

10TH ANNUAL TOM BROCK LECTURE

BOWLER'S CLUB

SYDNEY • 6 NOVEMBER 2008

'From a Federation Game to a League of Nations'



Mr Lex Marinos OAM



Published in 2009 by the
Tom Brock Bequest Committee on behalf of
the Australian Society for Sports History

© ASSH and the Tom Brock Bequest Committee

This monograph is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 978-0-7334-2706-0

Illustrations provided by Terry Williams and Lex Marinos. Thanks are due to the respective owners of copyright for permission to publish these images.

Design & layout: UNSW Design Studio

Printer: Graphitype

TOM BROCK BEQUEST

The Tom Brock Bequest, given to the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH) in 1997, consists of the Tom Brock Collection supported by an ongoing bequest. The Collection, housed at the State Library of New South Wales, includes manuscript material, newspaper clippings, books, photographs and videos on rugby league in particular and Australian sport in general. It represents the finest collection of rugby league material in Australia. ASSH has appointed a Committee to oversee the Bequest and to organise appropriate activities to support the Collection from its ongoing funds.

Objectives:

1. To maintain the Tom Brock Collection.
2. To organise an annual scholarly lecture on the history of Australian rugby league.
3. To award an annual Tom Brock Scholarship to the value of \$5,000.
4. To undertake any other activities which may advance the serious study of rugby league.
5. To publicise the above activities.

Activities:

1. The Tom Brock Lecture.
2. The Tom Brock Scholarship.
3. Updating the Collection with new material published on rugby league.
4. Reporting to ASSH on an annual basis.

Details of the Tom Brock Bequest are located on the website of the Australian Society for Sports History: www.sporthistory.org.

I was born in Wagga Wagga and have been seeing double ever since. As a kid I used to dream of holidays in Woy Woy and Kurri Kurri and travelling over the Mooney Mooney Bridge. I can still remember the thrill when *Gatum Gatum* won the 1961 Melbourne Cup.

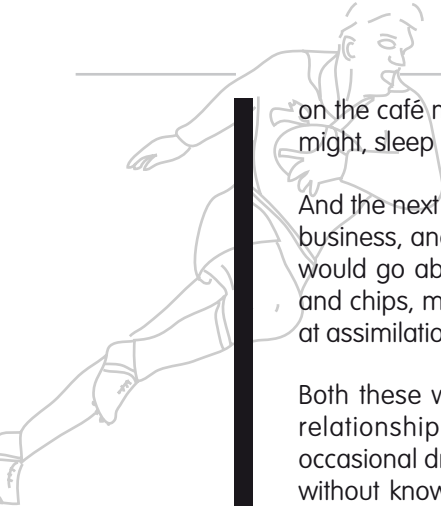
My favourite dances are cancan and cha-cha-cha; my preferred food—couscous and gado-gado; Governor-general—Isaac Isaacs; Senator—George Georges. I even thought Roger Rogerson was innocent. Needless to say, my favourite rugby league player is Fui Fui Moi Moi.

However, this duplicity made sense to me, growing up in post-Second World War Australia, and I wrote about it in 1995:

From an early age I had an understanding that there were two worlds. The first was when the shop was open, the day to day world of commerce, which brought the outside in to us. For fifteen hours a day customers would come and go as my family worked to please them and become part of this larger society.

The second world existed when the shop was closed. Especially on Sunday nights when the shop closed early. Then the other Greek families, a dozen or so, many of them café owners as well, would congregate at one café or another. The tables would be pushed back to create some space for dancing. A gramophone would materialise, as would a collection of 78s bought from specialty shops in Sydney or Melbourne, or brought directly from Greece by friends and relatives. Bouncy pop songs and mournful *rembetika*. *Komboloi* would spin back and forth around chunky fingers. Cards and *tavli* (backgammon) [would be played]. A couple of bottles of wine would produce barrels of laughter. Voices loud and excited. With more animation and emotion and expression speaking Greek in private than they could achieve speaking English in public. And every sentence [was] embellished by theatrical gestures.

And then there was the food. Lamb baked with garlic and oregano. Cabbage rolls. Spinach and beans in olive oil and lemon juice. Olives. Fetta. Yoghurt. Rice. Pasta. Sticky sweets. Sugar-coated almonds. Food that we ate. Food that was never



on the café menu. I thought it was our secret food. Fight it as I might, sleep always overtook me before the night had ended.

And the next morning the front doors would again be open for business, and again the outside world would come in and we would go about our business of serving steak and eggs, fish and chips, mixed grill. And we would also continue our efforts at assimilation.

Both these worlds coexisted in a functional, albeit cautious relationship. Peaceful most of the time. Disrupted by an occasional drunk. The first time I heard the word 'dago', I knew without knowing its meaning that it was not a good thing to be. Evidently my grandfather was one. So too was my father. I concluded that I was as well.¹

Despite the rather melodramatic labelling, being something else, the 'other' has often provided some discomfort within Australia's history. The feeling of belonging is equally strong, and in Australia, one way to belong, to move from the outside in, was to pursue popular national sports: swimming, tennis and cricket in summer; football in winter. The choice of code was determined largely by region, religion, cultural heritage or class. It hasn't always been easy to belong in Australia.

Pre-1788 Australia was 100 per cent Indigenous but with diverse cultural practices, hundreds of languages and some limited contact with nations to the north. There were 33 different nationalities on the First Fleet. Within 120 years, when Australian rugby league emerged in 1908, the Australian population was predominantly Anglo-Celtic, though many other immigrant communities had been well established.

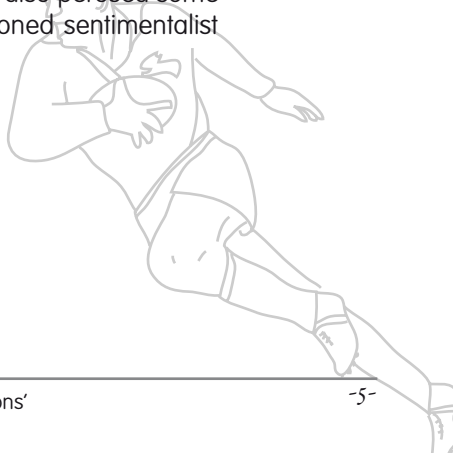
Diversity has always been a part of Australian Identity and contemporary Australia is a reflection of the waves of migration that have contributed to the constantly evolving nature of that identity. It is reflected in all levels of society, in our sciences and arts as well as in our sports, including rugby league.

My own introduction to rugby league was via John Mavroudis, the first great player I saw. Like me, John was from a Greek family and in the closeness of the Wagga community, we grew up together. Unlike me, he instinctively understood rugby league and how to play it. He had wonderful hands, was fast in the brain and fast in the legs when he had to be. Picture Laurie Daley. John led our four stone seven pound team to a primary school premiership as I tried desperately to hang on to his coattails. For the next two decades John did the same with school teams: the Wagga Magpies and Riverina representative sides. In a later era, he would have played professionally, but he rewarded the labour of his parents by becoming a very successful accountant. Sadly, John's son David was one of the Coogee Dolphins killed in the Bali bombing. It wasn't just that John was an outstanding player, he impressed me at how easily he fitted in with everyone and how sport provided a way for him to belong.

Tonight I'd like to dip into rugby league history to try to suggest patterns of participation at the elite level of players from non-Anglo backgrounds. Non-Anglo is a very general classification for someone whose cultural heritage and practice may be partly or wholly separate from that of the Australian British-Irish majority.

But first a word of caution: my approach will be largely anecdotal drawing on the known background and surnames of players. The latter approach, as I later point out, has its pitfalls as some players with Anglo names may have had a 'migrant' mother. Others with migrant names have may had an Anglo mother.

The Kangaroos player register from the official Australian Rugby League website has been a useful starting point for my research. Sean Fagan's site RL1908 has also been extremely valuable. I also consulted a number of other club and general sites. I have also perused some books and old programmes—quaint, old-fashioned, sentimentalist that I am.



German rugby league players

The largest group of non-British Europeans in Australia were German settlers and their descendants. Beginning in 1838, with the arrival of immigrants from Prussia, Germans became prominent mainly in South Australia and Queensland until the First World War when Kaiser Bill brought all that to a stop. During rugby league's pioneering days in Federation Australia northern Europeans contributed to the code. Being Christian and fair-complexioned they assimilated easily. A number of immigrant sons played rugby league.

Pioneer players included Denis 'Dinny' Lutge (1879–1953), foundation captain of North Sydney in 1908. A dual international, he played in each of Australia's inaugural rugby Tests against New Zealand. He was the second-ever Kangaroo captain and the first to lead the side to a victory.

Another dual international was E.A. 'George' Anlezark, who was born in Bathurst in 1882, Anlezark never played for any of Sydney's founding rugby league clubs, but as a professional footballer he played in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland, New Zealand and ultimately in England. He was a member of the 1908–09 pioneer Kangaroos remaining in England after the tour and playing for Oldham. Like many of the early professionals, he made a career in England.



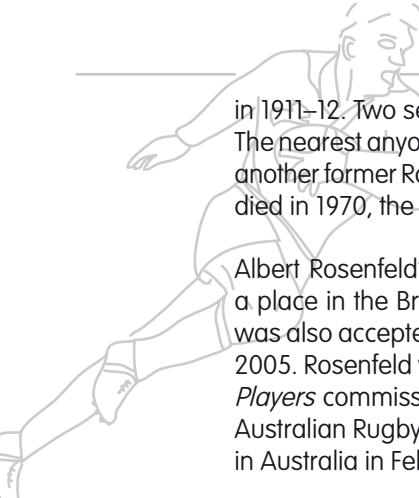
George Anlezark, an Australian-born player of German descent, was prominent in the early years of rugby league.

Then there was Wilhelm Gustaf 'Bill' Heidke (1882–1958) from Bundaberg, Queensland. After he appeared for Queensland against the professional New Zealand All Golds in June 1908 he was suspended from rugby union and went over to League. A utility back, he won selection for the inaugural Kangaroo squad of 1908, playing in two Tests including the first ever played at Wembley. Heidke was selected for the second Test v. Great Britain in Brisbane in 1910 when he was awarded the captaincy over Dally Messenger. Heidke was Australia's seventh Kangaroo captain, and the first Queenslander and winger to achieve this honour. After Australia lost 22–17 Heidke became the last winger to captain Australia. Bill's younger brother Harold also represented for Queensland, and in 1932. Bill's son, Les 'Monty' Heidke, also became a Kangaroo. This was the second Australian father-son representative combination coming just one week behind Sandy and Joe Pearce.

Johnno Stuntz of Sydney also played against the New Zealand 'All Golds'. A winger, he played in Easts' first match—the opening game of club rugby league in Australia—when he scored four tries. This tally, for the most tries on debut in Australian premiership history, has been equalled but not bettered. Stuntz represented Australia against a touring New Zealand Maori side in 1909. During the 1909–10 English season, Stuntz played for Warrington. He also played for South Sydney (1911), Western Suburbs (1913) and NSW (1911). It is a matter of irony that this player with a German ancestry died fighting for the Allies on the western front in 1916.

Herb Brackenreg, a front-row forward, had also been a rebel who played against the New Zealand 'All Golds'. He played in eight matches for Easts including that first match and the first premiership decider against local rival, South Sydney. He also represented New South Wales (NSW) before moving to Brisbane, playing for Queensland and Australia. Apparently, Brackenreg once beat Dally Messenger in a goal-kicking competition.

Another among the pioneering greats was Albert Aaron Rosenfeld (1885–1970). Born in Sydney, the son of a Jewish tailor, Rosenfeld played for Eastern Suburbs (1908–09) and later for the Huddersfield, Warrington and Bradford clubs in England. He played four Tests in the inaugural series against New Zealand and during the Kangaroo tour of 1908–09 signed with Huddersfield. He had fallen in love with a local mill manager's daughter whom he later married. At Huddersfield, he moved to the wing and became a try-scoring sensation scoring 78 tries



in 1911–12. Two seasons later he eclipsed this record scoring 80 tries. The nearest anyone has come to this record was the 72 tries scored by another former Rooster, Brian Bevan, in the 1952–53 season. Rosenfeld died in 1970, the last survivor of the inaugural Kangaroo tour.

Albert Rosenfeld's try-scoring feats (391 career tries) earned him in a place in the British Rugby League Hall of Fame in 1988. Rosenfeld was also accepted into the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 2005. Rosenfeld was also named in the list of Australia's *100 Greatest Players* commissioned by the National Rugby League (NRL) and the Australian Rugby League (ARL) to celebrate the code's centenary year in Australia in February 2008.

The four Polish Bolewski brothers of Glebe and Bundaberg were also prominent. Michael ('Mick') was a member of the 1908–09 Kangaroo tour who remained in England to play for Leigh. Henry also played a Test against Great Britain in 1914 while Walter was a Queensland representative. A fourth brother, Alex, also played representative rugby league.

During those early years Glebe also fielded Ogaard and Fritz Thiering. East players included Lou D'Alpuget, J. Le Petit, Sid 'Sandy' Kaufmann and W. Tijou. J. Appolloney, Bill Schultz and Reg 'Whip' Latta played for Balmain. Schultz and Latta became Kangaroos after the First World War. By my reckoning nine of 94 (9.5 per cent) Kangaroos from 1908 to 1914 were of non-British-Irish, predominantly German, heritage.



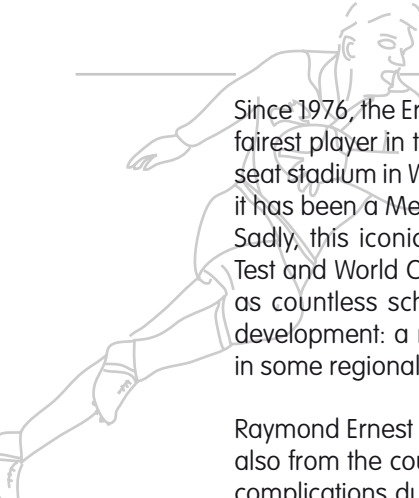
Mick Bolewski was one of four brothers who was prominent in Australian rugby league in its formative years.

Between the wars

The above trend was sustained between the wars with Kangaroo representatives included 'Immortals' Joe 'Chimpy' Busch, Ray Stehr and Eric Weissel, as well as Queenslanders Eric Frauenfelder, Fred Neumann and Les Heidke. It is easy to overlook the background of another 'Immortal', Frank Burge (1894–1958) of Glebe and St George and his brothers. The Burges were Australian-born of a German family: the addition of a final 'e' to the surname of Burg transformed it to a common Anglo name. Frank Burge played thirteen Tests for Australia between 1914 and 1922 and was named on the bench for the ARL's Team of the Century. His two elder brothers, Peter and Albert, represented Australia in rugby on the inaugural Wallaby tour of Britain and America. They later switched codes and played with Frank as did another brother, Laidley. In fact, Peter was chosen for the 1911–12 Kangaroo tour to Great Britain though he didn't play any Tests.

I have great interest in Joe 'Chimpy' Busch, who went from being a professional fisherman on the far north coast of NSW to Australian Test halfback within the space of months. He was spotted by Easts' star and talent scout 'Dinny' Campbell. Dinny played for the Wallabies before switching codes and played alongside Dally Messenger in Easts' first premiership-winning sides. He also represented NSW, before moving to England, and had nine very successful seasons with Leeds, when he scored 136 tries. Dinny had one final season with Eastern Suburbs in 1921. (I mention Dinny because his daughter Olive Grigg is my mother-in-law. She remembers Dinny bringing 'Chimpy' home for an occasional meal.)

Eric Weissel (1903–72) is also a favourite having played his entire career for clubs in the Riverina (NSW), including the Wagga Wagga Magpies. He captained an unbeaten Cootamundra side to successive Maher Cups. This was an era when country football was still strong. Weissel played two Tests against the touring British side in 1928 and made the Kangaroo touring squad of 1929–30 topping the tour point scoring with five tries and 56 goals. He played in three Tests of the 1932 Ashes series, including the brutal 'Battle of Brisbane' where his heroic 75-yard hobble on a broken ankle inspired a battered and bruised Australian team to 15–6 victory. Weissel was also a fair cricketer. Playing for a Riverina against Southern Districts in 1926, he dismissed Don Bradman for 43 when Bradman made his SCG debut.



Since 1976, the Eric Weissel medal has been awarded to the best and fairest player in the Riverina. In 1959 the Eric Weissel Oval, a 10,000-seat stadium in Wagga Wagga was named in his honour. Since then, it has been a Mecca for all aspiring young footballers in the Riverina. Sadly, this iconic venue of country rugby league, that has hosted Test and World Cup matches, Country-City and NRL matches as well as countless schoolboy knockout competitions, has been sold for development: a manifestation of the waning status of rugby league in some regional areas.

Raymond Ernest Stehr (1913–83), the Eastern Suburbs hard man, was also from the country, coming from Warialda in NSW. Despite spinal complications during childhood, Stehr defied medical opinion to become one of the toughest players of a very rugged sport. Recruited from Randwick Boys' High School in 1928, Stehr made his first-grade debut in a trial match aged just 15. In the following season, aged just 16 years and 85 days, he made his first-grade debut, and is still the youngest Australian player to do so. Stehr was a member of the legendary Eastern Suburbs side that lost just one match, winning premierships in 1935, 1936 and 1937. In 1940 he captained Easts to its eighth premiership and repeated this success in 1945. He was selected for the 1933–34 Kangaroo tour when he was sent off in two of the three Tests. He toured again in 1937–38. Stehr represented Australia 55 times including 11 Tests, played 33 matches for NSW and appeared in 184 club game

Among the *100 Greatest Players* of that era is another tough prop, Herb Steinohrt from Queensland's Darling Downs. His father had emigrated from Denmark in the late nineteenth century. Herb joined a talented Toowoomba Valleys side in 1922 that included Matt Heisler, Harry Liebke, Fred Prouten and Bob Miebusch. Herb played more than 130 for the famous Toowoomba Clydesdales side and represented Queensland from 1924 to 1933. He played nine Tests for Australia between 1928 and 1932, captaining Australia in the last three.²

The Eastern Suburbs lock-forward Andy Norval was part of Easts' dominant forward pack of the 1930s. The Norval name is possibly of Swedish origin (though it is also a Scottish surname). Born in South Australia, where he played Australian Rules, Norval began his rugby league career in Newcastle before moving to Sydney. He played in 105 matches with Easts between 1934 and 1941 and was a member of four premiership and three runner-up sides. He was selected on the

The 1924 Toowoomba side that defeated the touring British side in 1924 included four players with non-British-Irish names: 'Hern' Steinholt, Harry Liebke. Vic Armbruster and M. Heuschele.



1937–38 Kangaroo tour and played in three Tests, on the wing. Norval was named in the list of Australia's *100 Greatest Players*.

Herb Narvo, whose name was originally Nawo, had German ancestry. Sydney-born, but raised in Newcastle, Narvo signed with Newtown in 1937 and gained a late call up to 1937 Kangaroo tour, playing in four Tests. During the War, Narvo helped Newtown win the 1943 premiership but missed the following year's final due to his RAAF service. After the war Narvo joined St George steering the club to a Grand Final, which was lost to Balmain. During this period he was also the Australian heavyweight boxing champion.

Based on the ARL Kangaroos player register it appears that 22 of 218 (10 per cent) of the Kangaroos from 1908 to 1937 were of non-British-Irish backgrounds with players of German heritage being particularly prominent. This is similar to the numbers between 1908 and 1914 (10 of 94, 10.6 per cent).

During the second half of the nineteenth century Australia's abundant opportunities attracted an increasing number of immigrants. European migrants, which included entrepreneurs, peasants, farmers and artisans, built places of worship, established cultural and social



During the 1920s and 1930s rugby league players had more opportunities to excel at other sports than contemporary players. Herb Narvo was both a star in rugby league and boxing, becoming an Australian heavyweight boxing champion.

clubs and formed sporting teams. In the prevailing assimilationist atmosphere generated by Federation, many immigrant sons began playing the local, working class (and often Catholic) sport.³ The number of Chinese migrants also expanded dramatically from the time of the gold rushes.

This diversity was reflected at club level in Sydney. University players in 1923 included L. Halberstater and E.S. Ogg. Roy Beiber played for St George and Souths in the 1920s. Wests had J. Rosa (1930), Newtown fielded Hans Mork and his brothers, who were South African-born of Swiss parents, while Norths was positively exotic. Just flicking through Andrew Moore's history of the club, *The Mighty Bears!*, players of that inter-wars era include Deitz, Emelhenz, Arneman, Wunsch, Medina, Costa, Schiemer and the Dhu brothers. Norths had slick centre Herman Peters, another German Australian, who played four games for the Kangaroos on the 1921–22 tour of Great Britain. He kept a fascinating diary. Norths also had two black players, George Green and Paul Tranquille. Their probable ancestry is debated in Moore's book but either or both were Indigenous or possibly Afro-Caribbean and Mauritian respectively. (Despite the uncertainty about his background, Green was subsequently chosen in Indigenous Team of the Century!)

The great St George club entered the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) in 1921 and its first match was against Glebe. Although St George kept Glebe tryless, it lost 4–3. Herb Gilbert was captain-coach and Roy ‘Bunny’ Bossi was the hooker. The reserves included A. Bossi and Lew Heuschkel. Two seasons later Saints imported the first ‘outsider’ to Sydney football. Huatahi Turoa Brown Paki had impressed as captain of the 1922 Maori touring team, before being lured to Saints by George Carstairs. Paki played 15 games and scored three tries in 1923. He became a great administrator and an ambassador and was very influential in the development of Maori rugby league within the Waikato region. It’s almost impossible to imagine an NRL game nowadays without Maori players, so pervasive is their influence, but ‘Brownie’ was the first. But who was the first Chinese Australian first grader? Many believe that it was Billy Hong, Easts fullback/winger for a couple of seasons (1930–31).

Before leaving this era, cricket provides another illustration of the contribution of the German community to Australian sport and the adoption of the majority sport by cultural minorities. The only players of non-British-Irish heritage that appeared in Australian Test cricket from 1877 to 1938 were of German heritage:

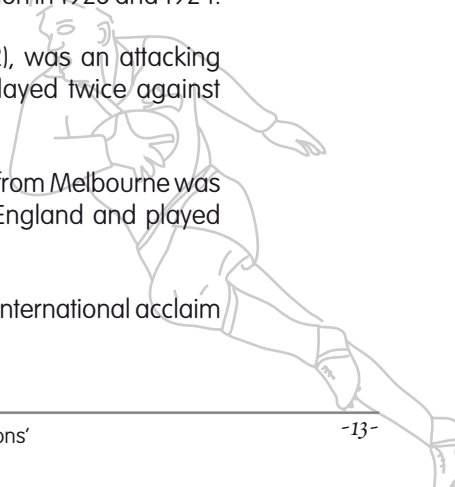
Dr Albert Ernst Victor Hartkopf (1889–1968), all rounder for Victoria played one Test against England at Melbourne in 1924–25. (Hartkopf also played 58 games for University in the VFL between 1908 and 1911 and kicked 87 goals).

Otto Ernest Nothling (1900–65), an all rounder from Queensland who first came to attention while at Sydney University. He played in the second Test v. England in 1928–29, (D.G. Bradman 12th man). He also represented NSW at rugby union in 1923 and 1924.

H.C. ‘Jack’ Nitschke (aka Slinger) (1905–82), was an attacking left-hand batsman from Adelaide who played twice against South Africa in 1931–32.

Hans Ebeling (1905–80), tall medium-pacer from Melbourne was a member of the 1934 Australian side in England and played one Test.⁴

At the same time Hubert Opperman was earning international acclaim with his endurance cycling feats.





Post-Second World War

After the Second World War, Australia chose to 'populate' rather than 'perish'. Large-scale migration irrevocably changed the country's identity. The impact would not be fully felt for another generation. Another 230 Kangaroos over the next 25 years included former captain 'Joe' Jorgenson, Balmain forward Fred De Belin (eight Tests), Peter Diversi, North's team of century lock and 1954 World Cup member; Newcastle champions Terry Pannowitz and Allan Buman; Queenslanders Elton Rasmussen, Bob Gehrke, Mick Veivers, Angelo Crema, Dennis Monteit, Col Weiss and John Wittenberg—all of them rugged, no-nonsense forwards. Former Australian and Dragons' captain-coach Graeme Langlands described Wittenberg in the following terms:

He was very, very tough. He lost half a hand in an accident with farming equipment before he came to Sydney but it didn't worry him. He told me that when he resumed playing after the accident the tops of the finger stumps would bleed during matches. He didn't let it worry him.⁵

The Immortal Reg Gasnier entered the scene during this period. I recall that early in the 1960s, when he first captained Australia, much was made of his distant French heritage. This was also the case with the Australian cricket captain, Richie Benaud.

Manly-Warringah winger, Nick Yakich whose career ended prematurely through injury was another notable player. Yakich represented NSW in 1965 and was also selected in Australian squad to tour New Zealand, the first Kangaroo of Croatian heritage. Nick's brother Fred also played for Manly as did second-rower Tony Antunac.

My tally of culturally-diverse Kangaroos by 1970 is 38 of 454 or 8.3 per cent, down from 22 of 218, (10 per cent) of Kangaroos from 1908 to 1937. While this suggests a decline from previous levels, anecdotal evidence from club records and programs suggest that rugby league was just as diverse, if not more so, as pre-Second World War levels. However, the diversity in the Australian team had become more significant a few years earlier (1960), when Queensland's Lionel Morgan became the first Aborigine to play for Australia. He was followed by Artie Beetson, Eric Simms, Ron Saddler and George Ambrum. At club level Eric Robinson, Kevin Longbottom, Bruce Olive, Bruce 'Larpa' Stewart, (uncle to the Ella brothers) and Kevin Yow Yeh were prominent.

Meanwhile St George resumed its Pacific experiment by signing giant Fijian forward, Apisai Toga. After two seasons with the Rochdale Hornets (UK), Apisai came to St George in 1968 and was joined by his (equally-gigantic) brother, Inosai the following year. Sadly, Apisai collapsed and died after training one night in 1973 when he suffered tetanus poisoning from an unattended coral injury while visiting Fiji during the off-season.

Changes in the 1970s

The election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 encouraged a new sense of identity and was a strong indication that the winds of change were blowing. Australia's new wave of theatre began with *The Legend of King O'Malley* by Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis and the Australian Council for the Arts provided financial support for the Arts. Sydney's Nimrod Theatre was founded in 1970 as was the Australian Performing Group, based at the Pram Factory in Carlton, Melbourne. Similar small companies presenting new work sprung up around the country: Adelaide had Troupe & Theatre 61; Brisbane, La Boite; and Perth, Hole-in-the-Wall. The Australian National Playwright Conference was established in 1972 and Currency Press, which published new Australian plays, in 1973.

Sydney Opera House opened during this decade as did the Adelaide Festival. The Victorian College of the Arts was established in 1976. Indigenous theatre (in western sense) began with *Basically Black* (Nimrod 1972) and *The Cherry Pickers* (Kevin Gilbert 1971, Black Theatre Redfern). There were regional companies: Hunter Valley (Castenet Club), Riverina Trucking, Murray River Performing Group (Albury Wodonga), Parramatta Riverside (Castle Hill) and community theatre: Sidetrack made and performed original theatre for migrant and working people in Marrickville and the inner-west. Grahame Bond unleashed *Aunty Jack* and Reg Livermore introduced *Betty Blokbuster*. The first Festival of Sydney took place in 1977.

The left-for-dead Australian film industry revived and with support from Australian Film Commission (1975), flourished. The decade featured *Sunday Too Far Away*, Peter Weir's feature debut *The Cars That Ate Paris* and the haunting *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (for which cinematographer Russell Boyd won a BAFTA), Bruce Beresford's *The Great McCarthy*, *Barry Mckenzie Holds His Own* and *Don's Party*; *Alvin Purple Rides Again*



and Petersen by Tim Burstall. Fred Schepisi's feature debut *The Devil's Playground* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. *Caddie*, *Storm Boy*, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, *Fourth Wish*, *Picture Show Man* and *Newsfront* (directed by Phil Noyce). *My Brilliant Career* launched the careers of Judy Davis and Gillian Armstrong, while *Mad Max* did likewise for Mel Gibson and George Miller.

Local content requirements also ensured plenty of television production: Crawford's cop shows, serials, mini-series, ABC comedies. *Countdown* premiered on ABC TV. Colour television also arrived. There was plenty of locally produced music, to be played on new community radio stations, as well as the ABC's Triple Jay network.

The first one-day cricket international was played in 1970 when Australia defeated England by five wickets. It was the Chappell era for Australian cricket, spearheaded by Lillee and Thomson. Then the game was transformed by Kerry Packer in 1977. Anti-apartheid riots marked the Springbok rugby tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1971, particularly in Queensland where Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen declared a state of emergency. Shane Gould won three of Australia's eight gold medals at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games but there were none at Montreal four years later. This 'failure' was a key reason why the Australian Institute of Sport was established in 1981. The Socceroos went to the 1974 World Cup Finals, North Melbourne won its first VFL premierships coached by the legendary Ron Barassi, Mark Edmondson was the last Aussie male to win Australian Tennis Open (in 1976) and Chris O'Neil was the last Aussie female (1978). The Wallabies won the Bledisloe Cup after 30 years.

Ethnic Community Councils were established and Carnivale, the NSW multicultural arts festival, was inaugurated in 1975. Early tests for 'Ethnic Television' (SBS) were conducted.

The sons of the post-War migrants were now to be found in most teams in Sydney rugby league. Tommy Raudonikis and George Peponis in particular symbolised the new era in a more dominant way than had been evident previously. Of course I declare bias, since one of them is from Wagga Wagga and the other is Greek.

The son of a Lithuanian father and a Swiss mother, Tommy Raudonikis was cocky, combative and refused to be beaten by any man. He was an outstanding leader and tough beyond comprehension. He must have

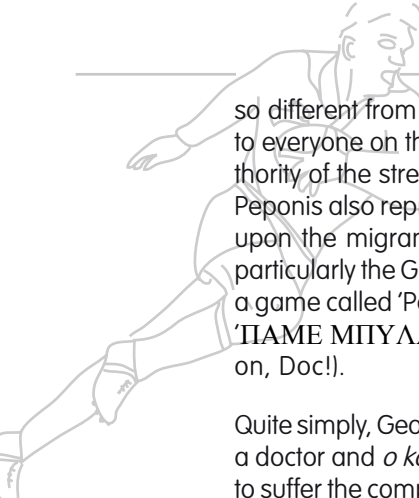


*Tommy Raudinikis,
the son of a Lithuanian
father and a Swiss mother,
provided superb service
from the scrum base.*

been a nightmare to play against. He started with Wagga Kangaroos (1969) before playing 202 games for Western Suburbs and another 37 for the Newtown Jets. First selected for Australia in 1971, he remained first choice for most of the decade and was captain in two Tests of the 1973 Kangaroo tour. He also captained NSW in the inaugural State of Origin contest in 1980. Raudonikis was the perfect protagonist for the 'Fibros' in their class warfare (ingeniously inspired by coach Roy Masters) against the Manly 'Silvertails' (this being the subject of the seventh Tom Brock Lecture). Along with all his other proletarian qualities, Tommy also embodied 'wog pride'.

I was also fortunate to enjoy Tommy's career as a coach with the Magpies from a privileged position as ABC's occasional 'Round the Grounds' reporter. One of my duties was to record interviews with the respective coaches and then broadcast them as part of my report. Tommy is an aural delight with a voice like he's had a few smokes, a few beers and eaten the bottles. If Wests had lost, which was not infrequent during those times, Tommy's language was often too 'colourful' for broadcast and I would have my finger poised to 'beep' as we went to air.

The other major 1970s figure was George Peponis, the first player born outside Australia to captain the Australian rugby league team. His family migrated from Tripoli in Greece to Australia when George was an infant. He played rugby union at Canterbury Boys' High School and then league before being graded by Canterbury-Bankstown in 1973, which supported him financially while he studied medicine. Like Tommy, he was also a fierce competitor (albeit less emphatic) and a great leader, with the 1980 premiership and five from five for Australia. But he was



so different from Tommy, that the concept of 'diversity' was apparent to everyone on the new colour television sets. Tommy carried the authority of the street while George carried the authority of the scholar. Peponis also represented another aspect of 'wog pride' and his effect upon the migrant communities in the Canterbury-Bankstown area, particularly the Greek, was immense. Little kids playing and tackling in a game called 'Peponis', signs in Greek: 'Pame Bulldogs', 'Ela, Giatre!' 'ΤΙΑΜΕ ΜΠΥΛΛΑΝΤΟΓΣ! ΕΛΑ ΓΙΑΤΡΕ!' '(Go Bulldogs! Come on, Doc!).

Quite simply, George was the answer to every migrant parent's dream: a doctor and *o kapitanos* of Australia! Except for those of us who had to suffer the comparison, he was the the model Greek-Australian son. The son our parents never had! My father delighted in the conceit that George could both injure and repair a person and that each weekend presented him with 13 prospective patients. He had visions of George bulk billing the opposition, he thought it was a stroke of genius.

George's great rival for the hooking position was Manly's Max Krilich, who led the Sea Eagles to the 1978 premiership when they played six matches in 16 days including the Grand Final replay where they beat Cronulla. Controversially, named as captain of the 1982 Kangaroos, the unassuming Krilich grew into the captaincy blending the best qualities of Raudonikis and Peponis. Under Krilich and coach Frank Stanton that side went on to defeat all before them and are now known as 'the Invincibles'.



The experiment to import an African-American from the NFL proved unsuccessful. Manfred Moore played just four games for Newtown.

Among the other Kangaroos of the 1970s was Parramatta half John Kolc, while the German thread, however slender, remained prominent with Ian Schubert and Queensland forwards Greg Veivers, Nick Geiger and Lew and Greg Platz. Larry Corowa became the sixth Indigenous Kangaroo. The growing numbers of culturally-diverse players show up in the figures. Kangaroo representation at end of 1979 was 47 of 523 (8.9 per cent). There were also six Indigenous players. This represented a slight increase from the 1969 figures (8.3 per cent)

Among notable 1970s club players were Tommy's 'Fibro' compatriot Mick Liubinskas; Parramatta's Sulkowicz brothers, Ed and Ted; New Zealand imports Dane and Kurt Sorenson and Maori Henry Tatana who played for the Bulldogs and inevitably, St George. Greek Peter Peters (aka Zorba) played for Manly. With great invention Newtown recruited Super Bowl winner Manfred Moore, but despite early promise the African American only lasted four games before deciding that the extra padding, particularly the helmet, offered by the NFL was preferable.

The 1980s

During this decade greater diversity became even more apparent among the Kangaroos. Queensland provided the mandatory German forwards Brad Tessmann and Bryan Niebling and also the distant son of French nobility John Ribot de Bressac, the paradoxically named Italian prop Martin Bella and a Romanian hooker Greg Conescu. From NSW came Eric Grothe and Andrew Ettingshausen (both selected in the 100 Greatest players) the latter providing a different image for German-Australian masculinity. Paul Sironen became the first Finnish-Australian Kangaroo. Our first Lebanese-Australian representative was Sironen's club mate, hooker Benny Elias. Benny was born in Tripoli, a city with the same name as the village of George Peponis's birth. Benny's parents, like George, brought him to Australia at a young age:

Sure, I looked up to George Peponis. But unlike George I started playing halfback. That soon changed because the Aussie coach [at junior club] wanted his son to play in that position. You know what, that turned out to be the best coaching move he made. I ended up playing hooker and I must admit my ethnic background helped me succeed. My parents, like most ethnics, worked hard when they came out here and I could see comparisons with the position I played. I really worked hard at my game, despite the taunts and criticisms I copped in my younger years.⁶



John Ribot de Bressac, the distant son of French nobility, is a study of concentration while kicking.

Elias worked so hard at his game that he transformed the hooking position. It may be too far-fetched to suggest that he was the Adam Gilchrist of the code. Benny provided a significant evolutionary link by taking the halfback's skills into the middle of the pack, and more importantly, into dummy half. As a hooker he was the 'love child' of Tommy and George! He was tough, cunning, abrasive, cocky and tricky and won games and bled memorably for Balmain and NSW. He was also brilliant in rescuing the Ashes on the 1990 tour. I particularly enjoyed his explosive contests at club and Origin levels with Steve and



Newtown player Fred Pagano, a 'tackling machine', had an Italian background.



*Dr George Peponis was
a kapitano of the Australian
rugby league team.*

Kerrod Walters and eagerly anticipated Balmain-Souths matches. I'm sadly ignorant of the history of relations between Lebanon and Malta, but judging from what happened every time Benny lined up against Mario Fenech, I assume there must be some vicious tribal revenge dispute dating back to the thirteenth century BC. Benny and Mario just couldn't seem to agree on anything. I wish that we had had 'scrum-cam'. The referees were kept busy but must have had many laughs.

Souths, like all clubs by then, had a strong sprinkling of players from diverse backgrounds. Fenech's team mates included Joe Squadrito, Ziggy Niszczot, Bronko Djura, Michael Pobjie and Paul Akkary,

Not only was the game becoming more multicultural, but also more professional and cosmopolitan. The North Sydney Bears for instance, unable to attract or produce enough top locals, developed a strong Kiwi connection that saw Mark Graham, Fred Ah Kuoi, Clayton Friend and the amazing Olsen Filipaina join the club. Saints had huge Tongan front rower John Fifita, while England's Martin Offiah (of Nigerian descent) had his first season in Australia with the Roosters. Ellery Hanley took turns with both Tigers and Magpies.

Indigenous Kangaroos of the decade included Queenslanders Colin Scott, Dale Shearer, Tony Currie and Sam Backo, along with Steve Ella and John Ferguson from NSW. The legendary Mal Meninga was a Solomon Islander. I have calculated that 55 of the 599 Kangaroos until 1989, 9.2 per cent came from non-British-Irish backgrounds and Indigenous players, in addition, comprised 2.1 per cent. I suspect that that a proper analysis of club playing staff during the 1980s would reflect a higher level of cultural diversity.



The 1990s

The diversity of the Kangaroos further increased during the 1990s with at least another 13 players of mixed heritage as well as a further seven Indigenous players being capped. From Queensland came Paul Hauff, Mark Hohn, Trevor Gillmeister, Gary Larson (of Swedish descent) and the quintessential German Queenslander, Shane Webke. NSW provided Glenn Lazarus, Jim Serdaris, Nik Kosef, Michael Buettner, Michael Vella (possibly the first Maltese-Australian Test player) and Jason Stevens. The latter may seem an anomaly in terms of names, but does serve to highlight one of the obvious flaws of my system, which ignores cultural heritage on the maternal side. Jason Stevens was raised by his mother and her parents, the Papadopoulos family. Likewise Craig Gower, who represented Australia in the Super League Anzac Test, has an Italian mother. He later switched codes and countries and played Test rugby for Italy against Australia in 2009. I expect there are similar players of whose maternal influence I am completely ignorant.

It is also worth noting the appearances of Jim Dymock and John Hopoate in the 1990s, as well as Solomon Haumono, who also represented Australia in the Super League international in 1997. The three are of Tongan descent and their appearances mark the beginning of a trend that has become more prominent in the present day, as more Tongan and other Pacific Islanders find their way into the NRL. Families from those islands traditionally travelling west for better employment opportunities. Whereas previously they had stopped in New Zealand, some have travelled further west and settled in Australia since the 1980s. Tongan communities have been established in Sydney's south-west, providing fertile breeding grounds for NRL players.

Indigenous representatives included Laurie Daley and Gorden Tallis who emulated Beetson by captaining their country. There was also Cliff Lyons, Craig Salvatori, Steve Renouf, Wendell Sailor and Andrew Walker, while Ken Nagas and David Peachey represented Australia in the Super League Anzac Test of 1997. During the early 1990s the NSWRL (as NRL then was) had the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants of all major sporting competitions in Australia (including the Australian Football League). My figures suggest just over 10 per cent of Kangaroos to be of mixed heritage (71 of 679) by the end of the decade. There were, in addition, 22 Indigenous players (3.2 per cent).

Enterprising clubs like the Bulldogs, not surprisingly, started to market themselves to the various communities, by staging 'multicultural days', highlighting the diversity within their area and team. The architect of this plan was Lyn Anderson, then marketing manager at Bulldogs, and daughter of legendary 'Bullfrog' Peter Moore. Jim Serdaris told Andy Paschalidis:

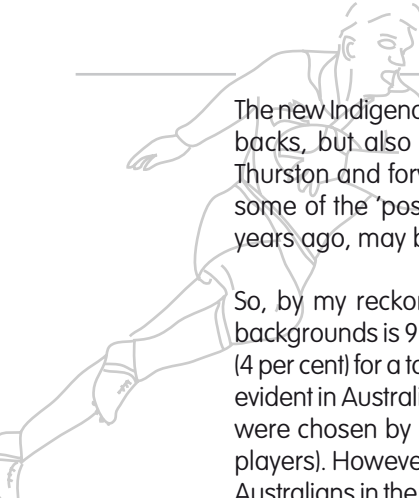
I grew up in the Canterbury area and I found that there had been an increase in the awareness of Rugby League when different players of ethnic background came through the ranks. The Lebanese people, in particular, are fanatical. It was a problem for Canterbury when they moved to Parramatta Stadium. The ethnic communities in the district didn't like the move and it showed in the [lower] crowd figures.

Like many of my mates I was under pressure to play soccer ... As a kid I must admit I got called 'wog' lots of times but I found it worked in your favour because it made you play better.⁷

The new millennium

During the first eight years of the new millennium there have been a further 30 new Kangaroos from culturally diverse backgrounds, with Pacific Islanders becoming increasingly prominent. Lote Tuqiri, Petro Cioniceva and Jarryd Hayne have Fijian backgrounds while Willie Mason, Richard Villasanti, Willie Tonga, Brent Kite, Anthony Tupou, Antonio Kaufusi and Israel Folau have Tongan antecedents. Reni Maitua emanates from Samoa, a background he shares with Karmichael Hunt who also claims Cook Islander heritage. Timana Tahu and Tonie Carroll (who also played for New Zealand) have Maori heritage.

There have also been some prominent non-Islander players. Hazem El Masri, born in the same city (Tripoli) as Benny Elias, emigrated from Lebanon with his family as an adolescent. He switched from soccer to rugby league, eventually joining the Bulldogs where he created many NRL and Bulldogs point-scoring records. El Masri is a devout Muslim, the first to represent Australia in rugby league. Rabbit and Rooster Craig Wing is the first Chinese-Australian (possibly via the Philippines) Kangaroo. Mention should also be made of Chris McKenna, Queenslander, son of an Anglo father and non-Anglo mother (Portuguese?). Braith Anasta has a Greek background.



The new Indigenous 'Roos included as usual some outstanding outside backs, but also playmakers such as Scott Prince and Johnathan Thurston and forward Sam Thaiday. This is a possible indication that some of the 'positional segregation' found in an American study 20 years ago, may be breaking down.⁸

So, by my reckoning, the final tally of players from non-British-Irish backgrounds is 92 out of 743 (12.3 per cent), plus 30 Indigenous players (4 per cent) for a total of 16 per cent and rising. A similar trend is probably evident in Australian rugby union. (*Rugby League's 100 Greatest Players* were chosen by 130 experts including 13 non-Anglo and Indigenous players). However, the figure is lower than the estimates of non-Anglo Australians in the general population: 25 to 30 per cent, with 25 per cent overseas-born, and 20 per cent speak reported to speak languages other than English at home.

The most likely reason for this is the lack of engagement with rugby league by the large Asian communities as well as Latin-American and emerging African communities, all of whom look to soccer rather than rugby league for social and sporting networks. Indeed, this still remains the football of choice for the majority of young European Australians. Traditional inner-city junior competitions have dwindled as other new areas flourish.

Sixteen per cent of the Kangaroos is also much lower than my straw poll of 2008 NRL players as provided by official club websites. NRL 2008: 413 players, 94 Maori/Pacific Island (22.7 per cent), NESB 37 (8.9 per cent), Indigenous 30 (7.2 per cent) making a total of 161 non-Anglo or 39 per cent. Obviously, these figures show the enormous impact of the Maori and Pacific Islanders on the contemporary game. Nevertheless, 16 per cent is higher than the non-Anglo representation in our Federal Parliament: 34 out of 226 (15 per cent) with 24 out of 150 in the House of Representatives and 10 out of 76 in the Senate.

The Rugby League World Cup

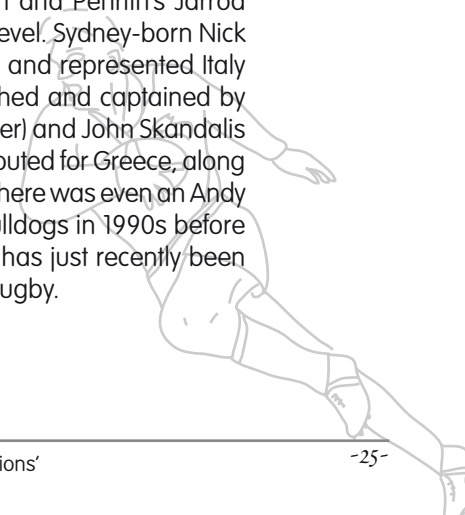
Before concluding I'd like to talk briefly about the Rugby League World Cup, a competition which has struggled for decades as it has tried to develop the game in other countries. I have fond memories of it, ever since the 1957 French team played a warm-up match in Wagga (cockerel blazer patch). Recent cups have shown some interesting developments which add further insight into the nature of rugby league in Australia.

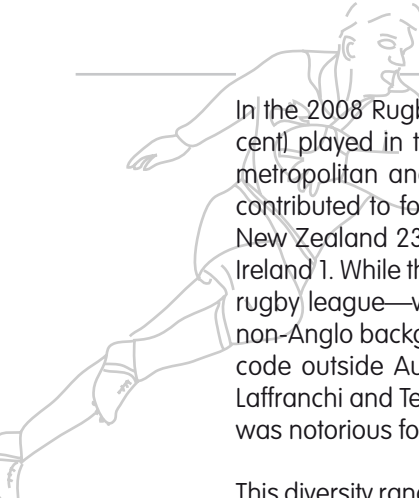
In an attempt to revitalise the tournament and to celebrate England's centenary in the code, the competition expanded to 10 teams in 1995, including South Africa, Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa and Papua New Guinea. There were another seven teams in an 'Emerging Nations' World Cup.

The twelfth Rugby League World Cup in 2000 expanded to 16 nations. The teams included Russia (which featured Ian Rubin from Souths and Easts), Cook Islands, Scotland, Ireland, Lebanon, New Zealand Maori and Samoa. The Cup has been reduced to ten teams in 2008, with qualifying rounds throughout Europe and the Pacific.

Interestingly, Lebanon and some of the European countries (Malta, Greece) have had their teams established by Australians before being able to supply domestic players. Lebanon missed out on the finals this time with a team coached by Darren Maroon (ex-Bulldog), captained by Hazem El Masri and including Frank Samia (from St George-Illawarra), Danny Chiha (Windsor), George Ndaira (Souths). Previous coaches and players include John Elias, Joe Thomas and Hassan Saleh.

Michael Vella, Roosters prop Shane Shackleton and Penrith's Jarrod Sammut have played for Malta at international level. Sydney-born Nick Zisti played for several NRL clubs during 1990s, and represented Italy in both rugby codes. The Greek side was coached and captained by former NRL players Steve Georgallis (Dutch mother) and John Skandalis and current Bulldog Nick Kouparitsas recently debuted for Greece, along with several other NRL and lower-grade players. There was even an Andy Marinos from Zimbabwe who played for the Bulldogs in 1990s before returning to rugby and representing Wales. He has just recently been appointed managing director of South African Rugby.





In the 2008 Rugby League World Cup 72 of the 240 players (30 per cent) played in the NRL. There were other players drawn from the metropolitan and regional competitions. Australian-based players contributed to following numbers to World Cup sides: Australia 24, New Zealand 23, Tonga 17, Samoa, 11, Fiji 9, PNG 7, Scotland 4 and Ireland 1. While the World Cup showcases the diversity of the NRL and rugby league—with 52 out of the 72 NRL players (72 per cent) from non-Anglo background—it is also a reminder of the weakness of the code outside Australia. Among Australia's new caps are Anthony Laffranchi and Terry Campese, whose uncle David, the rugby genius, was notorious for bringing the game into repute.

This diversity ranges across all echelons of the game. While the World Cup showcased The Greek community for instance have provided coaches, such as Phil Economidis (Gold Coast) and Arthur Kitinas (Souths), as well as club presidents, Nick Pappas (Souths), Nick Politis (Roosters) and George Peponis (Bulldogs). So far I am not aware of any Greek referees, which is surprising considering I've never heard a Greek yet who couldn't do a better job.



St George-Illawarra player Frank Samia represented Lebanon in the World Cup.

Diversity and the future of the game?

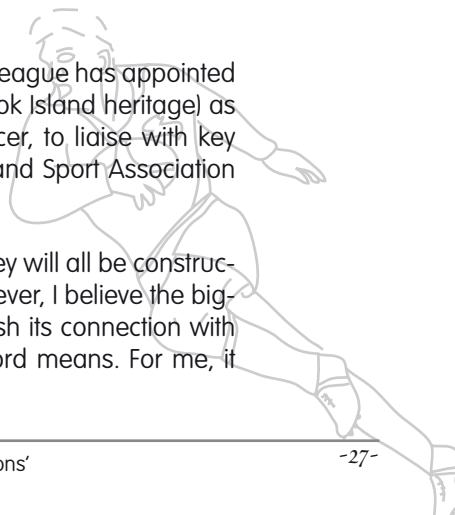
Finally, what does this diversity mean for the future of the game? Given the professionalism and the way the game is now played with the emphasis on size, strength and speed the continual development of Islander players is certain, as they are just as much in demand in English Super League and professional rugby. Likewise, the overrepresentation of Indigenous players seems likely to remain and perhaps even increase. But if League is to survive it will need to do even more work within the other diverse communities (particularly the Asian, African and Latin American communities) as the competition for junior players is intense among football codes and other sports.

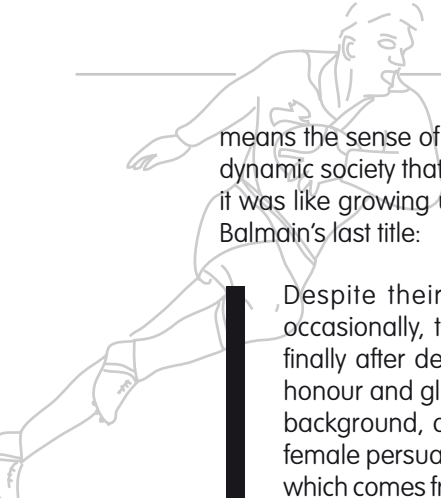
Crowds remain modest at many club games and Australia's dominance at international level has made for too many lopsided Tests in a sport that has such a small global footprint. Nevertheless, the 2008 World Cup was shown on television in 128 countries. This may create some interest but whether the international body can generate enough finance to undertake intense and meaningful development with smaller European affiliates remains doubtful. Australian (British and New Zealand as well) players should continue to be encouraged to play for their country of heritage. Perhaps some cultural exchange could take place.

I was interested to hear Matthew Johns last weekend talking about the future of the game and suggesting the inclusion of a team from Papua New Guinea in the NRL, similar to the Warriors.⁹ There have already been several fine players from that nation: Adrian Lam (Easts player and coach), thrilling Storm winger Marcus Bai, Michael Bani of the Sea Eagles, Neville Costigan at the Broncos and Raiders. Johns's idea makes good sense.

I also note with interest that the Victorian Rugby League has appointed former Melbourne Storm player Matt Rua (of Cook Island heritage) as Multicultural and Indigenous Development Officer, to liaise with key groups such as the Victorian Aboriginal Youth and Sport Association (VAYSA).

All such initiatives are welcome and hopefully they will all be constructive in strengthening the code in the future. However, I believe the biggest challenge the League faces is to re-establish its connection with its 'community', whatever we may think that word means. For me, it





means the sense of inclusion into a microcosm that reflects the wider dynamic society that is Australia. Writer Angelo Loukakis recalled what it was like growing up in Leichhardt in the 1960s and the euphoria of Balmain's last title:

Despite their decided disadvantages, occasionally, very occasionally, the unlikely lads would come good—as they did finally after decades of being on the outer, and to their eternal honour and glory, in 1969. If because of your unpropitious ethnic background, or possibly the fact that you were a person of the female persuasion, you were denied the immediate involvement which comes from playing the game yourself, there were still times when Rugby League stopped being something which happened ‘out there’, times when all the barriers came down and you too became part of the whole damn thing, and when you were able to directly experience something as central to the game as the joy of victory. That was what winning really meant that year, especially for those of us who normally felt on the outer—a distinct sense of being a part of it, of being included.¹⁰

If rugby league can find a way to regenerate that feeling among the youth of our diverse communities, it will go a long way towards securing its future. Without strong grassroots support and participation, the game will be unsustainable at the elite level. There are more than 100 languages spoken in Australia and rugby league (like all our major sports) must learn to communicate in all of them.

Notes:

- 1, 2 Sean Fagan, 'Herb Steinohrt: The Gentle Clydesdale', RL1908, <http://www.rl1908.com/Legends/Steinohrt.htm>, accessed 1 October 2008; Fagan, "'George" Anlezark: A Forgotten Pioneer', RL1908, <http://www.rl1908.com/Legends/Anlezark.htm>, accessed 1 October 2008.
- 3 Anthony Hughes, 'Muscular Judaism and the Jewish Rugby League Competition in Sydney, 1924-27', *Sporting Traditions*, vol 13, no 1, Nov. 1996, pp. 61-80.
- 4 James Bradley, 'Inventing Australians and Constructing Englishness: Cricket and the Creation of a National Consciousness, 1860-1914', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 11, no 2, May 1995, pp. 35-60.
- 5 'History of St George', http://www.showroom.com.au/dragons/dragonshistory/history_players_wxyz.htm, accessed 1 October 2008.
- 6 Quoted in Andy Paschalidis, 'Pies, Souvlaki and Yeeros', in David Headon and Lex Marinos (eds), *League of a Nation*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1996, p. 159.
- 7 Paschalidis, 'Pies, Souvlaki and Yeeros', p. 158.
- 8 Christopher J. Hallinan, 'Aborigines and Positional Segregation in Australian Rugby League', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1991, pp. 69-79.
- 9 *Grandstand*, ABC Radio (Sydney), 1 November 2008.
- 10 Angelo Loukakakis, 'Balmain Tigers', Headon and Marinos, *League of a Nation*, pp. 79-80.

