
Scouting an Anthropology of Sport

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Abstract: This paper explores some of the processes that shape the development of an anthropology of sport. It situates the anthropology of sport in relation to a broad and eclectic field of sport studies. It then identifies the anthropology of sport as embedded in the particular sorts of ethnographic projects undertaken and the sites where they are undertaken. Finally, it explores the significance of teaching and researching as activities that contribute to the shaping of an anthropology of sport. The paper argues for a disciplinary commitment to anthropology coupled with an acknowledgement that we should be extending our reach beyond the current boundaries of our discipline. Rather than writing only for a narrowly defined anthropology of sport we should be actively engaging broader and more inclusive audiences interested in sporting activities.

Keywords: anthropology, sport, soccer, institutions, teaching and research

Résumé : Cet article explore certains processus qui façonnent le développement d'une anthropologie du sport. Il situe l'anthropologie du sport par rapport à un champ vaste et eclectique d'études sur le sport. Il identifie, ensuite, l'anthropologue du sport comme lié aux types de projets ethnographiques déjà réalisés et aux lieux où ils ont été entrepris. Finalement, il s'intéresse à l'impact de l'enseignement et de la recherche en tant qu'activités qui contribuent à la constitution d'une anthropologie du sport. L'article plaide en faveur d'un engagement disciplinaire envers l'anthropologie, allié à la conscience que nous devrions nous étendre au-delà des frontières présentes de la discipline. Au lieu de contribuer à une anthropologie du sport définie de façon étroite, nous devrions nous adresser à des auditoires plus larges intéressés aux activités sportives.

Mots-clés : anthropologie, sport, football, institutions, enseignement et recherche

Introduction¹

In pursuing the development of an anthropology of sport it is important that we are mindful of the connections amongst the sorts of persons, issues, institutions and powers that shape the practices and production of both sport and anthropology. Both sport and anthropology commonly produce understandings and experiences that depend on local communities but whose significances are best understood when we locate them as embedded in much broader and more complex cultural environments. Here I record my intention to write from a local perspective, as a Canadian anthropologist living and working in the antipodes; but in so doing I write to the broader concerns of an anthropology of sport that claims a right to deal with any sport, from anywhere and from any era.

Australia has had an important role in the history and development of anthropology. While perhaps less central to many of the contemporary concerns of the discipline, anthropology in Australia remains connected to the waxing and waning of international trends in the discipline. It is certainly articulated to the larger enterprise of an anthropology of sport. Following the appearance of a few articles in Australian anthropology journals (Mewett, 1999; Palmer, 1998a, 1998b), an issue of the flagship journal of the Australian Anthropological Society, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (Palmer, 2002), was devoted to the topic. Yet this issue of the journal was not restricted to sports in Australia; it included papers on a variety of sports connected to diverse places around the world. Notably, it also included papers from a cultural historian and a human geographer. However, to fail to recognize appropriately the particular sorts of local conditions under which it is possible to write and to research sport from Australia is to miss, I think in a fundamental way, the particular local concerns of any more global ethnographic enterprise. We may, in some respects, all be cosmopolitans now but many of us continue to live and to work as ethnographers somewhere on the periphery.

The language of this is telling. Talk of core and periphery not only identifies a recognized set of academic concerns, a set of issues and problems, but also assumes that some places or sports are more core than others, that some analytical issues are more core than others.

With this in mind, I want to make three particular points before drawing them together to say something more general about the development of an anthropology of sport and the ways we might imagine a future for it. First, I explore the presence of what can be identified as a developing and generic “sport studies” focus and suggest that this must be considered in any shaping of the potential of an anthropology of sport. Second, I offer a brief account of certain aspects of one of my current research interests, pertaining to the anthropology of the soccer or the “world game” in Perth, Western Australia, to show how it can illuminate some of the ways that local social and academic conditions shape such an account. Finally, I suggest that teaching the anthropology of sport can provide an accessible and useful way of encouraging entry into anthropology, as a way of interesting some who find the traditional concerns of our discipline almost arcane and anachronistic in relation to their everyday lives.

Overall, these three points come together to shape our anthropological practices in ways worth examining. It is the intersections and interconnections among these aspects of our anthropological practice that will continue to invest our particular contributions to the understanding of sports with a sense of contributing to a larger body of scholarship while retaining something of the particularity of our discipline. So in developing these points, even in the attenuated way possible here, I take seriously the notion of “scouting” the anthropology of sport signalled in my title. In many sports scouting is the activity where interpretations and assessments about the potential and prospects of a (usually) young player are made and shared. Scouting is fundamental to the reproduction of the sport. I have recourse to a body of evidence similar to that available to scouts in sports: runs on the board, the contexts of previous actions and some idea of the way that past actions may be expected to speak to expected future performances. And, like scouts in all sports, I acknowledge scouting as an imperfect activity, more an interpretive art than a predictive science.

Sport Studies

Here I use “sport studies” to name a general focus on sport found across a range of traditional disciplines including psychology, human biology, economics, politics, history, geography and sociology. Sport studies exists now as both an institutional setting for the study of sport and as

a broad intellectual frame for understanding sport. Institutionally, it has become common enough to find departments, schools or programs in “sport studies” located in many universities. While there is a tendency for such programs to be identified as interdisciplinary it is clear that there are different degrees of integration among the disciplines that comprise each program. This interdisciplinarity is sometimes given shape in a somewhat muted way—through “joint appointments” rather than alignments or associations solely with sport studies. Often it is under the title of “kinesiology,” “human movement,” “exercise science” or some other scientific sounding rubric that those interested in sport find work. Here the role of the sociologist or anthropologist (and one could add historian or geographer or practitioner of any of the other disciplines noted above) of sport is often to provide social and cultural context for the “hard” analyses of the physiologist and exercise scientists. As these programs develop and produce their own graduates, it seems likely that the interdisciplinarity that now characterizes such places may soon be lost as the more traditional disciplines recede into the past and their own newly minted specialists take over.

Sometimes these programs bring together concerns about sport in systematic and interesting ways, as in a couple of volumes committed to unifying different perspectives in a Human Movement program in Australia (Abernethy, MacKinnon, Kippers, Neal and Hanrahan, 1996; Kirk, Hanrahan, Macdonald and Jobling, 1996). This presence of sport studies in universities is repeated in the catalogues of publishers, so that sport studies can now be found as a separate category of publications lumped under an overriding concern with sport rather than under the disciplinary perspectives from which the accounts are produced. One aspect that flows from the confluence of these two trends, university programs and publications, is the appearance of accounts that are no longer grounded in any single disciplinary perspective but instead are held together by the substantive focus on sport.

What is particularly important about the general field of sport studies is the way that sport acts as such a powerful focus for the analytical work carried out. Sport studies grew up as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary way of making sense of a particular sort of activity. And, for me, sport studies have a different feel to it in the various places where it is practiced. The social and cultural traditions along with the organization of both sports and studies of sport in various places makes this so. Australia is not Canada, nor the U.K. and is certainly not the U.S. The development of various sport studies traditions have more in common with the growth of regional studies, than other great interdisciplinary—transdisciplinary, multi-

disciplinary, non-disciplinary—exercise that has moved across the traditional academic disciplines, than with the “blurred genres” (Geertz, 1983) that may characterize some disciplinary practices. And some of the difficulties inherent in regional studies, as well as other synthetic academic creations (here I am thinking of hybrids such as tourism studies, leisure studies, criminology, urban studies and media studies), are clearly present in sport studies. Most notably, there is a tendency for there to be a lack of coherence due to the lack of any strong underlying analytical connections uniting the various perspectives and studies into anything approaching a coherent body of knowledge. Studies multiply but the struggle to grow insights into a body of deeper knowledge as produced in the traditional disciplines remains.

To work in the social or cultural side of sport studies at the moment is typically to come to it from a particular disciplinary background. But it is also to be pushed out to expand the focus of your work to address the myriad of other approaches to the subject. In part this has never overly worried anthropologists. Like most of us I read beyond our discipline and I assume that each of us reads a similar variety of other disciplines regarding the topics of our respective research. But it seems to me that when we poach from other disciplines we return home with our prize and recontextualize it within our own intellectual frameworks. Like the other hybrids noted above, sport studies tends to lack such encompassing frames for its insights. As such, research into sporting activities, when couched as some variant of sport studies, has remained rather weak in terms of analytical frameworks for the studies that constitute it. And while it is true that we can generate as many anthropologies of sport as there are anthropologies, we do have a home to return to with our evidence and usually a sense of what an anthropological account could or should be like and feel like (Rosaldo, 1989). In sport studies, what is strong in focus remains weak in approach and relatively underdeveloped in analytical integration. With a strong topic there is less need for strong boundaries. One field, anthropology, can emphasize (an imagined) strength in theory and approach in order to keep others out and to maintain the need for our contribution to be heard. The other approach, sport studies, can be synthetic and care less for theoretical pretensions and the recognition of disciplinary boundaries and do more to bring the topic to a wider range and larger number of potential readers.

Does, then, working within an anthropology of sport condemn us to talking to merely a few hundred other anthropologists rather than addressing a much wider readership? Are those working in this field in danger of

creating an expertise that we produce and that we alone tend to consume? I cringe when I read or hear justifications for the anthropology of sport that are grounded in little more than a need to do so because it has not been done to date. This sort of logic may work as a justification within our discipline, but it is hardly convincing beyond the boundaries of a purely academic anthropology. While I remain suspect of the theoretical grounding of sport studies, there is no suggestion that it is without value; I mean only to suggest that the values demonstrated in sport studies do not necessarily square with our anthropological and ethnographic sensibilities. In any positional understanding of these two broad approaches, it is the potential depth of the one that must be set off against the breadth of vision of the other.

As researchers within anthropology, anthropologists of sport must be mindful of the studies that others carry out. We have to read them and may often find ourselves writing to and about these others. This is nothing new for anthropologists. It has long been the way in our discipline. In writing about other topics in Australia, for example, I have hardly been constrained to read only the writings of professional anthropologists. My research would have been impoverished were it not for the work of demographers, planners and economists. The recent arrival of anthropologists on the sports scene has seen the shaping of an anthropology of sport that is sensitive to a range of pre-existing interests and concerns both within our discipline and within the broader field of sport studies. Much of this could be said for anthropologists' engagement with any number of other academic interests, such as development studies, gender studies, cultural studies and varieties of regional studies. In all of these cases, what social or cultural anthropology brings to such engagements is a firm grounding in and commitment to ethnographic ways of knowing the world. In the anthropology of sport, for example, our detailed and contextualized accounts tend to be constructed and carried out with methods that emphasize long-term and holistic engagements with the sporting practices we study. For social or cultural anthropologists it is a commitment to ethnography, in terms of both fieldwork and representation, that for me most characterizes the anthropological contribution to understanding social life. The more we move away from a commitment to ethnographic ways of making knowledge about sports, the more in danger we are of losing an anthropological identity and of being absorbed as mere contributors in some generic field of sport studies. Anthropologists are not alone in worrying about a disciplinary identity when dealing with such a strong subject as sport. Historians too worry about their

ability to maintain disciplinary integrity while engaging powerful others beyond their discipline (e.g., Nauright, 1999).

Rather than trying to sketch a history, or construct a genealogy, for the academic study of sport let me assume that an anthropology of sport already exists. Its presence is there to be found readily in publications, classes taught and anthropologists defining their research interests. As relative latecomers to sport studies, we have only just begun to make ourselves and our distinctively anthropological and ethnographic contributions felt. Our contributions are becoming clearer with each major publication in the field (Blanchard, 1995; Dyck, 2000; Dyck and Archetti 2003; MacClancy, 1996; Sands, 1999, 2002). And while we may indeed profit from the research in that broader domain of sport studies, the challenge ahead is to have our concerns embraced by those working in that broader domain. Having sketched something of this general trend let me turn to the particular challenges of understanding soccer in Western Australia.

The World Game in Australia

Soccer (football) is one of the most celebrated topics in the academic study of sports. The game has been studied by perhaps more academic researchers than any other game played. Recent works speak to both a range of places and topics that have been studied (Archetti, 1997; Armstrong, 1998; Armstrong and Giulianotti, 1997). This is certainly befitting for a game that can legitimately identify itself as “the world game.” But the game does not have the same status everywhere it is played. It is played in a number of places where it does not have the central place in the sporting calendar, and Australia is one such place (Murray, 1995). Indeed, the very fact that the game is known here as soccer rather than football, and that the latter term football has been conscripted for a particularly Australian version of the game, is itself telling about the place of the game down under. Even good academic studies of soccer in Australia have been driven overwhelmingly by notions of ethnicity (see Danforth, 2001; Harrison, 1979), where ethnicity is often used in ways that tend to embrace ethnicity as primordial difference and that jump to such essentialized differences for the explanation of almost all things about the game, often at the expense of considering other possible interpretations (Mosely, 1995; Mosely, Cashman, O’Hara and Weatherburn, 1997).

There is no need to belabour the history of soccer in Australia here, for it has been examined in other accounts (Jones and Moore, 1994; Mosely, 1987; Mosely and Murray, 1994). What does need to be said about the game in Australia is that while it arrived fairly early—by 1880 in

New South Wales is the commonly accepted starting point (Mosely and Murray, 1994)—it has never been central to Australian sporting culture. The game has been played by many, but has been culturally marginalized quite systematically at its highest levels. The national side, the Socceroos, has competed in the World Cup eliminations for some time now. While they have not had much success, and can look at the structure of the qualifying rounds as one reason for that, the game does occasionally break through into popular awareness. However, this is often short-lived. During the World Cup in 2002, the first finals played outside of Europe and the Americas, all the games were broadcast on Australian television. A commercial channel chose the best games, including the semifinals and the finals, but left the SBS, the state-sponsored Special Broadcasting Service, to broadcast the rest. Television coverage of the game has certainly improved over previous years (Moore, 2000), but it remains very much presented as an ethnic concern. In Australian sports media coverage of the last World Cup, held in Japan and South Korea, much attention was devoted to covering the various local ethnic communities’ responses as they followed “their” teams. Ethnicity remains the dominant trope for understanding the world game in Australia. While I find certain aspects of it problematic, this focus on ethnicity has, nonetheless, inspired some fine ethnographic accounts. Sociologist John Hughson, in particular, has produced particularly vivid analyses of the meaning of ethnicity among some supporters of a professional soccer team in Sydney (Hughson, 1996, 1997). Hughson’s fieldwork was spent with a group of young Croatian men that identified themselves as the “Bad Blue Boys.” These young men sought to maintain the Croatian identity of their team and so were in active resistance to the “de-ethnicized” organization of the National Soccer League in Australia in the 1990s.

The professional soccer league in Australia, the National Soccer League, has existed in various forms since the 1970s. It has, throughout its existence, struggled for survival with teams disappearing, going into receivership and changing quite regularly. In 2001 the Carleton team in Melbourne was forced to leave the competition midway through the season. This failure, for a team associated with one of the premier Australian Rules Football teams with the longest of traditions, is truly enormous. The economic precariousness of the game is further reflected in other forms of marginality. A recent volume providing a partial account of the life of the great Australian player and commentator, Johnny Warren, is titled *Sheilas, Wogs and Poofers: An Incomplete Biography of Johnny Warren and Soccer in Australia* (Warren et al., 2002). As the back cover of the volume notes, the title

evokes the days of the 1950s and 1960s when “you were called a ‘shielia,’ ‘wog’ or ‘poofter’ if you played soccer” in Australia. “Sheila” (a girl or woman), “wog” (a migrant, usually considered “not white”) and “poofter” (homosexual) were understood then as terms of denigration when applied to a man and marked those so identified as social and cultural outsiders—as being unAustralian. For soccer, identification as a marginalized game has changed through time and has meant different things at different times. As part of a study of the game in Western Australia I have been paying close attention to the ways that these sorts of understandings have gradually emerged. There still remains a strong association between soccer and ethnic social clubs that nurtured the game since the end of World War II. However, we make a mistake if we assume that it therefore follows that everything that happens within the game is understandable, if not reducible in some accounts, to “ethnicity.” Such a position is unwarranted and the assumption that it is the case is damaging to our potential understandings of the nuances and subtleties of the organization of the game in Australia. A short while ago I spent an afternoon with a well-known Australian historian, reworking interpretation after interpretation of particular events only to have him return repeatedly to a rather crude primordial ethnic gloss for interpreting all things contentious about the game. Where I was pushing for relational and processual understandings of events in Australian soccer, my colleague was quick, far too quick I think, to reduce any understandings to some assumed inherent characteristics of ethnicity. This easy recourse to primordial ethnicity as *the* essential feature of game misses the subtle and nuanced ways that ethnicity is asserted and used in Australian soccer (Moore, 2000).

Much of the academic research concerning sport in Australia has been undertaken with an unspoken concern for nationalist issues. In what is even now an early account, Brian Stoddart’s *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture* (1986) set the tone for much of this. After dealing with the traditional sports of Australia for much of the volume he introduces near the end a chapter titled “Play an Australian game, mate!” (1986: 158-182). In it he deals with those sports that do not seem to be clearly and distinctly Australian, or those which do not have the stamp of Australian culture on them. These are the games that were brought to (or, at least, that have come to) prominence since the influx of migrants following the World War II. Stoddart’s focus on this matter is fundamental in the development of the study of sport in Australia. While new accounts have been produced, such as those by Adair and Vamplew (1997), Cashman (1997),

Booth and Tatz (2000), and Hall (2000), with greater sophistication and a clearer analytical sense of direction, Stoddart’s account was key in defining the approach to many of the topics covered since its publication.

The Australia government formally embraced multiculturalism in the early 1970s and did so in a particularly Australian manner. Following a national referendum in 1967 that saw Australians vote overwhelmingly to grant Aboriginal people in Australia citizenship, with all the entitlements that follow, the government jettisoned traditional assimilationist policies that had been applied both to Aboriginals and to large numbers of postwar migrants. No longer were these people to be obliged to assimilate to Australian society, but rather they could choose to retain their cultural ties with their countries of origin. Embracing this newly acknowledged multiculturalism successive governments have allowed that there are many different ways of being Australian. Australian governments since have reinterpreted multiculturalism according to the perceived needs of their own times and economic agendas (Kelly, 1992) but no government has been willing to provide public support for overt multicultural activities in ways which seem to economically privilege ethnic difference. The attitude seems to have been one of allowing migrants, and Aboriginals, to maintain their culture as long as the maintenance did not incur any cost to the government. In this it is the case of Aboriginal Australians that has most vexed successive governments since Aboriginals were granted citizenship. Aboriginal people continue to refuse the label “ethnic” on the grounds that theirs is a prior claim, grounded in different moral facts. The “new Australians,” as they came to be known in the 1950s and 1960s were expected to assimilate and integrate, to become just like the rest of the population as quickly as possible.

While governments have, for the most part, embraced some form of multiculturalism since the early 1970s, the particular emphases in policy and practice have varied through time. Multiculturalism in Australia has come under attack from those on both the political left and right. Successive governments have worked to use multiculturalism to their own political and economic ends (Kelly, 1992). My point in this is that multiculturalism in Australia has not been a stable notion; it has been subject to the vagaries of politics and history. Likewise, nor should any interpretation of ethnicity be treated as though it is unproblematic. Indeed, there has long been a politics of culture at the core of Australian multiculturalism, with concerns about what the government can and cannot fund still being decided along ethnic lines. Instead of merely identifying difference, and naming those differences “ethnic,” the

analysis needs to become far more subtle and discerning. So while the game may still occasionally be called “wogball” in Australia (Hay, 1994), this stance has slowly been disappearing. In the past few years the ethnic names have gone from the national league teams and from teams in the various state leagues. In Western Australia, for example, no longer can Athena, Benfica, Croatia or Dalmatinac appear as part of a team’s name. They have all been anglicized, so that they become Knights, United, City and so on. Until this government-inspired change in the naming of soccer teams, English migrants took part in the game merely as members of one more migrant group in Australia. Now they have once again become associated with the mainstream, with that which is linguistically unmarked and taken for granted as the normative case.

Even though successive Australian governments have embraced multiculturalism, there has been a muted continuity with previous assimilationist policies. In the management of soccer Australian governments at both state and federal levels, have seen the strong ethnic presence in the game as a feature hindering the development of the sport. Through the 1980s and 1990s governments pushed very hard to have the game change in order to present less of an ethnic identity in the community. Governments pushed for teams to change their names, losing their ethnic origins, and often tied large sums of money for the development of the game to such changes. Those in control of the game often refused. Elsewhere I have shown how the offer of a significant support and funding from the Western Australian government in the mid 1980s was turned down (Moore, 2000). This has, in part, been explained as due to the requirement that the teams give away the ethnic names of their teams. However, more important was the fact that any change to the organizational structure of the game would undermine the positions of power and influence already held by a number of individuals. In this I advocate a non-essentialist approach to ethnicity that has been characterized in many different ways over the years. In avoiding any significant sense of accepting ethnicity as founded on primordial ties, I see ethnicity in Australian soccer more as a resource often used by those engaged in organizing the game and equally often used by those trying to change the organization of the game. It is an aspect of the politics of culture. In the ongoing struggles to control the game, ethnicity can be used to either further or undermine claims by individuals and groups. Ethnicity, from this perspective, is understood as situational and transactional (see Barth, 1969) and, as the Comaroffs (1992) have argued for a different ethnographic context, but about ethnicity more generally, embedded in the local history of the game.

Changes in the meanings and significance of ethnicity, then, should be seen as one aspect of the history of soccer in Australia; and in acknowledging the presence of ethnicity we should not there end our investigations. To this day the federal government continues to push for reforms in the management of the game in Australia that seem to many to be aimed at reducing ethnic control over the sport. In April 2003 the Crawford Report was tabled, providing a direction for the future development of the game in Australia with particular reference to the “the existing governance, management and structure of soccer in Australia” (Crawford, 2003: 2). As such, Crawford is disinterested in any ethnic involvement in the game.²

Over the previous couple of decades the study of soccer in Australia has attracted a small number of anthropologists. At times this anthropological engagement has involved a degree of writing against the entrenched interests of those with the most prominent voices. By far the strongest academic lobby in the field of soccer research, and of sport studies more generally, in Australia has been that of historians. The Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH) publishes *Sporting Traditions*, the premier journal for all of us in Australia interested in the study of (particularly) Australian sports, along with a newsletter and an important monograph series. The ASSH organizes an annual conference that brings together a diverse range of academics and others from around the country, and across the Tasman Sea. New Zealanders have taken quite a prominent role in the society. However, while the editorial policy for the journal is remarkably open, it is in the end still “history” that is identified in the title and that claims disciplinary prominence. Anthropologists do indeed publish there—Wedgwood (1996) and Mewett (2000) are two excellent examples—but it is not “our game.” And, perhaps what is almost equally interesting is that neither Wedgwood nor Mewett was identified as being anthropologists anywhere in the journal. Wedgwood’s account grew out of an honours thesis in anthropology. Peter Mewett began his professional life as an anthropologist but has subsequently been reinvented as a sociologist.³ The point is that in working closely with this important group of scholars (and I hope nothing I have said indicates anything other than great respect for them) entails writing to their editorial standards, disciplinary judgments and sometimes even disciplinary objectives, and not always to our own. I believe that this dominance, which is by no means absolute control, nonetheless has an effect on the sort of anthropology of sport that has thus far been produced in Australia. We do not have the numbers to establish an organization as vibrant as the ASSH and therefore we do not have the sort of flagship journal that

a large membership makes possible. For those of us who continue to write ethnographically about local sporting activities we are left with peers in a fairly distant international field and those with a mildly disinterested local sport studies focus.

Anthropology, Sport and the Academy

There is yet another powerful reason for continuing to push ahead with the development of an anthropology of sport, both in Australia and elsewhere. Teaching an undergraduate class in the anthropology of sport for the past 15 years or so has helped me understand several things that we can provide for our students and what they can, return, provide for us.

In my experience, a focus on sport can provide powerful encouragement to bring students into anthropology. Not only is the topic intrinsically interesting to many students (and most of them have at least a passing personal experience with or understanding of some aspects of sports), but it allows them to begin using this knowledge in class. It may at times be difficult to encourage students to make the shift from talking sport to talking an anthropology of sport, but the pursuit of this goal allows them to make this transition while still retaining a sense of the value of their own knowledge. There is great satisfaction in watching students wrestle with the complexities of turning their own knowledge and expertise in the complex field of sport into the subject for anthropological and ethnographic writing. For many of my students, the class in the anthropology of sport is the first occasion when they have had the opportunity of making anthropological knowledge rather than merely consuming it. For students, doing the anthropology of sport has become a hallmark of this class.

Over the years my position in teaching the anthropology of sport has moved from one of using literature about sports gleaned from a variety of disciplines due to a lack of suitable materials within anthropology to one where I could now teach it entirely with materials produced by anthropologists. Yet I choose to retain a broader reading list in order to push students into an engagement with the broader concerns of sport studies. The anthropological literature dealing with sports is certainly far more sophisticated now than it was 15 years ago, but there are still so many other ideas and insights out there that can open intellectual doors for students.

The research projects that undergraduate students have developed and undertaken for this class are diverse. They are encouraged to conduct small, local ethnographic projects that build on their prior knowledge and involvement in sports. Not only has this proven to be an excellent way of developing their ethnographic skills and capabili-

ties, but the results have also been a boon for me. These projects have produced insights into sporting activities in and around Perth, Western Australia, much faster and in far greater detail than I could ever have done as an outsider working on my own. It does not seem too much of a stretch to note that often students have explored domains of social and cultural life to which I would have found access much more difficult to negotiate. In some respects it has been like having so many research assistants heading out to locate and report on sporting activities in the local community. Over the years, students' work on these projects has fed back into the class and helped contribute to the local content in more ways than I could have achieved as a lone ethnographer.

There is also a flow on from undergraduate classes into honours and postgraduate research degrees. I have had students develop theses dealing with such topics as the political economy of the expanding Australian Football League (AFL), negotiating gender relations in squash, the difficulties of fundraising in women's sport, the significance of Australian rules football for the Aboriginal people in the southwest of Western Australia, the globalization of surfing, the making of local heroes in the AFL, and the making of community through the Gaelic Athletic Association in Western Australia. Each of these topics has in some way helped to connect research students to a local community, and each has given a research student the possibility of coming to an ethnographic project with a background knowledge that allows them to move quickly into an anthropological research project. Some of these projects have now begun to produce publications (Lanagan, 2002; McCarthy 2003; Wedgwood, 1996).

In approaching sport this way students are empowered to make knowledge from early in their studies. An intellectual facility with the complexities of theory and the details of local ethnography require considerable time to develop. In focussing on sport, students are brought into the practice of anthropology very quickly and develop their skills while working on projects—while doing anthropology rather than just reading what professional anthropologists have written. There is a general lesson here. In approaching the learning of the discipline in this way, we are able to offer classes that may attract a wider range of students. It is now hard for me to whip up great excitement about the intricacies of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage systems much less to inspire my students with such topics. I do not deny the importance of kinship studies, or other particularly anthropological specialisms, for our discipline; I merely wish to report that there is, nowadays, far more to anthropology than the traditional topics of an earlier iteration of our discipline.

For an Anthropology of Sport

Practitioners in established academic disciplines tend to emphasize their disciplinary particularity, often evoking strong boundaries to maintain differences from other disciplines and to confirm their own identities. As a developing field of activity, the anthropology of sport is still working to establish itself and, thus, has relatively weak boundaries. Rather than being clearly set off, and hopefully not set aside, from other subfields within a more general anthropology our study of sport seems to be at its best when it builds from existing theoretical and ethnographic strengths to produce the sorts of knowledge we have come to expect in good ethnographic accounts. While social and cultural anthropology has gone down the path of specialization—and the many different interest groups and publications of the American Anthropological Association are a good measure of this—a concern that grows from this fracturing of the core of the discipline is that practitioners of the different specialties do not always develop ways of talking across their differences.⁴

I am not opposed to an anthropology of sport taking its place beside these other interest groups. The powerful analytical focus that can come from an ethnographic commitment seems to me to provide ample reason for continuing on within an anthropology of sport. Such an approach ties us to the strength of a large disciplinary organization while still allowing us the space and place to let us work through our own empirical investigations in a coherent and systematic manner. Our analyses should share in the general development of anthropology rather than being sealed off into some separate subdisciplinary domain, irrespective of whether it is a path-breaking one or a quiet backwater. Yet in doing this we must always be on guard against making this disciplinary context our sole or main focus. To do this is potentially to render our studies of particular sporting practices of little interest to anyone but our anthropological colleagues, no matter how large the professional association. In a small place like Australia, the anthropology of sport may indeed wither if we try to maintain a dialogue only amongst anthropologists. And if we move too quickly to embrace a broader and more general anthropology there is always the danger of losing the local touch, of writing to problems found in the literature rather than in our ethnographic experiences.

In looking at the broader field, sport studies will likely be with us for the foreseeable future. This sort of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary or non-disciplinary work has certainly found favour in many places. So while it may at times be useful for us to dance with sport studies, it does seem to me that we need to take due care on such occasions. We need to work off of these other

accounts, be mindful of other ways of making sense of sporting practices, but in the end we would be wise to make sure that we find an anthropological way of speaking to this broader audience.

The overriding concern in this paper has been to situate the productive intersections of a personal anthropological practice and a developing anthropology of sport. In order to understand what happens locally, we need to understand the sorts of division of labour that appear in the various social, cultural and intellectual fields in which we work. A sporting field is only one of the contexts that shapes what we, as anthropologists, produce.⁴ I suspect many of us may well feel a bit isolated at times in so far as we are apt to find ourselves working in places where there are more sport studies scholars than anthropologists of sports and more anthropologists interested in topics other than the anthropology of sport. Here is precisely the site where the integration of our teaching and researching practices with the research of our students becomes particularly important. I do think that we can better understand our own practices by locating the contextual features that shape our work in terms of the sorts of problems we write to and the sorts of audiences that read our works closely. And while we may continue to write for our colleagues in anthropology, we also face the necessity of recognizing that we must push for our work to be embedded in the relevant sport studies literature. In Australia, there has been no way of avoiding the literature that emphasizes that in this country soccer *is* an ethnic game. I admit to contributing to this literature even as I find its essentializing tendencies uncomfortable.

Finally, looking beyond all this, the message from all of this should be quite clear: as anthropologists of sport, wherever we may practice, we can only gain by making our accounts of sporting practices engage with the accounts of others. It matters little whether the others we engage be those working in what I have identified here as sport studies, those working on the same sports as ourselves but from another disciplinary perspective, or even our students. As a focus of interest, sport has the capacity to bring us together with others interested in sport so that our differences can work in complementary ways to produce understandings of sport that are more illuminating. In this anthropology has an opportunity to bring the insights of our discipline to a much broader audience.

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Notes

- 1 This paper was originally presented at the joint CASCA/AES conference held in Montreal in May 2001. As I was unable to be present, due to the tyranny of distance, Vered Amit kindly read the paper for me. I owe her an enormous debt. I also thank Noel Dyck for the opportunity to develop the paper and for his kind advice over such a long period of time. I would also like to acknowledge the helpful comments of the two referees for the journal. I alone remain responsible for all shortcomings.
- 2 The Independent Soccer Inquiry of 2002 was funded by the federal government as a review of the governance, management and structure of soccer in Australia. Mr. David Crawford, the chair of the inquiry, is a recently retired business person. Mr. Crawford came to this task with no prior involvement in soccer. He has been the national chairman of KPMG, a business advisory firm, and remains a director of several large companies. He chaired a successful review of the Australian Football League about 10 years earlier.
- 3 The movement of individuals from anthropology to sociology is a well-recognized one in the Australian academy. Just as anthropology departments tended to dominate the development of sociology in England in the first half of the 20th century, so too in Australia. In Australia anthropology has continued to provide academic staff into sociology programs.
- 4 This intellectual concern, of course, has to be set beside the political and career importance of such things as having many more positions as heads of sections and the like that allow for a demonstration of leadership within a discipline and significance to a broader academic community.
- 5 I have previously made a similar point regarding working as an anthropological consultant in Australia (Moore, 1999). The work, and words, of consultant anthropologists are shaped very much by the industry in which they work, and particularly by the expertise relevant to that industry.

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