Off the Ball:
Ethnicity, Commercialism and Australian Football, 1974-2004.

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Abstract

Despite its seemingly marginal role in Australian sport, football (soccer) contributed significantly to public debates regarding multiculturalism and imagined Australian national identity. This thesis explores the relationship between the ongoing de-ethnicisation of Australian football and the game’s rapid commercialisation. I contend that the introduction of a new professional competition in 2004 rounded out decades of attempts by football administrators to downplay the ethnic image of the game in order to sell the game to a ‘mainstream’ audience.
Acknowledgments

This thesis is for my Dad, who introduced me to the pleasures of football, and the value of writing. Many thanks also to my supervisor Richard White, who helped turn my love of the game into an academic pursuit.
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Introduction.

I was eight years old when I first saw my father cry. He left the room, walked to the kitchen and stared out into the night as unwanted tears squeezed out. There had been no death in the family, no tragic accident, no argument with my mother – the usual reasons to drive a fully-grown man to tears. I sat in the living room, watching the television, confused. On the screen, Johnny Warren – SBS football analyst and former Socceroo – was choked up. Australia had just given away a two-goal lead at the MCG, dramatically allowing Iran to progress to the 1998 FIFA World Cup. Australia, once again, had failed to qualify for the greatest show on earth. English author Nick Hornby once wrote that despair is the natural state of the football fan. Nine years later, I sat in my room alone, sobbing to myself after Australia were knocked out by Italy in the 2006 World Cup, denying us a place in the quarter finals. It seems Hornby may have been on to something. I write this as an admission. My involvement in Australian football is an emotional, not a professional one. I approach this paper not only as an academic exercise, but also as a participant and a stakeholder in the games past and future.

My interest in writing about Australian football was sparked by the publication of Johnny Warren’s Sheilas Wogs and Poofters: An Incomplete Biography of Johnny Warren and Soccer In Australia in 2002. I quickly fell in love with football books. I was inspired by a group of writers who used football as a conduit to explain nationalism, economics, popular culture and history. However, aside from a number of journal articles that have discussed problems of identity, multiculturalism and

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representation with regard to Australian football, too little scholarly attention has been
given to the local game. Philip Mosely suggests that Australian football ‘has always
been associated with immigrants’, echoing Roy Hay’s argument that ‘football… has
always been a minority game and an immigrants game in Australia.’ As a
consequence, John Hughson comments that ‘the continuing affiliation of soccer clubs
to “ethnic communities” is seen to encourage a set of cultural practices which are “un-
Australian.”’ In response, Jessica Carniel has argued that in an increasingly
postmodern culture, cosmopolitanism will foster new interest in football, while Ian
Syson asks whether Australia’s embrace of football is a litmus test ‘of just how far we
still have to travel as a nation in relation to questions of masculinity, xenophobia and
tolerance.’

Since World Cup qualification in 2005, the advent of the A-League and the
establishment of new governing body, a spate of books were published for a popular
audience, some by academics, most by journalists, and a few by former players.
James Skinner, Dwight H. Zakus and Allan Edwards suppose that football has ‘come
in from the margins’, while Tracy Taylor, Damien Lock and Simon Darcy argue that
the mainstreaming of football reflects government policies that have encouraged ‘a

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6 Journalists Les Murray, Craig Foster and Jesse Fink all released books documenting their experience in football, while Mark Schwarzer released ‘the inside story of the Socceroo’s historic 2006 World Cup campaign’, before turning his hand to children’s books, releasing *Megs and the Football Kids*. Meanwhile, historian Trevor Thompson released a history of the game in Australia.
society which values Australian citizenship, appreciates cultural diversity and enables
migrants to participate equitably.'

Herein lies the thrust of my analysis. It is often posited that football was
marginalised by its ethnic affiliations and lack of corporate and mainstream support.
Few stop and analyse why. The official history of multiculturalism reads something
like this. First, there was the White Australia policy, where British migrants were
encouraged while all others were excluded; then came the period of assimilation,
where migrants from Europe came to Australia in droves, but were told to leave their
cultural baggage at the door. Finally, multiculturalism accepted and celebrated the
diversity of cultures existing within Australia and encouraged entry to Asians.

With reference to what Roy Hay has called ‘our wicked, foreign game’, this
thesis both remains wedded to and contradicts this history, as public policy and the
de-ethnicisation of football have, in many ways, run in opposite directions.
Considering this, sociologist Ghassan Hage’s proposal that multiculturalism is
haunted by a desire for migrants and their children to assimilate into an imagined
‘white nation’ is a crucial framework for this thesis. To add to this, I propose that
economic imperatives are central to the game’s fractured relationship with its ethnic
image. In this regard, this thesis builds upon existing scholarly work by analysing the
de-ethnicisation of Australian football as a result of its increasing commercialisation.

Chapter 1 begins with a study of Australia’s relationship with the world game,
briefly outlining the history of Australian football with a focus on the game’s
changing demographics, class and ethnic structures, and the relationships with other
sports and to Australian society more broadly. I also point to the ongoing turbulence

8 Tracy Taylor, Daniel Lock & Simon Darcy. ‘The Janus Face of Diversity in
9 Roy Hay. ‘‘Our Wicked Foreign Game’ : Why has Association Football
(Soccer) not become the Main Code of Football in Australia?’, Soccer & Society, Vol.7, Iss.2-3 April-
in state competitions and governing bodies as a prelude to understanding the crisis facing football at the beginning of the 21st century. Australian football has been undergoing upheaval and reform since the 1950s. Chapter 2 explores the relationship between progressive social changes and the emerging role for football within Australian sport. The creation of the first ever national football competition in 1977 meant that football was a trailblazer in Australian sport. Yet within a few years the momentum had stalled, and other football codes had instigated their own moves towards expansion and nationalisation. Football struggled to find its place within the nation.

Chapter 3 analyses football’s embrace of commercialisation and Americanisation with reference to the parallel shift from the ‘Australian Settlement’ to the free market, as well football’s identity crises in the context of broader cultural debates raging within the nation. As multiculturalism and national identity became increasingly contested spaces, conceptions of what was ‘Australian’ had become an uncomfortable topic. Chapter 4 assesses the enthusiastic embrace of the ‘franchise’ club in the 1990s and other commercial initiatives under the reign of David Hill, which pushed de-ethnicisation campaigns further than ever. Meanwhile, the rise of Asia and the increasing globalisation of football created new problems for the domestic game. By the turn of the 21st century, it had become clear that the game was in need of a radical overhaul. Chapter 5 explores the profound crisis that faced the game, which had led to the death of the National Soccer League and Soccer Australia. The Crawford Report in 2003 loomed as a saviour for the game. In this chapter I outline some of the major changes recommended by the Report, and why they were important. The Crawford Report and its knock-on effect was, in fact, a culmination of four decades of attempts to de-ethnicise and commercialise the game’s image.
A brief comment on the terminology used in this paper. I have used ‘football’ to describe what most Australians still refer to as ‘soccer.’ I use football to describe the game played with the feet; AFL or Australian Rules to describe our parochial game played with the hands and feet; rugby league and rugby union to refer to the rough and tumble tackling games in which the ball is transported from end to end primarily by way of carrying it in the hands or under the arm. In this sense, the word football makes sense to me etymologically. More importantly though, I favour the word ‘football’ over ‘soccer’ due to its use value around the world. Australia is one of hundreds of nations that play the game, most of which call it ‘football.’ The word soccer is primarily used in insular sporting nations such as New Zealand, the United States, and Australia, where local codes of football are given greater public attention. For me to accept and use the language of non-football sports commentators, who insist on calling the game ‘soccer’, in an almost pejorative manner, would be to buy into their insularity.

Craig Foster. Fozz on Football. Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2010: p. 174. The SBS football analyst and former Socceroo has attempted to differentiate the codes by naming Australian Rules, rugby league and union as “handball codes.”
Chapter 1: 
A Sporting People.

The Origins.

Organised sports have had a long and important history in Australia. As a ‘new world’ nation established by invasion and settlement of Indigenous lands, the British colonial influence was crucially important to the development of Australia’s sporting culture. However, the relationship with Empire was complex. As football historian Bill Murray notes, the sporting scene was

Complicated by close ties of blood, the desire to establish a national identity, and the need for military protection. New people in new lands were in a position to create new games, and the wide expanses of most of these countries allowed a greater variety of options.¹

Both points here are crucial. Sport fitted the rugged, masculinist culture developing in Australia. Indeed, Russell Ward, in his seminal book The Australian Legend, argues that sportsmen were privileged among ‘typical’ Australians above all other eminent cultural figures.² Rivalry with Britain is also a defining feature. Manning Clark’s A History of Australia, in true Clarkian style, uses sport to set the forces of dark and light against one another:

Now a boy from the bush was to face the Old World in a contest between one man with the bush virtues, and another employing the cunning, deviousness and tricks of an old and corrupt civilisation.³

This is not the first time Clark mentions sport in A History. Interwoven into his prose are references to cricket, ‘footy’ and the races. And while the cricket is Clark’s

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metaphor for an emergent nationalism, sport is used as a conduit to explain and articulate Australian cultural life.4

From federation right up until the 1970s, the so-called ‘Australian Settlement’5 allowed Australia to grow in a vacuum, with restrictions on immigration, trade and a heady dose of government intervention promoting the development of a relatively homogenous, prosperous and peaceful nation. Onlookers were impressed by the workingman’s paradise developing Down Under. As workers moved from farm to factory, urbanisation provided city-based sports teams a large and concentrated fan base. Indeed, it was the high standard of living provided by the Settlement that stimulated the growth of organised sports, as workers were afforded greater leisure time and disposable income, while the mass circulation of newspapers provided the public with updates on their team, and mass transport ferried workers to and from sports grounds.6

This is a standard explanation for the development of sport in industrialising nations. Where it becomes more complicated is in trying to explain how Australian sport became divided amongst the population according to geography, class and ethnicity. Ian Turner coined the now-famous term ‘the Barassi Line’ to explain the ‘deep cultural rift’ in Australia’s football loyalties.7 Writing in 1978, before expansion became the catalyst for new national competitions, Turner’s analysis still has some resonance. Australian Rules football remains an essentially Victorian game, with a strong presence in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania; while rugby

league dominates in the working class communities of Queensland and New South Wales. Rugby Union remains the domain of the middle and upper classes in those states, largely due to its growth through the private school system. And football, especially after the 1940s, became the migrant sport, or ‘wogball’. 

**Why Not Football?**

This relationship between football and European migrants is almost universally assumed to have ghettoised the sport, and stymied its progress into the Australian ‘mainstream.’ Certainly, this is the view taken by the successive administrators and government-sponsored commissions into the state of the game. But does this tell the whole story? Tony Ward puts forward an alternative argument, suggesting that throughout the dominions, the ‘iconic’ national sports that were already entrenched by 1900 have remained dominant ever since. For this reason, football ‘would always struggle to make headway in countries and regions already committed to rugby, gridiron or Australian rules.’ Bill Murray also takes a transnational view of the role of football in the British dominions, all of which have been reluctant to embrace the game. Sport certainly holds a curious place in the history of the British Empire. If Australia was a bastion of British race patriotism and pride in Empire, as James Curran, Stuart Ward and others allege, why is it that football, a British game, failed to become Australia’s national sport? Why the preoccupation with other sports and parochial football codes? Roy Hay argues that a lack of involvement from police, teachers and the private school system in promoting

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9 Tony Ward. 2010: p. 79.


the sport and the poor standard of local football hindered the development of a thriving football culture. Indeed, football was the British workingman’s game, while sports such as cricket and rugby were Empire sports, institutionally encouraged by colonial elites.

This argument touches on an important point. Hay, along with Tony Ward and Bill Murray all recognise that the establishment of other codes of football and sports crowded the marketplace.\textsuperscript{12} Geoffrey Blainey has argued that Australian Rules was a genuinely Australian product, therefore giving it a leg-up in the hearts and minds of the emerging nation.\textsuperscript{13} This supports a view that sports such as cricket and Rules were evidence of an emergent Australian nationalism in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, and appeals to a nativist element of Australian historiography that lionises that which emerged from the land. However, thanks to research done by Ian Syson, there is considerable evidence that Australian Rules historians conveniently overlook the ongoing antagonism of Rules officials towards football, and their active role in perpetuating the myth that football is ‘foreign.’ To borrow a line from Bill Murray, Rules officials ensured that football was to Australian sport as Communism was to politics.\textsuperscript{14} In 1951, Rules delegate Bill Brew commented that ‘people who come to this country and accept all the advantages, should support Australian Rules football instead of furthering their own code.’\textsuperscript{15} What may seem like a throwaway remark touches on a crucial, wider point. Here and throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, sport acted as a conduit to set the parameters of an imagined Australian national identity.


\textsuperscript{14} Bill Murray, 1994: p. 265.

\textsuperscript{15} Mr. Bill Brew, cited in ‘When in Rome’, \textit{The Argus}, October 11, 1951: p. 11.
Sporting teams allow Australians an opportunity to imagine the unity of the nation. As a cultural expression, values such as the support for the underdog, fair play and honesty are manifest in sporting contests. Masculinity, too, has been a defining feature of the Australian sports scene. For these reasons, sporting success is often linked to fantasies of an ‘Australian character’ or the Australian ‘way of life’, in much the same way that Australians imagine themselves through their war heroes.

And while domestic sporting teams have traditionally been formed around suburban and metropolitan electorates, football clubs are often organised around diasporic European communities with names like ‘Croatia’ or ‘Hellas’ rather than Canterbury-Bankstown or Footscray. Football appeared to cut at the crimson threads of kinship.

Existing class or geographic rivalries in other football codes, while important and often bitter, do not fragment the imagined national community like ethnic and foreign nationalistic rivalries. In this regard, while sports such as cricket, rugby league, union and Rules remain relatively uncomplicated by overt displays of political, ethnic and ‘outside’ influences, and intrinsically wedded to established notions of what Ghassan Hage labels the ‘white nation’, football radically complicates the supposed unity of Australia. And as multiculturalism continually undermined traditional conceptions of Australian identity, football increasingly became the sporting battleground for what it means to be Australian. Few other sports are as embroiled in the contested space that is Australia’s imagined national identity.

The Making of ‘Wogball’.

The story of football’s marginalisation begins in earnest post World War Two. The post-war migrant boom provided the first building blocks for multicultural Australia. However, it should be primarily recognised as a program of assimilation, rather than a celebration of diversity. Anna Haebich nominates three symbols of the ‘modern, new Australia’ in the 1950s: the Australian way of life, suburban middle-class living and the nuclear family. While the program for immigrants was always assimilation, many of the ‘new Australians’ who have integrated successfully remain steeped in their own traditions and ways of life. In this regard, we need to recognise the importance of the old when embracing the new. Enforced displacement actually enhances the importance of culture in providing a reference point and a community of interest for those unfamiliar with vague and exclusive concepts such as the ‘Australian way of life’. Fleeing poverty and destitution, war and political upheaval, their culture is often one of the few things migrants carry with them from their past into their new life. In this regard, assimilation is a policy that bites off far more than it can chew, for social policy can never totally estrange an individual from their language and culture. As Cornelius Vleeskens, a Dutch migrant and veteran of Bonegilla – that infamous refugee halfway house – commented, ‘the assimilationist policy by government in those days was in name only. It was an unnatural and impossible construct.’

Richard White argues that non-British migration was considered an external threat – on par with fascism or communism – during the 1920s. But on the back of large-scale immigration programs, White suggests that the migrant had transformed

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from an external to an internal threat by the 1950s. Whether invader or potential fifth column, however, there remained a governmental concern to regulate the composition and behaviour of the national population. In this regard, migrants who wanted a stake in the nation were expected to curb ‘old’ nationalist tendencies and embrace their new homeland. Often lacking skills in English and uninitiated into ‘the Australian way of life’, sport was one of the few institutions that acted both as a catalyst for social integration, and an escape from the pressures of assimilation. Les Murray (nee László Úrge) offers a personal account of the impact of football in the migrant experience:

I became a prisoner of Budapest SC. That day in Corrimal I entered the football ghetto. I found warmth and momentary refuge, albeit for a couple of hours a week, away from the cold of the hostilities and challenges I was facing as a spirited immigrant, eager to make the best of the cards I had been dealt. Later, I was accepted and even respected as an Australian of some worth. The boys in red, white and green that day at Memorial Park were a big help and I doubt if it would have happened without them.

Of course, the postwar migrations to Australia from Europe cannot be homogenised into one story. However, there are threads that work their way through the variety of experiences, of cultures and of influences that have shaped Australia. One of these is football. The game provided the Dutchman, the Hungarian, the Greek, the Italian and the Yugoslav a common language and a common institution to congregate and to integrate.

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21 Historians largely ignore the experience of women, particularly migrant women, in football.
Journalist Chris Masters has described sport as ‘the great Australian leveller.’ This is true in many different respects for all sports. Despite its seemingly marginal presence, football was the only code played and loved by both Anglo-Saxon workingmen and European migrants; and whilst it is a little told story, a few Aboriginal footballers found a momentary escape from racism in the new ethnic-based clubs. Herein lies the contradiction for the game. By the 1950s, football had the potential to connect the Anglo to the migrant, and the migrant to the Aboriginal. However, these ethnic-based clubs were anathema to the spirit of the times, and allowed football to increasingly become marginalised by the pejorative term ‘wogball’. Football was ahead of the times, and suffered accordingly. ‘Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like White Australia’ explained the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, in 1951. If Aboriginal and migrant cultures were considered a threat to national unity, football became a part of this potential fifth column. Nicknamed ‘wog Warren’ by his classmates despite his Anglo heritage, Johnny Warren soon found that playing football carried a social stigma unlike any other sport. Put simply, despite its long presence in Australia, football wasn’t a part of the ‘Australian way of life.’ Jock Riley – the larrikin, ocker vice-president of a fictional Australian Rules club in David Williamson’s 1980 film, The

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Club – illustrates this point; ‘some of our new Australians could be champions if they’d stop playing soccer and assimilate.’

New Participants, New Directions.

While British migrants may not have set up professional outfits, humble football clubs throughout the country provided workingmen a recreational outlet. Australian football in the early part of the twentieth century was characterised by small-time state competitions complemented by exhibition matches with touring teams. Australian football was following the path of the other football codes such as rugby league, which was beginning to foster community teams such as South Sydney, Eastern Suburbs and North Sydney. Australian Rules too was growing from the grassroots in Victoria. The splendid isolation of White Australia shrouded these competitions from any unwanted elements. In football, exoticism had to be imported through tours by Chinese, Canadian, English and various European teams to play against national, state and district elevens. And while Thompson recognises that there were a few ethnic clubs established in the 1920s and 1930s, they were sporadic at best and did not pose a threat to the established Anglo-Celtic clubs. Arthur Calwell’s immigration scheme would change all that. While other sports were largely unaffected by European arrivals, football would change forever. Rugby league, union and Australian Rules offered little to ‘new Australians’, and thus were left to develop in their own directions. Yet football increasingly became divided along ethnic lines.

Despite the pressures to assimilate, European migrants were growing in confidence as large numbers settled in the outer suburbs of Australian cities. By 1956, the Italian community had established Club Marconi in Bossley Park in Sydney’s

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26 David Williamson. The Club. Motion Picture, South Australian Film Corporation, 1980.
27 Trevor Thompson, 2006: p. 36.
west. A few years later, Sydney’s burgeoning Croatian community had established the King Tomislav Club – named after their own national hero – over the road from Club Marconi. Contrary to the precepts of assimilation, migrants were finding strength from their own communities.\textsuperscript{28} This is not to suggest that the new arrivals didn’t integrate. On the contrary, their children often led the charge into the Australian way of life. Yet no amount of integration could pull migrants away from the culture of their homelands. Community familiarity enabled migrants to make Australia ‘home’ just as much as any ‘Good Neighbour’ policy. Political scientist James Jupp has probably done the most comprehensive study of Australian migration patterns. He suggests that these ethnic community organisations predated multiculturalism as a policy or ideology.\textsuperscript{29} These organisations, which later would be the springboard for many of the first National Soccer League (NSL) clubs, were in fact the harbinger for new conceptions of nationhood and citizenship. Greek migrant Anthanasios Hatzianestis recalls: ‘Greeks went to see a soccer game… to release their emotions within the security of a crowd who spoke their language and understood.’\textsuperscript{30} Just as European migrants changed the rationale about what it meant to be ‘Australian’, football clubs with ethnic, rather than regional foundations, new sponsors and semi-professional players pushed the game in new directions.

The division between Anglo-Saxon and migrant clubs reached its apogee in 1957. After several tense years, a group of officials from the ethnic clubs coalesced in January to create a new governing body, the NSW Federation of Soccer Clubs.\textsuperscript{31} Their grievances with the old bureaucratic Association were based on issues such as

\textsuperscript{31} Resolution to establish the NSW Federation of Football Clubs, 1957.
promotion and relegation, transfer fees and representation. It is significant that the split began in Sydney, with the impetus for change coming from Hakoah Football Club.\textsuperscript{32} Trevor Thompson recognises that ‘Sydney absolutely dominated the administration of Australian soccer.’\textsuperscript{33} The NSW split would snowball to other states during the late 1950s and early 1960s, culminating in a disjointed and internally divided game. Separate competitions created unwanted and unnecessary disorganisation, rivalry and confusion. This infighting, combined with FIFA’s banning of the Australian Soccer Football Association (ASFA) over unpaid transfer fees illustrates a bleak picture for football.

Pragmatism eventually forced an end to the stalemate, and by mid 1963 the national governing body was expanded to include members from all factions around the country. The international ban was lifted, and the game was ready to move forward. These events of the late 1950s and early 1960s were football’s first major step towards commercialisation and nationalisation. Over a decade later, Andrew Dettre commented:

\begin{quote}
The revolutionary spirit of the NSW Federation created a rare atmosphere of friendship among clubs and officials. Migrants, for the first time ever, were encouraged to attend matches and barrack for their team.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

By the late 1970s, Hungarian businessmen Alex Pongrass of St. George Budapest and Frank Lowy of Hakoah would be fundamental to the establishment of the first national league. District amateur teams no longer held a monopoly on the game. Here, the issue of control is crucial. Football was the only sport being driven by ethnic blocs. Migrants had started to participate in other codes of football, but only on an

\textsuperscript{32} It is significant that Hakoah were involved because 20 years later, Sydney and Hakoah Football Club in particular would be responsible for the establishment of the National Soccer League.

\textsuperscript{33} Trevor Thompson, 2006: p. 62.

\textsuperscript{34} Andrew Dettre. ‘Challenges of ’77 Must Be Met.’ \textit{Soccer World}. Vol.19, No.38, October 1976: p. 5.
individual level. The perception that migrants were in control of football, and that Australian-born ‘white’ residents were displaced, would negatively affect the game right up until the beginning of the 21st century.
Chapter 2:
Imagining the Nation.

‘It’s Time.’

The pressures on football to Australianise its image began, then, in response to the perception that a ‘migrant’ sport was inappropriate in the domestic sporting scene. In a socio-political environment that explicitly encouraged migrants to assimilate into the Australian mainstream, this is hardly surprising. However, the relationship between football and its ethnic participant and supporter base became increasingly more complex as pressures to assimilate weakened, and government policies became directed towards ‘multiculturalism.’ By late 1969, Gough Whitlam announced that his reformed Labor Party would ‘renovate, rejuvenate, reinvigorate and liberate.’ It was a response to the social movements that had grown during the late 1960s in protest against war and discrimination on the basis of race, gender and class. The 1970s loomed as a decade of renewal in Australian culture and Australian football.

Few political leaders had promised so much as Whitlam. From multiculturalism to tariff reduction to increased spending on the arts and recreation, the Labor Party’s program was enormous, encompassing social, cultural, political and economic reforms. One of the most curious developments of Whitlam’s reign was his conscious effort to re-brand Australian nationalism. As James Curran and Stuart Ward have detailed in The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire, the collapse in British race patriotism during the mid 1960s was felt right throughout the Commonwealth,

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forcing a reexamination of Imperial loyalties and identities. ‘Australia was jolted by events into adulthood' commented former Prime Minister Harold Holt.²

At a political level, this reexamination was certainly profound. When Whitlam announced that Australia had ‘a choice between the past and the future, between the habits and fears of the past, and the demands and opportunities of the future’ in 1972, it was a statement of intent as much as an observation.³ The Labor government would go on to replace the British Honours system with the ‘Order of Australia’, and establish the Australia Council and the Australian Film Commission to encourage the development of the Australian arts. Along with these new institutions were symbolic efforts to embrace uniquely Australian symbols, such as a new national anthem to ‘proudly reflect our growing sense of national identity.’⁴ While some of these changes fed into popular culture – Richard White has made the point that ‘new nationalism’ was always ‘closely identified’ with the arts – it is worth remembering that an Australian way of life existed well before the end of Empire.⁵ A ‘way of life’ may not equate directly with nationalism, however it is certainly the case that Australians did articulate a particular view of themselves long before the 1970s. And as Richard White and Richard Waterhouse both point out, it was during this period of so-called ‘new nationalism’ that many younger Australians, minority groups and members of the New Left actually began to reject previous notions and symbols of what it meant

to be Australian. Put simply, by the 1970s, Australians were questioning the role of the bushman and the digger as much as they were Queen and Empire.

What did all this mean for football? As Richard Waterhouse points out, sport reflected the ‘tradition of cultural nationalism (that) had existed since the nineteenth century.’ Considering this, sports such as cricket and Australian Rules were perhaps one of the first areas in which a particularly ‘Australian’ brand of nationalism had been asserted. Football, however, following on from the 1960s boom – caused by the influx of European migrants – was feeling the hangover into the 1970s. Attendances were falling, and the game was still seen as foreign. In this context, the renewed political nationalism of the 1970s – which embraced multiculturalism and diversity – provided an opportunity for football to embed itself within new notions of an Australian identity. It was seen as a ticket out of the football ghetto. Indeed, before *Advance Australia Fair* formally replaced the imperial *God Save the Queen*, ASF President Arthur George obliged Whitlam’s request to play the new national anthem as the Socceroos lined up to face Iraq at the old Sydney Sports Ground in March 1973.

*An Aussie Abroad.*

While football was willing to give these ‘new nationalist’ symbols a stage, the political embrace of multiculturalism did nothing to stop debates around the role of migrants in football. By this point, Australian players still played for football clubs patronised largely by migrant supporters in state leagues around the country.

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However, as the Socceroos qualified for their first FIFA World Cup, football briefly enjoyed the mainstream limelight. *The Australian* commented that the Socceroos ‘aroused tremendous interest back home’, and helped push the game into Australian living rooms.9 And yet, while Australians had performed admirably at Olympic events – particularly in individual events such as swimming and tennis – Australian sporting teams were irrelevant in ‘the world game’. However, after spirited performances against East Germany, West Germany and Chile, the Socceroos found a place in world football. Sports writer Lincoln Waters commented:

The ‘boys from the bush’, plumbers, milkmen, carpenters and others, as they have been patronisingly called by overseas experts have turned their matches into great moral victories.10

Rather than prove the ‘overseas experts’ wrong (Australia lost two games and drew one) Australians instead happily embraced a comfortable and familiar niche as the valiant underdogs, a position they would hold thirty-two years on as the Socceroos returned to Germany for the 2006 World Cup.

In many ways, the ‘underdog’ was a fitting tag both for Australian football and for the Australian nation. Forcibly separated from the comfortable Imperial bosom, the nation was still insecure about its place in the world. Here, sporting success provided one way for Australians to imagine and project themselves. From Phar Lap to Don Bradman to the Socceroos and the America’s Cup, the chipper ‘overachieving’ sporting nation was to be a kind of creation-myth for Australians. Victories were proof of national superiority against all the odds, while losses could still be seen as ‘moral victories’ if played in the ‘right’ spirit. Indeed, the fact that the Australian team had played the pantomime underdog role so well meant that under the

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protective shroud of green and gold, positive stories about football began to penetrate headlines in the Australian press during 1974.\footnote{‘Garlands for the Wizards of Oz’, \textit{The Age}, June 17, 1974: p. 18.} \textit{The Australian} commented that the World Cup had helped change perceptions of Australian football, from a ‘migrant sport to a populist game.’\footnote{Editorial. ‘Soccer Scores’, \textit{The Australian}, June 28, 1974: p. 8.}

This is a crucial point. The perception that the Socceroos were ‘Aussie’ and ‘battlers’ did much to conceal the ethnic composition of the team. Coached by naturalised Serbian Zvonimir ‘Ralé’ Rašić, and led by Johnny ‘wog’ Warren and Yorkshireman Peter Wilson, the team blended Australian born players with those from all parts of the British Isles and the Continent. It even featured the flying Aboriginal left back Harry Williams. Indeed, drawing from various ‘ethnic’ clubs in Sydney and Melbourne, the class of 1974 was a microcosm of the migrant nation. Not for the last time, though, the fact that these ‘ethnic’ players were fighting for Australia – rather than a Croatian, or Greek, or Italian club – allowed the Socceroos to rise above the ethnic stigma that had engulfed the domestic game. Considering this, what are the limits of Australian multiculturalism? Should migrants participate in their own social activities, their own social clubs and speak in their own languages? Or should they integrate into an imagined ‘Australian’ umbrella culture of other migrants and Australian born citizens? It seems that in football at least, the latter proved the most popular. It is this very question that would play out for the next thirty years in the new National Soccer League.

\textit{Naming Rights.}

While the World Cup and the inception of the National League are best remembered in terms of their value to football, I am interested in the way in which
they allowed football fans and administrators to imagine the national. Indeed, the World Cup was crucial to the creation of Australia’s first national football league in 1977. Administrators were looking to the national as a strategy to downplay the ethnic image of the game, and as a way of increasing revenue for clubs. In June of 1974, commentators began pondering the possibility of establishing the competition by 1976, to build on the success of the Socceroos. In late 1976, writing for *Soccer World*, Andrew Dettre commented: ‘the National League will set out to do what no other football organisation has succeeded in Australia: to capture the public imagination with a national competition.’ Similarly, Johnny Warren reflected in 1980:

> It is fair to say that had the Socceroos not gone to Germany in 1974, we might not have a national league today. For it was a result of the World Cup that big companies became interested in sponsoring the game. They wanted to be on a winner.

The nexus between mainstream popularity, national credibility, corporate support and de-ethnicisation had begun. Indeed, as the Phillips National Soccer League kicked off in 1977, the debates circulating about the role and position of migrants and ‘ethnicity’ in the game mirrored some of the concerns being raised about the role of migrants and immigration policies in Australian society more broadly.

The central issue revolved around club names. Upon entering the NSL, clubs had been advised to drop their ‘ethnic’ names in order to broaden their appeal beyond their ethnic constituents. Interestingly, Pan Hellenic became ‘Sydney Olympic’:

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For a start, the name itself is a winner… Sydney gives us a passport throughout the world… and ‘Olympic’ has both associations with Greece and a pleasant ring with the Australian population in general.\(^{17}\)

Similarly, Andrew Dettre floated the idea that St. George Budapest should attempt to secure the sponsorship of oil giant BP, in order to become the BP Saints.\(^ {18}\) Halfway-house name changes would prove popular, but not particularly effective. For the next four years, East Sydney club Hakoah wrestled with the idea of renaming their club. Initial suggestions included Bondi Jets, Sydney Stars and Bondi Dolphins, until the board finally settled on the Sydney City Slickers for the 1981 season. It was clear that de-ethnicisation was a high priority for the new national competition.\(^ {19}\) Andrew Dettre parodied this move in an allegorical story of a grandson recalling the rebranding of clubs: ‘Hakkabi became Meatpie United… and Plague was renamed Vegemite Wanderers… Of course, there was nothing racist about of it, just ordinary business sense.’\(^ {20}\)

This evidence complicates John Hughson and Chris Hallinan’s recent assertion that de-ethnicisation initiatives were propelled by the Howard government’s ideological attack on multiculturalism.\(^ {21}\) De-ethnicisation programs, whether self-directed or enforced, have had a long and constant history in the game, no matter the political situation. Indeed, by the time Malcolm Fraser controversially replaced Gough Whitlam in 1975, it seemed as if multiculturalism was already a sacred cow.

Fraser spoke of his ‘faith and a commitment’ to multiculturalism, but reminded


\(^{18}\) BP being a convenient abbreviation for both ‘Budapest’ and ‘British Petroleum’.


Australians that ‘the essence of multiculturalism can be realised only in the attitudes and behaviour of people in areas which are beyond the proper reach of democratic government.’\(^{22}\) Yet in football, even migrants themselves were shying away from its multicultural heritage in order to sell the game to the broader Australian public. Why?

Philip Mosely believes that ‘gaining greater public patronage was a battle against entrenched xenophobia.’\(^{23}\) True enough, but does this tell the whole story? Mosely blames ‘WASP’ marketing gurus for their ‘predictable’ obsession with creating an Australian image, yet Frank Lowy – a Hungarian migrant and then president of Hakoah football club – believed name changes, proper marketing and promotion was key to long-term success.\(^{24}\) It is important to remember that ‘ethnics’ such as Arthur George and Frank Lowy in fact pushed early de-ethnicisation programs. The myth of ‘Australian’ versus ‘ethnic’ perpetuates a false dichotomy. Still, by ‘Australianising’ ethnic club names, administrators were appealing directly to the imagined ‘white nation.’\(^{25}\) Moreover, the evidence suggests that in an increasingly commercialised environment, ‘ordinary business sense’ drove decision-making, not government policy. *Soccer World* reported that ‘major oil and rubber companies are among those interested in providing sponsorship from 1979 onwards if Hakoah undergoes a cosmetic change of “image.”’\(^{26}\) Even if the issue was based largely on economic realities rather than identity politics, the issue was hugely contentious, and remained so until the death of the National League in 2004. While many looked forward to an enterprising, new national league which engaged ‘all’ of Australia,

\(^{22}\) Malcolm Fraser. *Multiculturalism: Australia’s Unique Achievement*. Address to Institute of Multicultural Affairs, Melbourne, 30 November 1981.


many migrants wondered why, in a so-called multicultural society, a Greek, Italian or Croatian club – built by and patronised primarily by first generation migrants and their children – should feel such pressure to ‘Australianise.’

*Wogball in the Multicultural Nation.*

Part of the answer to this comes from the expansionary spirit of the Phillips National Soccer League and the Australian Soccer Federation. It is critical to remember that the creation of a national competition rested on two imperatives: to raise the standard of the game and, perhaps more importantly, give the game a national stage in order to build on the interest generated by the 1974 World Cup. It was a hearts and minds mission. Herman Huyer of Phillips Industries wrote that ‘soccer is now a national as well as an international game here in Australia.’ In fact, football had been played around the country in state and district competitions for decades before the NSL. But thanks to a National League, and corporate interest from men like Huyer, football now had a national prominence and a pointy-end. Pressure was on to succeed in an already crowded sporting marketplace. The sceptre of rugby league in New South Wales and Australian Rules in Victoria haunted administrators and fans alike. Sports dailies were filled with stories of the respective codes, who were untroubled by the difficult identity questions facing football. They had their own problems to be sure, however players, administrators, clubs and fans remained relatively ‘white bread’ and homogenous. In 1978, David Jack wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that ‘heavy dependence on migrant support… antagonises Australian-born spectators who believe they are on the outside looking in’

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rugby league writer Brian Curran encouraged football to ‘think Australian’ if it was ever to match ‘the popularity proportions of Rugby league or Australian Rules.’\(^{30}\)

Whether these voices were correct is perhaps not the point. Despite football’s trailblazing role in Australian sport, it was clearly under pressure from ‘mainstream’ writers and other codes of football. In times of austerity, rather than appeal to Australian born football fans to overcome their concern with visible displays of ethnicity, the migrant clubs themselves became the scapegoats.

Amongst the football cogniscenti, a consensus clearly needed to be found.

Perhaps Andrew Dettre best summed up football’s impasse:

Migrants are perfectly entitled to form whatever association or union they want, be that a church choir, welfare agency, scout group or soccer team. The trouble lies elsewhere; Australians (born here) are also entitled to ignore these.

And they do.\(^{31}\)

Indeed, Fraser’s call for Australians to practice multiculturalism beyond the realm of public policy seemed to fall on deaf ears, at least in sport. Football was caught in a dilemma that would haunt it for decades to come. On the one hand, migrants remained great and loyal patrons of clubs like Marconi, West Adelaide and Footscray JUST. Yet for the most part, Australian born fans seemed uninspired by the prospect of supporting the local Italian, Greek or Yugoslavian club. Could football afford to cut its nose off to spite its face? De-ethnicisation was extremely unpopular with club officials and fans, and even tested the patience of the so-called ‘father of multiculturalism’, Al Grassby. He warned that the ethnic question was ‘a very serious subject and one which the ASF should approach very cautiously because of its far

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reaching effects, not only those involved in soccer.\textsuperscript{32} Yet for a game trying to move beyond its perceived ethnic base, playing nice to migrants and their institutions was an unattractive prospect. And as second-generation migrant children grew up, loyal fans seemed to be disappearing. ‘Our biggest problem is that our fans are literally dying out’, Frank Lowy once commented, ‘we’ve got more fans at Rookwood Cemetery than we do at games’.\textsuperscript{33} Not for the first time, Australia would look to the United States for answers.


Chapter 3:  
A Place in the Nation.

An Australian Ugliness or the American Dream?

In *The Australian Ugliness*, published in 1961, Australian architect Robin Boyd coined the phrase ‘Austerica’ to describe Australia’s growing infatuation with all things American. In ‘better educated’ circles, the increasing Americanisation of Australian culture was looked upon with disdain. Yet this intellectual lament could not stop the constant stream of Americana into Australian homes. Boyd described ‘Austerica’ as ‘second-hand Americana’ and ‘the parrot’s imitation’; a kind of localised version of American culture and ideas to fit the Australian market. Boyd remarked that the comparative similarities between America and Australia meant ‘Austerica’ was inevitable, adding that in a shrinking world, cultural exchange between the two countries had become far simpler than ever before. Some twenty years later, Richard White added that ‘what most people spend most of their leisure time doing is most open to Americanisation.’

Indeed, while Richard Waterhouse, Richard Cashman and Anthony Hughes have all noted the Americanisation of sports such as rugby league and cricket, historians have basically ignored the considerable American influence on football. In fact, it is not uncommon for scholars to ignore football’s history totally in favour of other, more ‘mainstream’ sports. For those who do bother, ‘de-ethnicisation’ is a common subject of analysis. This thesis is in no way the first to cover the topic.

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2 Robin Boyd, 1961: p. 63-73
However, most analyse de-ethnicisation as a ‘one-to-one’, European to Australian process. It is assumed that ethnic clubs either were forced, or voluntarily changed their image from Greek or Italian to Australian. However, upon closer inspection, there is ample evidence to suggest that there were many factors and cultural influences at play. In the quest to become a commercially viable and ‘Australian’ subject, de-ethnicisation proved to be a complex and multi-dimensional process.

As outlined in Chapter 1, football’s relative lack of penetration into ‘new world’ countries such as Australia, the United States, Canada and South Africa is peculiar. Yet all of these nations have their own distinct (if ignored) relationship with the world game. After a fairly inconspicuous history, by 1975, pundits from around the world were amazed by a new football experiment happening in the land of baseball, gridiron and basketball. Central to the spreading of the football gospel into the American sporting scene were a team of missionary footballers, headed by the high priest Pele at the New York Cosmos. With unprecedented capital and corporate sponsorship, by the late 1970s, that football would be a success in America seemed fait accompli. Sydney-based Hungarian émigré Andrew Dettre was one of the many football writers tantilised by the audacity of the North American Soccer League (NASL). By 1980, Dettre’s Soccer World looked towards the NASL for ideas to rejuvenate an Australian competition still in its infancy. Franchise clubs, television exposure, corporate involvement and marquee players were all looked upon favourably for the development of the professional game Down Under. Moreover, NSL manager John Frank and Western Suburbs’ marketing manager Mike Laing had both gone on their own fact-finding missions to the United States during 1978-79. And after the initial success of the New York Cosmos, investors and clubs began to

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market themselves as Australia’s answer to the ‘Cosmos’ during the late 1970s and early 1980s.\textsuperscript{6} Momentarily, football ‘American-style’ was at the cutting edge of the game. Australian football was its closest observer.

‘If one is not an initiator, if one lives by copying’ Boyd argued, ‘it is essential to be reassured… at regular intervals.’\textsuperscript{7} The arrival of the NASL onto the sports scene seemed to overshadow Australia’s own achievement in establishing the NSL. Despite the fact that no other football code had achieved such national presence, a cultural cringe was continually held towards the NSL, which constantly looked abroad for ideas and validation. Decades later, the A-League continues to battle with this antipodean attitude. When the New York Cosmos toured in late 1979, it was marketed as ‘once in a lifetime soccer.’\textsuperscript{8} Yet the Harlem Globetrotters of football were back to spread the gospel just three years later. Football writer Lawrie Schwab commented that the Cosmos’ arrival ‘dispelled some of the gloom’ hanging over the local game,\textsuperscript{9} while \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} reporter Brian Curran called the Socceroos win over the Cosmos in 1979 a ‘spectacular’, praising the ‘staggering turnout’ at the Sydney Showground.\textsuperscript{10}

The excitement was palpable. Enigmatic Socceroos coach Rudi Gutendorf, flush with excitement, proclaimed:

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{7}Robin Boyd, 1961: p. 57.
    \item \textsuperscript{9}Lawrie Schwab. ‘Cosmos set to Play Vics in October’, \textit{The Age}, July 2, 1979: p. 23.
    \item \textsuperscript{10}Brian Curran. ‘Socceroos Outpace Cosmos’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, October 26, 1979: p. 28.
\end{itemize}
This is the beginning of a new era in Australian soccer. Our boys showed tonight that they CAN play soccer, they CAN play aggressive and offensive football. Many people will come again to see us.\(^{11}\)

The underdog shoe once again fitted the Australian foot. By beating their ‘millionaire opponents’, Brian Curran praised Australia’s part-timers for proving that ‘money is not everything’.\(^{12}\) But for administrators concerned about the financial viability of the NSL, the ‘unique, ground breaking event’ showed new horizons for Australian sport, especially football.\(^{13}\) The NASL’s ability to appeal to the commercial imperatives of the television age left a significant impression on the local game. By 1980, marketing executive Rik Booth had announced that ‘The League will be remodeled over the next four or five years on the North American Soccer League.’\(^{14}\) The very next season, club names had morphed from Brisbane City to Brisbane Gladiators, Adelaide City to Adelaide Giants, APIA Leichhardt to Leichhardt Strikers, while in 1984, regional ‘conferences’ were introduced and ‘summer soccer’ was suggested after their relative success in the States.

Thinking Inside the Box.

The rise of television is perhaps the most important influence on this commercialisation and Americanisation of Australian sport. Indeed, the fortunes of Australian football would be inextricably linked to television for the next thirty odd years, right up until the present day. It is on Foxtel’s dollar that the A-League is financially viable. However, in the early 1980s television was still a relatively new

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
medium, while television sports’ broadcasting was in its infancy. The proliferation of colour televisions into Australian living rooms allowed sports teams new potential viewers and fans. Television also gave companies seeking to establish national markets unprecedented advertising opportunities. It should be no surprise then, that Phillips Industries was the National Soccer League’s inaugural sponsor. Consider this advertisement from the late 1970s. By associating with Phillips, the game projects a positive new corporate image and receives much needed sponsorship dollars, yet football is being explicitly used to promote a product. The game is both exploited and the exploiter in this scenario. Indeed, as the relationship progressed, the marriage of television and football would prove to be a complicated one.

Advertisement from *Soccer World*. Phillips is using football to sell television sets. 

*Photo: Soccer World*
Beaming pictures of once-humble community clubs to a national audience left club teams and players increasingly attractive to new types of sponsors and marketing techniques, while also boosting the club’s own internal desires for expansion and growth. With one eye on revenue streams, especially considering the increased overheads of maintaining a national competition, club directors were often happier than fans about the commercial turn. Commentators worried about the effects of commercialisation on the ‘soul’ of their respective sports. Writer Thomas Keneally gave voice to the frustrated fan:

Television changed the rationale of the game, leaving it twisted and hanging halfway between its working class, regional beginnings and the sort of professionalism that characterises American sport.15

The very same could be said for Australian football, if we were to replace the word ‘regional’ with ‘ethnic.’ De-ethnicisation campaigns, whether self-directed or enforced, were designed to push the game beyond its traditional boundaries. Just as rugby league club Newtown ‘Bluebags’ (later Jets) looked to professionalism and commercialism as a way of projecting the club beyond their ‘battler’ fans in Marrickville, APIA Leichhardt would embrace new commercial techniques and imagery to broaden their appeal beyond the Italian community in Sydney’s inner-west. Indeed, the inner-west was now seen as the base, but not necessarily the focus of these clubs. As Michelle Arrow points out:

Fans’ often nostalgic attachment to traditional practices of organising and participating in their favourite sports were frequently expressed but rarely heeded in the brave new world of commercialised sport.16

Traditional fans at Henson Park and Lambert Park were hardly impressed. ‘I fully support soccer’ wrote APIA fan Sam Tizzone in 1979, ‘but I will not tolerate these officials… playing around with the great traditions of my particular club.’

While the NSL was screened on Channels Seven, Ten and the ABC over the course of its lifetime, it was on the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) that football found its soul mate. Established by the Fraser Liberal government in 1979 to ‘provide informational and entertainment program services for recent migrants from non-English-speaking backgrounds’, SBS prioritised football over all other sports.

Before long, SBS had acquired the nicknames ‘Soccer Bloody Soccer’ and ‘Soccer Before Sex’ for its predilection for both the world game and soft-core adult films. The rise of the ethnic channel gave migrants a national presence and voice, and in turn, gave ‘wogball’ a consistent, stable, home on national television. According to Australian Soccer Federation president Arthur George, theirs was a marriage of both convenience and necessity. Football’s hurdles were migrants’ hurdles. Nevertheless, the ‘ethnic’ stigma continually hampered the relationship. Despite the fact that SBS was ever ready to pick up coverage of the NSL, what administrators really wanted was a commercial partner. Time and time again, however, the commercial channels flirted with the sport, without ever fully committing. Channel Seven was perhaps the guiltiest of these suitors. In any event, the channel is not of great importance. Rather, it is the very development of television that was the harbinger for the expansion, commercialisation and Americanisation of the football codes in Australia. More broadly, television would encourage Australians to reflect on national themes and on

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their national identity. In a globalising and increasingly commodified world, the 1980s was a decade in which national identity became an increasingly contested cultural and political space. Football, as ever, was caught in this milieu.

*It’s the Economy, Stupid.*

The changing face of Australian sport was not without political precedent. The 1980s were the beginning of new experiments in neoliberal economics and politics. ‘Popular capitalism’ was in vogue as populist leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher pushed conservative politics in new directions and into new demographics. In Australia, no such conservative leader would arise until the election of John Howard in the late 1990s. Yet before Howard was Hawke and Keating, the original ‘new Labor’ team. According to Fran Tonkiss and Carol Johnson, ‘it was Labor governments in Australia that implemented programmes of privatisation, deregulation and public sector cuts.’ In his seminal work, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics, and Business in Australia*, journalist Paul Kelly argued that Bob Hawke and Paul Keating’s inspiration was derived not from Labor tradition, ‘but by contemporary political trends’, ‘not hostility to the mixed capitalist economy but a determination to improve its performance.’ John Pilger had earlier made this point, albeit with far less congratulatory overtones – ‘to Bob Hawke, the future lay not in Whitlam’s “dream” but in a world of “consensus.”’ Indeed, Hawke 1983 election slogan was ‘Bringing Australia Together.’ Cooperation and consensus were not just catchy slogans to Hawke; they were a political manifesto and a way of life. A Rhodes

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scholar who spoke with a broad Australian accent, a trade union leader who hobnobbed with corporate giants and tycoons, Hawke was the Labor leader for the neoliberal age.

If the market had replaced principle and tradition as the guide for political and economic decisions, it should come as no surprise that it was in this increasingly monetised environment that Australian sport was swept up in the productivity and business logic of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the latter part of the 1970s, World Series Cricket drastically changed the way people received, watched and supported cricket, while in 1983, corporate manufacturing giant John Elliot became president of the Carlton Australian Rules Football Club. When Alan Bond’s *Australia II* team won the America’s Cup in 1983, the nexus between nationalism, commercialism, politics and sport was rounded out. To Michelle Arrow, the America’s Cup win brought together ‘several symbols of popular nationalism’, larrikin capitalists, larrikin politicians, the Australian underdog and the Australian innovator.\(^{24}\) In this new era, sport would be a way for companies to market their products on television as well as at the football ground. Consequently, beer, tobacco and car companies seized the moment. The relationship between commercialism and football, however, was far more complex than in the other codes. For football administrators, commercial rebranding was seen as a golden ticket to the Australian mainstream. Yet corporate support remained hesitant to associate with an unstable ‘ethnic’ game. This chicken and egg dilemma would plague the game for the next three decades.

\(^{24}\) Michelle Arrow, 2009: p. 146.
The question that needs to be raised, then, is why ethnicity was still seen as a barrier. One possibility is the definition of multiculturalism was still a heavily contested subject. European migrants, who had established families, careers and businesses in suburbs around the country, had proved that many cultures could exist within one nation, and demanded legislative acceptance of this fact. Assimilation had become an obviously outdated policy, as well as an immoral one. However, attitudes take longer to change than public policy. One of the most influential of these critics was historian Geoffrey Blainey, who, in early 1984, gave a speech to a small crowd of onlookers in rural Victoria, denouncing multiculturalism for unnecessarily exacerbating social and cultural divisions, particularly in times of austerity. Fellow intellectuals, politicians and migrant groups were outraged, and the issue soon went national.

The growing critique of multiculturalism was conceptual as well as being directed towards newly arrived Asians. Put simply, while people generally accepted that a variety of cultures existed in Australia, how that diversity should be managed remained unresolved. To the critics of multiculturalism – the ‘national-spatial managers’ as Ghassan Hage would later call them – the unity of the Australian nation was at risk from a two-pronged attack. Firstly, Blainey and his supporters (including future Prime Minster John Howard) lamented ‘the way in which Australian governments, perhaps with lofty aims, have cut the crimson threads.’ An Australian ‘type’ was becoming increasingly unrecognisable. Secondly, ‘the cult of the immigrant, the emphasis on separateness for ethnic groups, the wooing of Asia and the shunning of Britian’ were creating a ‘nation of tribes’, rather than one nation, and

making the celebration of Australian history more problematic. Clearly, assimilation lived on in the hearts and minds of many of these critics. Meanwhile, the tension between ‘Australian’ and the ‘other’ continued in football at both club and national level. By 1984, the North American Soccer League was dying, both in reality and the imagination of Australian football writers and administrators. David Jack, editor of *Australian Soccer Weekly*, asked ‘does Australian soccer have to be guided by the Yanks?’; while a reader from western Sydney proclaimed that ‘the future of the game lies not in it becoming Americanised or Anglocised (sic), but rather becoming Australian.’

*The 'Neurotic Search for a Place in the Sun.'*

The problem with this of course, was that ‘Australian’ was still a contested space. Should a football side from Adelaide be nicknamed City, Giants, or Juventus? Were they Australian, American or Italian? Was it possible to be all three at once? As trivial as it may seem, ongoing debates about the names of clubs went right to the heart of football’s identity crisis. Earlier, in 1982, Socceroo hopeful Paul Degney had caused a minor controversy by criticising what he called the national team’s ‘open-house policy.’ Degney’s argument was remarkably similar in style to that of Geoffrey Blainey. He demanded not to be called a racist, recognising that ‘Australia is a migrant country’ but insisted that the Australian team should be for ‘Aussies’ only. A month later, *Soccer World* lamented the lack of representation of ‘pure Aussies’ in

the NSL end of season award winners.\textsuperscript{31} These definitions of ‘Aussie’ were necessarily vague. Two years later, after the entry of two highly politicised Croatian clubs, it appeared that re-ethnicisation of club names was on the cards. Opinion was sharply divided on the issue. \textit{Australian Soccer Weekly} writers David Jack, Tom Anderson and Mike Johnson were against the ‘ethnic take-over’\textsuperscript{32}, while Johnny Warren praised the ‘return to multicultural names’ as ‘something to be proud of.’\textsuperscript{33}

Looking beneath the public debate, the return of ethnic or ‘multicultural’ club names was primarily an economic decision cloaked in identity politics. After the competition lost its major benefactor Phillips Industries, it was forced to move to a ‘conference’ model. The ‘Australian’ Conference (read NSW teams) and the ‘National’ Conference (the rest) would be finalised by a playoff series to determine the overall winner. Philip Mosely argues that the replacement of naming sponsor Philips Industries with the Greek-owned Olympic Airways, and telecast partner Channel Ten with SBS meant that the game’s backers were ‘hardly concerned’ with de-ethnicisation.\textsuperscript{34} These are valid points, but perhaps downplay the crucial role of ethnic clubs, who decided to flex their muscles during a particularly vulnerable financial period for administrators. In the expanded competition, new teams were needed. Sydney Croatia and Melbourne Croatia, who had performed admirably in their respective state leagues for years, could not be ignored, despite their strong nationalistic presence.\textsuperscript{35} The president of Sydney Croatia, Tony Basic, was resolute,

\textsuperscript{31} No author. ‘After 102 Years of Soccer in Australia: Not One “Pure” Aussie Among Award Winners…’ \textit{Soccer World}, Vol.25, No.9, October 1982: p. 24.
‘without our name, we don’t want any part of the National League.’ And so, after some brief navel-gazing by the Australian Soccer Federation, the de-ethnicisation of club names was put on the back burner in order for the competition to move ahead with its radical new format.

Once again, the parameters of displays of ethnicity were set by the economic needs and productivity of the league. In the meantime, football was also contending with an expansionist Australian Rules and a resurgent rugby league competition. In 1982, the South Melbourne VFL side had relocated to Sydney, marking the beginning of Australian Rules’ march north. The very same year, rugby league had expanded to include teams from Illawarra and Canberra in a bid to move beyond its Sydney base. Over the next decade, both codes, as well as a new and exciting basketball craze, would embrace ‘national’ competitions, establishing clubs in Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia. Football during the 1980s, as Roy Hay notes, was marking time. It had not managed to capitalise on a series of opportunities to turn a latent football public into regular, loyal supporters of local clubs. The relative strength of migrant clubs had meant that the first decade of the national league was characterised by sectional squabbles and piecemeal reforms. The league lacked stability, visibility and confidence. New attempts to introduce a ‘State of Origin’ gala event (borrowed from rugby league’s recently introduced and highly successful competition) came to nothing; the conference system had only compromised the ‘national’ appeal of the competition; and the experiment with American style names and marketing techniques turned out to be an embarrassing failure.

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The game had prioritised the window-dressing over the product, neglecting the structure for the cosmetic. Rightly or wrongly, ethnic clubs remained controversial in a society still coming to grips with the realities of multiculturalism. To support an Italian or Greek or Yugoslavian football side was simply a bridge too far for many. The overarching mentality was that migrants should assimilate into ‘Australian’ sporting teams, not the other way around. More importantly, commercial print and electronic media were unimpressed by the product, and wary of clubs’ ethnic baggage. Still, while the sceptre of assimilation haunted debates about the role and position of migrants in the sport, supporters of the ethnic clubs had begun to use the language and precepts of multiculturalism to defend their territory. ‘Our multicultural society needs ethnic clubs’ argued one fan in 1986, while many clubs grabbed the chance to revert back to their original ethnic names, sponsors and symbolism after the entry of Croatian clubs in 1984.³⁸ Melita Eagles, an overtly Maltese club from Sydney’s west, proudly played with the Maltese cross and ‘Air Malta’ emblazoned on their shirts. At its base and pointy end, football was contributing to and mirroring the direction and anxieties of the new multicultural society. Migrants demanded a voice, the ‘national-spatial managers’ panicked, and everyone was left thoroughly confused.

*The Celebration of the Nation: Football’s GOLDen Opportunity.*

In this context, the Bicentenary year loomed as a platform to express or downplay these national anxieties. Conservative commentators looked to the Bicentenary as a platform for highlighting the Australian achievement; while sections of the left and the Indigenous community denounced the nation’s celebration of the

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invasion and destruction of Aboriginal Australia as ‘the masturbation of the nation.’

Standing uncomfortably between the ‘three cheers’ and the ‘black armband’ was Hawke, and his ‘Living Together’ slogan. For sport, the kitty was expansive and indulgent, sponsoring everything from boomerang throwing to bocce. Sport ’88 was established to endorse and fund hundreds of sporting events big and small in ‘a year long carnival’ of activity. In the main events, priority was given to the national. Australia played England in the cricket, in rugby the Wallabies played New Zealand and England, in Rugby League the Kangaroos played ‘the rest of the world’, while in Australian Rules the first State of Origin contest was played. And in football, reigning World Cup winners Argentina, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and the ‘Winfield’ Socceroos participated in the Bicentennial Gold Cup. In an article for Australian Soccer Weekly, Johnny Warren commented,

For too long we have been ignored, for too long soccer has been taken for granted, for too long we have been regarded as a ‘foreign’ game. The Gold Cup is the opportunity to show our considerable clout in this country.

The stage was set for football to ‘establish the code into the rich fabric of Australian sport.’ And once again, the struggle of the migrant was conflated with football’s struggle to gain acceptance from the Australian mainstream. Interestingly however, while the Bicentenary went to great pains to highlight and celebrate Australia’s

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39 Gary Foley. The Need to be un-Australian this September. On-Campus Forum, University of Melbourne, April 12, 2010.
diversity, the success of the Gold Cup only reignited dormant calls to ‘Australianise’
the national league.\(^{44}\)

In his fine essay *The Unmarking of Soccer: Making a Brand New Subject*,
social scientist Toby Miller makes the case that the Bicentenary

Provided both stresses and opportunities for marketing the code anew…as an
‘Australian’ subject… It ran over with the formation of possibilities, rather
than memories, in keeping with the design of forming a new, Australianised
sporting subject.\(^{45}\)

Indeed, the air was full of possibilities for the future following the success of the
tournament. *Sydney Morning Herald* writer Michael Cockerill praised the strong
turnout for fixtures, forecasting that ‘28,000 fans can’t be wrong about soccer’s
future’\(^{46}\), while the *Australian Soccer Weekly* agreed with former administrators
Arthur George and Stefan Kamasz that franchised clubs and a de-ethnicised national
league were ‘vital for soccer to achieve its destiny in Australia.’\(^{47}\) Such teleological
discussion of the game’s ‘future’ and ‘destiny’ remain common in football circles.

Typified by Johnny Warren’s ‘I told you so’ catch cry; football fans, commentators
and administrators have often reverted to a complacent conviction that the world
game is on the verge of an inevitable golden future in Australia. Yet as John Huxley
recognised in 2002,

45 Toby Miller. ‘The Unmarking of Soccer: Making a Brand New Subject’, in Tony Bennett, Pat
Buckridge, David Carter and Colin Mercer (eds.) *Celebrating the Nation: The Critical Study of
46 Michael Cockerill. ‘Why 28,000 Fans Can’t Be Wrong About Soccer’s Future’, *Sydney Morning
Johnny Warren. ‘Knock the Game… But Back Into Shape.’ *Australian Soccer Weekly*, Vol.9, No.355,
Australian*, July 16-17, 1988: p. 86.
No sport in Australia has figured in so many false dawns. No so-called ‘slumbering giant’ has been prodded awake so often only to lapse into somnolence again.\textsuperscript{48}

The Bicentenary was just one of these routine ‘false dawns.’ However, by the late 1980s, the contrast between the successful Socceroos and the moribund NSL was stark. The relative success and popularity of Australian national teams against the declining standards and attractiveness of the NSL again allowed blame to be laid squarely with the local game’s ‘ethnic’ element, which was seen to control the direction of the game. Once again, this time along with rugby league, Australian Rules and basketball, football looked to the national for salvation.

Chapter 4:  
Blending the Old with the New.¹

Into the Nineties: The Bradley Report.

The events of 1987-1988 had showed the best and worst of football in Australia. Sydney City Slickers (nee Sydney City, nee Eastern Suburbs Hakoah, nee Hakoah) had been one of the most successful clubs at both a state and national level since the 1950s. Club directors Frank Lowy, Walter Sternberg and Andrew Lederer all were instrumental in pushing football in new directions. Quite simply, Hakoah were one of the most important clubs in the history of Australian football. Yet their Jewish roots continually prevented the club finding broad based support, putting enormous pressure on club finances. It was a sad but perhaps telling spectacle that one of Australia’s premier football clubs would win numerous titles and showcase some of the best talent in front of just a sprinkling of fans.² By 1987, Frank Lowy had seen enough. Frustrated by the internal politics of the game’s administration and squeezed by the high costs of running a semi-professional outfit in a national league, he hastily pulled his beloved Jewish club out of the competition just one game into the 1987-88 season.³ It was surely one of the darkest moments of the National League. On the other hand, the success of the national team in the Bicentennial Gold Cup showed that football could engage positively with a broad audience, and tap into Australian nationalism. Importantly, it proved that there was a latent football public, even if they had no interest in their local NSL side.

In late 1989 the Australian Soccer Federation hired Sydney academic Dr Graham Bradley to work in an advisory capacity to the board. By hiring an Anglo ‘outsider’ with a background in business management, one suspects a case of confirmation bias from the ASF. The Bradley report was to provide the ASF a mandate and a blueprint for change. Delivered in May 1990, Bradley’s findings are similar to the findings of the Crawford Report in 2003 in its criticisms of the structure and management of the game. Of primary concern for this thesis, however, is Bradley’s finding and recommendations for the National League. Bradley criticised football’s ethnic image, commenting that the game needed to ‘develop district support bases’ in order to become ‘truly national.’ In the long term’, the report concluded, ‘the ASF needs to create the image that soccer is not ethnic.’ However – as the author reminds us – ‘most clubs appear to have little idea on how to set about this task.’

While it may seem that the report was stating the obvious, the recommendation that the Federation needed to ‘create the image’ that football wasn’t just for ethnics is crucial. Implicit in this statement is that football was dominated and patronised by ethnic players, clubs, fans and administrators, and that it was still negatively affecting perceptions of the sport. According to Bradley, ethnicity was not a selling point, even into the 1990s. Instead, franchised, district based clubs strategically spread throughout geographical centres remained the order of the day. The ‘white nation’ needed to be resurrected in order to sell the game. As rugby league

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5 Ibid: p. 25.
6 Ibid: p. 44.
7 Ibid: Appendix C: General Findings From the Review.
journalist Roy Masters commented in 1996, ‘in soccer… image is everything.’ While the game may not have been able to shed its ethnic roots, Bradley proposed that they could be offset by a new, mainstream façade.

*Globalisation and the Rise of Asia.*

As noted in Chapter 3, the relative bipartisanship in abandoning the Australian Settlement opened the Australian economy and Australian culture both to new opportunities and problems. The growth of Asia and the brain drain were front-page topics throughout the 1990s. Football was just one facet of Australian society that dealt with these issues. Under the guise of economic efficiency and balancing the budget, Paul Keating’s economic rationalist approach ensured that the Australian state could no longer be seen as a vast public utility. Keating’s ‘Big Picture’ was politically risky, but in many respects, a necessary and visionary approach encompassing reconciliation with the Indigenous population, multicultural republicanism, economic rationalism and political, cultural and economic engagement with Asia. Keating was instrumental in establishing APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) – a forum that encouraged free trade and liberalisation throughout the Asia-Pacific region – while cultivating personal and political ties with Asian leaders.

The economic rise of Asia coincided with a boom in Asian football. In 1993, the Japanese created the slick new corporate-backed J-League out of the remnants of the old JSL, which had consisted of semi-professional outfits; while in 1994 – after being snubbed by the ASF for inclusion in the NSL – a consortium of businessmen led the Perth Kangaroos IFC and the Darwin Cubs into Singapore’s fledgling S-

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League competition. Players such as Abbas Saad, Alistair Edwards, Alan Davidson, Mehmet Durakovic, Gareth Naven, Tony Popovic and Aytek Genc all left the NSL to ply their trade at clubs in Malaysia, Japan and Singapore, while national team coaches Eddie Thompson and Tom Sermanni were lured to coach Japanese outfit Sanfrecce Hiroshima in late 1996. Their absence left a hole in talent, but more importantly highlighted the need for the NSL to provide a more attractive career path for Australian footballers. Too much time had been wasted fiddling with the foundations while fundamental issues of player welfare and professionalism were put on hold. Increased labour market freedom highlighted and exacerbated central issues, and Asian clubs began reaping the benefits of Australian disorganisation. Few other sports were as keenly aware of Asia’s potential as football. In 1993, Les Murray pleaded with authorities to look to the Asian ‘gold mine’, while contributors to the *Australian and British Soccer Weekly* declared that Australia’s future was with its northern neighbours.\(^{10}\) After the election of David Hill in 1995, the ASF hastily applied to join the Asian Football Confederation, but were overwhelming rejected by member nations. Johnny Warren lambasted Australia’s ‘how about a fuck’ mentality towards Asia,\(^{11}\) while Philip Mosely puts it somewhat more diplomatically – ‘Aligning oneself with Asia was as much a result of self-interest as it was of goodwill.’\(^{12}\)

Meanwhile, in Europe, football was becoming increasingly commercialised as clubs began running their operations in a business like fashion. Ironically, it would be

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an Australian who would do so much to set football on this irreversible corporate shift. In 1991, following English football’s ‘lost decade’ of the 1980s, where hooliganism and on-field and administrative mediocrity ruled the day, the top clubs moved to establish the Premier League, a breakaway top division that would enhance the quality of English football and allow clubs to negotiate their own sponsorship and telecast deals. Rupert Murdoch’s BskyB channel won the rights to broadcast Premier League games in a multimillion-pound deal. More than ever before, money became the deciding factor as to the success of football clubs, while inequality became an entrenched reality. The rich got richer while the poor got poorer, unless a wealthy private investor bailed them out. Indeed, the founding of the Premier League was just one of several events in the 1990s that would radically alter the nature of the professional game. By 1995, the Bosman Ruling was passed in the European Court of Justice, allowing greater freedom of movement of players between clubs, and expanding the scope of clubs to include foreign players in their playing roster. Quotas for foreign players remained in several European competitions, but the movement of players within the European Union became far less restrictive. In essence, the Bosman Ruling was a harbinger for change in player movements around the world. It was perhaps the defining feature of football’s rapid globalisation.

English manager Graham Turner predicted that this revolutionary new transfer system would ‘send shock waves through football.’\textsuperscript{13} Indeed, the tremors were felt worldwide, as it became easier for top European clubs to scout talent from all corners, including Australia. For most of its history, Australian players, clubs and coaches had remained landlocked. While Joe Marston and Craig Johnston were exalted to legendary status after playing for English clubs Preston North End and Liverpool FC

respectively, they remained exceptions to the rule. Australia was traditionally an importer rather than an exporter of football talent, particularly during the post-war years.\(^14\) As Jordana Brownstone notes, the Bosman Ruling facilitated a greater number of non-European players in the top Western European leagues, allowing players from outside Western Europe to ‘reap the benefits of playing amongst the best in the world’, in turn improving the national performance of their own country.\(^15\)

However, while the talent drain may have given Australian football a higher profile in overseas leagues, it only added to the growing list of problems facing the NSL.

International clubs poaching young Australian talent made the local game appear second-rate, particularly compared to the closed-market rival football codes.\(^16\) While the loss of Australia’s top talent wasn’t a totally new phenomenon by the mid 1990s, it proved hard to get used to. The *Australian and British Soccer Weekly* worried that the talent drain would decimate local football, with Mike Johnson warning that the game ‘cannot afford to give our best soccer players away for next to nothing.’\(^17\)

In both political, economic and football terms, engagement with Asia was a harbinger for Australia to ‘lift its gaze to the world’.\(^18\) Keating ruffled several conservative feathers in early 1992 by attacking Australia’s historic dependence on Britain, while pronouncing his ‘genuine desire for partnership and real involvement’


\(^{16}\) Rugby League and particularly Australian Rules do not have these problems, as they are essentially parochial sports played in just a handful of nations.


in Asia. Furthermore, the rapid rate of globalisation during the 1980s seemed to prove that Australia’s protective shroud needed to be removed. In doing so, harsh lessons were learnt, but new solutions found. ‘When you face things and begin to do what must be done’, Keating proclaimed, ‘you liberate ideas about what can be done.’ This lesson was being learnt in business, in politics, and in football. Globalisation and the rise of Asia were both confronting realities, but provided new and exciting opportunities for the future of the game. However, unresolved structural problems compromised the ability of administrators to tackle these new issues head on. ‘The game is in need of an enema’ – concluded Liberal Senator Michael Baume in 1995 – ‘It won’t like it but it will make it feel a whole lot better.’

**Crash or Crash Through.**

The arrival of David Hill in 1995 was heralded as a new day for football in Australia. His election continued the reform trend set by the 1990 Bradley Report, which had reacted to the perceived mismanagement of the league since the mid 1980s. There seemed no overarching strategy or vision for the league. The conference system and promotion and relegation had seen the end of two Brisbane clubs, so that the so-called national league was by 1990 comprised of fourteen clubs: eight from New South Wales, two from Adelaide and four from Victoria. Of these, three were clearly identified as Italian, three Greek, two Croatian, two Maltese and one Macedonian, leaving only Blacktown City and Wollongong City as non-ethnic clubs. Regional centres were effectively ignored, while clubs in Perth and Darwin began looking to Asia for competition. Meanwhile, basketball, Australian Rules and rugby

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league continued moving in the opposite direction, encouraging the spread of clubs into new geographic areas to foster a broader, national interest and credibility.

*Australian Soccer Weekly* editor Keith Gilmour commented that ‘soccer marked time while others moved ahead’\(^{22}\), while Frank Scicluna lamented that ‘our supposedly National League is nothing more than a bigger version of the off season Ethnic Cup.’\(^{23}\) Their frustrations, while exaggerated, were understandable. Football in the late 1980s was in fact moving away from its original ‘national’ sensibility, while other sports capitalised on neglected markets such as Perth, Townsville and Canberra. The game’s administration appeared anachronistic and directionless.

Despite the general consensus that the National Soccer League needed to spread itself beyond traditional clubs along the Eastern Seaboard, the political strength of the clubs meant that change was slow and piecemeal through the early part of the 1990s. Football commentators who had watched the game try and fail to reinvent itself for decades called for revolution, but it remained a case of one step forward, two steps back.\(^{24}\) Following the recommendations of the Bradley Report, the ASF had opened up the league to new applicants for the 1991-1992 season.

According to the *Australian Soccer Weekly*, some twenty new applications were submitted from around the nation.\(^{25}\) As Blacktown City and Sunshine George Cross made way for the Newcastle Breakers and Brisbane United, all clubs were forced to once again include district names to ‘Australianise’ their image. Thus Melbourne Croatia reluctantly became Melbourne CSC and Melita became Parramatta Eagles, while Sydney Croatia re-branded themselves as the Sydney Crows (Cro’s?) before


settling on Sydney United. However, match day programs and announcements often remained in foreign languages, while the chants ‘Hellas’ and ‘Croatia’ showed that fans hadn’t embraced the enforced change of image. This frustrated David Hill, whose program for the nineties was three-fold: to de-ethnicise the image of football; to establish commercial partnerships between the governing body and franchise the clubs; and to spread the league around geographical centres. In doing so, Hill gambled that football would move into a new, mainstream era.

Hill’s would-be revolution all began in the 1995-96 season. By this point, ‘summer soccer’ was well established, allowing football to avoid clashes with Australian Rules and rugby league fixtures. But it also gave Hill an idea. What better way to attract new supporters and ‘Australianise’ the game than by linking football clubs with established AFL and rugby league sides? By 1996, the view that football should embrace other sports seemed universal, and was reciprocated particularly by other football codes that recognised the value in football utilising their facilities and trading on their brand all year round. Rugby League clubs Canterbury Bulldogs, Sydney Roosters, Brisbane Broncos and the Manly Sea Eagles were all briefly interested, AFL clubs Carlton and Collingwood both fielded sides for a brief period in the late 1990s, while the Sydney Swans held meetings with South Melbourne Lakers (nee Hellas) in late 1996. National Basketball League sides Sydney Kings and Perth Wildcats, too, found themselves in discussions with football clubs about cross-promotion and marketing initiatives. Flanked by his former ABC colleague George Negus, David Hill hoped that new, franchised clubs with

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mainstream appeal would creep up and envelop the existing ethnic, community sides. Their sneak attack backfired as Marconi and Sydney United steadfastly refused to remove the Italian tricolours and the Croatian checkerboard from their logos. The debate over the role of ethnic clubs, some twenty years after the NSL was founded, was still far from resolved. And it was a debate that football fans were growing tired of. As Johnny Warren wrote in his article for the Sydney Morning Herald in August 1996, ‘the old curse rears its ugly head.’

*Where Do Your Loyalties Lie? The 1996 Fiasco.*

The ongoing cosmetic changes had made little difference to the perception of football within the wider community. Thus David Hill went further than previous administrators, enforcing radical changes to club logos as well as names as part of Soccer Australia’s bold and confrontational new ‘National Merchandising Plan.’ The issue split the football community, and brought politicians into the debate. Future New South Wales and South Australian premiers Morris Iemma and Mike Rann lambasted the changes, with Iemma announcing that the decision was ‘racist, discriminatory and strike(s) at the very heart of our society’s multicultural principles.’ This was echoed by Johnny Warren, prompting an angry rebuke from ASF commissioner George Negus:

> Multiculturalism… is a two-way process. In this case, it involves non-ethnic Australians benefiting from soccer's old ethnic roots and the original ethnically based clubs benefiting from and becoming part of non-ethnically based

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29 Indeed, out of respect to the game’s custodians, football writer Lawrie Schwab of the *Age* in Melbourne ignored all changes, insisting on calling clubs by their traditional monikers.
Australia. It's all about two-way multiculturalism… not racism and discrimination.  

Football was still working through the definition of multiculturalism. Should ethnic blocs be able to participate on their own terms, or should they assimilate into their local district sides? Was a Greek-backed team proof of multiculturalism or monoculturalism? And most importantly, would Anglo-Australians embrace them?

Still, the logo drama remained as much a commercial imperative as it was about identity politics. Hill wanted Australian kids to start buying Australian club football jerseys. He assumed this would only happen if the Croatian checkerboards, the Italian tricolours, and the Maltese and Greek crosses were removed and replaced by animal mascots, commercial sponsors and/or district names. The nexus between commercialism and de-ethnicisation was plain to see, as ‘sponsors were proving reluctant to embrace a game which many still saw as “foreign.”’

This earned Hill some powerful and resourceful enemies, particularly in the Croatian community. As several scholars have recognised, Croatian diasporic nationalism was stronger than ever during the 1990s as the former Yugoslavia was torn apart by war and territorial redefinition.  

Leading social researcher Hugh Mackay observed that Australians took ‘great exception to signs of conflict between Serbs and Croats.‘ The story of ‘George’, illustrates the direct conflation of ‘old’ nationalism and football:

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I am a bit worried about some of these Turks and Yugoslavs. People from some of these countries bring an enormous amount of conflict with them – you can see it in the soccer… if they come to Australia, they should learn to live like Australians. We don’t want to end up like Lebanon.35

Similarly, former South Australian Minister for Ethnic Affairs Mike Rann argued that ‘Australian multiculturalism is strong enough to cope with (ethnic) logos’, yet railed against the ‘excessive nationalism’ of Croatian sides.36 Indeed, the perception that ‘old’ nationalisms were still being played out at football grounds seemed to threaten Anglo-Australians, who were still coming to terms with the complexities of a new multicultural identity. What, then, are the limits to Australian multiculturalism?

‘More than any other group in Australia’, Philip Mosely recognises, ‘the Croats used soccer for political means.’37 Fair enough perhaps, considering the 1990s were formative years for Croatian nationalism and statehood; however as David Hill remarked in 1996, ‘it’s pretty hard to market Croatian nationalism to non-Croatsians.’38 A young Josip Šimunić, the tall, classy stopper at Melbourne Knights (nee CSC, nee Croatia) further exacerbated tensions when in late 1996 he announced his intention to play for Croatia, the country of his parents. A graduate of the AIS, who was born and raised in the nation’s capital, his decision inflamed the debate. The Sydney Morning Herald wondered if Simunic ‘had not played for a club with Croatian emblems on its jersey and which continues to identify with Croatia, would he have opted for Croatia over Australia?’39 Meanwhile, Sunday Age journalist Gary Walsh

criticised him for taking ‘foreign money’, while others called the young stopper ungrateful to the country that provided him a childhood ‘uninterrupted by wars or racial hatred’.\(^{40}\) Of course, these self appointed national-spatial managers hadn’t paused to think that war might have been precisely the reason Simunic chose the country of his parents, rather than the green and gold. The chance to represent Croatia, in 1996, was an unprecedented, exciting and emotional opportunity. In the 1998 World Cup, Croatia fielded a team for the first time, albeit without Simunic. Nevertheless, the issue struck right at the heart of anxieties about multiculturalism. Simunic’s decision to turn his back on Australia seemed to confirm suspicions that ‘ethnics’ and multiculturalism were dividing, rather than uniting Australia. Football, yet again, was the fifth column.

*Glory Days: An A-League Club in the NSL.*

Despite the stated intention of the governing body to create a national competition, Western Australia had continually proved a bridge too far. The primary reason was simply the tyranny of distance. A Western Australian side playing in the Eastern Seaboard dominated competition would have been akin to a Turkish side playing weekly fixtures in England, an impossible task without a generous benefactor considering the high travel costs.\(^{41}\) Following the Bradley Report, however, it became increasingly clear that administrators were ignoring Perth at their peril. The Perth Wildcats basketball side was already well established in the NBL, the West Coast Eagles had been introduced to the expanded AFL competition in 1986, with a second

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\(^{41}\) Johnny Warren. ‘Air Fare Issue Tough for Perth in NSL’, *Australian and British Soccer Weekly*, Vol.12, No.472, 18 March 1991: p. 9; Dr. Graham Bradley, 1990: p. 27. Bradley recognised that travel costs would be a problem for a Perth side, but recommended that the governing body assist them in order to equalise the financial playing field.
team mooted for Fremantle. Moreover, Perth would provide an interesting experiment in ‘one team one city’, which had been discussed, but not properly enacted, since the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Australian and British Soccer Weekly} further proposed that the NSL allow entry to New Zealand, highlighting the push for football to expand its horizons.\textsuperscript{43} Yet as always, progress was slow, forcing Perth sides into Asia. In October 1994, however, it emerged that Western Australian entrepreneur Nick Tana was interested in creating a new club, and within a year, Perth Glory were unveiled at the Burswood Dome.\textsuperscript{44}

The Glory scratched the Hill administration right where they itched. Without an identifiable ethnic base, the newest club in the NSL were rich, privately owned, with community, corporate and government support. Along with Collingwood Warriors and Canberra Cosmos, the Glory entered the league in 1996. They joined a new world of Australian club football sanitised by Hill’s merchandising plan – of Falcons, Zebras, Sharks, Wolves, Pumas, Stallions, not to mention Knights, Lakers, Breakers and Strikers. Cloaked in garish purple and orange jerseys, the Glory stood out. As General Manager Roger Lefort explained, ‘the name and logo has been chosen as it was representative of soccer’s rebirth, the beginning of a new era of soccer in Western Australia.’\textsuperscript{45} Indeed, they were also the harbinger of a change in attitude to the potential for Australian football. As Michael Cockerill wrote in late 1996, their success ‘seems to vindicate the ambitions of controversial soccer chief David Hill’:\textsuperscript{45}  

\textsuperscript{42} Andrew Dette. ‘Sydney Can’t Support These 5 Clubs.’ \textit{Soccer World}, Vol.20, No.35, 16 September, 1977: p. 3.  
\textsuperscript{44} Anthony Ranieri. ‘Perth Go For Glory’, \textit{Australian and British Soccer Weekly}, Vol.16, No.750, December 5, 1995: p. 4.  
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
The beauty is, too, that this all-Australian success story has happened not by accident but by design. Which means the formula can be applied elsewhere to strengthen and develop the national league.\(^4\)

One team, one city had arrived. There was unanimous support for the Glory ‘juggernaut’, and a much-needed injection of excitement into the game.\(^4\)

When Perth upset UTS Olympic in early 1997 at Belmore Stadium, the *Australian and British Soccer Weekly* reported that ‘the western invaders have captured the hearts of soccer fans around the country’ after the UTS Olympic fans cheered the 100-odd travelling ‘Glory Boys’ out of the stadium.\(^5\)

While the logo, name and colours were all new and exciting; it was their fans that really set the Glory apart from their eastern rivals. The Glory Boys, drawing from the proportionally high British migrant population in Perth, borrowed heavily from English fan culture.\(^6\) Perth resident and cultural historian Tara Brabazon suggests,

> Englishness is a safe or invisible ethnicity, whereas Greekness or Croatianess is dangerous to the sport... David Hill is therefore mobilising a distinct, Antipodean inscription of Englishness to counter what he frames as destructive migrant prejudices.\(^7\)

Anecdotal evidence supports this view. NSL general manager Stefan Kamasz praised the atmosphere at Perth Oval, commenting happily that ‘it was like being at an English game’, while Searlais Mullin observed that ‘recently arrived Poms and

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Scots… come along to enjoy the atmosphere of a game just like at ‘Home.’” Born in England before moving to Australia as a child, David Hill grew up an avid Manchester United fan. Certainly, the displays of Englishness in the west sat far more comfortably with his understanding of fan culture than the tribal European loyalties in Sydney and Melbourne, which reportedly shocked Hill. As Brabazon continues, ‘Perth Glory offers an opportunity to reconstruct and reimagine the English presence in Australia.’

While British migrants themselves might have enjoyed imagining a ‘little Britain’ in the antipodes, this may be overstating the case for the rest of the nation. The ‘Anglicising’ argument, while compelling, perhaps doesn’t tell the whole story. Considering the visibility and commercial popularity of the English Premier League during the 1990s, Glory fans on ‘the hill’ were simply reproducing the behaviour Australians saw on television. They drank beer, produced fanzines and fan merchandise, marched to the stadium in packs, sang songs for the duration of the game, and followed their club around the country in stoic ‘Tours of Duty.’ And while displays of English fan culture are still essentially ‘foreign’, they are politically neutral compared to Croatian fan culture, for example. Les Murray labelled the arrival of the Glory the beginning of ‘a second revolution’; while Stefan Kamasz put it more simply – ‘let’s follow Perth Glory.’

Similar franchises would enter in later seasons, most notably the Northern Spirit, who for a period of time were owned by English club Crystal Palace and later

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52 Ross Solly, 2004: p. 112.
Scottish giant Glasgow Rangers. At a time when the English Premier League was thriving, administrators hoping to de-ethnicise the image of Australian football happily embraced Britishness, just as they embraced American influences in the early 1980s. In the quest to make football an Australian subject, British and American influences were clearly not seen an external threat to the local game. If anything, they were a selling point. Why? Is British and American cultural familiarity bound up with historical political and economic alliances? Or is the sceptre of ‘whiteness’ being raised to sell the game to the Australian mainstream? Perhaps the comparative ‘whiteness’ of the other competing football codes in Australia wedged football, and forced it to play down its multicultural credentials. The limits placed upon displays of ethnicity, and the embrace of cultural influences from particular ‘white’ nations is illustrative of the limits of Australian multiculturalism. The Australian subject, despite the reality of its diverse and multiracial society, is still readily conflated with a ‘white’ subject.

_Iran: The End of the Hill Era._

After Eddie Thomson left for Japan in 1996, the Socceroos were in need of a replacement coach. Veteran disciplinarian Zoran Matic, who had guided Adelaide City to three championships, was considered the firm favourite. However, David Hill unveiled perhaps the biggest gamble of his tenure, the former Barcelona, Tottenham and England manager Terry Venables. ‘El Tel’s’ appointment was met with mixed reactions. On the one hand, he brought flair and hype to Australian football, with one advertisement cheekily suggesting that ‘this week, the most exciting player in Australian Soccer will be on the bench.’ On the other hand, the

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football cognoscenti worried that Hill was mortgaging Soccer Australia’s shoestring budget on a coach who knew nothing about Australian football, and would essentially be working on a part-time basis.\textsuperscript{57} Some wondered why local coaches were overlooked at a time where David Hill was supposedly ‘Australianising’ the game.\textsuperscript{58} There were even suspicions that Zoran Matic’s ethnicity and quiet nature had counted against him.\textsuperscript{59} Certainly, Venables’ English background and celebrity status did nothing to alleviate the image that David Hill was looking to recreate English football in the antipodes. In any event, Venables was Hill’s man, and the success of his chairmanship would be ‘inextricably linked’ to the success of the Socceroos’ World Cup campaign.\textsuperscript{60}

As it turned out, Venables performance was a cruel metaphor for the Hill era. The Socceroos performed at a higher level than they had in years, maintaining an unbeaten record throughout the qualification series. However, the two-all draw against Iran in the deciding match in front of a capacity crowd at the MCG meant that Australia were knocked out on the away-goals rule, and Iran were on their way to France ’98. The post match scenes of distraught Australian players, shell-shocked television presenters and my inconsolable father left a lasting impression on this 8-year-old fan. Australian football had come so close at both a domestic and national level, but remained so far away. World Cup qualification was supposed to be Australia’s moment of self-realisation. Qualification would certainly have given Australian football an enormous cash injection from sponsorship and FIFA revenue, and more importantly, given the game a sustained national presence

\textsuperscript{58} Les Murray, 2006: pp. 223-224.
\textsuperscript{60} Michael Cockerill. ‘Venables; The Time to Deliver has Finally Arrived’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, January 15, 1997: p. 48.
into the new millennium. Instead, the 1990s would be remembered as the decade of squandered opportunity. David Hill, who had tried so hard to start the revolution, could only exit right.
Chapter 5: 
Old Soccer, New Football.

‘A Plentora of Problems.’

As the nation waited in anticipation for the 2000 Olympic Games, Australian sport looked in good shape. Yet the ‘problem child’ of Australian sport was throwing yet another tantrum. By August, Soccer Australia was still yet to finalise the composition of the National Soccer League season, despite kick-off scheduled for late October. Farcically, the Newcastle Breakers were effectively out of cash, just ten years after being heralded as a key club for inclusion by the Bradley Report. In the revolving door that was the NSL, Newcastle Breakers survived under a new guise of ‘Newcastle United.’ However, after just eight rounds, Carlton FC – one of David Hill’s experiments with cross-code cooperation – had folded. A year later, the Canberra Cosmos and the Eastern Pride had also bowed out, while the ludicrously named Football Kingz hung on for dear life across the Tasman. Stable and predictable the league certainly wasn’t. With the exception of Perth Glory, efforts to mainstream the clubs had not converted the masses into regular fans. By late 2002, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) released a document entitled Australian Premier League: For The Fans, while Libero Consulting later proposed an ‘Australasian Premier League’. The new proposals, combined with the lack of penetration by existing clubs, were indicative of the looming sea change. The days of the National Soccer League were numbered.

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The disorganisation of the National League illustrated one key reality for football fans in Australia. The incremental and piecemeal changes that had football lurching from one idea to the next were not the answer. Wholesale changes were needed, new ideas and faces necessary. The *Four Corners* investigation into the corruption culture in Soccer Australia, broadcast in May 2002, only cemented this view.\(^5\) Ironically, it would be Frank Lowy – perhaps the man who did more than anyone else to create the old National Soccer League back in 1977 – that emerged as the saviour. This was largely due to the recommendations from David Crawford, whose report was the catalyst for the shift from ‘old soccer’ to ‘new football’. Crawford, a man who has traversed the corridors of some of Australia’s most prominent businesses, had previously delivered a report for the AFL which recommended the restructuring of the governing body, and the expansion of the game into markets outside its Victorian home. Crawford’s recommendations had undermined the power of parochial and self-interested club officials to look at the ‘big picture.’ In the AFL, reform had been successful from the top down, with David Crawford’s recommendations the catalyst for change. And so, after the 1995 Stewart Inquiry and the 2002 *Four Corners* report exposed the ‘brutal politics and questionable business practices’ of Soccer Australia, and Channel Seven had effectively buried the NSL in late-night time slots, the Federal Minister for the Arts and Sport Rod Kemp decided enough was enough. The subsequent 2003 Crawford Report would be perhaps the federal government’s greatest gift to football.

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A 91-page Demolition Job: The Recommendations.

In hindsight, the A-League has been relatively successful in establishing a league in which ethnic rivalries are no longer centre stage, and clubs represent a geographic location, rather than an ethnic community. However, in the writing of the report back in 2002-2003, this was by no means inevitable. Entrenched interests would have to be stepped upon to reach this goal. Yet as a government sponsored report, the recommendations in the Crawford Report focus primarily on the structural governance of the game. In order to give football cash grants and loans, the prime concern of the federal government was to ensure that the business practices of the game were in order. Interestingly, Issue 9 of the Crawford Report makes little mention of the ethnic question in relation to the competition, instead focusing on the position of the league within the structure of Soccer Australia. In this regard, the report itself leaves alone the ethnic question to focus instead on the finance/politics/governance of the competition. Perhaps dealing with questions of ‘ethnicity’ was considered too complicated territory for a government-sponsored report?

In any event, the attitude towards football amongst stakeholders and fans is illuminated in Appendix D. Self-identified ‘fans’ and ‘supporters’ seem far more concerned with the ‘so called “Australian” NSL clubs’, than corruption or the political structure of Soccer Australia. By selecting criticisms of the perceived ethnic composition of the National Soccer League, the report addresses the ethnic question by proxy. There were no statements, for example, about the various positive social features of ethnic-backed football clubs. Matt Cottrell, a fan from Adelaide, states that football in South Australia, at least at the pointy end, was hampered by the dominance

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of an Italian-based club, rather than a state based one.\textsuperscript{7} Further on, the comments of Dr Stephen Sassinis are illustrative:

\begin{quote}
Migrants and their Australian born children have greatly contributed in many ways to the progress of this country. Justifiably this then poses the question, as to why the same excellent integration that took place in the Australian population can not also happen in Australian soccer?\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

While these were comments, not recommendations, they were still selected to reflect the direction of the report. Clearly, behind the focus of cleaning up the game’s finances and governance lay the issue of ‘mainstreaming’ the sport.\textsuperscript{9} Indeed, the national league was central to the game’s renovation, as John O’Neill alluded to in early 2004: ‘Tinkering with Australian soccer was never going to be an option. We’ve got to have radical change.’\textsuperscript{10} In this regard, the nomination of Frank Lowy to head up the interim board and oversee the transition of the national league was a crucial feature of the Report.

\textit{The Prodigal Son Returns.}

Frank Lowy, despite being one of the founders of the NSL, had been at the forefront of the integrationists since the 1970s. His club in Bondi was one of the first to voluntarily remove their ethnic façade to try and attract a broader fan base. Under Lowy’s supervision, the Star of David logo and the Hebrew name ‘Hakoah’ were phased out. As mentioned in Chapter 4, while the Slickers were a very successful outfit on the field, Lowy left the game in 1987, jaded by the failure of clubs to

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{cqtt} Matt Cottrell, cited in Appendix D. David Crawford, 2003: p. 49.
\bibitem{sassinis} Dr Stephen Sassinis, cited in Appendix D, David Crawford, 2003: p 61.
\bibitem{hinds} Richard Hinds. ‘Australian Soccer has a Vision and it’s not all Greek to me.’ \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 27 March, 2004: p. 79.
\end{thebibliography}
broaden their base.\footnote{Rod Myer and Michael Lynch. Lowy’s Retail Revolution, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald}, 26 April, 2004: p. 36.} In this sense, his return was always going to be to complete unfinished business. As one of Australia’s most successful businessmen, Lowy’s vision for football was inevitably entwined with commercial interests. In this regard, the unresolved issue of ethnicity was inextricably linked to the commercial imperatives that football was still yet to properly address. Indeed, the lack of corporate support and mainstream disinterest in football was still explicitly being blamed on perceived ethnic affiliations and rivalries. If Frank Lowy had previously left the sport in a huff, the fact that the federal government and David Crawford were now courting him to take control of an interim board to replace Soccer Australia was indicative of the looming seachange.

In late 2003, Sydney Hakoah old boys Frank Lowy and Andrew Kemeny released the Report of the NSL Task Force. Following on from the Crawford Report, it focused primarily on the role, structure and composition of a new national competition to replace the NSL. Interestingly, a contradiction emerged in the process of selecting the new clubs:

\begin{quote}
It is important to understand that the League will not be an amended version of the current National Soccer League. It will be a completely new competition…

As such, the Task Force is of the view that all applicants, whether existing NSL clubs, State League clubs or new entities, should be dealt with on an equal footing.\footnote{Andrew Kemeny. \textit{Report of the NSL Task Force into the Structure of a New National League Competition}. Silverwater, NSW: Australian Soccer Association, 2003: p. 17.}
\end{quote}

To create a completely new competition, new clubs clearly had to be favoured over the old ones. In the end, Perth Glory, Newcastle United Jets and Adelaide United were the only clubs that managed to survive the cull. All three were ‘non-ethnic’
clubs founded in the dying days of the NSL. In year zero of new football, the old ethnic clubs were given ‘equal footing’ in name only. Moreover, the Task Force’s findings recommendation that a maximum three clubs be based in Sydney, two in Melbourne, one in Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane, and two more based in other locations to be determined by business merit was illustrative of the ‘catch-all’ mentality. Space was at a premium in a new rationalised market.

Furthermore, the Task Force was determined that clubs should be market driven and adequately funded, to avoid the problem of ‘under-capitalisation.’ In late 2003, Frank Lowy appealed directly to his peers at the big end of town – ‘we all have to make an investment in the game. The government did, we did, I did, and now corporate Australia has to come with us and support us in this venture.’ The Task Force recommended that clubs should operate on a budget of $5.5 million annually, meaning that many existing NSL clubs were simply priced out of the market:

While not too many candlestick makers bankrolled clubs, there was the odd butcher (or at least businessmen with smallgoods interests) and baker, along with suburban lawyers, builders and cafe owners. These were people who loved the game and put plenty of their own hard-earned into its development. But most of them lacked sufficient capital to take the sport to the next level. Their contribution was vital - but to move on, the game had to move beyond those boundaries.

In this regard, a primary focus for the new administration was to encourage private investment. And not just any investment, but new investment. Football had received

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14 Andrew Kemeny, 2003: p. 17.
congratulatory press for the recruitments of high-profile businessmen Frank Lowy, John O’Neill, John Singleton and Ron Walker to the game. After the calamitous business practices of the 1990s, it seemed the sale of Australian football required corporate backing to achieve mainstream acceptance. With this it was hoped that football could finally hold the attention of the thousands of Australians who play the game every weekend, and turn them from participants into fans and spectators. The A-League was designed from the top down, centrally directed and privately financed. Build it, and they will come.

*Putting the ‘A’-League in Assimilation.*

Interestingly, the board at the newly named Football Federation Australia (FFA) were inextricably linked to John Howard’s right-wing Coalition government. The Crawford Report, which was commissioned by the government, was Frank Lowy’s ‘bible’, while the federal government’s cash loan was conditional on the new administration implementing Crawford’s recommendations. Moreover, the return of Frank Lowy to the game was only decided after the Prime Minister personally telephoned the exiled entrepreneur. It is worth considering then, the socio-political environment in which the FFA worked. The Howard government, which had swept to power in 1996, dismissed Paul Keating’s ‘Big Picture’ rhetoric, arguing that

*There is a frustrated mainstream in Australia today which sees government decisions increasingly driven by the noisy, self-interested clamour of powerful vested interests with scant regard for the national interest.*

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18 Ibid.
By resurrecting the ‘relaxed and comfortable’ myth of 1950s middle-Australia, Howard sought to re-evaluate the terms upon which immigration and multicultural policy had been set. Rather than accept that a diverse range of cultures was inherently good for Australia, the Howard government reminded Australians that their Anglo-Celtic origins were something to be proud of and something that should be socially, politically, economically and institutionally maintained.

In this context, John Hughson and Chris Hallinan propose that the A-League ‘presented a symbolic return to the pre-1970s immigration policy of assimilation where people (or soccer clubs in this case) are expected to fit into a cultural grid.’\(^20\) It is hard to argue with this assertion. Certainly, the parallels between the Howard government’s brand of Australian nationalism and identity dovetailed nicely with the creation of the A-League. In an address to the Sydney Institute in 2006, treasurer Peter Costello even used football as a metaphor for his argument against ‘misguided, mushy multiculturalism’. Observing a Uruguayan migrant who was openly supporting the Socceroos against the country of her birth, Costello commented:

> If you loved Uruguay, wanted to speak Spanish, loved Uruguayan food, culture and political institutions you would not mark out Australia as the place to pursue these passions. … People come to Australia and become Australian citizens because they want to embrace the things this country stand 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.\(^21\)

This story contributed to Costello’s pertinent repudiation of one of the central precepts of multiculturalism – the right to retain and celebrate your culture. More

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importantly, Costello had stumbled upon the very issue that had plagued football since the arrival of European migrants to Australia’s shores.

While Hallinan and Hughson’s findings are compelling, and certainly have some weight, ideological imperatives were only one of several factors that allowed Frank Lowy and John O’Neil to succeed where previous administrators had failed. Lowy, O’Neil and John Singleton were certainly not the first to propose a reform agenda that revolved around de-ethnicising football’s image. Creating a mainstream brand had in fact been one of Frank Lowy’s overarching goals since the 1970s, and was almost unanimously agreed upon by successive administrators. De-ethnicisation remained a resilient idea throughout the entire debate on multiculturalism. One-team one-city had been proposed by several football writers since the inception of the NSL, and was a key characteristic of the North American Soccer League and the National Basketball League, which were both pervasive influences on Australian football.22 Furthermore, David Hill – a Labor man – had attempted similar de-ethnicisation initiatives during his tenure in the 1990s. If David Hill had succeeded in de-ethnicising the image of football and reached his goal to create a fully franchised, commercially oriented, mainstream and apolitical league, how would Hallinan and Hughson explain it? Part of the answer lies with Ghassan Hage’s analysis of Australian multiculturalism.


I have argued throughout this thesis that economic and commercial trends have led to de-ethnicisation initiatives in football. However, economic determinism

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does not explain the whole story. Socio-political and ideological concerns are central to the public debate on de-ethnicisation. Ghassan Hage suggests that both multiculturalism and assimilation are aimed at ‘regulating the modality of inclusion’ of migrants into Australia’s ‘white nation’ fantasy.23 Hage proposes that the language of multiculturalism – tolerance, acceptance, mixing – all remain wedded to a defined set of power relations which place the ‘white’ Australian culture at the centre of the debate. In this regard, when letter writers, administrators, politicians or commentators argue back and forth that ‘our multicultural society needs soccer clubs with ethnic names’, or rail against ‘excessive nationalism’ or decry ethnic names for erecting barriers between ‘new’ and ‘old’ Australians, the discussion always revolves around the implicit acceptance that migrants must conform to parameters and guidelines set by a ‘white’ manager.24 The ‘ethnic’ is rarely in control of the debate, whether their logos and names are deemed ‘acceptable’ or not.

Blessed with a tabula rasa, Frank Lowy, John O’Neil and John Singleton – rather than allowing ‘ethnic’ clubs to administer and set the direction of football – created a platform from which all Australians can contribute on an individual level. John O’Neil commented:

Everyone in the city would be pitched together. Fans would not bear the flags of a nation. They would carry the flags of a club that would, as a result of being the only team in town, carry a multicultural personnel’25

These sentiments were admirable, and in many respects, necessary, if analysed from a purely commercial perspective. However, the perception that ‘everyone would be

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pitched together’ promotes a very particular notion of equality – one that enshrines the Australian nation as the manager of behaviour and loyalty. No longer would other nationalisms and loyalties be tolerated. Cultural diversity was fine, but only if the imagined ‘white’ nation remained front and centre. Hage’s ‘national-spatial manager’ in this regard, was John Singleton, the larrakin tycoon who, according to John O’Neil, proposed the one-team one-city concept.26 ‘In a scorched earth, year zero policy’ wrote Michael Lynch in 2007, ‘it was like all that had gone before was airbrushed away in favour of the shiny new teams in this brave new world.’27 Football fans of Croatian or Greek or Italian heritage would be expected to assimilate into new franchises. And, rather than previous administrators who had tried but failed to marry clubs with ethnic roots with franchised, mainstream clubs, the new regime had learned the lessons of thirty-odd years of failed attempts to de-ethnicise football’s image. Put simply, ethnic blocs would no longer be allowed to participate on their own terms.


One year after the Crawford Report and the NSL Task Force was released, Perth Glory celebrated their second consecutive Grand Final victory over Parramatta Power on a grey afternoon in Sydney’s west. It was to be the last season of the National Soccer League. The league, which was once a trailblazer in Australian sport, was being laid to rest. Fans of the game were forced to wait in nervous anticipation, knowing that the future of the domestic game was by no means certain. Yet they needn’t have worried. The next two years would be arguably the apogee in Australia’s

26 Ibid: p. 260. Football commentators had long discussed this concept, but it remains an important point that John Singleton would consider this a priority in order to ‘Australianise’ the game.
football history. In early 2005, after years of failed attempts, the Asian Football Federation finally admitted Australia into the fold, thanks largely to the vision of John O’Neil and the diplomatic skill of Frank Lowy. In August, football fans were rubbing their eyes in disbelief as 25,208 fans turned out to see Sydney FC’s first game against Melbourne Victory. The ‘Big Blue’ Sydney-Melbourne rivalry was born. And in November, on a night no football fan will ever forget, Australia qualified for the 2006 World Cup in Germany, defeating Uruguay in a tense penalty shoot out in Homebush. The trifecta – Asia, the A-League and the World Cup – had football fans dizzy with joy. The significance of World Cup qualification cannot be overstated. Perhaps more than any of the structural reforms recommended by the Crawford Report, qualification gave football in Australia unprecedented confidence and a momentum to sustain it over the difficult years to come.

All Aboard the Football Bandwagon.

‘The Australian team’s always been a great marketing PR vehicle because people follow Australia’ explained Johnny Warren, ‘they might not follow the club teams but when Australia plays, they were interested.’ The qualification of the Socceroos was certainly a watershed moment for the game. What was most interesting was the interplay between the new ‘mainstream’ support and the game’s custodians, who had traditionally been marginalised in Australian sport. A new appreciation of the game’s diverse heritage was suddenly articulated in sports pages around the country, typified by purple prose about ‘multicultural Socceroos’ by

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Michael Cockerill and comedian Nick Giannopolous. Football’s confidence was skyrocketing as an ambassador for a sometimes-controversial policy. How are we to account for this new image?

As I have illustrated throughout this thesis, Australian football was, for the best part of the 20th century, seen as a conduit for foreign nationalisms and ethnic rivalries, which not only were of little interest to Australian-born sports fans and sponsors, but also a real example of perceived national difference, rather than unity. However, the Socceroos, at least since 1974, have continually been able to overcome this stereotype, most notably in 1988 and 2006. To Steve Meachem, the Socceroos were a ‘living embodiment’ of the government’s multicultural policy, while in Ultimo, The Powerhouse Museum ran an exhibition in cooperation with the Migration Heritage Centre which featured positive stories of Socceroo families from Lebanon, Croatia, Britain, Germany and Italy. In June 2006, The Footy Show incredibly ran its ‘World Cup Special’, a night where ‘for the first time, the footy codes come together.’ The tension was obvious when former Rules player Gary Lyon told guest Anthony LaPaglia ‘you would have been swimming up against the tide a fair bit back in Australia, when perhaps soccer, as we call it, wasn’t prominent.’ With a wry smile, LaPaglia reminded Lyon ‘we used to be called wogball.’ For football fans accustomed to seeing pejorative articles about ‘ethnic riots’ in the daily newspapers, it appeared that representations of Australian football had turned full circle. From a Hageian perspective, the players’ implicit loyalty to the green and gold enabled all of

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34 Ibid.
Australia to celebrate, rather than worry about the game’s diverse ethnicities and backgrounds, so that the national team became proof of the success of integration, rather than tribal loyalties and division. The ‘white nation’ was front and centre.

The mainstreaming of Australian football was complemented by an upsurge of corporate support of the Socceroos and the A-League. After that night in Homebush, FFA Head of Commercial Operations John O’Sullivan commented ‘this moves us from being an aspirational sport, commercially, to more of an established sport.’ Commercially and politically, the World Cup propelled football from a minority sport played by ‘sheilas, wogs and poofers’ to the centre of nation’s attention. More than ever before, football became intertwined with Australian popular nationalism. Tim Cahill became the new Weetbix Kid, National Australia Bank were the Socceroos ‘biggest fans’, while Nike supplied the underdog aura as they encouraged Australia to ‘stuff history’ against football aristocrats Brazil. Most illuminating, however, was a Qantas television advertisement that had golfers, cricketers, netballers, volleyball and tennis players around the country kicking their respective round balls like footballs. The symbolism was not lost on football fans. The game, as Qantas said, was taking off. Foxtel had signed a multimillion-dollar deal to televise A-League and Socceroos fixtures, effectively underwriting the national competition for its first seven years, while Hyundai Motors spent up big for naming rights to the A-League. Where Frank Lowy had once begged for corporate support back in 2003, now corporate Australia was tripping over itself to be part of the football family.

Conclusion.

De-ethnicisation, then, has proved to be an ongoing, resilient and complex process, one that will not be dictated by government policy, but rather by social attitudes and commercial imperatives. It is this complexity that makes this process so interesting as a proxy for wider debates about the role and influence of migrants in Australian cultural life, and indeed the very nature of Australian multiculturalism. To what extent do migrants and ‘ethnics’ actually control the debate surrounding their existence in Australia? Australia will always be a multiracial society, but can it really claim to be a multicultural one? To what extent does our fantasy of a ‘white’ nation dictate to migrants and their children the parameters of Australia’s imagined national identity? This thesis has used football as an example of the continued strength of fantasies of assimilation and ‘one nation’, despite the diversity of the participants involved.

As I have mentioned, the relationship between football and multiculturalism is a topic that has been traversed by several historians, with many coming to the conclusion that in a self-proclaimed multicultural society, ethnicity should prove a selling point and strength for the game at both the grass roots and the professional level.37 Yet while its global appeal will always provide football a steady stream of participants, this thesis has shown that the success of the A-League actually rounded out thirty-odd years of efforts to downplay the ethnic face of the game. By covering the different approaches of several administrations since the 1970s, this thesis has shown that de-ethnicisation was based around several competing influences, and was not a simple European-to-Australian process. Selling the game to the widest possible mainstream base was central, while influences from traditional cultural sources – the

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United States and Britain – remained important. The quest to make the game ‘Australian’ only opened a Pandora’s box of issues around what ‘Australian’ actually means. Despite the fact that football may not be the number one spectator sport in Australia, it is in this complexity, contestation and diversity that makes football a very Australian story.

Final Thoughts: The World Cup.

The 2006 FIFA World Cup was full of symbolism for Australian football. Thirty-two years after Ralë Rašić had taken a squad of part-timers to Germany, the golden generation of Australian football returned to a now-reunified Germany to face Croatia, Brazil and Japan in the group stage. The teams, who represented the past, the dreams and the future of the Australian game, were somewhat fitting. Asian powerhouse Japan, whose football development has mirrored Australia’s, but is ten years ahead, has become arguably Australia’s biggest rival in both domestic and international level. Brazil are the greatest national side ever – the pinnacle of the sporting world. And Croatia fielded a side featuring Josip Šimunić – ten years on from his infamous decision to play for Croatia – as well as Sydney born Ante Šerić and Geelong product Joey Didulica. The Australian team, meanwhile, featured Jason Čulina, Tony Popovic, Josip Skoko, Mark Viduka, Ante Ćović and Željko Kalac, all of Croatian heritage. All of these players had their roots in the Croatian clubs in Sydney and Melbourne, both of which were perhaps the most resistant to ‘new football.’ During the Croatia-Australia game, Šimunić received an unprecedented three yellow cards before being sent off (two yellow cards usually warrants dismissal). Amid the confusion, it emerged that English referee Graham Poll was, in
the heat of the moment, confused by Šimunić’s Australian accent. The incident became an international embarrassment for Graham Poll, but in many ways, it was a perfect metaphor for Australian football’s turbulent history. A Croatian footballer with an Australian accent? Where do your loyalties lie?

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N.B: The nature of this thesis means that many of these sources are difficult to categorise as either ‘primary’ or ‘secondary.’

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