

BARRACKERS' CORNER

This section considers barracking in both the Australian supportive and the English critical senses. We invite comments on articles or reviews in *Sporting Traditions*, but this corner is also open for readers' views on issues in sports history or contemporary sport.

In response to some issues raised by our recent survey let me say that the current policy of the editorial board is that, although articles of general international interest are considered for publication, our emphasis is on Australasian sport. All full-length articles are sent to referees for comment, but this should not deter non-academics from submitting manuscripts as these are chosen from all categories of membership. We have decided to have a broader and longer review section than in the other sports history journals because we see a major function of *Sporting Traditions* as being to let members know what is being published in the field.

Several respondents suggested particular topics for coverage. These included minority sports and methodology. We would be very willing to get away from the weighting towards football and cricket, but basically we are constrained by the material which we receive. A similar point applies to the demand for more illustrated material. If you want something different then please dust off your typewriters.

On the matter of quantity versus quality the majority preference was for an extra issue a year, though, given the escalating costs of printing and distribution, it is unlikely that this will occur in the near future. Two possible developments were considered at the recent executive committee meeting. The option of a mimeoed *Sporting Traditions* was rejected as being likely to alienate the substantial minority who looked for a quality publication. It was, in fact, decided to continue *Sporting Traditions* in its present form but to inaugurate a mimeo series of *Themes in Sports History* either as an extra to subscribers or, more likely, at cost which would not be excessive. The best solution, of course, would be an increase in subscribers which would enable us to achieve economies of scale in printing. Please ask your friends, colleagues, students and institutional or society libraries to consider joining us.

Wray Vamplew
Flinders University

FOOTBALL VIOLENCE: ON THE FIELD AND OFF THE BALL

For those of us who turned on our television sets in the early hours of June the first this year expecting to see a show-piece soccer match, it was a sickening spectacle to find ourselves watching instead the ghastly drama of people dying before our eyes while police and spectators continued to battle with each other in sporadic skirmishes. Flashbacks showed the charge of Liverpool supporters that set off the stampede that resulted in a wall collapsing, causing the deaths of 38 people before the 1984 European Cup Final had even started. Against such a background the game itself was an irrelevance and the celebration that immediately followed its outcome an irreverence. Only two weeks previously, on these same television sets, we had watched in horror as fire swept through the Bradford City stand with terrifying swiftness, leaving 56 dead, some of whom we had seen emerging as human torches after escaping from the inferno. Between these two disasters 10 people were crushed to death at a soccer match in Mexico.

In only one of these incidents did crowd hooliganism play a part, and even then the Liverpool supporters, justly condemned though they stand, did not set out to actually kill 38 Italians: the dead were the victims, as much as anything, of an administrative bungle, the accident of a wall collapsing and the inefficiency, if not stupidity, of the Belgian police. Nevertheless the game of soccer itself was called into question, and here in Australia statements varying from the inane to the simply prejudiced or thoughtless, ascribed to the simplest football code of them all some mystical power to incite animal acts of savagery.

Two weeks after the Brussels disaster a VFL football match between Geelong and Hawthorn ended up with a player from each side scoring a broken nose and a broken jaw, the result of a series of brawls which were picked up by the television cameras and watched by the police. It was only the intervention of the latter that brought this particular game into the headlines, for such assaults on the field are far from unknown at these games. What was different was that Hawthorn captain Leigh Mathews was charged by the police for criminal assault. The television cameras were not at the under-17 Australian Rules football match played at Hastings on

the Mornington Peninsula on 12 July which resulted in three youths ending up in the Frankston hospital with serious injuries resulting from a brawl reported as 'the Battle of Hastings' in one account, and 'mini-soccer brawl' (!!) in another. The television cameras were at Pratten Park, Sydney, on 7 July 1985, when a couple of hundred supporters of Sydney Olympic invaded the field to attack the referee and any players of Sydney City who were unfortunate enough to find themselves isolated from the protection of the players who had banded together to protect the referee. In an inquest on violence at football conducted by the ABC's 3L0 Saturday morning sports programme it was reported that an entire South Melbourne Hellas's under-14 soccer team had been banned for three years for an attack on a referee.

When Les Murray reported the Pratten Park riot on SBS television the following Monday he preceded an unedited film of the events leading up to the riot and the riot itself with a replay of incidents in a recent Australia v New Zealand Rugby League game in which two opposing players were ordered off for fighting, continuing to do so as they left the field and then really getting stuck into each other on their way up the tunnel for their early bath.

The incidents referred to above were in many ways typical of violence associated with the different codes of football and their respective administrations. Certainly they fall into my own experiences of the different codes, based on playing soccer in Australia over 20 years, with a couple of full seasons of Australian Rules and odd games of rugby, usually Union, whenever I had a spare afternoon and some team was short of a player (I also played Union at school in Scotland). Any comments I have to make on the above incidents, then, are based on this experience, and await corroboration, dismissal or qualification when Roy Hay presents the evidence of his exhaustive and quantitative study of violence in Australian football.

There are, it seems to me, patterns of violence related to football, but they have little to do with the game itself. They have, however, much to do with the people who play it and watch it, and the societies from which they come. So let's get rid of the nonsense about football, but soccer in particular, actually causing

violence. Those who want to blame soccer for provoking spectator violence have one unanswerable question to tackle: why a game which has existed in its present form for over a century was watched by countless millions in Great Britain from the end of the first World War to the 1950s in an atmosphere as close to sporting perfection as could be achieved - it is to British football in this period, and not cricket, that one should look when seeking the reasons for the widespread use of the English word 'fair play' in so many foreign languages. As to the nonsense about soccer causing violence because it is so boring, I would not deign to repeat this remark except that it seems to be held by many people. Boring sport sends people to sleep or drives them away from the game: it is hardly an inducement to roll up in tens of thousands and then kill each other over it!

There is one aspect of the nature of the different codes that does warrant discussion, however, and that is in the essentially skilful and scientific nature of soccer. Brute force can play a preponderant role in rugby, and science is irrelevant in Rules: these codes include physical violence within the rules and tolerate worse violence outside the rules. In soccer a fist to the jaw, a kick in the guts or a bone shattering tackle are obvious, outside the rules and generally seen as unacceptable. In soccer, too, unlike Rules or rugby, because of the low scoring nature of the game, a referee's decision can more often be vital. In the case of a close off-side decision there will always be a division of opinion depending on the angle of vision or the bias of support. All that this tells us, however, is that in soccer physical violence is frowned on and referee's decisions often have more hanging on them than in rugby or Rules: it does not explain why players should attack each other, rival fans riot or spectators invade the field.

Many of the popular prejudices in regard to football violence are, I believe, largely true: where I would take issue is in the reasons for this. The Australian football codes - Rules or the two variants of rugby - are violent, 'manly' affairs, in which brute force is applauded and punishment for transgressing the rules lenient. Major Rules or rugby games are very seldom interrupted by crowd invasions: the incredible thing about the so-called 'blood-bath' VFL Grand Final (1945) between South Melbourne and Carlton is

that the spectators, apart from throwing a few beer bottles (empty), never actually joined in; the heroes of Rules include people like Jack Dyer and Mopsy Fraser who boast of the injury they have inflicted on opponents; and in the last game I saw, the Grand Final between Richmond and Carlton, where the only spectator intrusion was that of an attractive blonde streaker, the opening five minutes was an all-in brawl, which, had it been soccer match, would have resulted in the game being abandoned due to lack of players through ordering off. From what I can gather rugby seems to follow a similar pattern. (As a schoolboy rugby player I can remember us being exhorted to 'kill' the opposition's star player).

Spectators at Australian football matches do fight with each other; they get sozzled, abusive and throw things, but they do tend to get ignored by the majority of the other spectators and are generally left to make fools of themselves in isolation.

This is not so in British football, where the art of football following includes organized thuggery in which fans from rival clubs are more concerned about winning street battles around the ground or gaining territorial triumphs inside: they even have their own league tables and an unofficial honours roll for such events (Millwall are said to be the current champions). Most of the havoc is caused by travelling fans, and when this involves going to the continent it means they can do so with the jingoism of Prime Minister Thatcher ringing in their ears. There was a time when Britons laughed at the way 'continentals' had to be kept off the field of play by barbed wire, walls, ditches and moats. Today most top class English grounds have spectator fencing (Chelsea's is proposed to be electrified), but while field invasions are far from unknown, the fences by and large are to keep spectators from attacking each other (it was the inadequacy of such fencing that allowed Liverpool supporters to attack Juventus fans and so start the fatal stampede in Brussels). It is still comparatively rare in British football for mobs (as apart from individuals) to attack referees or players. Such is not the case in Australian soccer, although until the Pratten Park incident there was hope that this was a thing of the past.

Before the 1950s soccer was seen alternately as a 'pommie'

game or a 'cissy' game by most Australians, the adjectives being more or less synonymous. When European migrants changed the nature of Australian soccer in the 1950s it became a 'Wog' game, or a 'dago' game. Australians looked on its growth with a mixture of fear that it might take over their code and relieved contempt when it seemed continually to erupt in riots and attacks on referees: they would mock the 'Latin temperament' with its low flashpoint and condemn resort to knives, which was an un-Australian thing to do (The Sun headline for the riot that acted as curtain-raiser for the Falklands War, when Argentina drew 1-1 with England in the World Youth Championship in Sydney in October 1981, was: '2 KNIFED IN SOCCER BRAWL'). In more self-righteous tones they would demand that migrants forget their ethnic animosities and the quarrels of their native land and try to act like Australians. Since the 1950s Australia has come a long way along the road to accepting migrants in a healthy multi-culturalism, and soccer too, especially after Australia's success in reaching the finals of the World Cup in 1974, is now taken seriously, with good coverage in the media and popular support when it comes to international matches. But old prejudices die hard, and incidents like the Pratten Park attack on the referee and isolated players allow those who will to condemn what they consider un-Australian violence.

Nevertheless, most violence at Australian football matches, Rules or rugby, takes place on the field and between opposing players. This is not to say there have been no pitch invasions or attacks on referees - in the early days, as with other football codes, this was common, and the sight of two mounted police galloping on to the oval to escort the umpire from the field in Rules is a permanent reminder of the danger that once faced umpires in that code. (And I have never encountered such vocal hatred for the man in the middle as greets the umpire at Rules games!) Moreover all-in brawls are still common in parklands football, like the Mornington Peninsula game that ended with such tragic results, and there is a small town near me called Donnybrook, whose football team seems determined to live up to its name. These parklands games still face the problems that plagued football in general in its early days: excessive drinking, gambling, flimsy or non-existent separation of players from spectators, and inadequate

police supervision. (Not unlike conditions at some major soccer matches today). The big games, however, at least compared to British football, are played in something like a picnic atmosphere, and the closest I have come to a comparable atmosphere at a sports event in Australia has been when Lillee came in to bowl against England at the MCG.

The reasons for this must be sought in the society that nurtures the game, and not the game itself. Australia is still a comparatively rich country, with spectators arriving at games and having to park their cars miles from the ground. In Rules territorial divisions are a farce and class divisions of teams a distant memory: the game is watched by people from all classes and, significantly, a very high proportion of women. And, as Australians, most of them have some hazy commitment to 'fair go' ideals, and a lethargy in regard to what others might see as injustice that mutes any expression of outrage. The heavy hand of the past does not weigh on their minds as it does in most countries, and we are still a long way from the daily atrocities that are a way of life in parts of the Middle East, Ulster and other disaster areas that dot the world.

Great Britain gave its colonies cricket, the world soccer, and wherever sport is played the highest ideals of sporting conduct that have been darkened only by the hypocrisy that often accompanied them. Great Britain no longer rules the world in sport or anything else. It is a society where class has always been obvious, and in recent years its economic slide has exacerbated such differences. There is no space here to discuss the causes and nature of hooliganism at British football matches. It has much to do with the alienation of large sections of the working class, and, as I argued in the paper I gave to the Sporting Traditions Conference in 1981 and suggest in a chapter of my book on *The Old Firm*, a lack of leadership. Since then Mrs Thatcher has continued her relentless drive to divide British society, and by her rhetoric in regard to the Falklands War away and against the miners at home, exhibited a hooliganism that should have precluded her from making any statements about the less reprehensible actions of the louts on the terracings. In Australia such leadership has

been restricted to the state governments.

In Australia, too, class divisions are not so obvious. In Australian soccer, however, ethnic divisions are. I played my first soccer matches in Australia with and against migrants who arrived at much the same time as I did, and finished playing with and against the sons of these migrants. Flare ups were common in the early days often caused by what some people saw as British bash on the one hand, and continental class on the other. The change in the law relating to charging the goalkeeper helped ease the problems of this culture clash, but more important has been the introduction of a first generation of 'ethnics' which has brought about a better mixture of skill and guts.

But the problem of ethnic identity remains. When I was writing my history of the rivalry of Rangers and Celtic in Scotland I was constantly reminded of my experiences playing soccer in Australia. The divide today between Rangers and Celtic is almost purely religious, but in its origins at the end of the nineteenth century the divide was ethnic, with Celtic the champions of a catholic community whose national identity and values were in important aspects different from the more affluent protestant community. Since then Catholics in Scotland have been almost totally integrated, and Celtic, while still a catholic club with a largely catholic following, are much more Scottish than Irish, the chanting of IRA slogans and the waving of tricolour flags notwithstanding. In Australia ethnic differences are generally more national than religious, occasionally with a racial edge. Like Celtic in Scotland in the early days, ethnic teams play an ambivalent role: they are a focus for community identity, a sharing of values which might not be those of the dominant culture, and they can give a sense of pride and achievement, as well as comfort to individuals who might otherwise be cut adrift in an alien or hostile environment. For the same reasons they might be treated with suspicion by Australians whose record in regard to racism is not unblemished. The problem is how to gain acceptance in the larger society, feel part of it, and yet retain a sense of identity that is the strength of a multi-cultural society.

The success of soccer in Australia has lain with the ethnic

teams. The game was founded by Britons and administered by Britons until the splits in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Until then it showed no growth to speak of, British migrants whose playing days were over refusing to watch what they considered an inferior product and getting on with the good life in a society whose language and values they basically accepted. Italians, Greeks, Slavs and other ethnic minorities did not have the same options and the soccer team of their nationality often became the focal point of their community interest. In this way the popularity of soccer increased, to become the second most popular football code in every state, and in 1978 the only one with a national league. But it is still seen as a 'foreign' game.

This is not unreasonable. Clashes between ethnic teams have been fairly frequent with Italian and Greek teams showing little love for each other as they contest state rivalries or Croatian and Yugoslav teams fighting out their political differences. Like Rangers/Celtic matches this can add a spice of excitement to such encounters, but taken too far it can result in violent excesses, and instead of serving as a useful safety valve can help prolong and envenom rivalries.

There is one aspect of the ethnic mix in Australian soccer that I must, with regret, refer to, and that is the attitude to referees. In my experience most players brought up in the British/Australian tradition do not see the referee as someone who would sell himself or show a deliberate bias - or at least they would not act on this belief to the extent of attacking him. What struck me as one of the worst aspects of the Pratten Park riot was that in the post match interviews most of the Greek officials seemed more intent on blaming the Federation or the referee than the fans who invaded the pitch. I do not as yet have the figures to prove it, but I believe Greek teams have been banned at some time or another in most states in Australia for attacks by their spectators on referees; I am sure that in any tally of similar violence in other codes, soccer would top the list and 'ethnic teams top the list in soccer. When I checked the story of the under-14 South Melbourne Hellas attack on the referee with the Victorian Soccer Federation I was told that such an attack was not unprecedented.

Perhaps I am showing my own ethnic bias here, but I confess that while I find brawls between two teams stupid, and riots between two sets of supporters even more stupid, I find mob attacks on referees utterly contemptible: no referee, no matter how bad he is, deserves to be beaten up.

But to conclude these unsubstantiated (but not unsubstantiat-able) comments, let me return to the tragedy that sparked off the topic of crowd violence. On the eve of the ill-fated European Cup Final I visited the Melbourne Cricket Ground to see the Four Nations Tournament, with Australia playing Tottenham and Udinese playing Vasco da Gama. There were played out that night in microcasm a preview of the passions that were to lead to tragedy on the other side of the world within twelve hours. Supporting Udinese was a small group of Italian fans with their flags, chanting 'Juve! Juve!' while some distance off was a slightly larger group of English supporters chanting Liverpool slogans. To begin with, and from a distance, it looked like a harmless exchange, even friendly rivalry, but later, and seen from close up, the scene was different. It was clear that the English supporters were not there to watch the football, but to pick a fight. They worked their way towards the Italian supporters and gathered above them ready for a charge. By this time the Italians, outnumbered and doubtless more concerned about watching a soccer match, had gone quiet. Luckily the police were on the scene in numbers that could easily control the would-be thugs, who were shepherded to a safe distance. Like the incident involving Alderman at the Perth cricket ground, this was an imported form of hooligan behaviour: the crowd were behind the police and the situation, given the small numbers, was easily defused.

The violence in recent football matches has brought understandable attention by the media and some politicians. Such commentators often have short memories and, in the latter case, thoughts of present gain in terms of electoral support. There is also the problem that such attention can exacerbate the problem it has set out to solve. By concentrating in these random reflections on the worst aspect of the world's greatest sport I would hate to give support to its enemies. As I have emphasized, the faults are not in the game itself, but this does not absolve its administrators and those who

have its best interests at heart, from admitting problems where they exist, and trying to do something about them.

Bill Murray
La Trobe University