

## **Bipolar (Un)patriots: national identity, ethnic identity and the 2006 FIFA World Cup**

by Jessica Carniel

*Introduction: when Australia went soccer-mad and mad about soccer*

Few would disagree with Richard Cashman's (vii) observation, "For better or worse, sport is central to the business of being Australian and appeals to many Australians." Almost one-third of the adult population are involved in sports or physical activities affiliated with a club or association (ABS, Participation in Sport and Physical Activities, Australia, 2002 [online]). Swimmers, athletes and football players are lauded as role models, icons and heroes for the admiration of fellow Australians. The 'Prime Minister's eleven' is not a special parliamentary cabinet, but rather a cricket team. An international sporting event, specifically the Sydney 2000 Olympics Games, is remembered as one of the most significant cultural events the country has known, and marks Australia's coming-of-age on an international scale more so than its celebration of federation in the following year. Furthermore, as Tara Madgalinski (309) argues, "the Olympic Games provided a useful cultural focal point around which images of the Australian nation could be generated." It could thus be concluded that sport in Australia provides a clear and safe rallying point for patriotic and nationalist feeling.

An interesting counterpoint to this can be seen in discussions surrounding Australia's participation in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Qualifying for the first time since its World Cup debut in 1974, this international soccer tournament generated an unprecedented level of excitement amongst Australians. Bookstores, particularly the larger chain stores, featured large displays of World Cup and soccer related books, DVDs and CDs (a 'soundtrack' to the World Cup is released each tournament year, featuring songs penned in support of each of the competing teams). In addition to official World Cup merchandise, histories of soccer (both in the world and in particular countries), biographies and autobiographies by soccer players and coaches, and fiction also comprised these displays. Extensive coverage of the World Cup finals was provided by SBS, including pre- and post-game discussion panels and a show featuring the daily highlights. In the lead up to the tournament, and repeated for its duration, SBS also televised a documentary series that examined the World Cup histories of the various participating countries, as well as other various soccer-related programs and films. These programs included the reality television series, *Nerds FC*, and the search for a team song, *Song for the Socceroos*. Although it is unsurprising that SBS' coverage of the event was extensive given the station's status as the official free-to-air network for the World Cup in Australia, soccer coverage on other channels, such as Channel Ten's *Sports Tonight*, also increased significantly both in the lead up to and during the event, arguably more so than in previous tournament years. Games were screened in large outdoor spaces, like Federation Square in Melbourne. People braved cold winter nights and rearranged their sleeping patterns in order to be part of the tournament as it happened. In short, Australia went soccer-mad.

On the one hand, the World Cup was, like the Olympics, an opportunity to celebrate national identity through sporting spectacular, even if that event was not being hosted in Australia. On the other hand, Australia's participation in the tournament generated debate over the ways in which a multicultural country can and cannot express national and ethnic identities through international sporting events. Beginning with a pre-tournament friendly with Greece, who did not qualify for the World Cup, Australia faced three countries from which significant numbers

had migrated to Australia. Greek Australians, Italian Australians and Croatian Australians faced an interesting choice that heretofore had only been hypothetical: if Australia played Greece/Croatia/Italy in the World Cup, who would you support?

The choice is laden with social, cultural and political implications. Discussions about choosing other national teams over the Socceroos should be read in light of recent public debate about national identity and citizenship. In the months preceding the 2006 World Cup, the role of dual citizenship and, by implication, multicultural and transnational Australian identities in contemporary Australian society were questioned and challenged. It is assumed that one's choice of team also indicates one's national loyalty, yet is it not also possible that one's choice of team and one's choice of country articulates fluid and multiple identities in an increasingly globalised context? Through an analysis of the shifting status of soccer in Australian society in recent years, this paper examines the complex relationship of sport and national identity, and the place of ethnic identification within the multicultural sporting nation.

*Sport and national identity: identification or brand recognition?*

Sports and sporting events are sites wherein national identities can be expressed and celebrated. As Martin Polley (35) observes, "A national team can, in media and popular discourse, take on the guise of the nation itself." David Rowe (23) also agrees that the media can use "great sporting occasions as festivals of nationhood". By promoting notions of national identity through sports coverage, he continues, "great sporting moments like the Super Bowl in the USA, the Melbourne Cup in Australia, the FA Cup Final in the UK, Hockey Night in Canada...and global media mega sports events, like the Olympics and soccer World Cup, have become orgies of both nationalism and commodification ('commodified nationalism', perhaps)."

Bob Stewart and Aaron Smith (296) argue that the postmodernisation of sport through shifts and developments in global communications allowed viewers to experience multiple loyalties and identities. Allegiances now shift between sports and teams as easily as people change television channel. Rather than access to sporting events being limited to the local club down the road, or even the city's large sporting arena, people can enjoy various international sporting events on television, and develop a personal interest in clubs beyond their local sphere. Focussing predominantly upon an understanding of postmodernism in terms of its influence upon marketing, commoditisation and communication, Stewart and Smith (296) further argue that in the era of postmodernism "club and team attachments [are] frequently the result of strong brand identification rather than neighbourhood and family pressures."

While this is certainly true on a 'local' scale – Manchester United provide a prime example of a 'local' team/brand whose international recognition and support base does not necessarily involve personal connections to the location the team ostensibly represents – such a shift is still not entirely applicable to understandings of team allegiance practices for national teams. Certainly there are exceptions; it is acceptable to support South American teams such as Brazil because of their exceptionally talented players (who are frequently rendered recognisable through lucrative advertising contracts with brands such as Nike, Adidas and Pepsi) but, it can be argued, the extent to which non-Brazilian fans, for example, can support such teams "in any

meaningful sense” may be contested (Bairner 166). Generally, however, the element of choice, which Stewart and Smith claim is a distinct feature of postmodern sport, is frequently eliminated from international sporting events when one’s home team is involved – such was the case of Australia’s participation in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. Although he considers the relationship of globalisation to postmodernity (or modernity or the premodern) to be irrelevant, Alan Bairner also highlights the element of choice in the globalised sporting economy but limits this choice to large sporting clubs with extensive international brand recognition, like Manchester United or Inter Milan. Regarding national support Bairner (166) states, “Few people support national sides for reasons other than their own national identity.” He does, however, emphasise that the concept of national identity, and people’s expression and experiences of national identity, is complex, and is played out differently in various sociopolitical, cultural and geographical contexts.

*Wogball: the changing status of soccer in Australia*

Despite the popularity of soccer in the United Kingdom and the high proportion of Australians of Anglo Celtic backgrounds, soccer has not enjoyed much support or success in Australia until very recently. Bairner (13) notes that while sport is a highly exportable cultural form, especially as part of imperialism and colonisation, soccer has actually spread more rapidly and with greater success in countries that were not part of the British empire, such as continental Europe and South America. Indeed, soccer in Australia has been more readily associated with postwar migration from continental Europe than with Australia’s British colonial history. Cashman (116) relates soccer’s limited success in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the limited social and political clout held by the working class migrants and ethnic communities who were its main proponents: “The successful growth of a sport...required effective involvement in community politics, in school and churches....Soccer, by comparison [to rugby league and other football codes], suffered because it had fewer friends in high places”.

Soccer was thus the sport of the marginalised. As former Australian soccer player Johnny Warren (xiv) observes, “‘Sheilas’, ‘wogs’ and ‘poofers’ were considered the second-class citizens [during his youth] and if you played soccer you were considered one of them. That’s how soccer was regarded back then and, to some extent, still is considered today.” Despite its ambiguous status in (straight, male) Anglo Australian spheres of influence, its popularity within and amongst ethnic communities influenced the formation and management of ethnic organisations; local ethnic clubs often arose around a soccer team and later grew into important social and cultural hubs for that particular ethnic community. Until the de-ethnicisation of soccer in the mid-1990s (to be discussed below), local and municipal teams were frequently associated with particular ethnic groups and were affiliated with particular ethnic organisations and clubs, usually Greek, Italian, Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian. While it might be argued that this exacerbated the sense of cultural and social fragmentation that some fear results from continued ethnic affiliation after the act of migration, others have argued that the creation of sporting organisations and participation in soccer actually benefited the socialisation and settlement of migrants and their children (Hay; Cashman).

It was this organisation along ethnic lines that the Bradley Report identified as one of the main 'image' problems faced by soccer (Hughson 170). Released in 1990, the Bradley Report was prepared for the Australian Soccer Federation (ASF) by James Bradley, an academic from the School of Accounting at the University of New South Wales. Although it ostensibly aimed to identify areas for improvement in the managerial structure and organisation of the National Soccer League (NSL) and the ASF, the report impacted significantly upon the intersecting histories of Australian soccer and ethnic communities in Australia. Bradley blamed soccer's lack of success in Australia and its poor image upon the strong associations between soccer and non-Anglo Australian ethnicity. He recommended that these associations be severed and in 1992 the ASF announced a renewed policy against ethnic club names, emblems, flags and logos (Booth and Tatz 166) effective from the 1995/1996 season onwards (Kobe [online]). Football Federation Australia's Spectator Code of Behaviour now features three significant clauses. Spectators present at matches are expected to:

respect the rights, dignity and worth of every person regardless of their gender, ability, race, colour, religion, language, politics, national or ethnic origin'; ... not engage in discrimination, harassment or abuse in any form, including the use of obscene or offensive language or gestures, the incitement of hatred or violence or partaking in indecent or racist chanting; ... must not attempt to bring into a venue national or political flags or emblems (except for the recognised national flags of any of the competing teams) or offensive or inappropriate banners, whether written in English or a foreign language (Football Federation Australia [online]).

Despite the ban, many teams are still associated unofficially with certain ethnic groups, as John Hughson explores in his work on the Bad Boys Blue in Sydney. Furthermore, continued television coverage of the game by SBS, which was initially established as a television and radio network that catered to the social, cultural and linguistic needs of Australia's NESB population, is a (positive) reminder of soccer's ethnic associations.

Boosted also by the publicity surrounding the Socceroo's success at the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the A-League has thus far enjoyed considerable success in its first two seasons. While game attendance for the NSL's 1995/1996 season averaged at 4 420, the average attendance at A-League matches in the 2005/2006 season was 11 627 including finals attendance (AusFootballReview [online]). Soccer's success in recent years is thus related largely to more effective marketing campaigns by the Australian Football Association (formerly the ASF and Soccer Australia) that play upon soccer's reputation as 'the world game' and the physical appeal of its players to both male and female audiences. The 2005/2006 campaign for the revamped A-League places attractive young male players of various (but predominantly white) ethnic origins in an urban setting. Dressed in fashionable streetwear and artfully dishevelled hairstyles associated with the 'metrosexual' look (which is, not incidentally, in turn strongly associated with the English soccer player David Beckham), they play a fast and furious match as they move through a city (which features parked cars supplied by Hyundai, the A-League's major sponsor) while using paint splattered balls to graffiti the names of various soccer skills ('scissor', 'spin', et cetera) on to a wall. The commercial is set to a hip hop track by New Zealand artist Scribe (the A-League features one New Zealand team, the New Zealand Knights). All these elements combined promote not just the A-League but soccer itself as

(post)modern, edgy, sexy, fast-paced and global. The campaign's tagline, "It's football but not as you know it", plays upon the ambiguous status of soccer as a football code within the bounds of Australia as a 'football-mad' country. Rather than marketing the league as soccer, the marginalised sport, the campaign emphasises the sport as an alternative football code.

In 2006, Australia qualified for the World Cup for the first time since their debut in 1974. Thirty-two years before the Socceroos' participation barely registered in national consciousness. As Andrew Orsatti observes, the 1974 team struggled to get time off work to attend the finals, whereas the 2006 Socceroos squad comprised professional players with no need of external work. Furthermore, their qualification warranted significant lead-up coverage in the media and involved several lucrative sponsorship deals that led to extensive exposure through various television and billboard advertising campaigns. This included a series of television commercials by the team's major sportswear sponsor, Nike, wherein the Socceroos were taunted by History, which was personified as an old, balding man in a brown bathrobe who spoke with an undefinable European accent. Other popular teams, such as Brazil and England, were also featured prominently in campaigns by SBS (found on buses, trams and billboards) that again focused upon the trivia of these teams' histories in the World Cup.

Whether the increasing success of soccer in recent years is even partly a result of the ban upon ethnic affiliations and insignia in the national league is questionable. Rather, its success must be seen in the context of the increased marketability of soccer on an international scale evidenced in the lucrative and high profile sponsorship contracts that major international tournaments attract. Graham Scambler (*passim*), particularly through his analysis of David Beckham, relates this "hypercommodification of football" to new forms of fame and fandom in the postmodern era. As discussed above in relation to Stewart and Smith's examination of the postmodernisation of sport, allegiances to sports codes and teams are now multiple, fluid and shifting; in this context, Australian sports fans are now more likely to enjoy, for example, AFL *and* soccer.

Lionel Frost dismisses the notion that indigenous football codes are threatened by the globalising force of soccer largely because of their deeply-rooted traditions and fan bases. He does, like other sports historians and sociologists discussed above, also acknowledge that advances in telecommunications and media allow spectators to hold loyalties to more than a handful of sports codes and teams. There are some, however, that view the growing popularity of soccer in Australia and the rest of the world as a threat to indigenous sports codes, such as AFL. Historian Geoffrey Blainey, for example, views soccer as "more and more threatening" and warns, "If Australia should ever reach the semi-finals or final of the World Cup, that day will be costly for Australian football." In his forecast, soccer will not remove but slowly diminish the role of AFL in Australian life. Soccer, in this perspective, is a 'world game' and therefore not simply as 'Australian' as the indigenous code of AFL. John Harms (17), on the other hand, argues that the constant pitting of soccer against AFL "is symbolic of a consistent failure to acknowledge the complexity of a multicultural society."

*Bipolar, unpatriotic and un-Australian: soccer, citizenship and Australian identity*

Bairner (xii) observes that British Conservative politician Norman Tebbit's suggestion during the 1990s that ethnic groups in Britain be subjected to a 'cricket test' to determine their identities and national loyalties rests upon a notion of the transformative potential of sport in the national context: "One way of becoming a true citizen of the nation would be to support the national sports teams". Although Bairner questions the ability of the 'unconnected' fan to support the national team of a country other than that to which he is connected to by either citizenship or birth "in any meaningful sense", he supports the rights of migrants to barrack for the 'old country'. "To infer political disloyalty from a simple expression of sporting nationalism...may be foolish at best and reprehensible at worst" (Bairner 169).

Debate about these issues in Australia are ongoing but have certainly come to the fore more frequently in recent years, and received considerable attention throughout the World Cup year of 2006. The most recent line of debate began in February of that year when Federal Treasurer Peter Costello ([online]) addressed the Sydney Institute on citizenship and Australian values:

People come to Australia and become Australian citizens because they want to embrace the things this country stands for. We should be proud that people from all over the world come here looking for Australian values - our values - and want to embrace them. Values like economic opportunity, security, democracy, personal freedom, the physical environment and strong physical and social infrastructure.... These are Australian values. We must be very clear on this point. They are not optional. We expect all those who call themselves Australians to subscribe to them.

Despite his acknowledgment of Australia's history of immigration Costello decried multiculturalism, the policy developed to manage the resultant social and cultural diversity of this migration history, as "mushy [and] misguided" (Gordon and Topsfield, [online]). Furthermore, Costello discussed dual citizenship, wherein Australian citizens have maintained or regained citizenship rights in the country of their birth, or of their parents' and grandparents' origin, as being contrary to these values. These concerns were reflected also in business leader Hugh M. Morgan's Wilfred Brookes Memorial Lecture at Deakin University on April 26. In this lecture Morgan controversially equated dual citizenship with mental illness. He stated, "because citizenship is one of the most important elements in personal identity, a person who is a citizen of two countries has at the least the beginning of a bipolar disorder. And if the other country is, in cultural terms, many miles away from Australia, then the bipolarity will become increasingly acute".

Morgan conflated and pathologised personal, cultural and civic identification. An in-depth analysis of the implications of Morgan's comments for the significant number of Australians diagnosed with mental illnesses such as bipolar disorder is unfortunately beyond the intended scope of this paper. What is clear, however, is that to be unequivocally Australian is to be 'healthy', but to negotiate multiple identities that *transgress* (in Morgan's and Costello's view) national borders is to be unhealthy – with the further implication that Australians with mental illnesses are unhealthy and therefore also unAustralian, as has been seen in the cases of Cornelia Rau and Vivian Alvarez Solon. The notion of the 'healthy' 'united' nation appears in newspaper columnist Andrew Bolt's (28 June) response to Italian Australian supporters of

Italy: “All *healthy* countries must make their divided people feel united to each other, but never has that job been this hard, in a wired-up world with big populations on the move” (emphasis added). The implications here are similar to those of Morgan’s and Costello’s comments: multicultural nations are fractured and unhealthy, the loyalties of their citizens are divided, and this is all exacerbated by increasing movements towards transnationalism and globalisation, which inherently threaten the concept of the unified nation-state.

According to Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence, Jim McKay and David Rowe (118-119), the “soccer subject” is multicultural and gendered; “the signified of soccer is ‘new Australian.’” Interestingly, they also see the “soccer citizen [as] split, divided not only in terms of sporting affiliation or affinity, but as a trace of difference from the ideal-type migrant subject.” By choosing not to support Australia in the World Cup, some soccer citizens were seen as choosing not to mend their ruptured subjectivities: “Fantastic! Australia, their home, was beaten! The country that had opened its arms to them and their parents was devastated! How sweet” (Bolt 28 June). Waleed Aly, on the other hand, viewed the divided loyalties more positively: “Were it not this way, and were such communities not so well established now, soccer would not have the kind of support in this country that has made the [duration of the 2006 World Cup] possible.”

Australian participation in the World Cup and the resulting discussions about ethnic and national identity must be read in context of soccer’s marginalised status in Australian society and also broader public debate about these issues. While the tournament did not in itself begin these debates, which have been ongoing in various forms throughout Australia’s history as a migrant nation, the World Cup and the game of soccer itself became complex site for examining and articulating transnational Australian identities within a globalised context.

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