

The History of Touch in Australia *

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In February 2000 the Sydney *Sun-Herald* announced that:

Touch football may be booted over the sideline at primary schools after the National Rugby League launched a \$2 million recruitment drive using the new sport, OzTag.

The Australian Rugby League Foundation, a development program largely financed by NRL [National Rugby League] clubs, has chosen to push OzTag as part of a long-term plan to raise the popularity of the code, particularly among girls and mothers.

But OzTag's main rival, the more established touch football, which enjoys high participation rates in schools, believes the NRL's backing could knock the sport out of the education system.¹

Backed by this massive funding, the newspaper announced that the ARL Foundation sent twenty-three development officers out to the New South Wales primary schools. At least one officer had been appointed to every NRL club and to State leagues to encourage a move back to Rugby League, and away from Touch. In a lead to the story the *Sun-Herald* claimed that 'there are 250,000 registered touch players nationally with about 500,000 school children playing'. This was compared with '35,000 registered OzTag players nationally with about 5,000 school children playing'. Clearly, Touch has the Murdoch-backed NRL worried, and is making an all out attempt to break the throttle-hold that Touch has over school children, many of whom clearly go on to choose Touch in preference to Rugby League as an adult form of sport and recreation. The time has arrived where the history of Touch needs to be assessed.

* Much of the unrecorded detail in this article has been kindly made available by the enthusiastic support of Cary Thompson, Hurstville, NSW, December 1999.

¹ Heath Gilmore, 'League Dumps Touch for Tag', *Sun-Herald*, 27 February 2000.

Anybody who played Rugby League or Rugby Union in Australia during the 1960s will remember playing a form of touch football as a form of practice and fitness at training nights. Often this would involve as many as thirty players, with the playing field usually being the normal Rugby field. Usually the rules were constituted a touch rather than a tackle. No doubt hybrids of this form of game are still being played today all over the world. It was from these beginnings that the game of Touch evolved. Today, the number of women's teams, mixed teams, Aboriginal teams, even teams involving prisoners from institutions in the State Department of Corrective Services are a feature of the game, and this inclusiveness may be a reason for its success over NRL-sponsored games.

The Significance of Touch in Australian Sport and Culture Today

In a telling 1997 article in the *Sport Educator*, Stewart-Weeks postulates a 'third wave' in the history of sport in Australia. The first wave lasted from the beginning of the century until the mid-1970s, and manifested a fairly distant relationship between government and sport. Amateurism and self-help was a hallmark of this period. The notion of sport as an economic sector, or as an industry, and as a serious policy issue, held little credence in the wider Australian community. The second wave commenced with the first Whitlam government sports budget of 1973, and through until the end of the century, culminating in the Sydney 2000 Olympics. As Stewart-Weeks contends, 'the second wave was triggered by the Whitlam government's decision to create a department with responsibility for sport and to allocate \$1 million for sports development'. Now the link between sport and government was dramatically upgraded, and irrevocably advanced. Moreover, public investment in sport rose dramatically, and 'the institutional framework for sports policy has become more complex and expensive'. Moreover, 'the size, scope and impact of sport as an industry has emerged as a key issue in its own right'. For Stewart-Weeks, the third wave can only be defined speculatively at this stage', however, there is likely to be less direct government financial support, and also it will be marked by 'less cumbersome and extensive institutional "machinery" much of which is likely to be privatised in one form or another'.² We shall illustrate in this article how the Australian Touch Association (ATA) has developed a grass-roots organisational framework, that is not top-heavy, but is based on mass voluntary involvement from the school level through to the national and international levels.

Stewart-Weeks goes on to state that 'an increasingly interesting phenomenon in sport is the shift from "membership" to a "customer" perspective on the part of those who

² Martin Stewart-Weeks, 'The Third wave: Developing a Post-2000 Sports policy Framework', *Sports Educator*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1997, pp. 4-11.

want to be involved in sport.³ This article will argue that this point is of critical importance to the future wellbeing of Touch in Australia. Its organisational framework has insured that it is customer sensitive, and is inclusive in style.

• How Touch was Perceived in 1984

Webb and Coffey in a 1984 article in *Sports Coaching* wrote that 'Touch, acknowledged as Australia's fastest growing team sport, is a game which is proving to be most suitable for men, women and children of all ages'. The authors outlined the reasons why they believed the sport would grow:

Touch offers social benefits to all participants as it is a true team sport. It brings together men, women and children from all levels of society and mixes them in a competitive environment at a standard commensurate with the desires of the player.

It is an inexpensive game. Each player only requires a T-shirt, shorts, socks and sandshoes. The team needs a ball for training and playing and markers are usually used to identify corners of the field. ... players can participate in a 16-match season for as little as \$30. Because of the small dimensions of the field and generally less resultant surface damage grounds are more available than in the contact football sports.

Injuries are minimal providing the normal precautions of warm-up, training, warm-down and non-overexertion are adhered to. The absence of body contact means less serious injuries and accidents. The physical and general health benefits are numerous. Touch is a game using endurance, speed, power (for those who are serious) and both extent and dynamic flexibility.

Additionally, Touch offers tremendous fitness potential with players often not realising how much running, particularly stop-start-stop work, they are actually doing. Once the ball is introduced into such an activity players can really become addicted.

Many players from contacts sports use Touch in off-season purely for the benefits of fitness. Many never return to the contact sport from which they came because this exciting sport provides the advantages of the others, with few of the disadvantages.⁴

Webb and Coffey went on to suggest a possible reason for the long-term success of the sport in Australia. They wrote that:

Children who participate in sport have much to gain. Children who participate in Touch have much to gain and little to lose. They learn to accept new challenges while testing the limits of their abilities.

They learn about cooperation with teammates and about healthy competition. They should also learn to take pride in honest effort and achievement regardless of victory or defeat. Many of these things can be

³ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴ Paul Webb and Dennis Coffey, 'Touch: Australia's Fastest Growing Sport, *Sports Coach*, vol. 7, no. 4, March 1984, pp. 58-61.

experienced in team sports other than Touch. But Touch can help children learn and develop new physical and psychological skills without the danger of serious injury. The stress of the competitive situation can aid in social and emotional maturation under pleasant circumstances.

Through the active and very participant-oriented sport of Touch the child should develop an enthusiasm for participation in sporting activities which can become the basis for lifelong interest in personal health and fitness.

Touch is the ideal team sport for high schools. Children of teenage years find it attractive and challenging.

It can be introduced into physical education lessons easily and the kids love to play it at lunchtime and after school.⁵

In 1985 Webb and Coffey reported that there were:

more than 120,000 registered players around Australia who enjoy regular competition in both summer and winter seasons. This number is increasing annually as people identify some of the advantages of this participatory sport.

National championships are conducted each year and competitions are divided into Men's Open, Women's Open and Men's Senior Divisions. Additionally, many States compete in the mixed Under 16 Division, a novel innovation where boys and girls are matched with and against each other.

The mixed division is proving very popular with adults too and as from 1985 National Championships, a competition will be contested in a mixed open division.

Mixed, or integrated as some prefer to call it, requires the normal eleven participants to be made up of six males and five females. No less than three females are allowed on the field at any one time. ...

The sport has developed to an international standard in every short time. New Zealand alone has more than 5000 teams and contacts have been made in Canada and the United States of America.

The first International Test Series will occur within 12 months and the inaugural World Series is being planned for 1988.

The high growth rate and the variety of participants reflect the ever-increasing interest in the game.

Affiliation with Commonwealth and Olympic Associations are under way and the time is fast approaching when the sport of Touch will be a household word on the international scene.⁶

If the motivation behind the Australian Rugby League Foundation-sponsored OzTag initiatives early in 2000 is a benchmark, during the 1980s and 1990s Touch rolled on from success to success. How did it all begin?

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. Of course, the idea of having boys and girls 'matched with an against each other' is no longer 'novel'. The 'normal eleven participants' comprised of 'no less than three females' has been replaced with a team of fourteen, comprised of seven males and seven females.

The Early History of Touch

Cary Thompson records that Touch started as a fitness and skills training aid for players involved in rugby codes in Australia. In 1968 the first official game of Touch was held in the traditionally strong Rugby League area of South Sydney. The South Sydney Touch Football Association was founded in 1968. Here Bob Dykes and Ray Vawdon started a formal competition between a small number of teams at Snape Park, Kingsford, in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs, a venue that is only less than a kilometre from the venue of the 1999 Touch World Cup. A formalised set of rules based on Rugby League was soon adopted. In 1976 a competition between neighbouring districts was formed, and it was called the Vawdon Cup. For the first three years the tournament was won by South Sydney. The competition was small, being between the South Sydney, Cronulla, Newtown, Canterbury and Manly clubs.

Already, by the mid-70s Australian society and the nature of its sport and recreation was changing. Early, the game had a natural appeal to women. Consequently, a women's competition was added in 1981, and won by Sutherland. That year Souths Juniors won the men's competition, with Port Hacking being runners up in both the women's and men's competition. This competition has expanded since that time to what is now known as the Sydney Championships, being played in autumn and winter over a fourteen-week period with some 300 teams competing in fifteen different divisions, catering for teams from as far away as Canberra and Newcastle.⁷

With Touch mushrooming across New South Wales, in 1977 the first State Cup was played at Port Macquarie on the Central Coast of New South Wales. Here Cronulla Sutherland took out the championship, with Manly Warringah being the runner up. South Sydney won it the following year, and again Manly Warringah came second. An index to the inclusiveness of the new game was sounded when a women's, and a men's over 35 competition was introduced to the State Carnival in 1979. South Sydney Juniors and Manly Warringah were the respective first-up winners of the event.

By 1978 the game was sufficiently strong in country New South Wales for a City versus Country Carnival to be held. In 1981 a women's division, and senior men's division were added to this carnival. In that year the Riverina District dominated the carnival. In 1982 a mixed-competition was added to the national carnival.

Colonising the Australian Football League States

During the early 1980s the sporting landscape of the non-Rugby League States and Territories were transformed by the introduction of Touch. During this time Grant Rodwell was in Tasmania, the most parochial and staunchly Australian Rules of all the States and Territories. During the summer months hundreds of men and women of all

⁷ Interview, Cary Thompson, Hurstville, NSW, December 1999.

ages gathered weekly at the Hobart Showgrounds for the Touch competition. The same scene was repeated across other regional Tasmanian centres. These people from variety of sporting backgrounds: Hockey, Australian Rules, Rugby Union, Soccer, and so on. Many, like myself, were schoolteachers, and soon the game was being played between schools, as a summer sport.

Towards a National Championship Competition

With Touch booming in other States outside the traditional rugby code States of New South Wales and Queensland, a National Championship was inaugurated in 1980, and was first held on Queensland's Gold Coast, with strong sponsorship from Johnson's Wax. Here there were three divisions: men's open, women's open, and men's over 35s. New South Wales won all three divisions, with the Australian Capital Territory being runners up in the men's and over 35s; Queensland won the women's division. Nine of the eleven players in the New South Wales men's 35s team were from the Manly Warringah district.

During late January and early February 1982 the second National Championships were held at Canberra's Bruce Stadium. Again, lucrative sponsorship underpinned the Nationals. This time by King Gee. From here the National Championships moved to Hobart in 1983, this time with the Dunlop Group as the major sponsor. Such was the growing culture that surrounded Touch, nationally, that by 1987 Peter Rooney, the then Chief Executive Officer of the ATA, wrote a lengthy article on the early history of the National Touch Championships in the glossy publication that accompanied the 1987 Ansett National Championships held in Perth. By then all States and Territories were fielding teams in the National Championships.⁸ Throughout the 1990s the sport continued to flourish.

The National Touch league Web Page shows that:

The nation's best Touch players will converge on Coffs Harbour in March 2000 to contest the Australian Touch Association 2000 National Touch League.

The tournament is the pinnacle of domestic competition in Australia and was created from a need identifies for elite competition for Australia's best Touch players. The tournament replaced the National Championships in 1997 and has proved to be a winner ever since with teams nominations increasing each year.

The tournament provides an opportunity for players to identify with a Regional area and thus gain more support from the local Touch playing community. 'Ownership is the key in this tournament, with an increased number of players being catered for, the competition tends to be more even than the previous national championships, and this makes a far more enjoyable tournament,' said Bill Ker, Chief Executive of the Australia Touch Association.

⁸ Peter Rooney, 'Gold Coast to Perth: the History of the National Championships', in *The Ansett National Touch Championships*, Perth, 1987.

'Touch is one of Australia's largest participant-based sports and this tournament offers players the opportunity to participate against their peers,' Mr Ker said.

The Opens and 20 years tournament runs over 4 days from Friday 10 March, this is immediately followed by the Senior divisions commencing Wednesday 15 March. The Senior tournament caters for players in age divisions from 30 years to 50 years for men and women.

The traditionally strong Touch states of Queensland and New South Wales are represented by teams from various geographic areas, whilst developing states are represented by the Crusaders which combine the ACT, Victoria and Tasmania and the Barbarians consisting of SA, WA and NT.⁹

Internationalising Touch

In 1985 the Federation of International Touch was formed in Melbourne, with Canada, the USA, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Australia the inaugural members. For Thompson, this organisation was the vision of Phil Smith and Peter Rooney from New South Wales. The first President of the organisation in 1986 was Paul Eggers, from Queensland. In 1991 Cary Thompson took over the helm of the Federation, and under his leadership the membership has grown from seven countries to twenty. The first recognised international game was the test series played between Australia and New Zealand at the South Melbourne Cricket Ground on 23 March 1985. Australia won the men's division 4-1, and the master's division 3-0.¹⁰ The following year there was a highly successful tour by Australian teams to New Zealand, with the Australian Touch Association underwriting the tour with \$14,000.¹¹ During October 1987 Australian National teams toured Canada and the United States.

The state of the game today

Today a stroll through parks and playgrounds in Australia's cities will provide first-hand evidence of just how popular Touch is. Indeed, in a lengthy article in 1999 it was revealed that:

Every lunch hour, across the nation, thousands of lawyers, accountants, stockbrokers and people from many other vocations, trade suits for shorts and computers for a football. In the eighties business people 'did lunch' in the nineties they 'play Touch'.

Sydney's competition is the strongest. Run by the NSW Touch Association (NSWTA), it attracts 105 teams in winter and 165 teams in summer. The competition runs every week day between noon and 2pm at Sydney's Domain with various divisions for men's and mixed Touch. 'We don't have a Women's competition any more,' said NSWTA Tournament Officer, Elaine Foster. 'It

⁹ <http://www.austouch.com.au/ntl/Default.htm>

¹⁰ Interview, Thompson, op. cit.

¹¹ 'New Zealand Tour', in *The Ansett National Touch Championships*, Perth, 1987.

just wasn't a great call, numbers dropped off because most women would rather play mixed.'

NSWTA rents the Domain parkland, supplies referees and charges each team \$470.00 to play in the 12 round competitions. The winter season is July to November, while Summer Touch runs from January to May. The winning teams recoup their \$470.00, the runner up prize is \$200.00; but money is not their motivation.

'It's mainly the exercise,' said Elaine. 'People just like to get out and do something. It's a bit of recreation instead of sitting around on your butt!'

The NSWTA started the competition two decades ago, with a 'life be in it' theme. It was originally run only in summer, but demand soon necessitated the need for winter competition as well. Touch at lunch has become part of Sydney fitness folklore and there is now a waiting list for teams looking to join the competition.¹²

By the 1990s it was the inclusiveness of Touch attracted so many participants in the sport. In a 1999 article it was contended that:

While State Touch Associations report a steady increase in player registrations, it would appear it is mixed Touch that is attracting all the attention. Jon Pratt from the Australian Touch Association experienced the player influx first hand, during a five-year stint as a development officer for the New South Wales Touch Association. Pratt explains the popularity of mixed Touch is due to its appeal to the family and people of all ages and ability.

'A lot of competitions that play mixed are very family oriented. You've got mums and dads wanting to play with their children and it's one of the beauties of the sport in that it allows all age groups to mix together,' Pratt said. He believes many other sports do not offer participants the same involvement as Touch at both social and elite level. 'Some hockey competitions do, as does netball. But the beauty of Touch is it is a non-contact sport that people can continue to play at a world class level right through to their early 40s, some say 50s, and still be competitive in their own age category'.¹³

Moreover, Touch is now included as a sport in the Australian University Games. The ATA Web Site boasts that currently, there are 250,000 registered players, with approximately 500,000 school children playing the sport. Then there are the armies of registered officials: during the 1998-99 season there were 12,332 males and 1,370 females. All of this requires a considerable administrative structure.

Administrative Structure

The ATA Board of Management is comprised of a number of volunteers who meet regularly in the Canberra Headquarters of the ATA. The Board is comprised of a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Technical Director, and a Financial Director. The ATA

¹² 'Touch at Lunch', *Touch: Australian Touch Magazine*, Summer 1999, p. 22.

¹³ 'Mixed Touch: the New Sporting Craze', *Touch: Australian Touch Magazine*, Summer 1999, pp. 16-17.

owns its own building in Canberra. Here it has a number of paid staff, whose principal task is to implement policy as directed by the Board of Management. There is a Chief-Executive Officer, and Assistant Chief-Executive Officer, and a National Technical Manager. There are also an Office manager, two marketing staff, and three support staff.

At a State level, New South Wales and Queensland each have a full-time General Manager, and six Development Officers, organised on a regional basis. Each of the other States and Territories has a Development Officer. The Australian Defence Forces are constituent bodies of the ATA, but do not have full-time staff.

• **Highlights of Thirty Years of Touch**

With a history ranging over a quarter of a century, and a fifteen-years international history, the game has its own legends and stars. According to Thompson, New South Wales has produced Karen Smith, Mark Boland, Katrina Maher, Owen Lane, Warren Speechly, Darren Shelley, Stacey Gregory, Giselle Tirado, Ron Wall, Andy Yiangou and Terry Star. Queensland has produced Terry Jacks, Kerry Norman, Bob Brindel, Scott Notly, Sharon Williams and Trevor McPhillips. And the Australian Capital Territory has produced Garry Lawless, and New Zealand can claim Vanessa Coates, and Peter Watts, the most-capped test player in the history of the sport.¹⁴

However, Touch is above all a team game, and Thompson is able to record some memorable teams during the history of national and international competition:

Australian Women's Open Team: is undefeated in international competition. Their World Cup results are: 35 games played, 34 wins and one draw. The team can claim a massive 409 touchdowns at an average of 11.69 per game, and only 24 touchdowns scored against them. Their test history is just as impressive, with 15 wins from 15 tests, and scoring 116-20. Their biggest win was 28-0 against Tonga in 1999, a non-test match.

Australian Men's Open Team: has lost only two games in the World Cup competition. It has played 35 games, won 33 and had two losses. It has scored 421 touchdowns, for an average of 12.3 per game, and had 63 scored against them. The team has played 16 tests matches, for 12 wins, three losses and one draw. Their biggest win was 29-0 against Papua New Guinea in 1995, another non-test match.

Australian Mixed Open Team: has only lost two games in the World Cup competition. Its history is that has played 36 games, won 34, and had two losses, with 422 touchdowns, scored at an average of 11.72 per game, and has only 37 touchdowns scored against them. The team has played 20 tests matches, with 16 wins, and four losses, but has amassed 199

¹⁴ Interview, Thompson, op. cit.

touchdowns, at an average of 11 per game. In another non-test match, their highest score was 23-0 against Amerika Samoa in 1995.

Australian Men's Over 35 Team: has had the honour of being the team that holds the world's record for the highest score in International Touch. The score of 32-0 was recorded in the 1991 World Cup in New Zealand against the Cook Islands. At the time the team was coached by Lee Thompson, who also has the dubious honour of being the coach of the Australian Mixed team that recorded the highest loss for an Australian team in International competition. This was the first test in Auckland in 1998, and the score was 2-7.

New South Wales State Team: has won the National Championships 11 times between 1980 and 1995, and has lost on only three games in that period.

New South Wales Mixed Open Team: has won the National Championships 14 times between 1980 and 1995, and has never lost in a State-versus-State series, including the 1999 State of Origin competition. This team has the second best highest score of 24-0 against Victoria in 1988. Its record includes 41 consecutive wins from 1986 to 1994.

New South Wales Women's Open Team: has won the National Championships 12 times between 1980 and 1995, and has lost only two games in that period. They have played a total of 113 games, for 101 wins, 12 losses and eight draws. They hold the highest winning score at the National competition: 25-0, against Tasmania in 1987. This team went for 41 straight games without a defeat from round 4 of the Nationals in 1980 to the final in 1986.

New South Wales Men's Open: has won the National Championship nine times between 1980 and 1995, and has lost on only five games in that period. They have played a total of 121 games for 101 wins, 12 losses and 8 drawn games. They hold the highest winning score for this division, which is 19-0 against Western Australia in a semi-final in 1982. They went for 41 consecutive undefeated games from round one of the Nationals in 1980 to the final in 1985.

Queensland 1985 Men's Open Team: coached by Alan Satchell, in the history of the Nationals, this was the first team to capture a national title from New South Wales. At National competition this team has played 120 games for 98 wins, 11 losses and 11 drawn games, all against New South Wales.

Queensland 1986 Men's Open Team: was the only team at national competition not to concede a touchdown in the preliminary rounds, but it lost the final 2-1 to New South Wales.

New South Wales 1988 Seniors' Team: did not concede a touchdown during the whole tournament.¹⁵

Explaining the Rise in Popularity of Touch

Coffey argues the development of Touch should be seen in terms of the evolution of the various games of football themselves. Rugby Union was developed from Soccer, as that famous man, William Webb Ellis, picked up the ball and ran with it. In turn, Rugby League developed from Rugby Union, utilising more ball-and-hand skills, and at the same time involving less kicking or foot skills. Touch evolved from both the rugby codes, with no kicking allowed at all. Hence, apart from the motivation to remove the new game from the macho reputation of the rugby codes, and to make it more inclusive, there was the early decision to call the game, Touch.¹⁶ Strictly speaking, of course, there is no *football* associated with Touch. There can, however, be no doubting the rise of popularity of Touch in Australia vis-à-vis traditional football codes. Lynch and Veal in their 1996 study of participation rates in sport and leisure in Australia show that 0.9 per cent of their fourteen plus years of age sample played Touch, only slightly behind Soccer, but a long way ahead of Australian Rules and Rugby League.¹⁷

While Coffey's account goes a long way in explaining the rising popularity of Touch, we need to look to wider sociological reasons for this phenomenon. Generally, researchers agree that for a sport to prosper into the twenty-first century it will need to have some essential characteristics: appeal for sponsorship; appeal to a television audience, and hence attraction to the media magnates; racial, ethnic, and gender inclusiveness; and low-cost for participation.¹⁸ This article has shown that Touch embraces all these dimensions.

The foundation was laid for the development of a mass-participation, inclusive team sport for the 1980s, 1990s and beyond. As Webb and Coffey have explained the game has huge appeal for school children. It provides for less contact, and is relatively inexpensive. However, its inclusive nature has been much to do with its high level of popularity during these decades. As Adair and Vamplew record in their study of the

¹⁵ Interview, Thompson, op. cit.

¹⁶ D.B. Coffey, 'Theory on the Evolution of Touch', *Queensland Touching*, vol 1, no. 2, May 1983,

¹⁷ Rob Lynch and A.J. Veal, *Australian Leisure*, Melbourne, 1996, p. 127.

¹⁸ See, for example, Martin Polley, *Moving the Goalposts: a History of Sport and Society Since 1945*, London, 1998; Geoffrey Godbey, *Leisure and leisure Services in the 21st Century*, Pennsylvania, 1997.

history of sport in Australia, during the post-war years there has been a steady progress towards generally inclusive sports, sports that cater for all ages, both sexes, and socially marginalised groups, particularly indigenous Australian people.¹⁹

In his landmark study, Tatz has shown how Touch has attracted high participation rates amongst Aborigines, especially Aboriginal women. Indeed, he claims that it is 'probably the most popular of sports for women', and Aboriginal women certainly have had their fair share of high-fliers in the game:

Success stories at the State level have been Diane Andrews who played for the ACT for four seasons and Amanda Roberts who played for New South Wales. Four Queenslanders have played for their State and all four represented Australia: Lily Jane Collins (1988), Erin Vickery (1988, 1990, 1991), Debbie Norford (1988, 1991) and Tanya Sewter (1990, 1993). Jodie Campbell and Sally Mitchell have represented Western Australia.²⁰

This is a telling example of the success of Touch in its inclusiveness. Anecdotal evidence will tell of mass involvement of Aborigines in Touch.²¹

Surprisingly, there is little other than anecdotal evidence on ethnic participation in Touch in Australia. The research simply has not been done, but again anybody who has played in weekly competitions, or have attended regional, State, or national carnivals will testify to the multicultural appeal of the game.²² Mosely, et al show the way in which traditional football codes have attracted ethnic participation in Australia, and particularly how some codes have sought to market their multi-cultural bases. The Canterbury-Bankstown (Sydney Bulldogs) Rugby League Club is one such club that has target marketed multiculturalism.²³ One may well suspect that in such ethnically diverse districts as Sydney's Canterbury-Bankstown Touch also has a wide appeal.

When the Australian Touch Association introduced a mixed competition during 1985 it was on a marketing winner. Thompson records that this was a deliberate move towards inclusiveness.²⁴ For the future enhancement of the sport, this decision was as important as the earlier decision to drop the word 'football' from the sports nomenclature. While during the 1990s we saw the evolution of women's Rugby Union and women's Rugby League, these new codes were strictly women against women. As Hargreaves shows women's sport in the twenty-first century will be marked by diversity and

¹⁹ Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, Melbourne, 1997, chaps 4, 5.

²⁰ Colin Tatz, *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport*, Sydney, 1995, p. 286.

²¹ Cary Thompson, Interview, op. cit.

²² Cary Thompson, Interview, op. cit.

²³ Philip A. Mosely, et al, *Sporting Immigrants: Sport and Ethnicity in Australia*, Sydney, 1997, esp. pp.206-209.

²⁴ Cary Thompson, Interview, op. cit.

empowerment.²⁵ And surely there is nothing more inclusive and empowering for both sexes than a sport that provides for competition between, and across gender barriers, at all levels from local to international.

There is, however, one other aspect of Touch that contributes to its mass appeal, and that has to do with athletic bodies, both male and female, in body-hugging shorts and tops. This is its appeal to the erotic, and, of course, this also is related to its media appeal. Research such as that by Guttman, has catalogued how this flavours popular culture, and attracts a mass following, either on television, or as spectators at matches. Guttman makes the point that this is not just with the male attraction for the female body. He also cites evidence to show how females are attracted to the erotic in Australian sport, such as females attracted to Australian Rules footballers in the tight-fitting shorts.²⁶ We may infer that this is also the case with Touch.

Conclusions

Touch, clearly has made a huge impact on the Australian sporting landscape since it was formalised with its own set of rules by the South Sydney Touch Football Association back in 1968. Hundreds of thousands of players and officials play in competitions ranging from lunchtime competitions in cities across Australia, to competitions in country towns, to elite international levels. The sport owes its success to the fact that, among other things, it is an inclusive, non-expensive, family-oriented sport. If Australian students of sporting culture are to develop a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic Australian sporting phenomenon during the last two or three decades, they cannot avoid studying the history of Touch.

²⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Sport in Females: Critical Issues in the History and Sociology of Women's Sports*, London, 1994, chap. 11.

²⁶ Allen Guttman, *The Erotic in Sports*, New York, 1996, chap. 5, but esp. p. 83.