

**Press Coverage of Sport in Melbourne:  
A Content Analysis of the *Age*, 1925–1975**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Applied Science (Human Movement) – (Honours)**

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**Melbourne, Victoria**

**November 2005**

### **Abstract**

Although the field of sport media studies has grown markedly during the last twenty years, there is a distinct lack of foundation research in the area of sport media history. In particular, there are few comprehensive studies of the historical content of sports coverage in Australian daily newspapers. Given the significance sport holds in Australian society, and the close relationship that exists between sport and the media, this lack of research is surprising. This thesis therefore aims to make a small, albeit important, contribution to this limited body of knowledge, through the examination of press coverage of sport in the *Age*, one of Melbourne's major daily newspapers. A sample of editions of the *Age*, from the years 1925, 1950 and 1975, were analysed to provide a representative cross-section of sports coverage during a 50 year period of the twentieth century. By answering key questions such as how much coverage or newspaper space is devoted to sport, has there been an expansion of the sports pages relative to the rest of newspaper, and what changes have occurred in the sports covered, this research not only provides valuable information as to the changing nature of sports coverage in a major Australian newspaper, but also provides a foundation from which further investigations into the relationship between sport and sport coverage in print media may be conducted.

### **Declaration**

I, Tim Shellcot, declare that the Honours by research thesis entitled ‘Press Coverage of Sport in Melbourne: A Content Analysis of the *Age*, 1925–1975’, contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Signature:

Date:

### **Acknowledgements**

I owe particular thanks to my principal supervisor, Dr Rob Hess, and my co-supervisor, Dr Matthew Nicholson, for their help, advice and support. Both provided invaluable knowledge, enthusiasm and encouragement throughout this research project. Thanks to Greg Dingle for his interest in this study, and also to fellow Honours students Rachel, Tania and Darren. Most importantly, this thesis could not have been completed without the support, patience and love of my wife Robyn, and the welcome distractions provided by Scrubby and Toby.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

Sport has long been a central part of the Australian experience. Richard Cashman, for example, believes that sport, as much as any institution, seems to define the Australian nation, with sport dominating the cultural and physical landscape.<sup>1</sup> It is not surprising, then, that the desire to be informed about sport has led to the reporting of sport becoming a staple of newspaper, radio and television content. Media reports of the endeavours of sportsmen and sportswomen have played a fundamental role in the way Australia views and understands itself, and Australia's most popular sports have had at least some of their histories shaped by the media.<sup>2</sup>

Mass media is an organised form of communication that can reach large numbers of people quickly and efficiently, and generally falls into two categories: print (newspapers, magazines and books) and broadcast (radio, television and film).<sup>3</sup>

Much of what we know and understand about sport is shaped by the media, although it must be acknowledged that media sports texts are also fashioned by a variety of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination: Australian Sport in the Federation Decades*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 4. Other authors who argue that sport has exerted considerable influence on Australian society include Brian Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever: Sport in the Australian Culture*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1986, Wray Vamplew, 'Australians and Sport', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 1-18, and John Bloomfield, *Australia's Sporting Success: The Inside Story*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Stoddart, 'Reflections Past and Present', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Greendorfer, 'Sport and the Mass Media', in Gunther Luschen and George Sage (eds), *Handbook of Social Science of Sport*, Stipes Publishing Company, Champaign, 1981, p. 161.



forces including politics, economics and the ideologies of those producing the texts.<sup>4</sup> According to Cashman, 'organised sport was and is a child of the media: the media gave and continue to give sport its shape, form and appeal'.<sup>5</sup> It is clear a close relationship between sport and the media exists, but while the field of sport media research is extensive, there are few comprehensive studies of the historical content of sports coverage in Australian daily newspapers.

This thesis is therefore concerned with one aspect of printed mass media, the newspaper, and its role in reporting on sport in Australia. The aim of this project is to examine the extent and nature of change in the coverage of sport in one major metropolitan newspaper, over the period 1925 to 1975. It also seeks to provide a methodology and initial data upon which future researchers may build. This research will be limited to the *Age*, a broadsheet newspaper published daily in the city of Melbourne. The *Age* is one of the longest established newspapers in Australia, and has provided reporting of local, national and international news to metropolitan Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria since 1854. Importantly, for the purposes of this research, the *Age* has covered sport throughout the twentieth century.

The first chapter of this thesis includes an overview of both the history of newspaper sports coverage, and of the *Age* and its sports pages. This will provide a foundation

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<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Kinkema and Janet Harris, 'MediaSport Studies: Key Research and Emerging Issues' in Lawrence Wenner (ed.), *MediaSport*, Routledge, London, 1998, pp. 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport. The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p. 169.

for an understanding of the development of sports reporting in newspapers, and assist in identifying changes in press coverage of sport that have occurred in Australia during the last century.

Chapter two examines selected literature investigating the relationship between sport and the print media, concentrating on research relevant to the study of sports coverage in newspapers. While a large body of work examining sport and media exists, much of it concentrates on television, or on specific themes such as the portrayal of women in the sports media. As a result, there is little examination of the historical content of the newspaper sports section, particularly in Australia. This thesis therefore aims to add to this limited body of knowledge.

Content analysis has been used as the research method for this thesis. Chapter three will provide an explanation of content analysis as a research tool, and will explain the methodology used to investigate sports coverage in the *Age*. To ensure the data collection process was kept to a manageable level, the methodology used by Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler to study the sports pages of the *Chicago Tribune* was adapted, and a sample of editions of the *Age* were selected for examination. This method permitted a representative cross section of sports coverage over the 50 year period to be analysed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page, 1900-1975', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 1, 1984, pp. 299-313. A review of Lever and Wheeler's results and methodology is included respectively in chapter two and chapter three of this thesis.

Chapter four will present and discuss the results of the content analysis, adopting a thematic approach to document the changing nature of sports coverage in the *Age*. Key questions such as the amount of newspaper space devoted to sport, changes and consistencies in the sports covered, and what the stories were about, will be addressed.

The final chapter of this thesis will summarise the key themes of this study. It will also contain recommendations for future research.

## **1.2 Sport and the Newspaper**

Before considering the history of newspaper sports reporting, it is valuable to reflect on what constitutes 'sport'. With an original meaning of 'to amuse oneself', sport as a term was first used in England around 1440 AD. This meaning changed over time, and the term was used extensively in the nineteenth century to describe competition in the form of games, as well as pursuits such as hunting, shooting and fishing.<sup>7</sup> In an Australian context, Brian Stoddart believes that from the 1920s 'sport' in this country referred to what was known as 'games' in Britain. Football, cricket, golf and tennis are unquestionably sport in the popular mind, with other activities such as horse racing, motor racing and surfing included, even though they involve quite different features.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Mechikoff and Steven Estes, *A History and Philosophy of Sport and Physical Education: From Ancient Civilizations to the Modern World*, Second Edition, McGraw-Hill, Boston, 1998, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 11-13. According to Stoddart, the important elements of sport are that: it involves the playing or watching of organised games by individuals or teams who recognise sets of rules; the activity involves mild to excessive physical exertion; playing, training or watching takes place mainly outside work hours, although it constitutes work for a minority; and non-

Newspaper reports of sporting events began to appear intermittently in the early part of the eighteenth century. These reports covered the interests of the leisured class, such as horse racing, prize fighting, golf and cricket, with magazine and newspaper reports on sport in Britain antedating their American counterparts.<sup>9</sup> While the *Boston Gazette* of 5 May 1733 is credited with publishing the first sports story in an American daily newspaper, prior to 1850 the press gave sport little attention, with coverage limited to box scores and records of wins and losses.<sup>10</sup> Although there was a proliferation of sports journals and magazines in both Europe and America in the early nineteenth century, sports news in newspapers was sporadic, and it was not until after 1850 that newspapers began to include regular and more descriptive accounts of sports events. By the 1880s sports sections began to appear in daily newspapers, and this coincided with the emergence of specialist sports reporters.<sup>11</sup>

Susan Greendorfer identifies the period between 1890 and 1914 as a time of significant growth in North American sports reporting. It is a particularly important phase, as it was during this time that the full impact of ‘yellow journalism’ reached the sports pages.<sup>12</sup> Joseph Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst revolutionised the

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competitive playing of the activity does not bar it from recognition as a sport, nor does the use of non-human resources, such as horses.

<sup>9</sup> John Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps: Sport, the Media and Society*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1987, p. 69. For a more detailed history of sports reporting in Britain see Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes, *Power Play: Sport, the Media and Popular Culture*, Longman, Harlow, 2000, pp. 22-33.

<sup>10</sup> Greendorfer, ‘Sport and the Mass Media’, pp. 162-165.

<sup>11</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> Greendorfer, ‘Sport and the Mass Media’, p. 166. ‘Yellow journalism’ is a term used to describe the exploitation, distortion, or exaggeration of the news to create sensations and attract readers. The term arose during the late nineteenth century, with daily newspapers published in New York abandoning traditional news coverage in favour of more reports on crime, gossip, scandal and sports,

newspaper publishing industry in the late nineteenth century, refining ‘yellow journalism’, and introducing illustrations, evening editions and Sunday supplements to the New York *World and Journal*, as a means of increasing circulation. Sports coverage was part of this revolution, and as publishers recognised that sport represented the type of news that was interesting and had widespread appeal, they began to commit a substantial portion of their news coverage to sport. Pulitzer and Hearst, through their reporting of college football, created the template for modern sports coverage. Sport and newspapers both benefited and contributed to the revolution, as readers looked to the dailies to satisfy their growing demand for sports news, while the press helped create audiences for a number of sports, including baseball and prize fighting.<sup>13</sup>

As sport helped publishers achieve the goals of selling both newspapers to readers, and readers to advertisers, it began to be treated as a unique news category. With this increase in importance, sports coverage became broader and more sophisticated, and the advent of telegraph and wire services allowed papers to provide more national and international sports coverage. Reports grew longer and more detailed,

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thus increasing circulation and readership for its early practitioners, such as Joseph Pulitzer and Randolph Hearst. See Stacy Lorenz, “‘In the Field of Sport at Home and Abroad’: Sports Coverage in Canadian Daily Newspapers, 1850-1914’, *Sport History Review*, vol. 34, no. 2, November 2003, pp. 135-136, for further information on this trend.

<sup>13</sup> See Michael Oriard, *Reading Football: How the Popular Press Created an American Spectacle*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1993, pp. 57-133, for a detailed history of both the evolution of the newspaper in New York, and the press coverage of American football, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

and writers began to review different parts of the game and evaluate player performance.<sup>14</sup>

This heralded the ‘Golden Age’ of sports writing, which lasted from 1920 to 1930.<sup>15</sup> The advent of radio meant the print media’s exclusive right to report sport was challenged, creating competition between the different news media to provide sports information.<sup>16</sup> Despite this competition, sport moved to its position as an indispensable section of the daily newspaper, and the quality of sports writing improved significantly.<sup>17</sup> There emerged ‘a number of writers of considerable literary skill who brought the genre of sports reporting a thoughtful, articulate and broadly philosophical approach’.<sup>18</sup> These writers placed sport and its participants into a ‘fantasy world’ that the newspaper reading public loved, and while the economic collapse of the 1930s ended the ‘Golden Age’, this approach to sports writing remained popular until the introduction of television in the 1950s.<sup>19</sup>

Media coverage of sport in the following 40 years underwent a process of continuous transition. Newspapers, having undergone a period of adjustment caused

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<sup>14</sup> Lorenz, “In the Field of Sport at Home and Abroad”, pp. 143-145, and Stacy Lorenz, “A Lively Interest on the Prairies”: Western Canada, the Mass Media, and “A World of Sport”, 1870-1939’, *Journal of Sport History*, vol. 27, no. 2, Summer 2000, p. 198-200.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Garrison with Mark Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, Second Edition, Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1993, pp. 17-33. Garrison and Sabljak divide the development of sports journalism in America, from prior to 1830 to the present, into six different eras. Greendorfer, ‘Sport and the Mass Media’, p. 166, suggests the ‘Golden Age’ lasted from 1914 to 1930.

<sup>16</sup> Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Greendorfer, ‘Sport and the Mass Media’, p. 166.

<sup>18</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, p. 71. See also Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, pp. 25-27.

<sup>19</sup> Eldon Snyder and Elmer Spreitzer, *Social Aspects of Sport*, Third Edition, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1989, p. 255, and Greendorfer, ‘Sport and the Mass Media’, p. 166.

by radio, then had to adjust again in the face of competition from television.<sup>20</sup> Lever and Wheeler label television ‘the single most important influence on the world of sport’.<sup>21</sup> They believe television has reinforced, not replaced, the print media, supporting the continued expansion of the sports pages.<sup>22</sup> This view is endorsed by David Rowe and Deborah Stevenson, who, while acknowledging that television has had a considerable impact on the practice of sports journalism, state:

the greater prominence of broadcast sport has not, however, led to any decline in the quantity of print sports journalism. In fact, the reverse has been the case, perhaps in part due to television’s promotion of sport to the ultimate advantage of all media.<sup>23</sup>

Bruce Garrison and Mark Sabljak agree, suggesting that the increasing amount of sports coverage on television enhanced, rather than replaced, newspaper and magazine sports reporting.<sup>24</sup>

While sports reporting continued to mature during the second half of the twentieth century, John Goldlust argues that ‘most of it has been fairly mundane and descriptive with a heavy emphasis on results, individual performances and records’.<sup>25</sup> ‘More importantly’, he adds, ‘rarely have newspaper journalists been critical of sport as a social institution’.<sup>26</sup> Stoddart concurs, believing writers were reluctant to question the sports they were describing, to criticise any dubious aspects

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<sup>20</sup> Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> Lever and Wheeler, ‘The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page’, p. 310.

<sup>22</sup> Lever and Wheeler, ‘The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page’, p. 310.

<sup>23</sup> David Rowe and Deborah Stevenson, ‘Negotiations and Mediations: Journalism, Professional Status and the Making of Sports Text’, *Media Information Australia*, no. 75, 1995, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, pp. 71-72.

of those sports, or to antagonise sports authorities for fear of being denied access to information.<sup>27</sup> Both commentators are critical of the quality of newspaper sports coverage, however Garrison and Sabljak take a different viewpoint, observing that no writer can hope to outperform the electronic media in telling the sports fan ‘who, what, when and where’. As a result, they suggest newspaper sports coverage has become more objective, and thus more critical, and includes more depth, more feature material, more analysis, and importantly, more investigative journalism not suited to a broadcast format.<sup>28</sup>

The development of newspaper sports reporting, and the continued expansion of the sports pages, coincided with, and was at least partly the result of, the influence of television. The emergence of extensive sports telecasting meant newspapers spent less effort on recounting the story of the game.<sup>29</sup> Thus, ‘sportswriters for newspapers have had to come up with stories that go beyond the action and scores’.<sup>30</sup> Interest has grown in sports issues off the field, with more analysis, more interviews, and greater coverage of areas such as the business of sport. Newspapers no longer need to provide up-to-date results and statistics, as these are available through other media such as television or the internet. As a result, newspaper sports

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<sup>27</sup> Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 95-98.

<sup>28</sup> Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>29</sup> Robert McChesney, ‘Media Made Sport: A History of Sports Coverage in the United States’, in Lawrence Wenner (ed.), *Media, Sports, and Society*, Sage Publications, London, 1989, p. 66.

<sup>30</sup> Jay Coakley, *Sport in Society: Issues and Controversies*, Seventh Edition, McGraw Hill, New York, 2001, p. 379.



stories now provide a more in-depth coverage that is different, but complementary, to radio or television.<sup>31</sup>

The sports pages have undergone continual change and expansion since the first reports and scores began appearing in eighteenth century newspapers, and most major Australian dailies have now introduced a lift-out sports section. This separation of sport from the rest of the newspaper has continued the expansion of the print space devoted to sport, while further reinforcing sport's importance to the newspaper and its equality with other forms of news. The one-time 'toy department' of the newspaper has progressed into a mature and legitimate news gathering section, and it can be argued that the sports pages are the most widely read segment of the newspaper.<sup>32</sup> Lawrence Wenner capably summarises the aim, appeal and success of the sports section, stating:

the sports pages of the newspaper reflect upon the significance of the events that are so often broadcast. The sports pages ready the fan for the event. The sporting event is heightened in importance by 'insider's gossip' about the players, coaches, strategies, and historical context for the sporting event. After the contest has been played, the sports pages recap these same themes, placing the game and its heroes into a 'fantasy world' that both sportswriters and readers have had a hand in creating.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As noted in Matthew Nicholson, 'Print Media Representation of Crisis Events in Australian Football', Doctoral thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2002, p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Garrison with Sabljak, *Sports Reporting*, p. 5. The phrase 'toy department' has been used to describe and malign both sports journalism and the sports section/department of a newspaper. See also Bruce Garrison and Michael Salwen, 'Newspaper Sports Journalists: A Profile of the "Profession"', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1989, pp. 57-68, and David Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, Sage Publications, London, 1992, pp. 98-99.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Wenner, 'Media, Sports, and Society: The Research Agenda', in Lawrence Wenner (ed.), *Media, Sports, and Society*, Sage Publications, London, 1989, p. 15.

### 1.3 The *Age* and its Sports Pages

Australia's newspapers have been reporting on sport since the publication of the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*, Australia's first newspaper, in March 1803. Early editions of the *Gazette* included news of boxing and wrestling matches, and by 1810 the paper had carried reports on cricket and horse racing.<sup>34</sup>

The *Gazette* was the only newspaper published in the colony until 1824, but this situation changed rapidly with the lifting of government censorship in that year. Over the next 30 years the fledgling newspaper industry advanced in fits and starts, with many papers emerging and then closing, but by the early 1850s there were at least eleven dailies being published in the colony.<sup>35</sup>

The *Age* was launched in October 1854, during the turmoil of Victoria's gold rush era. In competition with the *Argus* and the *Morning Herald*, the first owners of the *Age*, John and Henry Cooke, vowed that the new newspaper would be 'a journal of politics, commerce and philanthropy, dedicated to the record of great movements, the advocacy of free institutions, the diffusion of truth and the advancement of man'.<sup>36</sup> Increasing financial pressure over the next few months placed the young newspaper's survival at risk, and eventually the paper was sold to the Syme brothers in 1856.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ian Heads, *Backpage: Australia's Greatest Sporting Moments!*, Lester-Townsend Publishing, Paddington, 1989, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1968, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> *Age*, 'The Story of the *Age*', <http://150.theage.com.au/story.asp>, accessed 26 July 2005.

<sup>37</sup> *Age*, 'The Story of the *Age*'.

Under the control of David Syme, the *Age* became a dominant force in late colonial and early federation era politics. Circulation grew from 14,500 copies a day in 1860 to 120,000 copies in 1899.<sup>38</sup> After David Syme's death in 1908, the *Age* became more conservative, and by the mid 1930s circulation had dropped to 105,000.<sup>39</sup> This may have been a consequence of the depression but also as a result of competition from the *Argus*, the *Herald* and the *Sun News Pictorial*. During the 1950s and 1960s many changes were made to the paper's layout, news coverage and facilities, with the *Age* remaining under the control of David Syme and Company until a takeover by John Fairfax and Sons Limited in 1973. In recent years the paper has continued to change and diversify its news coverage, in response to competition from other forms of media and in an effort to again become a strong social and political force. It still remains part of the Fairfax media stable today.<sup>40</sup>

The *Age* is now one of two major daily newspapers servicing Melbourne and Victoria, and, as noted by Kathleen Whelan, its editorial philosophy clearly outlines the paper's major objectives. According to her, the newspaper aims, firstly, 'to remain a forum for ideas and talents', secondly, 'to be a newspaper of record and to play a positive and creative role in the development of Victoria', and thirdly, 'to

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<sup>38</sup> Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Caslon Analytics, 'Syme and the Age', <http://www.ketupa.net/fairfax1.htm#history>, accessed 27 July 2005.

continue to be an independent and critical voice in national and community affairs'.<sup>41</sup>

The paper has maintained a broadsheet format throughout its long history, providing readers with analysis of both domestic and international news, together with a number of special interest sections, which now include a tabloid sports lift-out. Circulation for weekday editions of the *Age* averages 193,000 copies a day, with Saturday's edition selling approximately 300,000 copies. The *Sunday Age*, launched in 1989, sells 197,000 copies.<sup>42</sup>

The importance of sport to the *Age* in its early years was demonstrated by the increase in editorial space allocated to the subject, with Henry Mayer recording that the amount of sports news rose from 5.8 percent in 1875 to 13.4 percent in 1925.<sup>43</sup> While no information is provided by Mayer as to where sports reports were placed in the newspaper, the increase in coverage provides an interesting contrast with the distribution of other categories of news included in the *Age*, for example overseas, crime and finance, all of which fluctuated before finishing this 50 year period at approximately the same level of coverage at which they started.

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<sup>41</sup> Kathleen Whelan, *Photography of the Age: Newspaper Photography in Australia*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> *Age*, 'Information about the *Age*', [http://www.about.theage.com.au/view\\_circulation.asp](http://www.about.theage.com.au/view_circulation.asp), accessed 27 July 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 13.

Although the *Age* has the reputation of being a quality newspaper, it is plausible that in the first half of the twentieth century its coverage of sport lagged behind that of its competitors, especially in visual terms. During its first 50 years the *Age* had very few illustrations of any description, and it was not until the 1930s that small photographs began to appear on the inside pages in order to illustrate news items. Indeed, it was not until the 1950s that photographs become an important aspect of front page layout.<sup>44</sup> The *Sun News Pictorial* and the *Truth*, together with interstate papers such as the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sydney Mail*, and the specialist sports newspaper the *Referee*, were including photographs and illustrations in their sports coverage from the early 1920s, thus providing the reader with a more attractive presentation.<sup>45</sup> This may also have been a factor in the drop in circulation of the *Age* during the late 1920s and early 1930s.

There are also indications that the quality of sports reporting in the *Age* experienced a plateau during the middle years of the twentieth century. According to Garrie Hutchinson, from the late 1940s to the 1970s there was a lack of opportunity for sports writing beyond match reports and news. He observes the *Age* was not very interested or comprehensive in its reporting of Australian Rules football, and that sports writing lapsed into a short form of news stories associated with the Saturday night football coverage produced by the *Sporting Globe*.<sup>46</sup> This is surprising, given

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<sup>44</sup> Whelan, *Photography of the Age*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> See Heads, *Backpage*, for examples of illustrated sport coverage in these newspapers.

<sup>46</sup> Garrie Hutchinson, 'In Our Own Style: Sports Writing in Australia, 1803-1997', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 58, 1998. Reproduced in Garrie Hutchinson (ed.), *The Best Australian Sports*

the popularity of Australian Rules football in Victoria, and also because in 1962 the *Age* ranked number one of fourteen major daily newspapers based on quantity of editorial space devoted to sport, and that the paper placed greater importance on home-state sport, over interstate events.<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, no information was provided on which sports were receiving coverage.

The format of the sports section in the *Age* in 2005 provides a strong indicator of the importance of sport to the modern newspaper. General news, business and entertainment have remained in broadsheet format while sport is now presented in a stand-alone tabloid lift-out. According to the *Age* this change was made in response to feedback from readers, and was promoted as ‘a sports tabloid packed with the latest news and hard-hitting, insightful analysis, all from the independent standpoint you would expect from our award winning writers’.<sup>48</sup> This statement demonstrates that the way sports coverage is delivered is very important in meeting one goal of the *Age*, that of satisfying its customer’s needs (and therefore selling more newspapers), while also supporting Hutchinson’s assertion that ‘the role of journalists in sport today is not just to provide well-turned descriptive phrases but also to investigate and report.’<sup>49</sup>

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*Writing 2002*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2002, pp. 314-316. The *Sporting Globe* was a specialist sports newspaper published bi-weekly in Melbourne between 1922 and 1979.

<sup>47</sup> Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 221.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Japson, ‘A Stronger Focus on News, Sport and Business’, *Age*, 28 March 2005, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Hutchinson, ‘In Our Own Style’, p. 330.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the history of newspaper sports coverage, and of the *Age* and its sports pages. It is clear that sports coverage in the print media has, since the first sports stories began appearing in newspapers almost three centuries ago, undergone a process of continual change and development. It is also clear that sport is now a dominant category of media output, regardless of whether that media is print or broadcast.

It must, however, be acknowledged that the change in the presentation of sports news in the *Age*, from haphazardly placed sports articles, to the placement of sport on the back page, to the lift-out sports section of today, is not well documented in secondary sources. This thesis therefore aims to make an important contribution to this limited body of knowledge, and create possibilities for further research into the relationship between sport and the print media.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the history of the newspaper sports section, and provided a brief overview of the development of sports coverage in the *Age*. This chapter will sharpen the focus of this thesis by identifying and examining a selection of research findings on the print media presentation of sport. This examination will draw on Australian and overseas work relevant to this research project, concentrating on studies that use content analysis to investigate the quantitative dimensions of newspaper sports coverage.

#### 2.2 Sport Media Research

Prior to the 1980s the study of sport in media was largely ignored, possibly because sport was considered more peripheral and trivial to more serious issues such as politics.<sup>50</sup> Since then the examination of the relationships between sport and the media has become a prominent area of study, with a number of factors contributing to this increasing prominence.

According to Alina Bernstein and Neil Blain, interest in the interaction between sport and the media has grown immensely in the last decade, a reflection that the two have become so closely associated that it is often difficult to discuss sport in modern

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<sup>50</sup> Lawrence Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', in Lawrence Wenner (ed.), *MediaSport*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 7.



society without acknowledging its complex relationship with the media. Sport's importance as a cultural force, and as popular content of the media, has resulted in a rapidly growing amount of academic writing that examines the sport and media nexus. This research can be found in a variety of literature across a number of disciplines, including sport history, sport sociology, gender studies and journalism.<sup>51</sup> While extensiveness of data and the level of academic rigour of studies vary, research into mediated sport has explored a number of different themes, including race and gender relations, commercialisation, drugs and violence.<sup>52</sup>

Raymond Boyle and Richard Haynes observe that sport has become important to those involved in media studies, even if they have little actual interest in sport, and they attribute this to two key factors. First, sport is nowadays an integral part of the business world, meaning sport and its linkage to the media now matters to those whose primary interest lies in the economic and political issues relating to the media. Second, the extent to which the globalisation of sport is influencing national traditions and identities has seen sport, with its universal appeal, being investigated for evidence of this process.<sup>53</sup> Matthew Nicholson also observes that the growth in sport media research is 'an indication that the study of sport within media and

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<sup>51</sup> Alina Bernstein and Neil Blain, 'Sport and the Media: The Emergence of a Major Research Field', in Alina Bernstein and Neil Blain (eds), *Sport, Media, Culture: Global and Local Dimensions*, Frank Cass, London, 2003, pp. 1-4.

<sup>52</sup> Kinkema and Harris, 'MediaSport Studies', pp. 27-56. Kinkema and Harris summarise a number of different studies within each theme. They believe most textual analyses of mediated sport have dealt with gender, focussing on the under representation and stereotyped portrayal of women in sport.

<sup>53</sup> Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, p. xi.

communication studies, and the study of media within sports studies are becoming increasingly respected academic discourses'.<sup>54</sup>

Growth in the analysis of the sport/media relationship is not surprising given the easy availability of sports texts, and the diverse methods of analysis that may be used.<sup>55</sup> Wenner believes that while this research is still in its formative stages, it has established:

baselines to understand issues such as how racially or gender biased coverage may be, how much and what kind of sports violence or commercialisation is featured, or how much nationalism or winning is emphasised.<sup>56</sup>

David Rowe observes that in spite of its historical precedence and substantial readership, the print media has been neglected in recent analyses of sports media.<sup>57</sup>

Supporting this view, Kathleen Kinkema and Janet Harris note the majority of textual studies have examined television, with print media receiving little critical attention.<sup>58</sup> Glenn Gamst and Yvette Sutherland attribute this neglect to the ascendancy of television as the dominant sports information medium.<sup>59</sup>

Focussing specifically on newspapers, J. Sean McCleneghan notes: 'little has been documented in scholarly journals about the Fourth Estate's most widely read

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<sup>54</sup> Nicholson, 'Print Media Representation of Crisis Events in Australian Football', p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', p. 10.

<sup>56</sup> Wenner, 'Playing the MediaSport Game', p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', p. 97.

<sup>58</sup> Kinkema and Harris, 'MediaSport Studies', pp. 27-56.

<sup>59</sup> Glenn Gamst and Yvette Sutherland, 'A Profile of Newspaper Sports Section Readers and Non-readers', *Journal of Sport Behaviour*, vol. 16, issue 4, December 1993, p. 229.

newspaper section by male readership – the sports page’.<sup>60</sup> This lack of research is surprising given that sport is a major aspect of news, accounting for 25 percent or more of major newspapers, with more daily coverage given to sport than any other single subject.<sup>61</sup> It has also been suggested that approximately 30 percent of those buying newspapers do so primarily for the sports section.<sup>62</sup>

A number of studies have, however, attempted to analyse the content of sports related writing in newspapers and magazines, with several of the studies relevant to this research project. Varying in both goals and methodologies, studies of sports writing include the portrayal of gender and sex roles, the coverage of race and minority groups, and the work practices of sports journalists.<sup>63</sup> Literature on the historical development of the newspaper sports section, through analysis of its content, is somewhat more difficult to find.

In an American context, Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler undertook a content analysis of the sports pages of the *Chicago Tribune* from 1900 to 1975. This seminal work analysed the coverage allocated to sport, providing an empirical base for assessing the changing nature of organised sport in American life. Results showed that the sports pages grew steadily from nine percent of the total newspaper

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<sup>60</sup> J. Sean McCleneghan, cited in John Henningham, ‘A Profile of Australian Sports Journalists’, *ACIPHER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, Spring 1995, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> Coakley, *Sport in Society*, p. 362.

<sup>62</sup> Snyder and Spreitzer, *Social Aspects of Sport*, p. 251.

<sup>63</sup> For a summary of this research see Kinkema and Harris, ‘MediaSport Studies’, pp. 27-54. For examples of research on the work practices of sports journalists see Garrison and Salwen, ‘Newspaper Sports Journalists’, pp. 57-68, and Mark Lowes, ‘Sports Page: A Case Study in the Manufacture of Sports News for the Daily Press’, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1997, pp. 143-159.

in 1900 to seventeen percent in 1975. The importance of the sports pages can be seen more clearly when comparing the ratio of sports news to other general news stories. In 1900, sports news comprised fourteen percent of all general news coverage; by 1975 sport constituted 52 percent of the coverage allocated to local, national and international news. Primary coverage was consistently given to the dominant spectator sports of American football and baseball, with only scant coverage given to a wide variety of other sports. A shift from amateur to professional, from local and regional events to national ones, and from individual to team sports was also identified, trends that were concurrent with the emergence of a professionalised sports industry. The majority of stories over the 75 year period concerned the athletes or their teams, with male athletes dominating these stories. The length of sports stories increased by 79 percent, a reduction in the amount of pre-game stories occurred, resulting in less information previewing the event and more description of the outcome.<sup>64</sup>

Lever and Wheeler believe the growth in professionalism and the advent of television both had a major effect on the way sport is played and viewed, and suggest this in turn influenced the way newspapers cover sport. Television increased the appetite of the public for sports information, while being ill-equipped to give fans the detail needed to follow and discuss the fate of their favourite teams. Rather than replacing the print media, television reinforced it, with the sports pages

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<sup>64</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 299-313.

expanding, providing greater detail on events, expert commentary and opinion, and a greater depth of coverage.<sup>65</sup>

Joe Scanlon's analysis of the sports pages of 30 Canadian newspapers supports Lever and Wheeler's finding that sports coverage is dominated by male professional sports.<sup>66</sup> Described by Mark Lowes as a 'pioneering content analysis work', the three month study revealed 87 percent of sports items could be classified as male, and almost two-thirds of reporting was about professional sports.<sup>67</sup> This supports Lowes' own contention that an imbalance exists in the coverage of sport in daily newspapers, with major male professional sports enjoying regular and plentiful coverage, while most amateur sports and female athletes are largely ignored. Lowes believes that the pursuit by the newspaper of a commercially appealing readership is responsible for this commercial sports bias.<sup>68</sup>

Gunnar Valgeirsson and Eldon Snyder analysed the content of sports news to complete a cross-cultural comparison between one major newspaper in each of Iceland, England, and the United States. Similar to Lever and Wheeler, they focussed on the amount of space devoted to sport, the types of sports covered, and the reporting of amateur or professional sport. The importance of scores and results in each newspaper, together with articles reporting on problematic areas of sport

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<sup>65</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 310-312.

<sup>66</sup> Joe Scanlon, 'Sports in the Daily Press in Canada', Unpublished Report for the Directorate of Fitness and Amateur Sport, Department of National Health and Welfare, Ottawa, Canada, 1970.

<sup>67</sup> Mark Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages: Work Routines, Professional Ideologies and the Manufacture of Sports News*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Lowes, *Inside the Sports Pages*, pp. 9-19.

such as drug use, was also analysed. Data showed that *The Times* in London contained the most variety in its coverage of sport, while the *New York Times* devoted the most space to its sports section. Newspapers in London and New York favoured professional sport, with a particular emphasis on scores and statistics. Coverage in each of the three newspapers reflected the popularity of specific sports in each society. In an American context, results supported Lever and Wheeler's findings, particularly in the large amount of coverage provided to the major professional sports of baseball, American football and basketball.<sup>69</sup>

Jane Crossman, Paula Hyslop and Bart Guthrie examined the sports section of one year of Canada's national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, for variations in gender, amateur versus professional sports coverage, and Canadian, American and international content. Their results are consistent with other studies, with male professional athletes gaining significantly more print and pictorial coverage. This was attributed to the profit motive of the newspaper, and its desire to produce a product that met the needs of the majority of readers. Data showed that Canadian athletes received the most coverage, followed by international, then American, athletes.<sup>70</sup> As analysis in this category did not include the nationality of professional athletes, the data may be misleading. This exclusion by the researchers is surprising given the popularity of professional baseball, American football and ice hockey in North America.

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<sup>69</sup> Gunnar Valgeirsson and Eldon Snyder, 'A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Newspaper Sports Sections', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 21, 1986, pp. 131-138.

<sup>70</sup> Jayne Crossman, Paula Hyslop and Bart Guthrie, 'A Content Analysis of the Sports Section of Canada's National Newspaper with Respect to Gender and Professional/Amateur Status', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1993, pp. 123-134.

With the exception of Lever and Wheeler, it is difficult to identify any international research which seeks to examine the content of the newspaper sports section over an extended period of time. While the studies reviewed vary in both the goal of each study, and the methodology used, similarities in results can be observed. This is particularly evident in the growth of the amount of news space given to individual sports, and the domination of male, professional sports.

In an Australian context, the development of the print media has been documented.<sup>71</sup> However, little attention has been paid to the historical development of the newspaper sports section. According to Cashman, in his exploration of the rise of organised sport in Australia, the print media was central to the expansion of sporting culture. He contended that:

The sporting press did more than record and disseminate information about the increasing number of sporting events: it interpreted and explained them, it invested them with shape, meaning and moral worth.<sup>72</sup>

While providing a brief history of sports reporting in Australian newspapers, Cashman does not detail the level and type of coverage that was provided to the reader, and focuses more on the role of television.

Similar to Cashman, Stoddart details the history of the sports media in Australia, placing more emphasis on the effect of the media on the changing nature of sport in

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<sup>71</sup> For examples see Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, W. Sprague Holden, *Australia Goes to Press*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1961, and Julianne Schultz, 'The Press', in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner, (eds), *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, Second Edition, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, pp. 23-46.

<sup>72</sup> Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 170.

this country.<sup>73</sup> Goldlust describes the links between the emergence of modern sport and the development of mass media, and provides a more detailed history of sport in the print media. The development in the content of the sports pages is not covered in depth, with Goldlust focusing on the transformation of sport through television, particularly in its expanded connection with the business sector and the increased commodification of sport.<sup>74</sup> Although each author gives valuable insight into the broader historical and social issues relating to sport and the media, little empirical research has been completed examining the content of Australian newspaper sports pages.

Australian studies of newspaper sports content have focussed on the treatment of female athletes, with some research also completed on the work practices and profiles of sports journalists.<sup>75</sup> In the context of this research project, Peter Brown's content analysis of the *Newcastle Herald* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* is particularly valuable. While aiming to examine the change in extent and nature of

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<sup>73</sup> Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 83-111.

<sup>74</sup> Goldlust, *Playing for Keeps*, pp. 58-110 and pp. 141-174. Chris Cunneen, 'Elevating the People's Pastimes: Sydney Sporting Journalism 1886-1939', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport: Money, Morality and the Media*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1981, pp.162-176, and Denis Cryle, "'Old Tales and New Techniques': Popular Journalism 1860-1930", in Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz (eds), *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1999, pp. 60-64, also provide information on the history of sports reporting in Australian print media.

<sup>75</sup> For an overview of a selection of studies on Australian newspaper coverage of women in sport see Peter Brown, 'Who gets the Coverage and Who is Counting? A Methodological Review of Selected Studies of Newspaper and Magazine Coverage of Women in Sport', in Alistair Boag, Celia Lamond and Esther Sun (eds), *ANZALS Conference Proceedings*, Australian and New Zealand Association for Leisure Studies, Brisbane, 1993, pp. 196-203. For information on the work practices and profiles of sports journalists see Kirsten Lange, 'Sport and New Media: A Profile of Internet Sports Journalists in Australia', Masters thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 32-44.



newspaper coverage of women's sport, Brown presents important information on the overall level and nature of sports coverage in two Australian newspapers.

With a sampling period of 1890-1990, Brown's research is one of few studies to examine newspaper sports reporting over such an extended period. Brown's sampling framework attempted to reflect equal representation of sports coverage throughout the chosen period, and showed total sports coverage increased from three percent of the newspaper in 1890 to sixteen percent in 1990. Reporting of local sports news decreased, while coverage of national and international sporting events increased, a trend that was particularly evident between 1965 and 1990. A significant increase in the number and range of sports covered was also evident, however total sports coverage was dominated by a handful of major sports for both men and women. Brown asserts his findings support other research which indicates the importance of sports news in contemporary media, with readers or viewers consuming news largely on the basis of its sport content.<sup>76</sup>

Brown also noted that by 1940 growth in sports news had led to the development of a special sporting section which appeared in the back pages of the *Newcastle Herald*. Although some sports news still appeared throughout the newspaper, the sports

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<sup>76</sup> Peter Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History: Coverage of Women's Sport in the *Newcastle Herald*, 1890-1990', *Media Information Australia*, no. 75, February 1995, pp. 24-34, and Peter Brown, 'The "Containment" of Women in the Australian Sporting Press from 1890 to 1990', *ACPHER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, vol. 41, no. 1, Autumn 1994, pp. 4-8. In 'Gender, the Press and History' Brown cites Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', Coakley, *Sport in Society*, and David Rowe, 'Sport in the Media', *Metro Magazine*, no. 86, Winter 1991, pp. 41-47, in support of his assertion as to the importance of sport in news.

section remained constant for the next 50 years, with the most important sports news stories appearing on the back page and events of major significance occasionally appearing on the front page.<sup>77</sup> This information provides a valuable indicator to the changes in format and positioning of sports coverage in Australian newspapers. However, Brown used a 25 year sampling period in his research, and he is therefore unable to determine exactly when the back page format of the sports page became established.

### 2.3 Conclusion

Various researchers have used content analysis to arrive at similar conclusions on the amount and type of sports coverage in newspapers, and these studies reflect a number of different ways of reading and analysing sports texts. Few studies have gathered data over extended periods of time, generally limiting sample periods to selected days, weeks or months. Selection of the sample period is driven by the types of questions each researcher wishes to answer, and the use of a constrained time frame is particularly evident in studies investigating media coverage of major sporting events such as Olympic or Commonwealth Games.<sup>78</sup> Studies using a time frame of more than one year are evident, however these tend to examine coverage of

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<sup>77</sup> Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History', p. 31.

<sup>78</sup> See Rachel Payne, 'Rethinking the Status of Female Olympians in the Australian Press', *Media International Australia*, no. 110, February 2004, pp. 120-131, and Richard Pringle and Sandy Gordon, 'A Content Analysis of Western Australian Print Media Coverage of the 1990 Commonwealth Games with Particular Reference to Gender Differences', *ACIPHER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, vol. 42, no. 2, Winter 1995, pp. 4-8, for examples of research limited to a period surrounding a major sporting event.

sport in magazines.<sup>79</sup> Longitudinal studies over years or decades, using a newspaper or newspapers for textual analysis, are limited.

The literature reveals that while there are a large number of studies that investigate coverage of sport in the print media, a great majority of these concentrate on gender representation and the imbalance in the reporting of male and female sport. In particular, this research focuses on the neglect or trivialisation of women's sport. Other research on newspaper sports pages and sports magazines address race, the role of the sports journalist in the production of sports news, and the use of sports news as a way of increasing or maintaining newspaper sales.

There have been few attempts to document the historical development of the sports pages, through examination of their content, with Lever and Wheeler's study the exception. This is particularly true when discussing Australian newspapers. Despite the important role sport plays in Australian society, and the close relationship that exists between sport and the media, a significant gap in the literature is evident.

This project will therefore aim to begin addressing this gap, providing empirical data on the nature of sports reporting during the selected era, and giving valuable information on the degree to which various sports are covered. It will assist in obtaining a better understanding of the history of sports reporting in Australia, and in

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<sup>79</sup> See Angela Lumpkin and Linda Williams, 'An Analysis of *Sports Illustrated* Feature Articles, 1954-1987', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1991, pp. 16-32, and Jan Rintala and Susan Birrell, 'Fair Treatment for the Active Female: A Content Analysis of *Young Athlete* Magazine', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1984, pp. 231-250, for examples of longitudinal studies using sports magazines.

particular the changing nature of sports coverage in newspapers. Importantly, this study will provide a foundation upon which further research may be conducted.

## Chapter Three

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, a selection of research conducted on the print media representation of sport was examined. While the literature revealed that several themes, such as the portrayal of women in sports media, have been explored, there is a paucity of research that examines the historical development of newspaper sports content. Therefore, the primary aim of this project is to gather data that will allow examination and assessment of the changing nature of newspaper sports coverage, concentrating on one major Australian daily newspaper, the *Age*, in the period 1925 to 1975. This investigation also seeks to provide a methodology and initial data upon which future researchers may build. Accordingly, this chapter explains the methodology that has been adopted for this project.

Content analysis is employed as the research method for this study, allowing the use of written and photographic material as data. This process thus allows a quantitative analysis of the extent of changes to, and trends in, newspaper sports coverage in the *Age* between 1925 and 1975. The sampling framework that has provided the base methodology for this study was used by Janet Lever and Stanton Wheeler in their study of the sports pages of the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>80</sup> The framework has been amended to more accurately meet the aims of this specific project, allowing a

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<sup>80</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 299-313.

number of questions to be answered, such as how much coverage or newspaper space is devoted to sport, has there been an expansion of the sports pages relative to the rest of newspaper, and what changes have occurred in the sports covered?

### 3.2 Content Analysis as a Research Tool

Content analysis involves the use of systematic procedures to examine and describe the content of a text. This text can be written, visual, or audio and its analysis generally involves the researcher determining the meanings and relationships of words or concepts within the text.<sup>81</sup> The text is categorised according to a predetermined set of rules, with this process using sampling and measurement procedures to reduce textual content to manageable data.<sup>82</sup> Examination and analysis of the objectively and systematically collected data then allows trends to be detected, enabling comparisons to be made or inferences drawn.

Content analysis has a number of strengths which make it an ideal research method for the examination of newspaper coverage of sport. First, it can be used to examine current events, past events, or both, and is most useful when the analysis includes a historical dimension.<sup>83</sup> Second, it can provide ‘hard’ evidence on topics about which there are often firm but unfounded opinions.<sup>84</sup> Third, longitudinal studies are

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<sup>81</sup> Chris Gratton and Ian Jones, *Research Methods for Sports Studies*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 167.

<sup>82</sup> Daniel Riffe, Stephen Lacy and Frederick Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York, 1998, pp. 18-19.

<sup>83</sup> Arthur Berger, *Media Analysis Techniques*, Sage Publications, London, 1998, pp. 117-118.

<sup>84</sup> Graeme Turner, ‘Media Analysis: Competing Traditions’, in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (eds), *The Media in Australia: Industries, Texts, Audiences*, Second Edition, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1997, p. 298.

possible using archived material that has outlived those who produced the material, their audience, and the events described in the text. Finally, categorisation and quantification of text permits reduction of large amounts of information to manageable levels, making close analysis possible while still retaining meaningful distinctions amongst the data.<sup>85</sup>

Newspapers are valuable sources of historical information, but extraction and treatment of newspaper data must be completed in a systematic way.<sup>86</sup> While newspapers are accepted as a common source of sport history information, it is important to acknowledge that a newspaper is never published as a historical document. First and foremost it is produced to sell to the public, and is written from varying regional, political, class, personal and business perspectives.<sup>87</sup> Each newspaper will reflect the characteristics of the city in which it was published, as well as the ideologies of the people involved in its publishing. It must therefore be noted that no single newspaper will provide a complete and balanced coverage of sport.

Don Morrow and Janice Waters liken the content analysis approach to using a 'methodological rake' for gathering relevant data. It can be used to assess themes, words, bias or ideas, and may be either quantitative, qualitative or a combination of

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<sup>85</sup> Riffe, Lacy and Fico, *Analyzing Media Messages*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>86</sup> Alan Metcalfe and Michael Salter, 'Researching Sport History: The Newspaper', in Ronald Smith and John Lucas (eds), *North American Society for Sport History Proceedings and Newsletter*, North American Society for Sport History, 1977, pp. 58-59.

<sup>87</sup> Don Morrow and Janice Waters, 'Method in Sport History: A Content Analysis Approach', *Canadian Journal of History of Sport*, vol. XIII, no. 2, December 1982, pp. 30-37.

the two, depending on the topic under examination. They also believe a number of assumptions need to be made when completing content analysis of newspaper sports coverage, and these assumptions seem valid when researching sports coverage in the *Age*. First, sports coverage reflects relative public interest, so the more interest in a particular sport the more coverage it will receive, in turn leading to increased sales as the press caters to public interest to sell newspapers. Second, sports coverage provides valid information about trends of sport in society, such as which sports are being played, and how popular a sport is. Third, sports coverage is relative to the geographical location of the newspaper, and regional biases may therefore affect content. Finally, general changes in sports coverage are evident through a sampling of editions.<sup>88</sup>

As discussed in chapter two, several studies have used content analysis to analyse sports related coverage in newspapers and magazines. These include studies using quantitative measures such as the number of articles, the total coverage expressed in column inches, and the type of news, to determine the extent of sports coverage in specific print media. Qualitative analysis, using a range of themes such as the portrayal of gender or race, and the commercialisation of sport, has also been used to interpret sports content.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Morrow and Waters, 'Method in Sport History', pp. 32-34.

<sup>89</sup> Brown, 'Who gets the Coverage and Who is Counting?', p. 198. Brown summarises several studies that use quantitative and qualitative content analysis to investigate print media coverage of women in sport. See also Crossman, Hyslop and Guthrie, 'A Content Analysis of the Sports Section', pp. 123-134, Marc Gelinas and Nancy Theberge, 'A Content Analysis of the Coverage of Physical Activity in Two Canadian Newspapers', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 21, 1986, pp. 141-151, Lumpkin and Williams, 'An Analysis of *Sports Illustrated* Feature Articles', pp.



Lever and Wheeler's study of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Brown's analysis of the *Newcastle Herald* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, are the most valuable in aiding the construction of an appropriate methodology with which to examine sports coverage in the *Age*. Both completed a longitudinal study, using a 25 year sampling period to examine various aspects of sports coverage in the respective papers during the twentieth century, however the framework used by each researcher to select the sample editions differed.<sup>90</sup> As the aims of this study more closely resemble the aims of Lever and Wheeler's research, it will adopt a similar methodological approach.

### 3.3 Content Analysis of the *Age*

In their study of the *Chicago Tribune*, Lever and Wheeler examined the years 1900, 1925, 1950 and 1975 to establish a representative cross section of 75 years of sports reporting. Using content analysis as their research tool, Lever and Wheeler read all stories of one inch or more during the first seven days of February, May, August and November, within each of the four selected years. Thus, their research was confined to approximately 120 days of newspaper coverage. Each story was categorised, allowing identification and analysis of a number of areas in which sports coverage in the *Tribune* had changed. These areas included the amount of sports coverage as a percentage of the total newspaper, the number and length of sports stories, the coverage given to major sports, the percentage of stories about players (relative to

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16-32, and Steven Whitlam and Hugh Preston, 'Sports Journalism as an Information Resource: A Case Study', *New Library World*, vol. 99, no. 1143, 1998, pp. 194-204.

<sup>90</sup> See Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History', pp. 24-34, Brown, 'The "Containment" of Women', pp. 4-8, and Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 299-313. Brown analysed the edition from every fifteenth day in the selected years, while Lever and Wheeler used the first seven days of February, May, August and November in each of the selected years to obtain their sample.

what they refer to as owners, managers, coaches, officials, referees and fans), and what the stories were about (either pre-game, post-game, or human interest).<sup>91</sup>

Their results showed significant differences over the 75 year period, and while it can be argued that some subtle differences or changes in sports reporting that occurred during the 25 year periods between samples may have been missed, the benefit of this approach was that the research period was limited by the choice of a number of key dates, thereby restricting the sample size to a manageable level.

Lever and Wheeler noted that their sample was designed to capture important seasonal variations in sports coverage, and that they restricted their sample size because of the enormity of the task. Furthermore, they acknowledged that there were obvious restrictions on the interpretive generalisations that could be drawn from this type of study and sample.<sup>92</sup>

The sampling interval and categories used by Lever and Wheeler are a good starting point for the construction of an appropriate and inclusive methodology that will allow examination of sports coverage in the *Age*. The selected research period for this project is 1925 to 1975, with examination of selected editions of the *Age* during 1925, 1950 and 1975 to be undertaken. For each of these years March, June, September and December are selected as sample months, with one week of each of the selected months to be analysed. In each instance the week will begin on the first

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<sup>91</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 300-309.

<sup>92</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', p. 300.

Monday of the month, and finish on the following Sunday. This will result in examination of 72 days of sports coverage, and ensure that no major sporting season is left out of the data collection and analysis process, and that sport biases are minimised.

The basic unit of analysis is an 'item of sport', with each item counted and sorted using a number of different classifications or categories. An 'item of sport' is defined as any item appearing in the *Age* that relates to a sporting event, athlete, team, sporting organisation or sports issue, not including advertising.<sup>93</sup> The search for 'items of sport' includes all aspects of sports news including articles, scores, fixtures and photographs, and covers all pages of the selected editions of the *Age*. This study focuses primarily on the number and type of items relating to each sport that appear in the *Age*, unlike Lever and Wheeler, who calculated both number of stories and column space provided to each sport.<sup>94</sup> In addition to counting and classifying items of sport, the total number of pages and total space devoted to sport for each edition was measured and recorded.

### **3.4 Categorisation and Classification of Items of Sport**

The content of each 'item of sport' was classified into a number of different categories, with classification determined by reading the headline (if any) and

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<sup>93</sup> Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History', p. 25. Brown uses this definition to describe an 'item of news', the basic unit of analysis in his examination of the coverage of women's sport in the *Newcastle Herald*.

<sup>94</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', p. 300. It should be noted that Lever and Wheeler only included items of one inch or more. Use of item number, not linear space, as the measure for this study ensured all sport items, regardless of column space allocated, were included, while ensuring the data collection process was kept at a manageable level.

visually scanning the item. It is important to note that some interpretation on the part of the researcher is required when classifying items, and rules relating to item classification were constructed to maximise consistency in this process. Individual sport items for each day of each sample week were counted, allowing production of weekly, monthly and yearly totals. This allows identification and comparison of trends by day, month and year.

Classification of items followed a simple step-by-step process. After identifying and recording the sport concerned, the item was then classified as belonging to one of six different categories. The six categories were: 1) Articles; 2) Scores and Results; 3) Photographs; 4) Cartoons; 5) Form Guides, Weights and Fixtures; and, 6) Announcements. Following categorisation, the focus of each item across several variables was identified.

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, some amendments have been made to Lever and Wheeler's methodology to provide a more accurate picture of sports coverage in the *Age*. First, this research will concentrate on counting the number of items of sport, with only minimal measurement completed of the column space allocated to sport. Second, it was apparent, once the data collection process for this project began, that the variables used to describe the geography of competition, and article content categories, by Lever and Wheeler, did not accurately capture the type of sports coverage being provided by the *Age*. Both these categories have therefore been expanded for this study.

Geography of competition items have been categorised to reflect both the location and level of competition. For example, if an item is included in the ‘national’ category it would indicate the sport or event is of national significance and interest, with the location in which it was played a secondary factor in deciding its categorisation. It was also appropriate to expand the article content category, as the *Age* contained items that could not be accurately categorised as pre-match, post-match or human interest. The addition of the categories general sports news, opinion or column, and promotion of sport, permits more detailed information to be gathered on what types of articles the *Age* published, allowing the interpretation of the gathered data to be more precise. Other item categories and focus of items were deemed appropriate for this research, and therefore remained essentially the same.<sup>95</sup> Rules and interpretations used when classifying items, for all categories and variables, are detailed in Table 3.1.

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<sup>95</sup> Lever and Wheeler, ‘The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page’, pp. 300-309. Lever and Wheeler did not plainly detail the categories used in their data collection process. Reading of the discussion and tables included in their article do, however, give clear indication as to the categories used to sort items.

**Table 3.1 Categorisation and Classification of Items of Sport**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Classification</b>
<b>Article</b>	A separate piece of writing on a sporting event, athlete, team, sporting organisation or sports issue.
<b>Score and Result</b>	<p>A statistical summary showing the score and result for individual sporting events, leagues or associations. Each individual league and association that has results published is counted as one 'score/result', even though it is the same sport and the results usually appear in the <i>Age</i> in one continuous section.</p> <p>A number of sport items provide both commentary (post-match report) on the event, followed with box results. If this occurs the commentary and the score are counted as separate items, providing a more accurate total of the type of information that is being provided to the reader.</p>
<b>Photograph</b>	Picture or image taken by camera relating to a sporting event, athlete, team, sporting organisation or sports issue.
<b>Cartoon</b>	Drawn image relating to a sporting event, athlete, team, sporting organisation or sports issue.
<b>Form Guide, Weights, and Fixture</b>	Item that provides information on an upcoming event but is not an article. These may consist of written summary and statistics, and includes form guides for all types of racing, the draw or fixture for any sporting competition, and team selections.
<b>Announcement</b>	All notices regarding upcoming events such as race meetings, annual meetings, or sports carnivals that are placed by the sporting organisation. It is assumed that the organisation has placed the notice for its own benefit, and is not reporting the <i>Age</i> has sourced or produced.

Focus of Items	Classification
<p><b>Gender</b></p>	<p><b>Male:</b> Item focussed on male sportspeople, or where an assumption can be made that the sport covered is played by males (e.g. Victorian Football League).</p> <p><b>Female:</b> Item focussed on female sportspeople, or where an assumption can be made that the sport covered is played by females (e.g. National netball championships).</p> <p><b>Mixed:</b> Item focussed on both male and female.</p> <p><b>Non-Specific:</b> Item where no gender is specified, or an assumption cannot be made, as to whether the competitor is male or female. Sports where the primary competitor is an animal (e.g. horse racing) will be classified as 'non-specific'.</p>
<p><b>Status</b></p> <p>Status of sport or athlete may be difficult to define, and a judgement on the status of the sport is made based on information provided in the item (e.g. prize money available, use of terms such as amateur), or by conducting a brief investigation into the history of the sport.</p>	<p><b>Amateur:</b> Item that clearly states the athlete or competition is amateur, with those involved not receiving payment for their involvement.</p> <p><b>Semi-Professional:</b> Athlete or competition where payment to play is made, but for whom sport is not a full-time occupation.</p> <p><b>Professional:</b> Item that clearly states the competitor or competition is professional, involving those for whom sport is a full-time occupation.</p>
<p><b>Participation Level</b></p> <p>Aims to provide data on the focus of the item, not just whether the sport is acknowledged as an individual or team sport. If the focus of the item cannot be identified the item is categorised on whether the sport is commonly known as an 'individual' or a 'team' sport.</p>	<p><b>Individual:</b> Sport that involves competition between individual athletes or the item focussed on an individual playing a team sport.</p> <p><b>Team:</b> Sport that involves competition between teams of players, or the item focussed on team competition in an individual sport.</p> <p><b>Mixed:</b> Item gives equal representation to the athlete and his or her team.</p>
<p><b>Geography of Competition</b></p> <p>Geography aims to reflect the location and level of competition together with the importance of the event.</p>	<p><b>Local/Regional:</b> Sport involving the Melbourne metropolitan area or country and regional areas of Victoria, and of major interest predominantly in those locations.</p> <p><b>Interstate:</b> Sport played outside of Victoria, but not at a national or international level.</p> <p><b>National:</b> Sport that involves competition of national significance. This includes sport played in or involving Victoria or its representatives, and state/national titles. Categorisation of items is based on significance of competition, with the location secondary.</p>

	<b>International:</b> Coverage of sport played overseas, and international competitions played in Australia.
<b>Role</b> Role aims to show who the story or item was about.	<p><b>Competitors:</b> Item focuses on individual athletes or their teams.</p> <p><b>Coaches:</b> Item focuses on a coach of an individual athlete or team, and includes trainers of animals.</p> <p><b>Umpires:</b> Item focuses on umpires, referees or those officiating in a sporting contest.</p> <p><b>Administration:</b> Item focuses on an administrator, or administration of a sport or event.</p> <p><b>Owners/Sponsors:</b> Item focuses on the owner or sponsor of a team, athlete or animal.</p> <p><b>Fans:</b> Item focuses on, or provides information to, fans of athletes, teams or sports.</p> <p><b>Mixed:</b> Focus of the item cannot be limited to one of the above classifications.</p>
<b>Content (Articles only)</b>	<p><b>Pre-Game Report:</b> Item that provides information or analysis of an upcoming match or competition.</p> <p><b>Post-Game Report:</b> Item describing or analysing the outcome of an event or competition.</p> <p><b>General Sports News:</b> Item reporting current news or issues not directly involving competition.</p> <p><b>Opinion/Column:</b> Opinion or subjective reporting by regular columnist or athlete.</p> <p><b>Promotion of Sport:</b> Item that provides information, without analysis, on a sport or event, with the aim of enhancing its profile or reputation.</p> <p><b>Human Interest:</b> Item detailing issues faced (e.g. injury), or achievements of, particular athletes or teams, including player or team profiles.</p>

### 3.5 Conclusion

The goal of this study is to examine the changing nature of sports coverage in one major Australian newspaper, and it must be acknowledged that the use of only a single source of written information about sport places restrictions on the identification of trends and themes in Australian press sports coverage generally. The methodology used for this project has, however, been constructed to allow



exploration of the extent, characteristics and changes in the sports coverage published in the *Age* over the selected era. The data gathering and analysis process has provided valuable insight into the historical development of sports coverage in this newspaper, and the findings of this process are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Four

### Discussion of Results

#### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter referred to the content analysis methodology that was applied to research sports coverage in the *Age*. The use of content analysis makes it possible to identify specific and empirically demonstrable changes in the way the *Age* has covered sport over the period 1925 to 1975. This chapter will present and discuss the results of the data gathering process, with the goal of determining how much coverage sport received, assessing whether or not there was an expansion of the sports pages relative to rest of the newspaper, noting changes and consistencies in the sports covered, and establishing what the stories were about.

#### 4.2 Sports Coverage as a Percentage of the *Age*

It is clear that between 1925 and 1975 both the size of the *Age*, and the extent of sports coverage included in the newspaper, increased. Table 4.1 summarises these changes, however, it seems that little variation occurred until 1950, with the major growth occurring in the second 25 year period.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Advertising printed in general news was included as part of the total newspaper when calculating sport as a percentage of the total newspaper. If this percentage had been calculated minus advertisements, sport would occupy a greater proportion of the newspaper.

**Table 4.1 The *Age* and the Space Allocated to Sport**

Year	Average pages per day	Average pages of sport per day	Sport as a percentage of the total newspaper
1925	19	1.8	9%
1950	19.8	1.6	8%
1975	29	3.8	13%

### 4.3 The Sports Pages of the *Age*

In 1925 coverage of sport in the *Age* did not have a set format or location within the paper. The typical edition covered a number of different sports and events, in closely packed or dense columns. Sport usually appeared midway through the paper, on pages six and seven, with at least one page dedicated to sports coverage. Sports reports could, however, appear on nearly any page throughout an edition. The sports page might contain a feature story of some length on horse racing, Australian Rules football or cricket, and then a number a brief items on a variety of other sports. The lead sports story was generally placed in the far left column of the page, but, in keeping with the rest of the *Age*, there were no photographs and small headlines, if any. It seems that the beginnings of a set format for the sports pages were in place, but without many of the features and consistency which are commonly associated with the sports section of today.

A significant transformation had occurred by 1950. Sport now occupied the back pages of the *Age*, giving the sports section a location that would remain during the second half of the twentieth century. Larger headlines and photographs attracted the

reader, and while the back page position made it easy for the reader to find sports coverage, the placement of articles or scores was still haphazard.

By 1975 the *Age* was devoting up to six pages to sport, and while this was typically the back pages of the newspaper, sport was now deemed important enough to sometimes appear on the front page, particularly if the story involved Australian Rules football or an event of international significance.<sup>97</sup> The sports column, the human interest story, and pre- and post-match analysis were now all part of day-to-day coverage. The significance of horse racing to the *Age* was also apparent, with the paper providing a bi-weekly four page lift-out form guide to the major race meetings. Importantly, the haphazardness that characterised the format in 1950 had largely disappeared. Articles, form guides and scores tended to be grouped together, creating a cleaner, less confusing, sports section.

While the percentage of space allocated to sport decreased slightly from nine percent in 1925 to eight percent in 1950, it grew substantially to thirteen percent in 1975. More significant is the total of 'sport items'. From the sample of 24 days in 1925 there were a total of 2,623 items of sport, but by 1950 this number had decreased markedly to 1,758. This is despite both the size of the paper, and the amount of news space devoted to sport, remaining almost the same. By 1975 this pattern had changed, with sport items growing by 26 percent to 2,222, accompanied by an

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<sup>97</sup> For examples see the *Age*, 3 June 1975, p. 1, and the *Age*, 3 March 1975, p. 1. Each edition of the *Age* in 1975 included on the front page a 'News Summary' containing a précis of stories and referring the reader to the relevant page. At least one sports story was generally included in this summary.

increase of 60 percent in the amount of news space allocated to sport, thus confirming the growing importance of sports news to the newspaper.

In each sample year, Monday's *Age* contained the largest sports content. In 1925 just under 25 percent of the Monday edition was sport. Given that most sport was played on the weekend this figure indicates the newspaper focussed more on describing the outcome of events, rather than publishing pre-event stories, and on providing scores and results to its readers. This view is supported by the amount of sports content published on the remaining weekdays, which ranged between five to ten percent of the total newspaper.

Data gathered from 1950 shows a similar spread to 1925, with sport on a Monday comprising nineteen percent of the paper, and Tuesday to Saturday again ranging between five and ten percent. While Monday's sport content in 1975 had remained stable at twenty percent, the percentage of sport in the other weekday editions increased, ranging from ten to fourteen percent. This indicates that by 1975 the *Age*, in addition to giving its readers more sports reporting, had shifted from concentrating on post-match reports and scores. The paper was now providing coverage that included more pre-match analysis, feature articles on players and events, and columns written by both professional journalists and current or retired players.

As noted earlier in this thesis, in 2005 the *Age* initiated a major change in the way it presents its sports section. As a result of research and reader consultation, the paper replaced its broadsheet sports pages with a weekday tabloid sports lift-out.<sup>98</sup> Sport is now provided to the reader in an attractive, easy to handle format with surprisingly little advertising.<sup>99</sup> For both the *Age* and its readers, this seems to have completed a transformation in form that has been occurring since the early part of the twentieth century.

#### 4.4 Coverage of Individual Sports

Australia has a long history of sports involvement, with Australian Rules football, horse racing and cricket all prominent since the late nineteenth century. Many other sports, such as tennis, golf, boxing and rugby, have captured the interest of both players and spectators at various times during the last hundred years.<sup>100</sup>

Horse racing, Australian Rules football and cricket dominated sports coverage in the *Age* during the period 1925 to 1975, with golf making substantial gains from a low base in 1925. Figure 4.1 shows these four sports together account for between 57

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<sup>98</sup> For further explanation of this change see Japson, 'A Stronger Focus on News, Sport and Business', p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> A number of researchers have commented on sport's ability to provide a newspaper with an audience attractive to advertisers, reinforcing the merits of sports news as crucial to a newspaper's financial viability. See Rod Brookes, *Representing Sport*, Arnold, London, 2002, p. 33, and Lowes, 'Sports Page', pp. 146-147 for examples. It is somewhat surprising, then, that the *Age* has made it possible for the reader to ignore the general news section, which holds the majority of advertising, while still getting his or her 'fix' of sports news.

<sup>100</sup> For detailed information on the history of sport in Australia see Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third Edition (revised), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, and Bloomfield, *Australia's Sporting Success*, pp. 14-33.

and 67 percent of total sports reporting across the period. Horse racing maintained its number one position throughout the research period, in contrast to Lever and Wheeler's findings on the coverage of American horse racing in the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>101</sup> The consistency in the amount of coverage given to horse racing was also noteworthy. While reporting on sports such as cricket and football fluctuated with the seasons, horse racing received a constant level of coverage throughout, indicating the industry remained popular with spectators and punters regardless of the time of year.

The position of Australian Rules football as the most reported sport behind horse racing undoubtedly reflects a regional bias in the sports coverage of the *Age*, with the code popular mostly in the southern and western parts of Australia. During the winter months, football averaged 27 percent of total sports coverage, comparing well with the bias towards rugby league (twenty percent of coverage) in the New South Wales newspaper the *Newcastle Herald*.<sup>102</sup> The extensive newspaper coverage of football reflects the cultural significance of the sport in Melbourne, and this coverage has been beneficial to both the sport and the newspaper, enhancing the popularity of the code and boosting the circulation of the *Age*.<sup>103</sup>

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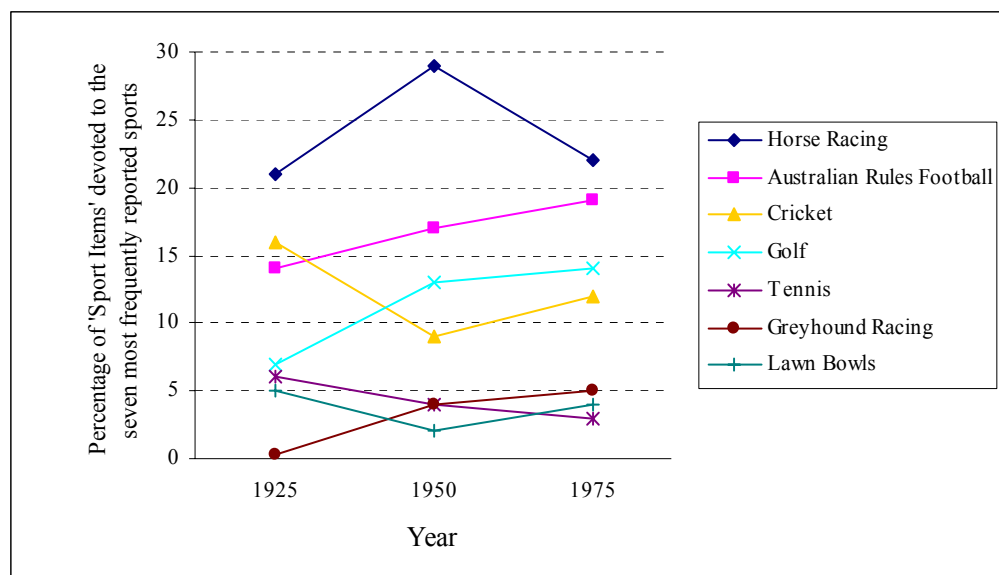
<sup>101</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 303-304. The coverage of American horse racing declined dramatically from 1900 to 1975. This decline was attributed to the growth of other sports, race track scandals, and to the expansion of other forums for racing news.

<sup>102</sup> Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History', p. 28.

<sup>103</sup> As discussed in Rob Hess, Caroline Symons and Dennis Hemphill, 'Sporting Culture', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2005, p. 679.

The prominence of cricket in the *Age* reflects its popularity with both players and the viewing public, and supports the notion that it ‘is the sport which comes closest to our national game’.<sup>104</sup> Unlike horse racing, which is primarily a spectator sport, and football, which during the research period was only popular in select states, cricket was being played and watched nation wide, generating great interest at regional, national and international level.

**Figure 4.1 Coverage of Major Sports**



In addition to the top seven sports listed in Figure 4.1, another 39 different sports were covered at least once by the *Age* during the sample years. This figure remained stable over the 50 years, unlike Brown’s research on the *Newcastle Herald* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, which found a large increase in the diversity of sports

<sup>104</sup> Richard Cashman, ‘Cricket’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third Edition (revised), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 115.



cited.<sup>105</sup> Table 4.2 shows that while the list of other sports covered in the *Age* includes well known activities such as athletics, soccer, boxing and hockey, the array of lesser known sports includes pigeon racing, lacrosse and water polo. Items from 1925 in particular include articles and scores on the now banned or relatively non-existent sports of coursing and hunting, indicating changing social attitudes to blood sports during the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>106</sup>

**Table 4.2 Sports Cited in each Sample Year**

Year	Sport
1925 36 sports	athletics, Australian Rules football, baseball, basketball, billiards/snooker, boxing, coursing, cricket, croquet, cycling, golf, greyhound racing, hockey, horse racing, hunting, ice hockey, lacrosse, lawn bowls, motorcycling, motor racing, Olympic Games, pigeon racing, polo, rowing, royal tennis, rugby league, rugby union, shooting, soccer, surf lifesaving, swimming, tennis, wood chopping, wrestling, yachting.
1950 40 sports	athletics, Australian Rules football, badminton, baseball, basketball, billiards/snooker, boxing, canoeing, coursing, cricket, croquet, cycling, fencing, golf, greyhound racing, gymnastics, hockey, horse racing, hunting, lacrosse, lawn bowls, motorcycling, motor racing, Olympic Games, pigeon racing, polo, rowing, rugby league, rugby union, shooting, soccer, softball, speed boat racing, squash, surf lifesaving, swimming, tennis, water polo, wrestling, yachting.
1975 37 sports	American football, athletics, Australian Rules football, badminton, baseball, basketball, boxing, canoeing, cricket, croquet, cycling, fencing, golf, greyhound racing, hockey, horse racing, lacrosse, lawn bowls, motorcycling, motor racing, netball, Olympic Games, pigeon racing, rowing, rugby league, rugby union, shooting, skiing, soccer, softball, speed boat racing, squash, surf lifesaving, swimming, tennis, water polo, yachting.

<sup>105</sup> Brown, 'The "Containment" of Women', p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> Coursing, a competition between hunting dogs in pursuit of a quarry, usually a hare, was progressively banned throughout Australia on the grounds of cruelty between 1953 and 1986. This ban assisted the rise in popularity of greyhound racing. See Andrew Lemon, 'Coursing', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third Edition (revised), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 112-113, and Gerald Crawford, 'Greyhound-Racing', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third Edition (revised), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 192-193.

While some coverage was given to a wide variety of sports, it came as no surprise that horse racing, football, cricket and golf dominated. These are sports that have been very popular with both spectators and participants alike for a long period of time, and it is likely the *Age* concentrated on reporting those sports in which its readership already had great interest. Stoddart describes this domination of media coverage by ‘traditional’ sports such as football and cricket as a paradox, noting that despite Australia allegedly being so preoccupied with sport there is only a very narrow selection of sports covered in depth.<sup>107</sup> Despite the growth of alternative sports such as basketball, and the contribution of an increasingly multicultural society to ‘new Australian’ sporting traditions, it appears that the non-traditional sports faced great difficulty gaining media exposure.<sup>108</sup>

#### **4.5 Changing Characteristics of Sports Coverage**

As stated earlier, the amount of newspaper space allocated to sport, relative to the rest of the newspaper, fluctuated between 1925 and 1975. The total number of sport items also fluctuated significantly, and it is important for this research that the changing nature of these items is identified. As detailed in chapter three, each item was placed in one of six different categories: 1) Articles; 2) Scores and Results; 3) Photographs; 4) Cartoons; 5) Form Guides, Weights and Fixtures; and, 6) Announcements.

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<sup>107</sup> Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, p. 85.

<sup>108</sup> Vamplew, ‘Australians and Sport’, p. 18.

**Table 4.3 Sport Items by Category**

Category	1925		1950		1975	
	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>
Articles	36	938	36	637	30	668
Scores and Results	41	1075	33	585	37	826
Photos	0	0	8	133	10	216
Cartoons	0	0	<1	7	<1	14
Form, Weights, Fixtures	12	312	14	238	20	445
Announcements	11	298	9	158	2	53
<b>Total Sport Items</b>	<b>2,623</b>		<b>1,758</b>		<b>2,222</b>	

Table 4.3 shows both the percentage and total of all items by category for each sample year. The focus of the *Age*, throughout the 50 year time frame, was on providing the reader with three main types of information. First, scores and results of local, national and international sport; second, articles providing sports news such as a description or analysis of a completed event, or a preview of an upcoming match; and third, form guides for future events, in particular horse racing.

The decline in the number of items from 1925 to 1950, despite the column space provided to sport remaining almost the same, suggests a change in the role of the *Age*. During 1925, a large number of sports organisations used the newspaper as a communication tool, placing announcements to promote or advise the public of events of interest. Country race clubs placing notices detailing upcoming meetings, and football clubs announcing annual meeting dates are prime examples of this, and

show that different sporting clubs saw the *Age* as a viable and important way of contacting prospective players, spectators or administrators. The large number of results from both suburban and country cricket and football included in the paper supports the notion of the 1925 *Age* as predominantly a supplier of information, with the ability to reach many people across all parts of Victoria.

By 1950 there had been a shift by the paper to provide fewer items of sports reporting, but of greater size. More analysis of events, particularly football and cricket was occurring, and the introduction of photographs in the 1930s meant a more visually pleasing layout.<sup>109</sup> While this suggests a more detailed sports coverage, it seems that at some point in the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s, sports reporting in the *Age* stagnated. Both the number of items, and column space allocated to sport, declined between 1925 and 1950, before increasing significantly between 1950 and 1975. The sample period used for this study does not allow the low point in the amount of sports coverage to be precisely identified, and this is an area open for further research. The reasons for this stagnation are unclear, but it has been suggested that the introduction of radio broadcasting of sport, and the effects of the economic depression, had a negative impact on the sporting press at this time.<sup>110</sup>

The most significant change between 1925 and 1950 can be seen in the scores and results category, in which the number of items almost halved. A large proportion of this decline can be directly attributed to the smaller number of cricket scores. In

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<sup>109</sup> Whelan, *Photography of the Age*, p. 19.

<sup>110</sup> Stoddart, *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 94-96.

1925 approximately 70 suburban and country cricket competitions had their results published in the *Age*, with a number of these competitions based around church, friendly societies or industry.<sup>111</sup> By 1950 the structure of amateur cricket seems to have changed, with the church, friendly society or industrial competitions no longer existing or not deemed important enough to be provided newspaper space. Further investigation may clarify the reasons for this, but it is possible that these institutions were playing a less important social role by 1950.

The downward trend of the number of items of sport had been reversed by 1975. Central to this was the inclusion of horse racing form guides for a greater variety of race meetings, and the publishing of team selections and umpiring appointments for the Melbourne District Cricket competition, and the semi-professional Victorian Football League and the Victorian Football Association, resulting in a substantial increase in the form, weights and fixtures category. Scores and results also increased by almost 250 items, with the three major sports of horse racing, football and cricket regaining some of the ground lost between 1925 and 1950. Amateur golf, by maintaining the volume of scores published in 1950, made a large contribution to this category, as did the lesser known sports of lawn bowls, soccer and yachting.

Also noteworthy was the increasing use of photographs by the *Age* in its sports coverage. In 1925 no photographs were included, but 50 years later photographs

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<sup>111</sup> Examples of these competitions include the Church of England, Manchester Unity Friendly Society, and Richmond Industrial Cricket Associations. See the *Age*, 2 March 1925, pp. 13-14, for a list of competitions and scores.

accounted for ten percent of the items devoted to sport. The ability to capture sporting pictures allowed the print media to provide readers with a visual image of the athlete or event, bringing the reader closer to the action. The emergence of sports photography in the second half of the twentieth century had an important impact on the nature of sports reporting provided by the *Age*, however the type of photograph used, particularly in 1975, is worthy of comment. Not surprisingly, football, cricket, horse racing and golf accounted for 85 percent of photographs published, but unexpectedly only 40 percent of all photographs were of competitors in action. This figure may reflect that, despite sports photographs first appearing early in the twentieth century, it was still a difficult task to capture quality action photographs on a consistent basis.

The remainder of photographs involving a player were either non-competitive, but the setting or caption made it obvious in which sport the athlete was involved, or a portrait accompanying an article. Both these types of photographs would assist the reader to identify with the athlete, especially as televised sport was still in its infancy as a medium. The *Age* also followed a trend, identified by Rowe and Stevenson, in which an attempt was made to raise the level of reader recognition of a number of sports journalists through display of their photographic portraits in the sports section.<sup>112</sup> Twenty percent of photographs printed in the sample editions from 1975 were portraits of reporters or columnists, particularly those who were either senior

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<sup>112</sup> Rowe and Stevenson, 'Negotiations and Mediations', p. 69.

journalists or sporting identities.<sup>113</sup> In addition to raising the level of reader recognition, the publishing of portraits can be seen as an attempt to build the reputation and authority of the sports journalist, while promoting the *Age* as a paper that provided the reader with ‘inside’ knowledge from those who had played the game.

#### 4.6 Focus of Sports Coverage

It is apparent from the studies mentioned in chapter three that male, professional sports have dominated the sports pages, and that over time there has been a shift from reporting local sport to covering events of national or international significance. This may be a reflection of not only the economics of the news business (newspapers cater to what they assume or perceive their readership wants to see in the sports section), but also of the large amount of professional sport now played, particularly in North America and Europe.<sup>114</sup> Data gathered from the *Age* shows results comparable to these studies, with the exception of the level of coverage given to amateur and professional sport.

Items printed by the *Age* over the 50 year time span were overwhelmingly about male athletes, with between 82 and 88 percent of non-animal related sports reporting categorised as male.<sup>115</sup> Football, cricket and golf were the backbone of men’s sports

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<sup>113</sup> Sporting identities writing for the *Age* in 1975 included Ian Chappell, captain of the Australian cricket team between 1971 and 1975, and Jack Fingleton, ex-Australian Test cricketer. The chief writer for selected sports, such as cricket writer Peter MacFarlane, also had a photographic portrait displayed with their articles.

<sup>114</sup> Crossman, Hyslop and Guthrie, ‘A Content Analysis of the Sports Section’, p. 125.

<sup>115</sup> Animal related sport includes horse racing, greyhound racing, pigeon racing, and coursing.

coverage. Women received significantly less coverage, with only five percent in 1925, rising to eleven percent in 1950, followed by slight increase to thirteen percent in 1975. Golf, tennis, lawn bowls and hockey accounted for 70 percent of total sports coverage for women, with golf on its own accounting for almost half of women's sports coverage. Although a greater range of female sport was being reported by 1975, newspaper descriptions of female involvement in sport, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century, support the view that women were limited to activities that emphasised grace, flexibility and co-ordination, reinforcing female exclusion from other more physically demanding and competitive sports.<sup>116</sup>

Sport is played at various levels in Australia, from local competitions through to national and international events. While the overall level of coverage provided to local and regional events declined from 83 percent in 1925 to 71 percent in 1975, deeper analysis is required to provide a full picture of the changes over the 50 year period. The publishing of scores and results, together with form guides, dominated local sports coverage in each sample year, however the spread of reporting across local, interstate, national and international categories in 1925 and 1950 was almost the same. By 1975 there had been a major increase in the amount of coverage given to international sport, with this shift more noticeable when considering the focus of articles only. Between 1950 and 1975 the percentage of articles concerning international sport rose from seventeen to 37 percent, implying that the inclusion of

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<sup>116</sup> Vamplew, 'Australians and Sport', p. 14-16, and Brown, 'Gender, the Press and History', p. 30.



the scores of local sports was sufficient coverage for this level of competition, while analysis of events occurring overseas or involving athletes representing Australia had assumed a much greater importance to the paper.

Lever and Wheeler's study of the *Chicago Tribune* demonstrated the rise of professional sport to a position of dominance on the sports pages, particularly between 1950 and 1975.<sup>117</sup> This study of the *Age* has returned a contrasting result, and while the coverage of professional sport has grown, the findings reinforce the view that Australian sport has been slow to accept professionalism, with amateurism the dominant ideology until the latter part of the twentieth century.<sup>118</sup>

The reporting of amateur sport in 1925 accounted for 63 percent of sports coverage, and it was only the substantial amount of horse racing items that prevented amateur sport occupying more than 80 percent of the sports pages. By 1950 the coverage of professional sport had risen to 39 percent of all sport items, a figure that would remain stable in 1975. This rise can be attributed to the increased reporting of professional golf, boxing, cycling and greyhound racing, and by the end of the 50 year period, to the growing coverage of international professional sport, in particular tennis, golf and English soccer. Amateur sport still accounted for 42 percent of

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<sup>117</sup> Lever and Wheeler, 'The *Chicago Tribune* Sports Page', pp. 306-308.

<sup>118</sup> See Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 54-71 and pp. 187-204, and Robert Paddick, 'Amateurism', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Third Edition (revised), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 11-15, for a detailed history of the relationship between amateur and professional sport in Australia.

coverage in 1975, reflecting that local and regional sport content remained an important part of the sports coverage provided the *Age*.

The line between amateur and professional in Australian sport may not be as clearly defined as in North America and Europe, and this study has also noted the amount of coverage provided to semi-professional sport.<sup>119</sup> As noted earlier in this chapter, football and cricket maintained pre-eminent positions in the sports pages of the *Age* throughout the research period, and it is these two sports, when played at the elite level, that account for the majority of semi-professional sports reporting. Given the importance of these two sports to Melbourne and Victoria, it is not surprising that the coverage of semi-professional sport occupied approximately twenty percent of sports reporting in each of the sample years.

Australian sport, however, was undergoing significant change during the 1970s, with both football and cricket taking significant steps towards full professionalism, and the Federal Government initiating a stronger commitment to international athletes in response to a lack of success at the 1976 Olympic Games.<sup>120</sup> It is feasible that in the latter part of the twentieth century the *Age* would focus an increasing amount of sports coverage on the emerging professional sports industry, to the possible detriment of local and amateur sports coverage.

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<sup>119</sup> Refer to Table 3.1 of this thesis for the definition of amateur, semi-professional and professional sport used in this study.

<sup>120</sup> See Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 187-204, and Paddick, 'Amateurism', pp. 11-15.

#### 4.7 Content of the Sports Section

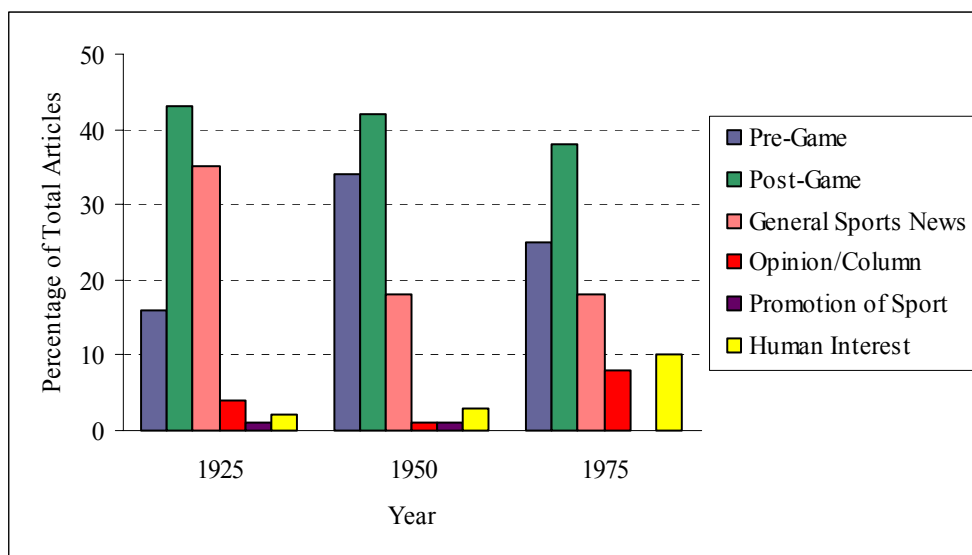
All sports items were classified according to who the item was about, with results showing that over the 50 year period the overwhelming majority of items, approximately 90 percent, related to individual competitors or their teams. Items concerning coaches, umpires, administration of sport, owners or sponsors, and fans , never amounted to more than fourteen percent of all items, and in none of the sample years does any one of these roles receive more than four percent of coverage. It is clear that readers were provided with information about the game and its competitors, with items about other sports issues and roles less important when deciding what was published in the sports pages of the *Age*. While there is no indication, during the research period, that this trend was starting to change, a more businesslike approach to Australian sport and the increasing influence of televised sport, in the two decades after 1975, means newspapers may begin to look off the playing field to maintain the relevance of their reporting. It is therefore conceivable that the peripheral roles would begin to receive more coverage during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Although approximately 90 percent of items concentrated on the competitors or their teams, a subtle shift in the subject of these items had occurred by 1975. The individual athlete was increasingly the focus of reporting, regardless of whether he or she was competing in a team sport. There is also an increasing emphasis on the individual in reporting not related to match coverage, such as staged photographs

and human interest stories, an indication that some aspects of sports reporting were now being treated less as news and more as entertainment.<sup>121</sup>

Approximately one-third of all sport items were articles. The content of all articles was examined, allowing each individual article to be categorised as either: pre-game report; post-game report; general sports news; opinion/column; promotion of sport; or human interest.<sup>122</sup> Figure 4.2 illustrates that article content shifted noticeably between 1925 and 1975.

**Figure 4.2 Article Content by Year**



Almost 80 percent of articles in 1925 related to post-match reports or general sports news. With the exception of feature reports on horse racing, international cricket or the Victorian Football League, articles tended to occupy no more than four column

<sup>121</sup> Rowe, 'Modes of Sports Writing', pp. 99-107, and Boyle and Haynes, *Power Play*, pp. 174-176.

<sup>122</sup> Refer to Table 3.1 of this thesis for a definition of each of these categories.

inches. Pre-game stories comprised only sixteen percent, with this content dominated by the two most reported sports, horse racing and football. By 1950 pre-game articles had doubled to 34 percent of all stories, with an accompanying halving of general sports news articles.

While the percentage of articles devoted to pre-game, post-game, and general sports news categories decreased slightly between 1950 and 1975, the sports column and the human interest story gained greater prominence. This type of sports coverage accounted for almost one-fifth of sports stories in 1975, and while the majority of these stories were still about competitors or their teams, it is clear that the reader was being provided with reporting that covered more than what took place on the field.

The changing nature of the sports section is evident in the growth in size of articles over the 50 year research period. Despite the print space allocated to the sports section doubling from an average of two pages in 1925, to four pages 50 years later, significantly fewer stories were published in 1950 and 1975. Although the amount of articles was less in number, these stories were longer and more detailed, a possible response to the growth of televised sport following the introduction of television to Australia in the mid 1950s. Lever and Wheeler identified a similar trend in the *Chicago Tribune*, noting that:

the longer stories found in 1975 were providing details and expert commentary on events witnessed by fans the day before, and that TV coverage whetted fans' appetites for reactions they could compare with their own.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Lever and Wheeler, *The Chicago Tribune Sports Page*, p. 310.

#### 4.8 Conclusion

The sports pages of the *Age* changed markedly between 1925 and 1975. In particular the development of a 'sports section', and the growing amount of newspaper space devoted to sport, supports the view that sports content developed to become an indispensable part of the daily press in Melbourne.

Trends identified in the research reviewed in chapter two have been supported by this study. The dominance of male sport, content focussing on the competitors or their teams, the increasing amount of coverage of national and international sport, and regional or national sporting biases, are themes identified in the majority of the studies. The major area in which the development of sports coverage in the *Age* differed from existing research trends is in its coverage of professional sport. This, however, would appear to be more a result of the slower progress of Australian sport to full professionalism, than of a decision by the editors of the *Age* to concentrate on amateur or semi-professional sport.<sup>124</sup>

There was also an important transformation in the type of information the newspaper provided to its readers. Articles became longer, and included a broader range of content, and the use of an increasing number of photographs made the paper more visually interesting. The publishing of scores diminished, a reflection of the increasing ability of the fan to obtain this information more quickly from other sources. Changes in the structure of sports reporting has not, however, resulted in a

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<sup>124</sup> An examination of the sports lift-out published by the *Age* on 7 November 2005 and 11 November 2005 shows that approximately 90 percent of coverage relates to professional sport, with reporting of amateur sport limited predominantly to results.

greater variety of sports receiving increased coverage. Throughout the research period horse racing, football and cricket dominated each category of coverage, and given the ongoing popularity and commercial power of these sports it is difficult to envisage this dominance being challenged.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

Despite the nexus that exists between sport and the media, there has been minimal investigation of the historical content of Australian newspaper sports pages. By documenting the changing nature and extent of sports coverage in the *Age* newspaper over the period 1925 to 1975, this thesis therefore adds to a limited body of knowledge.

As this thesis has demonstrated, a number of key trends and themes are evident in sports coverage in the *Age* between 1925 and 1975. First, the amount of newspaper space allocated to sport by the *Age* grew considerably. Second, there was a shift from concentrating on descriptive post-event coverage, to providing both pre- and post-match information and more in-depth analysis. Third, the sports of horse racing, Australian Rules football, cricket and golf received the overwhelming majority of coverage in each of the sample years, reflecting the popularity of these sports in Melbourne, and the desire of the *Age* to provide coverage of sports in which its readers had an interest. Fourth, sports reporting remained focussed on male competitors and their teams, with women receiving significantly less coverage. Finally, a decline in the reporting of local and regional events was identified, with a corresponding rise in the coverage of national and international events.



The results presented in this thesis are consistent with the literature reviewed in chapter two. Several similarities were identified, including an increase in the amount of news space allocated to sport, the dominance of male sport, sports biases applicable to the geographic location of the newspaper, and a greater focus on national and international sport. One noteworthy difference was, however, identified. In research conducted on North American and European newspapers, it was found that a greater amount of coverage was allocated to professional sports, than in the *Age*. This finding is a reflection that the professional sports systems in each of those locations emerged and prospered at a much earlier stage than in Australia.

The content analysis methodology, documented in chapter three, has provided a set of results that has allowed examination of the changing nature of sports coverage in the *Age*. Item categories were clearly defined, with the goal of maximising consistency in data collection from each sample year, and of providing a guide to future researchers attempting this type of analysis. The use of a 25 year sampling period, and the selection of 24 editions of the *Age* from each sample year, kept the data collection process to a manageable level. However, a smaller sampling period may have allowed greater depth to the analysis. For example, at some time during the 1930s, 1940s or 1950s the amount of sports coverage published by the *Age* would have reached its lowest point. A 25 year sampling period did not allow this point to be identified. While the limitations of this methodology must be noted, it should also be acknowledged that the methodology adopted enabled a representative

cross-section of sports coverage in the *Age* to be analysed, establishing both historical trends in Australian newspaper sports coverage, and a framework to guide further research.

Future avenues for research on newspaper sports coverage are numerous. This thesis has concentrated on one major Australian daily newspaper, the *Age*, over a 50 year period. Expansion of the analysis to include all of the twentieth century would be a logical next step, particularly as significant changes in Australian sport occur between 1975 and 2000, including the commercialisation of most Australian sports, a development which would be reflected in print media sports coverage. A comparative study of newspapers published in Melbourne would provide a more representative cross-section of sports coverage in the Melbourne print media, and allow comparison between the type and amount of sports reporting provided by both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. A longitudinal study of major daily newspapers from each state of Australia, using an identical methodology to examine each, would permit the historical content of newspaper sports coverage to be placed in a national perspective. At an international level, research comparing Australian newspaper sports coverage with newspapers published in other countries would help provide an understanding of what is unique in an Australian context, and reflect both common features and contrasts in the sports coverage of the selected locations.

Stacy Lorenz, in his research on the role of the mass media in creating local and national audiences for sport in Canada, suggests that the press helped to forge a

unified ‘world of sport’. This ‘world’ embraced amateur and professional sport, included teams, athletes, statistics, stories and myths, and connected readers to a community of interest composed of people who discussed, cared about, and paid attention to, the same sporting events, no matter where they lived.<sup>125</sup> Lorenz theorises that:

this world of sport can be thought of as a shared pool of information about sport – ‘information’ meaning not only news and factual data, but the entire range of ideas, attitudes, symbols, and knowledge that constitutes the common experience of sport.<sup>126</sup>

What role did the *Age* play in creating a world of sport for its readers, and how did these readers experience this world? By exploring the historical content of sports coverage provided by the *Age*, this thesis has begun to answer these questions. Further investigation of the sports coverage in the *Age*, and of print media coverage of sport in other Australian newspapers, would build on the foundation provided by this thesis, and allow a greater understanding of both the impact of the press in creating a wider sporting community, and of the print media’s effect on Australian sporting culture.

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<sup>125</sup> Lorenz, “‘A Lively Interest on the Prairies’”, p. 195, and Lorenz, “‘In the Field of Sport at Home and Abroad’”, p. 133.

<sup>126</sup> Lorenz, “‘A Lively Interest on the Prairies’”, pp. 195-196.

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