

# SPORT

LEONIE SANDERCOCK

**R**ARE IS THE AUSTRALIAN household where some sport or other does not exercise an influence', wrote a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist at the beginning of the year. He believed the influence to be benign. Sport was 'almost invariably for the good of the individual concerned and the nation collectively', and it was therefore fitting for a sporting festival, the Empire Games, to be high on the program of Sydney's sesquicentennial celebrations.

Appropriately, in a nation surrounded by water, a big-game fishing contest opened the 150th anniversary proceedings in Sydney. The entrants, 203 in all, came from as far afield as Great Britain, New Zealand, Hawaii, the United States and South Africa to compete for a £500 trophy for the heaviest game fish hooked within 80 kilometres of the coast. Entrants had to be amateurs belonging to a club affiliated with the Big Game and Rod Fishers' Association of Australia. Mrs Jesse Sams of Milton on the New South Wales south coast won the trophy by landing a 150 kilogram striped marlin off Ulladulla, an Australian game fish record. 'Who', the travel magazine *Walkabout* asked,

would have dared suggest at the beginning of the competition that the main trophy valued at £500 would be won by a woman angler? It was not that the women entrants lacked the necessary skill, endurance and experience, but rather that they were ... probably outnumbered by male anglers by at least 50 to 1.



Another sesquicentennial event, the eleventh Australian Bowling Carnival, attracted competitors from all over the empire. Australian winners represented their country at the Empire Games; they also represented one of the country's most popular amateur sports. Each city had many bowling greens and most country towns had several, at which club and district competitions were held. John May, who wrote under the name 'The Unknown Bowler', observed of bowling clubs:

No longer are they the close preserves of the idle rich ... their portals are thrown open to all men of good repute ... The very softness of the Green, the bright



Commemorative sticker issued to mark the big-game angling competition.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS



Above.

'It was a splendid exhibition of fishing and Mrs. Sams had earned the homage of all anglers, for she landed this fish with but 350 yards of her reel.' Walkabout, 1 June 1938.

Above right.

Jessie Sams 'winner of the trophy for the largest game fish'. O.L. Ziegler, Australia 1788-1938, Sydney 1938.



blue open sky, the beautiful surroundings ... the more sumptuous comfort of your simple apparel, all pure physical delights, combine to promote a genial frame of mind. And so the cares that haunt you in your social, business, even at times in your domestic life, all vanish like a morning mist, when once you have become absorbed in the friendly, fascinating rivalry of this most delightful of all outdoor games.

As all John May's readers were aware, 'the friendly, fascinating rivalry' of bowls attracted women as well as men. Women bowlers had clubs in every state, though (unlike men) they were not involved in the Empire Games.



**DAY OF GOLF**  
AT  
PATTERSON RIVER GOLF CLUB  
CARRUM  
SUNDAY, JULY 31, 1938  
COST OF DAY, INCLUDING LUNCH, **5/6**  
ACCOMMODATION for 60 ONLY. Early application and payment of fees necessary. All interested can obtain full information from the undermentioned persons:—  
MR. BOWEN — Ladies' Shoes  
MR. DICKENSON — Sporting Goods  
MR. GEYLE — Electrical  
MR. KAY — Manchester  
MR. NEWTON — Mail Order  
MR. TAIT — Shipping Office  
MR. LE FEVRE — Sporting Goods  
Captain and Handicapper.

Golf days were a regular feature of Myers's sporting calendar. Myer store news, 16 July 1938.

Golf had equally enthusiastic players. The monthly magazine *Golf in Australia* sold for 1s and claimed to represent 50 000 golfers. Its January issue featured advertisements for electric refrigerators, radiograms, cars, whisky, travel, golf gear, ski equipment and P & O cruises, suggesting that golfers had substantial incomes. Royal Canberra Golf Club had the prime minister, J.A. Lyons, as its new president; with an annual membership fee of £5 10s and entrance fee of £3 it was not for the poor. In western Victoria the Boort Golf Club was less expensive: Boort charged its 55 members a weekly entrance fee, green fees of 1s a round and annual membership of £1 1s for men and 12s 6d for women. It had an eighteen-hole course, whereas many neighbouring towns could manage only nine or twelve, but most courses in this part of the country were 'pretty rough'. They had to be net fenced to stop rabbits digging on the fairways, and they were very dry, with sand scrapes for putting, no sand traps or bunkers, and plenty of rough areas. Kalgoorlie's golf 'greens' were levelled areas of red clay beyond Lamington Heights, north of the town. A small group had formed the Kalgoorlie club. Edward Miller, a 23-year-old, remembers them as 'professional people, the bank and mine managers, people of that sort'. The course was built in the Lamington area, he believed, because the people living there 'held managerial positions or executive positions and were able to afford the time and money to play golf'.





King's School magazine,  
Sydney 1938.

Cricket was The Don. Don Bradman, the wonder boy from Bowral, had broken so many cricket records that commentators had run out of superlatives. On 3 January, batting for South Australia in a Sheffield Shield match against Victoria, he passed Clem Hill's record aggregate of 17 221 runs in first class cricket. Just before that he had beaten Hill's record aggregate of 6274 runs in Sheffield Shield cricket, and eight days later he became the only player to score two centuries in a match twice in Sheffield Shield competition.

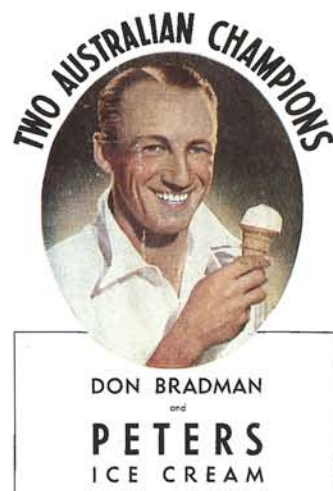
Bradman had become the greatest single sporting drawcard in Australian history. In the 1937–38 season 72 per cent of Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) revenue from Shield matches came from visits by the South Australians under Bradman. Takings from the South Australian matches were more than ten times higher than from the matches against Victoria, traditionally the premier fixtures of the Shield season. The SCG was central enough for city workers to hear which team was batting, and to hurry out to the ground if Bradman was in, and if they had no wireless within earshot, people wondering whether to go would gather outside Bert Oldfield's and Alan Kippax's sport stores in the city to watch the scores posted in the windows.

Social cricketers also came to the sesquicentenary. The New South Wales Railways Institute organised an interstate cricket carnival at the SCG on 24 February, but to judge from the lager on the lunch menu, the railwaymen took the game less seriously than Sheffield Shielders. The commissioner for railways was patron of the carnival, and in a souvenir program commemorating it, he proclaimed the management's belief in 'the value of organised sporting activities' and 'their assistance in the maintenance of that "team spirit" which plays such an important part throughout the Service'.

This view had been expressed by the establishment of a Railways Sports Ground near Sydenham station in Sydney. It had full-sized football and cricket fields, two bowling greens and a number of tennis courts. Grandstand accommodation was being built for 1000 spectators. Many private firms also subsidised sport for employees, providing equipment, clothing and transport, giving time off, and sometimes even building facilities. In the New South Wales Junior District Cricket Association competition, William Arnott, the biscuit makers, Tooheys the brewers, Hotpoint, Lustre Hosiery, Lever Bros and many other businesses fielded teams.



The sesquicentenary also provided a venue for newer sports. The Australian speedway championships were held at the Sydney showground, and on 9 January a crowd of 32 000 cheered Australia's third successive motorcycle speedway test match win over England and the United States. More than 12 000 people attended the world championship midget car races at the sportsground in April. Speedway



*Don Bradman, Australia's most popular sporting hero, earned extra income by lending the magic of his name to advertising campaigns. British empire games of 1938 souvenir programme.*





*'The thrills and spills of speedway racing made an exciting Saturday night out, offering the crowd a glimpse of danger. Some spectators got more than they bargained for. In June one adult and two children were killed at Penrith in the worst tragedy on an Australian speedway. The crowd ignored stewards and climbed over the safety barriers. The press demanded a full enquiry and extension of government control to speedway racing.'* SMH, 7 Mar and 15 June 1938.

MITCHELL LIBRARY

racing was popular, but opponents worried about its commercialism and professionalism and recklessness. The magazine *Australian cycling and motor cycling* replied that many of the 8000 motorcyclists in clubs around Australia would provide a mobile force for national defence should the need arise.

The premier event in Australian motor racing, the Australian Grand Prix, had been launched only ten years before at Phillip Island, 130 kilometres from Melbourne. In 1938 a new circuit was opened at Mount Panorama near Bathurst, 200 kilometres west of Sydney. That Easter 30 000 people flocked there to watch the grand prix. Of 31 starters the limit car was South Australian Ron Uffindell's tiny aluminium-bodied Austin 7, which provoked smiles when he took it to the line. Uffindell had 34 minutes start on the scratchman, Englishman Peter Whitehead, but the Englishman finished first in the 240-kilometre event, averaging 112 kilometres an hour in his British-built car. He drove without a helmet, reputedly because he wanted to hear the beat of his supercharged 1.5 litre engine, and covered the last five laps without a windscreen. The crowd cheered itself hoarse as Whitehead passed one car after another, and the city fathers were so pleased with the number of visitors that they voted to seal the race surface at a cost of £1200.



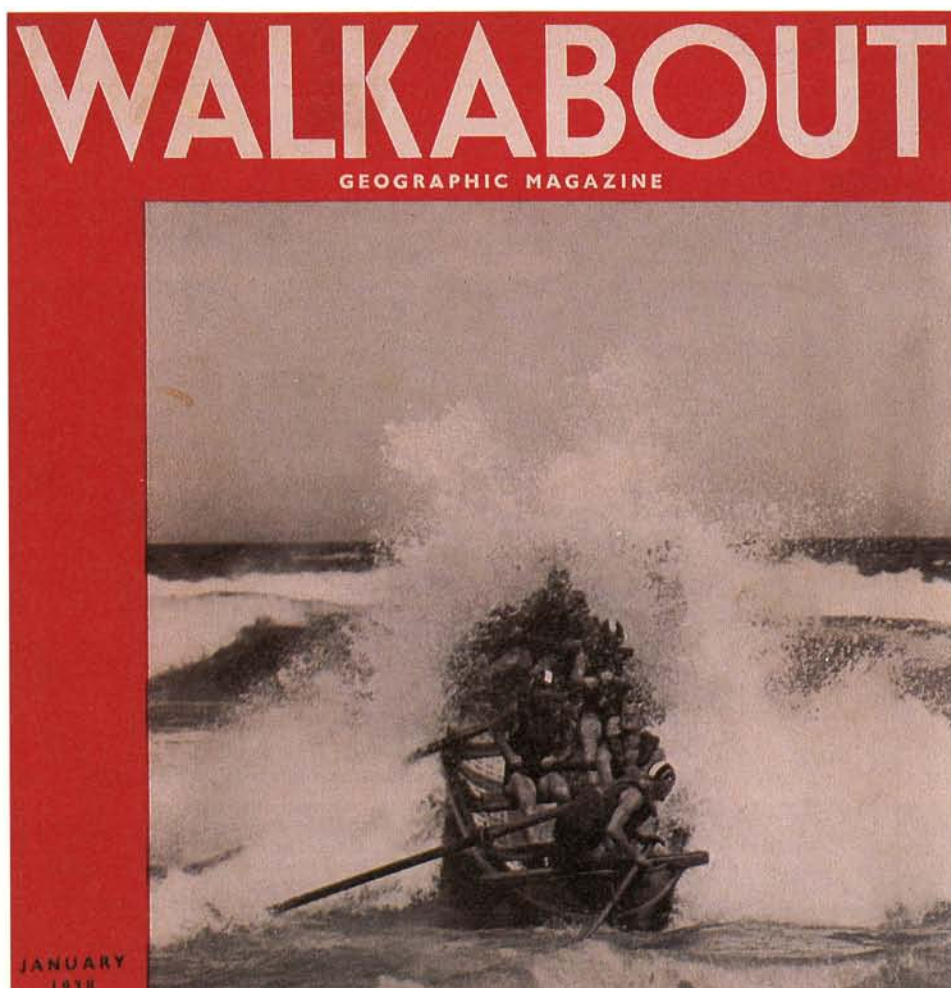
At Bondi beach on 19 February a characteristically Australian event was held to mark the sesquicentenary: a surf carnival. The New South Wales Government Tourist Bureau and the Australian National Travel Association requested the carnival as a show for the many overseas visitors then in Sydney, and the world-renowned James Fitzpatrick filmed it for one of the travelogues. Surf lifesavers captured the national imagination, for the surf symbolised the urban frontier of danger, tinged with glamour.

Danger there certainly was. On the first weekend in January record numbers of holidaymakers crowded Sydney's beaches—the Sunday crowd at Bondi was estimated at 36 000—and heavy seas kept lifesavers busy. They made 40 rescues at Bondi, 20 at Manly and 30 at Maroubra, most of them by belt and line because their surfboats kept capsizing. On Sunday 6 February four people drowned and scores of others were rescued in the last stages of exhaustion when nearly 200 surfers were swept out from Bondi. The backwash of huge seas, described by eyewitnesses as 'three tremendous waves in quick succession, like tidal waves', caught the swimmers by surprise. Nearly seventy rescuers used surf boats, skis, belts and lines, or swam out unaided into the raging surf to save drowning people. But for the fact that a relief surf patrol had arrived and a number of club members were about to engage in a race, many more lives would have been lost. Bondi beach clubhouse resembled a casualty ward. 'One of the most extraordinary features of the tragedy', according to one observer,

was that nearly all the women who were in difficulties remained calm, whereas men screamed and begged to be saved. Many of the beltmen were seized by men they had gone to rescue ... [one] said that when he reached a group who were among those farthest out from shore five men seized him and refused to let go. Some of the men seemed to go mad ... I hit the man who had me round the neck ... I had to do it.

Of such heroic stuff was the lifesaving legend made. There were a few women's clubs, notably in Perth, but it was a male legend. The bronzed lifesaver, with his magnificent physique and great courage in the face of raging seas and man-eating





*Front cover of Walkabout, Jan 1938.*

*Commemorative sticker issued to mark the British Empire Games.*

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS



sharks, became an inheritor of the Anzac tradition. Yet 21-year-old Dorothy McEwan of Newcastle 'would never talk to the lifesavers, because they were a whole lot of rude, beer-drinking, swearing, womanising lads'.



The Empire Games were held in February and March. On 11 January a rush for games tickets produced 'the heaviest one day's booking known in Sydney for any sport or amusement'. There were 135 000 people at the games, 80 000 watching four days of athletics at the SCG, 25 000 at the North Sydney Olympic Pool over three nights and one afternoon, 20 000 at two nights of cycling at Henson Park, 8000 at Rushcutters Bay stadium for the boxing and wrestling, and 2000 beside the Nepean River at Penrith for the rowing. Official attendance figures omit those who used the harbour bridge as a grandstand to watch the swimming and diving at North Sydney.

The games opened on 5 February. Rockets were fired, balloons and pigeons released, a choir of a thousand sang 'God save the King' and 600 athletes marched past. The pigeons were hardly out of sight before controversy broke out. In the semifinal of the women's 100-yard sprint, Thelma Peake from Queensland was disqualified for breaking twice. She was dismayed, believing that the runners had



Commemorative sticker  
issued to mark the British  
Empire Games.

BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS



been recalled the first time not because she had broken but because a javelin had landed near the track. 'Her disappointment must have been obvious to the crowd', P. Derriman has remarked in his history of the SCG, 'for immediately the official who disqualified her became the subject of prolonged barracking. He was even counted out—"one, two, three, four ..." in the way ... Harold Larwood had been counted out by the Hill five years before'.

These games produced a new heroine, the West Australian, Decima Norman. The press described her as a most unlikely champion: 29 years old, an age when sprinters were normally considered past it, she had not taken part in open competition until 1937 and had never proved herself in international company. Although she had wanted to try out for the 1936 olympics there had been no women's athletic association in the west to test her, so she had abandoned her olympic hopes and set about establishing in Perth a Women's Athletics Association. She was a secretary in a Perth radio firm, only 155 centimetres and slightly built. When she ran she buried her head between hunched shoulders and flayed her arms. One reporter who watched her first appearance at the games said she looked the least likely of the seventeen women sprinters to win.

But win she did, five times. She won the 100 yards, equalling the games record, the 220 yards, the broad jump in a new games record, and she was a member of two winning relay teams. Her tally of gold medals has never been equalled. When she won her third medal the SCG crowd gave her an ovation worthy of Bradman. To the *Sydney Morning Herald* Decima represented 'the athletic prowess of modern woman'.

Decima Norman in full flight.  
This 'most unlikely champion'  
became 'Australia's new  
sporting idol' during the  
Empire Games. Sydney  
photographer Max Dupain  
caught her in the long jump.  
'Besides her ability as an  
athlete, she is an interstate  
hockey player, a surf lifesaver,  
a tennis player, and a most  
competent business woman',  
noted the Home,  
1 Mar 1938.







King's School magazine,  
Sydney 1938.



Empire Games, Sydney,  
1938. Start of the 880-yard  
final.

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

The *Women's weekly* portrayed women athletes more in terms of their glamour than of their sporting achievements. 'A trip across the world', readers were told, 'a wardrobe of beautifully tailored sports clothes, the acclamation of admiring crowds, an invitation list as crowded as a film star's. That is the reward of these Empire Games girls for their prowess in sport'. In a feature on the West Australian swimmer Evelyn de Lacy, who won the 110 yards freestyle, the *Weekly* reported her romance and secret engagement and noted that the games were to be the final event in her swimming career. 'Five years of championship swimming is enough for any girl', Evelyn was quoted as saying:

The years of striving to reach championship standard are a tremendous thrill ... Though I prefer an outdoors life and am not very fond of dancing, at the same time I can't help being a bit envious of girls who have a good time, go to parties, and wear pretty clothes. A champion swimmer has not much time for pretty clothes or opportunity for wearing them. Yes, I know we all look very fit and healthy, but we cannot do much about the care of our complexions or about keeping our hair really nice. Now that I have had my swimming career, I want a really feminine, glamorous job. So I am planning to study beauty culture.

At the close of the games the New South Wales minister for Labour and Industry, J.M. Dunningham, prophesied that the Olympic Games would bring about the ultimate degradation of sport because they had become commercialised, whereas the Empire Games could do something of lasting benefit to the empire. Countries like Germany and Japan were betraying the sporting ideal by subsidising athletes, while the British Empire upheld that older sporting ideal in which sport was a world of its own, far removed from politics. How sport might both benefit the empire and remain non-political, Dunningham did not explain.



Joan Cleland, a student from Adelaide University, tackles her opponent from the University of Tasmania in an Inter-Varsity hockey carnival match on 16 August at Hobart. Away matches gave many students their first taste of interstate travel. They went by rail 'second class, no sleeper, eight to a carriage. It was often a very cold and tiring journey but great fun. If possible the two smallest were persuaded to sleep in the luggage racks which, with two on the floor and two on each seat allowed everyone to stretch out their legs, but even so sleep was intermittent'.

J. PATON, 1938 COLLECTION



King's School magazine,  
Sydney 1938.



The Nedlands Tennis Club built a new clubhouse in 1938, designed by architects Harold Crantz and Neil Perkins. Formed in 1925, the club had fourteen courts by 1938. *West Australian*, 14 June 1938.



Major sports produced major stars. The tennis players of the Davis Cup team, John Bromwich, Adrian Quist, Len Schwarz and Harry Hopman, were household names, and crowds of 10–12 000 went to Kooyong in Melbourne and White City in Sydney for big matches like the three-day triangular match between Australia, Germany and the United States. The women's team Thelma Coyne, Nancy Wynne, D. Stevenson and Nell Hopman, was less well known, but in 1938 the Lawn Tennis Association of Australia did send them to Britain, France, Germany and the United States. Its president, Norman Brookes, told the press, 'we have promised to send a team, and we owe it to our women players to do so. It is only fair that we should extend to our women players the same privilege as we have given our Davis Cup men'.

Despite its origins on private courts in large suburban gardens, tennis had become a game played by all classes on a variety of surfaces. Tens of thousands of Australians played some form of competition tennis (there were 36 000 registered hardcourt tennis players in Sydney alone), and many more played 'social tennis'. An Easter tennis tournament was a regular fixture in towns across Australia.



'A day in the life of Hubert Opperman, cyclist.' Pix, 1938.

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

Cycling also had an enthusiastic popular following and well-known stars. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* cycling expert wrote: 'there are probably a million cyclists in N.S.W. today and one of the finest features of this development is the enthusiasm with which the fair sex has once more taken up really practical cycling'. Each state had a Wheelmen's Association and 225 clubs were affiliated to the federal professional cycling authority. A further 146 clubs were affiliated to the Amateur Cyclists' Association of Australia, and both track and road racing had strong followings. Two Victorian road cyclists broke records. In December Hubert Opperman, whose name became synonymous with the Malvern Star bike which he rode and advertised, completed the world's fastest 1600 kilometres, riding from Adelaide to Sydney in two days, 18 hours and 16 minutes. Crowds along the way followed his ride, and he received a presentation at Luna Park. Ozzie Nicholson spent all 1937 in the saddle, and on New Year's Eve regained for Australia the world's twelve-month continuous cycling record. At the finish more than 30 000 people cheered him to the dais. His distance, 102 412.4 km, was announced.

Women's cycle races were common in country and city. The *Referee* reported a record-breaking ride from Melbourne to Nyah, 375 kilometres, by Mrs Valda Unthank who averaged more than 24 kilometres an hour in a night ride and completed the distance in 15 hours, 28 minutes and 28.6 seconds. Later in the year she broke records for riding from Adelaide to Melbourne and from Launceston





*Former Australian champion tennis player V. McGrath at White City, Sydney, July 1938.*

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS

*Cyclists competing in the Empire Games at Centennial Park. E. Duncan Gray won the 1000 m sprint cycling event and R. Porter the 1000 m time trial.*

MAGAZINE PROMOTIONS







By 1938, when the Ski Club of Australia celebrated its eighteenth anniversary, snow skiing was attracting an increasing number of devotees. Front cover by Virgil (O'Reilly). Australian women's weekly, 4 June 1938.



In the week before the Melbourne Cup War Cry, the official weekly newspaper of the Salvation Army, published this disapproving comment on the forthcoming race. War Cry, 29 Oct 1938.

to Burnie and back. She and another woman champion, Joyce Barry, were, said the weekly *Referee*,

both charming feminine types who look as if a round of golf would be their most strenuous pastime ... It seems incredible that they should possess the stamina, endurance and courage to do what they've done ... but there it is.



The popularity of some sports was enhanced by gambling. Horseracing attracted large crowds to courses and uncountable numbers of people who tuned in to the races at home and bet illegally with their local starting price (SP) bookies. 'In every city on race days', an historian of horse racing has observed,

men with silver coins jangling in their pockets could be seen darting in and out of houses and up and down lanes, shoving scribbled bets into their pockets and reporting back to base just before races started. Police made sporadic attempts to catch the S.P. operators, but the cockatoos or look-out men manning vantage points on verandahs or forks in the streets invariably tipped off their base before raids occurred. You could bet in threepences with these men and sit back in your own living room with a beer in your hand listening to the lively accounts of how your fancy ran.

A breed of race broadcasters emerged, men who could describe a race at a furious pace while maintaining an equally rapid flow of quips and colourful phrases.

On Melbourne Cup day even the country's rulers caught the racing fever. In Canberra federal cabinet paused in its discussion of vital national defence problems to conduct a sweep on the Cup. In Sydney there were unprecedented delays as afternoon trams stopped at 3.30 near wireless shops. On outback stations jackeroos came back early from the paddocks to hear the race called. Overseas liners delayed departure so that passengers could see the race, and Royal Australian Navy ships happened to be anchored in Port Phillip Bay on Cup day. At Flemington racecourse 93 446 people attended the Cup meeting. The *Argus* reported,

Rain vied with sun. Fur coats and floral frocks were delightfully incongruous. Goloshes and gossamer raincoats were a winning double. The men clung to felt-hatted uniformity save where the noble 'stove-pipe' reared to proclaim that this indeed was an occasion.

As usual a New Zealand horse, Catalogue, won, an aged gelding and an outsider, starting at 25 to one. 'Cup Win Triumph for Two Women' ran a headline the next day. 'Eight Year Old Catalogue Beats the Champions.' If Victoria's racing laws had allowed women trainers, Flemington would have seen two women, the owner Mrs A. Jamieson and trainer Mrs A.W. McDonald, leading in the winner. But Mrs McDonald, who trained Catalogue in New Zealand, had stayed at home, sending the horse in the care of her husband. Mrs Jamieson had been confident that Catalogue could become the first eight-year-old to win the Cup. 'As soon as the bookmakers' charts began to arrive in New Zealand', she said, 'I backed him. They had him at 80/1, which was far too long, and I didn't like taking advantage of them. But I suppose they know their own business best'.

The social exclusiveness of racing and the expense of owning and training horses were so great that an alternative horse sport, night trotting, had developed after the war. Fostered mainly by small businessmen, it could be entered more cheaply than racing and was patronised by a different clientele. By 1938 it was flourishing



at Wayville in Adelaide and Gloucester Park in Perth, with crowds of 20–30 000 every Saturday night. Promoted as 'The People's Sport', it attracted drapers, butchers, chemists, hotel proprietors and bootmakers as promoters and owners. Working men went to 'the trots', but they also had an alternative in 'the dogs'. "Poor Man's Sport" sweeps all classes and vies with horse-racing for popularity", proclaimed a *Pix* writer, and at dawn and dusk in working-class districts around Australia, wherever mechanical coursing tracks had been laid, men and women could be seen exercising and being exercised by large, lean hounds.

**FIXTURES FOR SEASON 1938**

**MELBOURNE BITTER**

**JUNE 18**  
Northcote v Prahran  
Cowell v Pt. Melb.  
Sham v Preston  
Coburg v Brighton  
W'town v Brunswick  
Oakleigh v Yarraville

**JUNE 25**  
Prahran v Pt. Melb.  
Northcote v Preston  
Sham v Brighton  
Coburg v Brunswick  
W'town v Yarraville  
Oakleigh v Cowell

**JULY 2**  
Preston v Prahran  
Brighton v Northcote  
Brunswick v Sham  
Yarraville v Coburg  
Cowell v W'town  
Pt. Melb. v Oakleigh

**JULY 9**  
Prahran v Oakleigh  
Northcote v W'town  
Sham v Coburg  
Brunswick v Pt. Melb.  
Brighton v Yarraville  
Preston v Cowell

**JULY 16**  
Coburg v Northcote  
W'town v Prahran  
Cowell v Brighton  
Oakleigh v Preston  
Pt. Melb. v Sham  
Yarraville v W'wick

**JULY 23**  
Prahran v Coburg  
Northcote v Sham  
Yarraville v Pt. Melb.  
Preston v W'town  
Brighton v Oakleigh  
Brunswick v Cowell

**SECOND ROUND**  
July 30; Aug. 6, 13,  
20—Semi-final and  
Final Matches.  
Grounds to be ar-  
ranged.

**'NONE BETTER'**

**FOSTER'S LAGER**

**1938**

**FOOTBALL FIXTURES**

THE SPECIALTY PRESS PTY. LTD.

Victorian Football Association  
fixtures for the season.  
BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS

You could earn 'a bob' from sport, it was said, if you were good enough, and a lot of people were trying. Ern left school in Melbourne at twelve to become a footballer, playing Australian Rules for Yellow Cabs on Wednesday afternoons, for Havelocks on Saturday mornings and for Coburg, a Victorian Football Association (VFA) club, on Saturday afternoons. Then the Victorian Football League (VFL) club, Melbourne, 'sent a couple of fellows down to see me. They were going to get me a job at Shell Oil, but when Fitzroy [another VFL club] heard about it they came after me too ... through my football I got a job at John Stone's timber yard'.

Australian Rules was a major sport in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania, and attracted enormous crowds in Melbourne. Just under 97 000 people, a crowd larger than that at Flemington for the Cup, packed into the Melbourne Cricket Ground to see the grand final between Collingwood and Carlton. When the gates closed thousands were still trying to break in through the members' entrance; and when about 10 000 people spilled on to the playing area near the scoreboard, the police were powerless to stop them. The crowd saw Carlton win its first premiership since 1915.

Victoria had 1500 Rules clubs, involving 50 000 players, 25 000 officials and 500 000 supporters. The VFL and VFA drew the big crowds, but the Metropolitan Amateur Association fielded 40 teams, the Country League had 30 000 players, and the Victorian Junior Football Union, the Wednesday Afternoon Football League and the Saturday Morning Industrial Football Association also had many supporters. 'Soapy' Vallenge, a Carlton champion, earned at least £10 a week from his footy. Yet he would have played for nothing, and to play, he said, he would have 'eaten a football, stewed or boiled, and then sucked the laces for dessert'.

Rugby League, the dominant code of football in New South Wales and Queensland, did not draw such huge crowds. In Sydney, more than 20 000 fans

## FOOTBALL REVOLUTIONISED

For years there has been a drastic ban on throwing the ball in Australian rules football. Now the Victorian Football Association, which has broken away from the Victorian Football League, proposes to allow throwing, within limits, in the belief that it will improve the game.

First experiments with the new rule have created a favorable impression, and the "Globe's" football authority, H. A. de Lacy, believes it will open up a new era in football.

Outstanding benefits are almost complete elimination of the holding-the-man holding-the-ball rule with all its contentious train, exclusion of all argument about the flick pass, and more open play and virtually a non-stop game.

In a most interesting discussion on the reform, Mr. de Lacy says that throwing will revolutionise the Australian code. Read his special article in today's

## SPORTING GLOBE

Epson and Valley reviews  
Sydney moves Plans  
for Ajax Form for Caul-  
field and Ascot are in

## TODAY'S GLOBE

Adelaide Advertiser,  
30 Mar 1938.



went to the final at the SCG to see Canterbury–Bankstown, youngest of the eight clubs, defeat the glamour side Eastern Suburbs, which had won three successive premierships during the thirties and had a line-up studded with internationals. In contrast, Canterbury–Bankstown succeeded by drawing heavily from its junior league and, after a dismal first season in 1935, by attracting country players to the city. The formula, by succeeding, promised to strengthen links between the premier competition and the sport generally.



Australia's obsession with sport had sometimes managed to distract the country from the social and economic miseries of a decade of depression, and as the year closed Sydney's sporting weekly, the *Referee*, was confident that sport would play an equally important part during the uncertain times ahead. The paper looked forward to a boom year for Australian sport, despite fears about what was happening on the other side of the world.

As the military movement insists on fitness in the man, it will run in unison with all that is best in sport. Therefore, from the sportsman's standpoint, there is a silver lining to clouds on the international horizon.

Australians who could write like that were at once deeply serious about sport and—despite the memories of 1914–18—innocent, even naïve, about war.



## THE ASHES

BRIAN STODDART



*Thousands of Australians listened to the ABC radio cricket commentaries, which brought ball-by-ball descriptions of Test Matches played in England. Commentator Victor Richardson, Test player, tells listeners 'He's out'. Pix, 23 July 1938.*

Described by *Wisden*, the cricketer's bible, as a team with 'happy spirit', the 1938 Australians went to England, won 15 of their 30 first class matches, and retained the Ashes by drawing a test series which produced some of the most magnificent cricket in the game's history. Each side won once: Australia at Headingley in Leeds, England at the Oval in London. For England, Len Hutton established a world record test score of 364 in the final test; Eddie Paynter (216 not out at Trent Bridge) and the captain, Walter Hammond (240 at Lord's) scored double centuries. For Australia, Stan McCabe played one of the great test innings, scoring 232 at Trent Bridge, and Bill Brown made 206 not out at Lord's. There were nine other centuries, and 4780 runs scored in just sixteen days of test cricket. Yet despite this batting onslaught there was some fine bowling. The fast bowler Ken Farnes took seventeen wickets for England, and was well supported by Hedley Verity, one of cricket's great slow-medium left arm bowlers, who captured fourteen. For Australia the legendary legspinner Bill O'Reilly took 22 wickets, and left arm slow bowler 'Chuck' Fleetwood-Smith fourteen.

Outshining them all was Don Bradman. The Australian captain reached 1000 runs in May, a rare cricket feat, during a century against Hampshire, and 2000 during a century against Nottinghamshire. England braced for his onslaught from the first game of the tour—he scored 258 against Worcestershire, repeating against that hapless county his double centuries of both the 1930 and 1934 tours. During the tests he scored three centuries even though he did not bat in the last test because



of an ankle injury. He averaged 108.5 in the tests and 115.7 in other first class games, scoring three double centuries and ten centuries in just 26 innings. 'One did not detect any waning of his powers', *Wisden* reported.

Bradman also continued at the centre of controversy off the field. In 1930 he had run foul of the Australian Cricket Board of Control for writing about that tour, and his tour bonus was cut. Now the issue was whether his wife could join him when the test matches had finished. The board first refused permission, then bowed to public and private pressure by allowing all wives the chance to join their husbands. No individual, however great, was to be given privileges which might place him above the game—or the board.

Bradman was always willing to confront authorities over the needs of his players. Almost all of them needed to earn money outside their sport; love of cricket alone could not keep them in the game. Slowly the board was giving way on this issue, partly because by 1938 its members realised that cricket needed Bradman more than Bradman needed cricket. Not everyone in England and Australia liked the change, believing that 'powerful commercial interests were watching for every opportunity to increase their profits by spreading commercialised sport'. Bradman's endorsement of a brand of trousers cannot have allayed their concern.

On the field Bradman convinced all but the most diehard English critics that he could play under any conditions, not just on good wickets in favourable circumstances. At the end of the 1930 tour there had been a whisper that he did not relish fast, short-pitched bowling. That led to the infamous 1932–33 bodyline series and, though he was cut down, Bradman did not fail. It was also thought that he did not like sticky, turning wickets. But at Leeds in 1938 he scored 103 of his team's 242, setting up the victory which ensured that Australia kept the Ashes. The critics were silenced.

Bradman's achievements, and those of other players, became front page and radio news. When he first led his team into London, Bradman broadcast a message



*Don Bradman 'gave the little inmates the thrill of their lives' when he visited the Perth Children's Hospital on Saturday 19 March and played with them on the lawn. Adelaide News, 22 Mar 1938.*

*Don Bradman and Stan McCabe resume their innings with the Australian XI in Perth in March. The Australian XI beat Western Australia by an innings and 126 runs.*

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN  
GOVERNMENT PRINTER





throughout the empire extolling the social virtues of cricket. The game was fast establishing itself as a staple of radio. By the time the teams met in the first test, well over one million sets were licensed in Australia, all stations reported the matches, many printed special souvenir programs for the tour, and commentators became household names during the long winter nights. Just four years earlier 'synthetic' calls 'studio reconstructions based on telegrams' had been thought marvellous. Now much of the coverage was live, a 1938 miracle. The boom in sports broadcasting was paralleled by a fierce debate about its social value. Some people wrote to newspapers lamenting the discrimination against 'decent' music in favour of cricket. Most who could, listened.

There were more serious matters. In the week before the team's departure early in March, the visit of an Italian warship to Adelaide was marked by hostile demonstrations, and there were reports from Germany that the 1936 olympic village was now an infantry school. The president of the Victorian Cricket Association, Canon Ernest Hughes, expressed the hope that Hitler would 'play the game' in the same spirit as would the Australian team, and in reply Bradman noted that although the tour was a sporting mission, great public enthusiasm and hope made it far more significant. A crowd of over 5000 farewelled the team's ship in Melbourne. A week later German troops were in Vienna.

Throughout the tour cricket and politics jostled for headlines. It was as if an Australian tour of England was an assurance of normality, not merely for the nations directly involved, but for cricket lovers throughout the empire. While Bradman flayed the Worcestershire attack it was perhaps easier to ignore Oswald Mosley's fascists demonstrating in London and to forget that in Germany Gottfried von Cramm, the great German Davis Cup tennis player, was in gaol. News that Bradman had reached his thousand in May was perhaps some antidote to reports of Japanese air raids in southern China and tension over Hitler's attitudes towards Czechoslovakia. While he was making his match-winning century at Headingley, at Villers-Bretonneux in France King George VI was unveiling a memorial to men of the AIF who had fallen on the western front during the Great War. As the Australian team set off for home riots were flaring in the Sudetenland, General Franco was preparing his final victories in Spain and Neville Chamberlain was in Munich on his peace mission. In summing up the tour the *Melbourne Argus* was as much seeking reassurance as stating fact when it declared cricket 'a power, a bond with England'.

*Melbourne Argus,*  
9 Mar 1938.



*Melbourne Argus,*  
22 Apr 1938.

## FAR FROM THE CROWD

DON DICKSON

Most Australians knew Darwin as the distant victim of a severe cyclone in 1937 and the landfall for courageous airmen and airwomen crossing the Timor Sea. It housed the men maintaining the British Australian Telegraph Company's cable link with the world, and was home for a few public servants and an army garrison slowly being strengthened. As we have seen in chapter 2, these Europeans headed a colonial hierarchy: beneath their own ranks were Japanese pearlers, Chinese merchants, Asian labourers, 'coloureds'—part-Aboriginal people—and a large Aboriginal population. It was a racial mixture unusual in Australia.

Isolation, size, and perceptions of status and race all affected the sport Darwin played. The most popular game was Australian Rules football, brought north from Adelaide and Melbourne by early administrative staff and settlers. Europeans also played golf and tennis; a few played cricket or hockey or went rifle shooting. Only



schoolchildren or adults at holiday picnics engaged in athletics. The gaming crowd watched occasional boxing bouts in the Star picture theatre and regularly followed the horses in southern cities by wireless.

Who played what was governed by occupational status. Golf, and to a lesser extent cricket and tennis, were played by people in better paid occupations such as banking, the government service excluding Works and Railways, the cable company, commerce and medicine. Such people also ran clubs which accepted members from lower occupational groups. Clerks and shop assistants, Railways and Works men, labourers and the unemployed played football, and occasionally cricket and tennis. Army men played most sports, while women could play golf (as associates) or tennis. Chinese, Filipinos and some coloureds occasionally played soccer, and coloured teams competed at football. Aborigines played no white sport, although they could watch football.

Few of Darwin's residents were sports enthusiasts. For the town's 3184 full blood Aborigines and 737 'Asiatics', mainly Australian-born Chinese, sport was one more area of cultural estrangement. Among just over 1900 whites there were only about 300 players and 150 followers of the various sports, though others participated in events held on holiday picnics. In January the Northern Territory Football League ran an Anniversary Day sports; in July the North Australian Workers' Union organised a Labour Day picnic; in September the Railway Picnic Day was held. All were a mixture of energy, tomfoolery and momentary dedication to winning. Events included running (maximum 75 yards), jumping, football kicking, throwing at a wicket, ladies' naildriving, stepping the distance, guessing the height of a pole and wheelbarrow races. The railway picnic had the exciting novelty of an Adelaide River venue 120 kilometres 'down the track', and thus a trip by motor car or special train. More than fifty cars made the journey, 'very few' of which broke down. Many people went to renew friendships or relieve boredom, and the day 'went off ... like champagne'. As well as the standard frolics there was an 'Old Buffers Race', an 'Old Bufferesses Race', and games and feasts of lollies, peanuts and toys for the children. The return rail trip was in bright moonlight, which moved one reporter to comment on a scene 'exhilarating in its beauty'.

At the Anniversary Day sports a procession of floats provided its own commentary. One precipitated racial annoyance. A 'Wacko Maroo', a make-believe Japanese pearling lugger crewed by Australian men, proceeded with its captain clutching a 'lubra' and plying 'her' with grog, only to be captured by an equally make-believe patrol boat, Larrikin: 'a few bursts of gunfire first skittled their mast, then their morale'. Spectators and players laughed but the Darwin Japanese Society lodged a diplomatic protest which had to be handled tactfully by the administrator, C.L.A. Abbott.

The golfing season began slowly. In March, April and May, the course was repaired after the ravages of the wet season, separate annual general meetings were held for members and associates, and trophies for the previous season's competitions were presented. The course was on a splendid site out of town, beside the sea at Fannie Bay. The first match was on the King's Birthday holiday, Monday 13 June, when 25 pairs returned cards for a mixed foursome over nine holes. Thereafter, as in past years, women played on Thursdays, mixed pairs on Saturdays, members on Sundays.

The Darwin Golf Club, alone among sporting groups, had its own clubhouse, a galvanised iron single room with a bar at one end. It was there because the club had been able to find guarantors to fund its construction. Only the wealthy played golf: annual fees of £25 when the Darwin basic wage was 16s 6d a day ensured that, and players were reminded publicly at the beginning of the season that



competition games were open to fee-paying members only. The clubhouse was a happy place. After a day of undistinguished golf in July, a local wit remarked that the high scores could be lent to Don Bradman, who seemed to be needing them in England. Bradman, playing in the fourth test, thereupon scored a century.

Golf had no public following, but many golfers also played tennis and followed football. Tennis was as respectable as golf, but less exclusive. The garrison had a team, and so did the Anglican, Catholic and Methodist churches. The game and its social contacts attracted people who might have had little to say to each other.

Cricket attracted few people, socially or otherwise: Darwin was too hot. Occasionally players' friends or wives or sweethearts helped score or yarned in the shade, but usually the players were on their own. The Garrison eleven and two town teams, Wanderers and Palmerston, played an unequal competition on the concrete pitch of the oval. Garrison won six of its seven matches, most of them easily. As if to confirm the game's mystery, its one defeat was Palmerston's solitary victory in the competition. The only interesting match, played on a September Sunday outside the competition, was described without irony as 'one of the most exciting matches ever played on the Oval'. Garrison played a team of the best Wanderers and Palmerston players and were beaten by only three runs. By then interest in the official competition had withered. In the first month of play, July, five matches were played, in August three, in September two, and in October only one. In the 'how out' column for the last match, three players were marked 'absent'.

'Big cricket' was another thing altogether. Darwin followed the battle for the Ashes closely. The *Northern Standard* gave the contests in England more than twice the space it gave local teams. Anything about Bradman was news: his fight to have wives of players join them in England after the final test, the argument over his sportsmanship in the match against Surrey, his poor scores and his centuries, an injury to his leg and his adamant denial that he might be persuaded to remain in England. The ABC cricket broadcasts, live from England for the first time, kept many 'listening in', and those who followed the bowling of Fleetwood-Smith and O'Reilly and the batting of 'young Hassett of Victoria' in the fourth test considered it, so a Darwin writer claimed, 'one of the epoch-making events of big cricket'.

Australian Rules football, controlled by the Northern Territory Football League (NTFL), boasted the greatest number of players and officials and the most public support of any game. During the season the local newspaper ran team lists, match descriptions, a football gossip section, reports of weekly meetings of the NTFL and many letters to the editor about football. The finals drew more than 200 spectators, and for many people the dry season was made desolate by football's absence. Only the NTFL could pay or provide labour for the grandstand, dressing rooms and most other improvements to Darwin oval, the only public recreation ground in the town. The oval was laid out near the town centre, on a strip of parkland with a scarp overlooking the waters of Port Darwin. It had been regraded and enlarged for the 1937-38 season, but there was no turf, and roughly-mown grass covered a pebble-strewn, porous red soil. Even in the wet season a fierce sun could bake it hard enough to rasp the skin from falling players. An iron-roofed grandstand had no weather protection from back or sides, but there were new dressing sheds. Players now had the luxury of lavatories and two showers for each team room, serviced by water from a windmill-filled overhead tank. To the disappointment of eager boys, a new six-metre wire fence prevented footballs from falling into the trees or to the rocks and sea below.

In the world of Australian Rules there was a deep-seated animosity between the Buffaloes and the Waratahs football clubs. It had to do with race. Everyone knew what Don Bonson, a star Buffaloes player meant when he spoke of 'the old ugly





King's School magazine,  
Sydney 1938.

head of the cobra ... colour'. The competition had only just recovered from a decade of racial turbulence. A coloured team had walked off in disgust at biased umpiring in 1926, and all coloureds were then excluded from the league for three years. When the league had almost collapsed without them, they were readmitted but limited to six per team. Then in 1933 coloureds were again excluded from one club because army players had become available, and two years later Waratahs refused to play with a coloured umpire or without an umpire of their choice. The bitterness this caused continued into the following season when two rival leagues were formed, one with all white players, the other mixed. But there were too few players, and in 1936–37 the NTFL had quietly resumed as the sole controlling body of a competition between three clubs, Buffaloes, Garrison and Waratahs. Waratahs had been formed in 1914 and came from the government service, the cable company and the banks; they were all white and proud of it. The Garrison team, formed as recently as 1936, relied on young privates and corporals, solidly built but not always well schooled in the rules. They 'just barged through', said a reporter after one of their games, and left 'bodies strewn all over the place'. They too were all white, although not hostile to players of other races. The Buffaloes, almost entirely coloured, were noted for their skill, speed and light weight—'about ten stone with wet socks on'.

The competition involved five rounds of three matches, then finals. By the fifth game tempers were hot and 'regrettable incidents' were reported. After a game between Waratahs, the eventual premiers in 1938, and Buffaloes, Bob Murray, secretary of the Buffaloes, complained in the *Northern Standard* that the umpires should have stopped Waratahs' supporters shouting 'kick them in the guts' and 'knock them down'. Murray left no doubt that the hostile barracking had been crudely racist. 'It is a sad commentary on the prestige of the white race', he reflected, 'when we are not prepared even in sport to meet and deal fairly with a less fortunate people.'

Race and class shaped life in Darwin. Leonard Scott, a Works department clerk, thought army officers 'a bit lah-di-dah' and considered the 'cable company' staff 'the silvertails'. Neither group mixed with coloured people, he noted, although privates and corporals 'lapped them up'. Val McGinness, the coloured labourer who helped Xavier Herbert celebrate the success of *Capricornia*, felt that in spite of some social mixing 'you could sense there was a colour bar'. Phyllis Uren, a schoolchild, witnessed a 'real furore' when a Chinese girl married a white man, and it was public knowledge that the chief protector of Aborigines, Dr Cecil Cook, pursued a policy of 'breeding out colour' by permitting coloured people to marry only other coloureds or approved whites. Aborigines could attend the picture theatre only as publicly permitted by the *Government gazette*, and 93 of the *Northern Standard's* 102 issues for the year contained at least one item on 'problems' relating to Aborigines, coloureds or Chinese. Even had they wished, footballers and other sports players could no more escape the climate of opinion and policy than the heat and humidity.





*Ginger Meggs was created by Sydney-born cartoonist J.C. Banks in 1922 and appeared in the strip 'Us Fellers' published in the Sunday Sun. Sunbeams Book Series 15, 1938.*

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