

Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000; 262pp, illustrated with Index.*

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My forays into sport history in general and *Sporting Traditions* are in search of papers that are critical interrogatives to sit alongside similarly oriented sociology papers. As such, I have acquired several works by Booth and Tatz especially since my principal interest is with the politics of 'race' and racialised identities, and I have the highest regard for their work in this domain. I was specifically asked to comment on the strengths of the volume for history and sociology, but I will contain my response to sociology – or more specifically, sports sociology

One-Eyed attempts to break new ground for general history books in Australian sports studies by claiming to be more theoretically explicit. The authors stated a desire to utilise a Grossbergian approach. However, within the same prologue, the authors argued that they declined to 'explicate' as 'our narratives and examples illustrate the philosophy and theory' (p. xv). This minimalist approach to theoretical analysis can be successful, but its effectiveness depends on the audience. Graeme Turner, for instance, can get away with this implicitness strategy in *Making It National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture* because his book is one of many in the Australian Cultural Studies Series that assumes considerable familiarity. Even so, the series editor John Tulloch dedicates sufficient space in the prologue and states:

Cultural Studies focuses not on the essential unity of national cultures, but on the meanings attached to social difference (as in the distinction between 'elite' and 'mass' taste). It analyses the construction and mobilisation of these distinctions to maintain or challenge existing power differentials, such as those of gender, class, age, race and people (like 'elite' and 'mass') become categories of discourse, communication, and power. Hence our concern in this series is for an analytical understanding of the meanings attached to social difference within the *history* and *politics* of discourse.¹

Turner, aided by Tulloch, was speaking to an informed audience.

Australian sport history, from my reading of the exchanges over the last few years, is not as theoretically grounded as their cultural studies colleagues. Readers of *One-Eyed* could have benefited from a greater discussion of the

history and *politics* of cultural studies, particularly when the authors overtly draw attention to a Grossbergian approach. Issues like the difference between the American school and the British school of cultural studies could have been tackled. Although an American, Grossberg was part of the Birmingham (UK) school and was linked with Stuart Hall for some time. A key tension between these groups is the American school's grounding in the liberal-democratic tradition and the downplaying of class-consciousness, which is a central tenet of their British counterparts. David Rowe in *Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure*² makes these types of distinctions and, in doing so, grounds his particular version of cultural studies that informs his work. The minimalist approach employed in *One Eyed* seemed at odds with views that a way forward in Australian sport studies is through multidisciplinary approaches like cultural studies.³

The introductory sections might have been stronger had the authors used a Grossbergian approach to address, in more detail, their obvious 'beef' with the state of Australian sport history studies. The incidence of the 'one-eyed' nature of sports fans support is plentiful. I teach plenty of students who possess ready minutiae of every AFL fact but think the Melbourne Storm is a Super 12 team. I'm not too worried, however, about the viewing bias or boorishness, but rather the political histories of these and all other aspects of Australian sports. I'm also not too worried about the romantic notions of sport held (at least initially) by undergraduate students and apparently some ASSH members. Their resistance to a critical interrogative approach to sport is far more interesting. For me the 'one-eyed' view is more to do with the prevailing power of the dominant axioms in Australian sports studies – particularly evident from the exchanges in the newsletters of the last few years.

Certainly for at least a decade, scholars in sport sociology have jettisoned the normative paradigm of a single tangible, fragmentable ontology where time and context-free statements are considered possible in favour of constructivist paradigms where the nature of reality is considered to be constructed, holistic, and consist of multiple possibilities, where only time- and context-bound working statements are possible.⁴ While on the one-hand Booth and Tatz seem ready to embrace the experiential realities paradigm, they retreat to an assumed agreement ontology when discussing the 'ephemeral nature of sport' – what 'it is'. This seems singular and universalist to me and thus diminishes the possibility that 'sport' can have multiple meanings to different groups and, indeed, be quite different for the same person at different times and contexts.

Sport in Australia is about more than those commercialised/heavily mediated sports – men's football, men's rugby union, men's rugby league, men's cricket and, of course, Mika Hakkinen gets more space than all the

remaining sports. The authors duly acknowledged the research of Shona Thompson as well as David Kirk and associates with regard to junior sport but it is brief. We know junior sport is huge. On Friday night in Melbourne approximately 6,500 juniors play representative-level basketball. It costs them and their families at least \$6.5 million per annum to play. Just inside a 'stadium' in one of the eastern Melbourne suburbs, the prominent sign says "Nunawading Spectres Basketball, Serious Basketball, Serious Girls, Seriously Good, and Loving It". There is a history and politics to junior sport in Australia and it much more than just 'market stakes' (p. 200).

The book takes on a new feel as it finishes. It is the final chapter 'The Australian Way of Sport' (cultural studies theorists would have entitled this chapter 'Australian Ways of Sport' to emphasise multiple interpretations of reality and simultaneously de-emphasise universalist thinking) where the authors alter their critical approach. As the Olympics came by, I wondered if the section of this chapter entitled 'Hard Heroes' was sub-contracted out to the writers of Channel Seven's Olympic Moments. Not only is Shane Gould (the flapping palms torchbearer of the opening ceremony) the idealised hero, but also she is ranked higher because of her 'christian' posture – arguably substituting one form of dependency doctrine for another as she shifts (laterally?) from elite sport to one of the branches of christianity. I am still at a loss to understand the authors' celebratory/romantic accent on 'heroes' – enough to stall this review. However, after several months, and no real help from similarly puzzled colleagues, I'll stick with the sub-contract thesis.

The authors possess an agreeable writing style and perhaps this is why I found it easy and fairly quick to read. At times though I found myself wanting more in some areas. For example, the authors made a welcome effort (p. 113) to address the taken-for-granted assumptions of the concept of 'race'. However, the opportunity to expand the debunking to include biological notions of 'race' and, at the same time, discuss how the notions have made political shifts – particularly in reference to sports performance – is not pursued. Decisions not to expand the critique of race or to include more on children's sport was probably due to the economic priorities of commercial publishers – those also being connected to the readability factor for the general public and sports fans. Realistically, can any book adequately provide a history of Australian sport within 250 pages and cater to multiple audiences? Nevertheless, I found this book could be a valuable resource for sport sociologists in Australia. It was not as strong in the introduction and in the concluding sections as well as in its universalist/singularised concept of sport. However, it was strongest when it introduced critical insights, and its definite quest to include Indigenous peoples and, to lesser extent, women. The authors also deserve considerable credit for drawing our attention to the less savoury and less celebrated events and people

in Australian sport. In this regard it is a constructive addition to sports studies and fills something of a void. My review is based on the assumption that the books says lots of valuable things and my critique should be seen to draw attention to what might be considered in future editions and by other authors.

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First in was Brian Stoddart, whose history of sport in Australia had the evocative but now whimsically outdated title *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, a reminder of the changes in sport since his book came out in 1986; next was Richard Cashman, whose *Paradise of Sport* in 1995 was closely followed by a more sober view of the Australian sporting experience through time in Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew's *Sport in Australian History* (1997). Now we have a double-barreled blast at those who would elevate the Australian's much vaunted sporting fever to the exalted ranks of significant daily existence, let alone paradise: Doug Booth and Colin Tatz, in *One-Eyed: a view of Australian sport*, take aim with an elegantly written polemic illuminated by literary and other scholarly allusions and examples, that sets out to challenge all that has been claimed by the believers in the glory of Australian sport and those who have written about it. For these two 'affectionate critics of sport' the 'fever' is a 'sickness' and whatever 'paradise' existed was for the unthinking majority of unlovely white Australian males.

One-Eyed is intended to be a corrective to what the authors see as the adulation with which sport has been treated, by journalists and academics alike, and above all to bring into full focus the role of aborigines, women and minority groups, in particular recent immigrants. They make no claims to having written a 'balanced' book, as one of their main aims is to highlight the ill-treatment of aborigines, women and immigrants - at least those of non-British stock, for the authors have a distaste for most things that come from the centre of imperialism from which stem all of Australia's ills, going so far as to suggest in a footnote that Britain rather than the bull-in-a-china-shop Prussian kaiser or his client, the antiquated emperor of Austria, was responsible for the first World War. (chapter 5, fn6) Certainly, sport as we know it today is overwhelmingly of European, particularly British, origin, carried around the world in the baggage of capitalism and imperialism, along with bibles, account books and the arrogance and armaments of a superior civilization, but it was surely the least lethal of the changes brought by those engaged in these earliest forms of 'globalisation'.

There is nothing wrong with tilting the balance to bring hitherto ignored

groups into due prominence, and nothing wrong with a history that clearly states this as one of its objectives - although some might wonder whether aborigines and women have been as overlooked as Booth and Tatz claim: there are few people - despite John Howard and his philistine cronies in Canberra - who would have dared to write anything in recent years that did not include women, and on Australia that did not include aborigines and their shameful treatment. For Booth and Tatz little that came out of Europe has much to recommend it, and this affects their views not only of aborigines, but their treatment of that most European of sports in Australia, soccer.

Booth and Tatz are the pre-eminent Australian scholars on race and racism in sport, and in this book give further examples of the deplorable way in which black sportspeople have been treated in Australia. Charles Perkins is mentioned, but never as a sportsman. Yet it was as a soccer player that Perkins not only found shelter from the racism of Australian football and cricket, but the money to go on to University, where he became the first aboriginal graduate. It was from this bastion of western civilisation that Perkins used his reputation on the soccer field and his university education - in the broadest sense, the idea of a university that the Howard government and the ineffable Dr Kemp are trying to kill - to embark on the famous Freedom Rides of 1965 (not 1963 as stated in the text, p. 152) to outback New South Wales to fight on behalf of his people against the blatant discrimination they faced in country Australia.

Whereas Perkins and his successful soccer career are overlooked by Booth and Tatz, a great deal of space is given, with reason, to the scandalous treatment of all-round athlete and later star League player in England Wally McArthur (p153), but with less reason in their claims to see the origins of Australian Rules, above all the distinguishing 'high mark', in aboriginal sporting culture (p.39). In fact the origins of football in Australia is a serious weakness in a book that for the most part speaks with a voice of authority: it is nonsense to refer to 'soccer' or 'Gaelic football' in the 1850s, when 'football' referred to a wildly varying style of game played by wildly enthusiastic males throughout most of the English-speaking world. These mainly middle-class young men were then coming to the realization that some order would have to be brought into their game if they were to continue to play it beyond school into university and then in their leisure time after a day or week in the office. The result was the codification of Association Football in 1863, Rugby eight years later, while the clearly identifiable Victorian (later Australian) game was there in 1859 and codified in 1866. (Gaelic football, totally unrelated to Rules, came in 1884, the American game evolved into something close to its present format in the decades following 1869, the year Americans celebrated as the centenary of their national football code, although the 1869 game bore more resemblance to 'soccer' than any other football code). In what can only be assumed to be an anxiety to

detract from the European origins of the world's most popular form of male sporting activity, (although given their distaste for football and sympathy for aborigines one might wonder why!) Booth and Tatz give full credence to the highly dubious claim by Jim Poulter that the uniquely Australian game owed much to the Gunditjmara aborigines of south-western Victoria (p. 39).

A major problem in writing a general history covering a long period and a wide range of sports, (as I suggested recently in this journal) is that there is inevitably someone who has specialist knowledge of one particular area or one particular sport, and is only too anxious to highlight the ignorance of those who venture into their territory. With this in mind, and while in general I can't claim that Booth and Tatz are particularly dismissive of soccer (which in the Australian sense deserves to be treated in the same category as aborigines and women), in a book that sets out to give due recognition to the 'ethnic' contribution to Australian sport, the failure to even mention the cataclysmic World Cup qualifier at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on 29 November 1997, where a sparkling display by the Socceroos was nullified by a short spell of brilliance by Iran which reduced Australia's 2-0 lead to 2-2 and elimination on the away goals rule, is a serious omission. This was arguably one of the most significant events, not in the history of soccer, but in the history of ethnic relations in Australia. Never before had such a variety of ethnic groups been gathered together in the one venue, never before had a crowd reacted with so much enthusiasm for the home team, singing 'Advance Australia Fair' with a gusto hitherto unknown. This was multi-cultural Australia at its best, and had we succeeded in qualifying for France 1998 the media would have covered the un-Australian game with all the frenetic nationalism that international sport at the highest level inevitably ignites. My personal deflation was shared by others of a soccer persuasion, but I was more struck by the number of agnostic or even more normally antagonistic Australians who watched that game on television and were enthralled by the spectacle - and perhaps also the realization that Australia was on the verge of reaching the finals of the only genuine World Game. Soccer has always been something of a paradox in regard to the ethnic experience in Australia, where for the last couple of decades all that has a multicultural flavour has been welcomed - except soccer. Participation by Australia in France 1998 would have been the best possible stage on which to further advance the cause of both soccer and the integration of migrant communities. As it is, the one good thing to come out of Australia's elimination, and one that should have pleased Booth and Tatz - except that it shows sport to have positive effects - was that thousands of Iranian women refused to obey the dictates of their Muslim masters and surged past the guards trying to prevent them welcoming home their heroes from Australia. (And in that same France 1998 it was a multicultural French team that won the trophy, silencing in the

best possible way the campaign by Le Pen and his cohorts who at the start of the competition spoke out against a French team significantly lacking in white middle-class French Catholics).

Again the omission of the Australia/Iran match is underlined by the treatment of soccer elsewhere in the book, where an inordinate amount of space is given to one particular community group in Australian soccer: the Croatians (pp. 165-69). Certainly the Croatians have been to the forefront of the game here, and in John Hughson and Roy Hay we have excellent researchers and writers on the topic, but by and large the Croatians are not noted for their successful integration into Australian society. In soccer they have maintained a fierce attachment to the homeland many of them have never seen, and as such exemplify one of the more negative images of the game here. But they fit into what Booth and Tatz see as 'the principal theme of this book', that 'the absence of immigrants, and in particular immigrant women, from Anglo-Australian sport highlights [the erroneous claim] that sport primarily connects pre-existing social groups and communities' (p. 202). Anyone who was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on the evening of 29 November 1997, in contrast to a game involving a Croatian team, would not have come away with that opinion.

It is this negativism in regard to sport that colours the Booth/Tatz canon. Like all sports lovers they dislike the boorishness of many fans, the hide-bound narrowness of most officials and the social myopia of too many star players, but they seem to believe that from any angle Australians are particularly racist, sexist and vulgar. They quote approvingly the 'social critic' Humphrey McQueen on the 'jingoistic and viciously racist' character of Australians (p. 226), but McQueen would be the first to admit that he has a particular view of the capitalist world. The other view of sport, that Australians are particularly besotted with it, is an assertion that Cashman and Adair/Vamplew have challenged, and which has always been questioned by anyone who has observed sport abroad, especially the soccer countries. These same observers would also challenge the Booth/Tatz assertion that sporting fever in Australia is akin to a disease. It is an opinion with which I would take vigorous exception, my own opinion based on writing on sport in several other countries and playing games here over several decades. Certainly there are many ugly aspects to the Australian sporting character, nowhere more evident than in a whole range of its cricketers from the 1960s to the present day, as well as in the host of examples Booth and Tatz lovingly - and justifiably - detail in their book. For me and for what it is worth, I think the Australian attitude to sport is among the healthiest in the world, a reflection of what at least until recently was a society which with all its faults and where the treatment of aborigines has been a permanent disgrace, had managed more than most to retain some sense of 'fair play' in regard to its fellow citizens. The health of Australian sport is

nowhere better seen than the way in which Australian Rules ovals are turned over to the spectators at the end of even the most rugged battle between the most bitter rivals. Nowhere else in the world would this be contemplated, let alone permitted, for fear of the arena becoming a Roman circus taken over by rival fans rather than a mass of enthusiastic youngsters, and where the only danger is being hit by one of the flying footballs.

It is the romance and sheer joy of sport that is missing in *One-Eyed*. The Booth/Tatz condemnation of Australians and Australian sport is backed up with scholarly rigour, and delivered in a clear and forceful style which sparkles with apposite allusions, quotes from distinguished observers and illustrated with drawings and photographs that reinforce the argument and make this book a most handsome production. It is a riveting read and a welcome antidote to much of what has been written on Australian sport, but it is itself a one-eyed book. The authors gaze around them on the Australian sporting landscape, taking in with their one good eye the iniquities they can pluck from the writing of a host of writers and critics, while their unseeing eye is turned to the simple pleasures that sport has brought to many Australians. For the moment they are the kings in the land of the visually impaired, but in true Aussie spirit they can expect that someone will try to topple them. In the meantime, and in the spirit of all good history, they have put forward one more argument in a line of arguments that is the lifeblood of history and society itself: as the book of wisdom says, history, like life, is argument without end. End the argument and life, like sport, would be finished.

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One might be forgiven for thinking that Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz are looking to pick a fight. Their *One-Eyed*, although billed as 'a view of Australian sport' – and it is certainly that – is actually cast as a history, and the authors haven't got much time for other practitioners in the field, dismissing much that is on offer as either 'poorly researched and reasonably written' or 'well researched and badly crafted' (p. x-xi). Booth and Tatz go on to carefully place themselves outside the culture of sport – 'we are not insiders or barrackers' – the implication being that this gives their work greater authority. The 'problem' for them, they confess, is that 'sport as sport is essentially ephemeral'; and what might survive in the form of memories is dismissed as 'trivia'. For them sport in itself is not of great significance: 'but sport is an important lens or mirror for examining the larger ideas and issues in a human society' (p. xii-xiv).

This does raise all sorts of questions, to which I shall return, but it points to the strength of this book, which lies in its insistence on social and political context. In pursuing sport's role in connecting individuals, the narrative locates the making of those connections within the larger historical processes. Eight, brisk chapters take us from 1788 to the present day, and the themes of race, gender and class are stressed throughout. Sport may be ephemeral, but it is not to be relegated to the margins of history: precisely because it is, as popular culture, so often taken for granted it can indeed be a powerful lens for viewing the interactions of race, gender and class.

While the outlines of the argument and the moral stance of the authors are clear, there are areas of ambivalence. Booth and Tatz tend to characterise historians who criticise the commercialisation of sport as guilty of the crime of nostalgia. They see Packer's World Series Cricket as a liberating force, because 'Test cricket was the product of a staid, pre-war, white middle-class Anglo-Australian culture' (p. 195). Well, you can't get much worse than that, and, as far as the authors are concerned, the market was a healthy, modernising influence. But they have nothing but contempt for the olympics (even denying them a capital 'O') which somehow are 'political' in a way, presumably, that Kerry Packer corporate enterprises are not. The market, they concede, is not 'neutral'.

When we have been efficiently delivered by the authors to the year 2000, we need to be reminded of the starting point: 'is there an Australian sporting identity, a distinctive Australian way of sport?' (p. 210) This does suggest that we are still victims of that 'national obsession' which Richard White identified in *Inventing Australia*, but I am not sure that the way in which Booth and Tatz have framed their historical narrative equips them to provide a convincing answer.

Australian sportsmen and women, they argue, tend to suffer from 'a win-at-all-costs mania that despises defeat and lacks any, often all, sense of perspective' (p. 214). We are bad losers and nasty sledgers; any last vestiges of the amateur ethos have long been jettisoned. Booth and Tatz even go so far as to give us their list of acceptable heroes. While the taking of bribes from bookmakers or the smashing of motel rooms might seem appropriate grounds for disqualification, readers will be surprised to learn that any sportsperson 'concealing their eyes behind mirror sunglasses' is similarly passed over (p. 211) The most notable absence from this select list is Sir Donald Bradman, apparently excluded, not because of sunglasses, but because he is deemed guilty of having feared failure in the bodyline series. Nor are things much better on the other side of the fence. Australian crowds, we are told, have acquired a recent reputation for 'obnoxious, often appalling behaviour' (p. 224).

Well, it may be good sport to stir the possums in this way - the list of heroes is clearly meant to be provocative – but what is lacking in these off-hand judgments is, surprisingly, much sense of historical or global context. When the authors remark that ‘paradoxically, market approaches to sport contribute further to disorderly behaviour’ (p. 226), I am left wondering where lies the paradox. If there have been changes for the worse in the behaviour of players and spectators, how much are they the product of the process of world-wide commercialisation? One day cricket surely provides more opportunities for corruption than old-fashioned ‘Anglo-Australian’ test cricket ever did.

And how does Australia compare with, say, the United States or Europe? The sporting anti-hero is hardly an Australian invention: one only has to think of John McEnroe or Ian Botham. Presumably we still regard ourselves as a cut above Britain, whose soccer hooligans periodically go on the rampage. It is remarkable, surely, that in Australia it is still permissible for the jubilant crowd to invade the football field to celebrate a player breaking a goal record. Australian crowds have in the past enjoyed a reputation for good humour and lack of violence, providing a comfortable environment for women: if this has changed much more exploration of the possible causes is called for.

Globalisation has enabled a number of sports, such as basketball and even gridiron, gain a higher profile in Australia. I have been struck, over the years, by the way in which so many Australian sportsmen nominate either Muhammad Ali or Michael Jordan as their inspirations, as if only a figure with global fame would do.

In any book of this kind there will be absences to be noted. It is surprising, nevertheless, that Australia’s most popular sport in terms of participants, netball, doesn’t rate a mention. Also missing are the martial arts which have enjoyed a minor boom in recent years, developing a network of subcultures, many with interesting Asian links.

There is also the occasional far-fetched assertion: to suggest that the Melbourne Cup is our true national day, on the grounds that it is ‘the one day of the year’ when Australians focus on a single event, might be acceptable as journalistic hyperbole, but begs the question of what, in emotional terms, might constitute a national day. It may be, as is sometimes claimed, that Australia lacks a true national day, but one would have thought that in terms of focusing on a single event, Anzac Day might just have a stronger claim.

But to return to the question of an ‘Australian way of sport’: while Booth and Tatz wax indignant about bad behaviour, they have little to say about the kind of play that might distinguish Australians in their sport. Similarly, their account of the origins and early development of Australian football demonstrates the relevance of social class, but ignores the nature of the game

itself, and what it might tell us about the values of a precocious, colonial community. The same sort of question might be asked of the sports we share with other countries: leaving aside our talent for sledging, do Australians play a distinctive brand of cricket, or rugby, or hockey?

Perhaps what is ultimately most contentious about this book, however, is its assumption that 'sport is a fiction, an illusion, and certainly not as real, let alone more real, than life itself' (p. xii). I am not sure what this means. If sport is part of our lives, how can it be less real than 'life itself'? Perhaps this confusion stems from the authors' insistence that sport is ephemeral: but then, so is a performance of a Beethoven symphony or the experience of reading a book. And the fact that sport is 'fun' – which is almost another way of saying it is a form of popular culture – does not mean that the memories attaching to it are somehow worthless. What those memories signify is another matter entirely. The time spent in tossing these grenades at the reader might have been better spent in some consideration of cultural theory.

In a way, this posturing seems unnecessary for the book as an intelligent and informative history of Australian sport. But clearly controversy is the name of the game. Even the title, *One-Eyed*, invites the inevitable riposte: is it the authors who are one-eyed? The back cover quotes Martin Flanagan as saying that 'this book is an argument waiting to happen'. One only hopes that the argument will be productive and to the benefit of sports history.

Notes

- 1 G. Turner, *Making it National: Nationalism and Australian Popular Culture*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. vi.
- 2 D. Rowe, *Popular Cultures: Rock Music, Sport and the Politics of Pleasure*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage, 1995.
- 3 See D. Rowe, J. McKay, & G. Lawrence, 'Out of the shadows: Critical sociology of sport in Australia, 1986-1996', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 14, pp. 340-361 for a discussion of this issue.
- 4 Y. Lincoln & E. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, Newbury Park, CA, Sage, 1985.