

The Political Uses of International Sport: Tunisian Soccer and Olympic and Pre-Olympic Australia

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I think people will feel they are letting the country down by going to bed.

(Steve Crawley, Seven Network producer, on whether Australian viewers would watch the C7 pay TV channels' 24 hour-coverage of the Sydney Olympics, *Age*, 29.8.2000)

As the twentieth-century ends, the role of sport as a bond of nation and an expression of national rivalry is now accepted. Great sporting victories can both restate the dominance of major powers such as the USA and the USSR as happened during the 1970s-80s and help put small countries on the map. This second expression applies to both those Western nations small in population and significance such as Australia (population 19 million) and, sometimes, to Third World or developing countries such as Tunisia (population 9 million).¹ On a lesser scale sporting contests can also play out regional rivalries. The three and a half million people of New Zealand like to defeat their more populous neighbour across the Tasman; sometimes they feel a sense of national disgrace when they fail to do this, as at the 1999 rugby World Cup.²

Sport appeals to popular emotions such as in the national broadcasts and reports of the Olympic Games. Most press and television reports in most countries are as blinkered as a racehorse on race day and almost totally exclude other countries from their field of vision. To watch the Olympics on television in a number of different countries is like inhabiting a variety of sporting planets, although all are supposedly reporting the same Games. Arousing this orchestrated and genuine popular emotion, sport appeals to ruling political elites. In democracies, popularity helps at the ballot box, while in more controlled societies, national sport may enhance the leaders' popularity following success. It may also neutralise some forms of dissent. If sport is a substitute for war between nations, it is perhaps better that politicians use its triumphal moments as a means of maintaining political control rather than utilising armament-building or the prospect of war.

Several historians, including Brian Stoddart (and this author), have advanced the argument for the political importance of sport in Australia.³ Accepting that

'sport is an integral part of the Australian social fabric', Stoddart argues that sport also played a role in 'building the character of the Australian nation' and finds 'significance' in its role 'in projecting the image of Australia and its people internationally'. In Third World countries, such as Tunisia, where the 'nation-building project' is usually conceived of in a more explicit, systematic way, the sport and nation relationship is also important.⁴ Stoddart's argument that politicians seek to identify themselves with sport and to associate national success with ideals of 'national development and unity' is applicable to both Tunisia and Australia.⁵ In both former colonial countries sport, along with nation, is a major focus of the invention of tradition, a subject first noted by Hobsbawm and Ranger regarding late nineteenth century European nations and their empires.⁶ This was the era of the emergence of new levels of display - mass exhibitions, spectator sport and imperial/nationalist parades and decorations.

The argument of this analysis is that sport in an era of globalisation - as a form of public enthusiasm, news and even ceremony - has similar appeal in quite different countries. Its focus is in part on the political uses of the Olympic Games, but, more significantly, on two small countries which are not quite part of any larger grouping, in which sport can play some comparable roles. In Australia, a democracy with more interest in economic progress than deeper political questions, sport matters. In Tunisia, a controlled state and a developing nation with a sense of its historic distinctiveness and strong European influences, both of which limit the influence of Islam and pan-Arabist identifications, national sporting performance matters politically. In Australia, the focus in the lead-up to Sydney Games 2000 was on the Olympic sports, in which Australia does disproportionately well for its population, as well as other international sports. In Tunisia, it is soccer, and in this study particularly the African Cup, which can put this Mediterranean fringe nation on the map and therefore matters most at home.

There are various ways of celebrating the nexus between sport and nation. Flying the flag, cheering on the national team at the match, dancing in the streets after a victory, and welcoming back the conquering heroes in street parades and at presentations are all part of the litany of celebration associated with sport. Sometimes, however, the modes used are ones also associated with a nation's involvement in war. In Australia, the festive rites of contemporary life have become diverse. Some are tied into consumerism (the post-Christmas sale, the spring sale, the Melbourne Cup specials), religious festivals or a local event; others are linked to national days, celebrating important moments in the history of the nation. Others still are associated with international sport, which is now brought to a larger audience by direct coverage on television. The excess of triumphal parades for the victors in Australia's international sporting contests reflects a games-oriented and successful sporting nation, which performs rather

better at sport than it does in some economic races (for example the Australian dollar declined to US\$0.55 despite the successful Sydney Games). In 1999, such parades were held for the world-beating cricket, rugby union and women's hockey players and for the male tennis champions, who won the Davis Cup.⁷

The culture of sporting celebration is also part of the culture of a new world society. For most Australians there are few days of deep national, religious, cultural or regional significance and, except for some Aboriginal and immigrant cultural traditions, the folk arts of a pre-industrial era were supplanted by sport from very early on. In this respect, Australia contrasts with a more economically-oriented society such as Singapore which has done very well in putting the Singapore dollar ahead of the playing field but has done rather less well in the arguably less important arena of sporting play. However, just as political leaders in Singapore and other controlled one-party states⁸ take the credit for the island state's economic achievement at orchestrated national day ceremonies, so do state premiers and mayors take the dais for the welcome home parades. Similarly, Prime Minister John Howard sought such an opportunity.

At first, he demanded, using the monetary menaces of withholding federal funds, that he, not the formal head of state (the Queen) or her representative (the Governor-General), officiate at the opening ceremony for the Sydney 2000 Olympics.⁹ Having retreated from this unpopular idea he found another opportunity Sport and politics would be expressed in the particularly Australian role of the prime minister as fan. John Howard cast himself as self-declared 'chief fan', appearing as a spectator at as many Australian gold medal events as possible. (Wearing the bushman's hat, the Akubra, he was not only hiding his balding head and protecting himself from skin cancer, but also donning a national symbol.) This fan role perhaps compensated for the fact that, as noted above, the triumphal marches, the victory parades, for the athletes would be held in the capital cities where the person of honour was the Lord Mayor, not the Prime Minister. Therefore he was again deprived the role as the head of the people's political circuses, as a Caesar saluting the victorious returning legions.

The association of sport and nation-building works differently in different countries. It also conveniently masks other less pleasurable social, economic or political realities. Since Australia had invested heavily in the Australian Institute of Sport and bought success (from no gold medals at Montreal in 1976 to fourth in the gold medal tally as the host nation in Sydney), the Olympics mattered.¹⁰ For Tunisia, in which the most popular sports are soccer, handball, basketball and volleyball, the Tunisian participation in the Games was smaller. The Tunisian team competed in handball, men's and women's judo, rowing and athletics and in fencing and boxing. Although the African champions in handball, the team finished a disappointing tenth, losing all its matches except for defeating the novices of the host nation (the sport had not been played in Australia before).

Like many semi-developed countries, the Tunisian team returned home without medals. The media and political mirror of this sporting reality was limited coverage of the games in the Tunisian newspapers, from the beginning.

The Olympics are an important test case of the politics of sport.¹¹ They represent an international phenomenon, the rise of sporting triumphalism as more countries sense the international appeal of success and the fuller utilisation of such success by incumbent politicians of whatever system, party or ideology. The truism that the Olympics are a substitute field for national assertion, if not war, was never more apparent than at the Sydney Olympics. This international phenomenon of national pride was also apparent in all countries, including two different societies in North Asia, Japan and China. Consider the Chinese and Japanese government responses to the return of their victorious athletes. For each country it was the typical response elsewhere – a celebration of ‘Our Olympics’ as each country remembers wars only as ‘Our War’, forgetting or never learning the overall story of the war, let alone the casualties of the war.

Thus for Japan the Olympics was about judo (four of five gold medals) and the women’s marathon (the other gold). For Tunisia it was handball (the major sport in which the country competed), for Russia it should have been Greco-Roman wrestling, except their champion lost to an American, for Australia it was the pool and Cathy Freeman. The relationship between politics and sport was apparent in the welcome home to the athletes and in the monetary and other returns, ones found not just in the commercialised developed world. The first Jamaican medallist received a BMW and the promise of a diplomatic posting. In Japan and China, as elsewhere, the conquering heroes of youth were welcomed by their older political leaders.

In China and Japan, as in Australia, as in Tunisia, as in the USA as in France, sport attracts political patrons. As modern sport had evolved in the nineteenth-century under the patronage of the aristocracy and the political classes, today Olympic sporting success receives political plaudits.¹² Leaders everywhere seek to associate themselves, their government and the nation with the lustre of the Gold medal.

Despite Japan’s small bag of gold medals, the prime minister Mr Mori was at the airport to welcome home team members, including popular and cute marathon gold medallist, Nakao Takahashi, with whom he was photographed for the press. She would soon receive a prestigious and rare ‘People’s Honour’ award from the Prime Minister, who was then struggling in the opinion polls as his popularity rating fell below 20%. This was, however, met with scepticism by sports administrators who were aware of the greater political than sporting import of the decision.¹³

In China, Beijing airport was a scene of even more rejoicing. As reported by

Associated Press 'members of China's Olympic squad were given a treatment usually reserved for visiting heads of state. Arriving at Beijing's airport, they walked a red carpet to the strains of a military band. Children gave them floral bouquets. And a member of the senior leadership cheered them. "The fatherland welcomes you. The people welcome you." Vice Premier Li Lanqing told the athletes. "... The fatherland is proud of you" according to the government news agency, Xinhua. Press photographs of individual athletes holding the 28 gold medals were often paired with pictures of Sunday's National Day flag-raising ceremony in Tiananmen Square. 'The *People's Daily* described the 28 golds – No 3 in the medal tally after the United States and Russia-as a testimony to China's rising strength and self-confidence.'

'This is our best ever result from an Olympic Games. This is our heroic athletes' gift to the nation. This is our powerful evidence of our great fatherland's splendor and flourishing' the ruling Communist Party's flagship newspaper said in a front-page editorial. "One could say the Chinese athletes' victory is a victory of patriotism, a victory of the Chinese people's striving for self-improvement', the *People's Daily* said.¹⁴

One Beijing resident, Mr Guo, felt an individual response which seemed not very different to either patriotic emotions or their political uses in other countries, including the USA. 'When I saw our country's athletes in the Sydney Olympics winning so many gold medals, I felt an intense feeling of pride' he said, and, the story added, 'Go China!'

The Chinese are amateurs in sporting celebration compared to the land down under which has fallen under the spell of 'Oi! Oi! Oi!'. The Australian media and the Australian people's love of international success in sport has been a subject of approval and of occasional disquiet. In fact, scientists and musicians often lament that similar popular plaudits are not given to the 'gold medallists' in their spheres of creative activity. The critics of Australian sporting prejudices, Doug Booth and Colin Tatz, have remarked that Australia's 'chronic lust for Olympic gold' is related to, or seeks to 'counter feelings of national inferiority'.¹⁵ In similar terms, the Australian response to the 1999 World Cup victories, for example, was habitually ecstatic. 'On TOP of the WORLD' headlined the *Melbourne Age* on 8 November 1999 after the Wallabies defeated France to win the rugby World Cup at Millennium Stadium in Wales. Five months earlier it had reported on 'moving scenes in the city as the [one day cricket] World Cup team is feted like men who have returned from the moon...More than 100,000 people greet the one-day team...'.¹⁶ While there was less excitement regarding other fields, for instance over the world champions in men's and women's triathlon and surfing¹⁷, emotion rose to a crescendo again with fresh victories in tennis and netball. Reports of the controversial tennis player Mark Philippoussis

defeating his French Davis Cup opponent, Cedric Pioline, described him blowing 'kisses and bowing to the Australian-dominated section of the crowd'.¹⁸ On the same day the *Age* headline declared that 'Melbourne plans heroes' welcome' after the Lord Mayor's announced a tickertape parade would be held for the tennis players, with the local hero, Mark Philippoussis likely to receive 'the biggest welcome'. Successful players recognised the larger, national, sporting context. Doubles specialist Todd Woodbridge, recalling how his parents had listened to the Davis Cup finals in the 1950s, reflected on the stars of the past, 'Hoad, Rosewall, Newk, Rochey, Laver, all those unbelievable champions that played for us'.¹⁹ Popular interest in the world cups was reflected in television ratings, with about 4.5 million Australians watching the World Cup cricket final on Sunday night, 20th June 1999, although not everyone lasted until the game finished at around 2 a.m. eastern time.²⁰

In the poorer countries of the Third World, sport is a relatively new subject of international significance. The Olympic Games remain a rich nations' club as are the Commonwealth Games. Developed countries, which have the good health, the time and the money for sport, win most of the medals, shared mainly with nations which had invested in sport for political reasons, such as Cuba. The mountain-bred Kenyan and Ethiopian distance runners and Moroccan and Algerian middle-distance runners are amongst the few exceptions to the rule. However, economic development and new communications technology are now beginning to put the Third World countries on the world sports map. The rise of television across Africa has created a popular appetite for sport throughout the continent, adding to the international legions of sports-watchers. Today, TV sets can be found even in poorer regions that sometimes lack life's necessities, including food. In a more advanced developing country, such as Tunisia, satellite television brings the people into contact with the rest of the world. Not just in the better suburbs of Tunis, near the seaside ruins of Carthage, but in other parts of the city and the country, satellite television has become common. Despite other economic pressures, it is now possible for a subscriber to have up to 80 channels, including all the free-to-air French stations and the international sports, films, entertainment and news programs; this contrasts with the five free-to-air channels which most Australians watch.²¹

International sport is disseminated through television: direct telecasts of the 2000 Confederation of African Nations Cup in soccer made the event more immediate than if matches had only been reported, or replayed, on a daily or delayed basis. Such contests can matter even more in developing countries than in the West, with big losses seen as a source of national shame. Badly defeated teams have been publicly humiliated and a Colombian soccer player who scored an own goal at the World Cup in the USA was later shot and killed. Even in a small developed country, New Zealand, the 'failed' All Blacks rugby union team

(failed because they did not win the 1999 World Cup or even make the final) was a subject for national debate.

In Australia the declaration of national holidays for sporting events is unusual, although absenteeism is not uncommon on the day. During the 1983 night of celebrations for the first-ever defeat of the United States in yachting's America's Cup the then Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, was drunk with pleasure. As the festivities began around Australia, he declared that 'you'd have to be a bum' to sack anyone who didn't turn up for work the next day.²² This was, however, as close as Australia ever came to government-prescribed, as against merely endorsed, public patriotism over sport. However, the large government expenditure on the Australian Institute of Sport, set up after Australia failed to win a gold medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics, reiterates the link between sport and politics.²³

In Tunisia, a small North African Mahgreb state, of 9 million people things are quite different. This was apparent in February 2000 when President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali declared a school and university half-holiday 'to permit young Tunisians to follow the match between Tunisia and Egypt' in the quarter final of the African Nations Cup in international soccer.²⁴ Televised direct from Lagos in Nigeria at 16.00 hours, this was seen as a nationally ennobling experience, an event of great importance.

Would the mainly home-based Tunisians succeed against the fitter Egyptian team, which included several overseas-based players? After several desultory performances, losing 4-2 to Nigeria, a Mahgreb 0-0 draw with Morocco, and a 1-0 victory over Congo, Tunisia was amongst the four quarter finalists from a total of 16 teams. How would the national team perform against the current holders of the Cup, Egypt?

Tunisian national pride matters greatly to a government seeking popular acceptance of its hegemonic rule.²⁵ In the long-time colonised country, national pride has been important in maintaining stability and ensuring the continued rule of foundation president Habib Bourguiba and his successor Ben Ali. Aided by repressive 'controls', it has also helped keep the lid on militant Islam, which has so influenced Tunisia's complex neighbours, Algeria, a nation characterised by civil strife, and Libya, which has taken its own route under President Gaddafi.²⁶

This pluralist and nationalist orientation has origins in Tunisia's history as a relatively independent and liberal country, even under colonisation, first by the Turks and then, from 1880, through the French Protectorate. The sense of national distinctiveness fits into a society of numerous paradoxes. Situated on the crossroads of the Mediterranean, at a meeting point of Europe and Africa for more than 2,500 years, it was the most invaded of all societies. (This contrasts

with the dual colonialism of the other small society, Australia: the invasion of Aboriginal land and colonial participation in 'other people's wars'.) The Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs, the Turks and then the French, and, very briefly, the Germans colonised or attacked the small North African nation. As a result, Tunisia is internationally connected in most spheres, often in contradictory or competing ways. Even after the end of many centuries of formal colonial subjection, international links persist. Economically, the country is connected to other North African countries (the Maghreb), Libya and the Arab world, particularly the Middle East. It is also linked to Europe, from which come capital, technology and tourism, and to which Tunisian workers have long gone. Such varied interactions situate this small country as one of the most diversely influenced nations of the world.

These influences, and their contradictions, inform Tunisia's domestic polity. With French as its second major language, it has numerous French-style civic institutions in a society that has been Islamic, albeit in a liberal way, for centuries. The economic involvements of international capital and the privatisation over the past decade of oil and heavy industries, of light industries, some transport and the service sector further add to the Western influences on the country. French television and education reinforce the connections. The regular newspaper photoshoots, the set pieces of Tunisia's leader meeting foreign potentates in a salon de luxe, are derivative. The gracious setting is one which the former colony had taken as a model from its former imperial ruler, as it frames the 'statesmen' in a traditional French way.

Other paradoxes concern religion and civil society, national identity, and degrees of political and religious freedom in a controlled state. Tunisian independence was finally granted by the French in 1956, after having been won by Habib Bourguiba, the 'father of the nation' after a long, but mainly peaceful, struggle. The ruler for the next four decades, Bourguiba created a secular and socialist state.²⁷ established a civil - rather than Islamic Shariah - court system, improved the situation of women (for example, by abolishing polygamy), and gave the state, rather than the mosque, the dominant role in education. In this specific respect, Tunisia is a more modern or 'Western' state than Ireland, where the church is still responsible for school education and hospitals.

Tunisia's degree of autonomy in recent decades has been summarised by the students of North Africa and the Middle East, Alasdair Drysdale and G. H. Blake. Bourguiba and his neo-Destour party

eschewed pan-Arabism in favour of developing a local, secular Tunisian nationalism. To foster a sense of national identity, awareness of Tunisia's Carthaginian Roman, Arab-Islamic and Mediterranean-European heritage is carefully cultivated. Tunisia is depicted as

unique because of its location as a bridge between the Mahgreb and the Mashreq and between Europe and Africa. This parochial focus, although often criticised by Arab nationalists and Islamic fundamentalists, has generally kept the country out of destabilising inter-Arab disputes.²⁸

This nationalism came in association with the virtual one party rule of the neo-Destour party, first under Bourguiba and then Ben Ali.²⁹ While economic development delivered some 'bread' to the people, national ideology encouraged respect for the government and repression controlled Islamic, and other, dissidence, the popular circus of international sport added a final element to the ruling polity.³⁰ For President Ben Ali, sport would prove a useful, and only partly contentious, vehicle for expressing the Tunisian sense of national unity and national identity. The 2000 African Nations Cup in Nigeria and Ghana would provide an international stage for national performance.

On Monday 7th February, after the usual modest drama of a soccer match (aside from fallen players' theatrical expressions of pain and the desired response of the yellow card), the Tunisian team emerged victorious. The 1-0 win against the favoured Egyptians had resulted from an early penalty shot in which the shooter outfoxed the goalkeeper. As a result the Tunisians' confidence grew and the Egyptians struggled; their captain's talent with the ball gave way to a less useful skill in remonstrating with the referee.³¹

As the telespectators emerged from their houses and cafes, just after 18.00, in one Tunisian country town, Beja, a small utility vehicle flew the national flag (two flags!) and its two loud-speakers spruiked the joyous message. In this matter, as in so many other respects, these Tunisians seemed happy but laid-back in their excitement.

The newspapers the next day reported on other, more dramatic, scenes of jubilation and celebration elsewhere, particularly in Tunis. *La Presse* headlined '*la rage du vaincre*' (the passion of victory) as, in the words of *le Temps*, the 'dream' had come true. (8.2.2000) The victory would inspire the national newspapers over the next few days, both those in French (*La Presse, le Temps, le Renouveau*) and those in Arabic. The popular Arabic papers, including *Bayan*, devoted several pages of colour photos to the match, consigning other stories, such as an article on the Australian international singer Tina Arena, to later pages.

While the national team's chances in the coming semi-final against Cameroon, the magicians of soccer, were not good, small countries learn to live in hope as well as fear. Perhaps, in a sport in which an odd goal can defeat superior opposition, it was possible that Tunisia's mainly local players could beat the more professional team from the Cameroon.

President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, whose image appears in every shop and office, as well as on the top left-hand side of page 1, 2 or 3 of each newspaper, was extremely pleased with the team's progress. Having declared the half-holiday, he now built on the theme of the value of national pride. He asked his Minister for Youth, Childhood and Sport to transmit 'the felicitations of the chief of state to the team, players, technical staff and coaches' for their success so far in the Cup, and for 'raising high the national flag during continental and international sports contests'.³² This front page report was accompanied by a photostory of the President receiving the French Prime Minister in a palace salon. In vigorous contrast, a larger complementary photo showed a flag-waving crowd of young Tunisian males celebrating the victory under the headline '*Scenes de liesse populaire* [popular jubilation] *à Tunis*'. Hooting horns, flashing headlights, chanting slogans, waving national flags, and singing of the national anthem were all present in the streets of Sfax and Kairouan after the final siren. One report suggested that the public displays represented a new understanding between Tunisians and their national team.³³

When Tunisia came to play the favoured stars of African football, Cameroon, the David and Goliath story was writ larger. One web report previewed the match as a 'clash of styles' between the Cameroon internationals (some playing at famous European clubs such as Liverpool and Real Madrid) and Tunisia. The Cameroonais, 'monstrous individuals, strong in technique, physical [fitness] and confidence', would be taking on the Tunisian-based players. At the same time the physically rough Cameroonais would be challenged by the 'smart Tunisians' who might target 'yellow carded players' and do much 'falling with cries'. A 3-0 loss to Cameroon was a predictable result, ending the impossible dream of the small nation and its local players.

Despite this defeat - and then a 2-2 result, losing 4-3 on penalties - to South Africa in the final for third place, the Tunisian newspapers looked hopefully towards the future. Perhaps, next time, the red lions of Tunisia would write themselves into the history books ('*écrire la légende*') as *le Temps* had hoped for before the Cameroon match.³⁴ As *La Presse* editorialised on its front page on Sunday 13 February, after it was all over, '*L'avenir est à nous*' (the future is with us). Significantly, if also predictably, it attributed the rise of Tunisian sport to a political transition, the era of the '*Changement*', the takeover by Ben Ali through a palace coup against the possibly enfeebled Bourguiba in 1987.

Politics and sport, as in nearly all societies today, are intertwined. The festivities and national pride engendered by sport are often paralleled by other celebratory moments, including national days. In the act, or art, of nation-building one aspect of Tunisia's new reality was the creation of national days which would intensify the identification with the state rather than with the

prophet. This tension between nation and Islam has been apparent in the Middle East and North Africa over recent decades, at a time when economic difficulties have engendered fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria and other parts of the larger Arab world as well as right-wing populism in the West.

National days can be more or less important. In Australia, except for Anzac Day, which recognises those who gave their life in war, national anniversaries have been less important, partly because self-government and then autonomy was granted readily by Britain to first the colonies and then the new Federation in 1901. While some days were once important, such as Empire Day from the 1900s until its demise in the 1950s, this was because they were part of socialisation into the British Empire and later the Commonwealth.³⁵ In Tunisia, however, national days are part of national education and nation-building, just as French imperial anniversaries had been important in maintaining the authority of the colonial power.³⁶ These post-colonial days included Independence Day (March 20), Republic Day (July 25), and now, the anniversary of Ben Ali's takeover, the 'Change', on November 7.³⁷ Both Evacuation Day on October 15, celebrating the final removal of the French army from Bizerte in 1963, and Martyrs' Day, which honours those who lost their lives in the long campaign for independence, are reminders that the defeat of colonialism was not entirely without conflict. A raft of socially educational days, including Youth Day, Labour Day on May 1, and Women's Day, complete the orchestration of social and national values.

Islamic holy days are also celebrated in Tunisia, including the Islamic New Year, the Prophet's Birthday, and the beginning of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Eid al-Adha. In important respects the religious days compete with the civic national days. In addition there are several local festivals, some traditional and others that have been created or enhanced for tourism. These range from rural harvest festivals, such as the wheat festival at Beja, to film and arts events at Carthage and Hammamet.

Although ephemeral, the *fête nationale* associated with the successes of the Tunisian soccer team in the Confederation of African Nations Cup, reinforced the civic days and supported the ruling hierarchy, as do similar celebrations in societies of varying political complexions. As such, this invented tradition reinforces patriotism and strengthens the secular (and in this case authoritarian) state. In this era of satellite and cable television, when some African countries have television channels but inadequate infrastructure for everyday life (water, sewerage, housing, roads), the festivals of sport have a socially and politically binding role. In Tunisia, where much of the news concerns links with the wider world, from Europe and the Middle East to North America, and the focus is on technological developments, exports and cultural ties, sport is yet another part of the equation of international social and cultural relations.

In all countries, the orchestration of popular sentiment for national sport raises the question of the relationship between sport, nation and politics. The appeal of sport as a means of providing 'political circuses' and popular pleasure, or at least national satisfaction and public distraction from matters of 'bread', dates back to Roman society, which, indirectly, influenced both contemporary Australia and Tunisia. Looking back over a year of 'welcome home' parades for Australia's world-conquering heroes, and looking forward to the national egotism associated with the Sydney Olympics, the journalist Greg Baum depicted Australia as a country drunk on simplistic 'soaring jingoism'. Australians were viewing the Games as merely a place for their favoured stars to win gold medals (Ian Thorpe in the pool and Cathy Freeman on the track). The ruling emotional pattern was an 'obsession with self, the need to prove ourselves over and over again; it is making us as a nation of teenagers'. Underlying this search for a 'greatest-nation-on-Earth status' in sport lay a sad, if comic, insecurity.³⁸

In a different debate a week later, a senior political correspondent in the *Australian* declared, of this land of general affluence qualified by a declining dollar and a balance of payments problem, that the quality of leadership offered by Prime Minister John Howard, and Opposition leader Kim Beazley was a 'national disgrace'.³⁹ In generally affluent Australia the festive national celebrations associated with sport have often benefited politicians, arguably through distracting public attention from other social and economic questions.⁴⁰ In the case of John Howard's ubiquity at the golden moments of the Australian Olympics, the result was not guaranteed. Public cynicism about politicians saw questions raised about his role as the great national sports fan. In Tunisia, however, where people live with greater economic difficulties, sporting circuses are an important substitute for bread. And, in the Tunisian political system, in which feting the President occurs without question, public debates over leadership have not arisen. In both countries, though, on the field of sporting dreams it seems that 'the future is ours'.

Notes

- 1 At the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, Australia, a developed country with a population of around 18 million, won a total of 27 medals, including 7 gold medals, while Tunisia, an advanced Third World country with half Australia's population, did not win a medal.
- 2 France defeated New Zealand in the semi-finals before losing to Australia in the final.
- 3 Stephen Alomes, *A Nation at Last? The Changing Character of Australian Nationalism 1880-1988*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1988, pp. 3-5, 7-8, 16-17, 157-9, 287-8.
- 4 Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, NSW, 1986, pp. 13, 56. On sport, particularly cricket matches against England, and the movement towards federation of the Australian

- colonies, see Bill Mandle, 'Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59, 1973, pp. 223-246 and K. S. Inglis, 'Imperial Cricket: Test Matches between Australia and England 1977-1900 in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan, eds, *Sport in History*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1979.
- 5 Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 64, 69.
 - 6 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger have explored how the invention of tradition crosses several political, institutional and cultural fields. They focus on imperial and colonial tradition, elite class tradition and popular festive and sporting tradition in their edited book, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.
 - 7 Despite the lack of recognition of women's sport there was a Sydney parade for the women's netball team which had beaten New Zealand in the final. Observers might note that some of the sports of dominance were predominantly British imperial in origin and character rather than globally popular.
 - 8 Many 'one party' states, ones totally dominated by a single party, allow some space in their assemblies for other parties, without changing the fundamental character of the form of rule.
 - 9 John Howard, undoubtedly fearing vocal or other opposition from some of the crowd, subsequently withdrew the request and the Governor General opened the Games. On the way in which sport influences politics in Australia, see Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, chapter 3. On sport and parliamentary politics and the language of political campaigning, see Stephen Alomes, 'Politics as Sport: Reality and Metaphor in Australian Politics and Political Coverage', pp. 67-87 in S Alomes and D den Hartog, eds, *Post Pop: Popular Culture, Nationalism and Postmodernism*, Footprint, Footscray, Vic., 1991.
 - 10 This investment in government-supported activity comes at a time when the country has in other ways abandoned nation-building for the deregulationist and private capital path towards social and economic development. Arguably, sporting symbolism masks this transition as it also distracts attention from unemployment rates or a cascading currency. See Michael Pusey, *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation-Building State Changes Its Mind*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1991.
 - 11 There is a rich literature on the politics of the Olympics, primarily focusing on specific cases of politicisation (Berlin, 1936 and Nazism/race, Mexico City 1968 and Black Power), on boycotts (Melbourne 1956, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984) and on the politics of the International Olympic Committee. See, for example, several recent studies: V. Simson and A. Jennings, *The Lords of the Rings*, Simon & Schuster, London/ New York, 1992; C. R. Hill, *Olympic Politics*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992; D. L. Hulme, *The Political Olympics*, New York, Praeger, 1990; B. Shaikin, *Sport and Politics: The Olympics and Los Angeles*, New York, Praeger, 1988; A. Tomlinson and G. Whannel, eds, *Five Ring Circus: Money; Power and Politics at the Olympic Games*, Pluto Press, London, 1984. The ubiquity of the sport and politics phenomenon at the Olympics is a more recent phenomenon in the era of mass satellite transmission of direct coverage of sport; the 'local' or 'Our Olympics' view of the Games is most often informally reported by travellers and expatriates disappointed at the lack of information on their country's athletes performances.

- 12 A summary of eighteenth-century sporting patronage in England is in Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 1-3.
- 13 She would appear at endless functions, private and public in the months after the Olympics; Japanese television replayed the complete women's marathon three times.
- 14 *Asahi Evening News*, October 3, 2000 (AP report).
- 15 Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 2000, p.87.
- 16 *Age*, 27 June 1999.
- 17 *Age*, 28 June 1999. World surfing champions since the 1960s have included Midget Farrelly, Nat Young and more recently Mark Occhilupo and Layne Beachley.
- 18 *Age*, 7 December 1999.
- 19 *Age* 7 December 1999.
- 20 *Age*, 22 June 1999.
- 21 At the turn of the century less than one fifth of Australian households had pay TV.
- 22 Some traditional sports events are held on holidays - the first day of the Melbourne Test cricket match on Boxing Day, and, more recently, the AFL clash between Collingwood and Essendon on Anzac Day. However, national days such as Australia Day, and often even Anzac Day, are not significant for many Australians.
- 23 The federal government has spent several hundred million dollars on the Australian Institute of Sport over the last quarter century. Its overall Australian Sporting Commission budget for 1999-2000 was A\$126 million. (*Herald-Sun*, 8 April 2000). There are also smaller institutes funded by state governments.
- 24 *La Presse*, 7 February 2000, p.1.
- 25 John P. Entelis's 1980 assessment of Bourguiba's Tunisian nationalist polity still holds today, even when political control is more qualified by economic liberalism and the move towards a market economy. He wrote: 'Inevitably, Bourguiba's stress on the unitary nature of Tunisian society serves to justify a monolithic political structure and the exercise of power on the basis of unanimity.' John P Entelis, *Comparative Politics of North Africa*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1980, p. 148.
- 26 Both Bourguiba and Ben Ali have regularly jailed Islamic political dissidents, although a degree of unwillingness to use the death penalty has ensured that the considerable repression has not produced an opposition with numerous martyrs. Economic growth has also ensured that the oxygen of fundamentalist protest, continuing massive poverty, has been limited, if not absent. The death of Bourguiba in 2000 however concentrated attention on the lack of progress in democratic and civil rights since 1987, something highlighted by a journalist who went on a hunger strike.
- 27 Independence was hard won after the jailing and exile of nationalist leaders, including Bourguiba, and a small scale guerilla conflict. It did not, however, involve events such as the long war in Algeria, which would leave a legacy of violence as an integral part of the social fabric.
- 28 Alasdair Drysdale and G. H. Blake, *The Middle East and North Africa : A Critical Geography*, New York, Oxford UP, 1985, p.181. Bourguiba also adopted an 'L'etat c'est moi!' conception of his centrality, with origins in French and North African traditions. When asked about Tunisia's political system he is reported to have responded "What system? I am the system!" (Quoted in Susan E. Waltz, *Human*

- Rights and Reform*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1995, p.50). Ben Ali has continued to assume the centrality of the leader.
- 29 The name of the neo-Destour party has changed at times over the last two decades including Destourian Socialist Party (PSD) and later Democratic Constitutional Rally (RSD).
 - 30 A small degree of 'parliamentary pluralism' came after the 1994 elections in which opposition parties had 19 seats in the 144 seat parliament, although this was hardly the end of Tunisia's 'presidential monarchy' or of the effectively one party state. See: 'Tunisia: Strong State, Strong Society' in Waltz, *Human Rights and Reform*, pp. 50-1, 58-61; and Eva Bellin, 'Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia' in Augustus Richard Norton, ed, *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol 1, E. J. Brill, Leiden/ New York, 1995, pp. 120-147.
 - 31 African soccer still had its colonial dimension. Tunisia's much criticised coach, Scoglio, who was loudly praised for his mastery, is Italian while Egypt's coach, Gerard Gili, who admitted that his team had been beaten by a better team on the day, is French.
 - 32 *La Presse*, 8 February 2000, p.1.
 - 33 *La Presse*, 8 February 2000, p.1.
 - 34 *le Temps*, 10 February 2000.
 - 35 See: Stephen Alomes, 'Australian Nationalism in the Eras of Imperialism and "Internationalism"', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 34, 3, 1988, pp. 320-332; and John M McKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion 1860- 1960*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.
 - 36 From the early years, 'Tunisia's many national holidays, anniversaries of important events in the nationalist struggle', have been 'occasions for the party to drum up patriotic fervour at mass meetings'. Charles A. Micaud, *Tunisia: The Politics of Modernization*, Praeger, New York, 1964, p.108.
 - 37 Bourguiba finally died on 7 April 2000 at his home in Monastir where he had lived since he had been deposed.
 - 38 *Age*, 13 February 2000. Australian Olympic Committee President John Coates believed that Australia could do even better than the 27 medals in Barcelona and the 37 in Atlanta, winning 59 medals. 'This is an opportunity for a country of 18 million people to hack it in the big time', he said in September 1999. *Age*, 21 September 1999
 - 39 Paul Kelly, *Australian*, 26-27 February 2000.
 - 40 Sporting victories and other celebratory moments sometimes bring home the bacon for troubled politicians and sometimes they are not enough. The struggling Liberal Party just fell over the line in South Australian elections held just after the Adelaide Crows first AFL Premiership in 1997. New South Wales Labor Premier, Barry Unsworth, in contrast, lost an election held in the aftermath of the Bicentennial excitement and celebrations of 1988.