

# The Postmodernisation of Rugby Union in Australia

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## Abstract

In recent times rugby union in Australia has undergone significant change. We argue that the nature of this change can be largely explained in terms of the rise of postmodern structures and practices in Australian society. Most sport managers, however, have not heard the tribunes of postmodernism announcing its imminent arrival, and neither would they be familiar with its modern antecedents. This article reviews the origins of postmodernism and its impact upon the rugby union sporting landscape. It is argued that postmodernism has removed the traditional metaphysical, mythical and social barriers that were thought to divide business from sport. As a consequence, the traditional, and for some supporters, sacred practices of rugby union were undermined by an expanding consumer culture. Thus, rugby union in the postmodern world is not only a sport, but also a business that craves for media attention, corporate support and audience interest. The implications of these changes for rugby union's future are foreshadowed.

## Origins and Evolution of Rugby

As part of the marketing campaign for the 1991 Rugby Union World Cup the media were invited by the Rugby Football Union (RFU) to be part of an audience to watch the reenactment of the what is widely believed the 'first act' that resulted in rugby's distinctive form (Dunning, Maguire & Pearton, 1993). According to the stone set in the wall at Rugby School, in 1823:

William Webb Ellis who, with a fine disregard for the rules of football as played in this time, first took the ball in his arms and ran with it, thus originating the distinctive feature of the rugby game A.D. 1823 (qf. Hickie, 1993: 1).

Many rugby administrators and players of the late twentieth century accepted this explanation as fact. In reality it is myth, a strategy formulated seventy years after the alleged Webb Ellis incident (Dunning et al., 1993). In practice its origins were more evolutionary. According to Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard (1979), it is through the English Public School System that rugby gradually emerged as a game with distinctive features. It was not until the

1850s, however, that a distinctively rugby game spread into English society at large and independent clubs were formed to administer the game.

By the 1870s rugby in England was predominantly played and administered by a relatively homogeneous upper middle-class clientele who wanted rugby to remain an amateur sport. Rugby according to this ethos had its ideal aim in the production of character. It was all about gentlemanliness, leisure, loyalty and decency (Allison, 2001). The competitive element was crucial, but striving to win was supposed, at all times, to remain subordinate to the production of higher values. At the same time, this ethos expressed the wealth, independence and exclusiveness of the public school elite. Thus, as a class, they could not only afford leisure, but also could use it principally to please themselves. They believed that if the code was to pay its players and administrators it would transform the sport from play into work and destroy its amateur ethos and character building quality (White, 1994).

This ethos came under threat as the popularity of the code expanded and cascaded into the lower classes, particularly in the north of England. As the game spread, it was taken up by those who had either not attended public school or, if they had, not the higher status schools such as Rugby, Eton or Westminster. While they considered themselves gentlemen, they frequently ignored some of the game's protocols. For example, to the disbelief of those in the south, 'northerners' were prepared to recruit working men as team members. Consequently, rugby in the northern regions held a lower degree of status and exclusiveness than in the south. This juxtaposition of socially exclusive clubs with more 'open' clubs was a configuration full of potential for tension and conflict (Dyer-Bennet, Townes & Trevithick, 1996).

These tensions emerged first in Yorkshire, and were given shape by the Yorkshire Challenge Cup established in 1876. As the Cup competition expanded, many new clubs were formed, and the numerical strength of Yorkshire rugby union increased rapidly. Moreover, since the Cup matches attracted large crowds, the Cup played a crucial part in the emergence of northern rugby as a spectator sport. This provided the economic catalyst for the transformation of open clubs into gate taking clubs with the capacity to pay players and administrators (Dyer-Bennet et al., 1996).

In the south of England, the values of amateurism were preferred. For the southerners, Rugby's ideals were encapsulated in the production of fun, pleasure and character building, but certainly not the production of monetary gain (Allison, 2001). The competitive element was crucial to the code's values, but striving to win was seen as subordinate to the production of pleasure and sportsmanship. Southern rugby club officials agreed that if the code was to professionalise and pay its players and administrators, as it was doing in some northern 'pockets', it would commercialise the code unnecessarily, and destroy its amateur ethos and intrinsic value (Dyer-Bennet et al., 1996).

Conflict revealed itself at the RFU general meeting in 1893. The public school elite resolved to oppose any form of professionalism becoming enshrined in its constitution, a regulation that would effectively deter working class involvement (Collins, 1998). Two years later, comprehensive sets of anti-professionalism regulations were drawn up. Subsequently, the game of rugby took different directions in the south as opposed to some areas in the north of England. The South therefore embraced the amateur values, which also meant that they played for its own sake, and officials administered in their spare time. At the same time, anti-professionalism regulations magnified the south-north divide. Officials in Yorkshire and Lancashire in particular, were left with no alternative but to embrace the increasingly professional game of northern union football, or what was to become known in 1922 as rugby league (White, 1994).

### **The Cultural Diffusion of Rugby**

By the end of the nineteenth century rugby union and its amateur ethos had spread throughout Britain and to the British Empire's colonies. This expansion created the impetus for the development of a world governing authority that could oversee and enforce the amateur ethos that the English public school elites wanted entrenched within the code. This led to the formation of the International Rugby Football Board (IRB) in 1890. The IRB was formed, in part, to ensure that amateur values were adopted by all countries that played rugby union, one of which was Australia. It was therefore not surprising, according to Tom Hickie (1993) that the amateur ethos became entrenched within the code in Australia. These values, however, did not stop officials and players from hotly debating the rules of the game. It became clear to those involved that there was a need for uniformity in this area. This need led to the formation of the Southern Rugby Union in 1874, which, in 1892, became the New South Wales Rugby Union (NSWRU). This organisation was administered by volunteer officials whose 'love for the game' acted as the prime motivation for their involvement (Hickie, 1993).

As the popularity of the code increased it began to spread north to Queensland, culminating in the first inter-colonial game of rugby football in Australia in 1882 between New South Wales and Queensland. This contest created the impetus for the formation of the Queensland Rugby Union, or as it was originally called, the Northern Rugby Union, which was officially incorporated on 2 November 1883 (Diehm, 1997). Despite the enthusiasm of the volunteer administrators who strived to establish the code in Queensland, for a long time it languished behind New South Wales in its influence on the Australian rugby scene. Consequently, the game faded into recession for twelve years at the end of World War One; however, it was to re-emerge in 1929.

Despite this slow consolidation period of the code in Queensland, by 1949 rugby union in Australia had expanded enough to warrant recognition and representation on the IRB. In order to secure IRB membership Australia needed

to form a national body that could voice the opinions of those who administered the code in the country. Consequently, the Australian Rugby Union (ARU) was formed to serve this purpose. The international 'codification' of the game was complete, and a single governing body controlled the game in Australia. The game had been, in a word, modernised, but not yet commercialised. In other words while Australian rugby union developed a well defined governance and management structure during the 1950s and 1960s its 'amateur hegemony' ensured that commercial interests did not 'contaminate' the game (Allison, 2001).

By the 1970s, rugby union in Australia began to display the first signs of commercialisation when the ARU accepted sponsorship from adidas to cover the costs of outfitting the Wallabies, the national representative team (Pollard, 1984). While this emerging corporate sponsorship broadened the financial base of rugby, it did not have a significant impact on how the game was administered, and did not extend to players receiving payment for playing (Phillips, 1994). Rugby union in Australia still supported and promoted the amateur values stipulated by the IRFB. The code therefore continued to be administered by volunteers, and played for pleasure rather than financial reward. The stance provided a justification for the ARU to expel players from participating in the code if they openly received payment for playing (Allison, 2001). These practices ensured the amateur values of the game were preserved and continued to flourish.

### **Commercial Pressures**

The gradual professionalisation of rugby league throughout the 1980s presented increased financial opportunities for elite players to defect to rugby league. For example, players such as Michael O'Connor, Brett Papworth, Ken Wright, and Russell Fairfax made the shift from union to league. It was becoming evident that the potential for greater financial rewards offset the consequences of being expelled from union for breaching amateur guidelines. At the same time it was becoming clear that the volunteer administrative structures that underpinned rugby union could no longer deal with the commercial pressures being placed on it as it struggled to survive against the expanding national competitions in Australian football and rugby league (Diehm, 1997). Throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s rugby union's amateur ethos was under threat. The rugby world admitted that the amateur values and traditions that were so strongly enforced by administrators and players for generations were becoming at best, severely undermined, and at worst, obsolete.

These pressures on rugby's traditions culminated in August 1995. In the first place, rugby union's amateur stance was put to the test as a result of the developments that occurred in rugby league. In early 1995 Rupert Murdoch's News Limited introduced its 'Super League' competition in an attempt to control administration of rugby league worldwide, and in turn provide product

for cable and pay television (Fitzsimons, 1996). In Australia, this resulted in a bitter struggle between Super League and the Australian Rugby League (ARL), the traditional governing authority of the code. The struggle was 'ugly' and created ongoing hostility between both clubs and players (Masters, 1997). One of the most significant outcomes of was a massive increase in player salaries. This resulted from the restricted market of player talent, the potential presence of two elite competitions, and the financial support provided to Super League by News Limited, and to the ARL by the Optus telecommunication company.

With salaries of rugby league players seemingly out of control, rugby union officials in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa became concerned that they were going to lose most of their leading players to league. This led to the formation of a 'southern hemisphere consortium' collectively known as SANZAR. The consortium announced on 23 June 1995, prior to the conclusion of the Rugby World Cup, that it had signed a ten year joint venture agreement with News Limited worth \$US550 million over ten years, with a five year option. Of this, 24 per cent was to be distributed to the ARU (it was later renegotiated to 27 per cent on the basis of TV viewing audiences), and the remainder distributed equally between the New Zealand and South African rugby unions. This distribution was defended on the grounds that New Zealand and South Africa delivered more rugby product through their provincial competitions (Skinner, 2001).

In return for News Limited's heavy investment in rugby union, the 'southern hemisphere consortium' was required to provide two products. The first was a 'Super 12' competition of five regional teams from New Zealand, four from South Africa and three from Australia. The second was a Tri-Nations international test match series between the three countries. Although the newly formed consortium had negotiated a deal with News Limited, it had not bothered to advise its players, or more significantly, sign them to contracts. In addition, a newly formed body called the World Rugby Corporation (WRC), headed by Ross Turnbull, a former ARU vice-chairman and once a member of the IRB, entered the market for players in order to establish a worldwide 'rebel' rugby union competition. The pivotal issue was that, while the WRC had secured the signatures of leading rugby union players with the offer of generous Super League-like contracts, they had not secured a pay television contract to televise its proposed competition.

Rugby union now not only had to deal with the rugby league onslaught, but was also faced with the possibility that the code could be hijacked by a former rugby union administrator who had initially gained the backing of Kerry Packer's Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (the largest media corporation in Australia). Rugby union officials were not prepared for this development. Consequently the IRB, under pressure from the rival WRC, which had committed 501 of the world's top players to WRC agreements for a proposed global competition, was forced to make changes to its amateur regulations. The

IRB held an interim meeting in Paris where it made the announcement that the amateur principles, upon which the game had been founded since its existence, were to be repealed. This announcement now known as the Paris Declaration, stated that participants in the game of rugby union football could openly receive financial remuneration for their playing services. The Paris Declaration was subsequently ratified by the IRB at its meeting in September 1995 (Rugby Football Union Commission Report, 1995). In effect, the IRB 'were conceding the demise of the ideological hegemony of amateurism' (Allison, 2001: 49).

A new era of rugby union therefore emerged. No longer could rugby union be administered and developed during the spare time of enthusiastic volunteers. Rugby administrators in Australia increasingly recognised that rugby union, at least at the elite level, was entering the world of big business, competing for the corporate dollar against not only other sports, but also other entertainment pastimes. These commercial forces undermined rugby's traditional values and produced chronic tensions between local club administrators and the professional association manager (Skinner, 2001). Rugby union's drive to seek additional financing, encompass new marketing techniques, attract new spectators, and effectively re-invent itself represents a radical, indeed transformational shift in its origins and management. Its 'modern' foundations had been undermined by a variety of commercial and cultural forces that can be summarised by the term 'postmodern'. However, this begs the question of what 'postmodern' actually involves?

### **Postmodernism's Antecedents**

In order to gain a grasp of postmodernism and the postmodern condition, one needs an understanding of the concept of modernism and modernity. In his influential book, *The Conditions of Postmodernity*, David Harvey reminded readers that while premodernity reached back into antiquity, the Renaissance may be considered the passage way to modernity (Harvey, 1989). 'Modernity' is therefore associated with the 'age of enlightenment' in western societies that began in the eighteenth century. Human creativity, scientific discovery, and the pursuit of individual excellence in the name of human progress, and further doctrines of equality, liberty, faith in human intelligence and universal reason abounded (Harvey, 1989).

Harvey (1989) described how the numerous 'anti-modernist' movements sprung to life in the 1960s spilling over into the streets to accumulate into a vast wave of global rebelliousness in 1968. One of the products of this disenchantment was the birth of more localised political movements, like the environmental and feminist movements, with single-issue objectives that were not tied to any particular political ideology. This growth in 'micro-political formations' was also accompanied by styles of theorising, which, in an analogous way, were antagonistic towards totalising tendencies. Forms of grand-theorising that focused on abstractions like class and ideology, and

which critical theory is prone to perpetrate, were critically cast aside. This new social theory, most of which has emanated from France, has been given a variety of names, but the most common were the terms 'postmodernist' or 'poststructuralist theory'.

The terms poststructuralism and postmodernism are often used interchangeably, but they are not identical concepts. Poststructuralism has been interpreted as a subset of postmodernism, which is viewed as a broader range of theoretical, cultural and social tendencies (Best & Kellner, 1991). Postmodernism offers a socio-historical perspective whose discourse entails a more detailed analysis of postmodern society. As with poststructuralists, postmodernists turned to discourse theory to explain how meaning is socially constructed semiotically using codes and rules in signifying practices.

Postmodernists also claim that fundamental socio-historical changes cannot be adequately explained by modern theories and, thus, new conceptual schemes are required. Postmodernists favour social analysis that incorporates local, contextualised and restricted conceptual strategies that focus on explicitly practical or moral interests. Local narratives are preferred to grand narratives, telling local stories rather than articulating general theories. Although postmodernism is a broader, more inclusive concept than poststructuralism, it is now accepted that the terms can be used synonymously (Smart, 1993).

### **Defining the Postmodern**

The term 'postmodern' has a variety of contested usages. In philosophy it refers to critiques and theories typified by Michel Foucault (1977), Jacques Derrida (1976) and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1994). They stress the plural, fragmentary and subjective nature of reality and of the self. In the arts it refers to a negation of the 'modern' movements in painting, architecture and literature, and a focus on the power and nature of representational systems within culture. In the social sciences it refers to social and political transformations in the western world brought about by 'post-industrialisation', information technology and the breakdown of consensus politics (Callinicos, 1989; Harvey, 1989; Layder, 1994).

Postmodernism is frequently characterised in inconsistent and even contradictory ways. According to Wayne Hudson (1989) it is characterised specifically as: a myth; periodisation; a condition or situation; an experience; an historical consciousness; a sensibility; a climate; a crisis; an episteme; a discourse; a poetics; a retreat; a topos; a task or project.

For critics, on the other hand, the only discernible point of consensus amongst postmodernists is their lack of consensus on postmodernism. Some regard it as a continuation of modernism (Sherry, 1991); others consider it to be a complete break with the past (Venkatesh, 1989). Some scholars draw clear distinctions between the terms 'postmodernism', 'postmodernity' and 'postmodernisation' (Featherstone, 1988); others treat the terms synonymously

(Jencks, 1987). Mike Featherstone (1988) for example, expanded upon a family of terms derived from these two generic concepts. Specifically he contrasts 'modernity and postmodernity', 'modernisation and postmodernisation' and 'modernism and postmodernism'. On deploying these terms, Featherstone noted how the prefix 'post' seems that which comes after. One useful approach to postmodernism is to view it as a critique of the rigidity and one-dimensionality of modernism:

postmodernism represents a realisation that there is not single truth but multiple realities, all are legitimate and all equally valid; that individuals, societies and economies are not governed solely by instrumental reason but are subject to historical and cultural processes that cannot be explained by reason alone; that the human being is not necessarily the centre of the universe; that modernism is itself an egregious male oriented conceptualisation of the world and has consistently retarded female participation in human affairs (hence the emergence postmodern feminism); that capitalism is not the only desirable form of economic order; that progress does not mean marching linearly toward a predetermined goal; that the quality of life need not be measured in economic and material terms only; and that in human affairs aesthetic judgment is just as important as economic judgment (Venkatesh, 1992, p. 19).

Terry Eagleton (1987) also highlighted this disjunction between postmodernism and modernism in his discussion of the theoretical and critical position of postmodernism. He proposed that it:

signals the death of such 'meta-narratives' whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal' human history. We are now in the process of waking from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality (Eagleton, 1987: 9).

The postmodern condition can therefore be seen as 'incredulity towards meta-narratives', or to put it more everyday terms, a refusal to accept that there is one preferred or best way of doing things, or making sense of the world.

### **Cultural Relativism and Uncertainty**

For the postmodernist knowledge is thus seen as being always provisional and relative to the context of its generation. It is therefore also essentially incoherent and contradictory, and self-reflexive within and through its generative cultural context. Postmodernity thus rejects all claims to certainty and all transcendental timeless truths and meanings. Knowledge is seen as

being legitimated consensually and autonomously within its particular cultural context. There is a rejection of heteronomous or foundational legitimation theories, wherein recourse is made to a universal foundation of truth, such as reason, nature, or the will of God. Rejected, then, are the traditional grand narratives, theories or philosophies of legitimation, whether they are of an empiricist, rationalist, Marxist or other nature. By extension, postmodernity involves a rejection of grand universalising social or development theories or schemata. It is anti-canon, in the sense of rejecting the idea that any intellectual tradition has epistemologically privileged authority.

The postmodernist scepticism towards all claims to the privileging of knowledge is seen as importantly conditioning the postmodern mood. Its point is that any claim for a superior path to what is true, good or beautiful, whether it be rationally, spiritually, empirically or otherwise based, is to be regarded with suspicion, a profound scepticism, even a cynicism. Any claim to the privileging of knowledge is seen as being open to (ab)use by its protagonists as grounds for intolerance towards, and the suppression of, belief other than that which is privileged. Just such abuses are seen as underpinning the cultural genocide that, from a postmodernist perspective, characterises the history of modernity. It denies *a priori* superiority not only to any path to knowledge, but also to knowledge claims themselves. It thereby also denies that there are any *a priori* substantive grounds for privileging one set of beliefs over others.

On the other hand, it has also been argued that postmodernism 'neither embraces nor criticizes, but beholds the world blankly, with a knowingness that dissolves feeling and commitment to irony (Gitlin, Siegal & Boru, 1989). In other words, it is not the business of postmodern inquiry to be politically committed or active, but merely to observe and comment. In another but related critique, postmodernism by promoting introverted intrinsically gratifying contemplation may obstruct activism by inducing lethargy. This is why postmodernism has been called the 'opiate of the intelligentsia'.

Critics working from within critical social theory frameworks have pointed to the shortcomings of poststructuralist theory and therefore the means of contributing to valuable knowledge. They question for example, the epistemological basis of its overall social strategy that is possible given that the notion of power does not, as Nancy Fraser (1989) indicates, give credence to notions of force, domination and legitimation. For it is claimed social change cannot come about when the notion of power is conceived without foundation, without a sense of what 'ought' to happen. Furthermore, the emphasis on language and textuality, proposed in poststructuralism, is said to avoid a grounding in political action. In other words, the relational notion of power is seen to lack emancipatory intent, via either the dialectic between theory and practice, or communicative action. That is, postmodernist understandings of power do not comply with normative frameworks of political practice.

Jürgen Habermas warns that postmodernism fosters nihilism, relativism and political irresponsibility. He encourages us to remain true to the intentions of the Enlightenment, particularly to the belief in human reason to solve human problems. Yet, despite Habermas's attempts to hold back the tides of irrationality it is generally accepted that the credibility of critical theory has been severely dented by the advent of the postmodern project and attempts to rethink the movement are underway (Ray & Rinzier, 1993).

Certainly there is a pessimism permeating postmodernism that is not shared by the critical theorists. Not only is there a wariness towards expressing any faith in the future or the possibility of constructive social action, but there is also a somewhat ritualistic attitude towards the past, particularly towards the Enlightenment project and humanism generally. While there are some reasons to be sceptical of the relevance of postmodernism, however, the fact remains that it provides a refreshing challenge to the absolutism of the modern era.

### **Modern Sport**

As we indicated in the beginning section of this article, rugby was transformed during the 1990s. Its position as a postmodern sport practice, however, can only be understood in reference to its earlier status as an exemplar of modern sport. Just as society changed dramatically of the last forty years, so too has the structure and practices of sport globally, and, more recently, in Australia (Lawrence & Rowe, 1986).

Most agree that sport has move through a number of transformative stages (Guttmann, 1978; 1988; Holt, 1989; Vamplew, 1988). During the pre-industrial period sport was unorganised and local in character. High levels of violence were tolerated and emotional spontaneity was encouraged. It was closely connected to the customs, rituals and ceremonies of the wider social life, and reflected the religious practices and seasonal rhythms. No controlling organisations or governing bodies existed. John Bale (1989) suggests the village was the focal point for what historians have subsequently called 'folk games'. Industrial capitalism transformed sport, A traditional way of life was replaced by a society that emphasised reason, rationality, individualism and achievement. Sport was considered a specific cultural expression of modernised, industrial society, and according to Richard Holt (1989: 3):

violent, disorderly and disorganised sports gave way to more carefully regulated ones adapted to the constraints of time and space imposed by the industrial city, embodying the Victorian spirit of self control and energetic competition as well as taking advantage of the development of the railway and mass press.

An analysis of the modernisation of sport by Allen Guttmann concluded that sport in the modern world exemplified the triumph of Weberian rationality

(Guttman, 1978; 1988). It became secularised, democratic, specialised, rationalised, bureaucratised, quantified and record orientated. Wray Vamplew (1988) supports Guttman's conclusion when he described the emergence of sport as a new mass consumption industry, such as from recreational to commercial. In doing so he identified the growing professionalism in sport, the establishment of formal administrative structures, the control over sport exerted by the middle classes, and the emergence of sporting monopolies.

Vamplew's primary thesis was that the development of mass spectator sport during this period was only possible because of rapid economic growth in the wider society. He identified four economic variables: the structure of the economy, including technology; the volume of non-working time; income levels; and the supply of energy. Vamplew concluded that the productivity improvement innovations associated with urbanisation and industrialisation led to an increase in both incomes and leisure time, and that this led, in turn, to a demand for commercialised spectator sport (Vamplew, 1988).

While the process of modernisation helps explain the emergence of structured and organised sports, it does not explain changes that occurred in Australian sport from the 1970s. Most spectator sports in the 1950s and 1960s were funded mainly through paid admissions, memberships, and internal fundraising, and supported by a culture of amateurism and paternalism. By the late 1970s, sport in general had been transformed into a highly professionalised and business-like activity with many players making a living from the game.

### **The Critical Transition**

Geoffrey Lawrence and David Rowe (1986) suggest that by the end of the 1970s sponsorship and media rights began to rival gate receipts as the dominant funding source, and television had created an audience that was often a hundred times larger than at ground attendance. Spectators and viewers were attracted as much to spectacular, time compressed, colourful and amusing contests, as they were to leisurely displays of ritual, skill and craft as in the past. Furthermore the management of sport became more complex and specialised as the marketing and finance functions expanded in order to exploit new leisure time opportunities. Consequently, sport and its management became entangled in a complex web of commercial arrangements, legal constraints and marketing deals. These forces were pushing some sports like Australian Rules football, tennis, golf and rugby league in a new direction. Rugby union, however, resisted until the 1990s, when the forces for change became overwhelming.

### **The Rise of Postmodern Sport**

A number of researchers have explored the changing face of sport in terms of the economic and cultural shift of society from mass consumption and modernity, to customised consumption and the condition of postmodernity that has been previously discussed (Bale, 1993; 1994; Guttman, 1988; Harriss,

1990). In fact, in Australia many spectator sports were radically restructured during the 1970s. For example, at the international level, tennis was organised as an amateur sport until the late 1960s, at which time it became fully professional. Soccer was 'bureaucratised' around the same time as FIFA, the game's international governing body, extended its influence over the game, and commercialised many of its activities. Locally, both Australian football and rugby league tightened their connections with the business sector through sponsorships and the lucrative sale of exclusive telecast rights. Rugby union, however, was still captured by its past. In particular, it was guided by its amateur values and hostility to the corporate forces of big business and global media. The resistance of rugby officials to anything commercial or novel, on the other hand, can be contrasted with the changes that took place in Australian cricket from the middle of the 1960s (Harris, 1990).

Indeed, Australian cricket provides a stark contrast to rugby union in terms of the way in which the sport became postmodernised. Customised stadium seating, in the form of private boxes and suites, and the deployment of venues by businesses as a vehicle for entertaining clients, were in place in the middle of the 1970s. In 1977 the introduction of Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket produced many changes. Instant television replays on giant video screens were introduced, games were played under floodlights, and marketing plans were designed to improve cricket's public profile (Quick, 1990). Cricketers became celebrities, and the sporting public was increasingly fed a 'fast food' diet of time efficient and time-compressed contests. According to Quick (1990), this changed the face of first class cricket as one day limited over international matches played with modified rules, and in coloured uniforms, took fans away from the slow moving traditional five-day test matches.

Television had a significant role to play in transforming sport from the 1970s onwards. By the 1980s it had not only become the dominant cultural icon, and transmitter of cultural values, but also the medium by which most people experienced big time sport in Australia. Its hyper-real emphasis on excitement, speed, the intimate close ups, a variety of slow motion replays, quick grab and the short attention span, conditioned viewers to demand constant entertainment, sensory stimulation, compressed dramatic tension and its quick resolution. As a result, the customary emphasis on the subtle if slow build up of tension, and the fundamental skills were relegated to a secondary position. Improvements in satellite technology during the early 1970s also enabled global markets to emerge, and expanded the sport audience beyond the wildest dreams of administrators who managed the game a decade earlier.

By the early 1990s sport's postmodern transformation was obvious, if incomplete. The Olympic games threw away its amateur pretensions and autocratic patronage. In its place emerged a hybrid sporting competition where amateur players mixed with highly paid professionals, and where Eurocentric officials bound by tradition and hierarchy deferred to globalised corporate

giants like NBC, Coca Cola, McDonalds, and Reebok. Whereas the modern Olympic games were underwritten by aristocratic privilege, the postmodern Olympic games are sustained by corporate and commercial linkages. Indeed, the proliferation of Olympic logos, sponsorships, memorabilia, merchandising, and marketing has meant that the Olympics commodification is now virtually accepted as part of the Olympic creed (Real, 1998).

Rugby union was one of the last major sports to succumb to the forces of postmodernism. By the middle of the 1990s rugby union decided its amateur traditions were no longer appropriate or relevant to its players or most of its fans. Commercialisation overwhelmed the game in 1995 when Murdoch's global TV network entered into the US\$550 million agreement with the national governing bodies of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Players subsequently earned massive salaries and marketers re-positioned the game as a spectacular experience that combined brute force with finesse and athleticism.

At the same time, rugby union realised that no sport could any longer be secure in the knowledge that its fans would retain their singular loyalty. Many fans now had multiple identities and loyalties and seamlessly shifted their allegiances between sports and teams. One week it would be Manchester United, and the Chicago Bulls the next. In Australia it may be the Queensland Reds one week and the Sydney Swans the next. Moreover, their identification and loyalty would be based on nothing more than a television image.

The postmodern sporting experiences that emerged in the 1980s, and which were consolidated in the 1990s therefore constituted a dramatic change from the modern, standardised, early post-war experiences. While rugby union in Australia was initially slow to adapt, it too, was caught up in the web of postmodernism by the end of the 1990s. The face of Australian sport was transformed, both commercially and culturally, as Table 1 indicates.

### **Postmodernism and Rugby Management**

The changes that occurred in the management of rugby is an example of how postmodernism impacted on the structure and administration of sport. Rugby officials were initially ambivalent about the need to question the game's history and traditions, ultimately and inevitably submitted to the growing emphasis on the spectacular contest and the big event. Postmodernism highlighted the need for change in the ways rugby was organised and promoted. As modern sport focused on central control of decisions, player subservience and part-time support staff, postmodern sport emphasised the diffusion of authority, consultation with players, and full-time specialist staff. The clue as to how organisational life in rugby accommodated itself to postmodernism can be found in the emergence of contingency models of management in the 1970s.

**Table 1: The Postmodernisation of Sport**

	Modern Sport	Postmodern Sport
Game, Structure & Strategy	Emphasis on conventional game plans and cautious innovation, matches end when results achieved.	Innovation and experimentation encouraged, traditional practices challenged.
Style & Structure	Conservative leadership. Preference for defence & risk avoidance.	Adventurous leadership. Preference for tactical innovation.
Customs & Conventions	Amateurism, fair play, conformity. Deference to authority.	Professionalism, questioning of traditional practices. Undermining of authority figures.
Spectator Preference	Display of traditional craft, skill & ritual.	Eclectic blend of entertainment, amusement, the spectacular and the tactical.
Financial Structure	Commercial viability dependent on gate receipts, small contribution from radio.	Commercial viability dependent on sponsorship, television rights, endorsements and gate receipts.
Facilities	Stadiums combined standardised seating with standing room. Viewing complemented by transistor radio.	Customised seating with reserved sections. Private boxes with customer service. Video screens used to replay critical incidences.
Promotion	Dependent upon publicity from radio and newspaper reports.	Direct promotion to target markets. Game tailored to suit needs of specific customer/spectator groups. Television the dominant promotional medium.
Viewing the Game	Live match attendance.	TV audiences dominate
Fan Loyalties	Singular loyalty to teams and players.	Multiple loyalties shift between sports and from local to global.

Contingency theories argued that there are no universal principles or meta-narratives that can be used to effectively guide an organisation into a productive future. Rather the ways in which an organisation should respond to its commercial and cultural world depends on the specific circumstances it faces. In some cases a rational, conventional, and disciplined approach may be needed to accommodate some change in market conditions, but in other situations a more intuitive and novel strategy might be more appropriate. A postmodern organisation will go one step further and claim that the intuitive, flexible approach would probably be the best solution in most cases, since a postmodern world is characteristically segmented and constantly shifting (Bergquist, 1993).

In order to meet these challenges, rugby managers had to develop greater strategic skills, deliver a timely and varied package of services to increasingly discerning customers, and continually monitor the changing needs of players and the public. As a result innovative and flexible organisational structures became necessary (Weick, 1993). Rugby administrators recognised it was important to give attention to workable organisational structures in which tasks were clearly designated and performance indicators identified, to design a chain of command which provided for a unambiguous set of reporting relationships, and to put in place a process for strategic planning. While authority had to be dispersed throughout the rugby community its future strategic direction needed to remain in the hands of the senior managers of the code. There was a need for information to be shared, tasks and events to be organised collectively, and promotional campaigns to be created which would allow different messages to be targeted to different groups of players and publics. In other words, the postmodern world in which rugby operated demanded a postmodern organisational response in which the strategic direction was set by senior staff, but the on the ground implementation was done by local officials.

### **The Postmodern Rugby Organisation**

As a result of the commercialisation forces for change, rugby administrators radically reviewed its management structures and practices. The changes were supported by a clutch of management theories and principles that no longer used mechanical or machine type metaphors to explain the nature of organisational life. Instead, biological metaphors were viewed as a better way of explaining organisational behaviour and managing people. For example, Gareth Morgan likened the postmodern organisation to a spider plant in which new shoots or branches would grow out of an increasingly shrinking core management centre (Morgan, 1993). Tom Peters (1992) highlighted the increasing flexibility of organisations by describing them as a form of carnival, in which energy, surprise, buzz and fun were hallmark features.

Rugby union organisations in a postmodern environment are at least viewed as open systems, which comprise an inter-independent array of changing technologies, policies, personalities, groups and skills. They recognise that they are not fixed and isolated entities insulated from their surroundings but need to expand and evolve by adapting to changes. The open systems approach to management and organisations also proposed that there was no single or universal set of principles that would be best for all the problems management faced. For example, there was no one best organisational structure, leadership style or management strategy; it all depended on the situation (Kast & Rosenweig, 1973). This implied that flexibility ensured survival, a strategic requirement that postmodern Australian rugby managers gradually embraced.

Rugby union can now be aptly described as 'Sportsbiz', a term used by Stephen Aris (1990) to identify the fusion of the cultural and commercial dimensions of sport. Rituals, myths, escapism, display, tribalism and community have all been conflated into a complex interdependent cultural and commercial system dominated by the hyper-real and mediated television experience. Not even rugby, with its rich amateur traditions and entrenched culture, could escape the clutches of the postmodern marketers and promoters.

Rugby managers need to view their pastimes as a form of business and utilise professional staff trained in all spheres of business. It no longer makes commercial sense to maintain traditional sporting practices for their own sake. In the current postmodern sporting world, history and tradition are valuable only in so far that they can be used to re-capture an atmosphere, re-invent an experience, or exploit a niche in a competitive and constantly shifting entertainment market.

### **Conclusion**

We have argued that the transformation of Australian rugby union can be explained in terms of postmodern values and practices, and its link to consumer capitalism. That is, postmodernism has removed the traditional metaphysical, mythical and social barriers that were thought to have divided business from sport. Sporting contests are now, from a management perspective, just another ephemeral, disposable product for sale in the global marketplace.

The experience of rugby union during the 1990s is an example of how traditional sport values, practices and structures were undermined by the postmodern forces of global consumer capitalism. The postmodern imperatives of flexibility and customised innovation mean that the game rules and playing schedules must be able to change to meet the ephemeral needs of customers, and in particular the television viewer. Blandness, uniformity and monotony are the curse of postmodern sport, unless of course the public want it, and the rugby manager can make it a profitable event. As rugby entered the new millennium, it became clear that its foundation amateur values and practices could not be sustained under the weight of global commercial forces. Simply put, the game had to be managed not only as a sport, but also as a business.

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