example, joined

Dunlop as a racquet stringer and messenger boy when aged fourteen. The company gave him free tennis equipment, two afternoons off each week to practice with Adrian Quist (A Dunlop director and former Davis Cup player) and the opportunity to play regular exhibition games with top local and overseas players.³⁸ Rosewall joined Slazengers at a similar age. In 1958 it was claimed that one Australian company was paying out £80,000 annually to amateur players.³⁹ Rod Laver freely admits that "from the age of fifteen [when he began working at Dunlop] I was a tennis pro. I didn't sign a contract until much later but obviously I was a pro".⁴⁰ The link between the companies and amateur tennis became so close that in 1958, after Kramer had stripped Australia of its best amateur players, the NSWLTA met with the sporting goods manufacturers in an effort to stem the flow of defections.⁴¹

These employment schemes, together with the dream of turning professional, made tennis appear a very attractive sporting proposition to Australian youngsters. In cricket, by comparison, there was virtually no employment of players by the sporting goods companies. The likely implications of this were fully appreciated by Jack Fingleton, a former Australian test cricketer and leading cricket writer:

Tennis, in post-war years, has cut the ground from beneath cricket in Australia, and that mainly because of its vigorous organisation. It is fostered in every nook and corner in Australia and is so geared that lads, while still in their teens, can rise to the very top...The money lure is one of the chief reasons why tennis has pushed cricket from public favour in Australia...I do know many parents realise the advantages of a well-paid career and encourage their gifted sons to play tennis.⁴²

The Australian interpretation of amateurism undoubtedly put its tennis at a considerable advantage over the Americans. Young Americans from well-off families were expected to complete a college education, hence their tennis could remain little more than recreation. All eleven Americans who played in Davis Cup ties against Australia in the 1950s either already held or were completing college degrees. The colloquialism 'a tennis bum' was a common American term of disparagement. The situation was very different in Australia where, in Rod Laver's words:

a career as an amateur player was perfectly acceptable. In fact it was choice, with all the travel, glory and privileges involved. Nobody asked when are you going to get a job, because we all had connections with sporting goods firms and because playing tennis was considered a very nice job. In America, with wider economic opportunities, a tennis player was expected to get educated and really go to work.⁴³

The more liberal Australian approach also extended to the Davis Cup captaincy. Harry Hopman, himself a former Davis Cup representative, was non-playing captain to all Australian Davis Cup squads in the 1950s and into the 1960s and he found the time to lead most of the lengthy overseas tours. It seems that Hopman was able to do this only because of the generous expenses he received from the LTAA and the income he derived as tennis writer for the Melbourne *Herald*. Captaincy of the United States Davis Cup team was a purely honorary position with selection often determined more by the applicant's financial security than a deep knowledge of tennis. Once the Cup was entrenched in Australian hands, it was rare for the U.S. captain to hold the position for more than two years as few suitably qualified people could repeatedly afford to take the necessary time off from their work. Hopman's great experience, or what Sir Robert Menzies once termed his "diabolical cunning", thus became yet another factor working to Australia's advantage. Observers claim his vigorous training schedules and heavy emphasis on physical fitness carried the Australians through many tight matches. His value courtside during a match is questioned, however, by some players who say his only advice was "hit for the lines".

The American sociologist, Reuel Denney, has suggested that the Australian attitude to amateurism in sport in this period is a classic illustration of sport reflecting the political ideals of the nation. Australians, he contends, saw no conflict in the 'shamateur' just as the country's egalitarian traditions deemed it right and proper for society to assist the individual.⁴⁴ This suggestion, however, is not borne out by the considerable criticism of shamateurism regularly expressed in both the editorials and letters to the editor columns of Australian newspapers. The Australian interpretation of amateurism did not enjoy anything approaching universal approval among Australians. One suspects it was more a

matter of the Australian tennis administrators' hunger for success blinding them to any apparent inconsistencies in their policies.

IV

The popularity of the Davis Cup with Australians was sustained throughout the decade with every challenge round a ticket office sell-out. At times, thousands of people went along just to watch the squads practice. Sports enthusiasts revelled in having the opportunity to watch tight competition between the world's best players, especially when the Australians generally emerged victorious. But success was in no way a guarantee for popularity. The Australian cricket team also enjoyed great success in the tests of the late 1940s and early 1950s yet test match attendances dwindled? Most cricket writers attributed the fall in crowds to Bradman's retirement and the almost monotonous sequence of Australian test victories since 1934. By comparison, the comparative infrequency of earlier Australian successes in tennis made the victories of the 1950s that much sweeter.

Davis Cup triumphs were savoured not merely for their own sake, however. The matches were played in a strongly nationalistic climate with national flags, uniforms, anthems and civic receptions. The event was presented as a celebration of nationalism. It was traditional, for example, for the scoreboard to display the name of the country, not its player. The Australian Prime Minister, R.G. Menzies, applauded this nationalistic tone in his note to the programme at the 1957 challenge round:

when the day comes and the first set begins and the Australian player has 3-1 against him, we find ourselves suddenly no longer abstract philosophers but Australians, not wanting to see our country beaten. International contests are like that. Individuals play in them, and play with superb skill, but the overall contestant is the nation.⁴⁶

Success in the Davis Cup was taken by many Australians as representative of much more than a mere sporting achievement. The victories seemed to symbolise Australia's recent shift away from Britain and outward to the world in general, and the United States in particular. This change in outlook was reflected in the note

from the South Australian Governor printed in the programme for the 1956 challenge round played in Adelaide:

When a test cricket match between England and Australia is being played, all over the British Commonwealth men are heard to say, "How goes the test match?" In just the same way, when the Challenge Round of the Davis Cup is being played, not only in the British Commonwealth but all over the world, the question is asked, "How goes the Davis Cup?" Such is the universality of the great game of lawn tennis.⁴⁷

Each year, the official souvenir programme drew attention to the large number of nations, generally about thirty, which had entered the competition that year. Only the Olympic Games and soccer's World Cup attracted more entrant states but each of these was held every four years not annually like the Davis Cup. Before

Second World War, Australians had aspired, in the main, for recognition within the British Empire. Australia emerged from the war less reliant on Britain and keen to be seen as a nation capable of holding a place on the world stage. Davis Cup tennis, the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, and other international sporting successes did much to satisfy this desire.

Distinct similarities can be observed in the way Australians greeted the 1950s Davis Cup success and the 1983 America's Cup victory. In both instances, appraisals of the victory invariably set the achievement in terms for wider than mere sporting prowess. In *Australia II's* case, the boat, its owner, crew, and financial backers have collectively been represented as the manifestation of 'the Australian spirit', a supposed yardstick by which the rest of the world can measure just what Australians can achieve when they set their minds to a task. Politicians and media commentators feted *Australia II* as a symbol of what we (not just its crew) can achieve. They urged Australians to adopt the yacht as a source of inspiration for us all.

Now that the America's Cup is in Australia, we are urged to nurture this spirit by doing our bit to help retain it. So, the backers of one commercial venture linked to the 1987 defence inform us in their promotional brochure: "No matter how tough the going there are some Australians who will never back down on a challenge. It is their courage in the face of seemingly insurmount-

able odds that has fostered a new mood of pride - a new will to win - in this great country".⁴⁸ In ways such as this, sporting events and sports achievements are used totally out of context as a supposed gauge of national virtue; a test in which our purported ingenuity and character allegedly have triumphed over the technological might and somewhat unsporting antics of the U.S.A.

Whether or not the Australian government in the 1950s (or today) had indeed become more independent in its policies or actions was another matter entirely. The Second World War might have loosened the bonds with Britain but this imperial partner, some would say master, had been supplanted by another, the United States of America. The new alliance, forged in the war, was reinforced through joint involvement in the Korean War and massive American capital investment in Australia's post-war industrial expansion.

Most Australians seem to have welcomed this new alliance and gladly accepted the 'coca-cola culture' that accompanied it. Thus, in a public opinion poll of thirteen cities around the world in 1958, U.S. policy in the Middle East won the highest approval rating (69 per cent) in Melbourne, higher even than New York (59 per cent). A Gallup Poll in the same year found that only 29 per cent of Australians thought that "the United States is influencing our Australian way of life too much".⁴⁹ Friendly contests such as the Davis Cup (and now the America's Cup) are seen as perfect vehicles to familiarise the two nations with the geography, people and political values of the other. "It is fitting that friendly and dramatic rivalry in a great sport should be one of many reasons why the two nations - wartime and present allies - are interested in each other" declared the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on 29 December 1954. Much the same sentiments were expressed the previous year by the U.S. team manager at the presentation of the trophy when he stated that he hoped Australia and America would continue to march side by side in sportsmanship, in peace, and in friendship.⁵⁰

Many historians of sport have contended that local and international sport frequently serves as a culturally unifying institution. In his article 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', Bill Mandle mentions an Australian journal which claimed in 1894 that "to go home and thrash the Englishman

[is] the summit of the schoolboy's ambition".⁵¹ The equivalent dream after World War Two was to thrash Uncle Sam. This wish is expressly stated by Rod Laver, a Rockhampton lad born in 1938 who became one of the world's best tennis players of all time. Laver recalls: "in the post war years there was a great national pride in tennis and the fact that our small country - in terms of population - could defy the world and smash the mighty U.S., our idol". Laver broke into the Australian Davis Cup team in 1959, the last of the sixteen year sequence of challenge rounds against America. The next three challenges were from Italy (twice) and Mexico. Says Laver: "It was a letdown that the Americans never made it".⁵²

Laver's disappointment reflected the special bond developing between Australia and America. Sport played an important role in shaping this relationship as it was one area in which Australia could match the world and defeat even mighty America. Australia's success in the Davis Cup and other sporting contests fostered a view that her position in the alliance with America need not always be one of subservience. Australia's sporting triumphs over America, especially the Davis Cup, promoted the idea that America was a friendly rival, not a hegemonic master. By this means the victories helped shape and sustain social structures and relationships in the wider Australian society.⁵³ As a consequence, the Davis Cup competition helped secure the very hegemony its victories seemed to challenge.

NOTES:

1. *Official Programme, Australia versus the Philippines*, Long Beach, U.S.A., 14-16 July 1939.
2. Sedgman won the Australian championship 1949, 1950, American 1951-2, Wimbledon 1952; McGregor won the Australian 1952; Hoad won the Australian and French 1956 and Wimbledon in 1956 and 1957; Rosewall won the Australian 1953, 1956, French 1953, American 1956; Rose won the Australian 1954, French 1958; Cooper won the Australian 1957-8, Wimbledon and American 1958; Anderson won the American 1957, and Fraser won the American 1959.

3. *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 9 Oct. 1950, p.4.
4. *Argus*, 28 Aug. 1950, p.1.
5. Newsreel: 1952 - Year to Remember; *SMH*, 3 Jan. 1959, p.1, 5 July 1952, p.1.
6. *LTAA Annual Report, 1954-5*, p.2.
7. D. Pails, *Set Points: My Tennis Story* (Sydney 1952), p.25.
8. *Herald*, 30 Dec. 1953, p.4.
9. *Ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1953, p.3.
10. C. McGregor, *Profile of Australia* (London 1966), p.135.
11. W.F. Connell, E.P. Francis, E.E. Skilbeck, *Growing Up in an Australian City: A Study of Adolescents in Sydney* (Melbourne 1957) pp.126-9, 131-3. The game's appeal was not limited, it would seem, to Anglo-Saxon Australians. A colleague at Monash University informs me that migrant children in his suburb of Footscray often played tennis as a protest against the cultural domination of cricket and Australian Rules football.
12. *Souvenir Programme, 1957 Challenge Round*, p.47.
13. P. Metzler, *Tennis Styles and Stylists* (Sydney 1969), p.120.
14. *Sun Herald* (Sydney) 9 Aug. 1959, p.2.
15. Pails, *op.cit.*, p.23.
16. *Official Souvenir Programme, 1952 Challenge Round*, p.19.
17. Sedgman, McGregor, Rosewall, Hartwig, Hoad, Rose, Cooper and Anderson. The top money earners were: Sedgman (approx. US\$ 150,000); Rosewall (US\$ 110,000); Hoad (US\$ 125,000 plus win bonuses). J. Kramer, *The Game: My Forty Years in Tennis* (New York 1979) pp.219, 227, 229.
18. Tickets were sold only as a three day series ticket. Most tickets were priced between 1951-2 £6.14s.3d. and £10.11s.9d. 1953-8 £5.11s.0d. and £8.6s.6d. The reduction in prices followed a drop in the Federal Entertainment Tax.
Source: *LTAA Annual Reports*.

19. Australia's share of the profits from the Davis Cup 1951-6 amounted to almost £130,000. Of this, the LTAA paid out £13,217 towards expenses of players at State championships; £7,400 for coaching juniors; \$£5,900 in grants to the State associations; £15,724 in loans to the States to improve stadium facilities; £67,622 distributed to the State associations as profits; £30,000 retained by LTAA. Source: *Official Souvenir Programme, Challenge Round 1957*, p.37.
20. *SMH*, 25 April 1951, p.7.
21. J. Davenport, 'The history and interpretation of amateurism in the USLTA', (Ph.D. thesis, Ohio State University, 1966), p.84.
22. *Official Souvenir Programme 1957*, *op.cit.*, p.37.
23. *Argus*, 29 Dec. 1954, p.1.
24. *SMH*, 29 July 1953, p.10.
25. L. Hoad, *My Game* (London 1958), p.72.
26. *Kramer*, *op.cit.*, p.244.
27. *Ibid.*, pp.201-2.
28. Davenport, *op.cit.*, pp.72-3.
29. *Ibid.*, p.78.
30. Dame M. Brookes, *Crowded Galleries* (Melbourne 1956), p. 104.
31. Davenport, *op.cit.*, p.74.
32. *Ibid.*, p.84.
33. *Ibid.*, p.92.
34. *Kramer*, *op.cit.*, p.216.
35. *SMH*, 1 Jan. 1952, p.7.
36. *Ibid.*, 5 Jan. 1953, p.1.
37. *Ibid.*, 1 Dec. 1959, p.26.
38. Hoad, *op.cit.*, pp.41-2.
39. *Sun Herald*, 9 Aug. 1958, p.11.
40. R. Laver, *The Education of a Tennis Player* (New York 1971), pp. 106-7.

41. *SMH* 4 Sept. 1958, p.13.
42. J. Fingleton, *Masters of Cricket: From Trumper to May* (London 1959), pp.212-3, 217.
43. Laver, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-8.
44. R. Denney, 'The Astonished Muse' in J.W. Loy and G.S. Kenyon (eds.), *Sport, Culture and Society: A Reader on the Sociology of Sport* (New York 1969), pp.340-1.
45. Aggregate attendances:

1928-9 v.	England	863,608
1932-3 v.	England	761,107
1936-7 v.	England	933,513
1946-7 v.	England	846,263
1950-1 v.	England	611,772
1951-2 v.	West Indies	415,050
1952-3 v.	Sth. Africa	388,039
1954-5 v.	England	703,397
46. *Official Souvenir Programme*, 1957 Challenge Round, p.32.
47. *Official Souvenir Programme*, 1956 Challenge Round.
48. Promotional leaflet inviting membership of a proposed Blue Water Defence Yacht Club.
49. R. White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney 1981), p.162 and 'The Australian Way of Life', *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 73, October 1979, p.540.
50. Jan. 1954, p.1.
51. *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 59(4), Dec. 1973, p.242.
52. Laver, *op.cit.*, pp.72, 109.
53. The idea that sport can shape and sustain social structures, as well as merely reflect them, is explored at length by Brian Stoddart in 'Sport and Society 1890-1940: a Foray', C.T. Stannage (ed.), *A New History of Western Australia* (Nedlands 1981).