Cultural citizenship, media and sport in contemporary Australia

David Rowe
Western Sydney University, Australia

Abstract
Mediated sport has assumed an extraordinary position in contemporary global culture. It is enormously popular, especially when stimulated by both artful and ‘carpet bomb’ marketing and promotion. It is, correspondingly, in high commercial demand in the transition from scheduled, ‘appointment’ broadcast television to a more flexible, mobile system of on-demand viewing on multiple platforms. The ‘nowness’ of sport means that it is highly effective in assembling massive, real-time audiences in an era of increasing fragmentation both in terms of numbers and viewing rhythms. At the same time, sport routinely insinuates itself into the everyday lives of citizens in ways that are no more uniform than the people who encounter it. Even among enthusiastic participants in, and aficionados of, sport, there is considerable experiential diversity in engagement with it in mediated form. Socio-cultural variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and social class, as well as dispositions of sporting taste, are responsible for considerable differences in the practices associated with mediated sport. This article addresses current research on cultural citizenship and sport in Australia, drawing on qualitative data from Greater Western Sydney, Australia’s most demographically diverse region, in analysing the various ways in which citizens engage with sport as participants and spectators. It explores the research participants’ views concerning their rights to access ‘live’ mediated sport within a broad framework of cultural citizenship, analysing the tension between commercial and citizen relationships in the production of public culture. Finally, the article considers problems associated with such access, including with regard to the so-called ‘gamblification’ of sport.

Keywords
commercialization, cultural citizenship, diversity, globalization, inequality, media, sport

Introduction: Sport, media and cultural citizenship
Mediated sport has assumed an extraordinary position in contemporary global culture (Rowe, 2011). It is enormously popular, especially when stimulated by both artful and...
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among enthusiastic participants in, and aficionados of, sport, there is considerable expe-
riential diversity in engagement with it in mediated form. Socio-cultural variables such
as age, gender, ethnicity and social class, as well as dispositions of sporting taste, which
are themselves conditioned reflexively by both material and symbolic forms of capital
(Bourdieu, 1984), are responsible for considerable differences in the practices associated
with mediated sport. This demographic diversity and socio-cultural complexity demands
a careful examination of sport’s role in lived experience and of the claims made on its
behalf, including in mediated form, that it has a ‘pro-social’ impact that enhances the
quality of collective life in large, disparate societies.

Sport is an important component of various – now most – societies and cultures.
Many arguments are made both for and against sport, which here is defined as rational-
ised, regulated, competitive physical play. On the positive side it is argued that sport is
important for the physical health of the citizenry; a key vehicle for formal and informal
diplomatic exchange; a unifier of peoples within and between societies; a major form of
popular pleasure, etc. In contrast, sport has been criticised on the grounds of being irre-
deemably subjugated by commercial exploitation; captured by national governments for
the purposes of patriotic and even xenophobic propaganda; deployed as a vehicle for
oppressive ideologies, including those relating to class, ‘race’, ethnicity, sex, sexuality,
gender, ability, age, and so on (Coakley et al., 2009). These are important debates, and no
‘final word’ can be advanced in relation to sport, not least because the various environ-
ments in which it is located, and which it helps to shape, are in a constant flux (see vari-
ous chapters in Maguire, 2014).

One argument that has been consistently advanced is that, while sport is a demonstra-
bly flawed social institution and cultural form, it can be improved and should be defended
from domination by forces seeking to harness it to sectional political–economic advan-
tage. There is an associated narrative that sport was created in the transition from folk
play to regulated physical culture, and in the process became part of national cultural
estates in terms of participation, embodied spectatorship and, increasingly, for mediated
audiences (Scherer and Rowe, 2014). This set of socio-cultural relations is connected to
the extension of citizenship beyond the political, social and economic domains to that of
the cultural (Miller, 2007). This ‘cultural citizenship’ in regard to sport could be described
as the rights and responsibilities regarding access to, and representation in, sports cul-
ture. It is worth at this point reflecting on the sympathetic but critical questioning by
Wenner et al. (2014: 74–75) of this concept:

A consensus definition of cultural citizenship remains elusive. The basic notion speaks to the
rights of all citizens to partake in essential parts of cultural life that define what it means to
belong in an egalitarian society. While many scholars agree that cultural citizenship rights
should be placed upon the pillars of civic, political, and social rights seen in Marshall’s (1950) classic conception of citizenship, questions linger about whether “one can in fact articulate a notion of cultural rights” without identifying obligations like those accompanying rights in other citizenship domains (Turner, 2001: 13–14). Similarly, essential debates remain over the contours and instrumentalities of cultural citizenship. Miller (2007), for example, struggles to answer ‘what is cultural citizenship?’ by assessing seven theoretical strains differing in disciplinary and political concerns.

Wenner et al. note the tension between ‘noble conceptions of cultural citizenship’ and the unashamedly marketised ways in which media sport is produced by ‘conflating consumer and citizen rights’, with appeals to nation states to adjudicate over those rights compromised to a substantial degree by global systems of ownership and distribution. They acknowledge the contending view that it is no longer possible to maintain the traditional separation between consumption and citizenship, and that ‘their interplay now takes place in an increasingly fused arena defining the public sphere (c.f., Soper and Trentmann, 2008)’ (p. 75). Their focus is on the US media sport environment, which is broadly unrepresentative across the world (as is evident in Scherer and Rowe, 2014) because of its combination of an historically weak public service broadcasting sector, early adoption of subscription television, and maintenance of a strong commercial free-to-air network television presence in major sports. But, the issues that they raise around citizenship and consumption, and the figure of the citizen-consumer, are important in challenging naive celebrations of sport as common culture. Could the championing of cultural citizenship rights pertaining to sport be a ‘cover’ for advancing sport-related consumption? Does it unfairly advantage some cultural forms and commercial interests over others? Can this ‘noble conception’ be used surreptitiously to support both orthodox nation state-based nationalism and the corporate nationalism (Scherer and Jackson, 2010) that feeds off it?

It is legitimate to characterise the concept of cultural citizenship as resistant to categorical definition, but no more so than ‘culture/al’ or ‘citizenship’ in other discursive contexts. Pawley (2008) argues that there are three distinct strands of cultural citizenship that focus differentially on the multicultural, the textual and the communicative, and that this structural separation militates against its coherent theorisation and empirical exploration. Nonetheless, the concept remains valuable (if necessarily imperfect) because of its insistence on ventilating the meanings and practices that both restrict and enable traditional and emergent notions of citizenship. Its principal utility regarding mediated sport for the purposes of this article is to illuminate the everyday, symbolic means by which senses of collective belonging are encouraged and deterred, especially regarding social subjects who may feel isolated, because of various forms of mobility and inequality, from the social collectivities that they inevitably encounter. Furthermore, the mobility and complexity characteristic of contemporary life of necessity produces multiple, often-competing social subjectivities and complexities. The emphasis in this case is on the nation and national culture – two more concepts subject to widespread analytical debate. It is not, of course, proposed that cultural citizenship only exists in relation to the nation – there are many other ways of construing it. Instead, it is proposed that the powerful articulation of sport, media and nation in Australia (and no doubt in
other countries) warrants a detailed analysis of cultural citizenship in an environment in which national cultural policy interpellates citizens through nationally-sanctioned broadcast sport.

The research context

In this article, these matters are addressed in the context of Australia and, more specifically, its most demographically diverse region, Greater Western Sydney (GWS), drawing on qualitative data and findings from a current research project.¹ The region’s overseas-born population is 35.4 per cent according to the 2011 census, compared to 24.6 per cent of the national population and, while only 56.4 per cent of GWS’s residents speak only English at home, for Australia generally the figure is 76.8 per cent. In terms of ancestry, the national population in the census is 66.7 per cent English or Australian, compared to only 46.8 per cent in GWS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Thus, it is apparent that GWS is more nationally and culturally diverse than an already-diverse Australia. The research (which is still continuing) did not seek statistical representativeness in terms of cultural background among those interviewed, but to register the region’s cultural diversity in broad terms. It was conducted in all three sub-regions of GWS (West, West Central and North West, and South West), which range from the densely urban, outer suburban to semi-rural. The total population is almost two million (1,923,698 in 2011 – Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) across approximately 8939 square kilometres, among whom 6.6 per cent are of Chinese and 4.8 per cent of Lebanese ancestry (the largest being 22 per cent of English ancestry).

Among the 70 research participants (involving 65 interviews and one focus group), all of whom were GWS residents, 41 per cent (29) were overseas born and 59 per cent (41) born in Australia, with 63 per cent male and 37 per cent female (an imbalance caused by the difficulty of recruiting female participants from some cultural communities – an aspect of the Australian sport’s gender and cultural order discussed below). There was a wide age-group range (but excluding minors and skewed towards young adults and the middle-aged). The social class position of the participants (mainly workingclass and lower middle class) broadly reflected the current position that GWS has a smaller proportion of high income households (earning $2500 per week or more) and a higher proportion of low income households (earning less than $600 per week) compared to Sydney as whole (Western Sydney University, 2016). Regarding national background and ancestry (which, according to Census responses, may refer to national or ethnic identification), there were 27 categories from across the globe included in the research study, encompassing Indigenous and other Australian, Oceania (New Zealand, Samoan and Fijian), Asian (including Chinese, Nepalese, Lebanese, Iraqi and Vietnamese), continental European (including Croatian, Maltese and German), North and South American (including Canadian and Uruguayan), and Africa (including Egyptian and Sudanese). These cultural identities (as noted, often multiple) were explored with regard to how a diverse populace might negotiate sometimes-competing allegiances and affective alliances in relation to Australia’s sport system, the society within which it is embedded, and the transnational/global environment to which it is intimately connected.
The general focus of this research is on the ways in which people resident in GWS from non-Anglo and Anglo cultural backgrounds engage with, and orient themselves to, Australia’s Anglo-dominated national sport culture. Although this article is focused mainly on mediated sport practices and tastes, the interviews ranged widely across participant background and biography, sport participation, in-stadium spectatorship and social variables (with gender and ethnicity particularly addressed here). The Australian federal government foregrounds sport (or, more accurately, approved sports) as a key element of national identity and as ‘common ground’ that brings together a diverse citizenry (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2014). In media cultural terms it gives effect to this priority for sport in so-called ‘anti-siphoning’ legislation that reserves ‘events of national importance and cultural significance’ – all of them sport events – for free-to-air television in the interests of maximising their population reach by preventing their exclusive capture by subscription television (Rowe, 2014).

Among the areas probed in interviews and focus groups with residents of GWS, many of whom had connections to community sport organisations, were questions concerning the sports shown on Australian television, their relevance to the interviewees regarding their degrees of familiarity and taste preferences, and their attitudes towards the protection of selected sports events (over 1300) on free-to-air television for the population at large. In the process, a subject was often raised unprompted by the research participants – the promotion of gambling through sport – that challenged notions of mediated national sport as a public ‘good’. This ‘gamblification’ of sport ostensibly undermines arguments that sport should be promoted to all residents and citizens, including recent migrant arrivals, in the interest of collectively beneficial rights of cultural citizenship. Before such questions can be explored, relevant aspects of the Australian media sport landscape must be outlined.

**Listing national sport**

In Australia the Broadcasting Services Act (Australian Government, 2010) contains provisions that enable the Federal Minister for Communications to schedule major sports events so that they must be offered first to free-to-air television. Normally, these events must be shown on the main channel in order to be available to a broad national audience, although since analogue television was switched off in Australia in 2013 there have been several cases where sports events have been allowed to be shown, in whole or in part, on secondary digital channels owned by the same network. The current schedule has been reviewed along with other arrangements in Australian television (Davidson, 2015), but political caution has meant, once again, that it will not be radically re-drawn for the foreseeable future (Christensen, 2016). The minister is also empowered to gazette any other event ‘the televising of which should, in my opinion, be available free to the general public’, according to the legislation, although it is important to note that it cannot ‘compel free-to-air broadcasters that acquire the rights to listed events to broadcast the events live, in full or at all’.

The present standing list provides a useful snapshot of the Australian media sport order. It contains two large multi-sport events, the Olympic and Commonwealth Games,
although the latter may be expected to be of little interest to many migrants (especially recent) from non-Commonwealth countries. There is a strong representation of two male football codes, Australian rules football and rugby league. The former is played professionally exclusively in Australia and so there is no reference to international competition, while the latter is of limited international significance but nonetheless has some international matches, including a World Cup. The more internationally-oriented codes, rugby union and soccer (association football), are protected only for international competitions and principally for World Cups (their main domestic competitions, Super Rugby and the A-League, being mainly on subscription television). Notably, Asian club and national team competitions are not on the list, despite Australia joining the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) in 2006 and hosting the AFC Asian Cup in 2015 (at which matches involving the Australian team were shown on delay or live by public free-to-air Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) television in conjunction with Fox Sports, the tournament subscription television broadcaster).

The slow development of soccer as a professional national sport in Australia, and consequently its lack of visibility on national free-to-air television, has been widely associated with ethnocentric Anglo hostility to the wave of post-World War II southern European migrants who established many clubs on an ethnic community basis (Hallinan and Hughson, 2010). In deference to Australia’s historical connection to Britain, the English Football Association Cup final is a protected event on the schedule. International (but not little-watched domestic) men’s cricket is represented, and international netball – the only professional women’s sport on the list – is also there, while in motor sport only events held in Australia are covered. This is also the case for golf, apart from the US Masters, while in tennis, apart from the Davis Cup games involving the national (men’s) team, the Australian, Wimbledon and US ‘grand slams’ are listed, but not the French (the only non-Anglophone country). Finally, Australia’s most famous horse race, the Melbourne Cup – popularly known as ‘the race that stops a nation’ – is on the anti-siphoning list.

The current schedule, then, indicates that the Australian national mediated sport environment is shaped by a mixture of historical precedent and commercial forces. It is not possible to address adequately all these developments here, but they include the unsatisfactory treatment of cricket and cricket players by the Australian Cricket Board that led to commercial television proprietor Kerry Packer’s so-called ‘revolution’ that wrested the game from public service broadcasting and made it integral to the summer schedule of his Nine Network (Haigh, 2007). Indeed, commercial-free-to-air television has exercised considerable political influence within Australia and has marginalised public service broadcasters (who lack the capital to compete with them) in sport while benefiting financially from the anti-siphoning list. It is not surprising, therefore, that they have been challenged for sport broadcasting supremacy by capital-rich subscription broadcasters, especially the dominant Australian player Foxtel, which is co-owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp Australia (no stranger itself to political influence peddling) and Telstra, the market-leading telecommunications corporation (Rowe, 2014).

In terms of cultural citizenship, broadcast arrangements can be regarded as a little eccentric in that the list includes overseas sport events in which Australia may not be involved, or only tangentially or contingently so. The absence of popular global sports
such as basketball and the under-representation of soccer, the so-called ‘world game’, suggests something of a lag between the intensifying diversification of the Australian population and the composition of the anti-siphoning list. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015), in 2014 the ‘proportion of Australians who were born overseas has hit its highest point in 120 years’, a migration trend that, as noted above, is accentuated in GWS. The resultant expansion of sporting taste preferences coincides with the list being under constant pressure to be reduced or even abolished on the grounds of market distortion and technological obsolescence (Rowe, 2014). However, changes to the list may also problematise what is considered to be the ‘national’ – for example, recent migrants may prefer free-to-air broadcast (as demonstrated below) access to premium overseas leagues such as the English Premier League (EPL) or the National Basketball Association (NBA) than unequivocally national-local sports like Australian rules football or events like the Melbourne Cup. In Bourdieusian terms, this shifting relationship between officially-sanctioned cultural taste, commercial concerns and actual taste preferences reveals sport to be a ‘field of struggles’ in which cultural citizenship is contested through mobilisation of different forms of capital, including economic, social and cultural (Rowe, 2016). Such issues of cultural taste and mobility are now addressed through the qualitative data of the research project.

The mediated sport experience

*Multicultural*

The anti-siphoning list and related media sport matters were discussed with a range of research participants from different backgrounds. Interviewees were generally in favour of it, though (as discussed below) this was more about the *idea* of, and *rationale* for, legislation to keep some sport on public free-to-air television than necessarily an endorsement of the composition of the list. Jacopo (all names of those interviewed have been changed to maintain anonymity), an Australia-born soccer operations manager of Italian background (who speaks only ‘very little’ Italian), described himself as ‘a bit of an advocate for that [the anti-siphoning list], because more people get to watch it. Otherwise, you know, it’s only restricted to people that can afford Foxtel [the dominant pay TV provider in Australia]’. A similar position was taken by Assi, an Australia-born woman from a self-described ‘very bi-cultural home’ (both parents being Lebanese born, but her mother having no ‘cultural memory of Lebanon’ after migrating when she was only three years of age, while her father moved to the country as an adult). She also reflects on the ways in which transnationalism interacts with a range of other intersectional factors in conditioning sport’s socio-cultural resonance. An English and Arab speaking public servant, Assi plays various sports (association football, tag rugby and engages in CrossFit), but for her the most important is Australian rules football (as a women’s team founder and player), although she supports anti-siphoning regulations across various sports:

I would be really upset if – I would actually really resent my code maybe if they made it that I had to pay to watch and I also think it goes against the spirit of engaging communities through
sport because all of these major codes now have some sort of community engagement or multicultural department that is trying to engage those communities. So if you’re trying to broaden the reach to invite people to play your sport, by making it exclusive, it kind of defeats the purpose. Plus some of the most disadvantaged communities who could never afford to pay to play or watch, would miss out, and that just doesn’t make sense because sometimes sport is that light of hope.

So if you look at earlier this year there was a number of incidents being reported about Muslim communities and it was just like a terrible period in time. I can’t remember specifically what it was but the rugby league final was coming up and Canterbury Bulldogs had made the final and I was – the news shifted from crazy extremist terrorists and whatever to Canterbury as a suburb and Belmore as a suburb [of GWS]. It just lit up with drums and the blue and white and everything and people were celebrating and found some comfort in sport. So to make that not accessible or to limit its accessibility, it doesn’t make sense to me because I see what sport can do for communities. Recently the Western Sydney Wanderers [association football team] coming back to Western Sydney. I mean the celebrations is unlike – that spectator, that family, that community, it just doesn’t make sense that you would make it exclusive. (Assi)

Ironically, most A-League matches played by the aforementioned Western Sydney Wanderers are not on free-to-air television (there being only one live match per week from the entire league since 2013, prior to which there were none), but Assi has a broader concern with sport’s role in community engagement in a multicultural environment. This is a broader conception of cultural citizenship than access to socially significant mediated sport. It is an issue – not discussed in depth in this paper – concerning the provision of access and opportunity for all citizens to participate in Australian sports culture if they so choose. Here cultural citizenship rights also concern removing material barriers to sport participation created by the cost of registration, coaching, equipment, apparel, and so on. Assi’s club, for example, waives the cost of registration fees for those who cannot afford to pay. Donald, an Indigenous Australian community liaison officer with the New South Wales police, strongly emphasised this point:

I’ll tell you why, in the South Sydney area, most probably why rugby league is so big there, it’s because registration, they don’t pay for it. South Sydney Juniors, the club, pay for all their registration, for every player in the junior league, so you’re always going to get kids to play there, mum and dad don’t have to fork out money for their rego [registration], you know. Then they can go and play another sport and put some money in that but, for a tennis lesson, you’re most probably looking at AU$60 or AU$70 an hour. Golf lessons, same thing, you’re looking at most probably, AU$30 or AU$40 and I’ve got a nephew that’s – son’s a motocross rider and they were buying a house, they ended up having to sell their house up to keep their son in the sport. So now they’re back out renting, you know, and obviously one of the most famous Australians in motorsport persons is Indigenous, is Chad Reed, I wonder how he followed his goal, yeah. It’s so expensive to do…

…I feel sorry for a lot of the parents that I’ve known that their kids excelled at soccer and they go “I’ve got to” – there’s one kid I know that’s – his mum says he’s got to pay AU$3,000 a year … So I can imagine the strain on the family would be like. I suppose that’s most probably why my boys predominantly play league you know, it’s probably one sport I can pay for. (Donald)
However, to return to Wenner et al.’s (2014) analysis of cultural citizenship discussed earlier, this is not just a matter of rights but also of responsibilities. While it cannot be suggested that involvement in sport in Australia should be compulsory (setting aside the sport, fitness and health elements in school curricula), when couched in terms of opportunity it might be proposed, for example, that parents should not obstruct – indeed, should actively encourage – their children’s voluntary participation in sport. But Assi and her sisters, for example, were initially discouraged by their parents from participating voluntarily in sport after school on grounds such as gender, expense and scarcity of time to transport them to training. They did so later, ‘So it was a long journey for us to go through because of the cultural barriers or the socioeconomic barriers. Once we got there, I just discovered an untapped passion and energy for sport’ (Assi). At the more informal level of family play, cultural values also impeded the girls’ participation in sport:

on Saturdays you would have a family barbeque and all our cousins would come down, you would see the boys, they would all pick up the footy and they hated formal sport and no-one would register their kids but they would play informally on the weekend. So all my cousins would be playing rugby or basketball or whatever and us girls – it was culturally not acceptable for girls to play with boys because they shouldn’t touch you and all of that, but when the parents weren’t looking we would sneak in and we would play. (Assi)

**Gendered**

Even when such ethno-cultural barriers did not exist, the gender order is in wider evidence. Kat, for example, who is an Australian-New Zealand citizen of Anglo heritage (born in Australia) now involved deeply in women’s rugby union, remarked that:

… people of my father’s generation, he’s 65, he’s a baby boomer, he finds it absurd that women play rugby. He thinks I’m mad and he’s like it’s terrible, terrible. When I was a kid he used to say to me when I played touch rugby, he would say “You shouldn’t play, look at all those scars on your legs, no man is going to want to marry you. That’s terrible, it’s appalling, cover up” and I’d be like, “Oh dad, don’t be so ridiculous”. But his generation do think that and they think it makes a woman very butch and once she’s finished school she should concentrate on her career and finding a husband and having a family. (Kat)

Although this is a rather stark and perhaps exaggerated account of gender discrimination in sport, there is no doubt that it is a male-dominated institution (McKay et al., 2000), while there is persistent gender-based inequality in the wider Australian society and culture (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014) – as in most other countries. There is also considerable cultural variation in the assignment of roles and in expectations surrounding involvement in organised sport. For example, Damien, a New Zealand born physical education teacher of Samoan heritage raised in Australia, observes of the prevailing practices among Pacific Islanders:

I don’t want to compare, because I don’t know too much from like the Muslim representation and others, I can only speak for I guess Pacific [Islanders]. But I know, yeah, because they’re
larger families, the daughter, the parents are working, the daughter is 16 – or everyone in our family, my sister, everyone knows the daughters are the princesses, become the second mums of the home, that’s generally how it is, rather than her playing sport. Your brothers are playing sport, and you [the daughters] look after the other five children at home. Yeah, that’s how I’ve always experienced it and seen it in my circle of friends and family. (Damien)

With regard to the responsibilities of cultural citizenship, it could be suggested that, just as citizens are expected to engage fully with political processes in an informed way (Curran et al., 2014), they should support and facilitate engagement with major cultural institutions and practices – in this instance those of a sporting nature. This is a difficult and complex area because it enters the sphere of governmentality and the management of conduct of citizens, while also involving a range of power relations. Tony Bennett (2013: 45), although discussing a rather different area of what he calls ‘the culture complex’, usefully conceives of ‘processes of “making culture” [that] are simultaneously ones of “organising freedom” and distributing it differentially across the population’. Relatedly, Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (2003: 2) emphasise the necessity of cultural policies that go beyond reproducing and reinforcing socio-cultural hierarchies and systems of control by means of ‘the management of populations through suggested behaviour’ in favour of a ‘movement towards a progressive or democratic culture – or cultures’. In respect of cultural citizenship, sport and media, this process requires handling the idea of national culture in ways that are not coercive and exclusivist, and in a manner that does not prescribe cultural taste and practice in order to produce a docile citizenry. National cultural policy, then, must challenge – rather than condone or obscure – the entrenched regimes of inequality with which sport and media are entwined.

Such intersectional structures of power come into focus when Kat reflects on the domination by men’s sports of the Australian media and the requirement for women to navigate male-controlled public space when wanting to watch a sporting event, and especially women’s sport that is not on the anti-siphoning list and so cannot usually be watched on free-to-air television in the domestic environment. Therefore, Kat answers strongly in the affirmative when asked if she supports the anti-siphoning regulations, while also condemning the lack of women’s sport free-to-air television (including the anti-siphoning list):

Yes. Yes, yes, yes, otherwise you have no choice but to go down to the pub and watch it, and as a female it’s extremely uncomfortable trying to watch football at a pub with all the men there … Yeah well we go there with the whole football team so we’ve gone after our match, we’ve been down at the local pub to try and watch the football and yes, it’s been awful. We ended up going home.

…IWith the girl’s rugby, especially the Rugby Sevens, they didn’t televise the majority of the girls’ matches at the recent World Cup. So the only way to watch them was to watch them streamed online through a UK site. It was appalling. It was really appalling. The Australian media chose to show none of their matches until the finals, which was on pay TV. So yeah definitely keeping an eye on how it’s going online. And for all the women’s rugby stuff, like the Nations Cup [a North American/European competition] and the [Europe-based] Six Nations, our media doesn’t show any of it. So the only way you can watch it is through the internet and through mostly the UK live streaming sites.
I think there’s not enough women’s sport. I think it’s so focused on the men’s sport and they, when you talk to them about we want to see more women’s sport they laugh at you and say “But no-one’s interested in that and we wouldn’t be able to get people willing to pay for advertising during women’s sport”. So, therefore, they’re not going to put it on. So that’s really frustrating. Like as I said the World Cup [the ‘unprotected’ Sevens tournament], both the men and the women were playing at the World Cup, all the men’s matches were available to watch on Foxtel but only the women’s finals. That was really, really disappointing and very discriminatory. (Kat)

The criticism of Australian television sport here partly refers to women’s sports in which Australia is competing internationally (in this case rugby union). Although the Sevens World Cup mentioned by Kat is not on the anti-siphoning list for either sex, subscription television is shown by her to favour men over women in its coverage of it. This media practice raises the broader question of the extent to which mediated cultural citizenship through sport tends to be conceived and enacted in ways that reproduce rather than challenge gender inequality. In addition, when sports events that are based on other continents (as noted above, some examples that Kat cites are competitions involving European and North American teams) are considered, especially by globally mobile citizens, the relationships between nation, sport and citizenship are demonstrably strained.

Mobile

The internet makes many sports available for viewing that do not involve teams from Australia (although individual Australians may take part). Yet, as noted in the schedule above, there are also protected events (such as the English FA Cup) that are not Australia-based or focused either. Such inclusions pose questions as to whether cultural citizenship should primarily be based on a ‘nationing’ logic, or whether in a world of global population flows and transnational tastes the emphasis should be on flexible transnational/global rather than fixed national tastes (or, indeed, whether the coming of digital networked sport means that media sports should now be entirely unregulated – Hutchins and Rowe, 2012). Kelil, born in China, working in financial services and an Australian citizen since 2007, would prefer to watch international leagues such as football’s English Premier League and basketball’s NBA live on television (despite time zone variables) rather than the codes of football that dominate Australian television:

… the thing is I found Australia is actually quite limit[ed for] the sport game which I am in favour – I love soccer and I love basketball, but unfortunately Australia[n] never have the soccer game for some famous leagues like in UK or in Germany or Spain. That’s the top of world class and like in China we always have it on the TV it’s for free, you don’t have to pay for the paid channel to get to watch those kinds of games. But in Australia it’s all, it isn’t on the free TV, you have to get the paid channel to watch those games, unfortunately I’m not paying [for] that money so I can’t watch it. (Kelil)

For Kelil, who has not grown up with the main sports in the Australian media sport system, free-to-air sport television is important but should be much more cosmopolitan and less historically nation-focused in nature:
Of course, it [sport on free-to-air television] is very important, and also it’s just a way to get in touch with the whole world because like, the soccer and basketball, it’s not only popular in a particular country but it’s popular in most like developed or developing countries, it’s very popular in America and it’s also very popular in Europe and so does in China…

…It helps a lot, if you know, it’s you don’t want to pay extra AU$40–50 a month to watch those [on] pay TV, if we have it for free, of course, [I’m] pretty sure more people are going to watch it. (Kelil)

Randhir, an Indian migrant to Australia (via the Middle East) and Kanchha, a Nepal-born Australian citizen who works in computing, similarly describe the gap between most of their favoured sports and those on the anti-siphoning list. Here an obvious tension is exposed between the national and the global in the constitution of claims around cultural citizenship conceived and legitimated in terms of the nation. According to a Bourdieusian logic, this difficulty arises out of the historically inherited dominance of dispositions of sporting taste that have arisen in a national-cultural context that is changing rapidly as a result of intensified demographic, technological and cultural mobility. For Kelil, either free-to-air television would need to secure the Australian rights to overseas association football and basketball by outbidding subscription television – an economically unlikely outcome – or the anti-siphoning list would need to be expanded to embrace them, which would raise difficult questions of further national government intervention in the mediation of other nations’ sports leagues. While this would advantage him as a media sport consumer based in Australia, it would be tenuously connected to cultural citizenship rights based on the nation and would, as in other parts of the world such as the Asia Pacific, be likely to have a negative impact on the development potential of domestic leagues (Gilmour and Rowe, 2012). Nonetheless, the political justification for protecting some sport for free-to-air television was consistently made in the interviews with people of diverse backgrounds.

**Accessible but exploitative**

There was virtually unanimous support for the policy principle, including among Anglo-Australians and those who subscribed to pay television in their own homes. For example, Daphne, an Anglo-Australian who works in the sports industry and volunteers in junior rugby union, stated that:

Well I think because pay TV’s such a luxury, and people can’t afford luxuries these days. To keep up with the Australian passion for sport, and it being a sporting nation, I think it’s very important that kids that don’t come from a luxury family still have access to watch Australian sport. (Daphne)

This egalitarian ethos was constantly articulated, although the quality of commercial free-to-air sports television was criticised by some, such as Robert, another Anglo-Australian:

I pay for the privilege of not having the ads. You get channels that get free-to-air; they get sports and don’t show them. Why bid for it if you’re not going to show it? And if you’re going to show
it then you show the crappy little bits of it. So you’ve done your bit, you’ve said yes, well I told them I’d show it, you only show crappy little amounts of it, but you’ve fulfilled your obligation to the government that you’ve shown ‘X’ amount of sport. When you’ve got designated sports channels that people can watch it on. I don’t know many people that don’t have pay TV. (Robert)

Certainly, the lack of premium sport for Australia’s main public service broadcaster ABC (which carries no advertising) has meant that advertising is a prominent part of the free-to-air television experience. The other public service broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), carries limited advertising, while the three commercial networks (Seven, Nine and Ten) and the various regional stations are advertising dependent. Robert doesn’t acknowledge that pay TV does show advertisements, but they are generally less intrusive during actual sport action. But apart from the quantum of advertising, what is advertised during major sports events in Australia and what are the products and services that they display? As has often been criticised, the promoted commodities are frequently unhealthy (Australian Sports Commission, 2015). Although tobacco products have long been banned, fast food, soft drinks and alcohol are consistently presented in advertising spots, sponsorship announcements and in display advertising on players’ bodies and in the stadiums in which they perform. Of particular concern to several research participants – and often mentioned spontaneously – is the advertising and promotion of gambling, especially online (including the televised quoting of betting odds). For example, Cathy and Jane, two Anglo-Australians who volunteer at netball, state:

this annoys me with sport. I think there’s too much focus on gambling and betting in sport. And I think that’s really increased in the last probably 18 months to 2 years. And that actually makes me not watch sport sometimes because of the emphasis on gambling with sport. It annoys me when they cut through the break or whatever to tell me the odds, so I don’t think you can have a discussion about sport and the popularity and the culture of sport without now addressing the advertising in sport. We’re not allowed to advertise cigarettes anymore and we’re not allowed during the sport but we’re allowed to encourage me to place a bet on it. (Cathy)

We’ve had a lot of families devastated by gambling. (Jane)

Such points were made repeatedly by interviewees, including by Donald, as noted above an Indigenous community liaison offer with the New South Wales police, who said:

… we see people all the time, whether they end up in custody because of it or end up a victim of someone that’s lost their money or domestic violence or suicide. Sad. I’ve been here 13 years, oh twelve and a half years, I’ve seen it all and a lot of it’s due to the strain people put on each other, through either gambling or alcohol. (Donald)

Similarly, Kassim, a Lebanon-born artist, community cultural engagement officer and volunteer rugby league coach, stated:

I’ll tell you, I’m not really happy with the gambling association, say with the NRL [National Rugby League], and with some of the sports. I think you’re seeing you know the payoff or the
trade off to having more sporting events, you are having, you know, gambling ads and so on, and you know making this as a normal part of society almost, that it’s an accepted thing, it’s just normal to gamble. The way it’s portrayed, I’m not really happy with that because you know gambling is an unhealthy thing, and against my religion. It’s not a – it’s something that you know you should shy away from, and gambling is – especially in Western Sydney and Southwest Sydney – it’s a problem, it’s a real problem. (Kassim)

This close association of broadcast sport, gambling and other products and services associated with social problems is substantially ‘endorsed’ by the anti-siphoning list, thereby problematising the claims made of benefits of mediated sport with regard to cultural citizenship. If it is accepted that gambling is a socially and individually hazardous practice for many citizens, its normalisation through sport (sometimes referred to as the ‘gamblification’ of sport) rather undermines the principle of healthy nation-building. When viewed in the light of other criticisms of sport mentioned above, including national chauvinism, ethnic stereotypification, racism, sexism and homophobia, (Coakley et al., 2009), conventional and rather anodyne arguments in favour of sport as both a vehicle for, and substantive component of, cultural citizenship, are manifestly weakened.

Conclusion: Is media sport culture good for the cultural rights of the citizenry?

This article has brought sport, especially in its broadcast form, into dialogue with the concept of cultural citizenship, and questioned the relationship between them in the Australian context. It has highlighted some of the ways in which claims to benefit the nation are, at the level of actual residents and citizens, subject to the vagaries of personal biographies and social positioning. Australia-based cultural theorist Suvendrini Perera (2001: 525) has questioned the unproblematic connections between sport, nation, citizenship, identity and politics in a world of mobile global environment with many diasporic populations. In a highly personal way, in response to a controversial cricket tour of Australia by Sri Lanka at a time of substantial political violence in the latter country, she argues:

To return to the questions with which I began, a Sri Lankan, Tamil, woman suddenly called on to ‘take sides’ in the cricket: my viewing position can be explained neither by my assent to the nationalist appeal of a unitary Sri Lanka, nor by a position “outside” politics, as a knowing connoisseur of the game. It is constituted, rather, by my constant interpellation as foreign to the country whose passport I now hold, but whose citizenship I can never fully assume.

Perera illuminates how citizenship is not simply a category but a set of dynamic relations that shifts according to the positioning of subjects according to a range of sociocultural variables. With regard, specifically, to cultural citizenship, the ‘matching’ of official nation-state expectations to social subjectivities and cultural tastes is necessarily imperfect in complex societies whose borders are highly permeable in the context of transnational flows and global connectivities. Even where modest evidence can be found
of involvement in sport organisations enhancing social connectedness (Hoye et al., 2015), it is questionable in relation to the more diffuse domain of mediated sport spectatorship. Here as elsewhere the consumption–citizenship nexus may be problematic (Trentmann, 2007), especially when it is detached from national sport institutions (as in cases where preferences are for sport events that are not coded or organised in terms of the ‘host’ nation) or involves products and services of dubious benefit to nation and citizen, such as when mediated sport carries ‘unhealthy’ messages.

This is not to argue that state intervention in the cultural sphere and its economy is illegitimate – if there was one conclusive finding from the research it was that a high level of consensus exists that there should be some regulation by the state of the migration of television sports onto subscription platforms. But there was less agreement over what should be protected or shown with, for instance, some of the historically dominant sports currently on Australian television likely to be unfamiliar and unappealing to recent migrants from countries, like India and China, with rather different sporting preferences.

With regard to the over-representation of male team sports on the anti-siphoning list, the inequitable gender order of sport in Australia is also clearly exposed. If, following Bourdieu (1988: 154), ‘The work of the sociologist consists of identifying the socially pertinent properties that make for an affinity between a given sport and the interests, tastes, and preferences of a definite social category’, it is clear that such work also needs to be applied to multiple categories and their diverse socio-cultural relationships in the structured but dynamic field of sport. Even if cultural citizenship rights relating to sport were relatively clear, their associated responsibilities are less so and, when canvassed, may resemble more traditional forms of citizen disciplinarity than democratic modes of cultural participation. A key task, therefore, is to clarify sport’s relationship to cultural citizenship in national contexts where the very idea of the public, as opposed to that of the market, is under severe pressure, thereby constricting the space where sport and its mediation can assert the requisite ethical authority that underpins any conception of genuinely ‘common culture’.

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Notes

1. The Australian Research Council-funded project is entitled A Nation of ‘Good Sports’? Cultural Citizenship and Sport in Contemporary Australia (DP130104502).
2. The ‘Current Broadcast Schedule of Listed Sport Events in Australia (Anti-Siphoning)’ is:

Schedule

Olympic Games

1.1 Each event held as part of the Summer Olympic Games, including the Opening Ceremony and the Closing Ceremony.

1.2 Each event held as part of the Winter Olympic Games, including the Opening Ceremony and the Closing Ceremony.
Commonwealth Games
2.1 Each event held as part of the Commonwealth Games, including the Opening Ceremony and the Closing ceremony.

Horse Racing
3.1 Each running of the Melbourne Cup organised by the Victoria Racing Club.

Australian Rules Football
4.1 Each match in the Australian Football League Premiership competition, including the Finals Series.

Rugby League Football
5.1 Each match in the National Rugby League Premiership competition, including the Finals Series.
5.2 Each match in the National Rugby League State of Origin Series.
5.3 Each international rugby league ‘test’ match involving the senior Australian representative team, played in Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom.
5.4 Each match of the Rugby League World Cup involving the senior Australian representative team.

Rugby Union Football
6.1 Each international ‘test’ match involving the senior Australian representative team selected by the Australian Rugby Union, played in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa or Europe.
6.2 Each match in the quarter-finals, semi-finals and the final of the Rugby World Cup tournament.
6.3 Each match of the Rugby World Cup tournament involving the senior Australian representative team selected by the Australian Rugby Union.

Cricket
7.1 Each ‘test’ match involving the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia played in Australia.
7.2 Each ‘test’ match between the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia and the senior English representative team, played in Australia or the United Kingdom.
7.3 Each one-day cricket match involving the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia played in Australia.
7.4 Each Twenty20 cricket match involving the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia played in Australia.
7.5 Each match in the semi-finals and the final of the International Cricket Council One Day International World Cup.
7.6 Each match of the International Cricket Council One Day International World Cup involving the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia.
7.7 The final of the International Cricket Council Twenty20 World Cup.
7.8 Each match of the International Cricket Council Twenty20 World Cup involving the senior Australian representative team selected by Cricket Australia.

Soccer
8.1 The English Football Association Cup final.
8.2 Each match of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup tournament.
8.3 Each match in the Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup Qualification tournament involving the senior Australian representative team selected by the Football Federation Australia.

Tennis
9.1 Each match in the Australian Open tennis tournament.
9.2 Each match in the men’s and women’s singles quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals of the Wimbledon (the Lawn Tennis Championships) tournament.
Each match in the men’s and women’s singles quarter-finals, semi-finals and finals of the United States Open tennis tournament.

Each match in each tie of the International Tennis Federation Davis Cup World Group tennis tournament involving an Australian representative team.

Netball
10.1 Each international netball match involving the senior Australian representative team selected by the All Australian Netball Association, played in Australia or New Zealand.
10.2 The semi-final of the Netball World Championships if it involves the senior Australian representative team selected by the All Australian Netball Association.
10.3 The final of the Netball World Championships if it involves the senior Australian representative team selected by the All Australian Netball Association.

Golf
11.1 Each round of the Australian Masters tournament, played as part of the Professional Golfers Association Tour of Australasia.
11.2 Each round of the Australian Open tournament, played as part of the Professional Golfers Association Tour of Australasia.
11.3 Each round of the United States Masters tournament, played as part of the Professional Golfers Association Tour.

Motor Sports
12.1 Each race in the Fédération Internationale de l’Automobile Formula 1 World Championship (Grand Prix) held in Australia.
12.2 Each race in the Fédération Internationale de Motocyclisme Moto GP held in Australia.
12.3 Each race in the V8 Supercar Championship Series, including the Bathurst 1000.


References


