

# THE CANNONS AND CANBERRA

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## INTRODUCTION:

Basketball is a colourful, fast and exciting sport which offers much to the spectator. The players are constantly moving during play, they all handle the ball many times, and they have to be ever-alert for sudden changes from defence to attack as the play allows little opportunity to contemplate missed chances. Ostensibly, it is a non-contact sport, yet it features many hard physical clashes, while not yet tolerating the violence of the rugby codes or ice hockey. There is a heavy emphasis on scoring, there are many spectacular turn-arounds in scores, and it uses the clock in a way that heightens the excitement in a close match. It is very much a team sport, yet it offers many opportunities for the display of individual flair, where very fit, and usually extremely agile, men and women can perform athletic feats that are both pleasurable and exciting for the spectator. Indeed, there is much aesthetic pleasure to be gained from the sport - to former US Olympian and NBA professional, Bill Russell, it is best described as "an art-form".<sup>1</sup> Even one-sided contests can give pleasure, for matches lacking in pressure usually allow players to show off their skills.

At the same time, basketball is an accessible sport, both in terms of being easily understood by the non-initiate, being "as simple as soccer, as free-scoring as Australian Rules",<sup>2</sup> as well as being played very close to the spectators. Of the major sports, perhaps only tennis allows so many spectators to get so close to the players, wherever they are at any point of play. This means that people are much more aware of the effort involved, of the physical confrontations, and of the facial expressions of the players than can be the case in many other sports. It is much easier for the fan to relate to a basketballer who is relatively close, than to footballer in a vast stadium who may be playing 200 metres away

from the fan's vantage point.

The types of people that are attracted to basketball is of significance. It is a sport which attracts women as well as men, girls as well as boys, and in fact many attend in family groups. One obvious reason for this wide appeal would be that it is a sport that is played by both sexes, with women having an equal opportunity to achieve the highest levels. The absence of violence and serious injuries may also be of importance for many spectators, particularly parents. Played indoors, the sport is unaffected by weather; most who attend can sit to watch it; and it is safe - even in the largest stadia there is no sense of being part of a huge body of people.

All of these benefits have long been realised in the USA, where NBA and college teams regularly play before sell-out crowds. It is relatively easily marketed, being ideal for television coverage; it features many superb athletes who are often accorded hero status, and the colour of the playing apparel marries well with the speed and excitement that is obvious to all. The burgeoning national competition in England indicates the marketability of the sport.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these advantages, and even although it has boasted a large number of active participants,<sup>4</sup> basketball has not been a high-profile sport in this country. It has been ignored by the major media outlets, which have treated it as a second-string sport, of roughly the same newsworthiness as baseball, volleyball or netball, so that in the major cities it has been lost in the wash of sports like tennis, cricket, and the various football codes. The only qualification to this picture has been in various country centres, where the sport has attracted more attention, because it has often been a focus of inter-town rivalry, as in the La Trobe Valley in Victoria or on Tasmania's North-West Coast.<sup>5</sup> It has only been in the past six years, that the general picture has begun to change as Australian basketball has begun to secure the image of a major sport, that is, one recognised as such by the media.

An important step forward was the establishment of several strong, competitive leagues including the Women's Basketball Conference, the Women's Basketball League, the South Eastern Basketball League and the National Basketball League (NBL). The creation

of this latter competition was very important, for it has become the sport's flagship. Many observers, such as Australian coach, Adrian Hurley, believe the success of the NBL has done much to lift playing standards, and hence public interest.<sup>6</sup> It certainly has done much to spread the gospel, for it has taken top-level competition into every capital city as well as various other major population centres, giving far-flung communities the opportunity to measure themselves against the best players and teams in the nation. Public interest has presumably been heightened also by international performances that have indicated a steady rise in Australian standards: a gradual climb in both men's and women's world rankings at the World Championships, a best-ever performance at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games, and winning performances in the Australia Games. These latter efforts received an unprecedentedly large amount of Australian television coverage.

With Olympic Games status, with a gradual increase in media coverage, and with the emergence of "name" NBL stars like Smyth, Davies, Loggins and Bruton, there has been an increase in the number of children wanting to play the sport.<sup>7</sup> This development may also have been due to parental pressure. Informal discussions with parents of young Canberra basketballers have indicated that these parents, at least, sought sports for their children that were relatively safe from violence and from injury, suggesting that the spate of publicity concerning football injuries has had an effect on parental acceptance of the football codes. Basketball's heightened profile may well have been fortuitously timed.<sup>8</sup> By the start of the 1980s then, many more Australian sports followers were thus beginning to appreciate what longtime Australian coach Lindsay Gaze described as an "underrated" sport.<sup>9</sup> Nowhere was this appreciation developed as quickly as in Canberra during 1983-84.

#### CANBERRA...AND THE CANNONS:

Where once Canberra sport was largely ignored by national bodies, in the past decade sport in the national capital has flourished to the point where this city of over 250,000 people has come to be regarded as a legitimate competitor in many major events. "Statehood" has been won in sports such as hockey, softball and

Australian Rules football, and gradually the performance of its teams has improved to a stage where the ACT can usually be regarded as competitive opposition. Victories in the Australian women's softball titles in 1976-77-78, or individual success in national teams by locals like Graham Reid (hockey), Stuart MacDougall and David Campese (rugby union) and Dimity Douglas (swimming) have pointed to an improvement in standards that has helped put Canberra on the sporting map, a development hastened by the presence of the Australian Institute of Sport and its students. With the development of national club competitions in a number of sports, Canberra has invariably been invited to join, though as a *Canberra*, composite team, not as an existing club combination. National soccer, table tennis, volleyball and basketball leagues have all seen Canberra involved, as has the Sydney rugby league competition, which admitted a Canberra team in 1982. The increased opportunities to watch elite-level sport has been eagerly seized by Canberra's sports fans. The rugby league team, the Canberra Raiders (which actually has its home ground at Queanbeyan), has become one of the biggest crowd-drawers in the League; to the extent that one Sydney club chose to play its 1984 home game against the Raiders at Queanbeyan because of a desire to maximise its match profits. The soccer team, the Canberra City Olympians (formerly the Canberra Arrows), managed to attract substantial crowds for a time, and though these have fallen away, the team still draws more than used to follow the original local soccer competition. With the Canberra Mazda Cannons (hereafter the Cannons) in basketball, these teams have managed to make themselves an important part of Canberra's sporting life, and it suggests that part of the explanation of the Cannons phenomenon lies in the attraction for Canberrans of being able to watch sport of the highest level.

Despite opposition from some established basketball centres, Canberra gained entry with nine other teams into the NBL when it was created. Like most other clubs, the Cannons operated out of what amounted to little more than a large shed; its crowds were thus small, probably being restricted largely to aficionados of the sport, and its players were a blend of imported Americans (including the player-coach), aging locals who gave valuable experience to the team, and a few promising youngsters. The first season in 1979 saw this scratch team surprise the critics of its admission,

by being able to match the established clubs, winning 13 and losing 5 of its games, and it lost the Grand Final narrowly to St Kilda, an established force in Australian club basketball. The next three seasons confirmed the competitiveness of the team, although it was never a serious title contender, finishing seventh of twelve in 1980 (11-11) and 1981 (12-10), and eleventh of fourteen clubs in 1982 (8-18). To this point, basketball was merely one of a number of winter sports that were attempting to attract support in the city, and despite the team's use, from 1981, of the first-rate new National Indoor Sports Centre (quickly dubbed "The Palace"), the crowd size had not increased markedly, and only two-thirds of the venue's capacity was used. All of this changed in 1983, however, so that by the end of the season, it can be claimed that the Cannons had become the focus of much community interest and pride. This transformation came as a consequence of a number of important and inter-related changes: the acquisition of a new coach, a marked increase in community-based sponsorship, a significant increase in media coverage, and, most importantly, a repetition of its winning form of 1979.

At the end of the 1982 season the Cannons management appointed Bob Turner as coach for the following year. Turner, an American, was New South Wales Director of Coaching, had been coach of the Newcastle Falcons, and in 1981 had won the NBL Coach of the Year title. The newcomer was quite central to what now developed in Canberra, for in him the Cannons were gaining more than just a team strategist. In his period with Newcastle, he had shown himself as adept at publicising the team and the sport as he was in coaching - though his 42-25 win-loss record which put him fourth on the all-time NBL coaches' table indicated his ability in that area. Helped by the good media coverage he and the Falcons generated, Turner had been able to make basketball an important sport in a city where rugby league had predominated, with the team playing before crowds that made Newcastle's average gate one of the top three in the League. Turner reportedly saw Canberra as "ripe for the picking" as a basketball centre, and he set about winning the same community support for the Cannons as the Falcons had enjoyed in Newcastle.<sup>10</sup>

Turner's *modus operandi* was basically two-pronged. On the one hand, basketball's presentation was "Americanised", with the

emphasis placed as much on entertainment as on a sporting contest, where the purchase of a ticket meant action, colour and variety. The aim was to keep people interested and entertained from the moment they entered the Palace: door prizes, entertainment such as jazz bands, gymnastics or jazz ballet, basket-shooting competitions for spectators, specific "nights" such as Armed Services Night, Ladies Night or E.T. Night, free Easter eggs, photos and posters of the team handed out to early arrivals - the range of ideas seemed endless, and, according to the team management, was designed to make a night at the basketball a highlight of the week: in the words of Turner, "it was not enough to throw the ball on the court and start playing".<sup>11</sup> As far as the actual play was concerned, the emphasis was placed again on entertainment, where winning, if not exactly ignored, seemed to share the spotlight with the promise of excitement:

A night at the Palace is more than just forty eight minutes of basketball...it's the colour, the charged atmosphere of five thousand electrified fans, the deafening roar that welcomes the Cannons...It's the magic of the Magicians, the madness of the gorilla, give-aways and half-time antics...It's slam dunks, three point bombs, snake moves and the GENERAL... It's 'EXCITEMENT GUARANTEED'.<sup>12</sup>

Basketball was thus seen as an entertainment product that had to be marketed vigorously to be successful, and the Cannons management was quick to respond to Turner's drive, which "turned the team into a major media event",<sup>13</sup> a development that was not accepted uncritically by observers in other centres, most notably in Melbourne, as exemplified by Lindsay Gaze who "always regarded the actual contest as more important than the promotion of the game".<sup>14</sup>

A key aspect of this approach was the policy of spending approximately one-third of the team's budget on marketing. NBL Director, Tony King, has pointed to the lesson taught by the Cannons' experience, namely that "more money has to be spent into putting people on seats rather than [just] getting good players".<sup>15</sup> Such a policy seemingly suited Turner's approach to the construction of the team, for he bought no expensive, high-scoring American imports. He did secure the Australian captain and two other Olympians, but his was not to be a team which had a consistent forty point scorer, being rather a team of even contributors, and

Canberra has not had the difficulties of a team like Sydney Super-sonics which attempted to buy the 1983 title, with the consequential near-collapse of the club.

Turner's other important move was to pick up the old theme of Canberra being "a city without a soul". He spoke incessantly of the need for the team and the town to complement each other, and to this end he and his players began to assume a higher profile in Canberra's life, with attendance at schools, fetes, club nights, shopping centres, youth training camps, and so on. Turner's diary was forever full, with him attending events as diverse as management motivation sessions, sportsmen's dinners and a host of school speech nights. As this developed, and as Canberrans began to concern themselves more with the fortunes of the Cannons, so Turner urged the view that the relationship was coming to indicate quite clearly that the much-maligned public service town was far from being just a collection of emotionless bureaucrats, concerned only with their superannuation. He spoke incessantly of the affinity between the team and its supporters, he stressed how the players, when on the road, never forgot what they owed the fans at home, and by the time Canberra had won the 1983 and 1984 NBL titles he was claiming that the Cannons had "proved that it [Canberra] has got a soul."<sup>16</sup> His words before the 1984 Grand Final were typical:

When the ball goes up today the Mazda Cannons will not be playing solely for themselves but for all those that have supported and worked for us so hard, in so many different ways, during the season.

We will be playing to continue building that soul for Canberra, the soul that has helped the Canberra Mazda Cannons believe they are champions.<sup>17</sup>

For the players part, they were assiduous in their attention to fan-mail or autograph-seekers, and what the coach preached, the players echoed: one claimed that Canberra crowd support gave the team a 10-15 point bonus, another described playing in Canberra as akin to "playing for a family", while the captain summed it up thus:

...it does give you more incentive to play at 'The Palace'.

Other teams come here wanting to knock off the champs but when you're out on the court you think 'bugger them'. This is our stadium, these are our fans - we

think we are the champs so if these clowns want to win they can go somewhere else and do it.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere a "fanatical" Canberra theme was discernable: Matthew Ricketson in the *Age* dubbed them "Cannonites"; a *Daily Telegraph* reported spoke of playing in front of the Canberra crowd as "a torrid experience"; and the Coburg Giants manager spoke of the crowd's malign influence on officials - "I really believe the fans in Canberra have an influence on referees".<sup>19</sup> A common cry among opposing coaches came to be that "the Cannons cannot win away from Canberra", so dependent were they on this crowd support to intimidate umpires and opposing teams.

Turner was backed by sound administration from the ACT Amateur Basketball Association (ACTABA) and the Cannons own Board of Directors. Headed by Ron Harvey, Cannons General Manager and NBL President, and Terry Ryan, Executive Director of the ACTABA, the administration impressed generally by its ability to provide a professional, efficient management that apparently managed to run the club with fewer difficulties than are often found in sports administration. Any dissension was kept firmly "in the family", and the team was presumably assisted by the absence of internal wrangling of the type that has been obvious in ACT soccer and Australian Rules administration in recent years. Club officials speak of a policy of keeping the "dirty washing" out of the public gaze.<sup>20</sup> A few matters occasionally caused community rumblings: a massive increase in season ticket charges in 1985, claims that ACTABA officials gave an undue amount of time to Cannons' affairs at the expense of other Association responsibilities, or the unfortunate exclusion of many Canberra fans from the final game of 1985 when a large parcel of tickets was sold to people from the surrounding region, are recent examples. Overall, however, the management's effort was sure of touch. To complement these efforts, the team management was assisted by a healthy sponsorship position. A major sponsorship deal had been secured with Mazda in the 1981 season, and with this continuing, the team worked hard to secure, and to satisfy, a host of local minor sponsors. The Cannons were assiduous in ensuring that the sponsorships were not treated as a one-way affair where the only beneficiary was the team. For the major sponsor there was the alteration of the team's name, but in

addition the Cannons made sure that the Mazda dealer network was kept informed by regular bulletin of the team's progress, and the manager of Mazda Marketing Services expressed himself as well satisfied with the deal.<sup>21</sup> Mazda's own publicity claimed that such sponsorship was directed towards more than just commercial success:

By assisting a team involved in national competition, Mazda are giving Australian sportsmen and women inspiration and experience to compete successfully both in Australia and overseas.

Mazda, by striving for excellence in the vehicles it sells to the public, complements its efforts to promote high standards in Australian sport.

And by sponsoring the game of Australian basketball, Mazda helps our team shoot for the ultimate goal, the basketball champions of the world.<sup>22</sup>

Mazda and the other sponsors who advertised around the court, or who sponsored a match at the Palace, had plenty of visual acknowledgement with courtside signs and programme references, as well as the provision of courtside VIP boxes and refreshments, and they were presented with lavish "thank you" gifts at season's end.<sup>23</sup> The importance of the sponsorship that was won can be seen in the ACTABA Profit and Loss Account for the year ending 30 June 1983, where NBL costs were \$157,179 with sponsorship providing \$52,403 of this sum, while the projected 1985 figures had sponsorship from all sources returning \$144,000 of a projected expenditure of \$359,934.<sup>24</sup>

Aiding this financial effort was a "booster" organisation: the "Cannonball Club". This was designed to raise funds for the team, as well as to organise social functions at which players would be present. In 1984 it helped spread the word, while raising money by the sale of assorted merchandise: clothing, posters, stickers and badges. The large number of people to be seen sporting such pledges of team support attested to the popularity of this effort. At first a small operation, eventually the marketing effort was taken over by a major department store which saw sufficient commercial advantage in being linked with the Cannons to make a series of commercials for use on local television. Elsewhere the coach and/or players advertised a wide range of goods and services, with one notable building society advertisement featuring Turner alone while making no effort to remind viewers who he was.

An essential part of this story was the part played by the media. The *Canberra Times*, local radio stations, and the commercial television channel CTC7 were all important, as they steadily increased the coverage of Cannons' affairs. It is significant, however, that this was far from being a matter of the media picking up Cannons' material by chance. In the early period the management "had to keep pestering" the *Canberra Times* to gain satisfactory coverage, and the club was prepared to write stories for the newspaper to achieve this.<sup>25</sup> In time the newspaper came to perceive a newsworthiness in the affairs of the NBL and the home team, and by the 1983 and 1984 seasons had allocated a particular reporter to cover basketball. Although the team management could quibble about the different writers' knowledge of the sport, they acknowledged the benefits to be gained from what was an increasingly personal view of the Cannons held by the second of these, Gary Scholes. Scholes' heart was clearly with the Cannons, as illustrated by his irate defence of the team when it was criticised in "foreign" newspapers, or when he felt that referees had treated the team badly.<sup>26</sup> Scholes seemed happy to write up whatever he was given, most notably the announcement of new season signings which the Cannons would dribble out to him singly over the summer off-season. The net result of all this was that the amount of coverage given the Cannons increased significantly over the years from the first NBL season of 1979. Analysis of the *Canberra Times* coverage of local sport for the months of May 1979, May 1982 and May 1985 revealed that the newspaper steadily increased the amount of space devoted to basketball stories: between May 1982 and May 1985, for instance, the number of stories increased by 33%, the average length by 34%, and the total space by a massive 79%. The coverage not only increased, but the placing of stories also altered to the team's benefit, with many of the 1985 stories being placed on the back page, by contrast with the earlier years when few achieved that prime position. By 1985, also, the front page story in the Sunday sports supplement was almost always the Cannons' match of the previous evening. The press effort did not end with the local outlet, for on every Monday of the season the Cannons sent more than 150 press releases to newspapers around the country. A measure of the effect of such a media barrage were the friendly references in the *Melbourne Age* during the 1984 and 1985 season.<sup>27</sup>

Table 1: Canberra Times Sport Stories (number)

	May 1979		May 1982		May 1985			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1. Soccer	61	13.65	Soccer	50	12.59	Soccer	51	12.14
2. Rugby League	48	10.74	Aussie Rules	41	10.33	Aussie Rules	43	10.24
3. Aussie Rules	45	10.07	Rugby League	37	9.32	Rugby League	40	9.52
4. Rugby Union	39	8.72	Hockey	30	7.56	Basketball	40	9.52
5. Hockey	38	8.50	Basketball	30	7.56	Hockey	36	8.57
6. Athletics	28	6.26	Horse Racing	30	7.56	Rugby Union	32	7.62
7. Basketball	25	5.59	Athletics	26	6.55	Horse Racing	18	4.29
8. Horse Racing	21	4.70	Rugby Union	22	5.54	Athletics	17	4.05
9. Motor Sport	17	3.80	Netball	14	3.53	Squash	16	3.81
10. (Golf	11	2.46	Tennis	13	3.27	Netball	11	2.62
(Netball	11	2.46						
		76.95			73.81			72.39

Note: The figures relate only to local sport, that is sport of Canberra and the surrounding district.

Table 2: Canberra Times Sports Stories (length)

Sport	May 1979			Sport	May 1982			Sport	May 1985		
	Column cm	Average length	%		Column cm	Average length	%		Column cm	Average length	%
1. Soccer	1500	24.59	14.56	Soccer	1221	24.42	13.44	Aussie Rules	1291	30.02	13.10
2. Rugby League	1304	27.17	12.66	Aussie Rules	1168	28.49	12.85	Soccer	1191	23.35	12.09
3. Aussie Rules	1265	28.11	12.28	Rugby League	1070	28.92	11.77	Basketball	1066	26.65	10.82
4. Rugby Union	972	24.92	9.44	Horse Racing	853	28.43	9.39	Rugby League	1053	26.33	10.68
5. Hockey	731	19.24	7.10	Hockey	704	23.47	7.75	Rugby Union	779	24.34	7.90
6. Horse Racing	701	33.38	6.81	Rugby Union	644	29.27	7.09	Hockey	761	21.14	7.72
7. Basketball	595	23.80	5.78	Basketball	594	19.80	6.54	Horse Racing	672	37.33	6.82
8. Athletics	429	15.32	4.17	Athletics	412	15.85	4.53	Fishing	276	55.20	2.80
9. Motor Sport	373	21.94	3.62	Golf	311	25.92	3.42	Squash	257	16.06	2.61
10. Golf	327	29.73	3.17	Tennis	214	16.46	2.35	Athletics	209	12.29	2.12
			79.59				79.13				76.66

The Cannons' efforts in television were designed firstly to gain regular coverage of the team's affairs, but secondly, and more importantly, to secure regular telecasts of matches. Again the management went out of its way to achieve the desired ends, being prepared to pay the production costs of a weekly delayed-telecast on CTC7. In 1983, "Hooked on Cannons" cost \$25,000 to offset costs, of which the club found \$15,000 and Mazda paid the balance; in 1984 the figure was \$35,000, with Mazda's input being \$25,000.<sup>28</sup> Despite the games having been played seven days before screening, the programme was immediately popular with Canberrans, with the ratings for the mid-Saturday slot almost matching the direct telecast of VFL matches that it preceded. For the Channel management the response was a pleasant surprise, especially as the award-winning programme quickly became the most popular locally-produced sports series.<sup>29</sup> By 1985 the club no longer needed to pay for the programme. Turner believed this television coverage was vital for the acceptance of basketball in both cities in which he had coached, being "instrumental in the rise of both the Falcons and the Mazda Cannons to major status if not the major code [i.e. sport] in both cities".<sup>30</sup>

All this may have been for naught had not the Cannons reversed their form of 1982, but the efforts of coach, management and players were rewarded with a 16-6 record in 1983 and a 16-7 record in 1984. In both seasons the team made the finals and, in a remarkable feat of consistency, won all eight finals matches it contested to take out the titles in both years. According to Turner this success was "crucial" in attracting the sustained attention of the city, for as this run unfolded early in 1983, so did community interest grow. This could be seen in television ratings, but was most obvious in the numbers attending home matches. The average Palace gate in the first five matches of 1983 was 1,981, while the average for the next seven was 3,534, with the season average ending at 2,857. The season had begun with the team still only using three-quarters of the Palace; by half-way through the season the court had been centred. A finals match against Nunawading Spectres drew a remarkable sell-out attendance of 4,909, and the total attendance for the season was the highest in the NBL, with the average gate higher than the old League record for one match.<sup>31</sup> In 1984 the average crowd was 3,732, with over 4,000 attending on seven occasions, and

a semi-final against the Coburg Giants saw 5,426 squashed into the Palace. The seasons total of 46,120 contrasted with the second-biggest drawer, Newcastle Falcons who attracted 22,740, and with the Sydney Superonics with their puny season total of 3,300.<sup>32</sup>

There were other ways in which the community interest and support could be detected. During the 1983 NBL Grand Final, Canberra Raiders' officials blamed a poor home gate on the fact that the rugby league match clashed with the basketball telecast. During the Raiders' match progress scores in the basketball were announced, with much vocal support coming from the crowd at each announcement.<sup>33</sup> When the team returned to Canberra on the evening after the match, a large crowd gave them a rapturous welcome at Canberra airport, and CTC7 interrupted its Sunday evening film to give the event direct coverage. Twelve months later I could bear witness to the size and enthusiasm shown in a similar welcome, as well as in their triumphal progress around Canberra's three main shopping centres. In other contexts, the Cannons became community property: as part of a Canberra tourist brochure, or when the MHR for Canberra, Ros Kelly, told a shopping centre crowd that the team "had put Canberra on the map". A few days earlier the ACT Tourist Commissioner had welcomed international ice skaters, Jayne Torvill and Christopher Dean, with the information that they would be performing in "the Palace [the] home of the best basketball team in Australia".<sup>34</sup>

Children's attitudes can be an important measure of a sport's popularity. The numbers of Canberra's youngsters playing basketball has risen dramatically, with youth training camps oversubscribed, and a 105% rise in registered teams in the five years, 1981-85.<sup>35</sup>

A survey of Holder High School students was undertaken early in the 1985 NBL season to test their awareness of the Cannons. For comparative purposes, they were also asked questions about three other major Canberra teams, the Raiders (rugby league), the Olympians (soccer) and the Comets (volleyball). The results are summarised in Tables 3 and 4.

Familiarity with the names of the teams was high for all except volleyball and this sport was omitted from the analysis.<sup>36</sup>

Table 3: Children and the Canberra Sports Teams

Team	Ability to Name Teams (%)			Attendance at Matches <sup>1</sup> (%)			Watching Televised Matches <sup>2</sup> (%)		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
Cannons	96.4	95.7	95.9	53.6	23.9	35.1	92.9	82.6	86.5
Olympians	53.6	17.4	31.1	28.6	15.2	20.3	42.9	26.1	32.4
Raiders	85.7	89.1	87.8	50.0	39.1	43.2	67.9	63.0	64.9

Notes: (1) At least one.

(2) At least once.

Table 4: Ability of Children to Name Players

Team	Naming at least one player (%)			Attendance at Matches and Ability to name players (%)			Non-Attendance at Matches and Ability to name players (%)			Average Number of Players Named
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All	
Cannons	71.4	58.7	63.5	92.3	100.0	96.2	61.5	62.9	62.5	4.6
Olympians	25.0	8.7	23.9	71.4	50.0	63.6	10.0	5.1	6.8	2.5
Raiders	50.0	19.6	31.1	71.4	77.8	73.9	28.6	7.1	14.3	3.9

When considering how many children had actually seen the teams, it appeared that, although more had attended a Raiders match than a Cannons match, substantially more had watched the Cannons on television. Moreover when the children were asked to name as many players as they could from each team, their awareness of Cannons was shown clearly.<sup>37</sup> To some extent this awareness came from attendance at matches as it is clear that the likelihood of being able to name players was much higher if matches had been attended; but even of those who had never been to a game, nearly two-thirds could name at least one player. When focussing on the children who could name players from the various Canberra teams, a greater number of Cannons players was named than for the other teams. The survey also indicated how much Canberra children were aware of the "stars" in the Cannons squad. Of the nearly two-thirds of the sample who could name players, all could name Phil Smyth, the Australian captain, while nearly 80% could name another Olympian, the 7ft 2in centre, Andy Campbell.<sup>38</sup>

The extent of Canberra's support for its team thus seems due to the efforts of its coach, the increased status of the sport, the coverage in the media, and the successful seasons of 1983 and 1984. This community support seems relevant to the view expressed by Michael Novak, when he noted that a team "is not only assembled in one place; it also *represents* a place". Miami, he claimed, became "a different sort of city" once it had the Dolphins, 39 and if the high degree of awareness suggested by the survey of high school children is any guide, for many residents Canberra is now a different sort of city since the emergence of the Cannons. Most adults in the city have come from elsewhere, and the popularity of local coverage of VFL and Sydney rugby league matches attests to the long-standing loyalties felt by many. For such people, and especially for their Canberra-born children, teams like the Cannons, Raiders and Olympians can be a focus of support in their own right. For many, the very act of living in Canberra has made them a target of derision, and it is not difficult to find residents who proclaim their intention of leaving the city as soon as they can. For others, the advantages of living in what is one of the most pleasant urban environments in Australia have been kept to themselves when conversing with "outsiders" whose ridicule merely indicated that they understood neither the city nor its residents. Now,

however, there is evidence that there are advantages in living in Canberra that can be trumpeted abroad, and that Bob Turner is correct when he says that the Cannons prove that good things come out of the place. One colleague, resident in Canberra since 1972, averred that he had not felt "Canberraised" until he began following the Cannons in 1983. Novak speaks of the devastating effect of living in Pittsburgh when the city's teams were among the also-rans, a feeling that was soon dispelled when the Pirates and the Steelers won a few championships: suddenly "it was a good region in which to grow up".<sup>40</sup> In Canberra's case, the response of this public service community to their team can perhaps be likened to the fervent support of Washington for the Redskins.<sup>41</sup> A *Canberra Times* columnist expressed a view that may well have applied to many:

As a fan of the Canberra Cannons I had begun to associate them and their excellence with Canberra. We have little enough in Canberra to inspire allegiance to place in our bosoms, but in my support for the Canberra Cannons and for the Canberra Arrows...soccer team, I had begun to make a stronger and better association with my city.<sup>42</sup>

Four years later the same writer claimed that a "major achievement" of Turner's was that

every Monday all Canberra wants to talk about what the Cannons did at the weekend and to feel a kind of communal elation or communal despair as a result...  
Can it be that basketball will become Canberra's sporting faith in the way in which Aussie rules prevails in... Melbourne?<sup>43</sup>

The Cannons thus are competing for the honour of the city as well as for the NBL title, and they are encouraged to treat this seriously: as Andy Campbell put it

Basketball is a popular sport in Canberra and you are very much in the public eye. Because of this I believe I am under an obligation to perform to the best of my ability.<sup>44</sup>

The Cannons offer the residents (only a minority of whom ever attend a match), an object of public interest in which, as supporters, they can demonstrate a sharing of common emotions with their fellows. Even for those who do not follow the team's fortunes on the competition ladder, they can still bask in the glory of "their" team's success:

Many supporters' involvement with a football club is their most intense emotional involvement with any abstract idea of community or social movement. Nor is the size of a team's support completely gauged even by the large support at the ground. Each team has many followers who, although they may rarely attend games, read and discuss its reported activities.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from showing the rest of Australia what Canberra could produce in the way of sporting excellence, an added factor was probably the delight in being able to knock over the "big boys" - and especially teams from Melbourne, long regarded as basketball's Australian centre. This may well have been a factor in helping explain the fact that until the 1985 season, the three biggest drawers in the NBL had been Canberra, Newcastle and Illawarra (Wollongong), and in the big increase in crowd sizes that occurred in 1985, the most spectacular occurred in Brisbane. Is this Canberra (and Australian) reaction to basketball a long-term development? As far as Canberra is concerned, Mark Wallace has reported that "plenty" of people living in the city remain unconvinced that basketball is a major sport, believing that once Turner leaves, the Cannons, and the interest in them, will die.<sup>46</sup> This remains to be seen, but it is perhaps significant that the 1985 season saw all teams reporting large increases in NBL crowds, with Canberra once again at the top of the tree. With the bonus of an increasing amount of television coverage of the sport, those who foresee a permanent place for basketball as a major Australian sport have solid grounds for optimism.

#### NOTES:

1. Quoted in Benjamin Lowne, *The Beauty of Sport: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p.257.
2. Bill Mandle, Canberra College of Advanced Education, interview, May 1985.
3. Mike Gibbons, "Through the Hoop", *Amateur Photographer*, 2 March 1985, pp.70-72.
4. There were 355,000 registered participants in 1978. Jim Shepherd, *Encyclopedia of Australian Sport* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1980), p.40.

5. See e.g. *Australian Basketball*, 1.1 (September 1983), p. 16; 1.8 (1985), p.31.
6. *Australian Financial Review*, 19 April 1985.
7. *Australian Basketball*, 1.9 (1985), p.37.
8. For examples of such articles see *Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 4 March 1985, *Canberra Times*, 5 May, 23 August 1985, *West Australian* (Perth), 31 January 1986.
9. *TV Week*, 30 March 1985.
10. National Basketball League, *1984 Year Book*, p.5.
11. Interview, May 1984.
12. Canberra Mazda Cannons 1985 Season Ticket Brochure. The "Magicians" are a troupe of boys who perform basketball tricks, the "gorilla" is the team mascot, "snake moves" are those performed by Herb "The Snake" McEachin and the "General" is Phil Smyth, Australian captain.
13. Paul Gover, "Canberra Cannons. A Little Bit Early", *Australian Basketball*, 1.1 (September 1983), p.22.
14. *Australian Basketball*, 1.10 (1985), p.22.
15. Interview with Tony King, *Australian Basketball*, 1.4 (1984), p.14.
16. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1984.
17. Supplement to *Canberra Times*, 1 July 1984.
18. Garry Ball quoted *Canberra Times*, 27 June 1984; Herb McEachin quoted *Canberra Mazda Cannons Programme*, 19 May 1984; Dave Nelson quoted *Canberra Times*, 21 June 1984.
19. *Age*, 2 July 1984; *Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1979; *Age*, 28 June 1984.
20. Interview with Bob Turner, Terry Ryan, Jerry Lee, May 1984.
21. *Canberra Times 1985 Season Supplement*, n.d.
22. *Australian Basketball*, 2.1 (August-September 1985), back cover.
23. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 July 1984.
24. ACT Amateur Basketball Association Incorporated, *Annual Report 1983; Canberra Times 1985 Season Supplement*, n.d.

25. Interview with Bob Turner, Terry Ryan, Jerry Lee, May 1984.
26. *Canberra Times*, 7 May, 1 September 1985.
27. See e.g. *Age*, 23 June, 2 July, 24 October 1984, 6 May, 1 July 1985.
28. Interview with Terry Ryan, June 1984.
29. Matthew Ricketson, "Television - What Now?", *Australian Basketball*, 2.4 (February-March 1986), p.30; Mark Wallace, "Canberra Crazy!", *Australian Basketball*, 1.3 (1984), p.18.
30. *Australian Basketball*, 1.8 (1985), p.30.
31. Canberra Mazda Cannons, *Fan Appreciation Night Championship Souvenir*, n.d.; Gover, *op.cit.*
32. Supplement to *Canberra Times*, 1 July 1984.
33. Wallace, *op.cit.*, p. 19.
34. *Canberra Times*, 3 July 1984.
35. *Canberra Times*, 8 August 1985; registration figures supplied by ACTABA.
36. Only 25.0% of boys and 6.5% of girls had heard of the Comets. Incidentally the Comets did not field a team in the 1985 national competition, being replaced by an AIS team. This was not public knowledge at the time of the survey.
37. The survey is unlikely to have been significantly biased by the presence of basketball players. Only 14.9% of those surveyed actually played the sport. Of these 91.7% could name Cannons players whereas 55.1% of non-basketballers could do so.
38. The references to specific players were as follows: 100.0% Smyth, 78.7% Campbell, 63.8% McEachin (first NBL player to score 2,000 points), 48.9% Dalton (Olympian), 36.2% Nelson (Cannons captain), 27.7% Ball (Australian training squad), 23.4% Kennedy (best NBL first-year player 1983, 17.0% Morrissey (new player 1985), 14.9% Sinderberry, 14.9% Lee (retired end 1984 season), 12.8% Dufelmeier (played 1982, returned 1985), 12.8% Appleby (new player 1985), 4.3% Hurst (retired end 1984 season).

39. Michael Novak, *The Joy of Sport: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls and the Consecration of the American Spirit* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), p.143.
40. *Ibid.*
41. I am grateful to my colleague, John Hart, for this observation.
42. Ian Warden, *Canberra Times*, 17 June 1981.
43. *Canberra Times*, 21 August 1985.
44. *Canberra Times*, 4 February 1986.
45. Stephen Edgell and David Jary, "Football: a Sociological Eulogy", in Michael A. Smith, Stanley Parker and Cyril S. Smith (eds.), *Leisure and Society in Britain* (London: Allen Lane 1973), p.215.
46. Wallace, *op.cit.*, p.30.