

## Sport and national identity

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## Sport and national identity

Long-time social stirrer Richard Neville enjoyed Sydney's 'vibrant culture' at the start of the 2000 Olympics:

From the moment the stockwhips cracked I felt a burst of pride at being an Aussie, a sentiment later confirmed while mingling at the boxing venues: the good-natured piss-taking, the sense of fair play, the barracking for the underdog.<sup>1</sup>

One hundred years earlier, the *South Wales Daily News* also saw a unique national culture represented in sport. The paper celebrated the Welsh rugby union<sup>2</sup> team's win over the hitherto unbeaten New Zealand All Blacks in their 1905 tour of the British Isles:

The men that represented Wales embodied the best manhood of the race ... the great quality of defence and attack in the Welsh race is to be traced to the training of the early period when powerful enemies drove them to their mountain fortresses. There was developed then those traits of character that find fruition today. 'Gallant little Wales' has produced sons strong of determination, invincible stamina, resolute, mentally keen, physically sound.<sup>3</sup>

As we will see in this paper, such entangling of sport and national images is common. But as the stories of variations in drinking prowess and in cricket interest discussed in the Introduction show, those images can be complex, and can change. This paper looks in detail at the idea of national identity. It starts by noting that changes have occurred in the national images linked to sport, drawing especially on examples from Europe. It then discusses recent research testing how accurate common images of national identity and character actually are. That research suggests there is some reality behind the images – but not as much as generally thought. And the 'typical' image can vary considerably between observers, and over time. There are often specific reasons why particular national images are touted at particular times, and why they meet with varying degrees of success. To demonstrate this, the paper surveys a range of changes in measures of national identity.

### International sports enthusiasm

Australia is not alone in mass demonstrations of sporting enthusiasm. On 21 June 1988, the Dutch soccer team beat Germany 2–1 in a semi-final of the European soccer championships in Hamburg. Although it was a Tuesday night, nine million Dutch, 60% of the population, turned out onto the streets to celebrate. It was the largest public celebration since the liberation from German occupation in 1945, and a former Resistance

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fighter said on TV, 'It feels as though we've won the War at last'. In the Leidesplein square in Amsterdam, the celebrating crowd threw bicycles into the air and yelled 'we've got our bikes back!' (German troops had confiscated Dutch bikes during the occupation).<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, this seemed the outpouring of long-held frustrations left over from the war, celebrated through sport. However, the situation was more complicated than that. As indicated by an opinion poll five years later, Dutch teenagers (most of them two generations away from direct experience of the war) had more negative views about the Germans than their older compatriots. Further, the two soccer teams had met many times prior to 1988 – most famously in the 1974 final of the World Cup. Despite Germany winning a sometimes spiteful game, memories of the war were not restoked in public Dutch commiserations in anything like the same way as in 1988. And eight years before that, most Dutch players had barracked for Germany when it met England in the 1966 World Cup final. It seemed that memories of the war were stronger 40 years after the war than they were 20 or 30 years after – and also stronger among younger rather than older people.

Dutch bank ABN Amro has documented that the Dutch drink much more beer in years when their football team is doing well.<sup>5</sup> But it seems unlikely that alcohol was the sole influence on 60% of the Dutch population in 1988. Something else seems to have been happening as well in the 1980s, emphasizing those memories. What that something else might be is a central concern of this paper.

Two years after the Netherlands beat Germany in the European championships, the 1990 World Cup in Italy also led to outpourings of national enthusiasm. On this occasion, the fervour was especially strong in Dublin, where half a million people, or 15% of the population of the entire country, gathered to welcome the team back from Italy. It was the first time the Irish soccer team had reached the quarter-finals of the World Cup. To mark the occasion the national airline, Aer Lingus, temporarily christened the plane bringing the team home 'St Jack' in honour of the coach, Jack Charlton.<sup>6</sup>

But this Irish national euphoria over its soccer team was remarkable compared with attitudes only a few years before 1990. First, the Irish soccer team had only recently had any international success, with the 1988 European championships the first time they qualified for the finals of a major tournament. Soccer in Ireland had suffered from disdain from the country's sporting authorities. In the pursuit of 'pure' Gaelic sports, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) had until 1972 banned its members from playing 'foreign' games such as soccer.

Second, as evidenced in the Aer Lingus naming of the celebratory flight, the team's success owed much to its coach. Jack Charlton, appointed in 1986, was English, and had himself played in England's World Cup team in 1966. The idea of a national Irish team having a foreign – let alone *English* – coach would have been anathema just a decade previously.

And thirdly, the team reflected a broader approach – and attitude – towards 'Irishness'. Charlton had made extensive use of an international soccer rule that allowed players to represent the country of their own, their parents' or their grandparents' birth. His successful Irish teams included a number of English, Welsh and Scottish accents. They also included black Irish players, such as defender Paul McGrath, perhaps the single most popular player with the fans in 1990. McGrath was the son of an Irish mother and a Nigerian father, born in London but taken to Dublin at the age of 2.

As one writer (himself of Czech-Irish parentage) wrote in *The Irish Times*:

The Irish soccer team, with its extraordinary collection of polyglot Irish pedigrees, has given us a new pride in our multi-cultural Irishness, and put one more nail in the coffin of the old, exclusive ... GAA-supporting, Fianna Fail-voting definition of 'real' Irishness. I'm sure Leopold Bloom [the Jewish hero of James Joyce's *Ulysses*] is up there cheering along with the rest of us half-breeds.<sup>7</sup>

Forty years earlier, in Limerick in the late 1940s, Irish writer Frank McCourt recalled there were strong social barriers between different sports. Catholics played the GAA-approved sports of Gaelic football, hurling and camogie, a kind of field hockey. In contrast, there was no doubt that cricket and croquet were Protestant sports. McCourt remembered watching the croquet players, all in white, on the lawn next to St Michael's Anglican Church on Barrington Street, and thinking of 'the futility of it all'.

Whatever the cries of 'Oh, good shot', 'we knew that unless they embraced the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church they were doomed for ever.'

– 'What's the use of playing croquet when you're doomed?' said McCourt to his friend Billy Campbell.

– 'What's the use of not playing croquet when you're doomed?' replied Campbell.<sup>8</sup>

But in looking at these examples, some caution is needed on how far sporting euphoria extends. Two years after the St Jack flight to Dublin, in the 1992 UK General Election, deputy-leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party Jim Sillars was unsuccessful in the seat he contested. After his defeat, Sillars chastised the Scottish electorate for not voting for the nationalist cause, maligning them for being '90 minute patriots' and saving their nationalist fervour solely for major sporting occasions.<sup>9</sup>

Paper 4 below looks at Australian patterns of interest in various national icons. As with these Irish and Scottish examples, it demonstrates that there are often wide variations in interest levels. This is reinforced in subsequent chapters for involvement in sports attendances and participation – and the differing motivations behind each.

But such variations are frequently pushed aside in the search for national sports that will reach across divides of religion, class and the rest. In Frank McCourt's childhood the uniting code was rugby union:

There may have been Protestant clubs in Dublin but, in Limerick, we had Garryowen, Shannon, Bohemians and the one we idolised in the back lanes — Young Munster. When the international Irish rugby team won the Triple Crown in 1948 and the Grand Slam in 1949, we never asked if the scorers were Protestant or Catholic, and we knew Gaelic football players and hurlers cheered as loudly as we did.<sup>10</sup>

When such sports do unite a population, many comments follow the lead of the *South Wales Daily News* and its ilk in attributing success to timeless qualities of a people. This discussion has expressed some scepticism about such claims – as illustrated in the soccer successes of both the Dutch and the Irish, there were very specific and contemporary features in the way that nationality was celebrated.

This point is reinforced if we compare key national themes at different points in time. In 1988, sport played an important role in Australian celebrations of the bicentennial of white settlement, with a programme of international matches in various

sports. One hundred years earlier, at the centennial celebrations in 1888, there was no such sports programme.<sup>11</sup> There were a couple of very practical reasons for this. The logistics of international travel were much more difficult in 1888 than 1988. And, as discussed in the final section below, there were very few international sports teams in 1888.

But the difference in recognizing sport accompanied other differences in the two celebrations. The four most important themes celebrated in the 1888 events were: the landing of the first fleet in 1788; social and economic progress; Australia's place in the world; and the country's achievements as a pioneer of democracy (for example with the secret ballot, first used in Victoria). Only one of these themes – Australia's place in the world – received as much recognition in 1988. The others had been replaced by: Australians' relationship with the land; diversity; and a more diffuse general history, which encouraged local communities to celebrate their own symbols.<sup>12</sup>

Such differences in key themes suggest problems with any 'timeless' descriptions of specific national characters. However, given the frequency of such descriptions, for a wide range of countries, it is necessary to have a more careful look at how much validity these descriptions really have. The next section considers this.

### National stereotypes

The redeeming feature of the Australian male, and the reason why, on balance, Aussie men are a cut above, is their wickedly dry sense of humour. That's something the English male tries to camouflage by quoting Shakespeare, but they seem to have delusions of grandeur ... Give me an Aussie male any day over the cheap, inebriated, emotionally inarticulate and sexually repressed British version.<sup>13</sup>

This blog from the British *Guardian* website in November 2007 used common national images. Toning down the vitriol, such comments typically see Australians as outgoing and sports-loving, Americans as aggressive, while Germans are conscientious, and especially in the sporting context, methodical to the point of being described robotic. Indeed, in 2006, host country Germany explicitly tried to change its image to welcome visitors to the World Cup.<sup>14</sup>

English historian Peter Mandler has cautioned about the range of characteristics that can be employed in such descriptions:

There is no necessary connection between the nature of Parliament, the boarding school, football hooliganism, fish and chips, snooker, the royal family, Monty Python and Admiral Nelson – except they are all thought to be 'characteristically' English.<sup>15</sup>

In 2005, US researchers Antonio Terracciano and Robert McCrae coordinated the most comprehensive international approach to this question. Their collaborative research project suggests that many common perceptions of quintessential characteristics are inaccurate.<sup>16</sup>

The research gathered and then compared two sets of data from 49 countries. The first set of data came from surveys in each country, asking 4,000 respondents what they thought was the typical character image of their own country. The second set of data came from averaging results of personality tests for a total of 27,000 people from the same countries. Unfortunately for our purposes, the researchers did not use a measure of sports madness, but concentrated rather on the five more standard

personality measures of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness.

The stereotypes were certainly there: Australians considered themselves to be extrovert; Germans rated themselves as highly conscientious; and Canadians thought themselves to be more agreeable than most. But these projections of stereotype in most cases had little relationship with the actual personality profile of average citizens of each country.

Despite the Germans' self image as highly conscientious, they score just about the same on this trait as Turks, who consider themselves to be rather unreliable. Puerto Ricans consider themselves highly extrovert but they are apparently no more so than the French Swiss who consider themselves introverted. Despite Americans and Canadians seeing themselves on opposite ends of the spectrum in both agreeableness and assertiveness, the study found that actual personality traits in the later two countries are very similar. Both countries were close to average in terms of being agreeable and only slightly higher than the global average in assertiveness. The study found only four cultures, including Australians, where there was a reasonable correlation between the national image and the results of the personality tests.<sup>17</sup>

Table 1 compares the rankings among the 49 countries in the study for Australians and English on the personality test measures. For each country, the first column gives the perceived national characteristics – the national 'image', while the second column gives the actual results of the personality tests.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Australians' image of ourselves on neuroticism gave a very low ranking, 48th out of the 49 countries. We gave ourselves a high ranking on extraversion – which came second out of the 49. Both of these were close to the actual rankings from the personality tests, where Australians ranked respectively 37th and second.

Overall, there is a reasonably close fit between image and reality for Australians on four of the five measures. Yet Australians faltered in one category, thinking we are about average on conscientiousness, when in fact we rank very low on this measure.

The marked contrast is with the English, with a self-image as introverted, low on openness and agreeableness, but conscientious. The results of the personality tests in the right hand column however reveal rankings very similar to those of the Australians – and indeed the English had the greatest disagreement between image and reality of any country in the study. Overall, the authors concluded:

Perceptions of national character are not generalizations about personality traits based on accumulated observations of the people with whom one lives; instead, they appear to be social constructions ... in-group perceptions of national character may be informative about the culture, but they are not descriptive of the people themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Table 1. Personality traits – rankings out of 49 countries.

	Australians		English	
	Self image	Actual	Self image	Actual
Neuroticism	48	37	25	20
Extraversion	2	2	39	3
Openness	22	15	35	4
Agreeableness	12	25	37	23
Conscientiousness	23	44	14	41

While Terracciano and McCrae's research throws doubt on the validity of most national stereotypes, it does suggest some soundness for the common Australian stereotype. Our 'sports mad' tag is perhaps especially linked to low levels of neuroticism and high extraversion. However, there were two very important further qualifications on these results.

The first is that the study compared national averages – and generally there is far more variation of personality types *within* countries than *between* national averages. There is also some variation in how people see their national character. While surveying a reasonable number of people in each culture gave fairly robust national pictures, the chances of any two people agreeing in their judgements of national character were actually fairly modest. Key factors likely to influence such variations include the personalities of the observers, and the way or context in which they were thinking about the national character.<sup>20</sup> This point is returned to below.

Secondly, and consistent with the above Irish examples, particular circumstances, and changes in those circumstances, can affect the way people view the national stereotype. Changes can occur over time that either emphasize or downplay particular elements in a national culture. But if, as Terracciano and McCrae argue, there is considerable variation within countries around the typical character, and if those variations change over time, who or what creates the widely held images of 'national character'?

US historian Peter Novick argues that the creation of such images has a lot to do with current agendas and issues:

The most significant collective memories – memories that suffuse group consciousness – derive their power from their claim to express some permanent, enduring truth. Such memories are as much about the present as about the past, and are believed to tell us (and others) something fundamental about *who we are now*.<sup>21</sup>

The next section develops this theme further, starting with the range of attitudes towards the 'typical' Australian character.

### Legends and identities

'Oz, Land of Sunshine, Sport and Sexism' read a headline in the British *Daily Telegraph* in November 2007. Describing a common image of the 'ocker' sports lover, the piece announced the publication of *The Ernies Book*. This 15-year collection of examples of Australian male chauvinism suggested 'many Australian men are still Neanderthals when it comes to their attitudes towards women'.<sup>22</sup>

Lee Glendinning, a columnist with the *Guardian*, riposted with a different image of Australian men:

They are masculine and they like a drink, yes, but they are also emotionally literate, kind and engaging. Most of them are lively, well-read companions whose love of cricket or football doesn't dampen their interest in and knowledge on international affairs or domestic public policy. They would do anything for their male friends, but equally so, they enjoy and cherish the company of their female mates.<sup>23</sup>

A lively blogging interchange followed on the *Guardian's* Comment is Free website, with many of the diverse views apparently coloured by participants' good or bad luck in relationships with Australian men.



In the late 1970s, researcher Harry Oxley noted similar differences in standard Australian images. Fifty of his adult students described the ‘ocker’ sports lover in unflattering terms: ‘a self-satisfied vulgarian’ with a ‘narrow outlook never rising to anything above mindless hedonism’. Oxley then compared this image with a more positive image of the ‘Australian Legend’ developed by writer Russell Ward 20 years earlier:

There are some differences: the ocker-knockers do not talk about improvising ability, while Ward and his like are silent about male chauvinism. But on most points, these two accounts are of the same fellow, described respectively by those who do not like him and those who do.<sup>24</sup>

The distances between ‘those who do not like him and those who do’ indicate that the standard Australian character is not a great fit for the entire population. The images in 2007, and in Oxley’s earlier discussion, draw on a number of character traits. But individuals rarely display all of these traits – in fact, there can be differences in the traits particular people show at different times. Terracciano and McCrae cite other research indicating that two observers can differ in their descriptions of a single person they both know well.<sup>25</sup> We all have a range of aspects to our individual characters, our identities, and people who know us in one context may well have different impressions from those seeing us in another.

In his recent book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen argues that there is generally little necessary connection between different aspects in our characters:

The same person can be, without any contradiction, an American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a novelist, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theatre lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician ... Each of these collectivities, to all of which this person simultaneously belongs, gives her a particular identity. None of them can be taken to be the person’s only identity in a single membership category.<sup>26</sup>

Sen had personal experience of the damage done by those stressing just one aspect of identity. He was 11 years old during Independence and Partition of India in 1947, and remembers ‘the speed at which the broad human beings of January were suddenly transformed into the ruthless Hindus and fierce Muslims of July’. Hundreds of thousands died in the Partition violence, one of them a Muslim day-labourer who risked an encounter with the mobs to try to find food for his hungry family. Knifed in the violence by Hindu rioters, the man sought shelter in the Sen family garden, but ended up dying in the ambulance on the way to hospital.<sup>27</sup>

Several reviewers of Sen’s book, while conceding his point about multiple identities, have queried the equivalence he gives to different aspects of all this diversity. Historically, there are many more examples of people being susceptible to political militancy based on nation, or on religion, than on vegetarianism or theatre going.<sup>28</sup>

But even if people are more susceptible to appeals to nationality or religion, the strength of such appeals differs markedly over time. It is not just the latent potential at issue, but also the whys and hows of specific appeals to those traits. Researchers of nationalism argue that such appeals particularly occur at times of crisis. For but one example, a study of the growth of conservative French nationalism in the 1880s found that the central word in their political vocabulary was not ‘family’, ‘order’, ‘tradition’,



‘religion’, ‘morality’ or any similar term. It was ‘menace’.<sup>29</sup> Such crises and menaces have been more common in times of economic, political, and social turmoil – and the strength of mobilization along national, religious or ethnic lines has similarly varied.<sup>30</sup>

This discussion has indicated some of the diversity which lies behind specific images of ‘national identity’ or ‘character’. It has also noted that particular visions of identity have been mobilized at particular times, driven by particular agendas. Even while dwelling on fears and menaces, such mobilization emphasizes as rallying points key icons and symbols that especially inspire national feeling.

The next section discusses the varied history of such symbols, noting that many are of very recent development. It traces the reasons behind this.

### National symbols

When the Welsh rugby union team – those ‘sons strong of determination, invincible stamina’ – met the New Zealand team in 1905, they did so under a new national symbol. The New Zealanders started the proceedings with a haka, a Maori war dance. The Welsh responded by singing the first notable public airing of what was to become the Welsh anthem – *Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau* (Land Of My Fathers).<sup>31</sup>

It is a key point that, despite the Welsh efforts supposedly representing ‘that training of the early period when powerful enemies drove them to their mountain fortresses’, the symbol of the national anthem was not adopted until after 1900. In fact, most such national symbols, while supposedly representing long-standing attributes, are also of fairly recent adoption.

This can be seen in the history of key American symbols. With the current ubiquity of the US flag and the image of Uncle Sam, it is surprising that Uncle Sam only became a common symbol around 1890 – at the same time that schools started to fly the US flag. The key national celebrations of the 4th July and Thanksgiving only became widespread after the Civil War of 1861–65 – and were promoted by some specifically to give unifying symbols for a bitterly divided country.<sup>32</sup>

Around the same time, key French symbols were adopted. La Marseillaise became the French national anthem only in 1879, a year before Bastille Day on 14 July was adopted as a national holiday. At the same time ‘Marianne’, another icon which started life in the French Revolution around 1789, was also cemented as a symbol of France.<sup>33</sup> There were specific reasons in France too for this timing. In the preceding 90 years, various French conservative governments had tried to suppress the three icons, which were in turn adopted as symbols by radical opponents. But by 1880 French conservatives, weakened by defeat in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, were actively looking for images that would resonate with the general populace, many more of whom were now literate and, of the men, had the vote.<sup>34</sup>

But while there were specific circumstances in the US and France, such developments were by no means unique. Many countries with differing political dynamics started to popularize national images in these years. So why did such national symbols emerge in the 1870s and 1880s?

Our image of nation states – at least as far as they represent a popular nationalist identification – is a fairly recent phenomenon. Certainly there were examples of strong patriotic fervour in much earlier times. A line much used in the First World War (and bitterly attacked by poet Wilfred Owen) ‘*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*’ (‘It is sweet and fitting to die for one’s country’) was written by Roman poet Horace. And Shakespeare around 1600 had John of Gaunt utter the much quoted paen to ‘This

blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England'.<sup>35</sup> But such references were mainly restricted to the literate, where most people in earlier societies were illiterate.<sup>36</sup> The very word 'nationalism' was little used before 1900,<sup>37</sup> and there is little evidence of mass enthusiasm for nationalism or national symbols prior to the 1870s. As historian Benedict Anderson has argued, nationalism involves 'imagined communities' of people who feel they have much in common despite never knowing, or even meeting, most of their fellow members.<sup>38</sup> The existence of such common feeling was highly unlikely to develop in feudal societies, not only because of the crystal clear class distinctions between lord and serf, but also because they often spoke different languages.<sup>39</sup>

A number of factors assisted the development of national symbols in the late nineteenth century. The first of these, stressed by Anderson, is the development of mass printing, especially of newspapers. The circulation boundaries of such newspapers themselves created communities of similar interest, and also encouraged particular preferred dialects. But while such newspapers had been present well before the 1850s (and had influenced the development of national identification amongst the middle class), it was the development of mass literacy in the later nineteenth century that extended their reach as vehicles of nationalism.<sup>40</sup>

A second important factor in the development of strong national images was the growth of the modern state in the later nineteenth century. Institutions such as regional administration, railways, the post office and especially mass education both encouraged, and were used as outlets for, nationalist messages. Prior to such institutions, there was little need for most people in a locally based peasant economy to change from a local dialect or see themselves as part of a wider group.

A third element was the extension of the franchise. As voting rights extended more broadly, political parties needed mechanisms and symbols to communicate with their expanding electorate. Related to this was the growth in developed countries of labour and socialist parties, with a strongly internationalist emphasis. Part of the increasing emphasis on nationalism and national symbols was a conscious conservative effort to repel this development.

But these factors encouraging the growth of national symbols in the late nineteenth century do not explain the form it took. Indeed, there is something of a paradox between the modern impetus for nationalism and the historical images and symbols – such as referring back to the French Revolution or Thanksgiving – that the nationalists stressed to gain support.

The impetus to create national symbols in the late nineteenth century can be viewed as a brand marketing exercise, of trying to get people to adopt or emphasize particular images. But there are plenty of examples of unsuccessful campaigns, where no connection was made with the target market. Appeals to images that already had some popular credence were often more successful in gaining the responses desired.<sup>41</sup>

Consistent with the above discussion of the complexity of identity, nationalist calls did not drown out all other aspects of personality and existence. For one example, at the start of the First World War in 1914, socialist organizers in Wales were aghast at the extent to which hitherto radical Welsh miners responded to the nationalistic call to arms. The conservatives beating the nationalist drum were dumbfounded a year later when, despite the War, those same miners staged a general strike.<sup>42</sup>

And there could be different types of calls to national symbols as well. Historian Peter Mandler has demonstrated that the context and usage of images of 'English national character' have varied considerably. In the late nineteenth century, the term

was used predominantly by Liberals, who were in the forefront of moves to extend the franchise and supported this with descriptions of the common sense of the populace. Conservatives, for their part, used the term much less, stressing the importance of Imperial institutions which encompassed a range of national ‘characters’, including most notably in contemporary political discussions the Irish.<sup>43</sup>

In marked contrast, the 1920s saw the Conservatives make the most use of appeals to ‘English national character’. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin made explicit use of the term in trying to build a national consensus after the social schisms of the First World War, the secession of Ireland, and the 1926 General Strike.<sup>44</sup>

Such political usage of terms of national identity and character continues to the present day. For one example, a concern with national identity seems especially strong amongst conservative writers in the United States. Recent books on the topic have included Samuel Huntington’s *Who are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Allan Carlson’s *The American Way: Family and Community in the Shaping of the American Identity*, and Michael Savage’s *The Enemy Within: Saving America from the Liberal Assault on our Churches, Schools and Military*. Such books have little doubt that there is a strong American national identity – and that it is under threat.

This paper has stressed the complexity of identity. National and ethnic origins are important traits in identity, but they coexist with many others, and are emphasized and take particular forms at specific times. The raw material for the images draws from a variety of sources, especially historical sources, but the images at any time are also strongly influenced by the current agendas that proponents have, and responses from the target audience.

The examples of the raw material for nationalist symbols discussed thus far have been largely historical – appeals to images from the French revolution or the forerunners of ‘Gallant little Wales’ holed up in their mountain fortresses. But especially from the 1920s onwards proponents of nationalism started to use additional raw material – national teams on the sporting field. As we will see in later papers, Australia was well ahead of this international trend, with successful advertising of Australian ‘world champions’ from the 1880s. But prior to turning to the reasons for that precociousness, the next section looks at how sport became an important part of other countries’ national images.

### Impacts on sport

In April 1990, English Conservative MP (and later Lord) Tebbit, in an interview with the *LA Times*, announced his ‘cricket test’ for national identity, especially for migrants from India and Pakistan living in Britain: ‘A large proportion of Britain’s Asian population fail to pass the cricket test. Which side do they cheer for? It’s an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?’<sup>45</sup> Amartya Sen disputed the validity of this cricket test, seeing a number of varying factors involved, including national loyalty and residential identity, but also the quality of play, and the overall interest of a match, and a series.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the force of Sen’s argument, many more people have used Tebbit’s approach over the years, seeing national sporting teams as indeed symbolizing something of the national identity. The above discussion has emphasized that in looking at the spread of national symbols we need to consider both the agendas of the proponents and the way others in the population respond. Consistent with this, this section looks at examples from both sides.

Predating Tebbit, the phrase ‘national identity’ has frequently been used in sporting contexts in the UK – at least, as judged from a search of *The Times* newspaper. The Index recorded 85 articles mentioning national identity between 1945 and 1955, 71 articles in the following decade, and only 70 in the decade 1965 to 1975. Although this is not a high level of mentions, a striking fact of this list was its relationship to sport. Just under 80% of the mentions across these years were in articles about rugby union.<sup>47</sup>

The discussion above also noted the importance of newspapers in encouraging the ‘imagined communities’ of nations. Once those newspapers started developing mass markets, they quickly realized the importance of sport in attracting an audience.

Despite the levels of both popular and newspaper interest, competitive sport at an international level lagged behind the developments within individual countries – largely because of the logistics involved. While soccer matches between neighbours England and Scotland were well established by 1900, the first soccer World Cup was not held until 1930 (and England itself did not send a team until 1950). And while the modern Olympics date back to 1896, the IOC website notes that early games attracted only small numbers of athletes and little media interest. The structure of the games themselves was a problem: often held in conjunction with World Fairs, competitions took place over some three months. The 1932 Los Angeles Games were the first to establish the modern format, more competitor and viewer friendly, of lasting a concentrated two to three weeks. Only eight years earlier, the 1924 Paris Games were the first that could be considered a major event. Forty-four nations sent athletes (the previous best was 30), and 1,000 journalists accompanied them.<sup>48</sup>

It was not just journalists who showed an increased interest in such sporting events. Dictators Mussolini and Hitler took full advantage of the respective World Cup in Italy in 1934 and the Olympics in Berlin in 1936 as propaganda opportunities for their regimes – both within the country and internationally. Italy won the 1934 and 1938 World Cups, and German athletes did well in Berlin in 1936. However, Hitler’s goal of these Games as a total triumph for Aryan supremacy was confounded by the successes of black American athlete Jesse Owens.

The military junta running Argentina in 1978 was equally determined to make their World Cup that year a political and propaganda success for their regime. Fifteen years later, one general remembered Argentina’s win over the Netherlands in the final: ‘There was an explosion of ecstasy and hysteria. All the country was on the streets. Radicals embraced with Peronists, Catholics with Protestants and Jews, and all had only one flag: the flag of Argentina.’<sup>49</sup> The military, which had seized power in 1976, were at the time involved in a bloody repression of dissidents in Argentina. Their hosting of the World Cup was a conscious effort to build a unifying national success, both internally and for worldwide media consumption. And they went much further than just building expensive stadiums and other infrastructure. There were widespread rumours that Argentina’s 6–0 win over Peru to go into the finals stage of the competition was strongly assisted by extensive and well-documented Argentinean Government financial aid to Peru.<sup>50</sup>

But the Government’s hopes that its massive investment in the World Cup would lead to an extended ‘explosion of ecstasy and hysteria’ in its favour were not realized. Despite considerable duching, much of the international media gave extensive coverage to stories of those who had ‘disappeared’ at the military’s hands. And within the country the exuberance did not last long in a climate of military repression, economic downturn and massive inflation. The junta’s slogan ‘25 million Argentinesans

will play in the World Cup' soon morphed into a cynical '25 million Argentines will pay for the World Cup'.<sup>51</sup>

So conscious efforts to use sports as part of nation-building by governments do not always get the results that they seek. In looking at such efforts, it is critical to consider how others respond – and in these reactions as well a range of agendas can be in play.

Similar diversity and contingency complicate more general efforts to see sport as mirroring some intrinsic aspect of national identity. Examples can be seen in Americans' passion for baseball, which some commentators have seen as symbolizing a yearning to maintain contact with a purer agrarian way of life.<sup>52</sup> Rather than such grand schemes, confirmed baseball fan Steven Jay Gould saw his 'serious and lifelong commitment to baseball ... purely as a contingent circumstance of numerous, albeit not entirely capricious, accidents'. The first of two key accidents was being Jewish when both his father and grandfather viewed a dedication to a distinctively American sport as a major tactic for assimilation.<sup>53</sup> The second was time and place. From 1947 to 1957, Gould's formative years, New York City had the three best teams in major league baseball. In seven of those eleven years, the championship play-off World Series was a 'subway series' between two New York teams. The successes encouraged a mass local following for the sport.<sup>54</sup>

Gould's mixed motivations, and the interaction of contingent circumstances, bring us back to the central themes of this paper. Despite the many attempts to see sports as representing particular national identities, those national identities themselves are neither as clear nor as static as often claimed. Rather, they are complex, as most identities are, and morph as social and other changes affect a country. The way that identities present themselves also change, influenced amongst other things by political agendas among those helping shape the image and by the response of the audience to the images being created.

Using these insights, the next paper looks at key icons of Australian identity. The differing ways in which these icons have been promoted and responded to provides a good context for understanding in subsequent papers the unfolding patterns of our 'sporting nation'.

## Notes

1. Richard Neville, 'Grandchildren of the Revolution', *The Age*, November 5, 2005, A2, 5.
2. Each of the five major codes of football refers to their own game as 'football', often denigrating the other pretenders to this title. As a sidestep to avoid confusion, this book uses the generic terms for each code: Australian Rules (notwithstanding the official title is Australian football); grid iron (aka American football); rugby league; rugby union ('rugby' being one game prior to splits into league and union in the 1890s and 1907); and soccer.
3. *South Wales Daily News*, December 18, 1905, cited by Andrews, 'Welsh Rugby', 339.
4. Kuper, *Football Against the Enemy*, 4–8.
5. ABN Amro, *Soccernomics*.
6. This and the following discussion of the Irish celebrations and team are from Ticher, 'Notional Englishmen', 82–5.
7. *The Irish Times*, June 30, 1990, cited by Ticher, 'Notional Englishmen', 85.
8. Frank McCourt, 'With God on their Team'. *The Age*, February 3, 2007 (reprinted from *The Observer*).
9. Bairner, 'Football and the Idea of Scotland', 19–20.
10. McCourt, 'With God on their Team'.
11. Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration*, 108–10.

12. *Ibid.*, 111–32, 139.
13. Comment from Danny Ryan, *Guardian* CiF website, Comments following Lee Glendinning, ‘Aussie Males’, November 6, 2007.
14. See Hay and Joel, ‘The Football World Cup and its Fans’.
15. Mandler, *English National Character*, 2.
16. Terracciano, McCrae *et al.*, ‘National Character’; Terracciano, McCrae *et al.*, ‘Personality Profiles of Cultures’; and McCrae *et al.*, ‘Consensual Validation’, 179. The text (for ease of expression) refers to 49 countries – the analysis used 47 countries but in two of those (Britain and Switzerland) two cultural groups were studied: English and Northern Irish in Britain, and French-Swiss and German-Swiss.
17. The four countries where the image was close to the reality were Australia, Lebanon, New Zealand and Poland. Not all of these self-images were complimentary.
18. Dr Terracciano kindly provided the author with the detailed statistics in a data appendix to the above papers.
19. Terracciano, McCrae *et al.*, ‘National Character’, 99.
20. *Ibid.*, 97.
21. Novick, *Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 202; emphasis in original.
22. Nick Squires, ‘Oz, Land of Sunshine, Sport and Sexism’, *Daily Telegraph* (UK), November 6, 2007.
23. Lee Glendinning, ‘Aussie Males’. *Guardian*, November 6, 2007.
24. Oxley, ‘Ockerism, the Cultural Rabbit’, 195.
25. Terracciano, McCrae *et al.*, ‘National Character’, 97.
26. Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 4–5. Sen’s 2006 book is an explicit rejoinder to works such as Huntington’s two books *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), and *Who are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity* (2004).
27. Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 4, and elsewhere in his book. Sen developed his ideas further in a joint report *Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding*. See article in *The Economist*, November 10, 2007, 75.
28. For example, the review of Sen’s book in *The Economist*, May 11, 2006.
29. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 121; and see McCrone, *Sociology of Nationalism*, 31.
30. See Friedman, *Moral Consequences of Economic Growth*, which emphasizes the importance of differences in economic conditions.
31. Andrews, ‘Welsh Rugby’.
32. Spillman, *Nation and Commemoration*, 24–5.
33. McCrone, *Sociology of Nationalism*, 45–6.
34. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 121; McCrone, *Sociology of Nationalism*, 46.
35. John of Gaunt’s speech was in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, Act 2, Scene 1.
36. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 51.
37. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 4, n.7. Prior to this time the word ‘nation’ simply meant ‘society’ or ‘state’, not a group coalescing state, cultural and self-identifying aspects.
38. *Ibid.*, 6.
39. Mandler, *English National Character*, 8; and see examples in McCrone, *Sociology of Nationalism*, 45 and Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 37, 60.
40. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, especially 44 and 61.
41. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 92.
42. *Ibid.*, 124.
43. Mandler, *English National Character*, 125.
44. *Ibid.*, 152.
45. Tebbit’s ‘cricket test’ has been widely cited, for example, by John Carvel, social affairs editor, *Guardian*, January 8, 2004.
46. Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 155.
47. Maguire and Tuck, ‘Global Sports and Patriot Games’, 115.
48. International Olympic Committee website: [www.ioc.org](http://www.ioc.org).
49. Kuper, *Football Against the Enemy*, 173.
50. *Ibid.*, 175.
51. *Ibid.*, 177, 174.
52. Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*.
53. For more on this theme, see Hay, ‘Approaches to Sports History’, 74.
54. Gould, *Triumph and Tragedy in Mudville*, 29–32.



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