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The sporting press and Indigenous culture in the nineteenth century

Abstract:
This review surveys portrayals of Indigenous athletes in nineteenth century Victorian newspaper sports writing. The review considers limited yet revelatory knowledge of the extent of the contributions of Indigenous athletes across the period, particularly where it highlights positive and constructive framings of their participation. The survey employs textual analysis to further underline the value of the sporting press as a practical resource, specifically in the recovery of "lost" or "hidden" knowledge related to the Indigenous Australians in the Victorian sporting landscape of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

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Introduction

Indigenous Australians made a significant contribution to organised sport in Victoria in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The scope and scale of that contribution has until recently been underrepresented or, arguably, woefully neglected. In addition, there are many instances where the portrayal and representation of Indigenous Australian athletes in the Victorian press during this period could be regarded as constructive and therefore incongruent to the contemporaneous and predominant assumptions related to Indigenous Australians. There are many issues to be discussed in relation to social, cultural, and/or political aspects of these dynamics in relation to newspaper reporting of sport in the region during the nominated era. They are for the most part beyond the scope of this brief review, which aims in the main to further the case for deeper more extensive examination of existing, archived, sporting press – predominantly the digitised collection of local, regional, and national newspapers gathered and maintained by the Australian National Library known as *Trove*. The records noted in this survey are gathered to inform and underpin our understanding of, and address gaps in, our knowledge of Indigenous athletes in Victoria in the nineteenth century and their subsequent contribution to the narratives of the State's sporting landscape.

This review employs textual analysis (McKee, 2003) to examine digitally archived newspaper reports. It builds on anecdotal observations and a consequent growth in evidence gathering in the State's press of significant levels of Indigenous participation in individual and team sports. The review underlines Indigenous peoples excelling in individual sports, such as those regarded as "pedestrian" (athletics) and boxing as well as team sports, such as cricket and football. Individual and team sports provided opportunities for Indigenous men to participate in activities outside of being subjected to coercion. Yet there were substantive obstacles to this participation, including the confinement of Indigenous peoples in missions and stations constructed and operated around the periphery of the colony during the nineteenth century. The predominantly white, male gatekeepers of these sports and their institutions were often resistant to Indigenous involvement at senior metropolitan levels. However, in townships and rural areas, talented Indigenous men could more readily navigate the substantial systemic barriers they encountered. While these athletes were subjected to abuse during their participation, in seeming contrast they were treated with a great deal of respect in the media, though this status was impacted by on field performance in various sports. Scrutiny of the sports pages reveals some of the extent of constructive responses to Indigenous athletes in otherwise intolerable circumstances.

The author of this review identifies as a white man, an Australian sports historian of European origin, specifically Scots, whose current research focuses on acknowledging the historical achievements of Indigenous athletes. Recent publications, including A*boriginal People and Australian Football in the Nineteenth Century* (Hay, 2019) and a biography, *Albert "Pompey" Austin: A Man Between Two Worlds* (Hay, 2020a) led the author to examine and reflect on the sports pages of local and regional newspapers as sources of rare positive literary treatments of Indigenous Australians in the nineteenth century. The books, like this review, could not have been produced without the resources of the National Library of Australia's marvellous *Trove*.

As one of Australia's most important cultural treasures, its value for research in sports history is incalculable.

This review paper stands within this larger body of work. It is arguably incomplete at this stage; however, it can be seen to supplement work presented in the aforementioned texts. The review that follows attempts to highlight and, in some small ways, deepen understanding of the extent of Indigenous athletes' involvement in Victorian sporting activities during the latter stages of the nineteenth century and very early in the twentieth century. It should therefore be read as a review and not a journal article in the traditional sense.

By the middle of the nineteenth century most of the Victorian press ignored Australia's original inhabitants or treated them with scorn and denigration (see Hay, 2019 & 2020a). In contrast, the writers of sport – they would not be described as sportswriters in contemporary terms – demonstrated an appreciation of Indigenous athletes' performances in a range of sports and associated activities. Vibrant exchanges erupted in the sports and other pages as attempts to prevent or encourage Indigenous participation in sport were put forward. This review seeks to highlight the value of the sports pages as a source for nineteenth century Victorian cultural and social sports histories.

Much of the writing is, perhaps surprisingly, matter of fact, with aspiration for objectivity and the avoidance of opinion, informed or otherwise. The writing tends to recount Indigenous athletes' actions and participation without deeper inquiry into motivation for, or reward gained from, participating in sporting activities. The result is a much more dispassionate reportage, occasionally tinged with surprise that the Indigenous peoples excelled in the domain of "white men's sports" as well as their capacity to gain the skills and embrace the etiquette related to what might have otherwise been considered strange pastimes. Very few nineteenth century reports of Aboriginal women performing in European sporting activities have been located to date, though Indigenous women are known to have taken part in Indigenous games like marngrook (Hay & Zafiris, 2017; Hocking & Reidy, 2016; Gooch, 2015; Edwards, 2009). The text *Truganini* by Cassandra Pybus (2020) highlights Indigenous women participating in water-based activities. While the women tend to be engaged in gathering food, not sports, there are instances where Indigenous women are described as spectators and supporters (Matthews, 1893). Megan Stronach and Daryl Adair (2019) highlight the swimming and diving proficiency of Aboriginal women and girls in Lutruwita (Tasmania). They cite the drawings of Jean Piron (1817) and share the story of Wauba Debar who saved her captors in 1822 (Stronach & Adair, 2019). These accounts pre-date the painting depicted in Figure 1: Mount Wellington (Glover, 1834). The English artist John Glover captures men at Corroboree (left) and women swimming and collecting seafood (right). It is included here to highlight evidence beyond the sporting press.

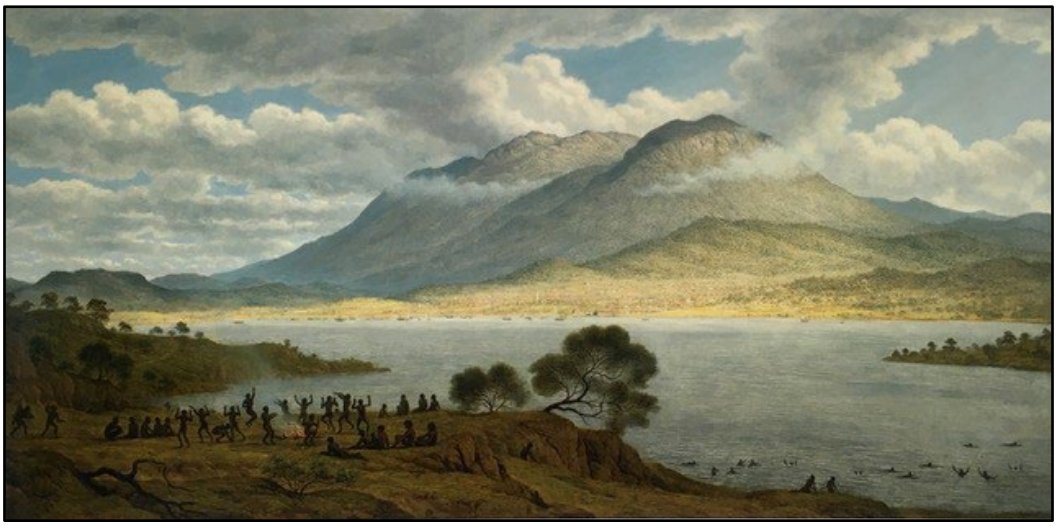

Figure 1: Mount Wellington (Glover 1834, Tasmanian Museum and National Gallery of Australia).

It is estimated that the first Indigenous sporting activity to receive sustained media attention occurred in 1866 when a cricket team from a community close to Edenhope in the Grampians (Gariwerd) came to Melbourne. The Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) was so concerned about the possibility of losing to an Indigenous team they drafted star players from other clubs (Mulvaney & Harcourt, 1988, pp. 45-46). The nucleus of the team from near Edenhope would go on to become the first Australian cricket team to tour England.

The excerpts below highlight without irony a genuine sense of surprise that Indigenous men could play an accomplished level of cricket. The register of surprise is followed by a diminishment of the team's achievement through the foregrounding of the role of the white coach, the sports celebrity, Tom Wills. These excerpts reflect those frequent instances where Indigenous agency is not fully recognised or deliberately underplayed.

> It would appear by the following paragraph from the Hamilton Spectator that the blacks of this colony can play cricket: "A good deal of interest was taken in the return cricket match, the Edenhope Club against the blacks. It came off at Bringalbert on the 21st instant, and terminated in a decided victory for the latter, the Edenhope men all going out in the first innings for thirty-six, and the second for twenty-six. The blacks scored in one innings seventy-five, thus leaving them victorious with thirteen runs to spare. There is some talk of ten blackfellows, with a white captain, challenging the Hamilton team". (*Argus*, February 1866, p. 5)

> It appears, from the score of a match forwarded, that the Aboriginal cricketing eleven are making good progress under the tutorship of Mr. T. W. Wills, and there is every prospect of a very interesting match taking place on the Melbourne ground on Boxing Day. A match was lately played at Edenhope between sixteen of Edenhope and the native eleven. The sixteen made only 47 runs whilst the natives scored 85. There was good concourse of spectators, including many ladies, and the play was watched with much interest. Mullagh, who appears to be the best bowler, obtained eight wickets, two of them in his first over. The highest score for the natives were obtained by J. Couzens

> and Bullocky – thirteen apiece. Couzens was very good at point. Tarpot is their longstop and Bullocky is the native "Lockyer". Sugar, who was one of their best players, died last week. Mr. Wills caused much merriment amongst the spectators while he was at the wickets in making short runs, being ably backed up by his sable brethren. The natives will arrive in Melbourne next week. (*Argus*, December 1866, p. 5)

Bullocky is compared to Tom Lockyer, the noted English wicketkeeper who toured North America with George Parr's team in 1859 and came to Australia with another touring party led by Parr in 1863-1864. The Melbourne daily newspaper, the *Argus*, noted that Tom Wills both cheated and taught his fellows to cheat. The material in these reports was taken from the local paper in Hamilton in the first extract and from an unknown, but almost certainly a similar one in the second.

> It is now definitively settled that the aboriginal cricketers will visit England, arrangements having been made to that effect between Mr. W. E. B. Gurnett and Mr. Hayman, on the part of the natives. Mr. Gurnett, who is well acquainted with many of the leading amateur cricketers in England, intends to take his sable band by the Panama route, and will leave Sydney next month, so as to arrive in London about the end of April. In the meantime, the aboriginals will not remain idle. On Saturday next they play a match, on the Collingwood Commercial ground, against fifteen of the C. C. and Prince of Wales Clubs, some athletic sports having been arranged to take place during the afternoon, in which the natives will compete.
>
> Then follows the grand match between Victoria and Tasmania, in which Mullagh, Cousens, and Bullocky will play for this colony. On the 24th, 25th, and 26th of this month the natives will test the skill of the Bendigonians; and on the 31st and 1st and 2nd of February give an exhibition of their talent at Ballarat. On the 8th and 9th February they play a farewell match on the M.C.C. ground against eleven of the club, the proceeds to be for the benefit of the aboriginals. This will be their last appearance on Victorian soil for some time, as they will proceed immediately to Sydney, where arrangements have been made for a match between them and eleven of the Albert Club; after which they will embark for England. Mr. Gurnett's band of darkies will be fourteen in number, as three more natives have been sent for from Edenhope. (*Argus*, January 1867, p. 5)

Gurnett's plans fell through. He was not the first or the last to have the idea of making money through the exploits of Aboriginal sportsmen. Later, in 1867, William Hayman, the driving force of the Edenhope cricket club, and the English cricketer Charles Lawrence formed a new group and determined to take the Indigenous team to England.

> It seems likely that an aboriginal eleven will be got together at Edenhope for a cricketing campaign, as many of the members of the native team of last year as are available being included. The idea is to take them to Adelaide in the first place to play before H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh. (*Argus*, August 1867, p. 15)

> A noticeable cricket match was played at Edenhope a few days ago, between a number of aboriginals interspersed with Europeans. The aboriginals were principally composed of those that Messrs. Hayman, C. Lawrence, and two other gentlemen, intend to take home to exhibit their prowess in the old country. Many of the names such as Bullocky, Mullagh, Cuzens, Tarpot, Sundown, &c, are familiar as forming part of the aboriginal eleven of last season. Mr. Lawrence (under whose tuition they are), advertises that before taking the native team from Lake Wallace, he will be ready to play them on any Wednesday against sixteen or eighteen all comers. (*Argus*, September 1867, p. 5)

This time the tour went ahead and was successful both for the promoters and for some if not all of the Indigenous players. Unaarrimin (better known as Johnny Mullagh), Bullchanach, Bullocky, Zellanach, and Johnny Cousins all burnished their reputations on the tour. Other members of the touring party were less fortunate. King Cole died of tuberculosis in England, and two other tourists were sent home early. The remaining eleven players had a very strenuous program to complete thereafter (Mulvaney & Harcourt, 1988). Some, if not all, failed to receive their contracted payment.

Sport and the civilising mission

There are occasional references to the "civilising" potential of Indigenous participation in sport. But sport could be a problem, particularly for the managers of missions and stations where the majority of Indigenous people were confined in Victoria in the second half of the nineteenth century. Even a classical "muscular Christian" like William Goodall, superintendent of Framlingham and Coranderrk stations, who led his charges on the cricket and football fields, noted the challenges he faced in "controlling" some of his charges in the wake of any positive demonstration of sporting prowess in team sports, or individual ones, including athletics and boxing (Goodall, 1882, p. 5). Daniel Matthews at the Maloga and Cummeragunja stations (Matthews, 1893, p. 4), H. P. Bogisch at Ebeneezer station, and John Bulmer at Lake Tyers all expressed concern at different times that sports participation with or against the colonisers had, what they say as detrimentally, transformative impacts on their relationships with Indigenous participants (Bogisch, 1902, p. 13). The receipt of wages for playing for outside teams or prizes won at pedestrian (athletics) or boxing events gave Indigenous men some degree of freedom from the otherwise stifling control of their white overseers.

It would be inaccurate and misleading to give the impression that all or even the majority of references to Aboriginal sports people were positive in the Victorian sporting press in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some writers were appallingly critical of Indigenous sportsmen. For all his writing about the iniquities inflicted on Indigenous people, "The Vagabond" (the pseudonym of John Stanley James; see Cannon, 2018) writing in the *Argus* could be particularly crude (1886, p. 4). His treatment of the Lake Tyers cricketers and the Framlingham people in general reinforced popular stereotypes of the time. He promoted the idea of segregating "half-castes" from the rest of the Indigenous population, which became the policy of the Board and led to the *"Half-Caste" Act* of 1886: "If all the half-castes, orphans or

otherwise, were removed from the associations of their black ancestors, it would be a gain to them and to the state" (The Vagabond, 1886, p. 4). Nevertheless, the Victorian position was less strident than the promotion of "white Australian" ideologies promoted by contemporaneous publications such as the *Bulletin* in New South Wales.

Readership – Indigenous and European

There are occasional glimpses of Indigenous readership of the press. The inhabitants of Coranderrk station in the Upper Yarra Valley made sophisticated use of the press for political campaigns to keep their land and restore John Green to the role of superintendent (Nanni & James, 2013). Green tried to grant his local community much greater freedoms and the capacity to manage their own affairs. The *Board for the Protection of the Aborigines of Victoria* would and could not tolerate these actions (Nanni & James, 2013). Divisions within the ranks of the Indigenous people played out in the press in the letters' pages (see Hay, 2019, pp. 29-30). The first generation of Indigenous people to struggle with the invaders were pitted against those who had mixed parentage, and there were more of those as time passed. As the former declined in numbers relative to the latter, team sport had a unifying element, giving the community a chance to unite against a common "enemy" on the sports field. It was often born of necessity since the missions and stations were so small that fielding teams at cricket and football was very difficult to sustain. White journalists only occasionally picked up these nuances and tended to lump members of Indigenous teams together as homogeneous, something which could, in the way Bain Attwood (1989) suggested, unconsciously reinforce or encourage uninformed notions of Aboriginality, including unity against a common (sporting) enemy.

When the Coranderrk football team took part in the local league, its matches and off-field activities included the building of a clubhouse and equipping the team with uniforms (Hay, 2019, pp. 35-36). The local league competition struggled if Coranderrk or Badger's Creek, as the team was known for a brief period, was unable to take part. In 1912, the build-up to the final between Coranderrk and Healesville in the local press resulted in the biggest crowd at the game played in Lilydale. The players were afforded a grand reception when Coranderrk won, though a motion to invite them to the end-of-season function of the Healesville club was not carried. The match itself was reported in the Melbourne press as well as the local paper, the *Healesville and Yarra Glen Guardian*. Unfortunately, the success of the Indigenous team was a pyrrhic victory. The following year the Board moved to close the station down and Coranderrk was unable to field a team (Hay, 2020b). Some members of the team went to Cummeragunja on the Murray River where they helped its Indigenous team to win the Western and Moira League five times in six years in the 1920s (Zafiris, 2016). The league promptly handicapped them by insisting that they not include players over the age of 25 in their team. Indigenous players and teams have, it seems, never had a level playing field.

At the Lake Condah mission station in the Western District of Victoria, a cricket team was formed in the 1870s. They played games in local competition and against teams from Hamilton and Portland. George Reynolds Rippon – who played with Tom Wills, was president of

Geelong Football Club, and a journalist with the *Geelong Advertiser* before a stint as editor of the *Hamilton Spectator* – wrote a striking example of balanced assessment of an Indigenous team. The match report of a game in 1879, the team, their performance, and those of individual players are shown here (please note: the text excerpts that follow are verbatim, and originally published as solid blocks, they have been separated here for ease of reading):

> The cricketing visit paid to Hamilton by the aboriginals from the Condah Mission station will long be remembered, inasmuch as it was the means of bringing about one of the most exciting matches ever played on our local ground: The visitors placed themselves under the command of a patriarch named W King; they called him "old gentleman", and really the title was well deserved, for no man could be more courteous than he. As a matter of fact, they all behaved admirably in the field, their conduct being worthy of imitation by many cricketing teams supposed to be composed of superior stuff, and the cheerfulness with which they – Egan excepted – accepted their defeat gained them many friends. Amongst their number was our old friend Bullocky, who looked as hale and hearty as ever.
>
> Indeed he has not appeared to such advantage for years, retirement from town life having greatly improved his general health and complexion, his face shining like a well-polished shoe, and his eyes having regained their pristine sparkle: He is evidently the cricketer of the team, the others owing much of the skill they have acquired to his tuition. As fielders they have seldom been equalled, and certainly never surpassed by any in Victoria, not even by the eleven who went home with Charles Lawrence to England.
>
> In Bullocky, Lovett, and King they possess fairly good bowlers. Lovett showing great tact in altering his pace, without any appreciable alteration in delivery. Bullocky can now and again cause a ball to twist and break but the others rely upon straightness and alteration of pitch and pace, and so well did they pursue these tactics that in the first innings the Hamiltonians could only put 38 on the scoring sheet. (*Hamilton Spectator*, April 1879, p. 3)

By the 1880s, the Lake Condah men had also formed a football team. Sometimes they called themselves the Darlot's Creek Wanderers, on other occasions they played as Lake Condah. In those days and for some time thereafter, players often switched between clubs. Those from the mission also turned out for a number of the other clubs in the area.

During the 1904 football season, four teams took part in the local competition for the Righetti medals – Portland, Tyrendarra, Heywood, and Condah. The last of these was the team from the township of Condah, though it included players from the Aboriginal mission at Lake Condah. But then so did Tyrendarra and Heywood. Competition was fierce and the destination of the medals was decided after protests in the committee room, including one by Condah against Heywood, whom they accused of fielding two Indigenous players, King and Foster, who had been away working and only returned to Heywood just before the match. King and Foster had played with the Lake Condah team in the past. A rule that players had to live for at least a

month in the area before being eligible to play was considered. The protest was dismissed, and Heywood won the league (Onlooker, 1904, p. 3).

In the middle of that season an incendiary letter appeared in the *Portland Guardian*, under the pseudonym "Fair Play":

> Football. (To THE EDITOR PORTLAND GUARDIAN.) SIR, – Your football team, and that of Tyrendarra, got rather a bad beating in the contests for the Righetti medals, and probably Heywood will get ditto next Saturday, owing, I believe, to the quick eye and fleet foot of a few blackfellows hired for the occasion. Is this, I ask, a fair contest between team and team? And if so, where is our boasted claim to a "White Australia", when a few poor units from a lower race can beat the sturdy sons of our own people in their national games?
>
> Now I claim that unless conditions are equal there can be no fair test of skill in any contest. Let the teams be all white or all black, then we can decide who the real victors are. Why cannot these teams act like white men, and stand or fall by their own merits, and so show what power lies in their own efforts to win a promised trophy rather than depend on the help given them by the progeny of a race said to be the lowest in the scale of humanity, although from the contest I rather doubt the latter statement. – Yours, &c., FAIR PLAY. (1904, p. 3)

The author was quickly taken to task by others. The captain of the Condah team responded (please note: the text excerpts that follow are verbatim, and originally published as solid blocks, they have been separated here for ease of reading):

> Having noticed in your issue of the 15th inst. a letter written by an Individual signing himself "Fair Play", wherein the writer ventured to make a number of wild statements, and in a general way air his opinion on a subject about which he apparently knows nothing, I consider it only fair to my own team that the public should hear the correct version. But first let me deal with the individual who, in his own straight-out manly "Fair Play" still stands behind the shelter of his "nom de plume" and fires mud at better men than himself.
>
> Why, even the meanest of the blacks, who he goes out of his way to insult, would not play the game so low. At least let him show his face, or for ever hold his peace. I assume that "Fair Play" has no knowledge of the facts, and therefore I pity his ignorance. Were it not so I should apply the lie direct. So much for your scribe, now for his statements, which I take in their order and blow them out seriatum [*sic*]. The Portland team were not so badly beaten as he states when it is remembered that they played two men short, and had to depend on the services of a number of juniors against the full strength of the Condah team. Neither were the Tyrendarra players badly beaten.
>
> In fact up to the end of the third quarter they had all the best of the game. Then how could the win at Tyrendarra be ascribed to the smartness of the colored [*sic*] players in

> the team when they were matched with a team containing a number of aborigines. Conditions, therefore, being equal as they will also be at Heywood on Saturday. Again, the Condah Club do not hire players for any occasion, as stated by "the chip in hiding" every man they play being bona-fide members of the club and, circumstances favouring, they will continue to play their team at its full strength, be the players black, white or yellow, and willingly concede to their opponents the right to do the same, Now, in conclusion, I sincerely deplore the fact that "Fair Play" should be so paltry as to insult without provocation our coloured countrymen and fellow subjects.
>
> Let us if we are in any way superior extend to them in fair play the right hand of good fellowship, and encourage them to be and do better. We whites have taught them to play our national game, so well that now at times the pupils can beat their tutors, Shall we refuse to associate with them in the game, we have taught them? Again deploring the ignorance, falsity, or smallness of spirit of the "chip in hiding", and thanking you in anticipation. – Yours, &c., NORMAN McLEOD, Captain, Condah F.C. (1904, p. 3)

Two consequences of this episode are highly significant. Condah township decided not to include Indigenous players in its football team the following season, while the denizens of Lake Condah mission reformed the Darlot's Creek Wanderers, which intermittently achieved success in local competition over the next two decades. Milltown, another local club that included several Aboriginal players from the Lake Condah mission, is illustrated in Figure 2: Milltown Football Club, Premiers 1906 (Vern McCallum Collection, 7583).

Figure 2: Milltown Football Club, Premiers 1906 (Sharrock, Vern McCallum Collection).

Players are listed from left to right, starting with the back row: Joe Mullens, Hugh Cottier, Herb Rundell, Phil Cottier, Irwin Bell (Pres.), Jim Coutts, Bob Duff, unknown, Jack Spolding, Carter (not known). Next half row: Alex Bannam, Scotty Mcleod, Mick Lovett, Leo Lovett. Third

row: Art Price, Walter Watson, unknown, Alan McDonald, Jimmy Lovett, Harry Carter, Les Coutts, Dave Price, (not known) Lovett, Frank Price. Front row: Bob Frost, "Pop" Young, Sam Rundell, Angus King, Evan Lovett, Billy Carter. The outcomes differed, and the variety of Indigenous experience is notable.

The variety of Indigenous experience

There is a tendency to view Indigenous experience as uniformly awful in this period, but the sports pages at least provide a glimpse of a more complex reality in which black and white mingled, particularly in rural and local regional contexts. For example, a number of Indigenous players became non-metropolitan football and cricket umpires, often being sought out for their effective and impartial control of games, (see Hay, 2019, pp. 44, 183-184, 195, 274-275). Like their white counterparts, they were subjected to abuse by the members of the public, with at times added racist bias. Angus King was one of those umpires. He can be seen in Figure 2 in the middle of the front row.

When we look at the top level of the game of football in metropolitan Melbourne, however, there is a clear difference from what was taking place in the regions. Repeated requests by Aboriginal teams to play games against Melbourne Victorian Football League (VFL) clubs were turned down or ignored by the league and its clubs (see Hay, 2019, pp. 1, 88, 99, 109). The consequence was that though a mission team like that from Cummeragunja could beat a South Bendigo team in a one-off match in 1900, the Cummeragunja side did not get opportunities to test itself regularly against senior football opposition. Metropolitan club Carlton played a one-off friendly match against Lake Tyers in 1913 when an end-of-season trip to Sydney was called off as the result of a smallpox outbreak in the harbour city (Hay, 2019; Zafiris, 2016), but this was a rare occasion.

Individual players were also denied access. Albert "Pompey" Austin from Framlingham near Warrnambool was unique in that he had a single game with Geelong in 1872, the only Indigenous man to play at the top level with a Victorian club until the 1930s (Hay, 2020c). Dick Rowan had a single non-League game for South Melbourne in 1902, but when the club sought permission to bring him down from Coranderrk for the following season, it was refused. "If he is allowed to go then others will wish to follow", the Board replied (Hay, 2019, pp. 195-196).

Descendants of Indigenous sportsmen and families and their stories

Several Indigenous families in Victoria have a very long history of participation or involvement in the games of football and cricket – Lovetts, Egans, Austins, Couzens, Rowans, Wandons, Clark(e)s, and Kings, for example. It has often been suggested that there is more to be learned from the memories and stories of today's Indigenous descendants about the sporting activities of their ancestors. This may be true of the immediate past generations, but if the aim is to find

out more about the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries then much of what turns up is at best a mixture of more recent family stories and material that has appeared in the research of local and other historians. Stories become generic, contaminated mixtures that are often fiercely held and believed to be unique when they are the product of a variety of influences (Hay, 2020a, pp. 193-196). As William H Geddes and Malcolm Crick argue:

> Is culture a collective heritage from the past or merely a stage for contemporary conflicts about power and meaning? Do people actually have "cultures", or are such substantivised entities merely the figments of anthropological imaginations or the reified by-products of historical encounters which produced ideological shadows which do not correspond to the substance of belief and behaviour at large? Such problems clearly run deep, but what can be said with confidence is that it is no longer possible for anyone to assert convincingly any pure or authentic cultural identity for the reason that there are no insular peoples or societies which have managed to escape the historical processes of, or contemporary expressions of, global entanglement. We are all mongrels now; we are all the products of a multiplicity of complex cultural influences; it is this hybridity itself that is the most evident aspect of cultural authenticity for most of us. (1997, p. 104)

Where family lore exists, it can be a hugely stimulating source with all of its twists and turns and often picaresque elements. Triangulated with conventional historical resources it can bring life to what might otherwise be very dull history. Unfortunately, there seems to be a significant gap in the memory and coverage of Indigenous experience in the latter parts of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Given the sharp reduction in Indigenous numbers following the arrival of men, guns, disease, sheep and cattle, this is hardly surprising (Hay, 2020a).

Among sports historians there has been a tendency to concentrate on the period when modern sports were being formed and codified and then leap ahead to the twentieth century when Indigenous sportsmen and those few women became more visible at national and international levels. The second half of the nineteenth century remains seriously under-researched, but as this article demonstrates there is a great deal to be learned by looking at the non-metropolitan press, in particular, its sports pages. There is really no substitute for going back to the contemporary newspapers, for all their faults and biases, to learn about Indigenous participation in sport in the late nineteenth century and the implications for the cultural history of Victoria and Australia.

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