

# Introduction

*Steve Georgakis and Kate Russell*

Late in November 2010, while waiting for the train at Goulburn train station to travel to Sydney, we came across a plaque, hidden in bushes, which commemorated the first train journey from Sydney to Goulburn in 1869. The plaque read, 'The first railway steamed into Goulburn on 26 March 1869, bringing up the Warwick Cricket Team from Sydney to play in a match against Goulburn.' On the same day the 'Cobb & Co Coach' was held up by bushrangers at Run-O-Waters Creek (three kilometres from Goulburn). While bushrangers have disappeared it is important to note that a cricket game was used to celebrate the newly built train line not a dramatic production, not fireworks and certainly not an opera. Sport has been a privileged social phenomenon in Australia since British colonisation and continues to be so in the second decade of the 21st century.

For more than a century scholars of Australian history and sociology have documented the important role that sport plays in the cultural and social identity of Australians. In 1912 English historian Inglis noted that as far as he could see Australians seemed to be interested in sport and nothing else, while Cashman (1995) more than 80 years later proclaimed Australia a 'paradise of sport'. The place of sport is so privileged in Australian society that a number of athletes, both male and female, have received the highest annual award 'Australian of the Year'. It is the only country in the world where four football codes (Football, Rugby Union, Rugby League and Australian Rules) battle for dominance. There are also a number of scholarly works, both historical and sociological which have highlighted the strong link between Australian identity and sport; the most authoritative and interpretative of these include Stoddart's (1986) *Saturday afternoon fever*, Cashman's (1995) *Paradise of sport*, Adair and Vamplew's (1997) *Sport in Australian history*, and Booth and Tatz's (2001) *One-eyed: a view of Australian sport*. There are also an innumerable number of popular texts which have looked at sport using a 'who won, what and where' mentality. Almost all of these texts deal with sport at the elite level, and include titles such as '100 greatest moments', 'cricket diaries' or 'biographies'.

While there are a plethora of books, very few studies have looked at issues related to youth sport specifically. This neglect has been unusual because study in youth sport can provide important insights to the understanding of Australian sport history and culture through the eyes of those that access it from a young age. This book is therefore an effort to produce a synthesis of contemporary issues related to Australian youth sport.

This edited book of scholarly chapters is primarily a response to the publication of the Crawford Report (2009) when youth sport issues took centre stage. In particular, the report highlighted two important but neglected themes in the academic literature. Firstly, the assumed privileging of elite sport over grassroots participation; and secondly, the diminished status of physical education and school sport. Upon its publication, debates in the media and elsewhere raged for months and centred on issues related to motivation, participation, role models, funding models, national curriculum, low status of physical education and school sport, marginalised experiences, and competitive sport versus inclusive sport. Some of the views were polarised; for example, the editor of the *Sunday Telegraph* (2009) noted that:

One thing is for certain: *The Sunday Telegraph* wants the Government to continue to spend heavily to fund Olympic sports. Olympic and other sporting heroes inspire generations of kids to get up and get active. Olympic and other sporting heroes cut obesity rates. End of story (22 November 2009, p. 37).

Relevant academic arguments did not find their way into these debates at the time, partly because there was little available research. At the very least the Crawford Report (2009) highlighted that government funding in sport should benefit *all* Australians. Philosophical perspectives were espoused and many argued that youth sport should be an end in itself, not a beginning for fame and fortune for the few. Many sports which historically boasted large entry-level programs very rarely discussed retention rates or how many dropped out due to not being identified by talent identification programs.

As the title suggests this book looks at youth sport. Since the relationship between youth and sport could cause debate it is worthwhile clarifying the use of the term. Sport is a collective noun and will refer to a range of organised activities including physical education, school sport, and organised community sport. For many youth, physical education and school sport is the main societal institution for the development of sport. This is because the latest participation rate figures demonstrate that for almost 40% of youth, school provides the main opportunity for regular organised and structured sport (ABS 2010). While school-based sport offers opportunities for teachers to introduce students to the benefits of sport within a safe and supportive network, the introduction of the national curriculum has raised significant questions about its future. Similarly, organised community club sport which has dominated the scene is in decline for a number of reasons, including economic pressures, competitive nature and parental concerns for safety.

Youth is a fluid term and is a transitional stage of physical and mental human development between childhood and adulthood. Youth as a social category, with its special concerns and theoretical issues, became visible at the time of the industrial revolution and is a Western construct that emerged in the 19th century. For the purposes of the book youth is defined very loosely as starting when childhood finishes and ending when someone 'settles down.' Because of the 'Peter Pan Syndrome', youth marrying much later in life, and also childhood finishing earlier, the period of youth is ever expanding. We have not included a definitive age range for that reason but suggest investigating the years between five and 25. The end of youth is when 'one gets one's act together for life' and the key theme is 'independency'

and the so-called transition into adulthood. The Australian Sports Commission, which amongst other roles promotes the national sports system, uses the term 'junior sport' for participants aged between five to 17 years. This of course coincides with the school years.

The link between youth and sport is a strong one and historically youth have been encouraged to play sport for a myriad of benefits. Bailey (2006) summarised the benefits under the following developmental categories: physical, lifestyle, affective, social and cognitive. Regarding lifestyle development, physical inactivity has been identified as a risk factor for a number of lifestyle diseases and participating in sport promotes general health. In the affective domain, sport can have a positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of youth and can build self-esteem, and decrease stress and anxiety. It is well documented that sport affects how youths develop socially. Through sport, individuals can experience equality, freedom and empowerment. Youth sport can teach essential values and life skills including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play. Regarding cognitive development, there has long been a tradition 'that a healthy body leads to a healthy mind' and that sport can support intellectual development in youth. School sport can improve a child's ability to learn, increases concentration, attendance and overall achievement. Therefore in each of the developmental categories noted above, there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that sport can have an undeniably positive effect. Although as Bailey (2006) highlighted 'further research and evaluation will help us better understand the nature of these contributions' (p. 399). This edited collection will shed light on these contributions.

This book explore several themes related to youth sport in the Australian context. In the first chapter, Daryl Adair provides an overview of sport in Australian history and culture identifying the many influences that have helped shape Australian sporting traditions. In the second chapter, Steve Georgakis asserts that while Australian schools and community clubs have been nurseries for major sports, there is a tendency for scholars of Australian sport to ignore the important role played by educational institutions in this process. There is one exception to this: elite independent schools and associations. The chapter argues that governmental educational institutions were central to this growth and consolidation of Australian sport, although their contribution has yet to be fully documented.

Since the release of the Crawford Report (2009) there has been much debate regarding the current funding privileging of elite sport over grassroots level sport. Matthew Nicholson and Russell Hoye provide an historical account of the development of a professional sporting system in Australia; in particular, the authors focus on the 1970s when Australia still had in place an amateur sports system in contrast to many other countries that had government funded sporting organisations. Such developments left Australia behind in terms of the development of elite athletes and this led to a complete rethink in the funding model and elite sport policy was prioritised. Richard Light's chapter on youth sport policy provides an account of the Australian youth sport model using the example of swimming. A well-established youth sport system is available, with 1.6 million of 2.6 million youth, involved in organised sport outside school. Within this system swimming is the most popular sport for youth (aged 5–14) in Australia with almost 500,000 participating (17% of

all children). According to Light, competitive swimming is organised in Australia through two structures: the community-based club system and the school system. Swimming is part of the physical education syllabus but the focus is on 'learning to swim' and developing competency in the water. Both the primary and secondary school systems offer access to competitive swimming structures for students who excel in the sport. This is achieved through levels – school, region, state and national titles. While an organised program exists for elite swimmers it is the club system that provides extensive training and preparation and most competitive swimmers compete outside school.

As sport plays a major role in the construction of feminine and masculine identities, a section of the book looks at issues related to sport and the construction of gender. Kate Russell explores the heterosexism of sport and its impact on girls and girls' participation in sport. Russell argues that the central component in the defining practices of appropriate and inappropriate activities for women and men is in the perception of the gendered identity that participation in an activity produces. Notions of acceptable body shapes and sizes often influence the ways in which a person or an observer may either accept or reject an individual's gender. These arguments fail to address the notion of 'functionality', which suggests that body shapes that enhance successful athletic performance are both valuable and valued. This practice also facilitates the validation of compulsory heterosexuality – the practice whereby heterosexuality is presented as the only valid, and therefore valued, form of sexuality. Murray Drummond adds to this work by identifying the sporting issues and discourses faced by male youth. He achieves this by examining the complex relationship between sport, masculinity and the body. He argues that being competent in sport serves as a rite of passage for males and youths who are not well versed in sport and have a weaker sense of masculine identity than others.

The next section of the book looks at marginalised sporting experiences. With over 2.5 million youths aged between five and 14 taking part in organised community sport, it is imperative to understand the motives for and against involvement. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010) notes that almost two in five school-aged youth do not participate in sport after school hours. Research would suggest that this group is overrepresented by immigrant youth from low socioeconomic areas of Australia and disabled youth. This section will look at issues related to marginalisation by focusing on disabled, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered) and Indigenous Australians, and aspects of their associated sporting experiences. Nikki Wedgwood's chapter looks at issues related to disability and argues that understanding sociology is beneficial to sports providers. The chapter highlights the fact that sporting practice in Australian society is heavily influenced by social structures like gender and ableism but also the fact that people who play sport or provide physical education are not completely constrained by these structures. Kellie Burns provides an overview of the Gay Games and raises some important issues related to their promotion and consolidation. The chapter analyses the event as a site of production, where normative meanings around sex, gender, citizenship and global living are constructed and contested. Colin Tatz's chapter notes that Indigenous athletes are overrepresented in professional sports such as boxing, Australian Rules football and Rugby League while there are still economic and social barriers to sports such as Rugby Union and swimming. Racial

vilification and abuse is still common while paradoxically sport is one of the few areas in which Indigenous Australians compete on equal terms. Sport is important in maintaining a sense of community and Colin Tatz claims that sport is the 'cement' that binds so many communities together.

The following section of the book highlights the link between learning and sport by looking at how the Australian beach and various aspects of physical education and school sport are linked to learning. Doug Booth's chapter looks at the intersection between sport and youth on the Australian beach. The Australian beach is one of the great symbols of Australian culture. Perhaps Australia's most defining moment on Sunday 25 April 1915 occurred on a beach, not in Australia but in Turkey, when thousands of ANZAC troops landed on Z Beach (later called ANZAC Cove) and were slaughtered. In recent times the Australian beach gained world-wide publicity after riots broke out on the Sydney's Cronulla Beach. Most of the literature on the Australian beach has concentrated on aspects such as surfing and criminal youth subcultures, but failed to mention the learning and other sport that takes place on the beach; for example the 50,000 youths who migrate to the beach every Saturday morning to compete in sport. The following two chapters look at issues related to physical education and school sport, and highlight the complexities surrounding the promotion of lifelong physical activity. Murray Drummond and Shane Pill explore the meaning associated with contemporary physical education and highlight sociological themes related to promoting participation. In particular their chapter focuses on the model of sport education as a way to enhance the physical learning experiences of children at school suggesting a broader approach to viewing curriculum development. Louisa Peralta's philosophical chapter brings into question the school's responsibility to address health issues such as obesity and physical inactivity. In particular, the author focuses on three intervention programs and illuminates the complexity of designing appropriate interventions to combat physical inactivity and obesity.

It is only recently that scholarship has looked at community club sport and the role of the coach in a sustained manner. The two chapters by Donna O'Connor and Andrew Bennie raise important questions related to the philosophy of community sport participation by looking at the role of the coach and various sports coaching philosophies. O'Connor's chapter examines the role of talent identification strategies and the consequences for both rural and city youth in moving towards participation in elite level sport, whereas Bennie's chapter seeks to expand our understandings of the ways in which a coach's preferred leadership style and direction can both positively and negatively affect the learning experiences of youth in sport.

The final chapters of the book deals with emerging contemporary issues in youth sport, such as child protection, the media, the sporting celebrity and research methodology issues. One of Kate Russell's chapters in this section looks at the intersection between sport and child protection. Russell identifies the ways in which legislation has helped shape child welfare policy in sport. Her chapter highlights the many factors that may increase the potential for harm among young sport participants as well as identifying ways to counteract this. Russell's final chapter explores body image in youth with regards to sport participation and

the media. In particular this chapter focuses on the factors that influence the development of body image in youth and how this is influenced by the sports they take part in, or observe through their exposure to a variety of media. Russell suggests that regardless of gender or age, females experience poorer body satisfaction than males and body image is influenced by a number of sociocultural factors including gender, age, race, economic status and cultural background. Bob Petersen's chapter notes the link between popular culture and the rise of the sporting celebrity. This chapter explores the role of consumerism within the sporting field, suggesting that youth can be susceptible to the 'bright lights' of money, sex appeal and talent presented to them. In so doing they can become unduly influenced by such practices and ultimately succumb to measures such as changing body shape in order to become like their idols. Consumers aren't just buying a product – they are buying into a lifestyle represented by a celebrity. The final chapter of the book, by Rachel Wilson, presents a critical review of recent and current research methods in this field. She analyses and critiques the methodological issues within youth sport; including the development of an unproductive dichotomy of quantitative versus qualitative research. This provides a very apt conclusion to our book, as she reflects on the wide range of research strategies required to make progress in a field which is driven by both physical and social understandings. She advocates the use of mixed methods which provide us with effective, evidence-based and engaging ways to promote the diverse benefits of youth sport across all sections of society.

Whilst we acknowledge that this book cannot possibly cover all areas relating to youth sport, we feel that it provides a valuable resource for both undergraduate and graduate students in the fields of sport sociology, sport studies, youth studies, coach education and leisure studies. Furthermore, researchers with a focus on the role of sport in the development of youth both within and outside the Australian context will find this an important addition to their collection.

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## About the contributors

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**Bob Petersen** was on the staff of the Faculty of Education at the University of Sydney for many years. He has been president of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society and editor of its journal *History of Education*. He is a member of the Australian Society for Sports History. His biography of the boxer Peter Jackson will be published in the US by MacFarland in 2011.

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**Kate Russell** is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Sydney, Australia. Her research interests and publications span the fields of child protection in sport, gendered identities in the sporting and educational context and the development of body image among sportswomen. Her most recent publications include the co-edited book *Child welfare in football: an exploration of children's welfare in the modern game* (2007), and a co-authored series *Science through sport: body image I middle secondary* and *Science through sport: body image II senior secondary* (2009).

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**Rachel Wilson** has degrees in psychology, audiology, research methods and education and holds a PhD in educational development from Oxford University. She is currently Senior Lecturer in Research Methodology and Educational Assessment at the University of Sydney. Her research interests range from early childhood to higher education and she has a particular interest in research for evidence-based education policy and practice.