

**For 'Duty and Pleasure':
The Development of Competitive Swimming in Victoria, 1900-1908**

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Table of Contents

Abstract		iii
Declaration		iv
Acknowledgements		v
Chapter One: Sport, Swimming and Victorian Newspapers		
1.1	Organized Sport and Australian Culture	1
1.2	Sport in Victoria	4
1.3	Competitive Swimming in Australia	5
1.4	Victorian Swimming: History and Development	9
1.5	Methodology	13
Chapter Two: ‘Including Many Ladies’: The Championships of 1900		
2.1	Introduction	17
2.2	Sport in Melbourne Society	18
2.3	Swimming Carnivals Prior to 1900	22
2.4	The Australasian Championships of 1900	25
2.5	The 1900 Victorian Championship Events	26
2.6	Conclusion	31
Chapter Three: ‘The Principal Event’: The Championships of 1904		
3.1	Introduction	33
3.2	Developments After 1900	34
3.3	The 1904 Victorian Championship Events	35
3.4	The Australasian Championship Trials	41
3.5	The Australasian Championships of 1904	43
3.6	Conclusion	44
Chapter Four: ‘A New Era’: The Championships of 1908		
4.1	Introduction	46
4.2	Developments After 1904	46
4.3	The Australasian Championship Trials	49
4.4	The 1908 Victorian Championship Events	50
4.5	The Australasian Championships of 1908	55
4.6	Developments After 1908	58
4.7	Conclusion	61
Chapter Five: Conclusions		63
Bibliography		68

Abstract

The first decade of the twentieth century represents a key period of development for men's competitive swimming in Victoria. In particular, the years between 1900 and 1908 encompass the initial lack of success at national championships, and the change of social attitudes toward the sport as a result of this perceived failure. These changing attitudes, and the subsequent developments in Victorian competitive swimming, can be traced through the print media of the time. Examination of the press coverage of the Victorian and Australasian championships of 1900, 1904 and 1908 indicates a clear shift in ideology. Where national swimming carnivals had once existed as a site for social networking and spectacle, Victorians began to appreciate the need for competitive success. This was reinforced by the emergence of aquatic icons such as Barney Kieran, a New South Welshman. Kieran's feats and subsequent status established swimming as more than a pleasurable activity; in effect, it now became the duty of Victorian swimmers to produce national heroes. The embrace of this sporting duty finally ushered in a Victorian champion, Frank Beaurepaire, whose achievements in 1908 were lauded by the press and the Victorian public. As a complement to the existing literature, this investigation into the social context of competitive swimming in Victoria adds considerable depth to understandings of aquatic culture in Australia, and provides a springboard for future studies in this area.

Declaration

I, Rachel Winterton, declare that the Honours by research thesis entitled 'For "Duty and Pleasure": The Development of Competitive Swimming in Victoria, 1900-1908', 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: 13 December 2005

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Chapter One

Sport, Swimming and Victorian Newspapers

1.1 Organized Sport and Australian Culture

Historically, Australian attitudes toward sport have evolved from British ideologies that identified physical recreation as a method of moral development. The most significant of these ideologies, Muscular Christianity, promoted the moral benefits of organized team sports for Christian men. This style of recreation was perceived to contribute to moral character through sportsmanship and team cohesion, and the evolution of Muscular Christianity further reinforced the Australian love for organized physical activity.¹ Given this, a variety of sports were adapted to suit the needs of the new colony. Pursuits that required minimal equipment were prominent, and sports that could be played in conjunction with drinking and gambling also became popular. This latter association, and their connection with the public houses, played a role in establishing a bond between masculinity and sport.² However, Muscular Christianity also incorporated a certain degree of nationalistic pride, and it is this aspect which Australian men, in particular, embraced.³ Sport thus became an important part of the moral development of most Australian males, and an essential part of what it meant to be Australian. Where the ‘cult of athleticism’ had been imported from Britain, connotations attached to organized sport

¹ Wray Vamplew, ‘Muscular Christianity’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 297.

² Rob Hess and Matthew Nicholson, ‘Australia’, in David Levinson and Karen Christensen (eds), *Berkshire Encyclopedia of World Sport*, vol. 1, Berkshire Publishing Group, Great Barrington, 2005, p. 123.

³ Vamplew, ‘Muscular Christianity’, p. 297.

by early Australians soon led to a more definitive role for sport in the wider Australian culture.⁴

Australian sport has always existed as more than just a physical activity or leisure pursuit. Richard Cashman, for example, advocates that it provided the framework for a developing nation. In his view, sport played a role in establishing nationalism, in providing mass entertainment and in developing a set of character traits that were inimitably Australian. When urbanization occurred in the decades following the gold rushes, it provided community hubs around which new suburbs could base themselves. The subsequent development of suburban clubs and venues soon followed.⁵ Cashman also suggests that the patronage of these clubs by influential men, who recognized that sport played an instrumental part in an emerging culture, contributed to this development.⁶ Many historians have assessed the impact of sport on Australian culture, and even its critics seem to agree that sport provides an ideal way to ‘connect Australians, to join disparate and similar people in a shared set of values, [and] to provide a focus for group loyalties’.⁷

Australian sport has also come to be associated with egalitarianism, mateship and fairness. Geoff Lawrence and David Rowe suggest that the linkage of these qualities is, in fact, a symbol of Australian nationalism, and that international sporting success is one of

⁴ Hess and Nicholson, ‘Australia’, p. 123.

⁵ Richard Cashman, ‘The Australian Way of Sport’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, pp. 47-8.

⁶ Cashman, ‘The Australian Way of Sport’, p. 48.

⁷ Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2000, p. 3.

the most successful expressions of this nationhood. Nationalism, as defined by Lawrence and Rowe, is ‘the identification and celebration of geographically bounded social characteristics which are perceived by citizens to be desirable and virtuous’.⁸ In a similar vein, and by way of one of the earliest historical examples, Bill Mandle also claims that Australian nationalism was most clearly manifested by the triumph of its multi-class cricket team over England in the 1870s.⁹ This triumph, suggest Lawrence and Rowe, was largely due to the increasing resentment of the working class to British paternalistic rule.¹⁰

Given the importance of sport to the existing societal framework and national identity, the academic discipline of sports history remains paradoxically small. Only over the last twenty years have critical histories of sport begun to emerge. Formed in 1984, the Australian Society for Sport History (ASSH), and its academic journal, *Sporting Traditions*, have provided a critical sounding board for research in the discipline. The increasing numbers of theses being written (thereby reflecting its recent inclusion within university curriculum) have contributed to the boom in sports history.¹¹ In fact, various sports and associations have now been widely researched, prompting Cashman to suggest that new directions must now be taken. He explains that historians should begin to focus

⁸ Geoff Lawrence and David Rowe, ‘Nationalism’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 299.

⁹ Mandle, cited in John Bloomfield, *Australia’s Sporting Success: The Inside Story*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2003, p. 8.

¹⁰ Lawrence and Rowe, ‘Nationalism’, p. 300. For research on this, and other effects of sport on nationalism in Australian society, see Richard Cashman, *Paradise of Sport: The Rise of Organised Sport in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, Richard Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination: Australian Sport in the Federation Decades*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2002, Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport In Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, and T. D. Jaques and G. R. Pavia (eds), *Sport in Australia*, McGraw Hill, Sydney, 1976.

¹¹ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. vi.

on a particular period, enabling new questions to be asked and greater depth to be achieved.¹² In line with such a suggestion, this thesis will be a study of the formative period in men's competitive swimming in Victoria, and in order to establish a historical context for this period, patterns of leisure and competitive sports will be examined.

1.2 Sport in Victoria

Physical activity in Victoria, and in Melbourne, has always been prominent. It is widely recognized that the people of Melbourne have a particular passion for both watching and playing sport, dating back to the nineteenth century. This love of sport extends from the early establishment of key sporting institutions. Melbourne was settled in 1835, and three years later the Melbourne Cricket Club was formed. After an acquisition of land occurred, the club acted as an institution for a multitude of sporting activities, in particular cricket and athletics.¹³ It has been noted that the founders of this institution represented an elitist group who led Melbourne society. Their patronage of sporting activity meant that sport was established very early as a worthwhile pastime.¹⁴ The two prime examples are the fact that Flemington Racecourse was established in 1840, providing a hub for horse racing, and the groundwork for Australian Rules football was set in 1858. Football was important in the establishment of sport as a spectator pastime in Melbourne, as the first teams were based on localities. Passionate involvement in clubs not only led to fierce barracking and support at football games, but encouraged

¹² Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 7.

¹³ Rob Hess, Caroline Symons and Dennis Hemphill, 'Sporting Culture', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, p. 678.

¹⁴ Richard Cashman and Tom Hickie, 'The Divergent Sporting Cultures of Sydney and Melbourne', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 7, no. 1, November 1990, p. 32.

spectatorism more generally. Another aspect of Melbourne's love for sport is the ease in which it was accessed. Lack of congestion meant that more space was available for recreation within the inner city. The growth of suburbs meant that locally based sporting clubs emerged, fostering competition between suburbs.¹⁵ Maggie Indian's pioneering work on the formalization of urban leisure in Melbourne between 1890 and 1900 suggests that sport played a pivotal role in Melbourne society at this time. Economic depression in Melbourne prior to these years led to a disintegration of the social hierarchy, and her theory that sporting activity helped to redefine social position and identity will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter.¹⁶ Against this background, it should be noted that the general literature cited thus far reveals very little about the position of swimming as a leisure activity or as a sport. This is despite the early inception of aquatic activity in Australia, and the enjoyment it provided.

1.3 Competitive Swimming in Australia

In a country surrounded by beaches, bathing quickly became a popular pastime following European settlement in 1788. Richard Light and Tracy Rockwell, in their article detailing the cultural origins of competitive swimming in Australia, suggest a number of other factors that contributed to bathing's popularity. They claim that the evolution toward competitive swimming can be attributed to the government's concern with morality, as public displays of the naked form were synonymous with bathing practices. To prevent these displays, governments began to restrict the natural locations in which it could be

¹⁵ Hess, Symons and Hemphill, 'Sporting Culture', p. 678.

¹⁶ Maggie Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure: Melbourne 1880-1900', in Richard Cashman and Michael McKernan (eds), *Sport, Money, Morality and the Media*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, 1981, p. 272.

practiced. They also began to erect bathing enclosures, to accommodate the demand.¹⁷ Light and Rockwell also suggest it was within these enclosures that competitive swimming developed. As they explain, races could be held more readily in fixed length enclosures than on the shoreline.¹⁸

It was English swimmers who conducted the first swimming carnival in the western world in 1837, and Australia followed soon after.¹⁹ The first unofficial Australian championship was held at Robinson's baths, Sydney, in 1846.²⁰ Formal organization of swimming did not occur until the 1880s, when new pools and baths were built and clubs were established. Councils and entrepreneurs, inspired by possible financial gains, and perhaps an obsession with health and a sense of duty, oversaw this construction.²¹ Competition continued to flourish, and, in 1889, the first colonial championships were held in New South Wales. The first amateur association was established in the same colony three years later.²²

It was no coincidence that competitive swimming became popular in Australia. Thierry Terret notes that the French associated swimming with new ideas about health and

¹⁷ Richard Light and Tracy Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming in Australia', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 22, no. 1, November 2005, p. 21.

¹⁸ Light and Rockwell, 'The Cultural Origins of Competitive Swimming in Australia', p. 26.

¹⁹ 'Swimming Milestones Since 3000 BC', cited in Veronica Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912*, Australian Society for Sports History, Campbelltown, 1992, p. 38.

²⁰ Clarkson, cited in Raszeja, 'A Decent and Proper Exertion', p. 38.

²¹ Holt, cited in Douglas Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf Lifesaving', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart (eds), *Sport In Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 234.

²² Clarkson, cited in Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf Lifesaving', p. 234.

physical exercise, and the middle classes in France bathed frequently.²³ The British had also endorsed bathing as a pastime with numerous health gains.²⁴ Terret explains that pools built in England in the nineteenth century sprang from a desire to measure sporting performance, and aquatic space was standardized for this purpose.²⁵ The codification of swimming in England acted as a model for Australians, and consequently aquatic culture in general became popular. The competitive aspect to bathing that emerged within bathing enclosures provided an opportunity for the new colony to establish their own brand of nationalism. Reet Howell and Maxwell Howell suggest that colonial pride had been established and experienced through Australia's aquatic successes, as well as in other sports.²⁶

Given the popularity of swimming in Australia, different aspects of competitive swimming have been researched. Douglas Booth documents the early developments in competitive swimming through bathing and beach culture.²⁷ Cashman's *Paradise of Sport* and *Sport in the National Imagination*, and Veronica Raszeja's honours thesis on women's swimming in Sydney, outline key developments in Australian swimming that relate to both competition and spectatorship. Raszeja's thesis is considered a pioneering

²³ Thierry Terret, 'Educative Pools: Water, School and Space in Twentieth-Century France', in Patricia Vertinsky and John Bale (eds), *Sites of Sport: Space, Place, Experience*, Routledge, London, 2004, p. 43.

²⁴ Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf Lifesaving', p. 232.

²⁵ Terret, 'Educative Pools', p. 42.

²⁶ Reet Howell and Maxwell Howell, *A History of Australian Sport*, Shakespeare Head Press, Drummoyne, 1987, p. 62.

²⁷ Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf Lifesaving'. For a more detailed history, see Douglas Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand and Surf*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2001.

work in this area, and is an example of the way greater depth can be achieved in swimming historiography.²⁸

Three state associations have commissioned swimming histories detailing the early years of the sport. John Daly's South Australian history (*The Splendid Journey*), John McDonald's Victorian history (*The First 100*) and Alan Clarkson's New South Wales history (*Lanes of Gold*) all celebrate the centenaries of the state associations.²⁹ The chronological approach of each publication acknowledges the contribution of the respective associations in achieving national success. Murray Phillips' review article of these histories comments on their mutual emphasis on individual successes. With these successes and the concomitant results, records and trophies becoming the focus, the context in which these developments occurred has been overshadowed. Phillips credits *The Splendid Journey* with contextualizing developments within administration, but emphasizes the lack of context in *Lanes of Gold*, and *The First 100*.³⁰ In this light, the documentation of early Victorian swimming history can be construed as largely anecdotal and biographical in nature. In regard to club histories, there is little literature available that outlines anything other than administrative developments. A number of swimming clubs have published their histories, but they tend to cover the early years of the sport

²⁸ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, and Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*.

²⁹ J. A. Daly, *The Splendid Journey: A Centenary History of Amateur Swimming in South Australia*, South Australian Amateur Swimming Association, Adelaide, 1998; Alan Clarkson, *Lanes of Gold: 100 Years of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association*, Lester Townsend Publishing, Paddington, 1990; John McDonald, *The First 100: A Century of Swimming in Victoria*, Swimming Victoria, Melbourne, 1993.

³⁰ M. G. Phillips, 'Public Sports History, History and Social Memory: (Re)presenting Swimming in Australia', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 15, no. 1, November 1998, pp. 97-8.

only briefly.³¹ The exception to this rule is the Surrey Park history, *Fog on the Dive*. In this case, Gerard O'Donnell gives a good insight into the societal developments in the club after 1905, a feature which helps to illuminate other aspects of Victorian swimming. In terms of biographies, a number of works exist that detail careers of early champion swimmers. Barney Kieran and Frank Beaurepaire are two of the earliest swimmers to attract scholarly attention, with Kieran the subject of both a biography and subsequent paper.³² John Lucas' article on Annette Kellerman and Emily Gibson's more substantive biography on Kellerman can also be included in this category.³³ Brief sections on these swimmers are also contained in respective state histories. However, Gary Osmond bemoans the lack of autobiographical books on early Australian swimmers. He notes that autobiographies on the three aforementioned swimmers would have been invaluable, as they would have yielded anecdotes and memories that no researcher will ever find.³⁴ This alone indicates the importance of autobiography and biography to historical analysis.

1.4 Victorian Swimming: History and Development

Competitive swimming in Victoria has a long history, and unofficial competitions took place before governing bodies were established. In 1861 the unofficial 'Champions Cup

³¹ Gerard O'Donnell, *Fog on the Dive: 100 Years of the Surrey Park Swimming Club*, self-published, Surrey Park, 2004; Albert Smith and Rosemary Cullinan, *From the Creek to the Dome: Lilydale Swimming Club 1903-2003*, Lilydale Swimming and Lifesaving Club, Lilydale, 2003. These histories are the only two that encompass the early years of Victorian competitive swimming. Other available histories refer to a later period.

³² L. J. Fromholtz, *The Sobraon Wonder: Biography of B. B. Kieran*, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, 1991; Graham Lomas, *The Will to Win: The Story of Sir Frank Beaurepaire*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1960; John Ramsland, 'Barney Kieran, The Legendary 'Sobraon Boy': From the Mean Streets to 'Champion Swimmer of the World', presented at the ASSH Sporting Traditions Conference, Sydney, 3-7 July 2003, no pagination.

³³ John Lucas, 'Making a Statement: Annette Kellerman Advances the Worlds of Swimming, Diving and Entertainment', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1998, pp. 25-35; Emily Gibson, *The Original Million Dollar Mermaid: The Annette Kellerman Story*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2005.

³⁴ Gary Osmond, 'Shimmering Waters: Swimming, Autobiography and Social Memory', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 20, no. 1, November 2003, p. 66.

of Victoria' held a monetary value of £30. For this prize, the NSW champion Bennett defeated the Victorian champion Stevens over 200 yards at St Kilda.³⁵ In regard to early Victorian swimming, *The First 100* contains similar information to the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association (VASA) history, published in 1969.³⁶ This latter work is slightly more detailed regarding early competitions and championships, although both histories document that the first swimming club in Victoria was the South Melbourne club, which was established in 1876. South Melbourne held the first documented swimming carnival in the colony in 1877. Thirteen events were held, including an 880 yard 'Grand Champion Race'. Various other clubs were formed over the next few years, and the governing body of Victorian swimming, the Victorian Swimming Association (VSA) was formed in 1893. Four clubs, namely Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, Middle Park and St Kilda, were affiliated in this year. The St Kilda club held the first carnival under the patronage of the VSA in December 1893, at Hegarty's Baths. Two more carnivals were held by the VSA, before their name change to the Victorian Amateur Swimming Association (VASA) in 1894.³⁷ Neither McDonald nor Belfrage allude to the circumstances behind this change.

The summer of 1895/96 saw the birth of the Victorian championships. To stimulate interest in the first championships, the Melbourne Swimming Club offered to present two perpetual shields, valued at 20 guineas each. These shields were for the 440 and 880 yard championships, but only on the proviso that the quarter and half mile titles were

³⁵ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 50.

³⁶ H. E. Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association: Brief History, 1893-1968*, self-published, Melbourne, 1969, no pagination.

³⁷ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

permanently granted to the Melbourne club matches. Middle Park provided a shield for the 100 yard title, also on the proviso that the championship was granted to the club for at least five years. Three events, namely the 100, 440 and 880 yard titles, were contested at the first Victorian championships. A Victorian won the 100 yards race but Percy Cavill, visiting from New South Wales, won the remaining events.³⁸

Despite the first Victorian championships occurring in 1895-96, McDonald states that 1908 was the turning point in Victorian swimming. In this year, a Victorian won their first Australasian title, and the state won the inaugural shield for the state amassing the most championship wins.³⁹ However, this journey to prestige and glory was not rapid. In 1900, the first Victorian representative attended the Australasian titles, demonstrating that it took Victoria eight years to win a national championship. Within these eight years, there is a dearth of information on the events that occurred within the association, or within the sport, to prompt this change. The results of each year are documented in secondary sources, and the competitors are known. The winner of each Victorian championship, and their time, has been included in the centenary history. Yet nothing is included in this work on the relative interest in Victorian swimming success, both colonially and intercolonially. No indication is given whether their initial lack of success was bemoaned, or simply accepted. The suggestion that winning an Australasian title was the turning point suggests that success was yearned for. Why, then, were Victorian swimmers not successful until 1908? Was it a lack of resources, funding or societal support, or other extraneous factors?

³⁸ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

³⁹ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 16.

From the literature, and the evidence put forward in centenary histories, the formative period in Victorian men's competitive swimming can be established as being between 1900 and 1908. The first Victorian sent to the Australasian championships in 1900 was unsuccessful, and this lack of success continued through to 1908 when Frank Beaurepaire won Victoria's first interstate championship. The broader question to be answered is, what circumstances changed in this eight-year period to prompt such a turnaround? This query is not addressed in any of the literature, and Swimming Victoria, the state governing body, holds no archival material from these years. The dearth of information from this period thus prompts a review of the print media of the time.

Given the reliability of newspapers as a primary source, the perceived media interest in Victorian swimming must be established. According to Richard Cashman, print newspapers played a significant role in promoting sport in this period. Their columns interpreted information about an increasing number of sporting events. This interpretation invested sports with a 'greater meaning and moral worth'.⁴⁰ Robin Grow's article on nineteenth century football and the Melbourne press also contains some insight into the emphasis of sport in media at this time. He explains that coverage of football was confined to three sections of the press, namely metropolitan, local/suburban and the specialist sporting media. He also notes that papers of a specialist, non-sporting nature

⁴⁰ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 207.

sometimes reported football, but related it to their specific field.⁴¹ Also duly noted is that at this time, football challenged the other existing sports for coverage.⁴²

Given this information, it was initially uncertain whether swimming would feature or rate highly in late nineteenth century newspapers. However, examination of a variety of Melbourne newspapers (inclusive of the metropolitan and specialist sporting and non-sporting press) indicates a solid, and consistent following of the sport. The initial interest of the press ranged from purely statistical, to erratic and inconsistent, to commentary based and alternatively to no coverage at all. As Raszeja notes, it would seem that the majority of the press were largely responsive to public interest in this new spectator sport.⁴³ The coverage that exists thus serves to provide a great deal of insight into the existing parameters of the sport. One aspect of coverage commonly reported in all of the above newspapers was that of the Victorian championships. Through the reporting of events and differing press opinions, a more complex narrative emerges from behind the documented times and records.

1.5 Methodology

As noted above, the newspapers of this time can be considered to be an excellent source of information regarding developments in this period. Therefore, the logical question is, how can such primary sources be used to recreate a detailed history of competitive swimming? As forementioned, championships were regular events in the Victorian

⁴¹ Robin Grow, 'Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 3, no. 1, November 1986, p. 23.

⁴² Grow, 'Nineteenth Century Football and the Melbourne Press', p. 24.

⁴³ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 40.

swimming season. These events were the pinnacle of Victorian competition, and the results of Victorian swimmers at the Australasian championships (also held yearly) were a good gauge of intercolonial success. It is through an examination of the press coverage of these events in this formative period, that a historical narrative can be constructed. This narrative will encompass the issues and events that hindered, or furthered, the cause of Victorian competitive swimming through these years.

To gain a thorough representation of these events, a number of different newspapers have been consulted. In keeping with Grow's findings, the newspapers that covered sport in this period reflected a number of differing reporting styles. With this in mind, samples from the three categories of newspapers noted by Grow have been consulted. To this end, two daily metropolitan newspapers (the *Age* and the *Argus*), two specialist sporting newspapers (the *Sporting Judge* and the *Melbourne Sportsman*) and two specialist non-sporting newspapers (*Melbourne Punch* and the *Weekly Times*) have been investigated.⁴⁴ Coverage of the official swimming season (between January and early April each year) contains sufficient scope for analysis, as both the Victorian and Australasian championships took place in this period. However, given the somewhat limited scope of the project, it is impossible to look at each year in its entirety. Matthew Healy, in his 2002 Masters thesis, is one scholar who successfully used the so-called 'slice' approach in his analysis of a lengthy period of history. This method advocates the use of key periods or years, as identified by the literature, to construct a history. In his study, Healy identified a number of studies that also adopted this method, most noticeably the

⁴⁴ Given that the *Melbourne Sportsman* ceased publication in 1904, this newspaper has not been consulted in 1908.

Bicentennial History Project.⁴⁵ Subsequently, for this study, the press coverage of the swimming seasons of 1900, 1904 and 1908 will be examined. The year 1900 was the first time Victoria participated in the Australasian championships, and 1908 was the year they first won an Australasian title. The year 1904, as the mid-point between the two other years, is examined for comparative purposes. Consequently, a chapter will be devoted to each year of coverage examined. The statistical histories will be related, inclusive of winners and times. However, the primary emphasis will be on the quality of press coverage and the relative status afforded to competitive swimming. Issues raised in the coverage of these events will be looked at in the context of their influence on Victorian swimming success. The definition of success, for the purpose of this thesis, will be categorized as performance and results at the Australasian championships.

While this thesis is expected to contribute to the existing research on swimming in Australia, it is intended to build on those swimming histories available. Raszeja's thesis examines a similar time period in New South Wales, and expands on the research contained in Clarkson's centenary history. It is impossible for great depth to be achieved in a history such as Clarkson's, as it incorporates more than 100 years of development and change. Raszeja has identified an area of importance within this history and expanded upon it. Her analysis of the context behind the development of women's swimming has recreated a history that goes beyond the results and times of women's races. Similarly, in researching the context behind the early developments in Victorian men's competitive swimming, this thesis will create a narrative that will not only

⁴⁵ Matthew Healy, 'Hard Sell: Australian Football in Sydney', Master of Arts thesis, School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance, Victoria University of Technology, 2002, pp. 3-4.

complement the existing Victorian histories, but add considerable depth to a broader understanding of aquatic culture in Australia.

Chapter Two

'Including Many Ladies': The Championships of 1900

2.1 Introduction

Social and economic changes that evolved in the decades before 1900 were to shape the way Victorians perceived competitive swimming. Prior to Victorian representation at the Australasian championships, the competitive component of this event on the sporting calendar was understated. Swimming carnivals appeared to exist as a pleasurable afternoon's entertainment with an unspoken focus on social cohesion, networking and opportunity. Economic events of the previous decade had facilitated this focus by altering the status of Melbourne's social classes. According to Graeme Davison, in the midst of the land boom (and afterwards), money had been the gauge of social standing in Melbourne.⁴⁶ The majority of Melburnians who had climbed to upper or middle class standing, through money earned in the land boom, had lost their riches in the economic collapse. The result of this was a great number of 'disenfranchised' citizens, who needed to regain or demonstrate their class status in alternate forms whilst the economy recovered. Sporting competitions were events that involved social interaction, and as Indian states, they were 'a chance to display, discreetly and for an acceptable reason ... a new or revived social status'.⁴⁷ However, these subconscious attitudes toward sport, and swimming carnivals, were not detrimental to the cause of Victorian swimming. To understand this dominant recreational attitude toward the Victorian swimming

⁴⁶ Graeme Davison, 'Class', in Andrew Brown-May and Shurlee Swain (eds), *Encyclopedia of Melbourne*, Cambridge University Press, Port Melbourne, 2005, p. 143.

⁴⁷ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 284.

championships, and the effect of this on the representation of Victorian swimming, the context in which these aquatic events developed must be considered.

2.2 Sport in Melbourne Society

There are a number of factors extraneous to swimming and sport in general that affected the way Melburnians perceived and enjoyed sport. This is especially the case in terms of participation rates. Economic circumstances impacted upon urban life in Melbourne prior to 1900. Among other things, these circumstances established a breeding ground for sports such as competitive swimming. Geoffrey Blainey suggests that the population boom of the 1880s had impacted positively upon Melbourne's urbanization, but it could not last. The limit of houses and shops that could be built had been reached. With this revelation, a number of issues began to arise. According to Blainey, Melbourne had been too reliant on British capital, and too many costly public works had been undertaken. There were too many imports and too many exports, and too much borrowing and speculating. The standard of living in Melbourne had depended on heavy borrowing, and the time to pay the debts had arrived. The flow of British capital had decreased and the price of exports had fallen.⁴⁸ Blainey goes on to explain that the increased pressure on the economy prompted the failure of small land banks and building societies. Unemployment began to impact on society, as building companies and laborers bankrupted, with no houses left to be built. Melburnians began to flock to the banks to claim their money, and the banks could not respond to the demand. In 1893, the

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *Our Side of the Country: The Story of Victoria*, Methuen Haynes, North Ryde, 1984, p. 139.

Melbourne financial system collapsed.⁴⁹ The result of this was a further net population decrease of approximately 50,000, further unemployment and empty houses.⁵⁰ By 1900, Melbourne (and the other colonies affected) had recovered from the depression, but all colonies experienced stagnant immigration in comparison to Sydney, whose population was increasing.⁵¹

Despite these economic difficulties, sport did not seem to be adversely affected, although the effects of the depression did lead to some changes that had implications for sport and leisure. Richard Twopeny, a visitor to Australia in the late nineteenth century, observed that Melburnians had a propensity for leisure, with public amusements always well attended.⁵² To accommodate this demand, money was spent on public works such as ovals, racetracks and swimming pools.⁵³ Rising incomes once more led to a greater expendable income for sporting activity, and the slow increase in population meant more potential customers. The urbanization that followed presented concentrated markets to which sport could be exposed.⁵⁴ However, one detrimental result of the depression, or more specifically the social constraints associated with this period, was the emergence of the Melbourne 'wowsers'. According to those Melburnians who promoted the pursuit of pleasure as part of a value system, it was the 'wowsers' who sought to reform the morals of others. As a result of the influence of wowsers, legal controls on forms of public

⁴⁹ Blainey, *Our Side of the Country*, pp. 139-140.

⁵⁰ Donald Horne, *The Australian People: Biography of a Nation*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1972, pp. 124-25.

⁵¹ Horne, *The Australian People*, p. 126.

⁵² R. E. N. Twopeny, *Town Life in Australia*, Elliot Stock, London, 1883, p. 3.

⁵³ Richard Cashman (ed.), *Australian Sport Through Time: The History of Sport in Australia*, Random House, Sydney, 1997, p. 14.

⁵⁴ Daryl Adair and Wray Vamplew, *Sport in Australian History*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 24.

leisure were introduced, and theatre, dancing and bathing were among the activities condemned.⁵⁵ However, as Robert Kossuth has noted in his study on Canadian bathing practices, ‘concerns over the morality of bathing in public outweighed the purported health benefits provided by the activity’.⁵⁶ As in this example, sport and leisure remained powerful activities. They offered entertainment, helped to develop social relationships and contributed to the economy by means of employment and investment.⁵⁷

By 1900, Melbourne was experiencing a greater rigidity to social life and activity. This change paved the way for the growth of mass spectator sport. Most sports in Melbourne, were now codified, controlled and occupied a defined and regular time period.⁵⁸ Indian suggests that spectator sports had an added attraction, as a chance was provided to display a new or revived social status. Once the worst of the Melbourne depression was over, the process whereby social position could be established was also of importance. This could be done in an acceptable fashion through involvement in more social sporting activities, and through this it was possible for people to re-define themselves and their social position, which may have been affected by the crash. Indian goes on to state that clubs that were established in the late 1890s tended to be formed by small interest groups, and had a limited base for recruitment. Their small status and social prominence indicates this need for social definition. The clubs themselves tended to focus on individual rather

⁵⁵ Patricia Grimshaw and Peter Sherlock, ‘Wowser’, in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart MacIntyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Revised Edition), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001, p. 701.

⁵⁶ R. S. Kossuth, ‘Dangerous Waters: Victorian Decorum, Swimmers Safety, and the Establishment of Public Bathing Facilities in London (Canada)’, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 22, no. 5, September 2005, p. 800.

⁵⁷ Wray Vamplew and Daryl Adair, ‘Sport and Leisure’, in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart MacIntyre (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Revised Edition), Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001, p. 607.

⁵⁸ Indian, ‘Formalisation of Urban Leisure’, p. 272.

than team sports and special skills or equipment were generally required. The more successful clubs tended to be based on a social, participatory principle rather than a competitive one.⁵⁹ Therefore Melburnians preferred to participate in these sorts of sport (bowls, tennis, cycling), while competitive sport drew spectators but did not enjoy high participation rates. Spectator sport was appealing to Melburnians, as the climate favored outdoor activity and there was an abundance of cheap land for sports fields. The abundance of single young men and their propensity for leisure pursuits also helped to draw spectators in large numbers.⁶⁰

Daly suggests that the popularity of sport in this period can also be attributed to the democratization of sport that occurred in the 1880s.⁶¹ The gentry, known as the 'leisured class' due to their abundance of spare time, had previously held something of a monopoly on sport. Their involvement in sporting pursuits was intended to display status and social position. The lower classes initially lacked the time and money to participate in these sports, but tolerated the gentry's activities.⁶² With a general increase in leisure time, though, sport was no longer an activity for just the gentry only. However, the gentry's status was reinforced by their 'paternalistic' interest in lower class activities, and their patronage of such pursuits.⁶³ The role of sport in defining social position can be seen to manifest itself within Victorian swimming carnivals.

⁵⁹ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', pp. 283-84.

⁶⁰ Blainey, *Our Side of the Country*, p. 81.

⁶¹ J. A. Daly, *Elysian Fields: Sport, Class and Community in Colonial South Australia, 1836-1890*, John A. Daly, Adelaide, 1982, p. 110.

⁶² Daly, *Elysian Fields*, pp. 179-181.

⁶³ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 110.

2.3 Swimming Carnivals Prior to 1900

Though Victorian swimming at this time was competitive, the matches held were socially based. Organizers attempted to draw crowds to carnivals through trick and novelty swimming, diving and other feats.⁶⁴ As an individual sport that was not open to the vast majority of the public (as very few could swim), there was a more dedicated spectator base. The rules were simple to understand, violence was non-existent, and entertainment values were high.⁶⁵ Most swimming matches were held on Saturday afternoons to cater for the structured leisure period (though more affluent clubs could afford to hold their competitions mid week, as the social elite did not usually work). So, where the middle classes were catered for in this respect, it was purely out of a need for spectators. Other restrictions prevented them from competing. Swimming clubs early in the twentieth century were exclusive, masculine organizations. Many clubs formed in this time period were considered ‘gentlemen’s clubs’. Their members consisted of the socially elite, such as doctors, lawyers, tradesmen and local councillors. Given this situation, club activities received favorable exposure in the press and were often endorsed by local councils.⁶⁶

Another restriction on the participation of the middle and lower classes, and perhaps the most influential, was the entry fee charged to race. Entry fees were steep to those who earned small wages, and were on a sliding scale according to the distance. Where a 50 yard race cost a shilling to enter, the 880 yard race cost five shillings.⁶⁷ This example of the subtle exclusion of the middle and lower classes is conducive to Indian’s theory that

⁶⁴ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, p. 51.

⁶⁵ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 53.

⁶⁶ O’Donnell, *Fog on the Dive*, p. 18.

⁶⁷ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

sporting clubs formed in the late 1890s became a mechanism by which social identity could be re-established.⁶⁸ Within this scenario, competitive swimming in Melbourne was very much an upper to middle class sport. The carnivals staged provided an arena in which the upper classes could prove their superiority by means of not only their paternalistic attitudes, but by their organizational control of the sport.

According to Daly, the Adelaide gentry had lent their support to competitive swimming, pronouncing it a healthy and worthwhile activity when performed in the proper environment (indoor baths) and under English amateur rules.⁶⁹ It is almost certain that the upper and middle classes of Melbourne shared this view of the efficacy of amateurism. The belief of nineteenth century Britons (and therefore many Australians) was that playing sport for money was unacceptable. Sport was considered a leisure and recreation activity, and it was believed that any financial reward would threaten the code of sportsmanship that made the matches worth participating in.⁷⁰ Murray Phillips suggests that swimming was a sport that developed in conjunction with the ideology of amateurism. Amateur and professional swimmers had always competed together, but prior to 1901, numerous clubs restricted their membership to amateurs. Again, this was a significant restriction on the lower classes, as their sporting prowess was often used to supplement their income.⁷¹ The paternalistic interest of the upper and middle classes in patronizing only morally correct sporting activity was instrumental in this shift. June Senyard suggests that in this period, the amateur was the gentleman, as only the

⁶⁸ Indian, 'Formalisation of Urban Leisure', p. 284.

⁶⁹ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Daly, *The Splendid Journey*, p. 21.

⁷¹ Murray Phillips, *From Sidelines to Centre Field: A History of Sports Coaching in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2000, p. 16.

‘unmanly’ mixed money with sport.⁷² This attitude ensured that most swimming matches held were strictly amateur, including the Victorian and Australasian championship events.

By 1900, the Victorian championships were an established fixture in the swimming season. Four events were contested, namely the 100, 220, 440 and 880 yard events, at a variety of different venues. More than ten swimming clubs were affiliated with VASA, and all contested the titles. Key swimmers such as T. Maynard and A. Pearson had begun to make their mark at these championships, mainly because they had learned to use the newly developed trudgeon stroke to full advantage. When the New South Wales amateur association suggested an agreement for the conduct of Australasian championships in the 1899/1900 season, VASA readily agreed.⁷³ Despite the public’s indifference toward the competitive aspect of swimming, VASA and its supporters were keen to broaden their horizons. Although the Australasian swimming championships had been held since 1894, they were based on an agreement between New South Wales and New Zealand only. In this 1899/1900 season, Victoria as well as Queensland were admitted to this agreement (Western Australia would be added in 1904).⁷⁴ The stipulations were simple - no more than three competitors from each colony were permitted, and the colony amassing the largest number of points was declared the victor. It was decided that no entrance fee should be charged to spectators and if profits were gained, they were to be retained by the

⁷² June Senyard, ‘From Gentleman to the Manly: A Large Step for the Amateur’, *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 18, no. 2, May 2002, p. 1.

⁷³ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

⁷⁴ Anthony Hughes, ‘Sporting Federations: The Impact of Federation on Sports Governance’, in Richard Cashman, John O’Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, p. 131.

host colony.⁷⁵ With these new arrangements, the coming season was viewed with excitement and anticipation.

2.4 The Australasian Championships of 1900

T. Maynard of the Geelong West club was the sole competitor for Victoria in the 1900 Australian championships. Maynard was well qualified for the responsibility, holding the Victorian half mile title from 1898 to 1900 and the quarter mile title in 1898/1899.⁷⁶ His trip to Sydney to compete in the championships was met with approval by the association, and at the annual VASA meeting, the delegate Pearson moved that ‘... all arrangements made in connection with T. Maynard’s trip to Sydney to compete in the championships, and which had been carried out without the knowledge of the Association, be approved of.’⁷⁷ The Melbourne press harboured great hopes for the Victorian. ‘Overarm’, the swimming writer for the *Weekly Times*, proclaimed that:

T. Maynard, the Victorian champion, who has gone to Sydney to compete in the Australasian championships, is in excellent form, and as he has been making far better times than he has ever put up before, I expect to hear of him carrying off a few of the honors on behalf of Victoria.⁷⁸

Despite this prediction, the New South Wales swimmers remained dominant. On 6 January, W. Bishop won the 100 yards Australasian swimming title. On 8 January, Dick Cavill won the one mile Australasian championship. On 10 January, he won the quarter

⁷⁵ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

⁷⁶ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

⁷⁸ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

mile and the half mile titles.⁷⁹ Maynard failed to make the final of the quarter mile event, with the *Argus* stating simply that ‘... the Victorian representative was defeated in his heat’. However, it was also divulged that ‘the final provided a very fine contest, in fact the best ever seen in Sydney’.⁸⁰ In the half mile event, Maynard qualified for the final and competed against the best swimmers in Cavill and W. H. Bond. The Victorian finished fifth from the five starters, in a race that failed to challenge the world record held by Freddie Lane. The *Age* reports that, in fact, he did not finish the race at all, but in principle was awarded the placing. Coupled with the fourth place gained in the mile event earlier in the week, it was not a good showing for the Victorian.⁸¹ Maynard’s disappointing results, when he had been expected to triumph, did not take long to filter back to the press. In keeping with his expectations, ‘Overarm’ from the *Weekly Times* declared that he was ‘rather disappointed at the poor show the Victorian representative made in this race. When he left here he was in the pink of condition.’⁸²

2.5 The 1900 Victorian Championship Events

For the Melbourne press, the Victorian championship races proved infinitely more newsworthy. This was due to the impending visit of a champion swimmer. The *Age* confirmed on 6 January that W. H. Bond, the half-mile champion of NSW, would compete at the Victorian quarter mile event at St Kilda later that month on 27 January.⁸³

Given that this meet had been due to be held on 13 January, and postponed on account of

⁷⁹ Cashman, *Australian Sport Through Time*, p. 112. For detailed information on the Cavill family see Veronica Raszeja, ‘Cavill Family’, in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O’Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 92.

⁸⁰ ‘Late Sporting News’, *Argus*, 11 January 1900, p. 6.

⁸¹ ‘The Quarter Mile Swimming Championship of Australasia’, *Age*, 11 January 1900, p. 9.

⁸² ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 20 January 1900, p. 14.

⁸³ ‘Swimming Championships’, *Age*, 6 January 1900, p. 11.

the governor's absence, the delay only served to increase public interest.⁸⁴ The *Age*, the *Argus* and the *Weekly Times* provoked this interest by advertising the event. To encourage attendance, it was promoted primarily as a ladies' day, with the quarter mile event added as an afterthought. As the *Weekly Times* noted:

The Melbourne Swimming Club holds a ladies day at Hegarty's St Kilda Baths today (Saturday). The entries, which closed on Saturday last, are very numerous, and an excellent programme of races will be put forward. The principal event of the afternoon will be the Quarter Mile Championship of Victoria, and as our best swimmers have entered for the event a splendid race should result. The programme also included several novelties and farces.⁸⁵

The drawcard was Bond, 'the Sydney crack', with the implication that it would be thrilling to see a swimmer better than their own.⁸⁶ It was expected that he would triumph, being the sole representative of the good name the Sydneysiders had established for themselves as swimmers.

As expected, the Melbourne club carnival was a tremendous success. Approximately 900 people attended, with this record attendance 'including many ladies'.⁸⁷ In keeping with the carnival theme, diving, blindfold events, costume competitions and bandbox races were held. In the principal event, Bond was triumphant over Maynard, with the South Melbourne competitor Coutie unable to finish. The *Argus* reported that '... all got away together, and from the first Bond, who relies on the trudgeon stroke to pull him through, maintained a short lead, which he increased as the race proceeded, and won easily by

⁸⁴ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 13 January 1900, p. 19.

⁸⁵ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 27 January 1900, p. 19.

⁸⁶ 'Melbourne S. C.', *Argus*, 27 January 1900, p. 11.

⁸⁷ 'Melbourne Swimming Club', *Argus*, 19 January 1900, p. 9.

about 40yds from Maynard.⁸⁸ The *Weekly Times* revelled in Bond's talent for using the trudgeon stroke. Their writer related that after the race, Bond declared that 'he was feeling nearly as fresh as when he started'. Upon reflection, 'Overarm' remarked, 'Bond's trudgeon stroke was a revelation to many, and the sooner our men properly acquire the style the sooner they will be able to tackle our Sydney friends with a reasonable hope of success'.⁸⁹

It is noted that this event was covered in reasonable detail in *Melbourne Punch*. Covered rather for its social aspects than any sporting relevance, the event was listed in the 'Gossip' section of the women's social pages. The ladies' days hosted by swimming clubs held a significant position in the Melbourne social calendar at this time, with one being hosted virtually every Saturday afternoon. In typical fashion, the ladies' day itself took precedence over the 'chief natatorial event' and was deemed by *Melbourne Punch* to have been 'a success from every point of view'. However, *Melbourne Punch* touched on an issue that was deemed of great importance by clubs at this time - attendance. Senyard notes that many journalists regarded the size of the crowds attending sporting events as 'more significant than the outcome of play'.⁹⁰ In this case, the *Melbourne Punch* writer marvelled at 'nearly a thousand persons being present, a fact that speaks volumes for the increasing interest taken in swimming contests'.⁹¹ This highlights that where hosting championship events in conjunction with ladies' days may have appeared to undermine the event, it provided a ready audience toward which the sport could be exposed. Ladies'

⁸⁸ 'Melbourne Swimming Club', *Argus*, 19 January 1900, p. 9.

⁸⁹ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 2 February 1900, p. 19.

⁹⁰ Senyard, 'From Gentleman to the Manly', p. 5.

⁹¹ 'Gossip', *Melbourne Punch*, 1 February 1900, p. 115.

day events were listed in the social section of *Melbourne Punch* as readily as garden parties and mayoral events. Given the gubernatorial connection with swimming events - the Victorian governor, Lord Brassey, and his wife, attended a great number of these events - they were no less prestigious. Melbourne sporting clubs coveted vice regal patronage for this reason, with Lord and Lady Brassey also regular fixtures at cycling races and football matches.⁹² Swimming clubs generally consisted of a prestigious member base, so these events were also considered a good opportunity for social networking.

After Bond's triumph, the rest of the championships proceeded without much media attention at all. In fact, other swimming events took precedence with state school championships and regional matches covered regularly and in detail. The 220 yard event was held at Ballarat on 16 February as the feature in a full program. In typical fashion, the *Weekly Times* noted that the program was excellent and the attendance large. Very little was noted from the race apart from the competitors and the results. Maynard and A. J. Pearson were the sole competitors, and 'after a hard tussle, Maynard secured the verdict by a head'. The more detailed commentary was reserved for events with a greater public interest, such as the relay events.⁹³ It is significant that the 200 yard championship received the same amount of coverage as the Learner's handicap, life-saving competition and the state schools' team race.⁹⁴ However, coverage of school sport in newspapers was prominent in Melbourne newspapers. Public school sporting contests in Melbourne did

⁹² Rob Hess, 'A Mania For Bicycles: The Impact of Cycling on Australian Rules Football', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 14, no. 2, May 1998, p. 6.

⁹³ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 24 February 1900, p. 19.

⁹⁴ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 17 February 1900, p. 15.

not draw huge crowds, but were of great public interest.⁹⁵ This was attributed to the role school sport played in the construction of manliness. At the turn of the century, notions of masculinity served the nationalistic purpose of defending the country. However, a shift in later years would see the public interest centered on the nationalistic aim of producing sporting heroes.⁹⁶

If events were of a particular public interest, minute coverage would be added, but results took precedence. As a result, most of the press coverage of swimming in 1900 consisted of placegetters and times. In some cases, a section of the column would be devoted to publicizing the next event of public interest, primarily Ladies' Days. If these coincided with a championship event, this would gain coverage also. The *Weekly Times* demonstrates this as follows:

The fixture for today (Saturday) is the second ladies day of the Melbourne club, to be held at Hegarty's St Kilda baths. The entries, which closed on Tuesday show that most of our best swimmers intend competing for the several events, amongst which are the Half-mile championship, Ladies' Bracelet, girls' races, Members' Handicap, farces, etc.⁹⁷

The *Age* were particularly interested in publicizing Victorian championship events, but not in covering the actual event. For reasons that are uncertain, their coverage of swimming was restricted to state school swimming events, women's competitions and interstate events. This is in contrast to the *Weekly Times*, who had a dedicated swimming writer each week and fixtures for the season included in the column. The *Melbourne*

⁹⁵ Martin Crotty, 'Manly and Moral: The Making of Middle-Class Men in the Australian Public School', in J. A. Mangan and John Nauright (eds), *Sport and Australasian Society: Past and Present*, Frank Cass Publishers, London, 2000, p. 11. For discussion of sport and masculinity at Melbourne University, see J. E. Senyard, *The Ties That Bind: A History of Sport at the University of Melbourne*, Walla Walla Press, Petersham, 2004, pp. 34-36.

⁹⁶ Crotty, 'Manly and Moral', p. 20.

⁹⁷ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 24 February 1900, p. 19.

Punch, a publication dedicated to social news, would cover swimming competitions whereas the *Sporting Judge* would not.

2.6 Conclusion

The Victorian championships of 1900 fulfilled their colonial ‘duty’, in that they provided an opportunity for social networking between the affected middle and upper classes. The prestigious member bases of most clubs offered an opportunity for new social groups to be constructed, and for new social networks to be created. The ladies’ day thematic approach attracted many spectators, and indulged the love of spectacular entertainment so prominent at this time.⁹⁸ While this emphasis on the social aspects of the championships appeared to undermine the competitive events, it was beneficial in terms of press coverage. The social perspective allowed the sport to be exposed to audiences outside the sporting and daily media. *Melbourne Punch* covered Ladies’ Day events as a matter of social duty, but the lack of coverage by the *Sporting Judge* supports the lack of appreciation for swimming as an actual sport. The tendency of the press to publicize and report events also boosted awareness, with commentary of the championship each week promoting the sporting contests. In regard to sporting success, the press had held the view that the Victorian swimmer would triumph intercolonially. The realization that their swimmers were not as successful as they imagined proved a rude awakening. To defend their often glowing claims, the press began to critique the newly formed association and their swimmers. Their findings, among them the view that there was a distinct lack of organization and stroke evolution, established a basis for improvement that could be acted upon. Coverage was negative, but the focus was on the competitive aspects. This

⁹⁸ Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion*, p. 39.

contributed to the perception of swimming as sport, not spectacle. It was the failure of the first Victorian representative that began to shift the focus of swimming toward sport, as the visit of Bond to Melbourne had shown that swimming could be more than just entertainment. Aquatics would eventually prove an area by which Victoria established itself as a state of some sporting significance.

Chapter Three

‘The Principal Event’: The Championships of 1904

3.1 Introduction

It is generally accepted that more hours became available for sport and leisure pursuits after 1900, impacting positively on competitive swimming in Victoria. With the social opportunities of championship carnivals established by the press, their coverage was often extended to include explicit commentary on the sporting element of these events. Such coverage was still a developing aspect, and one that could potentially contain public interest. With this increased support, 1904 saw a shift from anecdotal reporting to a more descriptive form. In effect, the perception of swimming as a genuine sport gave it greater opportunities for press representation, particularly in the metropolitan and sporting press.

The occurrence of Federation in 1901 may also have had some impact on sport in the following years. John O’Hara states that Federation ‘had an impact on attitudes, behaviours and imaginings of sportspeople and their organizations by gradually forcing them to reinterpret their sense of Australianness’.⁹⁹ He then goes on to suggest that Federation’s contribution to this sense of nationhood was particularly great, especially in terms of international performance.¹⁰⁰ Federation increased the scope and potential of the ‘imaginary grandstand’,¹⁰¹ and possibly created a greater need for international sporting

⁹⁹ John O’Hara, ‘Conclusions’, in Richard Cashman, John O’Hara and Andrew Honey (eds), *Sport, Federation, Nation*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2001, p. 185.

¹⁰⁰ O’Hara, ‘Conclusions’, p. 187.

¹⁰¹ Graeme Davison first used this phrase in reference to nations performing for, and in front of, other nations. For further clarification, see Graeme Davison, ‘The Imaginary Grandstand: International Sport and the Recognition of Australian Identity’, in Bernard Whimpress (ed.), *The Imaginary Grandstand: Identity*

success. Where sport had always joined the colonies as a nation in terms of international competition, this unification had now become 'official' in the eyes of the world. Therefore, the need for national sporting icons was as great, if not greater, than before Federation. Victoria's desire to produce a swimming icon was no less muted.

3.2 Developments After 1900

In 1904, VASA reached its tenth birthday with fewer than 300 members affiliated.¹⁰² This was not entirely due to a lack of popularity, as being able to swim was still regarded as a novelty. Very few inland swimming venues existed in Melbourne, and beach bathing was permitted only in daylight hours. Given this, any demonstrations of this art still attracted large numbers of curious spectators. In order to encourage attendance, most large competitions liked to boast feature demonstrations from interstate or overseas swimmers, and the newspapers used these to create interest.¹⁰³ A notable example is Annette Kellerman, whose aquatic feats were instrumental in promoting swimming carnivals in Melbourne. The Sydney-born champion swimmer moved to Melbourne after setting numerous New South Wales records in 1902. Upon her arrival, she gave swimming and diving exhibitions at a number of carnivals.¹⁰⁴ These feats contributed to the novelty theme of these carnivals, but also drew spectators to watch the events.

and Narrative in Australian Sport, Australian Society for Sports History, Kent Town, 2002, pp. 12-26. Alternatively, see Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, pp. 103-153.

¹⁰² O'Donnell, *Fog on the Dive*, p. 16.

¹⁰³ O'Donnell, *Fog on the Dive*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁴ Lucas, 'Making a Statement', p. 26.

Melburnians were also gradually becoming acclimatized to the greater formalization of leisure that had taken place in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁵ Indian suggests that by 1900, the working week had become more or less defined. Saturday afternoons and evenings became the time period for organized leisure, as those in the paid work force still had to work on Saturday mornings.¹⁰⁶ This freedom had led to a search for entertainment to fill the leisure hours. The advent of Federation had created a more ‘organized and stable society’,¹⁰⁷ and given this change, Melburnians were increasingly looking to participate in organized leisure. Veal and Lynch note that those who selected sport were also seeking ‘to capture something of a lost communalism, to create an identity and to take part in some modern passion play of heightened emotions’.¹⁰⁸ Like many of the spectator sports at this time, competitive swimming had much to offer in this area. In 1901, Melbourne had played host to the Australasian championships. This exposure to the best swimmers in the newly formed nation had prompted an appreciation of the competitive aspect of aquatics.

3.3 The 1904 Victorian Championship Events

The opening championship of the season was the 100 yard event, staged at the Melbourne Club’s headquarters in St Kilda. The *Argus* provided a detailed advertisement on the day of the event, boasting of the 140 entries received for the carnival and highlighting that ladies would be admitted. In an attempt to encourage further interest, the step of disclosing some of the names of entrants was taken, all names being well known in

¹⁰⁵ Rob Lynch and A. J. Veal, *Australian Leisure*, Addison Wesley Longman, South Melbourne, 1996, p. 66.

¹⁰⁶ Indian, cited in Lynch and Veal, *Australian Leisure*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁷ Lynch and Veal, *Australian Leisure*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁸ Lynch and Veal, *Australian Leisure*, p. 76.

Melbourne swimming circles.¹⁰⁹ As the first championship event of the season, the event attracted a crowd. The ‘first class’ program boasted thirteen events, including open and members’ handicaps in addition to the championship. ‘Overarm’, the writer for the *Weekly Times*, proclaimed that ‘all the best men had entered, including Clegg, of Ballarat’. Social arrangements were also in place, with a Bavarian band commissioned to entertain the visitors.¹¹⁰ The traditional events were enjoyed, with the ladies bracelet, the maiden race, lifesaving and diving exhibitions and the City of St Kilda solicitors’ race proving popular.¹¹¹ In fact, the *Argus* proclaimed the ladies’ bracelet event ‘the finest event of the day’.¹¹² Eleven starters took the field for the championship, and the *Argus* detailed the result of the race in their commentary:

All got away together, the first to take the lead being J. Murray Johnstone, closely followed by E. S Creaton, M. G Robb and R. Edmonds. About 50 yards from the post Robb gained a slight advantage, and a few yards from the post drew away from his opponents, and won the championship by about half a length ... Johnstone being second and R. Edmonds third. Humphries, the previous holder, retired early in the race.¹¹³

The *Age* was somewhat shocked at Edmonds’ defeat, suggesting that he seemed ‘a likely winner’. The point was raised that the water was rather rough, which prevented any fast swimming from occurring.¹¹⁴ Interestingly, the event was not promoted or referred to in any of the newspapers as a ladies’ day event, as in previous years. However, the headline of the photographic spread featured in *Punch* read ‘Melbourne Swimming Club – Ladies’ Day’. Where the photographs depicted the social aspect associated with the ladies’ day,

¹⁰⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 23 January 1904, p. 17

¹¹⁰ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 30 January 1904, p. 27.

¹¹¹ ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 30 January 1904, p. 4.

¹¹² ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 25 January 1904, p. 7.

¹¹³ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 25 January 1904, p. 7.

¹¹⁴ ‘Melbourne Club Carnival’, *Age*, 25 January 1904, p. 8.

such as fancy dress costumes and women's life saving, there was equal representation of the Victorian championship event.¹¹⁵ Photographs of the placegetters and a panorama of the starting swimmers of the event held equal value, and despite the lack of accompanying text the emphasis was on the principal event.

The event of the next week, the 220 yard Victorian championship, received no promotion and considerably less coverage than its counterparts, as the event was hosted at Ballarat's Eastern baths. Neither *Punch*, *Sportsman* or the *Argus* covered the events at all, and given the recent predilection of the *Argus* for detailed swimming results this was unusual. The carnival boasted above-average attendance, good weather and a comprehensive program, with the 220 yard race the principal item. It was stated that all the best swimmers, both metropolitan and local, had entered. The coverage was results-based, with no commentary, but it was ascertained that the championship resulted 'after a splendid race, in a win for Robb, of the Melbourne Club'.¹¹⁶ For his efforts, Robb was awarded the champion gold medal, with Edmonds of Brighton awarded the champion silver medal. Third was A.Ware, from Ballarat. Five other starters took the field, representing Brighton, Hobsons Bay, Melbourne, Melbourne and Western respectively, bringing the total starters to eight. The *Age*'s limited coverage did mention that only 'a number of prominent swimmers from the metropolitan districts' took part', suggesting there were some missing.¹¹⁷ The *Sporting Judge* reported that Clegg, from the Sale Club (who in

¹¹⁵ 'Melbourne Swimming Club-Ladies Day', *Punch*, 28 January 1904, p. 109.

¹¹⁶ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 16 February 1904, p. 19.

¹¹⁷ '220yds Victorian Championship', *Age*, 1 February 1904, p. 9.

reality swam for Ballarat) placed fourth, but his name was not mentioned in the *Age* results.¹¹⁸

For the quarter mile event, the *Argus* again listed the prominent swimmers that would be competing, in order to entice spectators to the Collingwood baths for the Abbotsford matches. The expectation was of a first class attendance and this prophecy was fulfilled. The press was glowing in their praise of what this meant to swimming as a sport, proclaiming ‘That swimming is rapidly gaining ground as a popular pastime was shown by the interest evinced by the public in the Abbotsford swimming matches’. As well as the considerable public interest, the mayor of Collingwood was duly acknowledged.¹¹⁹

The *Sporting Judge* mused: ‘That the natatory art is becoming more popular every year is very pronounced, and with better facilities in the way of baths in the various suburban centers, the pastime is sure to become more so’.¹²⁰ The Abbotsford matches ran a mere fifteen events, with the quarter mile race billed as the ‘principal event’. VASA increased their offerings for the first prize, sponsoring a gold medal, trophy and shield.¹²¹ The event resulted in yet another win for Robb, of Melbourne, winning his third championship.

According to the *Argus*:

All took the water together and swam in a bunch until the turn, when M. G. Robb, the champion, obtained an advantage from T. M. Johnstone, Ware and Clegg. The same order was maintained until the fourth lap, when Robb gradually increased his lead and won comfortably by about 2 lengths in 6min 41sec. Ware was second, and Clegg third.

In the fifth lap ... an unfortunate accident occurred. Those holding the rope, misjudging the last lap, ran it across the baths in front of Clegg, who was gaining

¹¹⁸ ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 6 February 1904, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 15 February 1904, p. 7.

¹²⁰ ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 20 February 1904, p. 4.

¹²¹ ‘Swimming’, *Age*, 15 February 1904, p. 8.

rapidly on Ware, who held second position. The rope caught his neck, and he lost about 4 lengths. Despite the accident he continued the race. He regarded the affair as purely accidental, and did not enter a protest. For his sportsmanlike conduct he was loudly applauded.¹²²

The *Age* added to the already considerable controversy, declaring that he ‘more than covered lost ground in a remarkable sprint, which indicated a probability of the result being different but for the accident’. However, their writer was gushing in his praise of Robb, noting that ‘There is a good deal of dash (and splash) in his style, but he is certainly a very strong swimmer’. Ware was also acknowledged as follows: ‘He is a powerful swimmer, with a long reach and a very regular stroke. His action from start to finish was like clockwork’.¹²³ Nevertheless, the *Argus* printed a statement later in the week, stating that ‘The Ballarat Swimming Club is greatly dissatisfied with the contest for the 440yds championship at Abbotsford, and tonight it was decided to ask the Victorian Swimming Association to declare the contest no race, and have it over again’.¹²⁴ Their request was in vain, as it was reported almost a month later that VASA had decided to ‘abide by the judge’s decision, and disallow the protest’.¹²⁵ Despite the controversy of the event, the comicalities still took precedence. According to the *Age*, the obstacle race was the ‘most amusing event of the afternoon ... The other events were of little interest’.¹²⁶ However, *Punch* featured a pictorial spread on the event, despite it having no ladies’ day connotations. Among the photos of the comic events were panoramic shots of the start of the quarter mile, of Robb in bathing attire, and of the

¹²² ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 15 February 1904, p. 7.

¹²³ ‘Swimming’, *Age*, 15 February 1904, p. 8.

¹²⁴ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 16 February 1904, p. 8.

¹²⁵ ‘Swimming’, *Argus*, 11 March 1904, p. 8.

¹²⁶ ‘Swimming’, *Age*, 15 February 1904, p. 8.

many spectators.¹²⁷ Pictorial representations were crucial for sport, as they permitted the ‘inspection and dissection of the sporting body’, and readers were exposed to the logistics of the event.¹²⁸ Cashman suggests that photography has had a large influence on the perception of sport. In his view, photographs could capture the athleticism and joy of sporting activity, and selected representations could express ‘approved ethics and ideologies of games’, such as mateship and cohesion. Cashman also mentions that the ‘precise and realistic detail’ that photographs provided allowed for the development of the ‘sporting pose’, indicative of athleticism.¹²⁹ Caroline Symons states that in the early decades of the century, the athletic body was represented by the *Age* as that of the physically powerful male. It was intended to be muscularly developed, strong and active, which was demonstrated by the ‘sporting pose’ the newspapers favored.¹³⁰ This type of pose, such as that of Robb in bathing attire, also contributed to the ideology of swimming as part of the broader ethos of Muscular Christianity, still prevalent at this time.

A record attendance was posted at the 880 yard event, and record entries ensued, so the racing was not completed until 5.30pm.¹³¹ Approximately 3000 spectators were present at the Hobson’s Bay carnival for their annual ladies’ day carnival, which was not represented or advertised in this way in the majority of the newspapers. The competitions were of an interesting nature, the ladies were well represented, and the event was well

¹²⁷ ‘Abbotsford Swimming Club Carnival’, *Punch*, 18 February 1904, p. 204.

¹²⁸ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 208.

¹²⁹ Cashman, *Paradise of Sport*, pp. 173-174.

¹³⁰ Caroline Symons, ‘The Shaping of the Gendered and Sporting Australians’ Body: Women’s Emergence in Sport, 1910-1930’, Honours thesis, School of History, University of Melbourne, 1989, p. 43.

¹³¹ ‘Overarm’, ‘Swimming’, *Weekly Times*, 27 February 1904, p. 19.

patronized. Six competitors took the field; Robb, Clegg, Harris, Edmonds, Shippen and Cartledge. According to the *Sporting Judge*:

A capital start was effected, the first to secure the lead being Robb, closely followed by Shippen, Clegg and Harris. The same order was maintained until the 6th lap, when Robb retired, and Harris gained an advantage. A splendid race ensued between Harris, Clegg and Shippen, the former winning by 1-½ yards
 ...¹³²

Robb's defeat sparked interest in the press, with a writer for the *Sportsman* stating 'M. G. Robb, who has been practically carrying all before him, sustained his first defeat for some time ...'¹³³ The *Argus* was more blunt: 'The defeat of Robb occasioned much surprise'.¹³⁴ Given that Robb had won the last three championship events, it raised questions over who would be chosen to represent Victoria in the upcoming Australasian championships.

3.4 The Australasian Championship Trials

To select the best swimmers to attend the championships, arrangements were made for VASA to hold trials for the 100 yard and quarter mile events. These trials were scheduled to take place as part of the Albert Park State School matches at Stubbs Baths on 24 February. The various newspapers, including the *Age*, reported dutifully that 'all the prominent swimmers, including several past champions, have notified their intention of competing'.¹³⁵ Amongst the names were Harris, Clegg, Edmonds and Arthur Pearson, a former champion of Victoria whose presence was duly noted.¹³⁶ Harris won both contests, the 100 yards by default, as Edmonds, the leader, collided with the steps prior to

¹³² 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 27 February 1904, p. 4.

¹³³ 'Swimming', *Sportsman*, 23 February 1904, p. 4.

¹³⁴ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 22 February 1904, p. 7.

¹³⁵ 'Hobson's Bay Matches', *Age*, 22 February 1904, p. 9.

¹³⁶ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 22 February 1904, p. 7.

the finish and relinquished the lead. Incidentally, Edmonds was also the second place getter in the quarter mile event. The media were supportive of Harris' form, and held the view that he was the obvious choice.¹³⁷ A number of the top swimmers had not competed, namely Robb and Clegg, but this was not alluded to. Given that Harris' victories did not automatically qualify him for the role (the VASA sub committee held a meeting shortly after to decide on a competitor), the media were given room to speculate on who would be sent. Their staunch support was offered to Harris, as the winner of the trials:

... the task of the sub committee of the association of selecting a swimmer to represent Victoria at the forthcoming Australasian championships should prove an easy one. Harris is a very powerful swimmer, and has some fine performances to his credit. Should the association choose to send 3 representatives, then M. G. Robb, R. Edmonds (of the Brighton Club) and J. W Clegg (Ballarat) will no doubt be considered as having special claims.¹³⁸

Victorian representatives were only sent to the championships in accordance with the agreement VASA had made with the other state governing bodies. It had been stipulated that at least one representative would attend. However, two representatives were selected in this year, namely Harris and Edmonds. VASA's intention was to also send Robb, the Victorian champion, but private business prevented his attendance. No Victorians chose to make the trip independently of VASA, undoubtedly due to financial issues. The press consensus was that VASA's money was being wasted. The *Weekly Times* admitted that the '... sending of men from Victoria is only a matter of carrying out the agreement, as realistically we have not the slightest chance against our Sydney friends, Cavill and

¹³⁷ 'Albert Park S.S Club', *Age*, 25 February 1904, p. 8.

¹³⁸ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 25 February 1904, p. 9.

Co'.¹³⁹ The *Argus* writer was a little more optimistic in his outlook, suggesting '... it is unlikely that they will be able to defeat such a man as R. Cavill. They, however, may be expected to do fairly well against the QLDs and NZs.'¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Harris and Edmonds departed together on 8 March to contest the championships on behalf of the state.¹⁴¹

3.5 The Australasian Championships of 1904

The Sydney-based championships suggested the reign of Dick Cavill was to come to an end. In March of 1904 the Australasian swimming championships were staged at the Rushcutters Bay baths. On 13 March, it was reported that he was beaten in his favorite event, the 880 yards. The winner of the event was a seventeen year-old naval cadet named Barney Kieran. Kieran's winning time of 11 minutes 29.9 seconds eclipsed the world record by over 20 seconds. The feats of Kieran, and of a fellow New South Welshman (Alick Wickham) prevented Cavill from replicating his clean sweep of the previous year.¹⁴² Kieran was a popular figure at these championships. Born into a lower class Irish Catholic family, he was pronounced a delinquent at thirteen years of age. He was consequently committed to the nautical-school ship, *Sobraon*, and it was here that he learned to swim.¹⁴³ His lower class upbringing and consequent success made him an admired figure in swimming circles. In terms of Victorian success, the Melbourne press predictions were accurate. Harris contested the 880 yards final, but 'gave up early in the

¹³⁹ 'Overarm', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 5 March 1904, p. 27.

¹⁴⁰ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 2 March 1904, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 8 March 1904, p. 7.

¹⁴² Cashman, *Australian Sport Through Time*, p. 120.

¹⁴³ Gerald Walsh, 'Bernard Bede Kieran', in Wray Vamplew, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman and Ian Jobling (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (Second Edition), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 232.

race'.¹⁴⁴ In the 220 yards, Edmonds placed last in his heat behind Cavill, and was beaten by the New Zealander, Creaghe, for a place in the final. Harris swam in the second heat with Kieran, and was defeated for a place in the final, which Cavill later won narrowly from Kieran.¹⁴⁵ Despite the once again poor performance of the Victorians, this was not alluded to in the press given their pre-emptive comments. However, this did not seem to affect coverage of the event.

3.6 Conclusion

The press coverage of 1904 ensured that swimming was established as a sport, with social connotations. This sporting view gave swimming regular representation in the metropolitan and sporting media. It is uncertain whether it was the natatory art or the sport that was more popular. The social status of championship events was now more prominent in *Punch*, who also began to support the championship events. This duality was integral in maintaining consistent media coverage in a variety of newspapers. Writers began to revel in the progress the sport was making through championship coverage (that is, increased attendances, prize money, new clubs and records). The mistakes VASA continued to make, though detrimental to the sport, increased press interest. Despite this, press representation suggests that VASA had begun to move in the right direction. Their inception of championship trials indicates their willingness to contribute to Australia's need to fulfill post-colonial ambitions. This ambition was to establish superiority over other nations through sport. Though the best swimmers did not always attend, this demonstrates the domination of the upper classes in competitive swimming. In effect,

¹⁴⁴ 'Australasian Championship Meeting', *Argus*, 14 March 1904, p. 7.

¹⁴⁵ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 15 March 1904, p. 6.

virtually only members of the upper class could afford to swim at the Australasian championships.

One of the exceptions to this rule was Kieran. His feats at the Australasian championships were a prelude to a boom that would occur in competitive swimming. His lower class upbringing and concomitant success were a tribute to the egalitarian status that existed in most other sports. Ramsland suggests that this upbringing enabled him to become a figure of public appeal that all classes could identify with. As a result of this, he became the true Australian representative, at a time when national identity was still being constructed. This character definition was attributed to his convict past and lower class origins. A 'native born colonial boy' was succeeding, and the entire nation eagerly followed his successes.¹⁴⁶ The concept of swimming as a source of national pride was evolving. This next shift in the way Australians, and Victorians, perceived swimming would have tremendous implications in 1908.

¹⁴⁶ Ramsland, 'Barney Kieran', no pagination.

Chapter Four

A New Era: The Championships of 1908

4.1 Introduction

The success of Kieran as a competitive swimmer had validated the press support of swimming as a sport. His successes after 1904 had also given sport an additional place in Melbourne society. Where swimming carnivals had been a site for social reconstruction, they were now an opportunity to build national heroes through success. Kieran's lower class origins had proved that even the lowliest of Australians could achieve sporting excellence. Given his hero status, it was also thought that swimming could build character traits associated with this identity. This had a positive impact on the Victorian championships. While the more social characteristics of aquatic activity still played a large role, swimming (and sport in general) was now a national duty that could not be shirked. The feats of Kieran immediately after the 1904 Australasian championships had played an integral role in consolidating and identifying this duty.

4.2 Developments After 1904

After his victories at the 1904 Australasian titles, Kieran continued to dominate his field. By April 1905, he had won six Australasian titles and set world records for every distance from 200 yards to a mile.¹⁴⁷ According to Ramsland, Kieran seemed unspoiled by his successes. The media liked to emphasize this, and this led to the construction of a public image of Kieran as a 'national icon'.¹⁴⁸ This status ensured that his public following was

¹⁴⁷ Walsh, 'Bernard Bede Kieran', p. 232.

¹⁴⁸ Ramsland, 'Barney Kieran', no pagination.

large. It was decided that he would be sent overseas to prove his reputation as a champion, and to establish Australian superiority. Public donations flooded in to cover the cost of his proposed trip.¹⁴⁹ Kieran swam in England, Scotland, Ireland and Sweden. He won all but two races, and set numerous world records. Walsh suggests that he was ‘the greatest swimmer the world had seen’. Tragically, the champion died suddenly from appendicitis on 22 December 1905.¹⁵⁰

His death devastated the entire nation. Ramsland suggests that Kieran’s story had been the glue that had bound the nation together, creating a feeling of national identity and egalitarianism in a newly federated nation. By triumphing in England, he had achieved post-colonial national ambitions, and established Australian superiority. Ramsland also goes on to state that the character traits Kieran possessed established him as the ideal Australasian athlete, and the ideal Australian. Over 30,000 mourners attended his Sydney funeral, and sporting associations gathered to ascertain what steps could be taken to honor Kieran. Among other memorials, the B. B Kieran Shield was established.¹⁵¹ This shield was presented to the state amassing the most victories at an Australasian championship. This shield became the pinnacle of Australian swimming, as each state was keen to honor Kieran’s memory. Subsequently, the hope was that another icon such as Kieran would be found.

¹⁴⁹ Ramsland, ‘Barney Kieran’, no pagination.

¹⁵⁰ Walsh, ‘Bernard Bede Kieran’, p. 232.

¹⁵¹ Ramsland, ‘Barney Kieran’, no pagination.

McDonald states that 1908 was the turning point in Victorian swimming, as it was the year that Victoria won their first Kieran Shield.¹⁵² This win was attributed to Frank Beaurepaire, a Victorian who won his first Victorian championship in 1906.¹⁵³ Beaurepaire began swimming as part of the Albert Park School Swimming Club in 1902, and won his first open competition in 1906. His win on this day against other seasoned swimmers was likened to Kieran's win at the Australasian championships two years previously.¹⁵⁴ Lomas' biography on Beaurepaire relates that Kieran was directly responsible for Beaurepaire's ambition to be a champion swimmer. In late 1905, Kieran had visited Stubbs's baths to demonstrate his stroke to the members of the school club. A team of four boys was chosen, each to swim 50 yards against Kieran's 200 yards. Beaurepaire swam the last lap and stuck with Kieran throughout. Kieran was so impressed, he made Beaurepaire promise to train over long distances. Three weeks later Kieran died, but Beaurepaire never forgot his kind words. He chose to take on the duty of 'donning the mantle which had so early fallen from Kieran's shoulders.'¹⁵⁵

Given this duty, swimming in Victoria had experienced a boom. At the close of the 1908 season, 25 clubs were affiliated with VASA, boasting a cumulative total of 3000 members. Given the increase in clubs, events and members, the format for the championship events in 1908 was different than in previous years. The Victorian and Australasian championships were held simultaneously, meaning that some of the best Victorians were competing interstate at the time of their local event. In this sense, the

¹⁵² McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 16.

¹⁵³ Belfrage, *Victorian Amateur Swimming Association*, no pagination.

¹⁵⁴ Lomas, *The Will to Win*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵⁵ Lomas, *The Will to Win*, p. 11.

Victorian championships were not a true reflection of the level of competition. This may have had a negative impact on the press coverage of the Victorian championships of that year.

4.3 The Australasian Championship Trials

As decided in 1904, VASA elected to hold championship trials to ascertain the best representatives for the state. Financial constraints meant that only one representative was intended to be sent to contest the Australasian titles in Western Australia. Three test events were held, namely the 220, 440 and 880 yards. The tests were something of a farce, with Frank Beaurepaire winning all events in Victorian record times.¹⁵⁶ Trevor Richardson of the Albert Park club swam a 220 yard breaststroke demonstration over the course of the tests, also breaking the Victorian record. However, neither of the pair was wearing a regulation costume, so the times were disregarded. Controversially, none of the more successful swimmers competed. Clegg swam, but Fitts, the Melbourne champion sprinter, did not. Beaurepaire was duly nominated as the state representative.¹⁵⁷ It appeared that attendance at the trials did not amount to anything, as the *Age* writer suggested:

The Association has not funds available to send more than one representative to Western Australia, but there is little doubt that if the Melbourne S. C. moves in the matter the association will cordially co-operate in raising the necessary funds to enable F. Fitts to accompany Beaurepaire.¹⁵⁸

Melbourne did not pursue the matter, but the *Argus* column stated shortly after the trials that another representative would attend. The selectors (Messrs Hoffman, Browne and

¹⁵⁶ 'Swimming', *Age*, 14 January 1908, p. 8.

¹⁵⁷ 'Swimming', *Age*, 15 January 1908, p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ 'Swimming', *Age*, 15 January 1908, p. 10.

Richardson) were so impressed by Richardson's exhibition swim, it was decided he would accompany Beurepaire to the titles. Lauded as 'undoubtedly the most expert breast stroke swimmer in Victoria', it seemed a logical decision.¹⁵⁹ However, a writer in *Punch* lamented, 'Why was Richardson picked in preference to Tucker, of Ballarat, who is supposed to hold this State's championship for the breast-stroke?'¹⁶⁰ The consensus was that a test should have been held for that event, and the Ballarat club lodged a protest with VASA on the grounds that Tucker should have been invited to take part in a test.¹⁶¹ Nothing more was heard in the press after this, and Richardson remained the second representative. According to the association secretary, R. M. Collins, VASA was lacking funds and could ill afford to send two swimmers. Given this, Collins hatched a plan to secure both Beurepaire and Richardson a half fare steamer ticket to Perth. According to Lomas, upon departure both boys wore a school uniform and cap, and bent their knees upon approaching the sales counter. The clerk subsequently sold them half fare children's tickets.¹⁶²

4.4 The 1908 Victorian Championship Events

The first Victorian championship for the season was the 440 yard event, held under the auspices of the Surrey Park club. In what was to be a precedent in carnivals that season, improvements were discussed (a lack of seating meant spectators previously had to stand around the edge of the quarry in the heat). Despite the event being the only one Beurepaire would compete in prior to his trip to Western Australia, it was decided that

¹⁵⁹ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 18 January 1908, p. 17.

¹⁶⁰ 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 30 January 1908, p. 172.

¹⁶¹ 'Swimming', *Argus*, 22 January 1908, p. 4.

¹⁶² Lomas, *The Will To Win*, p. 13.

the ‘racing on the whole was of poor caliber’.¹⁶³ Only Beaurepaire and Mason (Melbourne) contested the race. Swum in laps of 110 yards, ‘Bogey’ did not disappoint, winning the event by 30 yards.¹⁶⁴ The poor racing was not due to lack of talent, but unfortunate circumstance. Fitts, of the Melbourne club and a highly rated sprinter, withdrew owing to an influenza attack (his season was unfortunately marred with illness). Mason was also considerably ill, but given the scratching of the four other competitors he ‘pluckily’ agreed to swim.¹⁶⁵ Despite the appearance of Beaurepaire, the event was lauded as the second attraction. Traditional events, such as the Greasy Pole, and new attractions such as water polo were still considered more entertaining.¹⁶⁶ However, these events drew patrons to the carnivals to watch the principal event, and arrangements such as special cabs from rail stations to swimming baths reflected this interest.¹⁶⁷

In comparison to the previous years examined in this thesis, *Punch* initiated a swimming column that gave a very different outlook to the sport. Where the obligatory results were provided, a lighthearted approach was taken toward the reporting of the officials and competitors, giving the sport a great deal of drama, if not appeal. Undoubtedly this was a successful attempt to appease the spectators, who still enjoyed the comicalities of swimming. As related by ‘Old Swimmer’:

The course was between two ropes, and proved yards too narrow for the number of competitors, blocking and fouling being noticed in nearly every event. The cry of ‘Foul!’ was heard on every side. The Referee! Oh! where was he? Hoffman tried to wring the old bird’s neck, but the fault was with the course.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ ‘Crawl’, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 25 January 1908, p. 4. ‘Bogey’ was the popular nickname for Beaurepaire.

¹⁶⁴ ‘Crawl’, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 25 January 1908, p. 4.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Surrey Park Carnival’, *Age*, 30 January 1908, p. 8.

¹⁶⁶ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 23 January 1908, p. 131.

¹⁶⁷ ‘Swimming’, *Age*, 18 January 1908, p. 14.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 23 January 1908, p. 131.

The 500 yard title was held at the Ballarat Club carnival in conjunction with the Foundation Day celebrations. Many Melbourne swimmers attended, but not to compete in the championship. This championship attracted scant coverage, due to the lack of quality competitors. According to 'Trudgeon', 'The event was thought, in the absence of Beaurepaire, to be open, but it was robbed of much of the interest by lack of competitors'.¹⁶⁹ Once again, only two starters contested the event, with Mason this time winning over the ex-Victorian champion Clegg (Ballarat). Mason was never troubled, winning by 20 yards (faster, it was noted, than Beaurepaire's winning time of the previous year.)¹⁷⁰ The *Punch* writer declared that Clegg, the 'pride of Ballarat', was out of form, but it was also noted that 'These long distance races are becoming somewhat of a farce, as there are seldom more than three contestants'.¹⁷¹

The Melbourne club hosted the 100 yard title, an event where heavy swell played havoc with the swimmers. Widely acknowledged as a gift to the champion Fitts, there was surprise when Billy Mason 'romped through the wet' to win from Bennett and Fitts. Fitts' record 1906 time was bettered by a second, further adding to the win.¹⁷² Mason used the crawl stroke as opposed to the trudgeon.¹⁷³ The event was held as a ladies' day event (though not advertised as such) and this contributed to the great number of spectators (approximately 1000 persons) who paid admission.¹⁷⁴ Six competitors lined up for the

¹⁶⁹ 'Trudgeon', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 1 February 1908, p. 23.

¹⁷⁰ 'Crawl', 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 1 February 1908, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 30 January 1908, p. 172.

¹⁷² 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 6 February 1908, p. 207.

¹⁷³ 'Trudgeon', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 8 February 1908, p. 23.

¹⁷⁴ 'Melbourne Club Ladies Day', *Age*, 3 February 1908, p. 8.

220 yard championship at the Abbotsford baths, minus Fitts who did not start. The race was described by ‘Crawl’ as follows:

At the first turn W. Claringbold held a slight lead on W. Dinsmore, with Mason, Nicholson, Brettschneider and Mitchell well up. On the second turn Mason was a yard in front which he increased to 5yds in the third lap, with Dinsmore, Claringbold and Nicholson next. On the third turn Brettschneider retired. Mason forged ahead with a speed that was too warm for the others.¹⁷⁵

It was proclaimed that Mason ‘never swam better in his life’ and again beat Fitts’ record of the previous year. It was a difficult race, as three retired early due to a quick pace being set. The *Punch* writer, ever dramatic, eloquently described the start as ‘Six heads soon appeared on the surface, and the water was soon churned into foam as twelve strong legs and arms worked like engines’.¹⁷⁶

Contrary to the opinion that long distance events were becoming redundant, there were nine entries for the mile event hosted by the Hawthorn Club. A festive occasion was presented, and ‘... the good looking girls in the city turned out for the occasion to see the display of beauty only slightly adorned’.¹⁷⁷ The 44-lap event (Hawthorn’s baths were smaller than average) was strongly contested; with the race favorite Mason bowing out and Nicholson retiring due to poor health. This left the race for Clarry Powell, Johnson and Dixon, and Powell triumphed by 40 yards. According to ‘Crawl’, Powell swam ‘with a fine, easy stroke, and has plenty of heart’. It was suggested that his swimming future could be brilliant with proper application to the sport.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ ‘Crawl’, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 15 February 1908, p. 3.

¹⁷⁶ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 13 February 1908, p. 239.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 20 February 1908, p. 280.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Crawl’, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 22 February 1908, p. 1.

However brilliant Powell's feats, the supposed most successful carnival of the year was hosted by Brighton with the 300 yard championship the premier event. A record number of entries were posted, in readiness for the event. Five starters took the blocks, all familiar names, but it was again Mason who won the championship. Two retirees early in the race left the race to Mason, Nicholson and Claringbold, with the latter two ruining their chances by running into one another.¹⁷⁹ The *Punch* writer mused, 'If Nicholson had only swum a straight course, instead of meandering all over the baths, he could have had second easily'.¹⁸⁰ Despite the popularity of the Brighton carnival, the 880 yard title at Geelong boasted the largest attendance seen in years. Only four started, and Billy Mason did not disappoint, winning easily from Claringbold with G. Johnson third. The swim created a new Victorian record, with all swimmers commended for their efforts in finishing under Victorian standard time. It was suggested, somewhat ambitiously, that the trio had the potential to be the forthcoming long distance champions.¹⁸¹

The final championship event, the 220 yards breaststroke, was held on 18 March as part of Beaurepaire's welcome home carnival at the City Baths. Beaurepaire and Richardson had just arrived home from the Australasian titles, and the public was keen to celebrate. The baths were jammed full, and the event was proclaimed by the *Age* as 'the most successful function of its kind ever held in Victoria'. Beaurepaire swam in the 440 yard handicap, which he won convincingly. Richardson was triumphant in the principal event, winning by twelve yards from his teammate Meadows of the Albert Park club.¹⁸² Given

¹⁷⁹ 'Crawl', 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 22 February 1908, p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 20 February 1908, p. 280.

¹⁸¹ 'Trudgeon', 'Swimming', *Weekly Times*, 7 March 1908, p. 1.

¹⁸² 'Swimming', *Age*, 19 March 1908, p. 8.

Richardson's performance at the Australasian championship in February, this was no surprise.

4.5 The Australasian Championships of 1908

Whereas the Victorian championships of this year received only token interest (though indeed an increase on the coverage of previous years), the press revelled in the natatory feats of Beurepaire and Richardson at the Australasian titles. For the first time, the consensus was that there was a chance for Victorian success, and this view was shared across the country. Cecil Healy, passing through Melbourne en route to the championships, was asked what he thought of Beurepaire's chances. His answer was promising: 'I like it more than I care to admit'.¹⁸³ The Victorian was unique in many ways, but his stroke was unusual. Most swimmers were now using the crawl stroke, which had initially been considered only suitable for sprinting. However, it had evolved in the last ten years to a more versatile stroke. Nevertheless Beurepaire chose to stick with his own version of the trudgeon stroke, which he had perfected, rather than the crawl.¹⁸⁴ As Healy had predicted, Beurepaire's chances were better than good. He won the half mile event in 'brilliant style' and was warmly applauded for his efforts. His 60 yard win was attributed to him managing the waves better than the other swimmers, as he attacked them with vigor. On the same day, 'Bogey' achieved second place in the 220 yard event behind Healy, a distance much shorter than his favorites and therefore a good result for him.¹⁸⁵ A few days later he 'asserted his superiority' in the mile event, winning by 85 yards after a last lap sprint that greatly excited the crowd. Not content with his

¹⁸³ 'Crawl', 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 8 February 1908, p. 1.

¹⁸⁴ Cashman, *Sport in the National Imagination*, p. 176.

¹⁸⁵ 'Swimming Championships', *Age*, 10 February 1908, p. 6.

monopoly over the long distance events, he lined up an hour later for the 100 yard championship against Healy. Healy was triumphant, with Beaurepaire finishing second but gaining the appreciation of the crowd, the champion being cheered jubilantly as he left the water.¹⁸⁶

The most anticipated event of the titles, the 440 yard race, was a close race between Healy and Beaurepaire. 'Bogey' lost ground early in the race, with the West Australian representative colliding with him, but he triumphed against adversity and won by twelve yards. Richardson finished a surprise second in the 220 yard breaststroke, behind the world record holder Matson (from Western Australia).¹⁸⁷ As the *Punch* writer so succinctly put it, 'Beaurepaire had a go,'¹⁸⁸ and succeeded admirably. His feats (with help from Richardson) won the Kieran shield for Victoria, indicating that Victoria was the premier swimming state of this year.¹⁸⁹

The Melbourne press was jubilant in their reporting of the success of their swimmers, and especially of Beaurepaire. Their excitement in gaining the 'coveted' Kieran Shield for the ensuing twelve months was palpable. In fact, the unanimous opinion of Victorian swimmers, and also those interstate, was that Victoria had another Kieran amongst them. As the correspondent noted:

¹⁸⁶ 'Crawl', 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 22 February 1908, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ 'Swimming', *Age*, 21 February 1908, p. 5. Matson continued swimming as an amateur until 1909, in addition to playing competitive football. Once his amateur status was compromised, he went on to experience a high level of success in Australian Rules football as a player and coach. For further information, see Lionel Frost, *Immortals: Football People and the Evolution of Australian Rules*, John Wiley & Sons, Milton, 2005, pp. 41-58.

¹⁸⁸ 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 20 February 1908, p. 280.

¹⁸⁹ McDonald, *The First 100*, p. 27.

This is the first occasion on which Victoria has won in swimming championships. Indeed, until this year she has never provided a first class swimmer. That Beaufort comes within this category no one will now deny.¹⁹⁰

Writers gloated over Richardson's record-breaking swim, despite the fact they had previously bemoaned his selection.¹⁹¹ Congratulations were extended all around - to the boys themselves, to the trainers, to the association. It was openly admitted that this was the first time Victoria had 'ever even had a "look in" in the great swimming events', and this was worthy of acknowledgement.¹⁹² Given his success, VASA began to organize a movement to send Beaufort as Australia's representative to the 1908 Olympic games. As there was a lack of funds, an appeal was launched to raise money for the journey. The press put all their support behind this movement, with *Punch* declaring '... a subscription list has been passed round, when all and sundry should cheerfully stump up. This is a splendid chance for our society people and our patriots to come forward and send in their cheques.'¹⁹³ The lack of monetary and societal support for swimming was still an issue, despite the increasing success. Public letters were submitted endorsing support of the 'phenomenal, youthful champion.'¹⁹⁴ Beaufort attributed his success to careful training, and suggested that in the west 'all classes take a very keen interest in swimming'. He recalled that the crowd waiting for the result of the breaststroke championship was large, and 'as enthusiastic as if they were watching for the result of the Melbourne Cup.'¹⁹⁵ Given the trouble the association was having in attracting monetary assistance, this may have been an attempt to encourage some support. Beaufort's feats

¹⁹⁰ 'Swimming', *Age*, 21 February 1908, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ 'Swimming', *Age*, 21 February 1908, p. 5.

¹⁹² 'Welcome to Beaufort', *Age*, 9 March 1908, p. 9.

¹⁹³ 'Old Swimmer', 'Swimming Notes', *Punch*, 27 February 1908, p. 318.

¹⁹⁴ 'The Swimming Championships', *Age*, 22 February 1908, p. 16.

¹⁹⁵ 'Crawl', 'Swimming', *Sporting Judge*, 14 March 1908, p. 3. Beaufort's feats at these championships are covered only in anecdotal form in the Lomas biography.

did not go unnoticed in other states either. Cecil Healy commented that he considered Beaurepaire ‘the fastest thing ever seen in water’ and the long distance champion Springfield, defeated by Beaurepaire in all his events, was honest in his appraisal. He admitted, ‘I must confess I was surprised. Why, Kieran never beat me by much more than that himself’.¹⁹⁶ As the previous prominent Australian champion swimmer, Kieran was still an iconic figure in Australian society. Victoria’s self-esteem in winning the Kieran Shield was therefore based on more than a sporting victory, it was a pride stemming from the fact one of their own was the embodiment of all Kieran stood for.

4.6 Developments After 1908

Given the recent popularity of the sport, issues began to surface that previously had not posed a problem. Rather than the financial boom that should have occurred, smaller clubs began to struggle as additional clubs sprung up around Melbourne. *Punch* chose to advocate the cause of these smaller clubs, suggesting on one occasion that the public should rally financially around these clubs who ‘have grafted on and pushed ahead in spite of discouragement and disappointment’.¹⁹⁷ Some clubs boasting large entries attempted to make money, by having small prizes in relation to the entry takings. *Punch* condemned this, as their view was that it was a threat to the amateurism of the sport. Their suggestion was to increase the number and value of the prizes offered. The theory was that this would increase entries and heighten interest, and as their writer opined, ‘Surely the big clubs are not out for the profits’.¹⁹⁸ Money also became an issue in sending Beaurepaire to the Olympic games, considering VASA had struggled to send him

¹⁹⁶ ‘Crawl’, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 29 February 1908, p.1.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 6 February 1908, p. 207.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 6 February 1908, p. 207.

interstate. In this the press were a useful instrument, with swimming columns continually admonishing Victorians for their lack of support. *Punch* hoped that ‘V.A.S.A are getting some response from the moneyed people in our midst, who are supposed to be good sports’.¹⁹⁹ Despite the increase in prize value that was a happy result of increased attendances and entries, the press still saw that money was the key to further fostering the sport. The lack thereof was seen to be a result of the lack of society appearances at carnivals, even after numerous invitations. Given the support of society for sports such as tennis and horse racing, the *Punch* writer (the best qualified to comment on this) mused:

... Why is this? The sport is undoubtedly a clean one. There are no tricky practices, the events are always very keenly contested, and the sport is one of the most useful. There are no raucous voiced bookies shouting in one’s ear, and the racing is carried out in an efficient manner. The clubs certainly deserve more recognition and support from the moneyed section of our community than they at present get ...²⁰⁰

It would appear that while the gentry were happy to act as administrators for swimming, they did not extend this governance to monetary support and attendance. Daly claims that certain sports, such as horse racing and cricket, were symbols of class and status in Australian cities. Other sports, such as swimming, were seen as more egalitarian. As a rule, those who wished to remain ‘different’ would not patronize these.²⁰¹ In order to reinforce this class difference, the upper classes would act as governing bodies for these sports. The egalitarianism of sport in Melbourne meant that, according to Roberts, classes were bound to intermingle somehow.²⁰² Daly goes on to say that the gentry were involved in sponsoring sport for the other classes, but participated separately in their own

¹⁹⁹ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 5 March 1908, p. 348.

²⁰⁰ ‘Old Swimmer’, ‘Swimming Notes’, *Punch*, 12 March 1908, p. 385.

²⁰¹ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 181.

²⁰² Roberts, cited in Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 181.

class-appropriate sports, including horse racing, tennis and cricket.²⁰³ As a result, presidents and patrons of sporting clubs were drawn almost exclusively from the upper classes. This enhanced and confirmed the status of the upper class in society.²⁰⁴ Despite this paternalistic interest, the majority of their money was spent on their own sport, as partaking in appropriate sport was one of the main measures of social status.²⁰⁵ Given this, swimming was constructed for the middle to upper classes, and run by the gentry. It is possible that the previously poor performances by Victorians interstate were the reason monetary support was lacking. There was little incentive for patrons to offer financial aid, as there were more successful sports to be affiliated with.

Despite this, the Melbourne press shared the unanimous opinion that 1908 had been a turning point in Victorian swimming. Certainly, it was a far cry from the years where there were only minimal clubs and contests were friendly rather than competitive.

‘Crawl’, the *Sporting Judge* writer, summed it up best:

... I cannot help feeling that an immense amount of good has been done in the interests of swimming during 1907-8. Not only has the number of clubs increased, but the followers of the sport have nearly doubled. This is shown by the excellent attendances at the various carnivals. A great deal of attention was no doubt due to the magnificent performances of young Beaurepaire at the Australasian championships, but it is evident that the public are beginning to realize that swimming is more than a sport. It is a combination of duty and pleasure ... [and] will further serve to draw the attention of many, who for reasons best known to themselves have so long stood aloof from a sport which should be the very foremost in the State.²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 181.

²⁰⁴ Williams, cited in Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 120.

²⁰⁵ Daly, *Elysian Fields*, p. 120.

²⁰⁶ Crawl, ‘Swimming’, *Sporting Judge*, 28 March 1908, p. 1.

4.7 Conclusion:

One of the greatest conflicts facing the press in the period between 1900 and 1908 was how to report swimming. As the *Sporting Judge* related in 1908, swimming was more than a sport. In their view, it was a combination of duty and pleasure. However in 1900, swimming existed simply as these two separate entities, with the sporting link not yet in existence. So, the transition of championship coverage in the Melbourne press was also a transition in the public perception of swimming. Initially, the duty perspective was that of necessity and survival. Being able to swim was a life skill, and swimming clubs were a good way for these skills to be refined. Championship events were more an exhibition of these skills than for sport. A preferable way to exhibit these skills was through the novelty events that were prevalent in the carnivals of 1900. Pleasure was obtained through these events, and through the social arrangements that surrounded championship carnivals. Without these, the championships contained little social interest. The press, aware of this, constructed their coverage around the 'duty and pleasure' element.

After 1904, a transition occurred where the definition of 'duty and pleasure' began to incorporate sport. Swimming still existed as an avenue of duty and pleasure, but the duty of swimming was now to produce national sporting icons, such as Kieran and Beaurepaire. The pleasure of swimming was now in witnessing new records being set and accolades being gathered for the state. There was widespread anticipation about who would be the next champion. The original ideologies still existed, as swimming was still a necessary skill and the carnivals still a site for social gatherings. However, with the development of the sport, some new factors emerged. The public perception of swimming

initially reflected the press interest and style of reporting. The original ideologies were mingled with the elements of sport the press only dutifully considered. With the persistence of sporting coverage, and the emergence of Kieran as the first national swimming icon, the public came to realize that perhaps the parameters of duty and pleasure were changing.

This shift in theory was instrumental, as the number of swimmers that participated in Victorian championships increased. This was no doubt due to the emerging number of clubs and better facilities, but also to the dedication of the press. Where the reporting was not entirely focused on the sporting accolades, but rather the social implications, the championships remained in the background. Soon enough, the transition was made from social activity to sport, as there appeared a sporting icon to idolize. *Punch* became a leader in swimming coverage, with informative sporting information. The *Weekly Times* began to feature photographic spreads of Victorian championships and their competitors. Other press outlets also continued to push the sporting aspects of swimming onto the public through their columns, tracking the arrangements for championships and the performances of swimmers. Given the public's need for interesting news, social anecdotes were still prevalent, but the focus was on the swimming. Now that an audience for swimming had been created, the writers began to involve themselves in their columns. Questions were raised, judgments on swimmers were stated and controversy was reported on. Despite their occasional disdain for some of the championship practices, the press became swimming's greatest ally.

Chapter Five

Conclusions

The development of Victorian competitive swimming was largely due to a desire to fill the void left in the sport by the passing of Barney Kieran. However, this need for a national swimming hero was shaped by early economic and social changes, which prompted a shift in the public perception of swimming. This shift in the parameters of ‘duty and pleasure’ was the catalyst for improvement, as it established a common goal. This goal was to achieve significant results in national, and international competition, in order to prove Australian superiority. Competitive carnivals, such as the Victorian championships, were a way to foster competition and develop swimmers in pursuit of success. A common theme of Victorian championship carnivals was that they catered primarily to a social agenda. The relative importance of the social element waned over the course of the eight years examined. This can be tracked by means of the ‘slice’ analysis of the championships adopted in this thesis. Additionally, the changing nature of press coverage of the championships reflected the interests of the public in that period. However, the evolution of swimming coverage, from a socially based activity to a competitive art, is largely due to the emphasis of sport in the media. Sporting coverage had a cemented place in all print media, due to its appeal. Socially based activities could not be as easily placed, particularly in the metropolitan daily press. Therefore, the aforementioned shift can be partly attributed to the unwavering agenda of the press.

However, through examination of selected press sources, it is evident that other events played a part in developing the 'duty and pleasure' principle. In 1900, social cohesion and re-establishment were the key objectives of the championships. A new objective developed upon the failure of the first Victorian representative at the Australasian titles. It was seen that competitive swimming had a place outside Melbourne social circles, and could be an area for Victoria to establish sporting superiority. The increased time period for leisure, embraced by Melburnians, broadened opportunities for involvement in swimming. The championships fitted neatly into this defined leisure period. With the social opportunities of swimming matches clearly outlined by the press in previous years, more freedom existed for the sporting element to be developed. Nevertheless, the struggle between aspects of natatory spectacle and competitive sport continued. The position of swimming as a national interest was cemented upon the emergence of Barney Kieran. His feats promoted sport as a source of national pride, an important concept in the early years of the new nation.

Kieran's subsequent early death presented Frank Beaurepaire with a legacy that could not be ignored. All states by now saw that the greatest tribute to Kieran's memory was to win the Kieran shield, the embodiment of all he stood for. The objective was to produce a new sporting and national icon that would follow in Kieran's wake, and establish national superiority. As a result of this, swimming evolved to something more important than a pastime. The increasing attendances and competitors were indicative of the increased level of support. The Victorian championships were now seen as the grassroots level of swimming success, and the performances exhibited here a preview to the feats of future

champions. It was no longer suitable to simply be able to swim; one needed to swim well. The social structure of the championship matches still existed, and attendance of the social elite was still prized. However, this was not necessarily due to opportunities for social networking - it was more to attract money and patronage to support their upcoming champions. The parameters of duty and pleasure had changed in deference to the role swimming played in society. As a result of this change, issues began to arise that effected further development of the sport. Finances became the primary problem, with upper class financial support almost non-existent. This had implications for Victorian representation at national level, as the best swimmers often did not attend. In the case of middle and lower class swimmers, financial constraints prevented them from traveling to interstate events. The association did not have the funds to subsidize these swimmers, and consequently potential champions were excluded.

The development of Victorian swimming to the point where a national championship was won can be traced through the press coverage of these years. This development can be attributed to the evolution of the 'duty and pleasure' principle, and the representation of this in the press. Where homage must be paid to particular swimmers in achieving this shift, such as Kieran and Beaurepaire, these changing parameters undoubtedly shaped their feats and consequent success. The success of Beaurepaire symbolized Victorian swimming supremacy. However, this supremacy would not have been achieved without the work of the press in establishing swimming as a sport, or without Kieran's success to prove this point. Finally, without this shift, the need for Victorian swimming supremacy

would not have existed. This need was established by the public, and shaped by the perceptions of society.

It is probable that future investigations of aquatic culture in Victoria might yield further evidence or perhaps even different conclusions. Studies of early bathing practices on Victorian beaches or of public school swimming clubs would be beneficial in examining other integral aspects of competitive swimming, and their contribution to Victorian success. A study on Sydney baths and bathing practices has been completed by Marie-Louise McDermott, and provides an understanding of how competitive aquatics evolved in that state.²⁰⁷ A comparative study between Melbourne and Sydney aquatic culture may also give some insight into the reasons for Sydney's superiority, a dominance that still continues to this day. Additionally, the role of women in Victorian swimming has been omitted from this thesis, despite their participation in carnivals. There is considerable scope for a study similar to Raszeja's thesis, examining the development of Victorian women's swimming and administration. The same can be said for country swimming clubs and carnivals, a largely unacknowledged aspect of Victoria's swimming history. Today, a great number of successful state and national swimmers hail from country swimming clubs. Given the popularity of swimming in Victoria, the existing research on participation by minority groups is limited, and this also represents an important area that needs to be addressed.

²⁰⁷ Marie-Louise McDermott, 'Changing Visions on Baths and Bathers: Desegregating Ocean Baths in Wollongong, Kiama and Gerringong', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 22, no. 1, November 2005, pp. 1-19.

A number of studies have been completed addressing aquatic trends internationally. Studies such as those undertaken by Terret and Kossuth reveal particular international similarities in aquatic culture. Similarities are exhibited, such as class and certain motivations for participation. However, the differing geographical and nationalistic values that exist between countries may produce alternative attitudes toward sport in general, and it is fair to assume that these differences may encompass bathing practices and competitive aquatics. However, in regard to competitive swimming, there has been very little comparative research between countries. Again, there is potential for research in this area, particularly in comparing traditionally competitive countries such as Australia, the United States and Canada.

In summary, this investigation has isolated a developmental stage in Victorian swimming history, and provided some insight into the role and nature of competitive aquatics at this time. The study has also identified some external motivations toward the pursuit of initial sporting success. It is suggested that the influence of social attitudes and nationalistic values, as exhibited in an aquatic context, could be applied to Australian sport more generally. Closer comparative examination, regarding the impact of social and patriotic factors on sport in various countries, would contribute to a greater understanding of the role these aspects play in Australian culture. The conclusions drawn in this study should therefore act as a springboard for future investigation into aspects of aquatic culture.

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