

Reply to the Reviewers of One-Eyed

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It's really quite simple. People use sport to connect with those with whom they share pre-existing common identities—whether it be class, religion, neighbourhood, gender, race, cultural preferences, and so on. They also use sport to distinguish themselves from those with whom they have little in common. In sum, sport is not an intrinsic medium of social integration. *One-Eyed* focused on how sport has historically disconnected different social groups in Australia, notably Aborigines, women, ethnic minorities, Catholics, and workers. Our slant was deliberate. We set out to interrogate and critically question the evidence with a 'view' to giving general readers and students an alternative interpretation of the history of sport in Australia. This approach is the essence of academic endeavour. It is also an important alternative view to the overwhelming majority of academic histories that see sport as a practice, or the practise, of integration, and to a myopic daily, weekly and monthly popular press that celebrates and eulogises sport. In other words, analysing, or even elaborating on, the ecstasy and elation of sport was not part of our brief. We have a surfeit of panegyric in the mould of Michael Novak's *The Joy of Sport* (1967) or, closer to home, Richard Cashman's *Paradise of Sport* (1995).

Bill Murray and John Rickard are conspicuously uncomfortable with our approach. From their criticism, it would seem that sports historians who do not incorporate the romance and sheer joy of sport are betraying something—but quite what, we're not sure. To set the record straight, we quote from our Prologue:

Is this an anti-sport book? No. We believe that sport expresses beauty and grace; there is joy in the essence of particular sports, in skill, adroitness, in the manipulation of the human body and its senses, in achievement, in opposition or adversity (p. xv).

But it is one thing for a reviewer to feel ill at ease about a topic or a methodology

and quite another to ignore the essence of the argument. That is precisely what all three reviewers do. Neither Murray, Rickard nor Chris Hallinan contest, in any substantive way, our fundamental argument that sport has been, and remains, a site of social distinction. Although Murray rejects our claim that sport *primarily* connects pre-existing social groups and communities (our emphasis), he offers no counter-evidence. He sees the 1997 world cup Australia-Iran qualifying match as an example of the national soccer team assisting the 'integration of migrant communities'. Yet, he provides not one skerrick of evidence to prove that this was anything other than a temporary moment of transcendence in the 'normal' ethnic relations of distinction. We should all note that Palestinian and Jewish para-athletes stayed in the same village in October 2000, and shared the joy—until the nightly news overwhelmed such transitory moments. Even the normally sensible Governor-General, Sir William Deane, erred in proclaiming that global sport unites the world.

After reading the draft of *One-Eyed*, Murray generously alerted us to his observations and experiences at the Australia-Iran match. He recommended we incorporate them into the text. After much thought, we decided against including yet another example of sport momentarily connecting social groups and communities that, in the main, consciously distinguish themselves from others. *One-Eyed* already contains a plethora of such examples, although a second edition might add the Sydney olympic games.

Murray believes Australian sport is the healthiest in the world—as witness the fact that youth joyfully swarm over the sacred grass of Australian Football League grounds after a game. An interesting observation, but again, it is neither developed, contextualised nor compared with other situations. It remains his honest and ardent opinion but one no more sustainable, or universal, than the claim that Melbourne embodies multiculturalism because WASPs flock to Lygon Street on Saturday night to eat pizzas, spaghetti and sorbets, or that Cathy Freeman's 400m victory in Sydney reconciled white and black Australians.

No one can deny that sport has a material, or concrete, reality in time, place, business, and individual social relationships of all kinds. Sport, in these senses, is obviously part of our lives. Nevertheless, we strongly defend our assertion that sporting performances are essentially ephemeral. In dismissing this view, Rickard introduces the absurd parallel of the 'ephemeral' Beethoven symphony. Sports fans are primarily interested in results; performances are secondary. For Beethoven aficionados, the reverse holds: they are interested solely in the construction, coherence, strategy, technique, virtuosity, imagination and overall genius. They know the outcome, and 'play it again, Ludwig' is their applause, because each performance unfolds something fresh, new, and insightful. If sports fans remember anything, it's the outcome. Often, even the result is a

temporary memory, superseded very quickly by the next result or subdued by the excited anticipation of a forthcoming contest. If people are still clamouring to watch Warney's leg-spinners on video, CD, DVD, whatever, 173 years after his death we'll happily concede our error.

Hallinan contents that *One-Eyed* would have benefited from a greater dose of cultural theory. If cultural theory led him to the conclusion that we wrote 'Hard "Heroes"' for the benefit of Channel Seven's Olympic Moments we suggest this is evidence of the bankruptcy of that paradigm, an opinion incidentally shared by numerous prominent social historians including Arthur Marwick and Keith Windschuttle. Hallinan seems unfamiliar with the Weberian concept of ideal-types. Rarely, do ideal types come to fruition in real life. We don't espouse hero theory and we have none in our hearts and minds: but given sport's constant adulation of those regarded as sports 'stars'—Warne, Norman, Lockett, Fittler, Fenech, Phillipousis, *et al*—we proposed a possible 'hero' list in contrast to that ensemble.

Hallinan also questions our 'Grossbergian approach'. He misreads us. In the context of a discussion about the need for an intellectual genre called sports criticism, we simply stated that we liked 'the approach adopted by (the often maligned) Lawrence Grossberg' (p. xiii). We specified what constituted his approach. Nowhere do we say that we intend to emulate his method: we simply liked most of the specifics he listed in his methodology. We could as easily have said we liked the approach of F. R. Leavis and his school of literary criticism: critical analysis of drama or poetry or prose for content, form, structure, technique, effectiveness. That wouldn't have made us Leavisites. Hallinan's suggestion that a discussion of Grossberg's intellectual pedigree and 'the difference between the American school and the British school of cultural studies' could, somehow, have added theoretical clarity to *One-Eyed* is ludicrous.

One-Eyed is a critical synthesis of existing literature. We made no attempt to break new empirical or theoretical ground. We are somewhat taken back by professional reviewers complaining about 'missing' sports. Netball may be Australia's most popular participant sport but it is also one largely ignored by historians. Rickard expresses surprise—shock?—at our assessment that mediocrity plagues Australian sports history. Netball, coincidentally, is a good case in point, as the chapter on that sport in the edited collection *Sport in Australia: A Social History* testifies. Indeed, those interested might care to analyse the bibliography in *One-Eyed*, a list described (favourably) by one reviewer as longer than a Carl Lewis long jump! The paucity of quality contributions by sports historians from Sandstone Universities who have been employed in the field for decades might surprise some people. It doesn't surprise us.

As to theory, we fully understand why sports historians are still so nervous, uncertain and hesitant. Their lack of confidence derives from intellectual insecurity and desperation to win respect from academic peers. But this does not mean that every analysis needs a 'legitimising' theory attached to or underlying, or overlying, it. Explanations, especially of a contextual nature, are vital in all things. Explanations can be simple, complex, plain or devious: their evaluation and interrogation are not synonymous with 'theory', as Hallinan and Rickard imply. We remain wedded to critical analysis rather than to grand or minor theory, much of which we see as an artifice towards 'respectability'.

We do not wish to continue this debate. However, we are still searching for an explanation of why Australian historians find strong criticism of sport so offensive. After reading these reviews we are none the wiser.