

*The 1948-49 Track and Field
Season: Mrs. Blankers-Koen,
Mrs. O'Keefe, Mr. Calwell;
Lloyd La Beach,
Herb McKenley and Wally McArthur.*

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The analysis of particular moments in sport, such as the breakdown of traditional conventions and customs that occurred during the bodyline cricket tour, or even the birth of a form of sporting endeavour or of a particularly momentous contest will offer insights into aspects of history that cannot be supplied from other sources

With these words in the Preface of *Sport in History* Cashman and McKernan (1979) signaled a new era in the relationship between sport and history in Australia.¹ In 1985 the then federal Department of Sport, Recreation and Tourism in conjunction with the newly created Australian Sports Commission released *Australian Sport: A Profile* which was intended to 'fill a gap in the literature on sport in Australia' by providing 'an assessment of the historical, social and cultural context within which sport in Australia has developed with a description of the way sport is run and played today'.² Thereafter followed a number of critical historical analyses of Australian sport by Stoddart (1986), Stell (1991), Vamplew and Stoddart (1994), Cashman (1995), and Adair and Vamplew (1997) which clearly enunciated a number of persistent themes including the role of the media, gender, race, politics and amateurism.³ Such analyses have contributed substantially to untangling the complexity of Australian sport and provide a base from which to investigate specific events to show the interaction of two or more of the themes and thus enhance the richness of the literature on Australian sport. The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct principally from the print media a narrative of the 1949 concurrent tours by the Dutch athlete Fanny Blankers-Koen, the 'all-round woman champion' of the 1948 London Olympic Games, and the

two male Olympians, Lloyd La Beach from Panama and Herb McKenley from Jamaica.⁴

Such a narrative provides a continuity not readily apparent in isolated news items distributed throughout the print media over an eight month period from August 1948 to March 1949. In a continuous narrative the themes came into a much sharper focus. The media became both a source of information and a theme. The press was alerted to the possibility of Mrs. Blankers-Koen being invited to Australia during the 1948 Games and maintained updates on the status of the invitations. At times the press acted as a conduit for the relaying of messages between the organisers, sometimes surprising athletic officials by releasing information before official telegrams and much slower letters reached Australia. During the tours routine results and explanations appeared in the news and sports pages along with descriptions and human interest items in the social pages. Thematically gender was implicated on several levels: first, between male and female athletic officials in Australia; second, in contrasting the athletic talent of a champion woman against notions of woman's role in postwar recovery; and thirdly, in the presence of a white European female at the same time as black, Caribbean males. For the male athletes race was another theme touched upon as links were drawn between them and Australian Aborigines. In text and cartoons the print media went much further and linked the tours to prevailing political events: Mrs. Blankers-Koen with attempts to deport a woman of Dutch Indonesian origins and La Beach and McKenely with the forced relocation of a talented young Aboriginal athlete, Wally McArthur. The constraints of the code of amateurism were also demonstrated as the women's officials contemplated how they might host the Blankers children without breaching the code and La Beach showed considerable interest in professional 'gift' footraces.

The Invitations

On 6 August 1948, midway through the London Olympic Games, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that Mrs. Doris Magee, chaperone of the Australian team, would recommend to the New South Wales Women's Amateur Athletic Association (NSWWAAA) that Mrs. Fanny Blankers-Koen, be invited to compete in the next Australian athletic season. Mrs. Magee wore multiple hats: chaperone to the nine women in the Olympic team, official of the NSWWAAA and the Australian Women's Amateur Athletic Union (AWAAU) and sporting journalist.⁵

In the lead up to the 1948 Olympic Games the AWAAU had demonstrated an 'energetic frame of mind' by 'feeding the media a steady diet of press releases on the exemplary competitive performances of Australian women athletes'.⁶ Their efforts were rewarded with frequent and detailed press coverage at a time when newspapers and magazines placed most emphasis upon women's role as homemakers and mothers. Women had all but disappeared from the sporting pages unless their deeds "were just too difficult to ignore".⁷ Mrs. Blankers-Koen's performances could not be ignored. She was a quadruple gold medallist with victories in the 100 and 200 metre sprints, the 80 metres hurdles and as the anchor runner of the Dutch 4 x 100 metres relay. She held the world records for these events and for the broad and high jumps in which she had been unable to compete in London because Olympic rules restricted women to three individual events.⁸

The AWAAU was, however, subservient to the hegemonic rules of the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) which sanctioned only invitations for international exchanges issued by its affiliated men's associations. The AWAAU was forced to acquiesce to the men's Australian Amateur Athletic Union (AAAU). Following a joint conference of the AAAU and the AWAAU in early October 1948, the AAAU forwarded an invitation by letter to its counterpart, the Netherlands Amateur Athletic Union. Mr. Edgar Tanner, general manger of the 1948 Australian Olympic team, was quoted as being "surprised that it had been left to women officials to seek a visit by Mrs. Fanny Blankers-Koen, the most talked of and certainly most colourful athlete at the Olympic Games".⁹ It appears that the AWAAU was not the only group to attempt to take the initiative away from the AAAU. In mid-August there had been reports of an invitation issued by a syndicate led by Mr. Euston Greene and purportedly sanctioned by both the men's and women's associations. Mr. Arthur Hodson, secretary of the AAAU, dismissed the reports. Mr. Greene stated that the syndicate had no intention of profiting from the venture and seems to have acted out of frustration with the AAAU which "should have made a move a long time ago".¹⁰

During negotiations over the invitation the men's association magnanimously offered to cancel any of its events which might be seen as 'counter-attractions' provided the women's association did not present Mrs. Blankers-Koen's appearance in Sydney as a 'counter-attraction' to the Australian [men's] championships to be held at the Sydney Cricket

Ground on 15 and 22 January 1949. Press reports suggest that there was constant sniping over 'counter-attractions' between the associations throughout the tours.

Mrs. Blankers-Koen did not respond immediately. In late October *The Sydney Morning Herald* relayed a message from the Australian Associated Press (AAP) in The Hague indicating that Mrs. Blankers-Koen was undecided because she had expected the invitation to include her two children as well as her husband Jan who was her trainer (coach). The NSWWAAA was prepared to fund the children but was very concerned that such a gesture would breach the rules of amateurism which they interpreted to mean that 'an athlete could not receive any benefit through his or her own sport, and to pay the expenses of the children would constitute a benefit'.¹¹ It was feared that such a breach would not only compromise Mrs. Blankers-Koen but also prejudice the amateur status 'of our own girls'. A sign of the changing attitudes towards women's participation in elite sport was a comment from Mrs. Magee quoted by *The Sydney Morning Herald*, on 27 October

This rule was drawn up without thought of the possibility that a world champion would be the mother of two children.... The old gentlemen probably would not have approved of that!

There was a suggestion that a member of the Dutch community in Sydney would fund the children but this was also considered dubious in view of the strict rules of amateurism.¹²

To provide worthwhile competition the NSWWAAA provisionally invited Western Australian athlete Miss Shirley Strickland to accompany Mrs. Blankers-Koen on the tour. Miss Strickland had contested the same events as Mrs. Blankers-Koen in London becoming Australia's first female Olympic track medallist by winning bronze medals in the 80 metres hurdles and 100 metres sprint, a silver medal in the 4 x 100 metres relay and placing fourth in the 200 metres sprint.¹³

Mrs. Blankers-Koen finally confirmed her invitation on 14 December 1948 having rejected invitations to tour Chile and South Africa as well as one to compete in the American indoor season in February 1949.¹⁴ Miss Strickland also formally agreed to tour although doubts had arisen over her form. Since returning from London she had been defeated by local Western Australian athletes because she was carrying leg and foot injuries. Miss Strickland flew to Melbourne early in January 1949 to receive

specialist medical advice. This provided the press with a suitable subplot as she battled to regain form and hence a medical clearance which in turn would secure the necessary approval to compete from her State association. When it seemed unlikely that Mrs. Blankers-Koen would be seriously challenged following detailed reports of Miss Strickland's injuries a cartoon in *The Sunday Telegraph* of 9 January captured the resolve of the New South Wales women's association to push ahead with its plans. The caption stated that the 'N.S.W. Women's Amateur Athletic Association will not permit a hitch in plans to alter its programme for the Dutch Olympic champion runner Mrs. Fanny Blankers-Koen. *It believes in doing things by calves.*' (emphasis in the original.) By emphasising the legs of the women athletes and playing on words attention was focused on gender and the femininity expected of women in postwar Australia.

In addition to doubts about whether Mrs. Blankers-Koen would tour and the fitness of Miss Strickland, the NSWWAAA became embroiled in financial wranglings with the women's associations from other states. The generosity of the NSWWAAA to invest £2,000 in the tour was appreciated but each state had its own concerns. Victoria disputed the cost sharing formula for the Melbourne leg of the tour and presented an alternative which would require them to only outlay £400 rather than £500 as calculated by NSW. South Australia seemed unlikely to raise sufficient funds and threatened to pull out altogether. Western Australia believed that it should receive an appearance fee for its Olympic star, Miss Strickland. The NSWWAAA dismissed these latter claims arguing that not only was it a breach of the rules of amateurism, but all Australians had contributed funds to send the team to London so all Australians deserved to see Miss Strickland run at home.¹⁵

As newspapers across Australia updated the saga of the invitation to Mrs. Blankers-Koen it was also revealed that the men's association was engaged in its own negotiations to have victorious overseas male Olympians as draw cards for their 1948-49 season. Australia's track and field gold medallist, high jumper John Winter, had opted to pursue his banking career in London and did not return to Australia until 1950.¹⁶ Initially invitations were issued to Jamaican Arthur Wint, winner of the 400 metres in London, and American Harrison Dillard, gold medallist in the 100 metres. After some delays firm acceptances were received from Panamanian Lloyd La Beach, the 100 metres bronze medallist in London and world record holder at 10.2 seconds, and Jamaican Herb McKenley,

silver medallist to Wint. By inference, press coverage of the rival invitations reinforced the notion that a male place getter was a superior athlete to a female quadruple gold medallist.

Planning for the men's visitors did not proceed smoothly. McKenley insisted on spending the Christmas vacation at home in Jamaica as a break from his combined dentistry-physical education studies at Illinois University, USA. Subsequently he had difficulty leaving Jamaica because he was a scholarship athlete and could not take money out of the country thus incurring the wrath of the taxation officials. He failed to reach San Francisco in time to join La Beach for the flight to Australia. Serious doubts about his commitment to Australia also arose when the United States Amateur Athletic Association (USAAA) accused him of 'monkey-business' because he had entered the Knights of Columbus athletic meeting to be held in New York at the time he was to compete in Australia. The USAAA threatened to ban him from further competition in the United States if he did not honour his contract to compete in Australia.¹⁷ Upon his arrival McKenley denied the accusations emphasising that participating in Australia was a priority because he had been given such a 'rousing reception' during his visit the previous summer.

Fortunately, all three overseas athletes arrived in Australia by the second week in January 1949 but as *The Bulletin* of 12 January noted:

A month or so back the Athletic Association officials were entertaining rosy dreams of having this year the most prosperous in their history. The Olympic Games had revived interest in athletics, and the association planned to hold and cash-in on that interest by importing overseas Olympians to compete against our best. One by one, however, their plans seem to be drifting into the red. Clashes between Mrs. Blankers-Koen ... and Shirley Strickland would be a great draw card; the Dutch woman will still no doubt draw crowds, but Shirley Strickland, it seems, is on the sick list. Panamanian sprinter Lloyd La Beach arrived last week only to find his prospectively strong local opponent [John] Treloar is also *hors de combat*. Jamaican Herb McKenley, after temporarily vanishing in America, will arrive to find [Morris] Curotta, by unhappy coincidence, also a casualty.¹⁸

Mrs. Blankers-Koen's tour

Undaunted by the tyranny of distance the AWAAU devised an ambitious

programme for Mrs. Blankers-Koen and her husband-coach Jan Blankers. It took them almost a week to travel the 12,000 miles (19,000 kilometres) from winter in Holland via London to summer in Australia. They arrived in Sydney on 8 January 1949 where they stipulated that a week be allowed for acclimatisation and resumption of training. They then flew a further 6,000 miles to competitions in Melbourne, Adelaide, Perth and Brisbane before returning to Sydney for three more meets. Mrs. Magee and Miss Strickland accompanied them.

Mrs. Blankers-Koen contested 14 events for 11 victories including all her hurdle races plus high jump, shot putt and discus. Her losses – and some victories – were not without drama. In Adelaide she pulled up shortly after the start of the hurdles race because she could not establish her normal rhythm. Jan Blankers inspected the track and discovered that the hurdles had been placed for a 90 yards event rather than 80 metres. She easily won the re-run. In Perth Mrs. Blankers-Koen had the misfortune to fall during the 100 yards sprint incurring some damage to her right knee which impeded her for the remainder of the tour and resulted in her competing in fewer events than her hosts had planned. She further aggravated her injured leg in Brisbane where the hurdles were again set incorrectly.

The major upsets occurred at the three Sydney meets. In the space of a week seventeen-year-old Marjorie Jackson from Lithgow twice defeated Mrs. Blankers-Koen. In winning the first clash Miss Jackson set an Australian record of 11.8 seconds for the 100 metres which was one-tenth of a second faster than Mrs. Blankers-Koen's winning time in London. The sequence of the three levels of headlines in the *Sydney Morning Herald* displayed an interesting attempt to acknowledge the feat of the local girl yet not discredit the visitor: Level 1 - Thrills at Women's Athletic Carnival; Level 2 - Dutch Star Wins by 12 Yards; and Level 3 - Lithgow Girl's Amazing Time, after which the article by Tom Goodman opened with the defeat of Mrs. Blankers-Koen by Miss Jackson. On the same page there were four articles about the carnival plus separate photographs of each sprinter and broad jumper, Judy Canty.

At the second meet Miss Jackson had expected the race against Mrs. Blankers-Koen over 100 yards but was informed that she was not to take part in the invitation race. In protest her trainer Jim Monaghan advised her and another runner from Lithgow to withdraw from the 220 yards. Ironically, after setting an Australian record of 11.3 seconds for the 80

metres hurdles Mrs. Blankers-Koen withdrew from the 100 yards event on the advice of her coach so she would not be overtaxed prior to her final appearance three days later. Miss Jackson was then admitted to the depleted 100 yards field and won. In their final encounter over 100 yards Mrs. Blankers-Koen stumbled at the 65 yards mark and jogged through to finish unplaced behind Miss Jackson. Jan Blankers immediately inspected the track with his wife who argued that she had hit a muddy spot. This was not obvious to others who also inspected the track. What seemed to be apparent to some observers was a change in Mrs. Blankers-Koen's running style so she was further forward on her toes to gain more assistance from her spikes. Contrasting explanations appeared in the press. According to the report in the *Sunday Herald* of 13 February, Miss Jackson's trainer had placed a thin covering of crepe rubber over the leather soles of her running shoes, a practice endorsed by professional athletes to improve the grip on wet grass. *The Argus* of 14 February suggested that Miss Jackson had simply forgotten to remove the false rubbers she had used to protect her shoes from the muddy conditions during her warm-up.¹⁹ For Miss Jackson it was more than a victory over the greatest female athlete of the era. She and Monaghan had a score to settle with the officials who had excluded her from the 1948 Olympic team after she had missed the start at the trials. Miss Jackson was determined to gain a berth in the team for the 1950 Empire Games in Auckland. Convincing victories over Mrs. Blankers-Koen were part of her strategy.

As Mrs. Blankers-Koen travelled around Australia two types of press reports focused on her. The first were the standard results and race descriptions. Discrepancies were also discussed between athletics Australian-style and international athletics with which she and Jan were more expert than their hosts. The incorrect placement of the hurdles in Adelaide and Brisbane was one example. Another was the starting technique with Jan Blankers at one stage claiming that Australian women sprinters 'beat the gun' at the start and suggested that their technique was worth about a fifth of a second over 100 yards.²⁰ Their criticisms, however, were balanced by acts of generosity. Jan Blankers demonstrated his commitment to the promotion of women athletes by conducting special coaching sessions. He even broke his self-imposed rule not to coach during competition when he advised Miss Canty to modify her technique in the New South Wales championship which she won.

The second type of report was very much in keeping with the press in postwar Australia which had a 'new agenda ... operating for women. It was women's duty to restock the population and the emphasis now was on motherhood, homemaking and domesticity ...'.²¹ Mrs. Blankers-Koen thus received considerable coverage in sections of the press other than sport and news. The social columns described the mayoral receptions hosted in each state's capital city and functions held by various Dutch communities. Initially these reports in the women's pages concentrated upon her physique (almost six feet tall, lithe and with a stride length of seven feet); her age (30 years); her married status; her two children (who remained at home with their grandparents) and her husband's role as her coach. In Melbourne *The Argus Women's Magazine* of 4 January noted favourably, and perhaps as a rebuke to ambitious Australian women, that, 'She was a champion and yet a person at the same time. She showed little of the superior attitude of most highly successful women, and never pushed herself as a quadruple medallist'.²² Part of her reserve can perhaps be attributed to her hesitancy with the English language which prompted comparisons with the popular American film star, Greta Garbo. Husband Jan was portrayed as the dominant member of the partnership who 'insisted on her being a good wife and mother first; then a star athlete'.²³ There was no parallel suggestion that Jan had to be a good husband and father; then a coach! Her cooking and sewing skills were highlighted but her confession that she considered housework a necessity that she did not really like, seemed at odds with efforts to portray her as a homely woman. With the media emphasis on fashion readers were also informed that Mrs. Blankers-Koen wore size 7 shoes, minimal makeup, no nail polish and orange shorts – the latter without any explanation about Dutch team colours. *The Women's Weekly* did attempt to balance its 'wife and mother' article of 22 January with a full page pictorial display of her hurdling technique on 29 January.

Mrs. Blankers-Koen drew large crowds - almost 24,000 in Melbourne and 19,000 in Adelaide -justifying the efforts of the AWAAU to sponsor her tour. Photographs and cartoons illustrate an important aspect: the majority of spectators were male, an observation also made that summer about the women's Test cricket matches against England and the softball Tests against New Zealand.²⁴

As her tour ended *The Argus Women's Magazine* of 8 February attempted to establish a femininity for the Australian athletes modeled

on Mrs. Blankers-Koen. An article on hurdler, Miss Wilma Collins ran under the title 'Wife's Place is in the Home, Says Young Athlete'. Descriptions of Miss Collins' athletic prowess were intermingled with her physical features (height, weight, complexion and diet) and her plans to compete in the forthcoming Empire Games. She was engaged to be married and intended to give up athletics because 'a wife's place is in the home looking after her husband' although her fiance did not want her to cease and apparently saw himself as another Jan Blankers.

Prior to her departure on 17 February Mrs. Blankers-Koen expressed her belief that Australian women athletes would further enhance their international reputation although she added a particularly important condition - Australia needed to improve its facilities and a cinders track had to be the highest priority.²⁵ Reflecting upon the prowess of the young Australian sportswomen *The Bulletin* of 12 February claimed success resulted from the hardships women had endured during the past decade. There was no mention of the Nazi occupation of Holland during the war which Mrs. Blankers-Koen had not only survived but managed to give birth to two children and maintain some sort of training programme which took her to the pinnacle of her career at the London Games. Australian sportswomen, such as 1948 relay silver medallist June Ferguson (née Maston) were, however, aware that their wartime deprivations were far less severe than those endured by their European sisters and partially attributed their postwar successes to their more fortunate lifestyle.²⁶

There was a sense that Australian women athletes were on the brink of greatness. Caution gave way to optimism but was garnered in patriarchal rhetoric about 'our girls'.²⁷ As well as Miss Strickland, the women's athletic officials had considerable depth of talent upon which to draw including Victorian hurdler, Wilma Collins, NSW sprinter and Olympian Joyce King, and Victorian broad jumper Judy Canty. Mrs. Blankers-Koen was, however, entering the twilight of her career. According to details in an interview given during a stopover in London on her homeward journey Mrs. Blankers-Koen explained that her losses in Australia were due to competing out of season on grass tracks coupled with a large amount of travel.²⁸

The "other" Dutchwoman

Generally the press referred to Mrs. Blankers-Koen as the 'Dutchwoman' or 'Dutch athlete'. From late January 1949 and well into February the latter term was more precise as another story with strong Dutch affiliations

began to evolve and the press had to distinguish between the two especially when stories were juxtaposed on the same page. On 3 February The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran adjacent articles, one entitled 'Dutch athlete breaks down: Injury to knee' and the other 'Dutch say woman Calwell wants to deport is British'. The former, of course, referred to Mrs. Blankers-Koen and the recurrence of her knee injury, the latter referred to a Mrs. O'Keefe who was at the centre of a foreign affairs dispute between Australia, the Netherlands and Indonesia.

This second Dutch story revolved around the efforts of Mr. Calwell to deport Mrs. O'Keefe, a woman of Dutch Indonesian origins. She and her family had been evacuated from the Indonesian island of Ambon just prior to its invasion by Japanese forces in 1942. A condition of such evacuations was that the people would return to their home countries as soon as it was safe to do so. A Mr. O'Keefe hosted the family including eight children in Melbourne. Her Indonesian husband was killed while flying in an Allied surveillance flight in 1943. The young widow married Mr. O'Keefe in 1947. Mr. Calwell persisted with his order for her deportation but the Dutch government which had reoccupied Indonesia in the latter stages of the war, argued that by virtue of her marriage Mrs. O'Keefe was now a British subject and not eligible to enter Dutch territory without a visa. The O'Keefes did not want to leave Australia so refused to apply for a visa. The O'Keefe case, as it became known, added further fuel to tension between Australia and the Dutch over the latter's occupation of Indonesia which had been escalating since December 1945 when Australian wharves placed an embargo on Dutch cargo. Australia supported Indonesian claims for self-determination. The Dutch, however, saw reclamation of their former Far East colony as an opportunity to gain control of the lucrative tropical produce and so generate the funds desperately needed to rebuild Holland which had been devastated by the Nazi occupation. On 15 December 1948 Dutch troops seized Jakarta.²⁹ Australia was not the only country concerned about events in Indonesia and in late January 1949 the Indian Prime Minister Pandit Nehru hosted a conference in New Delhi attended by delegates from 20 countries to discuss 'certain principles of freedom and self-determination'.³⁰ Nehru expressed the fear of the region that the clash of Asian and Western nationalism would play into the hands of the Communists.

When questioned in the House of Representatives on 9 February about his insistence that Mrs. O'Keefe leave Australia, Mr. Calwell

launched into a long, emotional and confused speech in which, among other things, he accused Dutch officials in Australia of playing 'tricky games' to embarrass Australia into forgoing £8 million of outstanding Dutch war debts along with Australia's participation in the New Delhi conference. The White Australia Policy was also raised when Mr. Calwell declared, apparently in relation to Mrs. O'Keefe, that 'Australia could have a White Australia or a Black Australia, but a mongrel Australia is impossible'. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Robert Menzies, considered Mr. Calwell's speech to be 'the most lamentable statement by a Minister' and that it reeked of 'I hate Dutch sentiments'.³¹

Eventually on 16 February *The Bulletin* captured the irony of the situation with a full page cartoon. A woman in full Dutch national dress including clogs was shown easily clearing a flight of hurdles while spread-eagled on the track behind her was a man - clearly caricatured as Mr. Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Immigration. He was clutching a wad of deportation orders and his flight of hurdles in complete disarray. The caption, targeting Mr. Calwell, simply stated 'Not international class'. The cartoon was published in *The Bulletin* on the day Mrs. Blankers-Koen left Australia. At no stage was there any comment from Mrs. Blankers-Koen to indicate her interest or concern.³²

Lloyd La Beach and Herb McKenley

Lloyd La Beach arrived on 6 January. Herb McKenley joined him on 13 January. Once acclimatised La Beach and McKenley provided strong competition for each other and local athletes. Both claimed Australian records for their respective distances. In his first race over 100 yards at Manly Oval on 12 January La Beach fell foul of the starter with two false starts. For the remainder of his tour La Beach bore a somewhat dubious reputation for his tendency to 'jump the start' and his volatility, apparently being ever ready to engage in verbal disputes with the starters. McKenley's principal rival was Edwin Carr who had the satisfaction of defeating McKenley at his first outing in Australia when Carr showed considerable tenacity to battle through strong winds and a thunderstorm. La Beach and McKenley drew crowds in the thousands but not of the same magnitude as Mrs. Blankers-Koen even though La Beach had promised to 'attack the world record [at] each start'.³³

La Beach and McKenley competed in Sydney, Newcastle, Melbourne and Brisbane appearing in the latter in the same exhibition as Mrs. Blankers-Koen. There had been some earlier suggestions that Mrs.

Blankers-Koen might race against men but Jan Blankers had quickly dismissed it explaining that once she had ran against men in Holland and that it had overtaxed her and he did not believe women should compete against men.³⁴ In retrospect analysis of the tours suggests that the press unwittingly reiterated the gender difference in the headlines about each visitor and made it more obvious by running separate articles on the same pages. With several rare exceptions Mrs. Blankers-Koen was usually referred to as the 'Dutchwoman', 'Dutch athlete' 'Dutch housewife' or even 'Dutch girl' while the men were 'La Beach' and; 'McKenley' with negligible references to either their nationalities or their race in headlines. Perhaps Blankers-Koen was considered too long to include in a headline, although it was only three characters longer than the frequently used single word 'Dutchwoman'.

Neither La Beach nor McKenley received as much press coverage as did Mrs. Blankers-Koen. Far less attention was paid to their personal and social lives. It was briefly noted that La Beach confronted the prevailing racial discrimination when, accompanied by New South Wales officials, he attempted to book into a hotel in central Sydney. His hosts suggested that he freshen up while they sorted out the problem with hotel management but he had to transfer to a suburban hotel because, supposedly, his room was not ready.³⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 January reported that La Beach had spoken by radio telephone to his fiance in Los Angeles and this appeared to have a positive effect on his morale and performance. *The Argus* revealed on 20 January that La Beach was a member of the Order of Vascoe do Nunez Balboa, the equivalent of a British knighthood and he quipped to reporters that he was 'the Don Bradman of Panama'. La Beach's motives were also doubted when there was a suspicion that he was going to turn professional to compete in the lucrative Bendigo Thousand which offered over £2000 prize money for the short sprint.³⁶ By the end of his tour NSW athletic officials thought that they knew him sufficiently well to consider it just part of his showmanship and did not treat his comments to the press at the time seriously.³⁷

McKenley had spent the previous summer in Sydney so there was less interest in him this time. In contrast to La Beach he was described as having an 'equable temperament' and consistently displayed good sportsmanship. La Beach and McKenley departed on 4 February for more races in New Zealand.³⁸

Race

The press also made the link between La Beach and McKenley and another incident in post-war recovery. Aboriginal children, described in 1940s jargon as 'half-caste', had been evacuated from the Northern Territory during the war. The *Women's Weekly* noted that 'it was not as any planned social experiment, but because the south was safer'. The safe place was Mulgoa in New South Wales, approximately 45 miles inland from Sydney. Apparently the children were accepted into the community, however, in 1949 it was decided that they should be relocated. The girls were repatriated to Alice Springs in central Australia while the older boys were sent to St. Francis House at Semaphore in South Australia. Among the boys was Wally McArthur described by *The Women's Weekly* as 'a clean-limbed well built 15 year old [who] wants to be an electrician ... [He] is all out for sport and has his eye on future Olympic Games'.

As La Beach and McKenley proceeded along the east coast *The Argus* in Melbourne drew attention to an appeal to be lodged by Mr. R.C. Cornish, a selector for the NSW men's association, to have Wally McArthur returned to Sydney to prepare for the Olympic Games. Mr. Cornish claimed that McArthur's time of 52.2 seconds for the 400 metres was the fastest in the world by a 14 year old boy. Mr. Cornish was quoted as saying, 'America has depended on coloured runners for most of its Olympic titles for the last 30 years. Coloured athletes have something freakish about them and should be encouraged'.

This incident also led to questions in the House of Representatives and the Minister for the Interior, Mr. Johnson, indicated that there had never been any intention that the relocation of the half-caste children was permanent.³⁹

Conclusion

By extracting articles from the press of 1948-49 it is possible to reconstruct the concurrent athletic tours of Australia by Mrs. Fanny Blankers-Koen and Lloyd La Beach and Herb McKenley and in so doing delve further into the richness of Australian sport and especially the dawn of the golden era of women's track and field. Drawing upon themes such as gender, race, politics and amateurism previously enunciated in numerous critical analyses minimises the risk of being guilty of what Sheridan describes as 'historians' raids on magazines for evidence of social change' without proper concern for the context of each article in the publications.⁴⁰

The print media was both a source of evidence and a theme. It has been used as the anchor around which to frame the interaction of the themes bearing in mind that the media conveys messages within the value systems of the culture producing it both historically and contemporaneously.⁴¹

Notes:

- 1 R. Cashman and M. McKernan, *Sport in History*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland 1980 p. xi.
- 2 Department of Sport, Recreation & Tourism and Australian Sports Commission, *Australian Sport: A Profile*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra: 1985. p. ix.
- 3 B. Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever. Sport in Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson 1986; M. K. Stell, *Half the Race: A History of Australian Women in Sport*, Angus & Robertson; North Ryde, NSW 1991; W. Vamplew, and B. Stoddart, (Eds.), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, UK 1994; R. Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1995; D. Adair and W. Vamplew, *Sport in Australian Society*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1997.
- 4 The following newspapers and periodicals were used in this study: Adelaide – *The Mail*, *The News*; Melbourne: *The Argus*, *The Age*; Perth: *The West Australian*; *The Daily News*; Sydney - *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Sunday Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Sunday Telegraph*. Periodicals: *The Bulletin*; *The Women's Weekly*. Hansard was also consulted to confirm proceedings in the House of Representatives along with the previously mentioned secondary texts.
- 5 For a more comprehensive discussion of the work of Mrs. Magee and the activities of the AWAAU see D. H. Phillips, *Australian women at the Olympic Games 1912-92*, Kangaroo, Kenthurst, NSW 1992.
- 6 Phillips, *Australian women at the Olympic Games*, p. 57.
- 7 Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 232
- 8 H. Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia 1994, p. 172.
- 9 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 October 1948 p. 7.
- 10 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1948 p. 6.
- 11 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October 1948 p. 6.
- 12 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October, 1948 p. 7.
- 13 In 1975 reexamination of the photo finish clearly showed Miss Strickland had finished third but she declined to press claims for the medal. (Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, p. 173.
- 14 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 December 1948, p. 8.
- 15 *Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 1949, p. 23.
- 16 Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, p. 169.
- 17 *The Argus*, 6 January 1945, p. 16.
- 18 Treloar was a semi-finalist in and 200 metres in London: Morris Curotta was fifth in the 400 metres final.
- 19 This latter point was confirmed by Miss Jackson (Mrs. Marjorie Nelson) in an excerpt of an interview cited by Gordon in *Australia and the Olympic Games*, p. 178.
- 20 *The Argus*, 27 January 1949, p. 20.
- 21 Stell, *Half the Race*, p. 232.
- 22 This feature was based on reports of Mrs. Blankers-Koen's behaviour and demeanor while in London at the Olympics.
- 23 *The Sunday Telegraph*, 9 January 1949, p. 32.

- 24 R. Cashman and A. Weaver. *Wicket Women. Cricket and Women in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, NSW 1991. p. 104.; L. Embrey, *Batter Up! The History of Softball in Australia*, Australian Softball Federation, Bayswater, Vic. 1995. p. 21.
- 25 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 February 1949, p. 7.
- 26 H. King, 'The Sexual Politics of Sport: An Australian Perspective', in Cashman and McKernan (eds.), *Sport in History*, p. 81.
- 27 Misses Jackson and Strickland justified that optimism. Miss Jackson gained her place in the 1950 Empire Games team and won four gold medals. At the 1952 Helsinki Games she won the sprint double. Miss Strickland, as Mrs. de la Hunty, won the 80 metres hurdles in both Helsinki and Melbourne to become the joint holder of the record for the most number of track medals won by a woman athlete
- 28 *Daily News*, 21 February 1949, p. 10. Mrs. Blankers-Koen continued to compete but claimed no more Olympic victories
- 29 More comprehensive discussions of Indonesian history are available in texts such as Wilfred T. Neill, *Twentieth century Indonesia*, Columbia University Press, New York 1973; A. J. S. Reid, *Indonesian National Revolution 1945-50* Longman, Australia 1974; M. C. Ricklefs, *A history of modern Indonesia since c. 1300*. (second edition), Macmillan, London 1993.
- 30 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 January 1949, p. 1.
- 31 Hansard, 9 February 1949, pp.56-75.
- 32 Mrs. O'Keefe subsequently appealed successfully to the High Court. Mr. Calwell introduced several bills designed to 'restore ministerial control over aliens allowed entry during the war' but there was a change of federal government and Mrs. O'Keefe was accepted as an Australian citizen. C. Anderson, *The media: and use of "Tear-Jerker" stories to change immigration policies*, 1998; <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~natinfo/demise3.htm>. 7 January 1999.
- 33 *Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 1949, p. 20.
- 34 *Sunday Telegraph*, 9 January 1949, p. 14.
- 35 *Daily News*, 5 February 1949, p. 1.; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 January 1949, p. 7.
- 36 *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1949, p. 10.
- 37 La Beach apparently had other ideas. He returned to Australia as a professional in January 1951 and crisis-crossed the country to contest the sprint 'gifts' at athletic meetings in Whylla in South Australia, Claremont in Western Australia. Broken Hill in NSW and Seymour in Victoria. His two bronze medals at the 1948 Olympics remain Panama's only Olympic medals.
- 38 McKenley was a dual silver medallist in Helsinki in the 100 and 400 metres.
- 39 Hansard, 10 February 1949, pp. 146-147. Wally McArthur never ran in the Olympics. As Tatz explained in his texts *Aborigines in sport* and *Black diamonds*, McArthur became the Australian Under 19 sprint champion but his dreams were dashed when he was denied a place in the South Australian athletic squad because he was an Aboriginal in a country in which racial policies were epitomised in the White Australia Policy. He did, however, have a successful rugby career as the 'Black Flash' with Rochdale and Salford in the United Kingdom in the 1950s.
- 40 S. Sheridan, 'Reading the *Women's Weekly* Feminism, femininity and popular culture.' in B. Caine, and R. Pringle (eds.), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, NSW, 1995, p. 90.
- 41 G. Turner, 'Media Texts and Messages.' in. S. Cunningham and G. Turner (Eds.), *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, (second edition), Allen & Unwin, Sydney, NSW 1997, p. 296.