

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 this edition Melvin Adelman replies to Ian Tyrell's review essay which featured in vol.4, no.1, pp.91-99.

I was quite flattered to see that my book received such an extensive review in *Sporting Traditions*. Professor Tyrrell's thoughtful analysis of *A Sporting Time* raises good questions and contains some valid criticism of this work. However, there are points of disagreement, and in the spirit of dialogue rather than rebuttal I hope to elucidate on them, as well as clarify some of the intent of my work.

Tyrell correctly notes that modernization and class interpretation frameworks have raised different kinds of historical questions, although I am not convinced that they are intrinsically mutually exclusive. Since I never insisted that modernization was the sole method that may be employed to investigate the sporting process and its societal context, I think it needs to be judged primarily on whether it answers the questions being raised and the merit of these questions. The major objectives of my work were to demonstrate that the rise of modern sport initially began in America between 1820 and 1870, to explain why it occurred during this period, and to show that a far more active sporting culture existed here in these years than the previous scholarship had indicated. While Elliot Gorn's recent outstanding book, *The Manly Art*, amply illustrates that sport history can profit from applying a class interpretation, this approach would have not facilitated the goals of this study. This is not to deny that class influenced the modernization of sport and I attempted to illustrate how. Nevertheless, structural changes in sport were the result of a variety of inter-related variables. What I found useful about employing modernization as a heuristic device was that it facilitated an exploration

of the internal institutional development of sport while also permitting an examination of the linkage between sport and society.

While Tyrrell charges that my book "often degenerates into the studies of the individual sports", I have become concerned that sport historians, in their effort to gain legitimacy and overcome the limitations of the earlier scholarship, have at times sought to analyze the social context of sport devoid of its content. The belief that the modernization framework offered the best method to examine the themes under investigation does not invalidate some of Tyrrell's criticisms, especially his comments on my chapter on ideology. I should have made clearer that my intent was to examine the ideas of the dominant group. His remarks about blood sports also have some merit, although I stated in several places that the dominant group supported certain sports because they hoped that they would curtail what they perceived as more pernicious amusements.

I disagree with Tyrrell's assertion that my reliance on the daily and sporting journals slanted my understanding of sporting developments. While both gave less attention to the working class than to those in favorable positions, the coverage of sport, especially in the more "democratic" papers such as the *New York Clipper*, was fairly broadly based. In addition, a cursory examination of labor papers revealed virtually no discussion of sport, and even Gorn's work relied on many of the same kinds of primary sources as I did. Tyrrell is more correct in pointing out the problems of extrapolating class from occupation. The analysis would have also profited from incorporating census material and other data, but such an undertaking presented numerous problems in such a large city. Given the objectives of the study and desirous of having my work see the light of day, I adopted this approach, with its limitations, since class and occupation are closely although not perfectly related, and because I felt that it still offered a better understanding of the class backgrounds of sport participants than when historians depended on the impressionistic and often inaccurate statements of contemporary observers. Several of Tyrrell's remarks about New York developments also bear comment. I did not state that this city had by 1870 been totally transformed into a modern one. Rather I asserted that important alterations had propelled New York dramatically, although never fully, in this direc-

tion. I also thought that I have made clear that New York, for all the significant economic changes that occurred, remained essentially a commercial city.

Despite our differences over the baseball-cricket issue, there is much that I admire in Tyrrell's discussion of this theme and many points of agreement. However, I remain opposed to his class analysis to explain the fate of the two sports in America. While the percentage of working-class ballplayers increased after 1855, even prior to this date they comprised between 20 and 25 percent of the players, and even subsequently they still constituted a minority of the participants. While baseball enjoyed broad base appeal, artisans did not dominate the sport. Conversely, problems exist with Tyrrell's assessment of cricket even conceding that the issue is one of control not just numbers. His observations rely essentially on developments in Philadelphia, but cricket conditions there were most atypical. While the exceedingly limited amount of research on cricket in America makes any conclusions tentative, it appears that upper class participation in the sport outside of Philadelphia, and to a certain extent Boston, was minimal. In addition, Tyrrell violates a cardinal principle of his preferred framework by assuming, in the absence of evidence, upper class hegemony over cricket. Moreover, to the degree that gentlemen did control the sport it was more a product of default than their social position, as well as that most of the other participants were probably foreigners. Most importantly, for class to have influenced the fate of the two sports its impact must be shown during the era when they battled for supremacy. In this period, contemporary observers offered numerous reasons for why cricket was less popular than baseball, but not one singled out class, although they explained why other sports were unpopular precisely in terms of this variable.

While Professor Tyrrell has expressed reservations about my book, he has also offered some kind words as well and I appreciate them. That more research and different types of approaches will aid our understanding of sport is self evident. Nevertheless, I remain convinced that a modernization framework offers us one value method to examine sporting developments and its societal context.

TALKING OF HEROES

Colin Tatz

Phatic speech? Speech that is meaningless, speech known by utterer and utteree to be meaningless, but which maintains contact; more important, which (hopefully) keeps open the possibility of substantial communication.

All those years ago I stunned the customs and immigration men, literally. "G'day, how ya goin'?", they drawled. "Fine thanks" and, idiotically expecting an answer, I added: "and how's by you?" Clearly I had to learn phatic. What with "beaut day, isn't it?", "avagoodweekend" and "nice talking to you" (without talking to you), I comprehend.

Males also have super-phatic speech: sports talk. More than anyone else Aussie men use sport as a contact point: on the buses, in the bars and, lest you think it a working-class custom, in the toffee golf clubs.

The locker: the shoe-polishing routine. Fellow-brusher: "D'ya see Cash cream that Slav yestiddy?" It matters not that you did or didn't. If you say yes, he'll tell you how that misunderstood, heroic little battler killed, slaughtered and volleyed him to death. If you say no, he'll tell you how that misunderstood, heroic little...

The fairways: more of this, interspersed (sometimes) with a laconic, seemingly-sardonic throwaway line to the effect that Cec, the old (not the poor) bugger, has two weeks to go with cancer of the pancreas. But avoid any form of seriousness and re-lapse with a quick: "Wonder if Cec saw Norman's fantastic drive at the 17th on telly last night?"

Shower room: much public and pubic powdering and pomading, much phatic. "D'you guys see Norman's fantastic drive at the 17th on the box last night?" "Yeh, awesome, simply f.....g awesome."

Clubhouse bar: television full blare, abominable Kiwi run-outs in slow-motion excruciation. "Whassa score? What'd Border make?" "Nine." "Shit!" Nobody watches. You talk about the forthcoming Tests - League, Union, cricket, it doesn't matter. Nobody

listens.

You talk about what you glimpsed, not saw, last week on the Wondrous World of Sport, about what you heard its two up-front philosopher kings say about yet another 300m high dive into a wine barrel ("a Traminer, for sure Ian"). All this, mind you, amid that very moment's technicolor commentary on some Finn or another winning, yes folks, the uphill giant slalom. (That program has, of course, never quite recovered from the demise of Evel Knievel.)

Don't knock it, I hear you mutter. Indeed, don't. At least it's communication in a world that is frightened to death of contact. You could get AIDS. (That you don't from the incessant dirty jokes is a medical mystery; male dirty talk is hyper-phatic, more communicating than sports talk.)

Sports phatic needs heroes to exist. It can't function on the umpteenth Test match loss. It is difficult to whip up any kind of speech about Cash's win in the South African Open. Even Norman's two ("he wuz robbed") finishes in Majors events can hold up for just so long. Twenty-first in the Calgary bobsled is, hell, twenty-first. It all becomes limp-phatic, so to speak.

The America's Cup? Down the bilges, or up them, as appropriate. The World Rugby Cup? Fifth! Carlton versus Hawthorn? Who cares outside Victoria?

We do need national and international heroes - for our nationalism, sense of identity, our collective pride, to allay our insecurity, to lessen isolation, to prove manli- and womanliness. But we also need them as fuel for phatic.

We had a golden era, with a near-surfeit of heroes. The 1948 cricket team - Bradman, Hassett, Lindwall, Miller, Morris, Barnes, Tallon... Later teams had stars enough to command that Aussie invention, the instant, affectionate abbreviation, the fond nickname or first name: Simmo, Davo, Benaud (difficult), Pascoe (not quite), Slasher, Hookeyes, Hoggy Bacchus. There was Hoady and Rosy and Emmo and Eddo and Sedgo (or was it Sedgmo?). There was Dawn, Ilsa, Shane, Tracy, Lisa and sweet Lorraine (who never quite had the surname for any of this). We had Ossie, Dunky, the Von, a brace of Bruces, Peter Thomson (never, ever Thommo). Catchpole, Fairfax, Sattler, Beetson, Farmer, Barassi: the right stuff, indeed!

We're in hard times. Can you moisten your lips affectionately around Dyer, Waugh, Dodemaide, Merve the Swerve? How do you get to view them, to talk about them meaningfully on a par with Richards, Richardson, Marshall, Greenidge, Gavaskar, Vengsarkar, Dev, Qadir, Imran, Crowe and Hadlee? Apart from Bordeaux, that is?

In the absence or shortage of real world champions, we simply make them. Literally, we manufacture reputation and star quality (sometimes) from less talent than is warranted, and (too often) from less achievement than is real.

Somebody decided to fabricate Greg Matthews. It didn't last. But for a while he was presented, even accepted, as the world's most redoubtable, formidable, personable, incomparable all-rounder. Forget Hadlee, Dev, Imran, Botham, Marshall: for his size and ability he was the greatest!

When a "boring Swede" won recently, a certain channel's hysterical news-opener was: "Cash loses Australian Open!" The point not taken was that it simply wasn't his to lose: it belonged to another "boring Swede". In our desperation - with Hawke and Howard in VIP box almost clasping united hands - we'd already crowned the misunderstood, heroic little battler. We are very good at rejecting reality; even better at creating and adoring fantasy.

Greg Norman is a superb golfer, a great one. But that's not enough for us. Happily a Japanese distiller came up with an "official" set of "world rankings". It matters nought that these past 18 months have been *relatively* lean ones for Norman. Suntory's magic box says he's number one, our media proclaims him daily as number one and so, *em-phatically* for us plebs, he IS number one. "Greg Norman, the world's best golfer, today brushed his teeth with a no. 5 bristle, or was it a 4, Gibbo?"

Jeff Fenech, the holder of two world titles? No: boxing is a loser and so, consequently but somewhat sadly, is Fenech. A pity: he tries hard, is fiercely patriotic, he doesn't live in Florida or fight in Joh'burg, and he puts something back into society with his anti-drug work. Ironically black Lionel belonged, was revered, and was a natural for phatic - even in the Melbourne Club, so I'm told. This boy isn't.

We await the next Wimbledon, the next British Open. Cash and Norman, brilliant as they are, carry the burden of being our medium and our message to each other, in this our 201st year. A win or two could even open the way to talking about sport - if about nothing else - seriously.