

PLAYING TO WIN OR TRYING YOUR BEST: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIONAL ANXIETIES OVER THE ROLE OF SPORT PARTICIPATION DURING THE 2002 COMMONWEALTH GAMES

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ABSTRACT *In the last few years, growing concern has emerged in New Zealand sport about the shift towards a more commercial or professionalised model of sport and away from a mass participation-based model. In the midst of a relatively intense period of debate and concern over this change in direction, the 2002 Commonwealth Games took place in Manchester, England. In this article, we analyse how media coverage of the Games articulated with the broader public debate over the direction of New Zealand sport. Grounded in the assumption that the media both reflects and impacts on public understandings of cultural issues, we believe this analysis of coverage of the Games reveals a profound ambivalence over a more professionalised model of sport and points to an unwillingness to give up traditional values of sports participation in order to win. We explore how this debate articulates with current tensions in the realm of Physical Education and suggest that health and physical educators have an important role to play in challenging current pressures towards a win-at-all-costs approach to sport.*

INTRODUCTION

As we enter the 21st century, New Zealand sport potentially finds itself at a crossroads. Over the past decade, and increasing since the establishment of SPARC in 2002, we have seen a shift from traditionally egalitarian and participatory ideals to a more performance-based focus which emphasises winning. Periodic eruptions of resistance to this shift have emerged in response to public perceptions of a devaluation of an historically valued amateur ethos. Much of this concern has been widely reported in the media – which not only reflects but also impacts on public understandings of cultural issues. Indeed, it is through the media that the broad dimensions of the debate about which model of sport best serves New Zealand can be mapped. This apparent struggle over the future of New Zealand sport has come to the surface most clearly in three areas: the sports industry response to SPARC, debates within physical education about the appropriateness of sport within the curriculum, and in public responses to events within professional sports, each of which is addressed in the next section.

For the purposes of this paper, while recognising considerable overlap between the models, we differentiate between them primarily by their major focus. We define the participation model of sport as that which focuses on universal and accessible activity for all and emphasizes the importance of social and experiential values and participation for its own sake. In contrast, we define

the professional model as one which overemphasises competitive outcomes (in terms of winning), quantification (in terms of records), celebrity and a win-at-all-costs approach.

SPARC AND CONTESTATIONS OVER THE FUTURE FOCUS OF SPORT

Following poor performances at major international events – such as the 1998 Commonwealth Games, 1999 Rugby World Cup and World Netball Championships and the 2000 Olympics (Collins & Downey, 2000; Pringle, 2001) – a government inquiry, the Graham Taskforce, was established which “identified a lack of integration, co-ordination and leadership in sport and physical recreation” and recommended that a new “super agency” (Ash, 2002b, para. 11) be formed to replace the Hillary Commission for Sport, Fitness and Recreation and the New Zealand Sports Foundation. Sport and Recreation New Zealand, SPARC, was thus created to oversee the organisation, development and funding of sport in New Zealand.

SPARC’s three key missions were stated as: 1) to be the most active nation; 2) to have the most effective sport and physical recreation systems; and 3) to have athletes winning consistently in events that matter to New Zealanders. SPARC hoped that by becoming a “strategic partner” (SPARC, 2002b, p. 10) of sports, rather than a provider of programs like the Hillary Commission was, it would achieve a return on its ‘investment’. This shift in organizational focus was clearly towards that of a business model of sport as opposed to a social one. In its strategic plan SPARC strongly emphasised the link between successful sporting performance and New Zealand’s sense of national identity. It argued that “research shows 95% of New Zealanders get more satisfaction from world-class performances of New Zealand sports teams and individuals than from similar achievements by other Kiwis” (SPARC, 2002b, p. 8) and that it was “important to our national identity that we are world-leaders in some sporting disciplines” (SPARC, 2002b, p. 11). SPARC cited this research as justification for the increased focus on outcomes (performance) over output (participation). This link between national identity and successful sporting performance was most strongly reflected in the third of SPARC’s missions. Despite the apparent embrace of participatory ideals in the first two elements of the mission, the *winning consistently in events that matter* qualification provided justification for SPARC initially limiting targeted funding and development to seven priority sports (cricket, equestrian, golf, netball, rowing, rugby and yachting) in which New Zealand had strong and successful traditions². Three additional sports (athletics, cycling and swimming) were classified into a second tier and targeted for revitalisation. The chief executive of SPARC, Nick Hill, emphasised that existing funding levels for other sports would be guaranteed until December 2003 (Sanders, 2002a).

However, there was a strong public outcry and resistance, evident in newspaper coverage, to changes in the way that the New Zealand government, through SPARC, supports sport. Those sports not included in the targeted 10, in particular basketball, hockey and soccer, each with strong grass roots support and/or recent international success, expressed concern about continuity of funding and SPARC’s commitment to ensuring opportunity for sports participation for all (Maddaford, 2002; Tutty, 2002b). These sports “feel let down” (Unsporting gestures, 2002, p. 11) by the SPARC implication that they are of lower priority than the others and that they don’t matter to New Zealanders.

Even more widespread feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction were reported in response to SPARC's axing of the Community Sport Fund, which provided \$4.5 million, distributed via local councils, to grassroots sports clubs for equipment, capital works and administration support. SPARC justified the cut by explaining that clubs should receive funding from their regional and national bodies as well as being eligible for the millions of dollars from charitable gaming trusts (Alley, 2002; G. Brown, 2002b). However, councils around the country condemned the move (e.g., Bird, 2002; Powley, 2002; Watson, 2002), arguing that local authorities knew where best the money was needed, and that small local sporting organisations would be disadvantaged. A further issue of contention was the lack of consultation between SPARC and local sports clubs and councils before the changes to the Community Sports Fund were announced and implemented (G. Brown, 2002a, 2002b; Tutty, 2002a; Watson, 2002). Some argued that such disregard showed SPARC's commitment to grass roots sport was questionable and that its priorities lay primarily with achieving elite-level success (Arnold, 2002). Although SPARC conducted road-show style public meetings around the country during the latter half of 2000 to explain the changes to regional and local sports organisations, many felt that it was too little too late (Bloomberg, 2002; G. Brown, 2002a, 2002b)³.

Whether or not grassroots interpretation of and reaction to the SPARC changes is accurate, it is evident that there is widespread concern regarding what is valued in regards to New Zealand involvement in sport. The way sport is organised and valued by the government has changed: a clear priority is to have New Zealanders not only participating but winning in sport. This is an apparent about-face by the government which, since the 1970s, has emphasised the benefits of participation in sport for everyone, including the instillation of character-building values and traits such as hard work and fairness (Collins & Downey, 2000). Sports organisations are concerned that being a good sport or trying your best, long-held New Zealand values, may no longer be acceptable in an environment where funding and support is determined by on-field performance. As Grant and Stothart (2000) observe, a "*sport for all* ideal will struggle to survive in a system that reflects and celebrates a professional ethos where winning is the dominant characteristic" (p. 268, emphasis in original).

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND THE PARTICIPATION MODEL

This struggle for survival is evident within physical education as teachers and students grapple with the increasing complexity and variety of activities and meanings attached to sport and physical activity. Physical education can play a big part in cultural transmission by creating opportunities for students to experience and understand the traditions and values of sport. Officially, school physical education embraces the participation model, and sport's intrinsic, subjective and experiential values and its potential to promote social and personal development have seen it retained within the formal curriculum and extra-curricular programmes. However, although physical education has been described as a foundation stone for sport (Taggart, 1988), its apparent subservience to the requirements of competitive sport is increasingly controversial. Indeed, Stothart (2000) has described sport and physical education as "uncomfortable bedfellows" (p. 40).

Widespread concern has been expressed about the influence of the highly competitive, professional sports model within education. For example, the 1999

Health and Physical Education curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999), advocates attention on the meaning and significance of sport through the adoption of a socio-critical perspective and the process of performance, rather than the outcome, a narrow view often articulated by sport leaders. However, critics from within the physical education community have argued that sport in its contemporary forms has taken physical education too far in one direction. For example, Ross (1994) contends that “we in physical education have been exploited by the social and political growth of commodified, nationalistic male sport as entertainment” (p. 13). For Arnold (1992) the result has been that:

The ethos of what constitutes sport as a culturally valued practice is likely to fall short of its own ideals, moral standards, admired traditions and educationally worthwhile possibilities when (1) external goals come to be seen as more important than internal goals; and (2) perhaps as a result of this, an undue emphasis is placed upon winning so that the result of competition is held to be more important than the process of struggle and challenge. (p. 245)

In response to such concerns, educators have looked to alternative ways to encourage greater numbers of young people to experience and form a relationship of sustained participation with sport that is not focused on extrinsic values such as winning. One such alternative is the sport education curriculum model (Grant, 1992; Siedentop, 1994; Siedentop, Hastie & van der Mars, 2004). The national implementation and acceptance of this model in secondary schools is aimed at helping students become competent, literate and enthusiastic sports participants. However, the educative potential of sport as a culturally valued practice within school settings is countered by the ubiquitous presence of contradictory messages about clothing, language, behaviour and values that are conveyed to students through popular culture, particularly the mass media.

NATIONAL CONCERNS ABOUT A PROFESSIONAL SPORT MODEL

The concerns expressed within physical education and in reaction to SPARC’s shift in focus are reflective of broader concerns about the increasing professionalism of sport in New Zealand, particularly in rugby union and in America’s Cup yachting. Strong reactions against a professional sport model emerged when Sir Peter Blake’s expected successor Russell Coutts and some of his team mates announced they would sail for a Swiss syndicate in the 2003 America’s Cup (see Phillips, 2000). As Phillips describes it, the public response in sports columns, letters to the editor and editorials identified Coutts as deserting the nation: “To many in New Zealand his decision was seen as the act of a traitor, by a man who valued love of money above love of country” (2000, p. 324). The anger expressed by the media and public pointed to a national anxiety over the shift of sport from a participatory to a professional model (Phillips, 2000). As Phillips argues:

Many brought up with the old cultural expectations about sport have not found the revolution easy. The lure of money, the apparent rejection of local and patriotic sentiment, the acceptance of sport as a job and a business, the behaviour of extrovert stars who flaunt their sensational lifestyles rather than accept their responsibility as moral

exemplars – all this comes hard to generations brought up in the old order. Hence the anger of the letter writers and columnists...” (p. 331)

Many writers have been critical of the changes that have occurred as a result of professionalism (Hope, 2002; Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2002). Former All Black and rugby commentator Chris Laidlaw (1999) captured the feelings of many writers and fans when he claimed that rugby:

...now responds not to nationalistic fervour of an adoring public but to the television programme schedulers and the corporate sponsors... There is a growing sense of unease, if not resentment, among supporters of the game that it is somehow being taken away from them. In many ways it is. The stadiums are being built or rebuilt in ways that exclude those who can't afford the price of a seat. The game is no longer consistently free to air. If you want to watch it on television you have to subscribe. (p. 174)

Media analysis of New Zealand's loss of the 2003 Rugby World Cup sub-hosting rights revealed considerable ambivalence over rugby's embrace of a professional ethos. Marten (2003) argued that "After the loss of the Rugby World Cup sub-hosting rights there was public outrage and a call for a return to a governing body with knowledge of the 'grassroots' of the game" (p. 13). The ambivalence was dramatised in media coverage of the loss and captured in the pervasive concern that "the rugby public feels removed from the governing body, feeling that their destiny is out of their hands" (Marten, 2003, p. 8). The published comments from rugby fans and regional administrators reflected similar concerns to those expressed by sport organisations in relation to their 'governing body' SPARC.

The eruption of such concerns into the public domain via the media indicates the importance of sport to New Zealanders. Stories and issues in sport receive wide coverage and generate intense public scrutiny in part because sport is so strongly tied to national identity (see Evans & Kelley, 2002; Fougere, 1989; Laidlaw, 1999; McConnell, 2000; Phillips, 1996). In particular, it is through media coverage that articulations of sport to dominant imaginings of national identity become apparent (Bairner, 2001; Whannel, 1998) and it is this linkage that we explore in the next section.

SPORT, THE MEDIA AND NEW ZEALAND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Media coverage often serves as a barometer of the mood of the nation, particularly in relation to issues over which there is struggle or contestation. It plays an important role in setting the boundaries of how we make sense of issues because, although it does not tell us exactly what to think, it can tell us what to think *about* (Hall, 1994). Denzin (1996) argues that "those who control the media control a society's discourses about itself" (p. 319). In large part because the news media implicitly and explicitly claims to "stand in place of the people, talk *for* the people" (King & Rowse, 1990, p. 4), it is a key cultural resource that (re)creates ideas and assumptions about the world.

Media coverage of international sporting events such as the Commonwealth Games, Olympic Games or various sporting World Cups allows nations to emphasise national uniqueness and difference (Bernstein, 2000; Rowe, McKay & Miller, 1998; Steenveld & Strelitz, 1998). This is typically achieved by the use of an

'us/them' discourse in which 'our' nation's identity is constructed in opposition to the identity of another (Maguire & Poulton, 1999). Constructions of identity frequently involve the use of stereotypes, both of the home nation (us) and the competition (them), and are particularly prominent in coverage of major sporting events. Stereotypes provide a framework of meaning through which interpretation and explanation of sporting actions of other nations is possible (O'Donnell, 1994; Tudor, 1992). They also help reinforce desired qualities and traits of a home-nation's identity, by highlighting and implying that the negatively framed characteristics of others are undesirable (Whannel, 1998). Although there are commonalities in the ways that the sports media of different nations construct identity, the use of sport in this way is also highly culturally and contextually specific. As Bairner (2001) observes, "seldom is the linkage of sport and national identity straightforward and it is only by looking at particular nationalities that its nuances are revealed" (p. 18).

The limited research into New Zealand's construction of identity in relation to major sports events (Duley, 1997; Phillips, 1990; Silk, 2001) has revealed key stereotypes of New Zealand character which include strength, team spirit, hard work and perseverance as well as a laid back attitude, resourcefulness and a willingness to give anything a go. These stereotypes reinforce older notions of sport as embodying moral imperatives (see Phillips, 2000) rather than the professional sport model.

Overall, then, it seems clear that New Zealand is engaged in a struggle over which model of sport best suits the nation. While the government and some culturally important sports such as rugby union appear to be moving towards a professional model, the broader public appear unwilling to give up the more traditional values of the participation model. Given the scheduling of the 2002 Commonwealth Games during an intense period of public and mediated debate over the future of sport, they became an important site at which the various trajectories of the struggle could be interrogated and analysed.

METHODS

Media narratives that are available to the greatest number of people are more likely to become and remain the dominant narratives within a society. For that reason, the analysis was based on coverage in the two largest circulation daily newspapers, the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion Post*, and the largest circulation Sunday newspaper, the *Sunday Star Times*, between 22 July and 11 August 2002.⁴ This period included the Games period of 25 July to 4 August, as well as extra days to allow for build-up and follow-up coverage. From the 39 separate newspaper editions collected over the period of the study, a total of 549 separate articles and 317 separate images relating to the 2002 Commonwealth Games were identified. As a method, textual analysis identifies a text in order to "wrench it free from the routines of its consumption that would ordinarily have us take it for granted, and open it up for analysis" (Turner, 1997, p. 317). It attempts to identify the dominant, or preferred, messages that are embedded in the texts. In this study, both the content and placement of articles and images were analysed, with an emphasis on recurring narratives and themes within coverage. As with cultural studies analyses of texts more generally, we employed both inductive and deductive techniques, seeking themes that emerged inductively from the media texts and searching for evidence that supported and/or challenged previous research.

Overall, our analysis was grounded in the belief that “regardless of what is actually happening, it is the media’s interpretation of that event that shapes our attitudes, values and perceptions about the world and about our culture” (Phillips, 1997, p. 20).

FINDINGS: PLAYING TO WIN OR TRYING YOUR BEST?

Analysis of the media coverage revealed clear evidence of both the participation model of sport where taking part is valued for its own sake and the professional model which emphasizes winning. The participation discourse celebrated athletic performances, whether medal-winning or not, for the personal benefits they brought to individuals. The professional discourse was most evident in an over-emphasis on celebrating medal-winning performances. Both media commentary and quotes from athletes and coaches reinforced the value of the Games as an avenue where the traditional sport-for-all mantra and amateur ethos remained a realistic possibility. At the same time there was little doubt that the Commonwealth Games provided a valuable opportunity for New Zealand to ‘shine’ on the world stage and to prove itself as a nation by exhibiting sporting prowess.

The Ongoing Value of a Participation Model

A number of commentaries acknowledged that the Commonwealth Games were no longer the pinnacle of elite sporting competition but suggested at the same time that there was still value in the event. For example: “The Commonwealth Games are not the greatest sporting event on Earth....Yet none of this dampens the excitement filling Manchester as it looks forward to Thursday’s opening ceremony” (Let the Games, 2002, p. A12). The majority of commentators argued in defence of the Games’ continuing existence, focusing on the unique qualities and ambience that the Games embodied. Contrasted against the increasingly cut-throat world of professional sport, the Games were represented as a haven where sporting behaviour and participation for its own sake remained highly valued. As well, ambivalence about the professional sports model was evident in the representation of professional sport in the following quote: “To those of us accustomed to the increasingly cynical and greedily exploitative world of sport, it was nothing less than a shock to find that the Games really could be returned to their roots. That they could be discussed and enjoyed without constant reference to exactly how many millions were being earned, without endless recriminations for human error” (Scott, 2002, p. D1). Similarly, media commentator Chris Laidlaw suggested that “part of the secret has been their mystique as not just reasonable competition but a good time. There has arisen a special ambience which has surprised the more hard-bitten watchers of sport” (2002, p. B4).

Media commentary highlighted the persistence of the participation ideal in the Commonwealth Games – that is, the possibility of the average citizen from any country being able to train and compete without significant financial or technological resources, for the sole purpose of the glory of representing his or her country rather than the financial incentives so common in the world of professional sport. In particular, well known sportswriter Chris Rattue, in an article previewing the Games, emphasized this unique quality of the sporting competition: “So these are the games for the builder, the baker, the candlestick maker as well as professional athletes...we can still revel in the sight of ‘ordinary

New Zealanders' having their place in the sun (2002c, p. B5). Rattue also suggested that one of the charms of the Games lay in the opportunity for giving "the amateur a fleeting chance of fame" (2002d, p. A2) and quoted then-New Zealand Olympic Committee president John Davies whose comments reflected an emphasis on the participation ideal: "The Commonwealth Games are still in the amateur tradition and give an opportunity to people who would not normally compete at this level" (Rattue, 2002c, p. B5). Indeed, the amateur ideal became reality for New Zealand hammer thrower Phil Jensen who won silver in his first European competition. The win, described as "home grown and do it yourself" (Rattue, 2002b, p. B6) served to maintain the value of the participatory model in imaginings of the Games. This model – represented as a key element and essential quality of the Games – harks back to egalitarian notions of equal opportunity and a level playing field that are romanticised in historical imaginings of New Zealand sport (Fougere, 1989; Sinclair, 1986; Willmott, 1989).

Embodying the Participatory Model of Sport

Many New Zealand athletes chose to embody the participation discourse in reflecting on their performances.⁵ Athletes who won medals, but not of the colour of their choosing, were still represented (and represented themselves) as satisfied with the outcome. This approach was evident in sports reporter Dave Leggat's report of an interview with shot-putter Valerie Adams: "Asked if she felt it was gold lost rather than silver won, she fixed the questioner...with a steely eye. 'I'm not disappointed at anything, buddy. I am happy, I'm over the moon. I had a fantastic time out there. I didn't throw as well as I wanted to, but at the end of the day I was happy with my performance'" (2002k, p. B8). Similarly, bronze medal bowler Anne Lomas expressed no disappointment after losing to stronger opponents: "They played awesome. We can't be disappointed in losing to a performance like that....We got a bronze and I'm really happy. I'm going off to celebrate" (Bronze as good, 2002, p. D6). Badminton coach Graham Robson focused on the quality of play rather than the outcome for mixed badminton pair Daniel Shirly and Sarah Runesten Peterson: "It was so close, just a point here and there, but you have to be proud of them" (Barclay, 2002a, p. C7).

Further illustrating the rejection of a professional model of sport, athletes who did not win medals were also portrayed as happy with their performances and proud to be representing their country. For example, "Moss Burmeister just missed a podium finish yesterday. Swimming the fastest race of his life on his Games debut.... 'I'm stoked,' he said, adding that he believed he could push himself even faster" (Louisson, 2002, p. B5). Other athletes were described as "chuffed", setting personal bests, giving "highly creditable" performances or showing well deserved "tears of delight". Track athlete Dalas Roberts' comments are broadly representative of this theme: "I got quite emotional when I crossed the line. Not everyone can say they've made a Commonwealth Games sprint semifinal, even if I didn't go any further" (Rattue, 2002f, p. B7).

Even when New Zealand athletes lost medals they had a chance of winning, the media focused on how the individuals or teams should still be proud of their performances rather than criticising them for losing. For example, Dave Leggat wrote, "Far from being down in the dumps after losing the final yesterday, the men's hockey team had several reasons for satisfaction" (2002i, p. B6). The women's hockey team was described as leaving the Games "with heads held high" after losing the bronze medal play off (Black Sticks bow, 2002a, p. D2).

The reluctance of New Zealand chef de mission Dave Currie to publicly set medal targets for the team highlighted the rejection of the win-at-all-costs approach to sport participation. Instead, Currie emphasized the participation model in the following comments: "We are not going to predict how many medals we are going to get overall. We are not going to predict which sports are going to get them. We are going to focus on making sure we give everybody the opportunity on the day to perform to their very best ability, that they all give 120 per cent" (N. Brown, 2002, p. B6). This participatory focus was also evident in athletes' discussions of their own likely performance, such as weightlifter Olivia Baker who said, "I'm the strongest I've been, but there are nerves. I'm not setting a weight target to reach. I'll just go and do my best" (Leggat, 2002l, p.D5). Similarly, discus thrower Beatrice Faumuina downplayed the importance of winning when describing her approach to competition: "I was trying to relax and enjoy it out there" (Smiles ahead, 2002, p. A1).

Clearly, the media representations reinforced the participation model of sport by emphasising many aspects of performance that were unrelated to winning medals. Media coverage highlighted athletes' personal achievements, comparisons to previous efforts and positively represented characteristics such as trying your best that have long been valued in New Zealand sport.

The Professional Model: Our Chance to Shine

The focus on participation did not, however, mean that winning was ignored. The Commonwealth Games were clearly considered a place where New Zealand could affirm its traditional imaginings as a successful sporting nation. That SPARC chose success at the 2006 Commonwealth Games to gauge the effectiveness of its restructure (SPARC, 2002a) further points to the importance of the Games to New Zealanders. In an increasingly professionalized and competitive sporting world, the Games relatively small nature enabled New Zealand athletes not only to compete but to emulate the successes of the past. The Games were celebrated as an important event for New Zealanders because, unlike the Olympics, they provided a place where winning was "easier" (Sanders, 2002b, p. C5) or a more "realistic" possibility (Rattue, 2002c, p. B5). For example, "To a small country such as New Zealand, the Commonwealth Games is ideal to express itself in a sporting way. Success at world championships and Olympic Games might be beyond it but it can have its day in the sun at Commonwealth level" (Bidwell, 2002e, p. D7). NZOC officials suggested New Zealand athletes would "lift their performance because they feel they have a chance" (Rattue, 2002c, p. B5).

Although Games reporting covered both those athletes who were successful and those who were not, articles on winning athletes and teams were generally more detailed and received more prominent placement as well as larger headlines. For example, a back-page article on silver medallist Susie Pryde, accompanied by a photograph, detailed closely how the mountain bike race played out (Leggat, 2002d) compared with a one paragraph summary listing the results of the losing New Zealand shooters (Firing blanks, 2002). The trend of focusing on winning athletes was clearly evident in the images that accompanied the written text.

More than 78 different athletes and coaches were featured in the 232 photographs of New Zealanders. What was striking was the focus on medal success, with almost two-thirds of the total New Zealand images (65%) featuring medal winners. Of the winners, gold medallists featured most prominently, receiving a much greater proportion of images (57%) than the proportion of

medals they won (24%). Conversely, although bronze medals made up 47 per cent of all New Zealand medals won, only six percent of medal images were of bronze medallists. These findings suggest that gold medals were valued more highly or considered more newsworthy than bronze medals – a focus that reinforces a discourse of winning. The sports that received the most images were historically valued sports with a strong tradition of New Zealand success that have long been mythologised into New Zealand imaginings of nation (Fougere, 1989; Phillips, 1996; Sinclair, 1986). For example, athletics, cycling and squash won five of New Zealand's 11 gold medals and the four athletes who received the most images – Sarah Ulmer (19), Beatrice Faumuina (13), Valerie Adams (10) and Leilani Rorani (10) – came from these sports.

Contrary to the participation discourse espoused by many New Zealand athletes, several newspaper articles also reported comments that were more reflective of the professional model. This was particularly true in reporting of the women's hockey team losses where, even when an individual athlete played well, the team's loss caused distress. For example, "Caryn Paewai played her best hockey test in two years yesterday but afterwards she looked as if she had watched a favourite cat cross an eight-lane motorway" (Sanders, 2002c, p. B3). Similarly, swimmer "Dean Kent was distraught after illness caused him to miss a medal in the gruelling 400m individual medley. He was fourth, well below his personal best. 'It's just so soul destroying'" (Master stroke, 2002, p. D1; Distraught Kent, 2002). Their distress at failing to win a medal demonstrates the pervasiveness of the discourse of winning.

Several articles emphasised that the New Zealand team's final performance would be evaluated at home in terms of medals won, which may be a reflection of SPARC's measuring of success in quantifiable terms. It was clear that the success of the entire country was represented as being measured, at least in part, by how many medals were won by New Zealand athletes, rather than solely by personal achievements. The importance placed on securing medal success was evident in early concerns about a possible failure to achieve as many, or more, medals as in previous Games (e.g., Perrott, 2002b). For example, "Just two of the Kiwi medals were gold by last night....New Zealand had eight gold in Kuala Lumpur, and it is going to need a storming finish to beat that...Without a late gold rush Manchester will not be regarded as a success, and a final medal tally outside of the top six would hardly be acceptable" (Bidwell, 2002b, p. D12). However, following some disappointing, non-medal-winning early performances, the tone of media coverage became more positive once medals began to accumulate. For example:

Other New Zealand athletes were set for a rousing finish to their Games campaign after the team almost doubled their medal haul at the weekend. A rich vein of form boosted the total medal tally to 36 and the gold medal count to seven – one more than the Kuala Lumpur Games with one day of competition remaining. Hopes for further glory overnight rested with the rugby sevens, netball, triathlon, table tennis and badminton....In New Zealand's most successful 36 hours of the Games, the team collected five gold, three silver and 14 bronze medals across six sports, giving them a total of 36 and seventh place on the medal table. (Perrott, 2002a, p. A1)

The focus on medals in the Games coverage indicated a continued concern for the nation's standing on the international stage as measured by sport performance

(Moore, 1990; Phillips, 1990). A final medal tally shows graphically how successful a country is in direct comparison to others and is widely available for all to see. Luckily for New Zealanders' sense of identity, the nation finished a creditable fourth on the final medal tally with the largest number of medals won since the Auckland Commonwealth Games in 1990 (Gold rush, 2002).

Ambivalence about the Professional Model of Sport: Don't Be Like Those Aussies

Despite the co-existence of discourses supporting both sport models in media coverage, concerns about the win-at-all-costs or professional model of sport were also evident, particularly in how the New Zealand media framed the highly successful Australian team. Coverage of Australia and Australians during the Games highlighted a profound ambivalence about some of the characteristics (apparently) required for ongoing or future success. Much of the coverage was overtly critical, particularly in the framing of personality traits that were linked to Australian success. For example, terms with negative connotations such as arrogant, brash, cocksure, cocky and bragging were regularly applied to Australian competitors (see Bush, 2002a; Rattue, 2002c; The spirit, 2002; Wensing & Bruce, 2003). Such traits were generally presented in a critical light, the implication of which was that these traits were undesirable in New Zealanders. For example, "Even the Aussies, *with their massive capacity for self-congratulation*, seem a little stunned by their success" (Ansley, 2002, p. B5, emphasis added) or "Australians are *crowing* about their early medal success" (State of art, 2002, p. B7). Although the media seldom explicitly identified desirable New Zealand characteristics, the Australians frequently served as exemplars of what Kiwis should not be. For example, "We do not need to be as brash as the Aussies" (Bush, 2002b, p. TV12) or "New Zealand managed this without any of the bragging and chest-thumping which seems second nature to Australians" (The spirit that, 2002, p. B4).

At the same time that much of the media discourse rejected such characteristics as appropriate for New Zealanders, the coverage also revealed a deeper envy of Australian success as in the following quote: "Now it is simply part of being Australian, this assumption that whatever they compete at, they'll win – and all too often they do....Australians simply cannot conceive of losing" (Ansley, 2002, p. B5). The winning drive of Australian competitors was a common discourse in the coverage and sometimes revealed some of the tensions in how New Zealand is adapting to an increasingly win-at-all-costs environment. For example, sports writer Ron Palenski's somewhat critical use of the term *security blanket* in the following quote suggests some support for a more professionalized approach to sport but also includes an awareness – in the statement *today may not be the best day on which to say it* – that his view might not be widely shared. "Today may not be the best day on which to say it, but there's much to admire in the Australian attitude to sport. Wherever they go, whatever they do, they go to win. Not for them the security blanket of just doing as well as they can, striving for personal bests or, in the case of the Commonwealth Games, going for a good time and to win new friends" (Palenski, 2002, p. D7).

New Zealand print media also highlighted the amount of money spent by Australia on their elite sporting facilities and programs to ensure their Games success. Several commentaries derided the Australian concern with winning and the funnelling of significant financial resources towards sport to ensure successful

gold-medal outcomes. The financial and structural support available to Australian athletes was represented as an unfair advantage and sometimes as a form of cheating. Commentators suggested that this imbalance was not fair to Kiwis, who had to make do with their comparatively meagre resources as, for example, in an analysis of New Zealand race walker Craig Barrett's loss: "Barrett is no longer ranked top dog in the Commonwealth, that mantle now taken by a hot-shot 23-year-old Australian called Nathan Deakes, yet another product of the Australian Institute of Sport" (Mirams, 2002, p. D7). Yet underlying these critiques was an admiration or jealousy for the fact that the Australian government had valued the importance of sport to Australian identity and, in doing so, had been able to make a significant commitment to elite sporting performance.

CONCLUSIONS

Media coverage of the Commonwealth Games pointed to a national concern that formerly dominant imaginings of 'kiwiness' based around the amateur sporting ethos, making do with limited resources and still being successful are no longer likely to lead to the international success that is so important to feeling good about ourselves in a world context. Nationwide concerns about the future balance of government funding between participation and elite level sport that have been raised with the inauguration of SPARC are both implicitly and explicitly revealed in media representations of the Commonwealth Games. The eventual direction is not yet clear – both the participation and professional discourses appeared to be operating simultaneously without one being more dominant in coverage than the other.

Overall, the media coverage demonstrated that the New Zealand media valued wins by athletes, and that athletes felt that winning was an important element of competing at the Games. However, there was little evidence that the government's new approach to performance-based evaluation of sports success has been embraced by the sports community. Indeed, the reported reactions of many New Zealand athletes showed the power of the participation model within New Zealand society. One key value of this model is that it permits many more athletes to achieve 'success' than the professional model. Athletes who do as well as they can or who improve by, for example, posting personal bests can derive satisfaction from their performances that is unrelated to whether or not they win a medal. In this model, winning becomes a by-product of participating to one's best ability, and not the sole goal of sport involvement. Thus, although the New Zealand media appeared to celebrate winning and winners, the disdain shown for characteristics such as arrogance and cockiness displayed by the Australians suggests an unwillingness to sacrifice characteristics central to Kiwi identity in order to ensure a win.

Media coverage of the Games suggested that, as a nation, we are shifting towards but have strong reservations about a more professionalized model of sport that moves the government out of funding participation and into a much more explicit relationship between international sporting success and national identity. Indeed, in an environment increasingly driven by the principles of economic rationalism and financial accountability, many of the watchdogs of sport are speaking out against what they see as the erosion or elimination of the major intrinsic benefits sport can offer to participants. Of major concern is whether the professional model represents an appropriate focus for sport delivery in this country.

In no place is this more apparent than in education settings where young people are constantly exposed to the influences of the professional model, via television. Should we wish to resist this shift towards a fully professional model of sport, it is vital that the focus of physical education continues to emphasise the value of a participatory model of sport and physical activity. Yet, as Grant and Pope (2000) have indicated: "In the absence of a well-grounded body of information generated from schools in Aotearoa New Zealand, the guardians of sport and physical education have primarily acted *according to the trends and social forces of the time*" (p. 72, emphasis added). As key influences in young people's understandings of sport, health and physical education, teachers have an important role to play in bringing this tension to light and encouraging informed discussion about what might be gained and/or lost by adopting either model.

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NOTES

¹ This paper builds on Wensing, E. H. (2003). New Zealand National Identity in Print Media Representations of the 2002 Commonwealth Games. Unpublished Masters Thesis. The University of Waikato.

² Five of these initial seven priority sports are also predominantly white, male and middle-upper class.

³ From our experience at one of these meetings, the SPARC presentation focused mainly on the reasoning behind the selection of the ten sports and the ways in which these sports would be streamlined to provide effective delivery of their sport. This did little to assure the audience that commitment and support for grassroots sport was still a priority.

⁴ These newspapers also represented the largest circulation newspaper of the two major New Zealand newspaper companies – Wilson & Horton and Independent News Limited (now sold to Fairfax).

⁵ It should be noted that these discourses were also widely apparent in the 2004 Olympic coverage. For example, shooter Ken Uprichard, eliminated in the first round after a close contest, described his performance as “a good shoot” because he was up against a competitor ranked much higher. Triathlete Bevan Docherty, who ultimately won the silver medal, demonstrated a focus on his own performance rather than winning when he said, “Everything is going well and I am totally on form...the best I can do is have a good race” (TVNZ live coverage, August 26, 2004).

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