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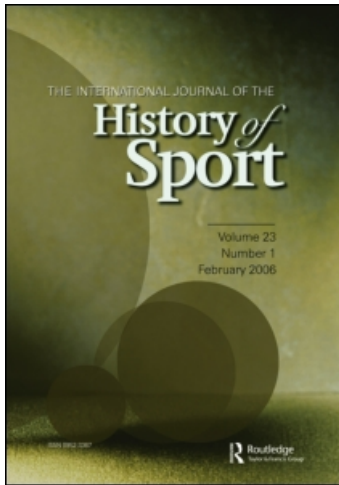
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# Rugby Union Football in the Land of the Wallabies, 1874–1949: same game, different ethos

Peter Horton

*Football as a generic game-form was a feature of the sporting culture of the settlers of Australia. As the various codes emerged in Britain they were ‘exported’ to the colonies throughout the Empire. In Australia this cultural imposition was not complete for the British games faced significant cultural resistance, most notably from Australian Rules football. The first formal club was founded circa 1865 and by the time a governing body was formed in 1874, the game had acquired distinctive playing and administrative traits and a sporting ethos. These were aberrant to the British form as pragmatic modifications were made in response to the social, cultural and environmental exigencies and demands of the frontier-like context: the game of Rugby immediately became Australianized. This analysis traces the development of the game’s culture in Australia through the initial 75 years of its institutionalization and demonstrates that despite its transit through the colonial era, urbanization, nationalism, federation and the travails of two World Wars, aspects of the residual culture remained. Rugby football, established in NSW and Queensland as a feature of the cultural hegemony of British Imperialism, prevailed largely unchanged in terms of power relations, ideology, finances and success over its first 75 years. This discussion reflects upon the critical influences, incidents and individuals that impacted upon and shaped Rugby union football in NSW and Queensland up to the founding of the Australian Rugby Football Union, which took until 1949 to occur.*

Rugby football was a significant part of the cultural baggage of many of the settlers of Australia. It was a feature of the sport culture that had such a central role in the cultural hegemony of British Imperialism, [1] its rugged nature, and its heritage and association with the credo of muscular Christianity, the ideology of Athleticism and the cult of games meant it was a definitive descriptor of colonial masculine identity. Football and cricket were unquestionably major agents of morality in the Public

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Schools of Britain and in those of colonial Australia in the 19th and early 20th centuries and a successful passage, jumping through the sporting hoops of British bourgeois ideology, was believed to more than adequately prepare young men to not only become gentlemen, but to successfully function and rule in the world once they left school. Games, it was believed, inculcated not only physical propensities but a limitless catalogue of virtues and character traits such as: honesty; determination; self-reliance; initiative; courage; and, implicitly, patriotism. [2] Such values and associated social mores and patterns of behaviour became representative of a way of life for the dominant social groups of Victorian Britain and in its Australian colonies. [3] Thus, sport, metaphorically and literally became culturally very powerful. The culture of Rugby football was very much a manifestation of the interface of these social forces, the social demographics of those that played the game and axiomatically the nature of the game itself. Reference to Rugby union football being a 'player's game' was used to justify the game's convoluted laws and its apparently barbaric nature. Yet, another clichéd description of Rugby union football was that it was a hooligans' game played by gentlemen, whilst its rival Rugby league was a gentlemen's game played by hooligans. This rather gratuitous and excessively trite commentary on the two rival Rugby games, which was, as much of a class statement as it was a sporting argument, is becoming or probably has now become redundant on both counts. Rugby union football has, since 1995, become 'officially' a professional sport. Even so the cultural custodians of Rugby union still zealously attempt to safe-guard aspects of the game's unique culture, which grew from its roots in British public schools and universities of the Victorian and Edwardian eras even though, as with all sports that were transplanted in this harsh and most unlikely of sporting contexts, the game of Rugby immediately became creolized.

### **Rugby, *the* Football in the Eastern States**

In Britain by the mid 19th century sport had become accepted as a valid cultural form being adopted by the British bourgeoisie as a vehicle for proselytizing the credo of muscular Christianity, athleticism and the eugenics of social Darwinism. [4] Sport at this time and in the context of British public schools and the universities was a male domain. By the 1880s Rugby football had assumed a dominant position athletically and as a moral proselytizing medium in the public schools. [5] Rugby football, by its very combative nature was the ultimate marker in terms of appropriating masculinity to the boys and young men playing it. [6] Soon after the settlement of Australia sport became a central dimension of the dominant ideology, [7] which held sport as being central to the representation of masculine identity. [8] The debate over football supremacy in Australian colonies particularly in the capital of Queensland, Brisbane in the 1880s and early 1890s was steeped in rhetorical assertions as to the belief that Australian Rules football, the major threat to Rugby football, was lacking in 'pluck strength and endurance' [9] being, not only an unpatriotic game, but suitable only for 'milkshops' and support for it was 'based on the kid-glove nature and effeminate

nature of colonial youth.’ [10] Support for Rugby football came with the flood of new migrants to Brisbane that occurred during the last two decades of the 19th century. From 1881 to 1891 the population of Queensland grew by 84.4% however in Brisbane, it grew by 174.1%. [11] Over 80% of these were from Britain with the English and Welsh being the largest group followed by the Irish. [12] Thus, as young males were predominant in the immigration figures during this period, [13] there emerged a dominant, numerically at least, group of young British males in Brisbane that would have had a significant level of cultural capital. It is suggested that to these young migrants sport was a meaningful social and cultural feature of their lives and Rugby football offered them a powerfully appropriate male domain. [14] They would have known of the game, if not supported it, and would have been familiar with its emerging culture. Rugby football, indeed all football, represented the hegemonic male identity, perceived as being grounded in physical courage, strength, skill, team-work and gentlemanly conduct that represented the epitome of masculinity. [15] Migration to Sydney during this period was equally as avid, with the population rising from 224, 939 in 1881 to 481, 830 in 1901, although Sydney attracted a more cosmopolitan group of émigrés, those from Britain still formed the largest group. [16]

The sporting impact of the population explosion in Brisbane between 1881 and 1891 was very apparent in relation to Rugby football as the game began to grow in popularity; during this decade the number of Rugby clubs increased from just two to 72. [17] Such a number of clubs and divisions required several levels of administration, organization and facilities, consequently a range of administrative bodies, Rugby unions, existed: the Northern Rugby Union (renamed the Queensland Rugby Union [QRU] in 1892) for Senior clubs, that was also responsible for the overall stewardship of the game in the colony; the Minor Rugby Union, established in 1888 for Juniors or second tier teams; the Sub-Junior Minor Rugby Union, established in 1890, and the Ipswich Rugby Union which was founded in 1891. Other provincial unions existed and by 1896 the majority of provincial unions had affiliated with the QRU including, Toowoomba, Warwick, Maryborough, and Mount Morgan. [18] However, the QRU was not the absolute ruler of the game in Queensland, the Central Queensland Rugby Union refused to accept the direction of the QRU well into the 20th century. This was indicative of the wide-spread disenchantment felt by many of the provincial unions, particularly with respect to the selection of Queensland teams, and the QRU’s executive control of the game and its finances. The widespread discontent in the provincial regions became one of the most significant contributive factors in the emergence of the set of pre-conditions that pre-empted the rise of Rugby league in Queensland in the 1900s. [19]

Rugby football in New South Wales (NSW) was dominated by Sydney both in terms of player numbers and administration. Sydney was the birthplace of Rugby football in Australia, Sydney University being the first club to be formally established c1865 [20] with the Southern Rugby Football Union (SRFU) being established in 1874. [21] (The SRFU was to become the New South Wales Rugby Union (NSWRU)

in 1892). The initial use of 'Southern' in the nomenclature is indicative of the colonial mind-set at this time, for as Fagan remarked 'most of the inhabitants apart from the indigenous populations, thought of themselves as 'colonial Britishers.' 'Home' was England, Wales Scotland or Ireland.' [22] The adoption of 'southern' was evidently used by way of a courteous regard for *the* Rugby Football Union (RFU), which had recently been established in England in 1871. The closeness of the founding of the SRFU to that of the RFU and to the formulation of the modernized set of rules, which most significantly expunged 'hacking' and 'tripping' from the game is indicative of the currency at that time of the game in Australia. The naming logic, however, does not prevail in consideration to the adoption of 'Northern' in relation to the Queensland body; they were clearly deferring to the senior union south of Brisbane. However, the renaming of both Unions in 1892 was indicative of an emergent sense of Australian colonial identity.

By 1877 the SRFU's realm however, only extended to 16 clubs, though the game had spread to the country regions and provincial cities such as Bathurst, Newcastle and Wollongong. By 1896 the NSWRU had 75 clubs under its control, which is surprising considering the fact that the population of the Sydney metropolitan district was well over double that of Brisbane which already boasted 75 clubs by 1891. Also, as Fagan suggests the number of clubs playing had grown but the quality of the competition and the organization 'had progressed little since the 1880s.' [23] By 1896 in both NSW and Queensland unrest was rife in the provincial clubs. In NSW, as in Queensland, the clubs were concerned with the way the game was controlled: all clubs were required to pay membership fees and, although they all had voting rights in meetings of the NSWRU, the country clubs, were swamped numerically by the clubs in Sydney and consequently gained little from their affiliation. [24] During the 1896 season tensions were also manifest amongst the clubs in Sydney. Powerful Senior clubs openly sought to recruit the talented players from Junior clubs, using 'incentives' [25] whilst allegations were rife that players in the Junior ranks were receiving match fees. [26]

The widening support for Rugby and its growing democratization appeared to be changing its character. The laudable effort by the NSWRU to instigate a players' accident insurance scheme at the start of the 1896 season, although it was abused and sparingly used after an excessive flood of initial claims, was also an indication that the game's controllers were becoming sensitized to the changing social dynamics and issues emerging in the game. [27] The leaders of the NSWRU were concerned that the culture of the game, if not its ethos, was being assaulted and needed to be protected. The growing presence and power of the ever increasing number of junior clubs coupled to the campaign to establish suburban-based clubs in Sydney all sought to undermine what the Rugby establishment in Sydney would have considered was the natural order of things. The game needed some overarching organization and control and who better than those that wrought in the earliest days of the game's history, those who saw themselves as the guardians of the game? [28] Though the SRFU was established in 1874, the game lacked real leadership and any authority until after the

initial intercolonial Rugby football series with Queensland in 1882. [29] Hickie suggests that the game was in crisis in 1877 when an attempt was made to replace it with 'a hybrid football code, including the best features of the Rugby and Australian games.' [30] However, what he calls the 'narrow-based elite' that administered the game in NSW were able to wrest control of football in Sydney and thus the entire colony, with, it is suggested, a not insignificant element of serendipity by way of the emergence of an intercolonial focus, and the subsequent parochialism generated by the annual Rugby clash with Queensland. The establishment of this fixture, in 1882, not only marked a significant moment in the development of the game but also in the emergence of the character and identity of sport in general in Australia. Queensland had become a separate self-governing colony in December 1859, having previously been ruled from Sydney and those living and toiling in the regions north of the Tweed River soon assumed a ferocious sense of identity and parochialism, this rivalry. The sporting rivalry between NSW and Queensland is produced an inimitable set of sporting and social characteristics that still defines the eastern states of Australia, whilst Rugby football, be it League or Union, is still the most popular form of football in NSW and Queensland. [31]

Rugby football was played in varying modes and times in all the colonies of Australia, [32] but the heartland of Rugby football was, and probably still is Sydney. This is defined by the direct link that exists between the ethos, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the members of the original organizing committee of the SRFU (NSWRU) of 1874, who assumed the mantle of a *de facto* national Rugby union, and that of the founders of the Australian Rugby Football Union (ARFU) in 1949. Not surprisingly a link also existed to the earliest English origins of the game. Several of the key players involved in the founding of the SRFU had been schooled at some of the great English Public Schools and universities at a time when the educational ideology of muscular Christianity and the cult of manly sports were being established. J.J. Calvert, a major instigator of the game in Sydney and the earliest referee, had attended Shrewsbury School in the 1840s and later Oxford University. The Arnold brothers, viewed as being major influences in the game's establishment in Sydney [33] also had a significant association with its earliest origins in England. The records of the Rugby School show Richard Arnold was a pupil from 1863 to the end of 1864 and, although the school's records are not conclusive, W.M.M. 'Monty' Arnold (Richard's younger brother) may well have also attended the school during the same period. Though, as Hickie assiduously points out, 'Monty' Arnold appeared to have a rather uncertain memory of his years of schooling. [34] However, their heritage is redoubtable as they were direct relatives of the esteemed Dr. Thomas Arnold, [35] who was Headmaster of Rugby School from 1828 to 1842 and, though not an avid supporter of games, he certainly realized their potential as being a 'more suitable occupation for his pupils' leisure than the time-honoured drinking, gambling and poaching facilitated.' [36] Arnold's attitude and tolerance of games during his tenure at Rugby School and the reforms he instituted led to the formalization of the laws of the game. [37]

Rugby union became the premier football code in NSW and Queensland in the 1880s. [38] At this time sport was central to the cultural hegemony of British imperialism yet, as is very apparent the 'football' introduced by the British throughout the empire rapidly became influenced by the various colonial environments and social situations. For example football in the colony of Victoria developed in an utterly idiosyncratic manner under the influence of a specific group of individuals and their experiences and because of the availability of large playing fields. [39] Life in the various colonies of Australia, though underpinned by similar values and beliefs systems and polity as that of the motherland, was by dint of the very nature of the various colonial situations, their locations, environments, climate and the make-up and motivations of the people utterly different to life in Britain. The colonies even the cities and towns represented a frontier situation and all dimensions of social activity and the people had to react to it. Sport had to be administered and conducted in a pragmatic manner and in a way that responded to the needs and attitudes of the participants and supporters; competition, parochialism and intense rivalry fitted the pioneer context and almost immediately became features of Australian sport. In Britain extrinsic motivational devices in Rugby union, including competitions based on league tables or knock-out cup competitions had become an anathema to the establishment middle class, largely southern English, leaders of the sport. At the same time in Australia competitions and premierships were becoming entrenched features of the game. In Brisbane in 1887 the Northern Rugby Union instigated the Hargrave Cup competition by way of a premiership for 'Seniors'. [40] In NSW the notion of a premiership also became an implicit feature of the sport with the Senior Premiership being formally enshrined with the adoption, in 1883, of the Gardiner Cup. [41]

The preoccupation of the Rugby Football Union (RFU) in England in the late 1880s with amateurism and all the attendant taboos regarding professionalism, structured competitions, gate-money, coaching and even excessive competitiveness did not, to any great extent, exist in the first twenty years of the game's history in NSW and Queensland. The administrators of the game in Sydney and Brisbane assumed a pragmatic approach that was appropriate to their geographic, demographic, economic and climatic contexts. It was this practical philosophy of the early directors of sport that established its character in the colonies, and many of these characteristics still persist. In general terms the animus between the social classes, that drove so much of the social dynamics in England at this time, was not so apparent in Australia nor was the conflict between the bourgeoisie and the emerging working class movement such a predominant feature in Australian society during the period of its industrialization. The tensions which emanated during the era of industrialization and the associated class struggle and its interrelationship with, firstly, the institutionalization and then the massification of sport in Britain and the concomitant attachment of specific social symbols and mores had not become so established at this time in Australia.



### The Great Football Split: the Culture Bifurcates

The split of Rugby football into union and league in Australia in 1908 was unquestionably precipitated by the fact that the NSWRU refused to accept proposed rule changes and by the way it governed the game, particularly in regard to the wide-spread practice of match payments. The game had already, in the eyes of the traditionalists become far too competitive and gratuitously violent, and had already affronted the conservative sensibilities of stalwarts such as Monty Arnold, who clearly wanted shot of the grubby business associated with policing such transgressions. The establishment of the Metropolitan Rugby Union (MRU) in 1900 served to shift the power in the clubs away from members of the upper echelons, who had controlled the game through their privileged position, to members of an emerging *nouveau riche* who were commercially driven and based in the district clubs. The overarching control of the game remained, however with the establishment figures in the NSWRU. The tensions surrounding the 'split' [42] emanated from deep lying beliefs and prejudices that further exacerbated the growing class divide that had emerged in all Australian cities by 1908. Sport was a central and unifying feature of the workers' struggle and for a large proportion of the urban class in Sydney's inner suburbs, who were Irish-Catholics, Rugby football represented a very real dimension for the expression of class identity, parochialism and, as the workers became politically motivated, it gained a political agenda. [43] Fuelled by a good deal of anti-English sentiment and a sense of alienation, the working class in Sydney readily adopted Rugby league football viewing it as a symbol of their struggle, as the union game so apparently reeked of English imperialism. [44] Rugby league, born as it was from 'class consciousness,' [45] gained the mantle as the symbol of the workers' struggle in NSW and later in Brisbane's working class inner suburbs of Fortitude Valley, Toombul, South and North Brisbane. [46] In both locations it axiomatically became strongly affiliated with the Labor movement. In Sydney 'the personnel of Labor branches and league clubs were often almost interchangeable.' [47] The published aims of both the Rugby League and the Labor Party were interchangeable as both sought to protect the needs of the working class, to give them security, to provide better conditions and to ensure they had compensation for injury. [48]

As the First World War approached, Rugby league had gained ascendancy over Union in Sydney [49] and in the country regions of Queensland. [50] When war broke out Australian society became divided as to the nation's involvement in this European war. This social division soon extended into the sporting community, and the various administrative bodies became embroiled in the question of whether or not to continue to compete during the war. In Victoria the major football bodies, the Victorian Football Association and the Victorian Football League, clashed over whether to continue to play and in NSW and Queensland arguments arose between the internal administrations of both the Rugby League and the NSWRU. The continuance of sport bore, in the main, a direct relationship to the prevalence of the Catholic working class in the administration and of course the playing ranks of

the games involved. In Brisbane and Sydney Rugby league was played continuously throughout World War One, whilst Rugby union ceased in both centres for the duration of the war.

The decisions to play or not and the associated affiliations of the two groups became a significant cause of future tensions between league and union. Their respective loyalties, the source and nature of the player/support base and the underlying sporting ethos of both games were based upon the fundamental issue of playing for money. This was at the heart of the establishment of the identity of the codes and of the resultant perception each body had of the other: the union players, administrators and supporters were the 'rah-rahs' whilst the league fraternity was disparagingly referred to as the 'mungos' (mongrels) and the stereotypes emerged. Recourse to such epithets was deliberate, both viewed each other critically; the union players and supporters were all private school 'whimps' and university graduates from wealthy families, they were anti-workers and of course would have voted conservatively, whilst the league players and supporters were working class, state school educated and were all anti-establishment Labor voters. Such discourse endured until Rugby union entered into the world of professional sport, such sentiments may well still prevail at the lower levels of the game now referred to as 'Community Rugby' where perhaps the idea of playing a game for the love of it still exists. The character of any sport cannot, however, be so simplistically designated and neither Rugby union nor league can be said to be the preserve of a particular social class or demographic. Clearly, generalizations can be made but at no time in the history of Rugby union football in Australia can it be said that the game was *only* played by people of a certain class, religion, race or educational status. The captain of the First Wallabies Herbert Moran reflected in 1939 that, 'In 1904 Amateur Rugby was still a game for all classes – just as it is Wales today. There were no social distinctions, nor any systematic professionalism.' [51] Though Moran did reflect somewhat ingenuously that, '...There may have been some individuals who were privately assisted by supporters of a club, but they must have been very rare.' [52] The blame for the disruption of the ethos of Rugby football, Moran insisted was nothing to do with class division:

We all stood on a level of equality and since we played only on Saturday afternoons no one lost money by playing. Those who later became professionals changed their status, not as a rule from any dire necessity, but out of a desire to gain their living more pleasantly. It was themselves who created a social discrimination in Australian Rugby.

As Australia entered the First World War the game had undoubtedly assumed a clearly different identity from that of Rugby league, and indeed, from all other football codes played in Australia, yet no individual football code could be identified on the basis of a simple functionalistic view. Rugby union football was not the sole preserve of a single group of men, nor did it have a single dominant social group, players came from the inner working class suburbs of Sydney and Brisbane, they

came from Sydney University, from the coal-fields of the Hunter Valley and from country towns like Bathurst, but all were part of the fraternity that played this violent, confronting, chaotic, complex and utterly challenging 'manly' English game that so patently served colonial males in their quest for manliness, healthy amusement and moral fitness. [53] Most merely loved to play it and the associated social interaction and affiliation it engendered. For some, Rugby union proffered a means to social advancement. Yet, for all the game was steeped in tradition, a common set of values, camaraderie, friendship and loyalty: it was not a frivolous undertaking. Thus, the decision to cease to play at the onset of the war was not arrived at easily or without thought, it stemmed from a deep sense of loyalty and respect for those who had gone to fight. The decision of the Rugby league's administrators to continue to play was viewed by the union fraternity with disdain, the decision being seen as tantamount to disloyalty if not treason; union's disaffection with league grew. The arguments for and against continuation raged throughout the early years of the war; those sports that continued were in the main working class sports such as horse racing, boxing and, on the eastern seaboard, Rugby league. Their promoters and supporters suggested that continuing could in fact help the war effort by raising funds. Diametrically opposed on moral and political grounds the supporters of Rugby union abjectly refuted such arguments saying 'that it was immoral to promote sport as public entertainment while men were dying...' [54] The sentiments that this polemic created perhaps explain why there existed and in some cases still exists, such animosity between union and league supporters. The schism which precipitated the split of Rugby into union and league in Australia in 1908 in many ways defined the cultural fabric of both games for the next 87 years until Rugby union was professionalized in 1995. The impact of the Great War was to anneal the differences along not only class grounds but parochially, ethically, in direct sporting terms, and implicitly in relation to the associated loyalty to and identification with the British Empire. The places that both codes hold in Australian society, despite Rugby union's recent emergence as a professional sport, are still very different, though now this is evidently not based upon class or religion.

### **1919–1949: The Tough Years**

Ironically, it was the theatre of war that was to be the direct reason for the game's revival in Australia following the First World War. The allied troops in Africa and Europe, probably at the behest of their commanding officers, engaged in a variety of sporting activities; as C.E.W. Bean, the official war historian recorded, 'Games were often played as close to the front line as possible, football, cricket, hockey... King sport reigned supreme behind the trenches.' [55] Sport again was embraced by the Allied High Command at the close of the War as part of the sport programme they instigated to both occupy the troops from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and India while they waited to be demobilized and transported back to their homes, and perhaps to lighten their spirits and certainly to distract them from both

the horrors they had gone through and from the fact that their demobilization was to take over a year. Considering the background of the High Command, Rugby union football naturally figured large in the various contests, from inter-unit to inter-regimental games: a team representing the 1st Australian Imperial Forces (AIF) was invited to play a French Army XV, it then went on to play in the Rugby football component of the King's Cup festival of sport that took place in England in 1919 in celebration of the end of hostilities.

Thus, the sixty or so Australians who took part in the competition returned to Australia hardened not only martially but in the football sense. The NSWRU being financially in disarray saw the return of the conquering heroes as an opportunity to revive the corpse of Rugby union football in the state, and certainly the defeat of New Zealand in the King's Cup, and the fact the majority of the team were drawn from NSW helped in the revival. The animation was continued as the AIF team swept all before it on its internal Australian tour and, according to Mulford, their scintillating play and their heroic status, 'stopped the pre-War exodus to the professional game and... culminated in the outstanding successes of the Waratahs in 1927–28.' [56] This resuscitation was not as apparent in Queensland with few AIF players returning to inject life into the game it struggled for local support; in 1920 the QRU was dissolved and did not re-emerge until 1928–29.

Unquestionably, 1919 was a significant nodal point in the history of Australian Rugby football with the traditional loyalties of the two Rugby football camps being further entrenched as a consequence of the tensions that arose during and after World War One. Issues of national loyalty, political affiliation, class, sectarianism, parochialism, sporting ethos as well as amateurism constructed how the players, administrators and supporters of each rugby code viewed each other. The cultural identity and definitely the underpinning motivating philosophy of those playing and administering Rugby union football in Australia for the next 76 years, was to be shaped by the loyalties established during and immediately after the First World War. The two rugby codes were to remain ardent rivals, diametrically opposed based largely on the dichotomy between amateur and professional sport but amplified into and through class or a perceived sense of class, education (private vs. state schools), occupations and surprisingly on actual sporting grounds. The mutual disaffection was not simplistically founded; many working class men played Union and some clubs were based in working class suburbs or towns, many clubs had strong links to the Catholic church and colleges whilst others, though not exclusively, were Greater Public School (GPS) old boys clubs. However, Union was soundly positioned as the preserve of the middle and upper middle classes, the sport itself was referred to as the game played by the 'rah rahs' or by the 'silvertails'. Its leaders and a majority of its players were old boys of private schools, particularly the GPS and Associated schools in Sydney and in the GPS schools in Brisbane. To the boarding houses of these schools and to the many Catholic colleges in the capitals of Sydney and Brisbane came the sons of farmers, graziers and country businessmen, serving to continue the tradition established in the earliest days of game's history, a tradition that continues today.

In Queensland in 1928 Union was beginning to stir after its 10 year hibernation. Rugby union players from Queensland had not all faded from view, a number of Queenslanders studying, particularly Medicine and Law, in Sydney played with the University of Sydney team in the Sydney competition. The most famous Queenslanders to emerge and play Tests, representing NSW, during this period were full-back Otto Nothling, an outstanding all-round athlete who played 18 Rugby Tests as well as a Test for the Australian cricket team, hooker Duncan Fowles who played eight Tests and legendary five-eighth Tommy Lawton who played in 14 Tests in a career spanning 13 years. Lawton also won a Rhodes scholarship, spending three years at Oxford University. He returned to Sydney in 1925 to captain NSW in the first Test of their tour of New Zealand and was outstanding on the Waratahs tour to the UK in 1927–28. Lawton returned to play in Brisbane with the Valleys club in the QRU competition in 1929 from where he captained Australia in six further Tests. [57]

Such players kept Queensland's place in Australian rugby union alive during the game's dormant period in the north, however, the game's re-emergence in the GPS schools in Brisbane in 1928 proved critical. The campaign to re-establish Rugby union as the premier football code in the GPS sporting competition was led by Nudgee College's sportsmaster, Jack Ross, and Canon Morris the Headmaster of 'Churchie' (the Church of England Grammar School) with the support of Brisbane Grammar School's Headmaster, Stuart Stephenson. [58] Soon some social club games were organized and within a year the traditional forces regathered momentum and in 1929 the QRU was reconstituted. An indication of the sense of continuity with the game in Queensland's heritage and the yearning of the Rugby Union stalwarts to regain their game's social position was that two members of the first Queensland intercolonial team of 1882, Fred Lea and the redoubtable Tom Welsby were enlisted to add gravitas to the game's new administration. Thus, by aligning Lea and Welsby, symbols of Rugby union's definitively conservative and traditional origins, with the 'new' heroes Otto Nothling and Tom Lawton, both Brisbane Grammar Old Boys, on the organizing committee: the cultural and social parameters were clearly reaffirmed and Rugby union football in Queensland could again serve its traditional cultural undertaking.

Rugby union football in Australia had, until the emergence of the Super 12 franchise team the ACT Brumbies in 1996, been dominated in sporting and administrative terms, as well as culturally, by NSW and Queensland. However, it is interesting to reflect upon the not insignificant contribution Victorian Rugby union players, clubs, the Union and the long-suffering supporters of Rugby in the home of Australian Rules football made to the viability of the game in Australia. Whilst Union in Queensland hibernated for 10 years after the First World War it continued to be played in Melbourne, albeit in a very meagre manner, until the Second World War and beyond. It could be contended that those that played rugby in Melbourne, considering the massive presence and history of Australian Rules football, were not only very dedicated and loyal to the game but perhaps even more so than some of

their northern cousins, the real 'rahs rahs'. Victoria played against many of the major touring rugby nations between the wars, though with only moderate success beginning in 1921 when they played South Africa as they stopped in Australia en route for New Zealand, in 1926 against New Zealand and the New Zealand Maoris. It was after the 1929 match against the All Blacks, in which the Victorian side including 5 players from NSW played as an Australian XV, that Victoria gained its first Test cap, when centre Gordon Sturtridge was selected in the Australian team to play in the first Test the following week in Brisbane, which Australia won 17–9. [59] Victoria's greatest moment in international rugby came when they very nearly beat the British Lions in 1930, losing in an amazingly open game, 41–36 during which, 18 tries were scored! Five years later they secured their first victory over NSW.

During the ten-year period, 1919–1929, that marked the hibernation of union in Queensland, NSW assumed both stewardship and to a large extent ownership of Rugby union football in Australia. The NSWRU had since 1874 acted in the capacity of the *de facto* Australian Rugby Union but now, with the apparent demise of the only other viable Rugby union in the country, they literally had a mandate to formally act in that capacity. The NSW team, the Waratahs played as the Australian team in home tests against New Zealand, the New Zealand Maoris and South Africa, and when they toured overseas to New Zealand, the UK, France, and North America they played 'Tests' against the national teams. During this period NSW played 39 Tests, [60] all of which have recently been retrospectively sanctioned as official Tests by the ARU.

Who played and supported the game and, most definitely, the manner in which it was played up to beginning of the professional era in the 1990s was established during this decade. Despite the fact that the game was well patronized in the country regions of NSW only seven players from clubs outside of the Sydney metropolitan area were selected for NSW in the 38 Tests played during this period. [61] To say that Rugby union football at this time was Sydney-centric would be a truism; Test matches were played in Sydney, the game was administered from Sydney, virtually all the players selected played for Sydney clubs and, naturally, the vast majority of spectators would have been locals. The culture and the style of the game emanated from Sydney, the Waratahs heartland; the Waratahs adopted an expansive style of play on their tour to the UK, France and North America in 1927–28 on which they strove, as the team manager Gordon Shaw said in his tour report, 'to make the game attractive to both player and spectator and an exhibition between friendly sportsmen.' [62]

### **The Emergence of the ARFU**

Following the First World War Rugby union football suffered administratively, financially and with respect to its popular following because of the massive losses and the dislocation it suffered as a consequence of the virtually complete cessation of play during the course of the war. The game struggled to gain veracity for the next 20 years and, just as the Second Wallabies [63] arrived to begin their tour of the UK in 1939, war again intervened and the tour was immediately cancelled. Six of the party enlisted

in Britain whilst the rest of the touring party returned to Australia in the SS Strathmore after a harrowing 'zigzagging' [64] voyage spent trying to avoid German U boats.

All sporting bodies were ravaged by the war with players, officials, administrators dying or being seriously injured in battle or in prisoner of war camps. In Queensland in 1940, despite the loss of over 200 players and officials to the forces, the QRU decided to maintain the Brisbane competition and it continued throughout the war, though only four clubs were still playing by 1945. [65] The game was still being played in some country centres, and most importantly at the GPS schools in and around Brisbane. The memory of the game's 10 year hibernation in Queensland after its cessation during the First World War was a salutatory lesson to the game's officials in Queensland and they decided that this was not to happen again, as the comments of the QRU Chairman, Jack Ross at the opening of the 1945 season indicate:

We have achieved the object of all devotees of the amateur game, that being not to allow the game to lapse as occurred after World War 1, but to have the organisation available to those members of the Union who have engaged in the sterner game of war during the past six years. [66]

At the outset of the Second World War it was decided by the Management Committee of the NSWRU to cancel all interstate games but to maintain all club competitions throughout the State in an attempt to avoid 'the problems caused by the cancellation of all senior Rugby competitions during World War 1.' [67] Union at all levels and in the schools continued throughout the war. Charity representative games were played by district selections, such as the Metropolitan XV against sides representing the Army and the RAAF with all the donations going to the war-effort with much of the rhetoric expressed in the NSWRU's newsletter the *Rugby News* becoming jingoistic. The dialogue was reminiscent of the hubris of that surrounded the evocation of the 'militaristic and nationalistic constructions of manliness' [68] at the time of the Great War that viewed the sport fields of the leading public schools in Australia as the training grounds not only for life but also battle:

Another year of this great world struggle has come and gone... We take pride in those who have been decorated and mourned the loss of those who have made the supreme sacrifice.

Rugby Union is more than a mere game. It is a national asset in the community. Being played for the sake of the game, it builds up character and a physical fitness that ensures a cleaner and healthier outlook on the problems of life. [69]

Throughout the war the President of the NSWRU was Justice Leslie Herron and the comments he made in the *Rugby News* in 1944 demonstrated an interesting extension of the cult of games and the ideology of athleticism, he had expressed above: in hoping that 1944 would be the last year of the war he called all Rugby players to 'plan for peace and must realize that the organization of leisure will be as important as the

re-organisation of work and distribution and the Rugby Union must be prepared to take its place as the leader of thought.' [70]

As the game had continued in, albeit, a restricted manner, once the war ended representative competition was able to resume with interstate and international matches being promptly played in 1946. [71] But it was hardly a case of 'normal play' being resumed, the world was never to be the same with sport essentially beginning a metamorphosis during this phase of sport's global development that had accelerated after the end of the Second World War. [72] During this phase sport became further penetrated by the forces of commercialization and politicization, which were features of the intensification of the globalization process. The resultant shape of sport globally, and certainly the changes that later occurred in Rugby union in Australia, demonstrate that the nature and form of the outcomes may well be both uncontrollable and unintended and produced 'the seedbed in which future power struggles are played out.' [73] The establishment of the ARFU in 1949 was an outcome of the playing-out of local struggles and rivalries, between the NSWRU and the other states' unions, particularly Queensland, [74] driven largely by the insistence of the global controllers of the game the International Rugby Football Board (IRFB). [75] The IRFB had been founded in 1886 with Scotland, Ireland and Wales as founding members (England, the RFU, only joined in 1890) and once England joined the IRFB assumed the role of guardian of 'its' game and sought to undertake the promotion of the sport globally. [76]

In 1926 the IRFB offered Australia token representation on the board via the delegates they had on the RFU. [77] The outstanding efforts of the Australian Imperial Forces team in the post war King's Cup competition and their loyalty and sacrifices in the 'greater' game had undoubtedly prompted the invitation. [78] Though, it was not until 1949, after further demonstrations of loyalty in World War Two that Australia along with New Zealand and South Africa became full members of the IRFB. [79] It can be assumed that this was as a consequence of the support of the Queensland-born President of the RFU, L. C. (Bruno) Brown.

## Conclusion

For close to a century Rugby union football in Australia had remained locked in a social, cultural and indeed a sporting space. The game was not the preserve of a single class, though, as has been illustrated above, it was restricted geographically, it had largely retained its amateur character and was idiosyncratically Australian; even differing technically and culturally from that of its antipodean cousin's across the Tasman. For over 100 years conservatism was a dominant force in Rugby union globally, however, the exact manifestation of this was most particular to the location. In Australia, the game adhered, in general to amateur ideals in terms of payment for play, definitely so in Brisbane, [80] more so than in Sydney. [81] After the game's institutionalization in Australia the controllers of the game eschewed any idea of moderating competitiveness, they established leagues, introduced cup-competitions



and, significantly, they adopted the use of non-playing coaches, a practice that was banned in the UK until the 1970s. [82] In Australia in the 19th century clubs adopted training regimes and the planned use of strategies and deception in games, which were played with heightened, traditionalists said excessive, levels of competitiveness; criticism of which was a constant feature of international clashes between England and Australia throughout the amateur phase. Such criticism was very apparent during the inaugural Wallaby tour to the United Kingdom in 1908, during which the Australian tourists received a frosty and patronizing reception from the administrators of the game, the press and particularly from spectators. The attitude of the English and their personal criticism of the individual players, the Australian team's tactics, its intensity and determination to win, which, in light of the Wallabies obvious physical superiority, was invariably accompanied by sneering and largely incorrect references to the players' 'convict' origins, which marred the tour. So intense was the criticism that, according to Herbert Moran, the captain of the First Wallabies, the members of his team were so disgruntled 'under the carping criticism, and beneath the magnification of minor incidents, their British patriotism wilted.' [83] Reflecting upon the tour some 30 years later Moran said that not only did the Wallabies' patriotism wilt, they manifestly demonstrated it six years later in 1914, '...When war broke out those thirty-one men were still in the flower of their physical vigour, yet only seven took part in the war.' [84] Ironically, the sacrifices made by Australians in the two World Wars strengthened the filial bonds between the ex-British territory and the motherland. Sporting contests between the two nation, however, have always produced the most extreme, passionate and at time bigoted responses.

Through the first 75 years of its history the Australian Rugby union football assumed the countenance and manner of a fractious offspring; always arguing, always disagreeing and inevitably out-reaching its parents but never straying far from the cultural hearth. Yet loyalty and allegiance to the Empire in the two 'greater' games of the 20th century, the two World Wars, decimated the playing and administrative ranks of Rugby union football in Australia, and shackled the game's development on both occasions. It was the talent, tenacity and dedication of the players, coaches and club officials and some serendipitous events that allowed the game to rise from the ashes twice. The collapse of the game in Queensland after World War One was balanced by the emergence firstly, of the AIF team and then the Waratahs, who installed the running game as Australia's method. Following World War Two Australian Rugby union football was again in a parlous state, yet the preconditions for its future success soon began to evolve. The foundation of the ARFU, which gave the game in Australia an international voice, and the intense rivalry and competition with the two other major Southern hemisphere Rugby unions, New Zealand and South Africa hardened the Australian game at all levels. Growing numbers of tours to New Zealand by school teams, clubs as well as State representative teams and the Wallabies further challenged the Australian game. Success was spasmodic and progress slow. It took another 25 years before the Australian team really gained

respect internationally. Whether this began on the field or in the board rooms is problematic but what is certain, for success to happen each must wholeheartedly support the efforts of the other. And perhaps this was the missing key factor?

## Notes

- [1] See, Mangan, 'Prologue: Britain's Chief Spiritual Export', Mangan & Hickey; 'Globalization, the Games Ethic and Imperialism'.
- [2] See Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*. See also Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, p. 9.
- [3] See Horton, 'Football, Identity, Place.'
- [4] Chandler and Nauright, 'Introduction: Rugby, Manhood and Identity', 4–6.
- [5] Chandler, 'The Structuring of Manliness', 13.
- [6] *Ibid.*, 28.
- [7] Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*.
- [8] See, Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*.
- [9] Pegasus, 'The Rival Games' in, *The Brisbane Courier*, Monday, 19 May 1884.
- [10] *Ibid.*
- [11] Glynn, *Urbanization in Australian History*, 25.
- [12] Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s*, 20.
- [13] *Ibid.*, 25.
- [14] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 86–103.
- [15] Horton, 'Football, Identity, Place.'
- [16] See, Burnley, 'The urbanization of the Australian population' 3–16.
- [17] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 590.
- [18] QRU, Annual Report, 1896.
- [19] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 569.
- [20] Hickie, *They Ran with the Ball*, 38–43.
- [21] *Ibid.*, 130–141.
- [22] Fagan, *The Rugby Rebellion*, 4.
- [23] *Ibid.*, 21.
- [24] *Ibid.*
- [25] The Cynic, *The Referee*, 22 April, 1896, 8.
- [26] The Cynic, *The Referee*, 5 May, 1897, 8.
- [27] See, Fagan, Chapter 2 and Hickie, & Hughes, *The Game for the Game Itself*.
- [28] Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*.
- [29] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 104–143.
- [30] Hickie, *They Ran with the Ball*, 185.
- [31] Horton, 'Football, Identity, Place', 1350–52.
- [32] See, Fagan, online at <http://www.colonialrugby.com.au/>
- [33] Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 15.
- [34] See, Hickie, *They Ran with Ball*, 81–2.
- [35] Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 15.
- [36] Marples, *A History of Football*, 120–1.
- [37] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 31–42.
- [38] Horton, 'Football, Identity, Place'.
- [39] Blainey, *A Game of Our Own*.
- [40] Horton, 'A History of Rugby Football Union', 182–185.
- [41] Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union*, 486.

- [42] See, Fagan, *Rugby Rebellion*, passim, Howell & Howell *The Greatest Game*, 2–25 and, G. Lester, *The Story of Australian Rugby League*.
- [43] Horton, 'The Green and Gold', 77–8.
- [44] Phillips, 'Football, Class and War', 168–9.
- [45] Parsons, 'Capitalism, Class and Community', 9.
- [46] The first formal Rugby league season in Brisbane was 1909 when the four founding clubs played on Saturday, 8 May. The games were however controlled, ironically, by the Amateur Rugby League Referees' Association of Queensland and according to Howell & Howell (*The Greatest Game*) were very meagerly reported in the press though the clubs almost immediately gained a strong supporter-base as locals assumed ardent parochial loyalties.
- [47] Parsons, 'Capitalism, Class and Community', 9.
- [48] Scott, 'The Development of Rugby League in Brisbane'.
- [49] Phillips, 'Football, Class and War', 162–6.
- [50] Diehm, *Reds! Reds! Reds!* 94.
- [51] Moran, *Viewless Winds*, 36.
- [52] *Ibid.*
- [53] Chandler, 'The Structuring of Manliness', 25.
- [54] Phillips, 'Football, Class and War', 158.
- [55] Bean, *The Official History*, 59.
- [56] Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 65.
- [57] See, Howell *et al.*, *The Wallabies*, and, Howell *et al.*, *They Came to Conquer*.
- [58] Diehm, *Reds! Reds! Reds!*, 113–15.
- [59] Howell, *et al.*, *They Came to Conquer*, 315.
- [60] Howell *et al.*, *The Wallabies*.
- [61] *Ibid.*
- [62] Fenton, *For the Sake of the Game*.
- [63] The title 'Wallabies' was, until the game became commercialized, generally only used with reference to the Australian teams that made the full British Isles tour involving tests against all four home countries and a complete itinerary of other matches against regional, county, club and university sides, following in the footsteps of the First Wallabies captain by Herbert Moran in 1908–09, who Pollard suggested favoured this exclusivity. (Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union*, 860) The marketing potential of the tag 'Wallabies' or 'Wallaby' is immense and its adoption for all products and matches involving the Australian rugby union team is indicative of the extent of the game's penetration by corporate cultural capitalism and its emergence as a feature of mediasport. The last full Wallaby tour took place in 1984 when the Eighth Wallabies completed the 'grand slam' against all four Home countries.
- [64] Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union*, 870.
- [65] Diehm, *Reds! Reds! Reds!*, 138–140.
- [66] Jack Ross, in, *ibid.*, 139.
- [67] Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 100.
- [68] Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, 221–227.
- [69] Justice Leslie Herron, President, in, the Annual Report, New South Wales Rugby Union, 1943 cited in Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 103–4.
- [70] Leslie Herron, in, *Rugby News*, match publication of the NSW Rugby Union, 1944, cited in Mulford, *Guardians of the Game*, 104.
- [71] In 1946 all interstate and international football was reinstated with NSW winning the traditional interstate series against Queensland 3 matches to nil. The entrenched (sibling) rivalry between New Zealand and Australia continued in 1946 when Australia toured New Zealand and the challenge for the Bledisloe Cup resumed. New Zealand toured Australia the

following year and played two tests, over 53,000 spectators attended the matches in Brisbane and Sydney.

- [72] Maguire, *Global Sport*, 84–6.
- [73] *Ibid.*, 215.
- [74] Queensland, traditionally seen as the Premier state's most serious rival had lost so much ground, in player strength and, naturally financially since its post World War One 'hibernation', that it could only muster enough credibility or power to gain more than three votes of the ten on offer.
- [75] Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union*, 48–9.
- [76] It was in 1997, when the game had become fully professional and the international governing body made a political economic decision to move its headquarters to Dublin that it became the IRB.
- [77] Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union*, 49.
- [78] See, Mulford, 56–68.
- [79] Australia as a full member of the IRFB was able to play with special dispensation for several years with regards to the laws governing kicking into touch on full and the use of time-keepers; both have since been universally accepted. Australia also promoted the change to the point-value of a try, up from 3 to 4pts and, the introduction, internationally of replacements.
- [80] Fagan, *The Rugby Rebellion*, 31–4.
- [81] Dunning & Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players*, 232–3.
- [82] Howell et al., *The Wallabies*, 386.
- [83] Moran, *op cit.*, 69.
- [84] *Ibid.*
- [85] *Ibid.*, 70.

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