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Australia: a model of egalitarian sports society?

Joncheray Helene

Australia as a country is recognised as "athletic". Its successes in international competitions, as well as the fact that it regularly hosts important sports events, are evidence of that. In 2003, not only did Australia host the rugby World Cup, but the Wallabies¹ made it to the final even though Rugby Union is a sport which can be described as minor within the national sports space. The simple observation of the number of athletes who have won medals, related to its population, often places Australia on top of the best nations in international competitions. As novelist Bryson (2000, p. 147-148) says humorously, Australia still is in a class of its own, as far as sports are concerned. Bryson uses the example of the Atlanta Olympic Games, at which Australians won 3.8 medals per million of inhabitants, which is twice as much as the second-placed nation, Germany, and five times as much as the United States. Moreover, Australian medals were obtained in varied sports, 14 in all, which was only achieved by one other nation, the United States. Sports in which Australians do not excel are thus rare. For the sake of comparison with France, at the same Olympics, Australia won 41 medals with a population of 20 million, while France won 37 when it has three times more inhabitants. And if one looks only at participation, as Didon would appreciate, Australia is one of a few countries which have competed in every Olympics since the start of the Baron de Coubertin era. In 1956, the Olympic Games took place in Melbourne before going back to Sydney in 2000. As a matter of fact, the introduction of television services in Australia was programmed to coincide with the first Olympiads. As can easily be imagined, the importance of this sports event helped sell TV sets and provided a powerful promotional tool (Goldlust, 1987, p. 81).

The significance of physical activities among settlers and the climate, which contributes to the practice of outdoor activities, are some of the reasons which explain the sizeable role sports have in the Australian society. However, the introduction of sports didn't occur in idyllic conditions. The arrival of British immigrants, who had their own sports culture and above all, their special colonist status, disrupted the lives of between 500 and 600 aboriginal tribes with different sociocultural origins, and whose traditional games were listed and detailed by Edwards (1999). As Adair and Wamplew (1997, p. 65) explain, contrarily to a belief widespread in Australia, colonists are not responsible for the apparition of physical activities

¹ Son équipe nationale

on the continent. They brought with them what are now labelled as sports, but traditional games such as the famous boomerang were already played by a lot of Aborigines (700 games were listed by Edward). In the circumstances briefly mentioned, the breaking up, the destruction even, of aboriginal cultures following the invasion of tribal territories and the imposition of European beliefs and values, most often prevented the passing on of their customs from generation to generation, and of traditional physical activities among others (Adair et Wamplew, 1997, p. 22). One of the specificities of the colonisation of Australia (peopled by exiled British prisoners) is that it generated a division of physical activities into sectors: most individuals, be they governors, detainees or free colonists, had access to the practice of "their sports" (Stoddart, 1986, p. p.24), these being an ideal way to have access to social relations in the first 80 years of colonisation. Some activities, such as horse racing or cricket, helped upper classes to distinguish themselves and reinforce their status and feeling of superiority. The first clubs offered them the possibility of meeting individuals from a similar background. The colonial elite thus created in hunting and golf clubs, as well as in most tennis clubs, a sort of sanctuary in which people with the same social status were able to socialise (Stoddart, 1986, p. 47). At the end of the 19th century, when the gold rush transformed this penal colony in a promised land, Australia experienced new changes but its development didn't prevent it from keeping certain characteristics. One of the most important ones concerns the number of participants. The following table, which lists the number of members according to their gender, happens to be quite telling.

Sex	Age group (years)	Fitness, leisure or indoor sports centre	Sport or recreation club or association	Work	School	Other	Total organised participation
		Number ('000)					
Males	15 to 24	233.5	668.7	15.5*	184.2	36.9	872.0
	25 to 34	221.8	498.5	23.3*	4.7**	64.4	655.4
	35 to 44	177.9	425.1	27.2*	7.5*	58.7	578.9
	45 to 54	109.5	322.5	16.0*	0.2**	49.1	427.7
	55 to 64	76.0	229.0	16.3*	0.8**	45.0	308.3
	65 and over	91.3	256.1	0.9**	0.0**	53.5	344.5
	TOTAL		910.1	2,400.0	99.2	197.3	307.7
Females	15 to 24	239.1	453.9	12.6*	188.3	61.3	701.7
	25 to 34	287.9	329.3	21.7*	10.7*	66.3	593.0
	35 to 44	256.0	311.3	13.6*	7.4*	47.8	532.5
	45 to 54	191.1	264.2	14.8*	5.1**	49.0	453.0
	55 to 64	151.9	220.5	1.9**	2.3**	60.6	368.0
	65 and over	137.0	211.1	1.1**	1.7**	87.3	373.6
	TOTAL		1,262.9	1,790.2	65.6	215.5	372.4
Persons	15 to 24	472.6	1,122.6	28.1	372.6	98.2	1,573.7
	25 to 34	509.7	827.8	45.0	15.4*	130.7	1,248.4
	35 to 44	433.9	736.4	40.7	15.0*	106.6	1,111.4
	45 to 54	300.6	586.7	30.8	5.3**	98.2	880.7
	55 to 64	227.9	449.5	18.2*	3.0**	105.5	676.3
	65 and over	228.3	467.1	2.0**	1.7**	140.9	718.0
	TOTAL		2,172.9	4,190.2	164.8	412.9	680.1

Table 1: Organised participants — total participation in organised activities by type of organisation, age and gender, 2007.

Moreover, the leitmotiv of affirmation of their cultural identity and of demonstration of their values through sports has continued to drive its inhabitants.

The first part of this article will broach the beginnings of sports' settlement in Australia, a second one will put the idea that sports were accessible to all to the test, and the last one will deal with the particularities linked to this country.

1. The colonisation and the genocide of the aboriginal population.

The effect of the arrival of English settlers in Australia, at the end of 18th century, was the breaking up and even, in many cases, an elimination which has been recognised a few years ago as a genocide of the aboriginal population. It seems Australia's first inhabitants had come from Asia about 40,000 years ago. Between 500 and 600 tribes with different sociocultural origins and dialects (200 of them) were listed when the colonists arrived. Even if estimates vary, it is widely recognised by historians that hundreds of thousands of Aborigines died following the colonisation by Europeans (Adair and Wamplery, 1997, p. 63). These aborigine

life losses resulted from a violent conflict with settlers, from the isolation of traditional food sources, and from the transmission of new diseases. Aborigines fought for survival, through the economy that existed between the tribes and their cultural system. And because of the British colonists' territorial claims upon aboriginal lands, war was declared.

Added to imperialism, race separations were justified at the time by Darwinism: the domination of the British race justified the subjection and racist abuse. Christian churches denounced Darwinism as opposed to the biblical theory (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 65) and offered refuge to Aborigines during Christian missions, but these institutions were willing to "civilise" them by ignoring aboriginal culture and by imposing European customs. Christian missions introduced sports as part of their ideal of civilisation (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 64). That's why Aborigines were over-represented in Rugby League, Australian Rules (also know as Australian Football or Footy) and boxing (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 143). To this day, K. Edwards, an Australian researcher who is specialised in traditional aboriginal games, has listed more than 700 of them (Edwards, 1999). Under the circumstances we have brought up, traditional aboriginal physical activities have faded away and, most often, ceased to be transmitted from generation to generation. As a matter of fact, as early as the beginning of the 18th century, ancient aboriginal cultures were broken up, even destroyed following the invasion of tribal lands by the imposition of European beliefs and values (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 1). Settlers had their own customs in sports which, for Aborigines, became claims of the white culture's domination. The transfer of desires and cultural activities such as sports and leisure activities, which were familiar to the migrants, reinforced divisions within the Australian society. So social exclusion was very much part of the first stages of colonialism in Australia, and it contradicts the common belief that an egalitarian sports culture was found in the first stages of the country's construction. The colonists had brought their "own sports" in Australia, but these games weren't boundless, according to their place within the population. The arrival of Europeans thus radically modified the Aborigines' life conditions. The idea that sports may have been transplanted into colonised societies with the arrival of a new political regime, of laws, of technology and of culture, is founded on the disappearance of the traditional society's institutions and practices.

So, sports rapidly developed in the former British colony for an obvious reason: Australia was colonised by the "creators" of sports, the British. In the United Kingdom, sports seemed to reinforce social values which the community looked for. Even though several political and historical events, such as the great depression in the 1930s and World War II, disrupted sports'

development in Australia (Bloomfield, 2003), they rapidly became a characteristic feature of Australian life.

2 Sports, accessible to all?

As we've previously explained, the European settlement started in New South Wales in 1788 to the detriment of the continent's first inhabitants. The myth of sports open and accessible to all rapidly grew along with the Australian society.

Colonists of all origins and all classes found in this environment situated on the other side of the world, a fertile ground for the development of sports, in which competition was appreciated with eagerness and enthusiasm, be it on pitches or within the institutions. Paradoxically, sports there were both a means of expressing oneself in order to ensure a cultural and individual unity, and an indicator of social and sectarian differences. The first Australian "sports event" may have been a race between dinghies manned by the First Fleet's boats' crews, and took place in 1788. The first competitions in the colony were not official, but accounts report cricket matches in 1803 (Mandle, 1985, p. 4) and horse races between 1807 and 1809 (Howard, 1978, p. 5), as well as a regatta in 1827 (Molony, 2000, p. 51). Most of the sports played later on were cricket, tennis, rugby, golf, which show Anglo-Saxon origins... and "the development of other sports, such as swimming, is linked to local conditions or the influence of the Oceanian culture" (Pons, 2000, p. 108).

2.1 The prisoners' ambiguous status

The penal status of the first to arrive was imposed upon the prisoners who were transported from England. They weren't supposed to have fun or play. However, the detainees were not mere prisoners, they were the workforce (Pons, 2000, p. 2) of a colony in which the first governors' main concern leaned more towards economical survival than sanctions. While the penal status presupposed a strict discipline, many prisoners were thus granted specific liberties such as spare time, leaves, the ability to live together or even get wed. It was indeed strategically important for Great-Britain to establish a permanent colony in the antipodes. For prisoners, life was made up of servitude but also freedom, as well as leisure activities with little resources. This might explain why the prisoners may have torn up bibles sent by

evangelists in order to make cards by applying soot or blood for red or black characters (Hirst, 1983).

As far as free colons are concerned, they started giving in to traditional British sports and betting. They organised animal competitions such as rooster, dog and rat fights, as well as boxing and wrestling matches (Cumes, 1979).

2.2 The use of sports as a social distinction

At the end of the 19th century, sports were carried out in an atmosphere of social distinction. In Australia, the relationship between the government and the development of sports was clear: in order to become an acceptable cultural form, sports had to be included in the life of the dominating classes. The physical activities the British bourgeoisie had brought aimed at conveying the Christian religion, amateurism and Darwinism's proselytising values. These features of middle-class ideology were exported as a British cultural piece of luggage (Horton, 1997, p. 5). So sports were an ideal access way to social relations in the first 80 years of colonisation. Most individuals could easily play "their sports" (Stoddart, 1986, p. 24). Some physical activities such as horse racing or cricket helped the upper classes to distinguish themselves and to reinforce their status and feeling of superiority. The first clubs offered the possibility for upper classes to meet individuals with a similar background. The colonial elite thus created in hunting clubs, golf clubs and most tennis clubs the equivalent of a sanctuary in which people with the same social status could socialise (Stoddart, 1986, p. 47).

2.3 A relaxing of participation rights

However, one can not affirm that the exact composition of British sports' social features was brought all the way to Australia. As it happens, local conditions induced modifications (Stoddart, 1986, p. 35). The sports that were imported weren't played exactly the same way as in England. The social and physical environment caused changes on sports with British origins, and in about one hundred years, an Australian sports culture emerged (Mangan and Nauright, 2000, p. 88). As D. Adair and W. Vamplew (1997) explain, Australians engaged in imported sports and adapted them. For instance, Australian cricket didn't adopt English gentlemen's rigid, formal and social segregations. Amateur gentlemen and professional players from the working class played on the same teams. However, they didn't use the same changing-rooms, used different doors to enter the pitch and had different, specific

responsibilities on there. Variations in participation were interesting to notice because they suggest differences in the structure of classes' workings, English and Australian societies' in this case, and the importance with which the external logic of specific sports was altered.

So, instead of imitating their social superiors, Australian middle classes adopted a different approach, based upon another philosophy of sports and leisure activities. They had accumulated a lot of wealth, but contrarily to their hedonistic social superiors, they looked for the virtues of discipline, of sobriety. In the middle of the 19th century, middle classes adopted physical activities which corresponded to Christianity's morals (Stoddart, 1986, p. 48). Weight-lifting and athletics constituted two distinct orientations. Firstly, in elitist private schools, athletics were encouraged in order to develop the values of cooperation, loyalty, courage, obedience to rules, devotion and perseverance. The goal was to prepare boys for political or business careers and family life.

In this regard, athletics were an exclusive ideology which aimed at separating classes. Shortly after weight-lifting was instituted, another ideology was associated to it: social Darwinism. Based upon erroneous interpretations of C. Darwin's (1859) ideas, this social Darwinism has had an important influence on the vision of middle classes' life as well as social relations, by bringing in the notion of social and racial prejudices.

2.4 The influence of sports played in school

Sports' status and the country's socioeconomic aspects were modified following the gold rush's impact in 1850s. The growth of big cities and the complexity of socioeconomic relations which ensued saw sports reinforced in their claim as an institutional social key in Australia. One of the main environments in which sports developed during this social metamorphosis was the school system, especially in private schools which tried to preserve British traditions rigorously (Vamplew and Stoddart, 1994, p. 18). Team sports and athletic physical activities were very popular. Football was played in different ways in schools. In Melbourne schools, for instance, Australian Rules football was the most popular physical activity while in Sydney, it was Rugby Union. Then, at the beginning of the 20th century, catholic schools in Sydney were won over by Rugby League. These schools were the main conveyor of cultural diffusion in this British continent.

2.5 Differing points of view

According to J. A. Mangan and J. Nauright (2000, p. 78), all of Australia's history is that of a conflict between social classes. One's economical status determined the sport(s) each Australian played, how, when and where (Booth and Tatz, 2000, p. 38). According to another historian, R. Waterhouse, the involvement of all classes in sports and leisure activities in Australia suggests that the cultural life had a homogenous quality at the time (Waterhouse, 1989, p. 247). R. Waterhouse claimed that the cultural change through sports and leisure activities was a product of the 1830s and 40s, when a middle class society started to emerge. But according to him, the seeds of social segregation had certainly been planted earlier because New South Wales' colonial elite (Australia's most populated province) tried to distinguish itself from the sociability of the prisoners and those who had been emancipated for a long time. The aristocracy accentuated its distinction by avoiding "common" recreations. For example, it preferred not to go swimming in the sea because Sydney's prisoners often swam in salt water. Swimming, indeed, was a "dirty" recreation. They also tried to reinforce their positions by delimiting leisure spaces: when pastors' families ruled on balls, dancers were subjected to discrimination depending on their status, and colonists and former prisoners were dispatched to different spots in the dance hall. According to Adair and Wamplew, social segregation in sports and leisure activities became more obvious in the 1830s, especially when leisure activities became more formal. But the reasons for these differences pre-existed: they resided in the nature of these penal societies and their hierarchy of contract and freedom (Adair and Wamplew, 1997).

In 1901, Australia, formed by six former British colonies, was a member of the Commonwealth and had the status of an independent democratic nation. The ruling King or Queen of England, also is the King or Queen of Australia and the leader of the parliamentary constitutional monarchy. Until World War II, a majority of Australians had Anglo-Saxon origins, be they English, Scottish, Irish or Welsh. Because of a lack of manpower and a desire to be on neighbourly terms with Asian nations among others, Australia has had to open up and renounce the role of a strictly British bastion it dreamed of. Australia experienced a massive immigration of Greeks, Italians, Yugoslavs, Lebanese and Turks. In the past 20 years, an important influx of Asians has taken place (Pons, 1983, p. 60). These new Australians have brought a great cultural diversity, in sports among other things (Howell and Howell, 1987, p. 101).

2.6 From games to sports

B. Stoddart described the effects of the economic variable upon the distribution and organisation of sports in the 1920s-30s: everything went well when one wanted to play street versions of games like cricket, tennis and golf, using basic equipment, but in order to play regularly and seriously, one had to have the proper clothes and equipment, as well as enough money to pay for entry fees and registration fees. For those who were not wealthy, it was simply impossible, especially during times of economic depression. Because of that, a lot of them "chose" to play football, which was cheap to play, contrarily to golf (Stoddard, 1986, p. 23). It is not surprising that tennis and golf were brought into the colonies but quickly became well-liked among the upper classes (Howell and Howell, 1987, p. 53).

To sum up, there is very little evidence showing an egalitarian sports culture was developed in the building years, when white men arrived in Australia among others. One could imagine the demands of such a life would have erased social differences, but the opposite happened. The colonists were determined to stand out from the prisoners, and landowners wanted to be socially separated from workers (Adair and Wamplley, 1997, p. 5).

2.7 The example of oval ball games

Oval ball games constitute a concrete example in which one can find all of the characteristics of sports' development in Australia. Down Under, there are today four sorts of "football": actual football (or soccer), Rugby League, Rugby Union and Australian Rules. The latter is the king of Australian sports. Some matches attract up to 80,000 spectators to stadiums, oval pitches adapted from cricket, when "only" 20,000 attend rugby matches. It is a fast and physical sport whose historical origins are not precise. It may have been invented by Australians in order to differentiate themselves and may be derived from Gaelic football, which is played in Ireland. This team sport, in which all seems to be permitted, is a rival for other rugby games. That sport's development is sometimes attributed to the great distances which separated population centres, and which may have led to the development of different sports environments.

In Australia, Rugby Union tended to be played in private schools, in three main states (Tatz, 1995, p. 392). One of the goals of Australia's national teams was to beat the English. Matches against England still arouse more passion and intensity than those against other nations. It's been one of Australian sports' characteristics for a long time, and paradoxically it symbolises its national identity as well as its filiation, its link, that is, with England ([Horton, 1997, p. 7](#)).

The decision to immigrate to Australia or not was irreversible, most times, and sports seemed to bring to newcomers' lives a social signification and emotional dimension. Even though rugby was appropriated by the British middle class, it developed nuances in response to the colonial environment, involving a significant part of the middle class and working class population. In England, rugby was influenced by the dominant sports ideology and thus very much in favour of amateurism. This preoccupation symbolised the bourgeoisie's involvement in England, but the bourgeoisie wasn't as important in Australia, which might explain the latter's lesser resistance to professionalization (Horton, 1997, p. 13). However, for a long time the province of New South Wales, more precisely the area of Sydney, its economic capital, was the only place where Rugby Union stood up to Australian rules and Rugby League competitions.

The settlers brought with them British leisure activities which Australians ended up adopting. At first, no creation of a new culture took place, but, on the contrary, the elimination of the aborigine culture did, with the aim of imposing the British culture. Sports were prosperous in colonised Australia, and even though social and ethnical tensions were revealed, the general tendency was characterised by an important participation. The British political heritage permeated sports: "The Australian society formed essentially during the Victorian era and, for a greater part of the 20th century, kept the typical Victorian features such as racism, Puritanism or male chauvinism. But, naturally, it also acquired characteristics related to the specific conditions in which the country became populated, a strong appetite for social justice in particular. In a way, it is the contradictions between these two characteristics which fuelled the country's social evolution and which allow one to understand its present state" (Pons, 2000, p. 93).

3 Australian specificities

3.1 Climate and geography

As we explained previously, the history of sports in Australia has distinctive characteristics linked to its colonial past. Its climate and geography have also been influential factors which may explain, partly, the way sports developed there. Australia is an island continent in the southern hemisphere, south of Asia. It is made up of two territories and six provinces. Three oceans and four seas surround its 21 000 miles (34 000 kilometres) of coasts. For the sake of

comparison, Australia is 14 times bigger than France, and its population is three times less important. One can easily imagine that one of the main problems was that of distances. Many sportsmen, such as "golfers [...] suffered from isolation problems" (Ramsey, 1977, p. 168). In order to overcome these obstacles, leagues were formed in suburban communities. Teams turned to suburban communities, which were at the heart of the development of sports in Australia, when transport limitations restricted competition to the metropolitan level. One of Australia's inventions consisted in having clubs based on electoral districts. Many of them thus became communities organised around civic associations. Indeed, a very important aspect of the Australian sports culture was, at first, to refuse sponsorship (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 141).

Australia's geography and climate were beneficial to the development of certain sports like surfing. Because of the size of its coastline, 70% of Australia's inhabitants live in coastal cities. 300 schools have a weekly surfing program and a unique lifestyle developed around the surfing world. The Australian surfing culture became synonymous with the Australian way of life, full of energy yet laid-back. In Australia, surfing is at the same time a leisure activity, a technical and physical challenge, a sport and a lifestyle. Surfing really is part of everyday life. Australia is probably "the" country in the world where surfing has a national character. One can easily understand it by observing a map showing how Australia's population is distributed: the East, South-East and South-West shelter almost all of it, the rest of the country being barren. Australians' almost daily contact with the sea explains why they have developed a range of gliding tools: surf boards, surf canoes, surf boats. The history of surfing in Australia is thus that of a predominantly coastal population. The symbiosis of Australians with their maritime environment is a deep cultural reality: they love and protect this environment with faith and enthusiasm. The problems of pollution are a major concern, and ecology is not an eccentricity like it is in Europe, but a part of civic education (Dejean, 1989, p. 133).

To newcomers, Australia looked like an isolated country with a very different climate from the one they'd left behind. Despite everything, the colonists often adopted their homeland's physical activities even if they weren't meant for Australian conditions. They adapted their culture to the local sports environment instead of simply adopting it (Adair and Wampley, 1997, p. 140).

3.2 Imitator versus inventor

The colonial sports culture wasn't very original because it had been imported from British games and pastimes, where modern sports were born. Consequently, Australians really identified themselves to the British as far as sports are concerned, developing few notable creations, except maybe for Australian Rules, which is restricted to its continent, and life-saving. Every year during Bondy Beach's Surf Carnival, the country's best life-saving crews compete in athletic jousts such as surfing, rowing, sea rescue, with quasi-military training, teams and rules. Except for life-saving competitions, Australians have rarely spread their own sports in the world. Sports historians see Australia rather as an imitator than as an inventor. Generally speaking, it was difficult enough to organise a national Australian Rules competition as it was, let alone export it successfully. For all that, the distance between Australia and England doesn't seem to have slowed down the development of certain sports: indeed, in Australia the first rugby club was founded in 1864, in France it only happened in 1872. In this precise case, colonists actively participated in the development of the sport in Australia. But the genocide of the Aborigines, who had a different sports culture, and the fact that the people who lived there were destined to stay, didn't facilitate possible future exchanges which may have been promising.

3.3 Victory, no matter what!

Australians' success in the world of sports is recognised by many, and gives this country a particularly athletic image. Australia's history seems to be at the basis of this success. The government which introduced sports in Australia in the 19th century was a liberal state which appeared in occidental democracies when capitalism and economic liberalism were blossoming. Under this political regime, competition between individuals was predominant. The leading role was granted to individuals and the state's and main social institutions' was limited.

Within the context of the first prisoners who arrived on the continent, a possible sentiment of inferiority may have led many young "Australians" to seek victory no matter what the cost in order to show the whole world, upper social classes among others, that they were just as good as others. That's what E. Waters claims in an article entitled "The patterns of Australian Culture" (Waters, 1963, p. 110). Others have suggested that the prisoners wanted to show the colonists they wouldn't let them intimidate them. When Europeans came to Australia, they brought with them their traditions, including their games. Since then, social, economical,

political and geographical factors have influenced the development of sports, which today occupy an important place in Australia.

3.4 The top ten club-based physical activities in 2007

The top-ten club-based physical activities in 2007, in terms of total participation rate, were "aerobics/fitness, golf, outdoor football, tennis, netball, basketball, outdoor cricket, lawn bowls, Australian football and touch football. Of these, only aerobics/fitness, outdoor football and basketball experienced increases in participation between 2001 and 2007"². We can compare these results with the top ten participation in any physical activities which are: "walking, aerobics/fitness, swimming, cycling, running, tennis, bushwalking, golf, outdoor football and netball"³. Some club-based activities have seen a decline in participation like touch football (-25%), lawn bowls (-24%), tennis (-20%) and golf (-18%).

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	% change 2001-2007 (a)
	Total participation rate							
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Aerobics/fitness	2.1	2.9	3.4	4.7	4.4	4.3	4.8	144.0%
Golf	3.5	3.9	3.9	3.6	3.1	3.2	2.7	-17.8%
Football (outdoor)	2.0	2.2	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	7.7%
Tennis	2.6	2.7	2.9	2.8	2.5	1.8	1.9	-20.1%
Netball	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.0	2.0	1.8	-13.0%
Basketball	1.4	1.7	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.1	1.3	5.2%
Cricket (outdoor)	1.4	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.8	1.3	-3.9%
Lawn bowls	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.7	1.2	-24.4%
Australian football	1.4	1.5	1.7	1.6	1.9	1.5	1.2	-5.7%
Touch football	1.8	1.5	1.2	1.4	1.4	1.5	1.2	-25.4%

Base: All persons aged 15 years and over in 2007 (n=16,400); in 2006 (n=13,708); in 2005 (n=13,726); in 2004 (n=13,662); in 2003 (n=13,703); in 2002 (n=13,632); and in 2001 (n=13,424))

(a) Percentage change in the number of participants between 2001 and 2007 – see footnote at bottom of page.

Box 1: Total participation rate in top ten club-based physical activities by year

The Australian government is taking a keen interest in its inhabitants' sports activities. Every year since 2001, a study about sports activities takes places⁴. Part of the data gathered has

² Exercice, Recreation, and Sport Survey (ERASS), 2007, p. 37

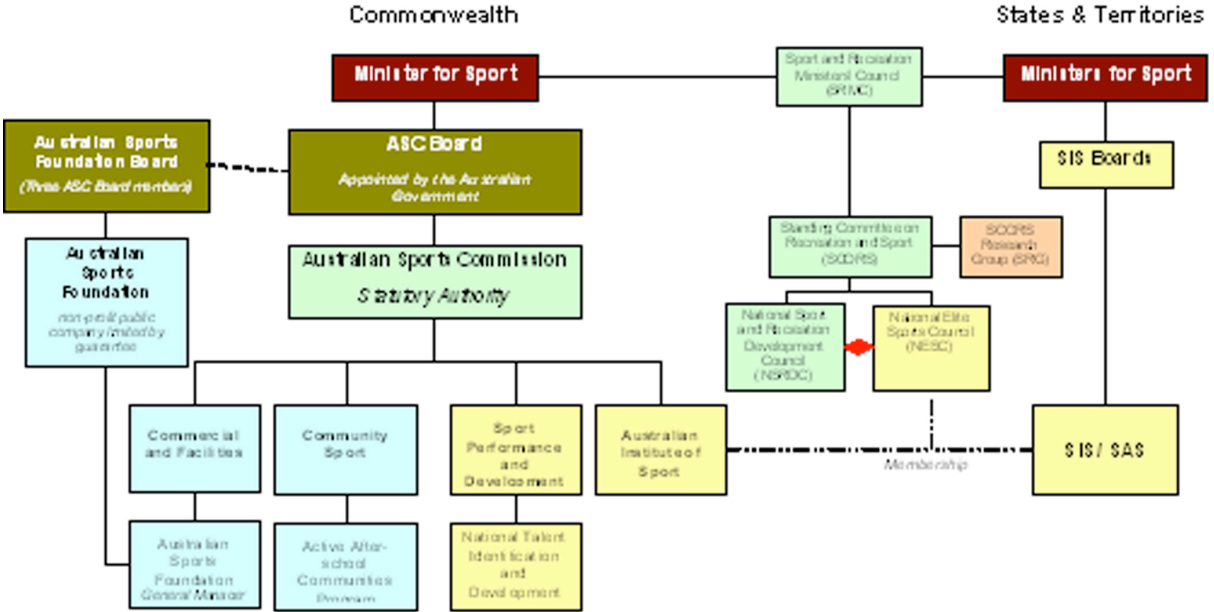
³ Exercice, Recreation, and Sport Survey (ERASS), 2007, p. 37

⁴ Exercice, Recreation, and Sport Survey (ERASS)

been presented in the table above. "Sports activities are strongly encouraged by the authorities. The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is the Australian governmental agency in charge of the development of sports in Australia. As such, it supervises the activities of other, more specific organisms such as the Australian Institute of Sports (AIS), which is in charge of the development of the sports elite, Sport Performance and Development, which is in charge of the promotion of sports, or of Disability Sport Unit, which is in charge of the sports activities of Australians with a disability"⁵.

The Ministry for Youth and Sport is administered through the Department of Health and Ageing. It's one of 10 "outer ministries", which, unlike the other 20 ministries, don't belong to the cabinet and do not take part in the decision-making process within the government. The prime minister chooses the ministers, the former being named by the Governor General, who represents Queen Elizabeth II (The Commonwealth of Australia is a constitutional democracy).

In each state and territory, a department of Sport and Recreation is responsible for the implementation of government policy. The sports system diagram below⁶ shows how sports are, quite simply, organised in Australia.



Graph 1: Australian sports system diagram

⁵ Australie : Marché des sports et loisirs, Ubi France et les missions économiques, Mission économique de Canberra, Australie, Version originelle du 24 août 2006

⁶ Special thanks to the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

In conclusion, the aborigine population, which played a lot of traditional games, suffered a genocide when settlers arrived at the end of the 18th century. The colonisation of the island by the British came with the imposition of European beliefs and values (Adair and Wampley, 1997). In an environment where seasons are the opposite and the climate is hostile, far removed from family, British physical activities and sports doubtless counter-balanced the nostalgia they must have felt.

It also was the result of the presence of some colonists, who tried to duplicate the British social life. Moreover, in the 1820s-30s, winning against Great-Britain was considered as a sign of maturity for a colony, at the international level but also in matches between players born in England and players born in Australia: "British or Ireland born versus colonial-born or Australian-born matches" (Vamplew and Stoddart, 1994, p. 2). And for at least a few of the "European" Australians, those concerned with distancing themselves from the detainees, engaging in respectable English physical activities was necessary in order to remind them of which civilised society they belonged to. For this reason, the first regiments' officers may have tried to promote horse races and cricket matches, activities worthy of the English aristocracy.

The ascendancy of British settlers over the majority of Australians, and the importance of sports in the British culture at the end of the 19th century, seem to constitute a predisposition when one looks at the place of sports in Australia today. Sports have long been qualified as the central characteristic of the popular Australian culture, so much so that enthusiasm for sports has often been described as the essence of the Australian identity. It is true that in light of the statistics, physical activities hold a serious role in the Australian society and project a particularly athletic image of it.

Today, Australia is a multicultural society considered to be modern and developed. Its population is estimated to be of about 20 million, for a density of one inhabitant/square mile (2.5 inhabitants/square kilometres). 380 000 Aborigines now live on the island continent, which represents less than 2% of its population. Even if it remains marked by a peculiar natural environment, the Australian way of life tends to resemble those of the United States or Europe. Its inhabitants live mostly in coastal towns. Sports, which are omnipresent on the radio, on television, in newspapers and magazines, are part of many of its inhabitants' lives. However, "the undeniable popularity of sports events doesn't mean that the whole population participates in physical activities. If a lot of Australians have leisure activities which require

physical efforts, a lot of them only have a contact with sports through television and suffer from a lack of physical exercise" (Pons, 2000, p. 109).

Just like Australia, New-Zealand and South Africa, which are located in temperate zones, have a lot of open spaces and are above the level of subsistence, quickly granted themselves time for leisure activities, either through participation or as spectators. Moreover, in Australia's colonial society as well as New-Zealand's, sports, which allowed to structure new codes of behaviour and to encourage obedience to rules, were eagerly adopted (Phillips, 2000, p. 324) in order to counter cultural, political and educational changes and re-establish order. Sports were encouraged by states, within schools among others. In this climate of fear of losing standards of civilised behaviour, organised games became a way to control the possible passage to anarchy and violence. The social dynamism produced by the sports community within the school system, as well as the academic rivalry between private and public schools, are also part of the history of sports in Australia (Mangan and Nauright, 2000, p. 80). Before concluding, one should recall that Australia is devoted to three sports using an oval ball: Australian Rules, Rugby League and Rugby Union⁷... The latter has always been minor, compared to the other two, and is not played in the whole country but, essentially, in the state of Sydney, New South Wales, and in that of Queensland, whose capital is Brisbane. Australia can hardly be called a land of rugby, contrarily to New-Zealand. This reality of Rugby Union in Australia, precarious compared to other sports, is not well-known and incites one to undertake new research in order to know more about this country.

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⁷ *Le rugby à XV, parent pauvre de l'ovale australien*, (Revue de presse), Planète Rugby, Dimanche 4 juin 2000.

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