

Why ‘The End of Sports History?’

It is tradition, and a good one, that academic conferences have an overarching theme. Conference themes typically reflect prevailing paradigms, debates, controversies, trends or simply, the *zeitgeist*. The choice of theme for Sporting Traditions XII appeared obvious in light of current institutional stresses endured by the academic discipline of history, and its sub-fields, and in view of the questions raised by Francis Fukuyama’s ‘The End of History?’ thesis a decade ago. (Although we must confess that our close colleague John Loy was the first to suggest the theme.)

Consequently, we were initially taken aback by some negative responses. ‘I’ve never been to a conference where participants contemplated, let alone discussed, then end of their field’, blubbered one poor soul. In his myopic paranoia he failed to notice the question mark at the end of the title, an admittedly small punctuation mark but one that opens limitless possibilities for approaching the theme - as the contributors to this volume demonstrate. Happily, this particular critic didn’t come to Queenstown; equally happily, only a tiny minority of sports historians felt such consternation and this small subset is, as Murray Phillips reminds us, fast approaching extinction.

It is also tradition, and one with which we are less enamoured, that conference include one, two, or even three, keynote speakers who discuss their latest, supposedly, groundbreaking research. Too often, however, the research is stale, the speakers unreflective. Moreover, time constraints invariably preclude serious debate and exchange. On the other hand, keynote addresses do afford associations and societies valuable opportunities to recognise leaders in the field and their contributions.

Determined to dispose of the worst and capture the best features of the keynote speaker tradition, we invited ten prominent thinkers in the field to discuss and debate ‘The End of Sports History?’. The debates occupied the main session on each of the four days of the conference. (Pleasingly, several other conference delegates responded to the conference theme; they presented in sessions immediately following the feature speakers.¹) Debate, however, was the operative work. Some past organisers of Sporting Traditions conferences have included single-session debates in their programs. But most often, debate has been spontaneous

and typically stifled by over-sensitive chairs fearful of disrupting what they perceive to be a 'clubby' conference mood. What those chairs fail to recognise is that full exchanges of views are the basis of resolving disagreement and, ultimately, engendering collegial respect. Indeed, as the readers of this volume will discover, despite the diversity of ideologies, perspectives, styles, ambitions and agendas among the contributors, they share a degree of confidence in the future of sports history.

We would like to thank John O'Hara for the opportunity to edit this volume of *Sporting Traditions* and the ten speakers at Queenstown who generously agreed to commit their reflections, analyses and prognoses to paper for this special edition. The articles appear in the same order as they were presented at the conference. Although the azure skies, clear waters, and majestic peaks of Queenstown may be absent, we hope that the spirit and content of *Sporting Traditions XII* shines through.

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Note

- 1 Mamie Haig-Muir and Roy Hay, 'The end of sports history? Why it has only just begun' (haysoc@deakin.edu.au); Lynn Embrey, 'the end of sports history? Let's ask the students' (L.Embrey@cowan.edu.au); Sob Stewart, 'Economic rationalism, sport management education, and the demise of sports history' (maybloom@vic.bigpond.net.au); Gerd von der Lippe, 'The end of sports history?' (Gerd.v.d.Lippe@hit.no).