

**EARLY ADVERTISING (1892-1932) ON RECREATIONAL SPORTS
- THEMATIC POSSIBILITIES OF THE D'ARCY COLLECTION AT
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS**

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The D'Arcy Collection of advertisements is housed in the Communications Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The sheer volume of the material contained in the collection is more encyclopedic than eclectic. There are two million plus items covering the years 1869-1970. The founder of the collection, initiated in 1920, was St. Louis advertising mogul William D'Arcy. His mandate to his clipping assistants was to scan a wide array of local, regional and national publications (newspapers and magazines). The unofficial curator of the collection, Diane F. Carothers has noted that the collection is singular in that it avoided selecting items and products. There were no restrictions placed on themes, classes, categories or eras. While large circulation glossy magazines such as *Harper's Bazaar* and the *Saturday Evening Post* were culled, so too was *Country Life*, *Collier's*, *Vanity Fair*, *The American Magazine*, *Literary Digest* and *Field and Stream*. Trade publications such as *The Prairie Farmer*, *Refrigerator News*, and *Hardware Age* were also canvassed.

The major problem with the collection is not just identifying but accessing materials relevant to an understanding of the evolution of sports advertising in the first one-third of the century. There are, after all, several hundred reels of film. Preliminary scanning by Carothers suggested that the following sections merited analysis: bathing suits, billiard tables, bowling, playing cards, fishing equipment, football, golf accessories, equitation tackle, motorcycles and scooters, swimming pools, tennis rackets, bicycles, boats (canoes, motor boats and yachts),

camping equipment, firearms, muscle remedies and restoratives, games, golf courses, ice shows, race tracks, sleds and baseball. From this list a final grouping was established (beverages, bicycles, billiards, boats, baseball and bathing suits) and the time period was narrowed to the years 1892-1932.

In definitional terms recreation is seen to be, ‘...free and pleasurable, having its own immediate appeal, not impelled by a delayed reward beyond itself or by any immediate necessity’.¹ Sport is perceived, along Guttman lines, as an activity possessing such characteristics as rationalization, bureaucratic organisation, quantification and the quest for records.²

Selected Sources

Among a welter of specialized sources on the history of advertising, a number stand out as being of particular worth. Presbrey’s *The History and Development of Advertising* was selected because of its ‘provenance’. Ideally placed as a possible primary source, being published as the heady days of the 1920s waned, and, with the Depression and the Wall Street Crash only moments away.

In a concluding chapter entitled ‘Advertising as a Social Force’, Presbrey makes the case that advertising had the potential to be a civilizing influence. He cited the example of flamboyant entrepreneur P.T. Barnum bringing the great soprano Jenny Lind to America. He went on to note that advertising’s concerns with the outdoors and health highlighted a growing public awareness of hygiene, diet, sanitation and exercise. Presbrey saw in advertising an ‘educative force’ primed for ‘social betterment’.⁴ In future studies on this topic it is suggested that consideration be given to the degree of similarity and/or difference between advertising sports equipment and using sport to advertise non-sport goods, for example, beer.

Presbrey also provides all manner of interesting and intriguing avenues for assessing the early role and importance of sports advertising. He discusses a media survey carried out by the *Press and Printer* of Boston in 1898. This journal did a content analysis of a number of magazines and newspapers in the Boston area and noted 2583 separate advertisements. Of these the highest category was 'medicines' (425) and the lowest was 'tobacco/cigars'(17). 'Bicycling' (133) and 'sporting goods and outdoor amusements' (109) were placed towards the middle of the listing.

Much of the early work on sports advertising and marketing relied heavily on the phenomenon of the bicycling craze. This study is no exception and Presbrey dramatically underscores the central role of vigorous advertising in the market place.⁵ For example, Monarch Bicycles in 1898 sold 5000 machines and utilized a relatively low advertising budget of \$75,000. A year later monies invested in advertising reached \$125,000 and sales more than doubled to 50,000 units. This advertising strategy was, according to Presbrey, multi-faceted. There was an allocation for urban 'monthlies' and weekly magazines; 2500 rural 'weeklies'; catalogues; and \$10,000 to sponsor and promote the entourage known as the touring Monarch race-team.

By the 1920s advertising was a societal vehicle to be reckoned with in terms of its economic clout and cultural impact. President Coolidge called it:

The most potent influence in adopting and changing the habits and modes of life, affecting what we eat, what we wear, and the work and play of the whole nation.⁶

F. Rowsome, in an informal history of advertising, makes the point that the word slogan is from the Gaelic and meant originally a battle cry.⁷ Once again the period following World War I is emphasized. This was the era of creating the special identity (Camel, Coca-Cola, His Master's Voice) and the promotional craft of transforming prettiness and

femininity into allure (White Rock Mineral Springs Company and their maiden heroine figure called 'Psyche'). But there was much more than brand identification. There was the creation of the 'hard sell', the employment of emotional psychology, the reign of the copy writer and fledging rivalries between advertising agencies.⁸

J.P. Wood has chronicled the growth of American advertising in the 1920s when advertising revenues jumped from \$1.5 billion in 1918 to \$4 billion in 1929. 'The high-pressure salesman became the darling of business and the pattern of the successful American man'.⁹ By the beginning of the 1920s the *Saturday Evening Post* doubled in size to 200 pages and testimonial advertising saw a new lease of life with cameo portraits from opera to boxing and baseball stars. Advertising copy may not have waxed eloquently but it fired off poetic salvos and enjoyed being 'sentimental, rhetorical, illogical and irresistibly flattering'.¹⁰

The period from the end of World War I until the stock market crash of 1929 was a period of extremes of cynicism and enthusiasm... and a fever for what was new.¹¹

The North American Society for Sport History proves to be a most helpful resource organization and the pioneering efforts of, in particular, Field, Pitts and Miller is noteworthy. In a 1990 paper they carried out an extensive survey of 7300 advertisements in the period 1900-1920 and assessed the impact of advertising techniques. Among their conclusions was that advertising helped to establish a 'consumption ethic' for sporting goods and that 'manufactured sporting goods were the best, highest quality goods that money could buy'.¹²

Among other significant contemporary NASSH contributions to this topic of early sports advertising and marketing have been, Osborne,¹³ Whorton,¹⁴ Breen,¹⁵ Hardy,¹⁶ Dyreson,¹⁷ Ray¹⁸ and Beran.¹⁹ For example, Beran discusses the technological advances that made the Esther Williams Jantzen swim-suit of the 1930s so vastly different from the woolen bathing costume of 1900.

Recent studies in American Culture/Popular Culture have provided to be particularly insightful. At the 1991 American Culture/Popular Culture meeting in San Antonio, Texas, there were several complete sessions devoted to advertising and among these presentations work by Hubbard, Willis and Vachon, Manca, Moriarty and Ray aided in the interpretation of recreational sports advertising from 1892-1932.

Leisure Studies in many respects, however, has provided the tightest theoretical prism for analysis. Tomlinson, while reviewing a text on soccer in England in the 1920s, explains leisure in terms that fit nicely over the concept of advertising in the same frame.

A social history of leisure... reminds us of the way in which leisure has been both the focus of contested meanings and almost simultaneously a source of integrative social and cultural experience.²⁰

Harre explores leisure and creates three categories - time, place and moral quality.²¹ He then subdivides leisure time into, a) relative, that is, in contrast to frantic time, b) no wages, c) play. Play he splits into, a) own territory and, b) proper arenas. Moral quality is divided into, a) perceived freedom and, b) complex enjoyment. By the selection of any advertising theme covered in this paper (boating and billiards, are especially rewarding) it is possible to gauge the interpenetration and interweave of leisure and recreational sports advertising.

Beckers on the other hand, adopts a biographical tack and reviews the contributions of Andries Sternheim. Sternheim was a Dutch Jewish diamond cutter who became a leisure scholar in the 1930s.²² He was fascinated by the revival of working-class recreations (for example bowling and billiards) across social classes. However, after considerable periods of time reviewing advertisements in magazines, such as *Vanity Fair*, *Collier's*, *Harper's Bazaar* and especially the *Saturday Evening Post*, the Sternheim thesis that carries most weight is the philosophical thrust

of recreational sports advertising. These advertisements were designed to inculcate bourgeois values and behavioural patterns. The images, the ideologies and the intent was to raise the class consciousness of a prospering lower middle class in the America of the 1920s. This burgeoning class of Americans had money to spend and time to enjoy trying out fresh recreational avenues.

What of the role of women in this early stage of recreational sports advertising? Once again *Leisure Studies* gives us some useful paths to explore. New Zealander Shona Thompson emphasizes the male hegemony in sport. 'It is argued that gender relations in sport are mediated by male interest and serve to incorporate women for the institution's maintenance and reproduction'.²³ This state of affairs was even more omnipresent in the world of recreational advertising from 1892-1932. Women did not hold down significant power positions either in newspapers or in the world of advertising, yet they did make up a significant sector, perhaps major in terms of bicycling and bathing suits, of the clients' consumer base. Henderson's work identifies the experiences of leisure for American farm women over their life - the period covered was 1930-1980. Her novel approach employs the construct of 'containers for leisure'.²⁴ These included house parties, dancing, reading, visiting friends, church activities, women's clubs and so on. Free time spent in the outdoors was 'elaborately described' and categorized as 'refreshing and relaxing'. Certainly a close reading of the *Saturday Evening Post* and its recreational sports advertising in the 1920s and early 1930s, reveals that material was designed to market the joys of the outdoors and target women as potential buyers. Bolla's study on contemporary media images of women and leisure concludes with the following overview statement:

Chatting with men, 'passive' physical activity, and lounging are the predominant illustrations of women's leisure... Women's leisure appears highly sedentary, often mindless, and heavily dependent on men.²⁵

The extent to which this accurately represents specific advertisements reviewed, for the purposes of this paper, is questionable. Indeed, in areas of leisure activity, such as bicycling and bathing, the picture would be false.

In the light of the sheer quantity of the material contained in this sub-section of the D'Arcy collection, the paper restricts itself to a first stage review of basic themes that seem to lend themselves to on-going analyses. The five themes suggested in the following section are listed as analyses 1-5. With each of the analyses a key question is posed. While this paper draws on American primary sources, suggestions are made regarding possible implications/similarities/differences within an Australasian context.

ANALYSES

Analysis 1

The Rhetoric of Selling Recreation

Company/Item	Production Slogan/Logo
Paradise Water	<i>Are you fit at 50?</i>
Mountain Valley Water	<i>Too much work, too much food, too little exercise</i>
Columbia Bikes	<i>Wheeling - the sport of the day</i>
Billiards	<i>Any weather is billiards weather</i>
Chris Craft	<i>.....Joyous outdoor life</i>
Wilson	<i>Excellence of equipment</i>
Jantzen	<i>Swim for a bounding health and joy</i>

The first suggested analysis is to carry out a content analysis of the advertising copy and explore the thesis that there is a particular language and vocabulary employed in advertising recreational sports items. Within Australian and New Zealand publications over the same time period, it would be fascinating to assess the extent to which advertising rhetoric reflected the voice of 'Mother England', the tenor of an emerging sense of antipodean identity, or an embrace of Americana and American culture.

Analysis 2

Celebrity Figures in Promotion

Figure	Sport	Concept
William Bachrach- Illinois Athletic Association Coach	Swimming	Credibility
Johnny Weissmuller	Swimming	Mass Appeal
Babe Ruth	Baseball	Match-up hypothesis
Alfred Lord Tennyson Judge Landis	Billiards Athletic paraphernalia	Influential endorser Charismatic carry over.

The second suggestion is to explore the extent and scale of the celebrity persona as a successful advertising tool. For example, the dead nineteenth century romantic English poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, was seen to embrace and promote the same sport-billiards - as the twentieth century American journalist Grantland Rice. Weissmuller and Ruth were household names in American sport and, in many respects, personified stellar performers in their field. The Wilson Company adopted a more sophisticated marketing strategy by translating a tribute to the athletic nobility of the spirit of Kenesaw Mountain Landis (the commissioner of baseball) into a declaration of their own commitment to producing excellent athletic equipment.

In Victorian New Zealand there was an affection for Britain's cultural baggage. Tom Brown's sporting motif of cricket ('... it's more than a game. It's an institution') struck a cultural chord on the fringe of the British Empire. New Zealand lionised W.G. Grace, General Gordon of Khartoum, and swimmer extraordinary Captain Webb. On the return of the all conquering All Blacks from their rugby tour of Great Britain in 1906, New Zealand cheered their compatriots.²⁶ Were these successful athletes perceived as 'native' athletic folk heroes? By the 1920s and early 1930s it would seem likely that Australasian popular press sporting advertisements capitalised on the exploits of local celebrity athletes. Nevertheless, the British Legacy was a powerful one. As late as the 1950s, Brylcream (a hair tonic), was marketed around the world by the English cricketer Dennis Compton.

What of Australia's success in the Davis Cup-1908-1911, 1914 and 1919? What of the Australian rugby team who won the Olympic gold medal at the 1908 London Olympics? In the period 1890-1920 there were the successes of cricketer Victor Trumper and boxer Les Darcy. During the years 1920-1935 'Boy' Charlton won a swimming gold medal in the 1924 Olympics over 1500 metres and Phar Lap galloped to horse-racing victories in Australia and America. And, of course, in the late 1920s, there was the arrival of arguably the greatest batsman of all time, Don Bradman.

.....had there been a god of the game to whom we could have prayed that lad's name [Bradman] would have risen from almost every home in Australia, freighted with a country's hopes, imploring heaven that he would not let us down but would carry to greatness the promise he had already shown.²⁷

These personalities and others must have attracted the attention of Australasian sports advertisers.

Analysis 3

'Roger Callois And His Classification Of Play Paradigm'

Recreational Sports	Themes in the Advertising Package
Agon (competition)	Arthur Lundberg, Champion of the Northwest rides a Dayton
Alea (chance)	Victor bicycles: walking or cycling. A toss of the coin or a decision?
Mimicry (pretense)	“The best time you every dreamed of ...”
Ilinx (vertigo)	“For the speed and sport that gives you a kick and a thrill”

A third possible analysis is to take a theoretical model, in this case Roger Callois' classification of play,²⁸ and interweave it with the messages and motives implicit in the collected advertising data. In the case of the given example, bicycling, primary source advertisements go some way towards affirming the Caillois paradigm.

Analysis 4

'Females: Role, Status And Position'

Product	Sport	Theme
“White Rock”	Hunting	Male exclusivity
“Monarch”	Bicycling	No gender bias
“Monarch”	Bicycling	High Fashion
“Stearn”	Bicycling	Stereotyping
“Bicycling Union”	Bicycling	Female Class elite
“Evinrude”	Water skiing	The athletic Female
“Jantzen”	Swimming	The athletic Female

A fourth area to explore is the role, status and position of women as they appeared in recreational sports advertisements from 1892-1932. An 1899 Stearn bicycling advertisement portrayed their product as ready to ‘capture a women’s heart’ because it had a ‘light and graceful makeup’. Some *Saturday Evening Post* advertisements of the 1920s were aimed at a prospering upper class rooted in the ethos of East Coast preparatory school, private college, exclusive country club and New England gentry.

The Campus trail is a speedy track.
 From chapel to class to gym and back.
 The college girl for the bike is strong,
 For there’s lots of fun as you spin along.

Vassar, Wellesley and Smith all say
 It makes for a longer busier day
 Pick for your college the one you like,
 But the honours go to the girls who bike.

Jantzen advertisements in the period after 1920 increasingly depicted an athletic female captured in a movement setting. Ready to dive, airborne or hitting the water. Some of the Jantzen advertisements even gave statistical surveys - without any corroboration - that, for example 478 out of 517 physical instructors recommended the use of a Jantzen suit. Annette Kellermann, Australia's first international swimmer and movie star was quoted as saying in a April 4, 1912 *Bulletin* interview:

[I] can spend hours in the water, and feel just as fresh coming out as I did going in. I was the delicate child of the family - no, I don't look it now. Nerves? Haven't any, and never get ill, so I'm a good advertisement for swimming as exercise for girls.²⁹

Although not used as advertising copy the following description of Australian batsman Stan McCabe in 1932 captures the flavour of the artistic and athletic possibilities inherent within sports reporting. The source is the *Sydney/Morning Herald* of December 5.

With the grace and verve of a lithe-limbed ballet dancer and, amid cannonades of cheers that swept the ground every few seconds, he smacked England's star bowlers all over the place with boyish zest.³⁰

A cross-cultural study of American and Australasian sports advertising over the period under review in this paper would reveal many similarities. Nevertheless, the settings and their cultural values have profound differences.

In the United States the ideal of greatest emotional appeal has always been liberty (or freedom); in Australia that place of honour is held by equality.³¹

In the period of this paper, 1892-1932, it would be most unwise to assume notions of universal norms on the interpenetration of work and leisure in Australia and America. While the Protestant work ethic certainly legitimized, if not sanctified, the creed of the driving American worker both on the shop floor and in the executive suite, Brian Stoddart highlights the paradox of play in an Australian context.

Australian leisure history simply cannot be understood within the orthodox trivalized line. Leisure has always had a serious socializing purpose which is possibly one reason why Australians have always treated leisure subconsciously as a serious business....³²

Analysis 5

'The Athletic Artistic Images Of Advetising'

1. Eye catching slogans - "Downhill after 30?"
2. Beverage bottles framed against sporting paraphernalia.
3. Golfers vigorously striding off the course headed for a ginger ale!
4. Celebrity figures photographed dominating the advertisement space.
5. Increasing use of photograph over lithograph or illustration.
6. Moving athletic images used by Wilson, Evinrude and Jantzen.

A final analysis calls for an artistic assessment to be made of the evolution and development of aesthetics in the recreational sports advertising milieu. By the early 1930s, many recreational sports advertisements epitomized up-market sleekness and sophistication. Products were presented as being both alluring and impossible to resist. The images for boats, bicycles and bathing suits was a melange of healthy, handsome, successful and athletic young people enjoying the American dream of economic prosperity in a healthy, out-of-doors setting.

This study of the evolution of sports in American advertising is a preliminary one. It has endeavoured to utilise the D'Arcy Collection at the University of Illinois as a primary source and, in terms of theoretical insights, the contributions of work in American Culture/Popular Culture and in Leisure Studies. Five possible/speculative analyses are outlined as they seem to indicate promising testing and proving grounds for future work in this area. The period under review, 1892-1932, graphically illustrates the reorientation of recreational sports advertising. In the 1890s and the 1900s the major concern with advertisers was providing information to educate and thus indirectly influence possible buyers. By the 1930s the major thrust in advertising was hard hitting selling to create and capitalize upon an ever-expanding market that was, and is, the cornerstone of American consumer culture.

APPENDIX (SOURCE NOTES FOR ANALYSES 1-4)

1.
 - "Paradise Water", *Globe Democrat*, 24 May, 1921.
 - "Mountain Valley Water", *Globe Democrat*, 14 November, 1930.
 - "Columbia Bikes", *Standard of the World*, May, 1894
 - Billiards, *American Magazine*, February, 1917
 - "Chris Craft", *Saturday Evening Post*, 27 April, 1929.
 - "Wilson", *Saturday Evening Post*, 24 June, 1922.
 - "Jantzen", *Collier's*, 31 May, 1931.

2.
 - William Bachrach, *Saturday Evening Post*, 26 May, 1926.
 - Johnny Weissmuller, *Collier's*, 31 May, 1931.
 - Babe Ruth, *Saturday Evening Post*, 24 March, 1928.
 - Tennyson and Rice, *Saturday Evening Post*, 20 December, 1930
and *Saturday Evening Post*, 5 February, 1921.
 - Judge Landis, *Saturday Evening Post*, 5 February, 1921.

3. - agon, *Literary Digest*, April, 1922.
 - alea, *Harper's Weekly*, 26 October, 1895.
 - mimicry, *American Magazine*, July, 1920.
 - vertigo, *Saturday Evening Post*, 6 October, 1928.
4. - "White Rock", *Country Life*, October, 1929.
 - "Monarch", Not identified, 1895.
 - "Monarch", *Harper's Weekly*, an 1896 advertisement.
 - "Stearn", *Harper's Weekly*, 25 May 1901.
 - "Bicycling Union", *Saturday Evening Post*, April, 1928.
 - "Evinrude", *Saturday Evening Post*, specific issue not identified, 1926.
 - "Jantzen", *Saturday Evening Post*, undated, circa, 1927.

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NOTES

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15. N. Breen, 'A History of Athletic Apparel', paper to NASSH, 1987.
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