

Globalisation and Sport

Globalisation now describes just about everything, from the way we do business to the way we watch football. So what are the implications for sport in a world where global is rapidly replacing local?

ABC Radio program transcript

Mick O'Regan: Hello, and welcome to The Sports Factor. Today on the program we're going to consider the impact of globalisation on sport. Globalisation is a difficult word, meaning different things to different people. So what does it mean, and what does it mean for sport?

To help me answer those questions I recorded the following interview with Professor Toby Miller from the University of California, Riverside, in the United States, who is a respected authority on issues of globalisation, culture and contemporary sport.

1: Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: Well I've been involved in a couple of different projects to look at globalisation. Because when people talk about globalisation, especially when they're referring to culture, I sometimes wonder whether it's simply one of those words that's used to describe something that you can't understand. So I got involved in two projects: one to look at Hollywood around the world, and how the spread of film and television culture from the United States has functioned, especially in the so-called period of globalisation of the last say 20 years, and secondly to look at sport, and to see how that too has globalised.

2. Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: Well on the one hand yes, on the other hand, no. It's wrong to say it's the end of the nation, because people know Brazil's the best team, and they know that Ronaldo is from Brazil. Conversely, it's right to say it's the end of the nation because children today are not the sort of an Australian child like we were who only knows the winner of the New South Wales Rugby League the year before. What's happened is that there's been televisualisation of various kinds of sport, and that has generated a new awareness amongst viewers. So for example, Nike is really crucial in this instance. So on the one hand, yes, it's the end of a certain kind of parochialism and an opening up to a global cultural market in really positive ways. On the other hand, the nation is still super important, because it's still the nation within which club contests occur, and it's still the nation that's the register at which events like the Olympics or the World Cup success is measured.

3. Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: I feel Old School about it, I feel very sad and there can be something that's seriously lost when that takes place. In the case of Manchester United, the fact that the Glazers come from the United States is relevant, because the United States is not seen as being hospitable to football. Secondly, they are seen as fire sale merchants, who come into a town, buy up a club, spend vast amounts of money on bringing in very talented baseball players, football players, hockey players, whatever it is. Once they've won a title or two, they sell those players at inflated rates, leaving the club with very, very low salary levels, and suddenly, complete lack of success. There are too many stories like that, so there's a fear for a lot of people that the story will be replicated in the case of Manchester United.

4. Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: Oh, of course it is, and of course there are many opportunities for people to do that, and I wouldn't want to deny for a second, the right and the legitimacy and the competence, the skill and the brilliance of people in those developing nations to ply their trades elsewhere. What's tragic is when you get traditionally under-represented groups or oppressed minorities putting all their eggs in the sports basket, when there are other baskets that they could invest in, particularly educational ones.

And the vast majority of people who are signed up on very, very tenuous contracts by US scouts, whether it's American Samoa or it's in Venezuela, are a) not going to make it if they're not good enough; b) going to get hurt or injured; c) probably unless they really get into a good college, that makes them study hard, which isn't always the case, they're likely to give up a lot of educational opportunity and then emerge at the age of 20 or 21 with no skills, a broken body, a great sense of disappointment, and nothing much to take back with them. And that's the tragedy, the dream of the United States that brings in so many of us from around the world. For the tiny percent that make it, of course it's a dream come true. For others, it's a nightmare you take back with you to the place you came from.

5. Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: There's a huge debate about that. Montreal is still paying off, as everybody knows, the 1976 Olympic Games, and most of the countries that have held these Games have been unable to quantify the alleged payout, even years later, of the investment. The one example that's an undisputed success is Barcelona, and what Barcelona did after the '92 Olympics, was to utilise all the European Union money that had come in to help stimulate their economy, and turn all the facilities that were made available for the '92 Games into centres for other kinds of major international congresses.

6. Mick O'Regan:.....

Toby Miller: Basically I don't think the options for the entry of new sports onto the world arena are very positive, very powerful, at the level of team sports. I think there are a lot of possibilities at the level of those individual extreme sports, we've seen the transformation of the Winter Olympics, but basically my guess is that we're going to see a concentration of the traditional sports and their success, I'm thinking particularly of football, Association Football.