

Sports archives and collections in Australia

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Sport is one of the defining cultural pastimes and interests in Australia. Australians are renowned for their love of sport and their attendance at amateur and professional sporting events reflects this. Nearly half of the Australian population regularly participate in some sporting or physical activity. Accordingly, Australia is one of the world's most successful sporting nations in terms of medal success. Where Australia may not be as successful is in managing all its sporting records.

Sporting activity, like many of the performance arts, essentially entails a live game, match or race. However, unlike for instance a dance or theatre performance there is no script or notation and every sport event is a one-off where the conditions or opponents cannot be repeated.

What can be collected directly from sport performances therefore is often just the recording of the event. Initially this was in print reportage form, then through still photography, and now through sound and film/video recordings. With the unique access afforded by the digitisation of Australia's newspapers within Trove (<http://trove.nla.gov.au>) it is possible to find the very earliest written reports of sporting events. The digitised picture location service also available via Trove makes finding historic sports images also very accessible.

Aside from reportage of sports, what is also collected is the accompanying event paraphernalia or ephemera (advertisements, tickets, posters, programmes or brochures, costumes or kits) as well as the resulting statistical facts about athletes, scores and results.

All of the large publicly funded Australian cultural and collecting agencies, including, The National Library of Australia (NLA), the National Archives of Australia, the National Museum of Australia as well as the Powerhouse Museum and National Sports Museum have extensive sports collections. These collections are predominately of sport event ephemera.

Archived material from the Australian hosted Empire Games (1938); Commonwealth Paraplegic Games (1962); Commonwealth Games (1962, 1982, and 2006) and most impressively the Olympic Games (Melbourne: 1956, Sydney: 2000) and the Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games are collected and preserved almost in their entirety. In particular the collection for the 2000 Olympics and Paralympics are enormous and spread through a number of institutions. The same cannot be said of all Australian minor sports events nor of Australian minor sports in general.

Sport libraries in general do not collect event ephemera, but concentrate on collecting publications in such areas as sport science and medicine, administration, participation, integrity and performance management.

There are only a small number of dedicated sports libraries in Australia. The Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) Library established in 1873 has a large collection of cricket, AFL, Olympics and other sports publications and ephemera. Unfortunately like many private libraries its collection is not greatly accessible to the public – although there is the adjacent National Sports Museum that does offer the opportunity to view sports ephemera and realia. The only other major library is the National Sports Information Centre (NSIC) within the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) in Canberra. The NSIC

houses a large collection of sports information and resources with a strong emphasis on the technical and scientific. The library is accessible to the public and to its primary users. The NSIC's primary users include Australian sport's leading coaches, sport scientists, medical practitioners, researchers, administrators and policy makers.

Aside from these two major dedicated sports libraries there are a number of academic libraries and some state and departmental libraries that contain reasonably large collections of sports materials. Coordinating sports libraries and related bodies is the Australian Sport Information Network (AUSPIN) which enables the cross institutional sharing of expertise and resources.

Outside of libraries and museums other sports collections are held by a wide variety of sporting bodies. Each major sporting code has a national organisation that controls that sport. Within each of these bodies there are collections or archives relating to their activity. Under the national sporting bodies are the regional bodies, and then the clubs, teams and individuals who participate within the sport. Each of these entities may hold some archival material of value.

The Australian Sports Commission is Australia's primary national sports administration and advisory agency. It holds a large sports archive, including that of the NSIC. The Commission maintains its own corporate records, within its Information Management Section, and also provides general information management advice and leadership across the sports sector. Another integral part of the Commission is the Australian Institute of Sport which is Australia's sports science and medicine centre of excellence and home to a large research collection.

Within Australia, there are numerous Halls of Fame. These halls were created to memorialise the achievements of individual athlete's from within a particular geographical area or sport and were either created by sporting organisations or by regional administrative entities such as local councils or sometimes by commercial sports enterprises. Traditionally these halls were actual physical buildings or permanent displays within buildings that contained sports people's memorabilia. While there are many still extant, a number are now being created as online only presences with digitised displays.

Since 1996 the NLA through its PANDORA Archive (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au>) has been building a digital archive of online resources featuring Australian sport and recreation. So far more than 1150 websites and web resources have been preserved, some of which have been copied many times to reflect their changes over time. The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic collection is a particular highlight and was the world's first online archive of an Olympic games. Included in the collection of 147 websites were all the official and state websites as well as numerous commercial, media and cultural websites.

Digitisation of sports ephemera and archival works has also been accomplished by a number of other large collecting bodies, including the NSIC, which also have available digitised collections of sport images and other materials.

Another aspect of sports collections, are the mass of sports data collected and created by the Australian community. A fairly large subset of sport enthusiasts are those who choose to collate or produce statistical (performance and results) sporting data. Individual collections can be located on websites (such as at: <http://stats.rleague.com/afl/>), however there is an expectation that there are many other data collections which are not available online or not easily findable online – this is particularly so of non-professional and low profile sports.

The sports in Australia that generate a large amount of popular and thus commercial support, such as Australian Rules Football, Rugby league and Cricket generally manage their records, data and collections as professionally as they manage their teams. However the smaller the club, the less likely they are to be in a position to effectively manage their collections.

Commercial sport is widely identified with the entertainment and business sector and manage their corporate records in a professional manner as required by commercial law. Amateur sports and local sports organisations, which are generally not-for-profit concerns and do not have a great deal of external oversight for their records, are however part of the cultural sector, even if often they generally do not perceive themselves to be. As such, unlike other types of community groups, there can be difficulty in getting these sports bodies to adopt the practices recommended by collecting and cultural agencies to manage their records and archival collections. There may also be perhaps a difficulty of many in the cultural and collecting sector to fully engage with the sporting community.

Sporting organisations are interested in keeping sporting collections, primarily of ephemera and realia (caps, medals, cups, ribbons), which often have a tangible commercial value. Individual sports 'fans' are also very keen on collecting sports memorabilia, and as such there is a commercial element in collections that many other community organisations do not have.

What is not recognised within many sports organisations generally is that aside from sporting records, the scores, times and results, that collecting other records (archives) is also of importance.

It should be borne in mind that the vast majority of sports organisations are small, have limited finances and rely on volunteers for their existence. When an organisation is focussed on finishing the season or the next championship, it is not unexpected that they would find it difficult to divert their stretched resources to focus on managing their history. Therefore there are very few sporting organisations that have the resources to employ staff with the defined task of managing information, records or archives.

One outstanding example of a sporting body that has recognised the importance of managing its records is the Australian Paralympic Committee (APC). The APC invested in employing a Knowledge Manager within its staff and is now reaping the benefits. The APC has been able to enter into relationships with the National Film and Sound Archive and the Australian Sports Commission (NSIC) to assist it to preserve and promote its collection. The APC also in partnership with the NLA has established a digital oral history archive and with Wikimedia has created an online wiki based history of the Paralympic movement. These achievements show the possibilities that exist for a sport organisation that is prepared to develop its information management capabilities so that it may successfully engage with cultural institutions.

Australia has the benefit of the national bibliographic tool Trove which co-locates disparate collections. The organisations that contribute to it are those larger organisations (libraries, museums, etc.) which have catalogues or other registries. All of the major libraries that collect sport information have their holdings on Trove. However, there is no alternative sports archive or collection register and no sporting organisation large or small has its holdings on Trove, so that much of the sporting collections in Australia which reside in sporting organisations repositories are not visible or accessible.

Where you have smaller organisations managing collections of material, that are not directly related to the running of their day to day business, we can assume that appropriate care and preservation of those collections may be an issue. The Australian Community Heritage Grants scheme assists small community groups and organisations to identify and preserve their significant holdings for future generations. During the life of the scheme over 870 grants have been made to community organisations towards preserving their collections however only 8 sporting organisations so far have received any funding – which considering the very large extent of organisations devoted to sports in Australia is a very low figure. This is somewhat symptomatic of the divide between sports and the wider cultural sector.

What we can expect therefore is that the majority of the archival holdings of sports organisations are not being optimally looked after, and that organisations do not have an awareness of the help that could be available to them. A few of the larger sporting organisations have elicited the assistance of libraries to assist with the management of their collections. For example, the NSIC assists with the preservation of digital materials owned by Swimming Australia. Other sporting organisations alternatively have instead turned over their collections to libraries or museums to care for them. The majority of small collections however remain unknown and inaccessible and as likely unpreserved.

While sports organisations often may not be keeping records, sportspeople seemingly are much the same. Almost uniquely for any group of successful professionals in the public eye, sports celebrities are barely represented in major manuscript archives. The outstanding cricketer Sir Donald Bradman has a museum dedicated to him and is also represented in archival collections across Australia, but he is almost alone. It would be highly unlikely that no sportspeople created or are now creating archival worthy collections of personal papers, as other notable people have and are. It is therefore clear that either sportspeople do not wish to supply archives and manuscripts collections, or more probably and likely that archives and manuscripts collection managers are simply not requesting sportspeople's papers.

Research use of sporting collections and archives that exist is not confined to the sports fan. Sport is such an important facet of communal life in Australia that sporting records and resources are used by a wide field of social researchers.

Sport has been used by government and social organisations as a medium to promote a range of social causes and changes. Sport which is widely seen as providing an equitable arena has been used to integrate and assimilate Australians into the national ideal. An early example of this can be seen with the adoption into 'Western' sport codes of Australia's indigenous peoples. As early as 1868 an Australian Aboriginal cricket team was visiting England and was thus the first representative Australian team. So that for much of Australia's past, Aboriginal people could not vote, but they could represent Australia on the sporting field. Aboriginal Australians have continued to feature in Australia's sporting success most iconically in Cathy Freeman's Olympic gold medal winning performance at the Sydney 2000 Olympics.

Australia has continued to use sport as a means to support multiculturalism, with outreach to new migrants made a priority by government and sporting organisations. The large scale support for the Paralympic sporting movement is another example of government and public efforts to use sport as a means to support social inclusion of Australians with a disability.

Maintaining access to the cultural record of sports' role in changing social attitudes will remain a requirement of archivists and records managers in Australia. Sport continues to shape and inspire the lives of Australians. Therefore, keeping good records of how people administered, participated in and were spectators in games, matches and races will continue to be required of Australia's collecting institutions. The Australian Sports Commission will continue to provide support and advice across the sport sector. So that sports organisations may find pathways to assist them to identify, preserve and disseminate their collections which will enable the enjoyment and knowledge of sport to continue to be passed down to future generations.

Some examples of Australia's major sporting archival collections

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/information/nsic/collection> National Sport Information Centre, Australian Sports Commission

<http://acms.sl.nsw.gov.au/item/itemDetailPaged.aspx?itemID=52515> Davis Sporting Collection (State Library of New South Wales)

<http://library.sl.nsw.gov.au/record=b2565526~S2> Tom Brock Collection (State Library of New South Wales)

http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Paralympic_Movement_in_Australia History of the Paralympic Movement in Australia (Australian Paralympic Committee)

<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/subject/19> Olympic and Paralympic games digital archive (National Library of Australia)

<http://www.athletics.com.au/history/index.htm> - Athletics in Australia, 1890- (Paul Jenès, Peter Hamilton, David Tarbotton, Fletcher McEwen and work from Bert Gardiner)

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs188.aspx> Empire Games, Sydney, 1938 (National Archives of Australia)

<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/fact-sheets/fs57.aspx> Olympic Games, Melbourne, 1956 (National Archives of Australia)

<http://www.nla.gov.au/oral-history/australian-centre-for-paralympic-studies-oral-history-project> Australian Centre for Paralympic Studies Oral History Project (National Library of Australia)

<http://www.nsm.org.au> National Sports Museum

<http://www.olympic.uts.edu.au/> Australian Centre for Olympic Studies

<http://www.orange.nsw.gov.au/site/index.cfm?display=147051> Orange City Council Sporting Hall of Fame

<http://www.pictureaustralia.org/trails/sport.html> Picture Australia - sport (National Library of Australia)

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/our-collections/collection-strengths/sport-games/australian-football> Australian Rules Football (State Library of Victoria)

<http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/our-collections/collection-strengths/sport-games/chess> MV Anderson Chess Collection (State Library of Victoria)

http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/search_tags.php?tag=paralympic Sydney 2000 Paralympic Games (Powerhouse Museum)

<https://secure.ausport.gov.au/clearinghouse> Clearinghouse for Sport (Australian Sports Commission)