

Watching Football in Marvellous Melbourne:

SPECTATORS, BARRACKERS AND
WORKING CLASS RITUALS

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ABSTRACT: A study of the crowds drawn to Australian football matches in colonial Victoria illuminates key aspects of the code's genesis, development and popularity. Australian football was codified by a middle-class elite that, as in Britain, created forms of mass entertainment that were consistent with the kind of industrial capitalist society they were attempting to organise. But the 'lower orders' were inculcated with traditional British folkways in matters of popular amusement, and introduced a style of 'barracking' for this new code that resisted the hegemony of the elite football administrators. By the end of the colonial period Australian football was firmly entrenched as a site of contestation between plebeian and bourgeois codes of spectating that reflected the social and ethnic diversity of the clubs making up the Victorian competition. Australian football thereby offers a classic vignette in the larger history of 'resistance through ritual'.

KEY WORDS: Australian football, nineteenth century sport, elite ideology, working-class rituals

Australian and other forms of football evolved from games played in the British public schools and variants of folk football. Although the codification of football did not come exclusively from British public schools, there is no doubt that the middle-class played a hegemonic role in modernising this game.¹ The formalisation of football in Victoria and Britain occurred during the onset of industrial capitalism and the rise of mass spectator sport, and early football in Melbourne was controlled by a middle class hegemony, which developed the rules and defined the social mores for watching its code. It was the working class, however, that turned the game into a mass spectator sport and by the mid-1880s it supported football in ways that often discomfited the middle class. Many working class spectators adjusted to the new ideological, economic and environmental infrastructures put in place by the middle class; some grafted older conventions of watching sport to a modern, more regulated and administered version of football, and others asserted their own culture and modes of spectatorship and therefore challenged middle-class values.

In the nineteenth century Melbourne was a progressive, ambitious and entrepreneurial city with a booming free enterprise economy. The colony of Victoria attracted skilled, ambitious and independently minded citizens (mostly from Britain), and by the end of the gold rushes these were arguably some of the richest people in the world. In per capita terms Australia's real product and consumption were higher than the United Kingdom. The distribution of wealth was uneven, but working-class people on average earned more than those from similar socio-economic backgrounds in Britain and the United States. Victorians valued the affluence that came from the colony's industry and commerce, and new forms of leisure appealed to those with newly acquired disposable incomes. Theatres, music halls, 'Shilling Balls', and circuses were all well patronised entertainments, and many watched and participated in sports such as racing, cricket, hunting, coursing and pedestrianism. Melbourne's middle class also formalised traditional amusements like football and created sporting clubs and structured competitions – a tendency amply demonstrated by T.W. Wills, W.J. Hammersley, J.B. Thompson and T.H. Smith in developing the Melbourne Football Club rules during 1859. This new attraction was more regulated but also easy to understand and was less dangerous than older forms of football, and from the 1850s to 1870s amateur middle-class sportsmen, public schoolboys and white-collar professionals played football in parklands on Saturday afternoons where onlookers viewed contests without charge, often during a leisurely stroll.

This was the period in which industrial capitalism was the dominant

1 See Adrian Harvey, *Football: The First Hundred Years. The Untold Story*, Routledge, Oxon, 2005.

economic and cultural formation. At its heart was a middle-class ideology that espoused the protestant work ethic and *laissez-faire* economics. It revolutionised British society and culture both at home and in its colonies abroad; in the arena of sport, entrepreneurs exploited old pastimes and turned them into new commercial enterprises. Leisure was increasingly allocated a market value in a consumer culture, and those who wished to view high-quality sport increasingly had to pay for the privilege. These developments transformed the watching of football in Melbourne, as football clubs entered into business arrangements with cricket clubs by the late 1870s. Football soon became big business and clubs contributed to the process of enclosing arenas, segregating areas to limit the public's movements within them, and charging admission prices for profit.

The physical boundaries in enclosed sports stadia enforced new forms of social control and class differentiation; it was here that people learned to 'consume' football in a mass entertainment context.² If the new boulevards of Paris were designed to facilitate the *flow* of consumers into department stores, then the football stadium facilitated a certain *containment* of people. Many of these architectural edifices developed from pavilions, which were basically clubhouses built for use by private members and players. In time exterior walls were placed around fields of play to prevent most people from watching football for free (and so excluded the poorest members of society), and internal fencing separated viewers from players on the field of play. Gates, fences and other constructions also enforced internal segregations. These included grandstands, where one paid extra to sit down in greater comfort with a better view (usually constituting about 10-15 per cent of patrons), as well as members', women's and male-only smokers' stands, and special seats for politicians and other dignitaries.³ Once these areas were designated the remaining space was made into a standing room area for patrons who paid for basic ground entry, an area that became known as the 'Outer', a term that signifies that only a select few were entitled to be part of an 'inner' crowd.

2 As argued by June Senyard in 'Marvellous Melbourne, Consumerism and the Rise of Sports Spectating', in Matthew Nicholson (ed.), *Fanfare: Spectator Culture and Australian Rules Football*, Australian Society for Sports History, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 25–40.

3 It is unfortunately outside the scope of this article to provide a detailed consideration of the role of women in early football. For a more detailed discussion of women and Australian football see two articles by Rob Hess, 'Women and Australian Rules Football in Colonial Melbourne', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 13, 1996, pp. 356–72; "'Ladies are Specially Invited": Women in the Culture of Australian Rules Football', in J. A. Mangan & John Nauright (eds), *Sport in Australasian Society. Past and Present*, Frank Cass & Co., London, 2000, pp. 111–41.

The fee for watching the football spectacle and enjoying amenities in Melbourne and Geelong's stadia was relatively inexpensive, but people were required to pay for something they had once experienced for free. Despite this, football became immensely popular and attracted massive crowds. In 1873 contests between Melbourne and Carlton were attended by an average of between 5–8000 people. By the early 1880s (and after the introduction of admission charges) matches between Carlton, Geelong, Melbourne and South Melbourne attracted crowds of around 14,000. This represented just over five percent of Melbourne's population. Crowd numbers continued to grow throughout the 1880s and in July 1888, when a record crowd of 30–35,000 (about seven percent of the city's population), watched Carlton play South Melbourne at the MCG.

The Ideal Spectator

As the game turned into a mass entertainment commodity the 'spectator' became an ideal viewer. Historian June Senyard has associated the spectator with the 'consumer' and the inception of consumer culture in industrialised cities where modern forms of leisure brought disparate classes together.⁴ The spectator was a product of a broadening of interest in the game for middle- and working-class men and women, adults and children. Changes to labour laws at this time allowed more people to attend matches on Saturday afternoons. The civil service employees, bank officers and schoolteachers who shared their leisure time with amateur players on Saturday afternoons in the late 1860s and early 1870s were now joined by a whole new audience that came from the ranks of factory and building workers.

In the rising industrial era the re-organisation of work was accompanied by reforms to leisure activities, and much of these were directed at changing working-class activities and attitudes. The rise of mass spectator sport brought with it demands from the middle-class for 'controlled' and 'orderly' forms of support. This mirrored an earlier tendency in Britain where Methodist and evangelical middle-class reform movements tried to suppress violent folk blood sports like dog and cock fighting, bear, bull and badger baiting, and robust pastimes such as folk football. This call for prohibition was meant to eradicate entertainments that fostered drinking, gambling and lewd behaviour amongst the plebeian social order (although some in the aristocracy and middle-class also participated in these events). Calls for a new 'civilising' process was made by the middle class to prevent unruly and riotous behaviour that threatened social order, and was part of a process that had at its object 'the creation of a more orderly, disciplined, regulated and supervised society'.⁵

4 Senyard, 'Marvellous Melbourne'.

5 Robert D. Storch (ed.), *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, p. 14.

Journalists played an important role in espousing middle-class codes of behaviour in relation to spectatorship. These correspondents encouraged obedience to respectable notions of bourgeois behaviour and urged social and legal sanctions against those who consumed their sport in an inappropriate manner. The better class of football supporter was expected to act as a model for the 'lower orders' by displaying discipline, self-restraint and a respect for law and order. The release of emotions was acceptable to a certain degree, as cheering was natural, but one was also expected to applaud 'fair play' on the field and be magnanimous in victory and humble in defeat.⁶ In Victoria, football journalists were quick to acknowledge and praise such behaviour. As football grew in popularity orderly crowd behaviour was the norm. Many of the working-class spectators who now flocked to the game conformed to middle-class ideals of spectatorship and so obeyed the new capitalist division of leisure and its physical segregations and restraints. Only three police constables were assigned to control a crowd of 13,000 people at the East Melbourne Cricket Ground (EMCG) in June 1879. This seemingly impossible task was achieved because the 'immense crowd were kept in order simply by their own sense of fair play'.⁷

As football crowds grew, new working-class football enthusiasts devised ways of expressing criticism, loyalty and solidarity in rituals of spectatorship that were mostly expressed in socially acceptable and non-disruptive ways. One important expression of support involved the wearing of club colours on one's attire, which was a secular adaptation of plebeian displays at traditional religious festivals and celebrations in earlier times.⁸ When Melbourne played Carlton at the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) in 1880:

The youth of the city and suburbs with whom football is so popular flocked into town and showed their fancy or partisanship by displaying in their buttonholes the colours of their pet team... The ladies, too, mustered in force in the reserve, and wore the dark blue or red and blue to show their preferences.⁹

By 1886 crowds were bringing bannerettes, shawls and entire ensembles decked out in club colours, and those who flaunted paper and cloth rosettes usually secured larger ones as the season progressed, especially when their team looked likely premiers. In 1887, 1,800 Carlton supporters caught the train to Geelong to watch their team and wore 'blue and white hatbands, with the words "Forward, Carlton", lettered in gold, while others sported gaudy woollen

6 Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1986, pp. 88-9.

7 *Argus*, 16 June 1879.

8 Guttman, *Sports Spectators*, p. 83.

9 *Age*, 7 June 1880.

caps of the same colour.¹⁰ A range of celebratory rituals such as a parade of carriages — from which club supporters flourished flags and handkerchiefs adorned with the club's colours — accompanied premiership teams *en route* to their final matches of the season. In 1889 when the South Melbourne team was afforded this tribute it was preceded by a brass band playing 'See the Conquering Hero Come'. Other revelry that added colour to the spectator experience included those who celebrated a goal by throwing their hats into the air and stomping on them when they fell to ground. Others raised babies into the air and shook them in triumph after a goal was scored.

The Continuities of Working-Class Culture

The middle class did much to propagate civilised and responsible behaviour to maintain good public order at sports events. These ideals attracted the support of many aspiring working-class artisans, trades, self-employed and small business people. Nevertheless, there were plebeian customs that had little in common with middle-class calls for reason, discipline and self-restraint. This had certainly been the case in Britain. Their rituals and expressions came to dominate the football spectatorship of 'barrackers' in Australian football and 'fans' in British soccer, and many did not consider middle-class customs to be superior or desirable.

In some quarters it was felt that the ignorant and uncivilised working classes did not have any worthwhile 'culture'. This was the case in Britain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when, 'the terms, "working classes" or "toiling masses" carried no positive cultural connotations, for they signified *irreligion, intemperance, improvidence or immorality*.'¹¹ The 'lower orders' did have cultural traditions that were expressed at old festivals, wakes and fairs, as well as religious and other holidays throughout the annual calendar. Some of these occasions permitted temporary liberation from established social constraints and expectations. Mikhail Bakhtin used the term 'Carnavalesque' to describe the behaviour and rituals carried out on special occasions when plebeians could reverse and subvert conventional social orders. At these hedonistic celebrations authority figures like lords, priests, and upper gentry could be freely ridiculed, and even the king could be mocked in rituals that turned him into a clown and thereby symbolised the victory of the collective social body over individual power.¹² Derby's street football was a case in point, for after having been played by 1000 men and boys

10 *Argus*, 12 September 1887.

11 Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Working Class Culture and Working-Class Politics in London, 1870–1900: Notes on the remaking of a Working Class', *Journal of Social History*, vol. 4, 1974, p. 463.

12 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984.

for six hours, the player who secured the winning goal was chaired through the streets like a king on a throne, and was given the honour of throwing up the ball to start the following year's contest like any other dignitary. At such times it was permissible to be disrespectful to one's 'betters', and 'it was customary for unpopular or just well-dressed persons among the spectators to be "dusted" with bags of soot or powder.'¹³

Carnivals that were held on Shrove Tuesday, Good Friday, Easter Tuesday and Christmas Day in Derby, Middlesex, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire often included football matches. On such occasions football was part festival, part game, and when describing the plebeian crowd's interest in football it was suggested that 'enthusiasm was too cold a word for their attachment to it'.¹⁴ This is not surprising given that these games presented opportunities to celebrate kinship reunions and other forms of social bonding that reinforced community identities. Annual football contests were also ritualised hostilities that were held between rival towns, villages or communities, and they were keenly contested, for the community pride of the township was at stake. These were winner-take-all affairs, and it was acceptable to offer any advice and any means, whether fair or foul, to help one's side to victory. The games were chaotic and it was difficult to tell players and viewers apart at times, for players came and went as they pleased and viewers sometimes participated or directly interfered with the play. In the confusion it was not unusual for violence to break out, and these led to assaults, damaged property, severe injury, and other forms of mayhem, especially when there were old scores to settle.¹⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed efforts to suppress these pastimes were instigated because:

[s]uch annual releases of constraint were bothersome to the point of being subversive. They could earn the committed opposition of the pleasure-distrusting evangelical; the scorn of the rational; the distaste of the aspiring; the impatience of the business community; and the fear of the magistracy. As public occasions, calendar festivals were striking concentrations of those aspects of

13 Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society 1700–1850*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973, p. 78.

14 Eileen Yeo and Stephen Yeo (eds), *Popular Culture and Class Conflict 1590–1914: Explorations in the History of Labour and Leisure*, Harvester Press, Sussex, 1981, p. 91.

15 Robert Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society*, pp. 82–83; Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, *Barbarians, Gentlemen, and Players. A Sociological Study of the Development of Rugby Football*, Routledge: London/New York, 2005, pp. 21–22.

rough and disturbing plebeian leisure which were most disliked and most worrying.¹⁶

The 'rough and disturbing plebeian leisure' included cruel animal sports like rat, badger, and bear baiting, and cock and dogfights. Despite some fierce resistance authorities were eventually able to suppress many of these pastimes, including street football. Moreover, as working class people were introduced to the new disciplines of the industrial workplace, so too was their leisure time transformed from a weekly or fortnightly period of carnival celebrations (like Whitsuntide) to the allocated 'vacation' or one day 'holiday' permitted by bourgeois employers, and supported by parliamentary legislation.

In Victoria the middle class organised and fostered the growth of football and established its clubs, but as the colony's affluence increased during the 1870s working people began to play and attend football matches in ever increasing numbers. Although wages were relatively high in Victoria leisure time was not so evenly spread. The eight-hour day movement started in the 1860s, but it took time to have an appreciable impact on the rest of the workforce. In 1870 the Victorian government agreed on a work contract of eight-hour days with railway workers, and in 1874 miners and engine drivers secured similar conditions. The privilege of the half-holiday on Saturday had first been granted to the civil service, bank officers and schoolteachers, but by the end of the 1870s many factory and building workers began to enjoy the same benefit.

Melbourne's working-class poor were mainly spread throughout the lower parts of the city's northern inner suburbs such as Carlton, Fitzroy and Collingwood. In those areas they lived along lanes, alleys, narrow streets, next to and between factories. This was in stark contrast to the wide suburban streets of middle-class life. In North Melbourne, Richmond and South Melbourne the poor lived in low-lying areas that were easily flooded while the middle class lived on higher ground. Many of these poorer areas over time became the slums of Melbourne and were associated with crime, disease and destitution. Employment from these areas usually went to non-unionised unskilled workers who were ready fodder for industrialised factory operations. In time, work on the assembly line became the norm for many from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and some worked 10-14 hour days in five-and-a-half and six-day weeks. This included kitchen hands, hospital staff, shop assistants (retail shops could remain open until 10 o'clock on Saturday nights), hotel workers, and delivery workers. Lower class women were generally employed in domestic work as cooks or maids.

When working-class barrackers were able to attend football games from

16 John Rule, *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England 1750-1850*, Longman, London, New York, 1986, p. 215.

the late 1870s they made football into a mass spectacle. Most workers did not have the luxury of sitting in the grandstands, but they did stand in the Outer and could freely release their inhibitions, and in the process brought a form of team support that transformed amused watching into serious 'barracking'. Senyard has described barracking as 'the vanguard in the evolution of spectating', that instigated a different way of viewing modern football:

[I]t was the working class who most impressed and it was those who stood in the outer that assumed greatest power. The people who purchased membership tickets and sat in the grandstands... were often seen as tempering their emotional commitment by seeking protection from the weather and the comfort of seating. It was the spectators who were prepared to stand for the afternoon in the ripping wind or the sleety rain who evoked admiration ... [T]his was the real football crowd for in the outer emotional experience was supreme.¹⁷

The drenched spectator standing in the Outer did not get great value for money, but did get the opportunity to 'barrack' in a manner that challenged middle-class propriety and its ideals about 'fair play'. The working-class barracker also strongly identified with clubs and the communities from which they sprang because of his or her commitment to strong territorial, social and familial ties. These loyalties carried no price tag. Like the fan on the terraces of Football Association grounds in Britain, the barracker could 'enjoy some success through the victory of his or her team, in a kind of "reflected glory". Communities produced local sides... and came together to support the town club, as a form of civic pride.'¹⁸

The Barracker

The spectator who became known as the 'barracker' rose to prominence in the mid-1880s, but this social type had emerged at an early period of the game. The growing popularity of football in Victoria during the late 1860s was in part due to encounters between the Melbourne Football Club and British soldiers of HM 14th (Buckinghamshire) Regiment. Contests between them in 1867-68 attracted exceptional crowds of over 3,000 people. In 1869 there was so much public interest in an impending match between these rivals that it was held at the MCG so an admission price could be charged. It was around this time that the term 'barracker' emerged because of the

17 Senyard, 'The Barracker and the Spectator', p. 36.

18 R. W. Lewis, 'Our Lady Specialists at Pikes Lane': Female Spectators in Early English Professional Football, 1880-1914, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 26, 2009, p. 2172.

boisterous support offered by soldiers to their comrades on the field of play.¹⁹ The regiment's soldiers, the bulk of whom came from plebeian/working-class backgrounds, were noisy, excitable and fanatical. This uninhibited expression of emotion eventually entered into broader football culture, and the expression of any loud or particularly enthusiastic encouragement for a team was called 'barracking'.

Barracking was a complex social phenomenon and distinctions were made between various forms of barracking. While one could enjoy the atmosphere and forcefully cheer for a favourite team, one was also expected to display decent social conduct. For instance, in a match between University and Hotham in 1886 another journalist was at pains to emphasise that although 'The "barracking" was earnest, and sometimes lively', it 'was conducted on respectable lines.' Barracking was also differentiated from other forms of spectatorship as illustrated in a report in 1892 in a match between St Kilda and Carlton, which 'was witnessed by a large gathering of spectators, including "barrackers" for both sides, who made their presence known by forcible demonstrations of disapproval whenever the umpire's ruling was not to their liking.'²⁰ Broadly, barracking was understood as the show of enthusiastic support, but the 'barracker' was a social type who presented a fanatical dedication to clubs, which expressed a new level of intense football following. The barracker's extreme personal investment in a team exceeded conventional expectations, and their renowned partisanship gave rise to the term 'one-eyed'. The barracker was an obsessive and effusive student of the game, taking great pride in knowing every player by his first name, and being able to 'recognize him almost by the glimpse of a bootlace'. In 1888, a correspondent called 'Hawkeye' stated that it was:

[i]dle for any man to expect to converse with a 'barracker' at a football match ... The more the opposition barrackers howl, the hoarser grows the throat, and his tonsils tremble and jump like the piston rod of an express steam engine. Not until his throat is like the sole of an old boot that has been drying in the sun for a summer, does he think he has done his duty to the club of which he is the self-constituted barracker.²¹

The working-class barracker 'cheered' with those from other classes, genders and age groups at a football match, but the barracker also heckled and jeered, and such practices became more prevalent as the century progressed. Aggressive and negative barracking did not conform to middle-

19 Geoffrey Blainey, *A Game of Our Own. The Origins of Australian Football*, Information Australia, Melbourne, 1990, p. 54.

20 *Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1886; *Age*, 18 August 1892

21 *St. Kilda Chronicle*, 12 May 1888, p. 5.

class values: journalists roundly condemned those who disparaged, abused or encouraged acts of violence against opposition players and umpires. On such occasions, barracking was identified with social unruliness and disorder, and was described by terms such as ‘blackguardism’, ‘rowdiness’, ‘ruffianism’ and ‘larrikinism’. The daily and weekly press kept an account of this threat to ideal spectatorship, and as early as 1876, the correspondent ‘Vagabond’ declared that football had a ‘decided moral lowering and brutalising effect upon the spectators’, and described the conduct of barrackers who ‘howled and shrieked’, as well as the values they espoused:

[T]he show was a fine one, but the cruelty and brutality intermixed with it, and which the crowd loudly applauded, and appeared to consider the principal attraction, was anything but a promising evidence of a high civilisation. I was told by several that it would be a pretty rough game, and they gloated in the fact. As the play went on, and men got heavy falls, and rose limping or bleeding, the applause was immense. “Well played, sir” always greeted a successful throw. “That’s the way to smash ‘em” said one of my neighbours. “Pitch him over!” and such cries were frequent.²²

Across Victoria, bellicose and abusive barracking became the dominant mannerism in football spectatorship by the early twentieth century and was described in the following newspaper report:

The army of “barrackers” which follows each football team is an unruly horde, obeying very primitive impulses, and giving itself up every Saturday afternoon to the ecstasy of reasonless emotional seizures. The noisiest “barrackers” are unfledged youth and callow girls, whose idea of a happy half-holiday on Saturday makes them a curious psychological study. The barracker has no keen interest in the game as a game; he is happiest indeed when he shuts his eyes to the play, and, turning his face upward, howls to the sky like an Arctic dog... Among the very tender youth of Victoria, football has created a sectarianism, with a cleavage as deep as that between Conservative and Liberal, Orange and Green.²³

Such reports established a clear divide between civilised and uncivilised observers, and between the respectable spectator and the savage barracker.²⁴ Journalists often denounced aggressive, gratuitous, ungenerous and brutal barracking and called for a return to moral rectitude and action from

22 *Argus*, 30 September 1876.

23 Unsourced citation in Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where Cazaly? The Great Australian Game*, Granada, London, 1981, p. 65.

24 Senyard, ‘The Barracker and the Spectator’, p. 49.

authorities to protect middle-class culture from such savageries. Some in the working class however followed their own tune, and although many undoubtedly conformed to new forms of controlled leisure initiated by the middle-class, others resisted this hegemony and asserted a more autonomous culture.

This had been evident in British culture, where the working-class:

... developed its own repertoire of collective action, folk wisdom, moral economy and so forth. Although it could not help but be sensitive to changes in political climate, law, urban development and the vagaries of ideological change in ruling groups and local elites, it entered the nineteenth century with some strengths. It certainly did not go down like nine pins before... the new institutions of urban industrial capitalism; nor did it give up the ghost immediately it was bidden — whether in the countryside, the small town or ... industrial cities.²⁵

This being the case, one can argue that the barracker's calls for violence against opponents and umpires were not a social aberration as much as the continuation of pre-industrial habits of aggressive support expressed by plebeian/working-class participants in calendar events and other festivities. In the late nineteenth century barrackers in a Victorian football crowd were continuing forms of spectatorship that were seen at cock and dog fights, football and other forms of plebeian leisure that were common in Britain until the mid-nineteenth century. One would also expect that British migrants, like those who remained in the mother country, adapted older forms of plebeian/working-class 'barracking' to new middle-class sports, and transferred many of those customs to Australia. It is therefore not coincidental that troublesome and aggressive spectatorship was also prevalent in the north of England at soccer matches during the same period, and lifted in intensity during the mid-1880s and 1890s.²⁶

Resistance

As in Britain, the working class in Victoria did not always 'consume' their leisure like middle-class audiences and at times reacted against hegemonic norms of spectatorship established by that class. This reaction may have been encouraged by the actual physical segregation of spectators in sports grounds. As in Australian cricket those in the Outer may have rejected

25 Robert D. Storch, *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England*, Croom Helm, London, 1982, p. 8.

26 R. W. Lewis 'Football Hooliganism in England before 1914: A Critique of the Dunning thesis', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 13, 1996, pp. 310–39.

grandstand habitués who followed ‘the English tradition of polite applause for both sides’ as the ‘lower-class fans of the Outer developed a lusty counter tradition of ‘barracking’ friend and foe alike.

Many ‘spectators’ accommodated the new conditions of viewing sport, but others resisted, for instance, having to pay for their leisure. It was not unusual for journalists to report that so many thousand patrons paid for entry while others watched the game from outside the perimeters of the ground. This was such a common practice at the Punt Road Oval that an area was called ‘Scotchman’s Hill’ because it overlooked the ground and was used by those who regularly watched Richmond’s games for free. Similar phenomena were reported at other venues like the MCG in June 1892 when 14,000 people paid to watch a match between Carlton and Geelong while another 10,000 were estimated to have jumped the fence. At the EMCG in May 1893 it was observed that many watched the game for nothing from the Jolimont railway bridge. Others viewed games from trees, or peered between the cracks in the fence. Some people forged tickets to enter the ground, others passed their membership tickets through gates to friends outside, and one enterprising supporter impersonated an umpire in an attempt to gain free entry. In the 1890s local Footscray residents protested the full enclosure of the Western Oval: they were now expected to pay for football games that had once been observed for free on a public reserve that allowed access for all members of the community.²⁷

Spectators also contravened the boundaries that separated them from the players. Throughout the 1870s players had to operate in ever-diminishing fields of play when spectators spilled onto the ground. This was understandable given that the space between players and viewers was not properly cordoned off at the time, but such interference continued into the 1880s and 1890s even though football was now played on enclosed grounds. In 1880 a spectator threw his hat at Carlton’s Gunn just as he was about to kick for goal and in 1882 during a match between Melbourne and South Melbourne at the MCG a ‘rough’ jumped the fence and struck the umpire. It was also not unusual for boys and adults to throw stones or hats at the ball to prevent a player from properly taking his kick. Crowds also kept the ball when it went out of bounds, especially home supporters when trying to waste time if their team was leading and had to kick against the breeze. At Geelong in the final match of the 1894 season Essendon had its time with the breeze in the final quarter reduced in half when local supporters stole, ran away with, or concealed the ball.

27 Maggie Indian, ‘Formalisation of Urban Leisure: Melbourne 1880–1900’ in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport, Money, Morality and the Media*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1979, p. 275.

During the first 20 years of Australian football's development, when the primary audience was middle class, football rarely suffered crowd problems. In the 1870s some problems arose in matches involving the Albert Park and South Melbourne clubs. Yet crowds were generally so well behaved that a police presence at football games was rarely required, as was remarked at a Carlton and Melbourne match at the EMCG in 1880: 'The ground was well kept. The point on the west wing where there is generally a little crowding was kept by a couple of mounted troopers — a very unusual sight on a Victorian football ground'.²⁸ Sporadic crowd problems arose in the early 1880s, but a fracas at the Corio Oval, Geelong in August 1883 between visiting Carlton and local supporters was so atypical that it provoked indignant letters to newspapers complaining about abusive language and 'ungentlemanly conduct'.²⁹ Crowd behaviour worsened as the decade progressed when a greater influx of spectators from working-class backgrounds appeared on the scene. Moreover, from 1884 clubs with strong working-class affiliations were admitted to the VFA and brought significant new audiences with them to football matches.

Umpires were rarely popular but reports of harassment of them became more frequent during the 1880s and 1890s. The worst incident occurred at South Melbourne in July 1884 when some local supporters attacked umpire J. J. Trait. This troublesome trend escalated when the VFA was expanded to include new clubs such as Williamstown (1884), Richmond (1885), Port Melbourne, Footscray, St Kilda (1886), and Fitzroy (1884). All senior football clubs were founded by middle class members of the local community and were supported by patrons from the same class, but the first four of these clubs were based in working-class suburbs, and claimed a largely working-class following. For many of these supporters, the idea that one's choice of club should be determined by middle-class sensibility ahead of tribal affiliation was totally foreign. In July 1886 newspaper reports spoke darkly of 'disgraceful disturbances' at Williamstown, and in September there was a near riot at North Melbourne, a club that had a well-earned reputation for unruly crowds. In September 1887 a brawl broke out between Prahran and Richmond supporters, and in 1888 two brawls in the crowd were reported in consecutive weeks at Footscray. In the same year came a report of a 'skirmish' between Footscray and Richmond barrackers; this was followed by crowd violence towards an umpire at Williamstown when hosting Fitzroy: police who were stationed at Williamstown railway station hurried to the ground to help restore order, but in the process left the station open to rampaging Fitzroy larrikins who rushed the station, jumped the barriers and pushed their way onto the trains.

28 *Argus*, 10 July 1880.

29 See letters to the *Argus* 10, 11 August 1883.

The 1889 season coincided with the looming economic depression in Melbourne and was a watershed year in relation to crowd violence. Attacks on umpires and players, and near riots occurred at Footscray, St Kilda, Williamstown, Port Melbourne and North Melbourne. Disputes and fights among spectators were reported at matches involving local rivals like Footscray and Williamstown, Williamstown and St Kilda, and Port Melbourne and South Melbourne. Police arrested barrackers for brawling at games twice in September, and on the second occasion Footscray supporters began an all-out brawl that involved the players. In 1890 umpires were regularly attacked and it had become normal practice for police to escort them from grounds. During the year North Melbourne supporters attacked the umpire with fists, hats and stones every time he went near the boundary line. Incidents such as these forced the Victorian Football Association to ask police to station four mounted officers at North Melbourne to prevent further problems. In the same year Footscray supporters vandalised a train after a match, South Melbourne supporters were involved in a crowd disturbance at the Corio Oval in which hotels were vandalised, and in a match between South Melbourne and Carlton supporters of both clubs hit out at players during play, which led to retaliation from the players. The worst incident occurred on 23 August when near rioting Footscray supporters seriously threatened the field umpire.

The North Melbourne club was held to be particularly responsible for the decline in spectator 'standards'. Under the headline 'Blackguardism and Football', the journalist 'Observer' reported on a VFA subcommittee meeting that investigated some 'disgraceful' incidents that occurred at the Arden Street ground in June 1890.³⁰ In covering these events the correspondent struggled to adapt to a situation in which good and bad spectators seemed to have become both barrackers and members of football clubs. He believed part of the problem was due to the display of club colours, a custom which in previous times had represented a harmless adaptation to mass spectator sport and the opportunity to show one's club allegiance. If 'anyone' could be associated with a football club and behave in a manner that brought disrepute to that club then an established sense of order was put at risk. 'Observer' railed against a changed football landscape where working-class spectators were 'taking over the game' by infiltrating the territories of exclusion that had once marked its viewing. This infiltration resembled a guerrilla war in which the 'enemy' could not be clearly identified. '[F]ootball clubs in spite of their enormous revenues seek to swell them by enrolling members indiscriminately ... This is a very bad form of money-hunger'.³¹

30 *Argus*, 14 June 1890.

31 *Argus*, 14 June 1890.

'Observer's' complaint about 'money-hunger' overlooked double standards that had been undermining the 'amateur' ethos of football's formative years. The bourgeois hegemony conceived by industrial capitalism included the kind of entrepreneurialism that helped develop the modern infrastructures to profit from a captive football viewing public. Yet, the principles of *laissez-faire* capitalism forced poorer clubs to grab money wherever it could be found, as they did not have the kind of financial patronage enjoyed by the wealthier clubs. This meant these clubs had to lower the price of season membership tickets to gain as much money as possible so as to keep up with their more affluent competitors.

By 1891–92 the economic depression contributed to a reduction in attendances, but admission was still only sixpence, and most commentators blamed the decline of popularity on crowd disorder and a poor standard of play. By August 1892 crowd trouble had reached epidemic proportions. In that month Fitzroy supporters punched and kicked Melbourne players. At South Melbourne an Essendon player's cheek was cut open when a stone was thrown at him from the crowd, and North Melbourne's captain became embroiled in a heated argument with Geelong supporters during a game. In September Fitzroy supporters gave the South Melbourne players a 'send-off', which led to the arrest and charge of a man for attacking someone with a 'loaded' stick. The year culminated with an all-out brawl at Geelong where Carlton player Bill Hannah was arrested and charged for assault. Violent behaviour was now endemic and the VFA felt obliged to form a 'disturbance committee' to try and find ways to control crowds. This committee made little impact: in 1893 crowd problems were so numerous that they became a regular part of the football experience. In June 1893 a judge claimed that people were now afraid to go to matches 'on account of the conduct of the crowd of "barrackers"'.³² Port Melbourne was infamous for the poor behaviour of its supporters and players, and in August 1893 the VFA warned the club to eliminate 'rowdiness' or it could no longer play on its home ground. Port Melbourne responded to this warning by printing 'keep order' messages on their membership tickets.

As attendances continued to slide the wealthier clubs began plotting to form a breakaway league. One of the catalysts for this action occurred during the 1896 season. This had been a relatively uneventful year until July when North Melbourne met Collingwood at the North Melbourne Recreation Reserve and 2,000 local supporters rioted after their side narrowly lost a close-fought encounter. Male and female barrackers, including some armed with sticks, iron bars and hat-pins attacked the umpire and Collingwood players as they approached the members' pavilion. One female supporter

³² *Age*, 27 June 1893.

struck umpire Roberts in the face at half time and he was attacked again after the match when he passed through the gate towards his dressing room. Collingwood captain Proudfoot and some North Melbourne players tried to protect Roberts but he was only able to safely leave the ground when additional police were added to his escort. This explosion of crowd violence was due to a great sense of frustration and the fierce desire to defend local pride, but the *Australasian* called the riot a 'wild beast show' and described the male and female rioters as savages whose behaviour had disgraced football and civilisation.³³

This riot was not only a violent transgression of boundaries between spectators and players, officials and observers, but also symbolised the erasure of class segregations in the stadium. As in 1890 some journalists were particularly incensed that the riot was generated from the members' grandstand at the North Melbourne ground. The *Australasian* stated that the trustees of the ground were in part responsible for the disgraceful behaviour because they failed to maintain the normal segregation between respectable, middle-class spectators and the mob, which usually congregated in the Outer. This 'invasion' of middle-class territory was too much to bear:

The assault upon the umpire was made in the reserve, the particular section of the ground that should come directly under the supervision of the trustees... The reserve... differs from members' reserves at most cricket-grounds. Members of the cricket and football clubs and the privileged guests of both are admitted to it, but in addition every common barracker and low ruffian who puts up an extra 6d is at liberty to enter, and to disgust the more respectable section of the occupants with the vilest of language, and even, as Saturday's proceedings testify, to batter inoffensive and unprotected umpires.³⁴

This correspondent believed that working-class ruffians and the culture from which they came were ruining an admirable game, one invented by middle-class sportsmen and their followers. These same people had now also come to dominate one of the major bastions of middle-class spectatorship: the grandstand.

It is noteworthy that the escalation of crowd trouble in football grounds from poorer suburbs in the 1890s occurred during the greatest economic depression the colony had known. Extravagant financial speculators fed a land boom in the 1880s and exacerbated structural instabilities that unravelled in the early 1890s. This left a trail of bankruptcies, credit emergencies and a ruined economy. The depression had a particularly severe impact on

33 *Australasian*, 1 August 1896.

34 *Australasian*, 1 August 1896.

employment. The economy shrank by 30 per cent between 1891 and 1895 and unemployment reached 30 per cent of skilled labour by 1893. Employment in transport and communication fell by 21 per cent after the government ceased major construction projects. The end of the building boom put thousands of factory workers, tradesmen and building labourers out of a job. Workers in the inner suburbs were particularly reliant on employment in manufacturing and trades. In 1891, 54 per cent of Collingwood's male workforce was aligned with manufacturing and trade, 55 per cent in Footscray, 53 per cent in Richmond, and 49 per cent in North and Port Melbourne.³⁵ Unemployed male breadwinners rose from 8.3 per cent to 17.6 per cent during 1891–93.³⁶ Areas such as Port Melbourne, Brunswick, Footscray and parts of Prahran, where 'young working-class families had hardly known the stigma of destitution', now faced particularly high levels of unemployment.³⁷

These unstable economic circumstances may help to explain the intensity of violent conduct at football grounds during the 1890s. If football had been captured by the working class it was partly due to the fact that the football stadium was one of the few places where working-class people could continue to hold onto something dearly loved and local, especially at a time when they were suffering severe economic, social and political deprivations. During the economic depression the working-class football follower was deprived of much power and esteem either as an unskilled worker, or as one of the many unemployed that had paid the price for the reckless actions of middle-class entrepreneurs. Moreover, football allowed them to barrack in a socially unacceptable way and so to 'consume' football in the way they chose. When they crossed the boundaries of 'decent' behaviour, they did so deliberately, and in the process brought an earlier hegemonic middle-class convention into crisis. The riots in particular were violent collective actions that seriously eroded the legitimacy of middle-class ideology and its construction of social order. The football authorities and their journalistic colleagues attempted to maintain the line of proper 'consumption', to hold on to an earlier morality, but they could not ultimately control the way people consumed their leisure. This was because:

[t]he Melbourne crowd had made the game its own — and, if moved by anger or frustration, showed themselves only too ready

35 Lesley Ann Fricker, 'Aspects of Melbourne's nineteenth century urbanisation process', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1978, pp. 241, 244, 256, 279.

36 Shurlee Swain, 'The Poor People of Melbourne' in Graeme Davison, David Dunstan and Chris McConville (eds), *The Outcasts of Melbourne : Essays in Social History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 96.

37 Swain, 'The Poor People of Melbourne', p. 104.

to take an active part. The football authorities wanted to have it both ways — to enjoy the large revenues provided by the mob, but at the same time to exercise (or have the police exercise) an effective control.³⁸

The working-class made football into a lucrative mass spectacle and became the lifeblood that enabled the game to expand. However, the measures of control and reorganisation that were implemented to make the most of this new leisure industry could not entirely tame the market that gave it life. This was a cost the middle class had not expected to pay.

Conclusion

If barracking was an innovation in sports watching during the late 1870s, by the 1890s aggressive barracking became the dominant means of expressing support at the football. The North Melbourne riot of 1896 perhaps highlighted this transformation in spectatorship more than any other event. It was widely condemned by middle-class commentators: the conservative *Argus* took the opportunity to inform readers that such activities were alienating middle-class spectators and driving them from the game. It was also argued that the absence of reputable and ‘ideal’ middle-class viewers contributed to declining standards in crowd behaviour and in the way football was played. An *Argus* columnist argued that:

The majority of the players compare very unfavourably indeed with some of the old Melbourne, Carlton, Essendon and Geelong teams, who made the game a great one. Men of that stamp now prefer cycling, harrier-racing, and other sports to football, and the game is the loser by it. The attendances have fallen away greatly, and the surviving patrons are unfortunately not the fittest... With the game thus given away to mere “barrackers” the spectators at some of the lesser matches are entirely one-sided, and such scenes as that at North Melbourne on Saturday are likely to occur.³⁹

Such statements announced a kind of defeat of middle-class spectatorship and its sense of control over the game. It also signalled the triumph of a working-class attitude to sporting leisure that was marked by a strongly emotional and aggressive form of barracking, which was often fractious and occasionally violent. The working class multitudes that attended the sport in increasing numbers from the late 1870s also brought increased revenue to ambitious clubs like South Melbourne who used the funds to recruit the best players, and its success in this area brought a bounty of premierships and considerable civic pride to the suburb. Such processes also contributed

38 Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner, *Up Where Cazaly?*, pp. 65–66.

39 *Argus*, 27 July 1896.

to the dissipation of the game's middle-class amateur roots in favour of a professionalised mass spectator sport. Historian Richard Cashman's summation of cricket supporters in the nineteenth century helps explain the trends in football spectatorship that have been argued here:

Side by side with the patrician involvement was a vigorous plebeian tradition: more boisterous, sometimes even violent, less imitative and more indigenous, and more in tune with working-class rather than elite values. From time to time the plebeians threatened to overwhelm the patricians, and to appropriate cricket for the people.⁴⁰

The working class made a significant contribution to the rituals of football spectatorship in Victorian Melbourne and introduced customs such as 'barracking', characters known as 'barrackers', and other rituals that expressed a fanatical support for clubs. These undermined middle-class ideals of the polite, fair-minded, and restrained spectatorship. Such fanaticism also led to serious breaches of viewing etiquette and the social order, and in so doing disrupted and sometimes violently challenged the new organisation of leisure.

40 Richard Cashman, *Ave A Go, Yer Mug! Australian Cricket Crowds from Larrikin to Order*, Harper-Collins, Sydney, 1984, pp. 21–22.