

'A Lack of Esprit De Corps': The 1908-09 Wallabies and the Legacy of the 1905 All Blacks

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In his 1939 autobiography *Viewless Winds* Dr H.M. 'Paddy' Moran, captain of the 1908-09 Australian rugby union team to Britain, presented a damning indictment of the British sporting ethos.

Should disintegration ever take place within our Commonwealth of Nations, it will most likely be provoked, not by fundamental differences on political matters, but by the lack of sympathy shown by some Englishman in authority I never knew in Australia such rabid anti-English sentiment as when a ruthless cricket captain treated arrogantly the people whose guest he was. But in 1908 the *Morning Post* declared that it was we who were 'disturbing Imperial relations' ... Is it any wonder that we all finished that tour believing that the Englishman is petulant in defeat?

In another passage, Moran suggested there was food for thought in the fact that less than six years after their return from Britain only seven of his touring party of thirty-one enlisted to serve the Empire in the Great War.¹

Moran's reflection on the role of Douglas Jardine in the 1932-33 bodyline cricket series is nothing new.² But the antagonism evident during the 1908-09 Australian (Wallabies) rugby tour of Britain provides an entirely unexplored framework in which to examine aspects of Anglo-Australasian relations in the crucial years between the South African War and the Great War. Existing accounts have dismissed the tour with the observation that the Wallabies arrived at a time when the novelty of touring colonial rugby teams was wearing rather thin, that they were not as impressive a team as their New Zealand and South African predecessors and failed to win as many games.³ Yet the Australian tour is extremely significant both in its own right and as a stark counterpoint to the contemporary rhetoric and later historiography of the better known 1905 All Blacks. The controversies of 1908-09 cast much light back on the events of 1905 and provide an important context and corrective to those who have focused largely on the idealisation of the New Zealanders. Certainly reactions during 1905 possessed their own contemporary resonance, but failure to consider these in the proper context of what happened in Britain very shortly after is rather

akin to the historian of the Great War who stops at Christmas 1914 and leaves the reader to guess the outcome.⁴

While little has been written about the Wallabies in Britain,⁵ the task of revising the parameters of the 1905 All Black tour is well under way. Elsewhere I have highlighted the significant disjuncture between the rural mythology of New Zealand rugby and its disproportionately urban actuality.⁶ Geoff Vincent and Len Richardson have embarked on a critique of the unity of the supposedly 'national game' that the All Blacks represented. They reveal a complex struggle for control between traditional elements - those essentially loyal to the English Rugby Football Union and the game it prescribed - and those 'reformers' who advocated a liberalisation of the playing laws and greater flexibility in interpretations of amateurism. The ideals of amateurism and gentlemanly sporting conduct were not simply translated to New Zealand. Rather they were often contested and subverted by players and administrators possessed of a pragmatism and colonial egalitarianism similar to that of northern England.⁷ Against this background, and allowing that earlier scholarship has underestimated or ignored the volume of criticism of rough play or unsporting conduct leveled against the 1905 All Blacks, it is somewhat one dimensional to portray them as 'missionaries of Empire' (to borrow the term coined by New Zealand Premier Richard Seddon in 1906) or as a benchmark for Edwardian virility. In short the All Blacks were neither an embodiment of New Zealand manhood nor representatives of a single and coherent set of sporting values.

Further, Vincent's account of the 1908 Anglo-Welsh team in New Zealand highlights the fact that British rugby authorities were deeply concerned about the state of the Australasian game very soon after 1905. The particular focus was the Professional All Blacks tour to the north of England in 1907-08. The so-called All Golds - containing four of the 1905 All Blacks and four other All Blacks - experienced mixed fortunes on the field, but their legacy was the beginning of the Northern Union game (Rugby League) in Australia and New Zealand.⁸ Thus the Anglo-Welsh tour was essentially an 'imperialist crusade' by the Rugby Football Union to 'save' New Zealand rugby for amateurism. But what ensued was an acrimonious clash of cultural and sporting values which served only to fracture the Anglo-Australasian rugby relationship until well after the Great War. The tourists developed a strong animosity towards the supposed aggression and roughness of New Zealand rugby and the fanaticism of its supporters who seemed to treat the game as something akin to a 'religion'. Moreover, they were disturbed by the apparent circumvention of the amateur ethos whereby 'working men' were able to devote considerable time to training and playing.⁹

This paper will complement and extend Vincent's analysis by considering both the Australian and British perspectives as the Anglo-Australasian rugby

relationship deteriorated even further after the Anglo-Welsh tour. At the same time, the issues addressed here are much more than a sporting controversy. A reappraisal of reactions to the All Blacks and Wallabies necessarily brings one to a reconsideration of both the British 'physical deterioration' debates during the decade after the South African war, and to certain of the stock assumptions concerning 'colonial manhood' and its supposed significance to the maintenance of the British Empire during this period. To properly address these later themes is far beyond the scope of a single article, but at the very least it is important to set the agenda for further research.

To understand the Wallabies, something must first be said of the 1905 All Blacks and the ferment they created. Their impact on British rugby between September and December 1905 was startling. In the course of a 33 match tour, their only setback was a controversial 3-0 defeat by Wales at Cardiff. They scored 868 points and conceded only 47.¹⁰ Certainly the British game was weaker after the Northern breakaway of 1895, but these results still caused shock and demanded further explanation.¹¹ Some critics initially found it in what they regarded as the All Blacks illegal use of a wing-forward who loitered off-side and harassed the opposition back-line.¹² But most soon recognised the superior playing abilities of the team - the forward strength and use of specialist positions, the pace and coordination of the backs and the overall combination between both.¹³

But the success of the All Blacks was also enmeshed with broader factors - and especially the New Imperialism and xenophobia of the post South African War years. That it had taken more than two years for 450,000 British and imperial troops to subdue 40,000 Afrikaners raised significant questions about the standard of military recruits, and by implication the standard of British manhood as a whole. In particular, observers pointed to the urban degeneration of working-class men who constituted the bulk of the fighting force. Sir Frederick Maurice in an influential article in the *Contemporary Review* claimed that 60% of those seeking to enlist were rejected as unfit.¹⁴ In this context, and against the background of the rise of Germany and the victory of Japan over Russia in May 1905, John Nauright and Jock Phillips argue that the performances of the All Blacks were interpreted as something of a reassuring safety net. That is to say, the physical virility of the British Empire was in safe hands in its colonies, if not at its core. While Britons bemoaned the consequences of urban degeneration, the New Zealanders were apparently the embodiment of a land with shorter working hours, better diet, a 'brisk and breezy' climate, ample space and an absence of urban congestion. More specifically, they were seen as products of a vigorous colonial 'frontier'.¹⁵

These themes have become central to a strain of historiography devoted to aspects of rural masculinity and the apparently straightforward nexus between

rural pioneering mythology, identity, sport, the Anzac legend and emergent nationalism. As Phillips explains, the vigorous and successful colonial sporting world served as an obvious counterpoint to an apparently moribund and complacent Britain.¹⁶ Keith Sinclair regards 1905 as being 'famous in the New Zealand secular religion of nationalism'.¹⁷

Yet this emphasis on the supposed qualities of the 1905 All Blacks, and an apparent continuity with the troops at Gallipoli and beyond, entirely ignores the controversies of the intervening period both in New Zealand and Britain. And it is the British perspective—as vented against the Wallabies—that requires particular attention. For much of the mythology that emerged around the 1905 All Blacks and colonial manhood in general was a product of the rhetoric of British sources being projected back to an Australasian audience.

British teams had visited Australia in 1888, 1899, 1904 and 1908 - all, with the exception of 1899, as part of larger tours of New Zealand.¹⁸ By June 1907 the New South Wales Rugby Union had determined to return these visits.¹⁹ Moreover, a certain degree of evangelical purity is evident in their approach to the undertaking. In announcing the tour, the Union '[noted] with pleasure the expansion of the Imperial character of the Rugby Union game, and trusts that it will continue to expand as a pastime throughout the world'.²⁰ One administrator suggested that any profit derived from the tour should be put in an 'Imperial Fund' to develop the game throughout the Empire. He declared that such a public-spirited proposal would 'help to make the visit more memorable and more acceptable... than it would be if we simply follow in the steps of New Zealand and South Africa and make as much money out of it as we can'.²¹ These reactions were obviously inspired by the appearance of the Northern Union game in Sydney during 1907 and the organisation of the first Kangaroos tour of Britain at the same time as the Wallabies.²²

In July 1908 the New South Wales Rugby Union established an 'examining committee' to confirm the *bona fide* amateur status of all touring players.²³ After this process had been completed, the *Referee* was able to greet the final selection of the team most favourably. 'It is a strong combination and will worthily represent Australian rugby union football in the old country.... This team will play rugby in its true spirit, and on that score the pin-pricks should be very few'.²⁴

The Wallabies certainly carried their amateur idealism to Plymouth - if little further. Replying to a welcome for his team, Paddy Moran insisted that despite the pernicious influence of professionalism in Sydney, 'He was thankful to say that they themselves had remained strong adherents to amateurism, and although they might be beaten in forthcoming encounters they could never be robbed of their amateur status'.²⁵ He also stated that the team was largely drawn

from New South Wales rather than Queensland, and pointedly remarked that 'We [New South Wales] have more college and professionally trained men in our ranks than the other Union'.²⁶

Yet these grand pronouncements came too late to satisfy rugby authorities in Britain. Despite the best intentions of the New South Wales Rugby Union, the Wallabies fell victim to broader rugby politics as Scotland and Ireland in particular used them as scapegoats for the apparent sins of 1905 and the more obvious sins of the 1907 New Zealand professional team. In January 1908 the Irish Rugby Football Union, very much an urban elite body dominated by public school old boys,²⁷ announced that, in accordance with its amateur principles, it would not play a fixture against the Wallabies if a profit was to be made out of the tour.²⁸ On 5 March 1908, the similarly elite and conservative Scottish union²⁹ took the same decision amidst a wider series of measures aimed at stricter management of colonial tours. A resolution was passed stating that the Union would take no part in colonial tours except those that were managed by a committee equally representative of the four committees of the Home unions. Further, Scotland declined to associate themselves with any proposal for another New Zealand tour until the details of the gates and accounts of the 1905 tour, asked for by the Union in March 1907, were supplied along with those of the 1908 Anglo-Welsh tour of Australasia. Scotland also opposed any attempt to have colonial representatives on the International Rugby Board.³⁰

The Irish and Scots, and some likeminded elements within the English game, were further antagonised when the Rugby Football Union released a report in March 1908 claiming that veiled professionalism did not exist in England to nearly the extent it once had. The Union claimed that the remaining problem was simply one of lavish entertainment expenditure by clubs in order to attract players.³¹ A motion expressing lack of confidence in the report and condemning it as whitewashing, moved by the Moseley RFC at the RFU AGM in May 1908, was defeated amid acrimonious debate.³²

From the point of view of the Australian players, the refusal of Ireland and Scotland to support colonial tours was a severe snub. As Tom Richards observed:

It is the one discordant note that will forever mar the harmony of the tour. It cannot very well be taken as other than a slur on Australia's good sporting character, and the slight will be keenly felt by the thousands of Irish and Scotch colonists whom we have always been pleased to welcome to our land of sunshine and content.³³

Richards was too optimistic. This was certainly not the only discordant note of the tour, as the Wallabies quickly encountered problems with those who did agree to play them.

From the earliest tour matches, the press seized on aspects of apparently rough Australian play - and especially incidents such as the sending off of Steve Middleton for punching an opponent in the match against Oxford University. In the first of several attacks, the football columnist for the *Morning Post* roundly condemned the conduct of the Australians. 'The incident caused something like disgust among those accustomed to see the rugby game played in the proper spirit, and generally there was a feeling of regret that this 'ordering off' incident should have occurred on one of the university grounds, of all places'.³⁴ In slightly more measured tones, the Oxford *Daily Chronicle* lamented the Australians' failure to reveal their true talents. 'Clever as the play of the colonials was, they were so frequently guilty of unfair play that one's admiration of their cleverness was sadly diminished by indignation. They were out to win at all costs, but they were so superior forward that they could have won with ease without recourse to unfair methods.'³⁵ There were similar reactions when two more players were sent off in later tour matches.

By the mid point of the tour the *Morning Post* columnist had become trenchant in his criticism of colonial tours in general.

The rugby game required no 'boom'; it was a great and flourishing sport before the New Zealand invasion. These recurring tours are merely a highway to exhibition and professional football. The football dictum laid down at the Exeter Church congress many years ago was that in football we want players not spectators.... New Zealand and Australia easily acquired the arts of the game, but they forgot the foundation on which all games of recreation are built; the instincts of sport.³⁶

The *Daily Mail* added that it was 'no secret that lack of *esprit de corps* [was] one of the chief features contributing to the collapse of the Wallabies'.³⁷ 'W.L.S.' in the *Athletic News* lamented that 'These Australians are such jolly good footballers, when they like, that I marvel at the introduction of these nasty incidents into their game'.³⁸ But perhaps the most damning criticism came from an un-named British correspondent during a comparison with the All Blacks and Springboks.

The South Africans observed morality, canons, traditions and rules, the New Zealanders observed the rules, while the Australians disregard every one of these sacred and holy appurtenances to the game. The result as far as English sides are concerned is just the same. They are always beaten to a frazzle.³⁹

Finally, Hamish Stuart - who soon emerged as the most sustained critic of colonial teams - observed that 'One is not concerned as to their idea of fair and

unfair play. All that is relevant to the issue is that they have been guilty of unfair play according to rules'.⁴⁰

The Wallabies themselves were in no doubt as to the general tone of their reception in Britain. Speaking on his return to Sydney, James McMahon, manager of the team, complained that 'as visitors to the Mother Country, as representatives of part of the British nation, they could not understand and were certainly not prepared for such hostility as was shown them by the section of the press'.⁴¹ Tom Richards mused that 'If we were hostile and treacherous aliens, instead of colonial Britishers playing a national game, some of the criticisms poured upon us would not have been too hot'.⁴²

Moran eventually felt obliged to respond directly to the various criticisms. His letter to the *Daily Mail* on 24 November 1908 is an intriguing combination of defense for the Wallabies and scathing contempt for those who questioned their methods.

This rugby game is a strenuous struggle between physical giants, and we must not refer to gentle ladies for a decision on what constitutes rough play. Our sisters always did think it rough when that horrid man upset us so rudely in the days when they came to watch us at play. Our tackling has been always hard... and has no doubt earned the disapproval of men who have never played. The player, however, who objects to a robust tackle should lay aside his jersey and leave it to become moth-eaten in disuse. For him there are other games, and I believe the newest is diablo.⁴³

Moran and several supporters of the Wallabies also observed that they were penalised for indiscretions that were not an issue for referees in English club games.⁴⁴ Moreover, with the hindsight of thirty years, Moran felt no need to change his views on the conduct of rugby or the source of the controversy in 1908.

The real danger is that in the anxiety to mitigate its brutalities, the game may suffer in those very hard qualities which make for virility in the race. It was surely meant to be vigorous and a little dangerous. From its university centres a nation decays, aspiring to softness. In such struggles as take place in rugby, men's tempers will sometimes boil over. Let us not take these matters too seriously. Above all let us beware of newspaper sleuths who expand misdemeanors into serious crimes in order to satisfy the vicious appetites which they themselves have created.⁴⁵

He was certainly not the last sportsman to condemn the British press.

Inevitably Moran's stance provoked a sharp retort. 'Medico' informed the *Daily Mail* that many ex players were among the spectators and well understood the game being played by the Wallabies. 'The puerile reference to players objecting to robust tackling and the doctor's advice to them to resort to diablo are surely indicative of animus unworthy of a medical sportsman'.⁴⁶ But the last and longest word went to Hamish Stuart.

One never accuses a side of unfair play for the mere sake of doing so; such accusations are ever made more in sorrow than in anger - sorrow that there should be men and sides who are in no way inspired or imbued with the traditional spirit, the hereditary sporting instinct, of the game. Every player can not, of course, approach the rugby Corinth through the portals of a public school or university. Hence the principle that conscience is above the referee and its voice shriller than any whistle is never instilled into many players. That is their misfortune, but in some cases at least it is also their fault. It is to be feared that in dealing with the question of unfair play, many writers fall into two errors. One section fails to make allowance for the difference between our idea of how rugby should be played and the colonial idea. Another section confounds the particular act with the spirit that prompts the act. Judged by this standard the New Zealanders were an unfair side because the ruling motives of their game were 'play to win' and 'play to the referee'. The Australians.. seemed to be concerned by the same motive, though it is probable that custom and the national idea have so blunted their moral sense that they are sublimely unconscious of their delinquencies and are sincerely surprised when accused of unfair practice.

Stuart concluded that the Australians were merely 'clumsy imitators' of more scientific illegal methods used by the New Zealanders.⁴⁷

Such reactions to the Wallabies are a reflection of a much wider breakdown in the translation of social and sporting values beyond the controlling elite of British rugby. Certainly the foundations of rugby in the North of England, Wales and Australasia owed much to seeds sown by old boys of English public schools. But one must always remember that many among the subsequent generations of players were drawn from a much larger social group. It was factory workers, labourers, miners and many others of a relatively humble origin who developed competitive playing methods to achieve supremacy on the field. Moreover, the middle-class administrators of the Australasian game were, like their counterparts in the North of England, more likely to derive their status from commercial activity. As Vincent explains, 'These men were

frequently involved in the management of small-scale enterprises which fostered a measure of common identity between employer and worker'. Thus their imperatives were rather different to the amateur idealists who condemned the Wallabies and All Blacks. They possessed a more socially inclusive attitude to participation in rugby and were decidedly more aware of the need to modify the amateur ethos in order to incorporate working men into the game.⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, the limited support that did exist for the Wallabies in Britain was to be found in the north of England and in Wales. Following the Durham match, the *Football Mail*, taking no account of ample reports to the contrary, was almost ecstatic in its praise.

[W]herever they have been, they have won golden opinions. They are regarded as the most unaffected, 'unsidy' team of tourists that has ever visited England. And they are all thorough sportsmen. They love the game and play it cleanly and whole-heartedly and they study it seriously and work out their tactics brainfully.⁴⁹

In Wales, Alf Joseph, a former Cardiff player, was quick to defend the conduct of the Wallabies.

It is of course true that in a few instances there have been some slight lapses from grace, but considering that all these games have been contested in vigorous football fashion - not in drawing room fashion - such incidents, deplorable of course, are almost inseparable even in the most academic sides. To condemn on this account, in wholesale manner, the unsportsmanlike practices and methods (which latter, by the way, differ in no way from those usually employed by first-class sides in this country) of the team, is unjust and savours much of the old adage 'give a dog a bad name and you can hang it'.⁵⁰

Other Welsh accounts of tour matches generally exhibit far less condemnation of the Wallabies than was the case in England.⁵¹

No sooner had the Wallabies departed Britain in January 1909 than they were implicated in a new phase of the international rugby controversy. When the Scottish RFU were finally furnished with the various tour expense accounts they had requested early in 1908, they discovered, much to their apparent surprise, that both the All Blacks and the Wallabies (no mention is made of the South Africans) and the recent Anglo-Welsh tourists to Australasia, were paid allowances of 3s per day for petty expenses. These were variously described as 'washing and tips' or 'wine money'. Despite an insistence from the English RFU that these allowances did not constitute any form of profit to the players, and simply saved team managers having to pay petty expenses as they arose,

the Scottish Union saw nothing but a direct breach of the laws regarding professionalism. They promptly cancelled their fixture with England scheduled for March 1909.⁵² Eventually the Rugby Football Union sought to placate Scotland by abolishing direct cash payments to players and agreeing with an International Rugby Board resolution that such direct payments were contrary to amateurism. In a final display of ideological purity, or petulance, Scotland demanded that this decision be made retrospective to include the 1905 tour. But they finally relented and agreed to play the English fixture.⁵³

For their part, observers in Australia and New Zealand detected a good deal of hypocrisy in the Scottish position and the stance taken by the Irish RFU in 1908. Several pointed out that the practice of paying daily allowances had originated with the 1899 British tour of Australia. 'Wine money' at the rate of 3s per day was certainly paid to all, including Scottish players, on the 1904 tour to Australasia.⁵⁴ Others felt that the entire dispute stemmed from the desire of the Scottish Union to exact revenge for their lost financial opportunities in 1905. Having offered the All Blacks all of the gate money for the international fixture at Edinburgh, in anticipation of a small crowd, they were mortified when the tourists profited by more than £1700 from an unprecedented large attendance.⁵⁵

Australasian observers might also have added - if the self serving hypocrisy of the Rugby Football Union had not shrouded it in mystery - that the 1888 British touring team to New Zealand were also paid substantial sums for their efforts - in direct contravention of a recently enacted code of amateurism. One suspects that the Union were always rather more interested in rooting out working-class transgressors of their laws, than those such as the supposedly amateur paragon Andrew Stoddart who received £200 for pursuing the game for the sake of the game in Australasia.⁵⁶

Even some British critics were sceptical of Scottish motives. 'J.M.D.' in the *Football Evening News* accused them of nothing more or less than class-based hostility.

This craze for the amateurism that is almost impossible - the amateurism that must include social position and a University or Public School education-is a serious hindrance to the spread of the imperial sporting spirit.... There is no room for class distinctions in imperial sport and they must be swept away ... The Irish and Scottish Unions did more harm than they were aware of when they refused to meet the Australians, and that fact will be brought home to both bodies before very long⁵⁷

But these were rarely expressed sentiments in the south of England during 1908.

Finally, within six months of their return to Australia, the Wallabies vindicated their critics in a manner that was to retard the development of Australian Rugby Union for at least two decades. At the end of August 1909 it was announced that fourteen of the touring party had agreed to play three exhibition matches against the Kangaroos Rugby League team which had toured Britain at the same time. Acting independently of the New South Wales Rugby League, a private syndicate under the direction of hotelier James Joynton Smith, guaranteed the players sums ranging from £50 to £200.⁵⁸

The New South Wales Rugby Union expressed considerable regret that the players had defected after taking the hospitality of the Union during the English tour. 'It is to be deplored that the players who deserted should have, for their personal gain and profit, made use of the popular name attached to your team and temporarily cast a slur on the name of Australian amateur sport and Rugby Union football'.⁵⁹ The *Sydney Mail*, whilst acknowledging the difficulties facing working-class players, was at the same time highly critical of the stance taken by the Wallabies.

The movement created quite a revulsion of feeling in the minds of those who are for the strict maintenance of amateur sport. While holding the opinion that sport should be universal, and open to all sections of society, and also that the man who cannot afford the expense of playing the game purely for the love of it, should be recompensed for loss of time etc, I cannot support the manner in which a transfer was brought about. The men were practically bought over.⁶⁰

In short, the Wallabies had ultimately betrayed those who had defended them in earlier controversies.

The defection of the Wallabies did considerable damage to the future of rugby union in Australia. Stripped of its best players and their lucrative spectator appeal, the New South Wales Rugby Union was soon in financial crisis as spectator numbers for key fixtures declined from 13-23,000 to 1-2,000 during 1910. In 1911 the Union was obliged to sell its prize asset - the Epping racecourse which it had purchased in 1907 in order to develop a new ground. The union game lost further ground during the war years and was all but extinct in Queensland during the 1920s.⁶¹

What emerges, then, is a picture of Anglo-Australasian rugby far more complicated than the conventional eulogising of the 1905 All Blacks. Certainly the early twentieth century touring network fostered notions of imperial loyalty and virility on the one hand, and the shift from imperial deference to emergent nationalism on the other. But it must equally be remembered that these themes were undercut by bitter antagonisms. It is revealing, even allowing for the

intervention of a World War, that no representative New Zealand team visited Britain again until 1924, no Australian team until 1927 and no British team visited Australasia between 1908 and 1930.⁶²

This significant breakdown in Anglo-Australasian rugby relations between 1905 and 1908 must prompt a reconsideration of a rather narrow interpretation of the rhetoric associated with notions of British 'physical deterioration' and the salvation that was apparently to be found in the colonies. The weakness of the existing discussion is that its failure to move beyond the events of 1905 means that it also fails to embrace the full extent of Edwardian 'muscular Christianity' and the duality demanded of the ideal sportsman.

Although prone to a shifting definition, the notion of muscular Christianity outlined in the mid-nineteenth century by Thomas Hughes, Charles Kingsley and others, emphasised the bond between sport, manliness and godliness - linking honesty, maturity and a strong sense of moral duty with robust energy and physical vitality.⁶³ What is most important to note here is the inextricable connection between qualities of body *and* mind - between physical prowess and the possession of a strong moral character. Indeed, as Keith Sandiford explains, 'It was not likely... that a feeble body could support a powerful brain'.⁶⁴ By the end of the century - as Norman Vance argues - the religious aspect of muscular Christianity had to some extent given way to a more militaristic emphasis which conceived sport more for martial than moral purposes. Yet the duality still applied.⁶⁵

We must keep this duality firmly in mind when considering the increasingly antagonistic British reactions to touring colonial rugby teams. For there has been too strong a tendency in existing scholarship to emphasise the physical idealisation of the 1905 All Blacks whilst ignoring the widespread perception that in many other respects they and their Australian successors did not embody the basic tenets of the Edwardian sporting ethos. While it may be true that the tourists revealed an ample number of healthy bodies, their apparent failure to accompany these with a healthy frame of mind - with *esprit de corps* and an appropriate devotion to the principles of amateurism and gentlemanly sporting conduct - indicates that much stricter parameters need to be set when considering perceptions of colonial sportsmen as a bulwark against physical deterioration.

It is also important to remember that the tone of the physical deterioration debates reveals rather more about a select sample of contemporary middle-class opinion and an articulate propaganda campaign than any set of realities. In the first instance the Deterioration Committee were very sceptical about the figures for unfit recruits presented by Frederick Maurice and others. Moreover, rather than a general physical deterioration, they were inclined to see the

problem as a lack of fitness - which is certainly not the same thing.⁶⁶ Further, the Committee itself only briefly alluded to possible links between sport and a better physique. Their focus, and ultimate recommendation, was rather more directed towards the provision of gymnastics and military drill - as distinct from organised sport - in the schools.⁶⁷ But even this emphasis on a militaristic path to health needed to be approached with caution. It sat very uncomfortably, and was known to sit very uncomfortably, with the broad section of British society - Liberal and otherwise - which had either opposed the South African War or come to disapprove of its ultimate conduct by the time the Liberals won a landslide electoral victory in January 1906.⁶⁸

Doubt must also be cast over any assumption of an unqualified admiration for colonial manhood in the years before 1905. While there was much public admiration and enthusiasm for colonial males who rushed to volunteer for military service during the early stages of the South African War, the response in the upper echelons of the Tory establishment and the British Army was certainly more cautious. For a start, the very use of colonial troops implied doubt about the quality of the British military effort. More to the point, and in the context of the army reforms that followed events in South Africa, clear distinctions were established between volunteers or militia and professionally trained soldiers.⁶⁹ It is also well enough known that colonial troops were perceived as lower class and prone to riotous behaviour. Various Australian accounts of the South African War reveal ample evidence of indiscipline and disrespect for the British command structure.⁷⁰ One of the strongest examples here is the Court Martial and subsequent execution of the Australian 'Breaker' Morant in 1902 - a case in which his supposed conduct in shooting Boer prisoners highlights a serious disjuncture between British and colonial social and military mores.⁷¹

In 1905 and again in 1908 the behaviour of Australasian rugby players confirmed many of the suspicions that a certain section of the British establishment already held about the performance of their peers on the battlefield. Indeed, it was the methods of the All Black's apparently obstructive wing-forward and captain David Gallaher - a veteran of South Africa - that drew the strongest condemnation from British observers during the 1905 tour. In short, it is doubtful whether those who really mattered in terms of the formation of policy, as distinct from those who cultivated the popular rhetoric of conservative imperialism and attendant fears of physical deterioration, ever regarded sport in general, or Australasian rugby players in particular, as a working model to solve a problem - if, indeed, one existed.

It is clear that the clash of sporting values and playing methods evident during the Anglo-Welsh tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1908 was equally

a factor for the Wallabies in Britain at the end of the same year and surely influenced the decision of some of the fourteen who abandoned the union game in August 1909. In all respects, British attitudes to Australasian rugby were now a long way removed from the adulation that had marked the early stages of the 1905 All Black tour.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Luke Trainor and Jim McAloon for discussion and references relating to aspects of this paper. H.M. Moran, *Viewless Winds: Being the Recollections and Digressions of an Australian Surgeon*, London, 1939, p.70.
- 2 See in particular B. Stoddart & R. Sissons, *Cricket and Empire: The 1932-33 Bodyline Tour of Australia*, London, 1984.
- 3 J. Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood and Imperial Race Virility: British Responses to Post-Boer War Colonial Rugby Tours', in J. Nauright & T.J.L. Chandler, eds. *Making Men: Rugby and Masculine Identity*, London, 1996, p.137, n.6.
- 4 While the 1906 and 1912 South Africans encountered some of the same rhetoric as the New Zealanders and Australians, these tours must be viewed very much in the context of Anglo-South African relations in the years after the South African War (1899-1902) and the Union of South Africa (1910). These issues are beyond the scope of this article. It is worth noting however, that the on- and off-field conduct of the 1906 Springboks was considered to be exemplary. See L. Laubscher & G. Nieman, eds, *The Carolin Papers: A Diary of the 1906/07 Springbok Tour*, Pretoria, 1990, esp. pp.113, 224.
- 5 See Moran, pp.56-79; J. Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union: The Game and the Payers*, North Ryde, NSW, 1984, pp.860-70; M. Howell & L. Xie, *Wallaby Greats*, Auckland, 1996, pp.116-21, 136-42'.
- 6 'Rural Myth and Urban Actuality: The Anatomy of All Black and New Zealand Rugby 1884-1938', forthcoming, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.35 No.1, 2001.
- 7 L. Richardson, 'The Invention of a National Game: The Struggle for Control', *History Now*, Vol.1, No.1, 1995; G.T. Vincent, "'A Tendency to Roughness": Anti-Heroic Representations of New Zealand Rugby 1890-1914', *Sporting Traditions*, Vol.14, No.1, 1997; G.T. Vincent & T. Harfield, 'Repression and Reform: Responses Within New Zealand Rugby to the Arrival of the 'Northern Game, 1907-8', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.31, No.2, 1997.
- 8 See J. Haynes, *From All Blacks to All Golds: New Zealand's Rugby League Pioneers*, Christchurch, 1996.
- 9 G.T. Vincent, 'Practical Imperialism: The Anglo-Welsh Rugby Tour of New Zealand, 1908', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol.15, No.1, 1998.
- 10 The complete results of the tours were:

		P	W	L	D	For	Against
1905-06	All Blacks	33	32	1	0	868	47
1906-07	Springboks	29	26	2	1	606	95
1908-09	Wallabies	30	24	5	1	425	144
- 11 For the decline of the English game after 1895, see R. Gate, *Rugby League: An Illustrated History*, London, 1989, p.29; T. Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, London, 1998, pp.157-67. Jock

- Phillips and others have also offered the spurious suggestion that the All Blacks succeeded because they arrived in September at the beginning of the British season and before their opposition had time to prepare. This ignores the fact that the tourists had been on a boat for at least six weeks and were unlikely to be in peak physical condition. Moreover, those teams who played them in November or December had ample time to prepare. See J.O.C. Phillips, *A Man's Country? The Image of the Pakeha Male - A History*, Auckland, 1987, p.118.
- 12 For example. *Otago Witness*, 25 October 1905, p.60; G. Dixon, *1905 - The Triumphant Tour of the NZ Footballers*, Auckland, 1999 [1906], p.33.
 - 13 For example, Dixon, pp.44-5, 49-51, 65-6.
 - 14 F. Maurice, 'Where to get Men', *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1902, pp.78-86; 'National Health: a Soldier's Study', *Contemporary Review*, Jan. 1903, pp.41-56; A. Summers, 'Militarism in Britain Before the Great War', *History Workshop Journal*, No.2, Autumn 1976, p.111; A Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop Journal*, No.5, Spring 1978, pp.14-22.
 - 15 Nauright, 'Colonial Manhood', pp.121-32; 'Sport, Manhood and Empire: British Responses to the New Zealand Rugby Tour of 1905', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol.8, No.2, 1991, pp.244-7; J.O.C. Phillips, 'Rugby, War and the Mythology of the New Zealand Male' *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.18, No.2, 1984, pp.95-7. For the 'urban degeneration' argument, see G. Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society*, London, 1984, pp.127-51.
 - 16 Phillips, pp.83-92; *A Man's Country?*, pp.98-112.
 - 17 K. Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity*, Auckland, 1986, pp.148-51.
 - 18 For tour details see Pollard, *passim*.
 - 19 *The Referee*, 26 June 1907, p.10; *New South Wales Rugby Union Annual Report 1906*.
 - 20 *New South Wales Rugby Union Annual Report: 1907*.
 - 21 *The Referee*, 26 June 1907, p.10.
 - 22 I. Heads, *True Blue: The Story of the NSW Rugby League*, Sydney, 1992, pp.9-78.
 - 23 *New Zealand Referee*, 12 August 1908, p.53.
 - 24 *The Referee*, 29 July 1908, p.8.
 - 25 *The Referee*, 11 November 1908, p.9. See also 18 November 1908, p.9; 16 December 1908, p.9; *Sporting Life*, 10 November 1908; Pollard, p.861.
 - 26 *Western Daily Mercury*, 21 September 1908, p.3.
 - 27 R. Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford, 1990, p.245.
 - 28 *The Times*, 13 January 1908, p.13. Ireland and Scotland had already refused to take part in the 1908 tour of Australasia. See R.H. Chester & N.A.C. McMillan, *The Visitors: The History of International Rugby Teams in New Zealand*. Auckland, 1990, p.80.
 - 29 Holt, p.255.
 - 30 *The Referee*, 21 April 1908, p.9; 13 May 1908, p.8. In many respects this position was consistent with Scotland's view of professionalism in a domestic context - especially regarding apparent transgressions within the Welsh game. See G. Williams, 'How Amateur was my Valley: Professional Sport and National Identity in Wales 1890-1914', *British Journal of Sports History*, Vol.2, No.3, 1985, pp.255-6; *New Zealand Referee*, 20 January 1909, p.59.

- 31 *The Times*, 3 March 1908, p.12.
- 32 *The Times*, 29 May 1908, p.14.
- 33 *The Referee*, 16 December 1908, p.9.
- 34 *Morning Post*, 19 November 1908, p.11.
- 35 *The Daily Chronicle*, 19 November 1908, p.8.
- 36 Quoted in *Otago Witness*, 13 January 1909, p.62.
- 37 Quoted in *Sydney Mail*, 6 January 1909, p.54.
- 38 *Athletic News*, 23 November 1908, p.4.
- 39 Quoted in *The Referee*, 6 January 1909, p.9.
- 40 Quoted in *The Referee*, 30 December 1908, p.9.
- 41 *The Referee*, 31 March 1909, p.9.
- 42 *The Referee*, 31 March 1909, p.9.
- 43 *Daily Mail*, 24 November 1908, p.9. Diabolo involved throwing and catching a spinning top on a cord fastened to two sticks held in the hands.
- 44 For example, *Daily Mail*, 27 November 1908, p.7; *The Sportsman*, 23 November 1908, p.2.
- 45 Moran, *Viewless Winds*, pp.78-9.
- 46 *Daily Mail*, 27 November 1908, p.7.
- 47 *Otago Witness*, 3 January 1909, p.63.
- 48 Vincent, 'A Tendency to Roughness', pp.93-4. See also, M. Phillips, 'Football, Class and War: The Rugby Codes in New South Wales, 1907-18', in Nauright & Chandler, pp.159-60; C. Cunneen, 'Men, Money, Market, Match', in D. Headon & L. Marinis, eds, *League of a Nation*, Sydney, 1996, pp.22-4; E. Dunning & K. Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, Canberra, 1979, pp.130-44.
- 49 *The Football Mail*, 31 October 1908, p.3.
- 50 *The Referee*, 24 February 1909, p.9.
- 51 For example, *Cambria Daily Leader*, 8 October 1908, p.3; *South Wales Daily News*, 8 October 1908, p.7; *The Cambrian*, 18 December 1908, p.7.
- 52 *The Times*, 14 January 1909, p.15; *New Zealand Referee*, 27 January 1909, p.54.
- 53 *New Zealand Referee*, 10 February 1909, p.56; *The Field*, 27 February 1909, p.365; 6 March 1909, p.410.
- 54 For example, *The Referee*, 20 January 1909, p.9.
- 55 *New Zealand Referee*, 14 April 1909, p.55.
- 56 For example, Arthur Shrewsbury to Alfred Shaw, 14 March 1888, Arthur Shrewsbury Letter Book. I am very grateful to Tony Collins for a copy of this correspondence.
- 57 Quoted in *The Referee*, 23 December 1908, p.9.
- 58 *Sydney Mail*, 28 September 1909, p.59; M. Howell, '1909: The Great Defection', in Headon & Marinis, pp.29-34.
- 59 *New South Wales Rugby Union Annual Report: 1909*.
- 60 *Sydney Mail*, 8 September 1909, p.59.
- 61 Howell, '1909: The Great Defection', p.36; W. Vamplew, et al, eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Melbourne, 1992, p.304.
- 62 The only contacts involved various services teams which played in Britain during and immediately after the First World War. See A.C. Swan, *History of New Zealand Rugby Football: Vol. 1 1870-1945*, Wellington, 1946, pp.526-9.
- 63 For discussions of the range of interpretations, see B.E. Haley, *The Healthy Body and Victorian Culture*, Harvard, 1978; J.A. Mangan & J. Walvin, eds, *Manliness*

- and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940*, Manchester, 1987; D. Newsome, *Godliness and Good Learning*, London, 1961; N. Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought*, Cambridge, 1985.
- 64 K. Sandiford, *Cricket and The Victorians*, Aldershot, 1995, p.36.
- 65 Vance, pp.189-206.
- 66 *Annual Report of the Inspector-General for Recruiting 1900*, (Cd 519: 1901) pp.ix, 299; *Director-General of Army Medical Service - Memorandum*, (Cd 1501: 1903), p.919; *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration*, (Cd 2175, 1904), pp.1-6,92-3.
- 67 *Committee on Physical Deterioration*, p.84.
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- 69 L. Trainor, *British Imperialism and Australian Nationalism*, Cambridge, 1994. pp.27, 102, 150-2; R.L. Wallace, *The Australians at the Boer War*, Canberra, 1976, pp.34, 78-9; K.S. Inglis in L.M. Field, *The Forgotten War: Australian involvement in the South African Conflict of 1899-1902*, Melbourne, 1979, p.vii.
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- 71 Wallace, pp.361-84.