

## 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.

Here Dr. Alex Tahmindjis, Director of Sports Medicine for the New South Wales Ice Hockey Association, takes up the topic of sports violence.

In any discussion of violence in sport ice hockey inevitably features prominently: indeed many would regard it as the violent sport *par excellence*. It need not, and should not, be so. New South Wales has taken a lead in attempting to counter this unenviable reputation by combatting what are believed to be major factors contributing to the violence on the ice.

It should be noted that the existing rules allow violent body contact to be made. Bodychecking an opponent so that he is unable to participate effectively in the play is quite legal providing that he was in possession of the puck and the check was not excessively violent. The fine line between what is legal and illegal means that players often react angrily when the referee's interpretation does not coincide with their own opinion. In an effort to reduce this precipitating factor to violence, the New South Wales ice hockey authorities have actually changed the rules and banned body contact for all players up to junior level i.e., in games for those up to the age of seventeen. Significantly there was some support for extending the ban to all levels of the sport. Additionally, in an attempt to reduce injury - and weaken the impact of deliberate violent play - protective clothing has been improved and both helmets and face cages have been made compulsory for players under twenty-one. A committee is investigating the possibility of extending this legislation.

Rough-house tactics have often been employed at the behest of coaches, most of whom came from Canada where such behaviour was common. Pressure is now being placed on the coaches to face up to their responsibilities and to exert sufficient control over their players by whatever methods they are skillful enough to employ. Moreover,

where a player is cited to appear before the authorities the coach may also be required to attend. Since this began to be applied there has been a dramatic decline in the number of players having to make such appearances. Players and coaches are also being warned that violent play is not immune from prosecution under the laws of the land and that legal action could be taken against them.

In the past referees have been reluctant to take severe action. In one of the 1984 semi-finals an all-in brawl occurred but not one player was sent-off. Now the officials are being pressurised to apply the rules strictly. At a recent meeting of the Board of the New South Wales Association, a referee said that if he applied all the rules there would be many more stoppages of play: the response from the Board was a unanimous "Apply the rules". It is, of course, important that the game officials are competent and here there is room for improvement in the training of referees, in perhaps increasing the number of referees, in making use of aids such as instant replay videos, and, possibly most important of all, in adjusting the rules of play so that they are more precise and easier to interpret.

This still leaves a major problem which may be beyond the influence of the Association. I have been associated with a number of ice hockey sides as team doctor and this has made me aware of the variety of psychological problems which, in effect, make up a team. I have often thought that a coach should consider his side to be a seething mass of psychopathology, and start the season with two bottles of valium, one for the team and one for himself! Perhaps the crux of the problem of violence on the ice lies in the psyche of the individual players. Who responds violently? Who lacks the self-control which others possess? Who openly provokes violence? Currently few coaches possess the necessary ability in diagnosis and therapy to deal adequately with this.

Violence in sport is very common and is often protected and even promoted. I believe that it is an evil as it encourages a disregard for the simple rules of civilised behaviour. I believe that violence in sport is detrimental to the sport because it persuades parents to direct their children away to something else. I also believe, however, that it is a problem which can be dealt with, either within the existing rules, or within a new code of play if necessary. Most important of all, a responsible attitude on the

part of administrators and coaches must be demanded as these people have a very important part to play in the shaping of our children's attitudes. Those of us who love sport for its positive attributes must make our feelings public by bringing them to the notice of the authorities at meetings of sporting bodies, in the newspapers and on radio, and by contacting' relevant politicians. It will be worth the effort.

Dr. John Marshall Carter writes in response to Bob Petersen's review of his booklet, *Sport and Pastimes of the Middle Ages* which appeared in the last issue of *Sporting Traditions*.

First of all, let me agree with Mr. Petersen that the booklet has a misleading title. It is true that the majority of the material is concerned with England. I apologize.

Regarding my idealism, I can only say that if one is going to be misled (as Mr. Petersen says I was), one should be misled by as great a scholar as the late Dutch medievalist Johan Huizinga. If I ended up by focusing more on the perceptions of medieval people than on the actions, I can only say that I was not aware that the history of ideas had disappeared as a sub-discipline of history.

I feel that the reviewer's criticism of my neglect of pictorial evidence is not quite justified due to the amount of space I devote to the Bayeux Tapestry as a source of sport history. Twenty-six of the seventy-seven pages are devoted to artistic evidence for medieval sports.

Furthermore, what kind of a criticism is, "Oddly, I cannot tell whether Carter reads Latin or even French?" in a booklet, designed for beginning students, that states clearly in its preface: "Medieval sport is still waiting for its H.A. Harris. Until that time comes, students of sport in western society might benefit from individual studies such as the seven I have collected and titled *Sports and Pastimes of the Middle Ages*." Indeed, although some of Mr. Petersen's criticisms are justified, writers of books do provide useful services. I have done so in my booklet discussed here. I have tackled the very thorny problem of definition of medieval sport; I have given students a brief review of the literature of medieval sport; I have shown them some of the primary sources where they might do their own research on medieval sports; I have given them a view of the medieval church toward sports and pastimes; I have demonstrated

how artistic evidence might be used to provide insights into medieval sports; I have illuminated the role of a medieval sports writer; finally, I, as a writer of books about medieval sport, have provided a segment of the academic community-- those who don't write books about medieval sports-- with some grist for their mills.

Lastly, I think that Mr. Petersen's description of the booklet as "lightweight history" can provide us with a good ending to the story. As in the world of heavyweight boxing these days (with light heavyweight Michael Spinks sitting atop of the pugilistic realm), there has been no heavyweight on the scene. And, furthermore, as Spinks demonstrated, lightweights have a way of becoming heavyweights."