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Cokley, John; Patching, Roger; Scott, Paul

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# Gender preference in journalism education: why sport misses out

John Cokley

Roger Patching

*Bond University*, [Roger\\_Patching@bond.edu.au](mailto:Roger_Patching@bond.edu.au)

Paul Scott

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# Gender preference in journalism education: why sport misses out.

Cokley, J<sup>1</sup>; Patching, R<sup>2</sup>; Scott, P<sup>3</sup>

Refereed article for *Australian Journalism Review* (amended version after review)

## Abstract

*Sports and research into sports journalism features in only a tiny minority of international articles and conference papers at the academic end of the profession. This article looks at sport's place in the research literature, its importance among journalistic practitioners and their audiences, and theorises that sports research in academic journalism has become an unpopular field for two measurable reasons: (1) gender, and (2) market forces.*

## Introduction and rationale

Nothing gets politics (or anything else) off newspaper front pages and out of broadcast bulletin headlines faster than an outstanding sporting achievement or a sporting controversy<sup>4</sup>. Coverage of sport is also evidently important to media owners, who are the potential employees of graduates from tertiary journalism courses. Sport is also “the fastest-growing sector in the British media” (Andrews 2005: 1),

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<sup>1</sup> University of Queensland

<sup>2</sup> Bond University

<sup>3</sup> University of Newcastle

<sup>4</sup> Such as the cricket-ball tampering allegations in August 2006.

which is arguably “the most competitive in the world” (Andrews 2005: 2) “and the same applies in most other English-speaking countries” (Andrews 2005: 1) as well as, for example, in the cricket-driven Indian subcontinent, and in the soccer-fixated world of South America.

This competition has extended beyond the sports pages into transnational media boardrooms, such that “professional as well as amateur sport are increasingly integrated into an emerging global ‘sports/media complex’ ” (Law et al 2002: 280) driven largely by six global corporations “which own or lease the visual product from source to point of consumption by a globally expanding audience, and then rent out ‘their viewers’ and listeners’ attention’ ” (Sage, in Law et al 2002: 281). These corporations are News Corporation, Disney, AOL-Time Warner, Viacom, Bertelsmann AG, and Vivendi–Universal (Law et al 2002), all of which distribute media content into the Australian and South Pacific market, and as such are likely to require Australian sports content – especially specialist journalistic content – from time to time.

### **Background**

Australian Rules Football is just one of four codes<sup>5</sup> popular around its home country but it reached top prominence among national television owners and audiences in 2005-2006 when its organising body, the Australian Football League (AFL), was offered AUD\$780

million by the ailing (now deceased) Kerry Packer for the rights to televise AFL games on his Nine Network television group for five years from 2007. The rival Seven Network had earlier paid \$20million for the right to match the offer, which they later did, successfully, in collaboration with a third rival, the Ten Network. The offer marked an increase of more than 50 percent on the previous price of \$500 million paid by a Nine-Ten-Foxtel<sup>6</sup> consortium for the same television rights for the five years to the end of 2006.

Legitimacy for such high fees to televise a single code of football in the relatively small Australian sports market is offered by the latest survey by Sweeney Sports (Sinclair, 2006a) which suggests that AFL has overtaken swimming as the nation's most popular sport. Almost three out of every five Australians (59 percent) reported some involvement with AFL in 2005. Swimming, the top-ranked sport for the previous three years, slipped to equal second with tennis on 56 percent, with cricket coming in fourth on 53 percent, then a big drop to the other three codes of football: rugby league (42 percent), soccer (41 percent) and rugby union (40 percent) (Sinclair, 2006a). Sports coverage is also one of the biggest sections on the national newsagents' magazine racks, since vicarious adventure is very popular:

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<sup>5</sup> Along with, in order of internationalisation, soccer (also known as "football"), Rugby Union and Rugby League

<sup>6</sup> Foxtel is the News Corporation-controlled network

Most of us who love adventure must live it vicariously . . . In the process of getting away from ourselves . . . from the routine of office and factory and the common monotony of home . . . uncounted millions have found the supreme stimulant in sport. It holds the thrill of the battlefield . . . the romance of the stage . . . the ambition, joy and sorrow of life itself. (Kofoed 1932: ix)

Kofoed's enthusiasm for the distractive qualities of sport might be considered by many as little more than a reworking of Juvenal's *panem et circenses* – a term coined by the satiric Roman poet to describe the practice of Roman Emperors providing free wheat and circus games as a means of pacifying the populace – and based on a review of tertiary journalism courses around Australia, journalism educators take a similar view. Some courses have subjects specifically in sports journalism<sup>7</sup> but most bundle all “specialist rounds” together in a few generic lectures. Local government rounds, court reporting, and police or emergency rounds are often lumped together with sport as a “grab-bag” of areas which require the some batch of skills. Some others contend that any general reporter should be able to cover any specialist area without any specific training.

As an aside, the current authors suggest that in any “round”, specialist knowledge by a journalism applicant of the particular area is often the final, telling factor that achieves – or doesn't achieve –

appointment to a job. Such trained but “insider knowledge” might also be the key ingredient in obtaining a major interview or breaking a major story.

### **Methodology**

The researchers undertake a literature review, a focussed content and frequency analysis of the only national newspaper in Australia to include regular and substantial journalistic sports content<sup>8</sup>, and a frequency analysis of sports-related research in the major Australian journalistic academic research database.

### **Formative studies**

The authors undertook two formative pilot studies to map the extent of the research problem: examination of a relevant academic publishing data set; examination of gender among journalism students and academics in Australia.

#### *Study 1 – sport in academic literature*

The bibliography formed by Dobinson (2002) – “Australian Journalism Research Index 1992-2002”, in *Australian Studies in Journalism*, 10-11:268-356 – presents nearly 88 pages of closely-fitted citations, representing 10 years of journalism research by Australians published in 23 peer-reviewed academic journals from 1992-2002 from

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<sup>7</sup> One of this article’s authors has taught sports journalism as a discreet subject at three Australian universities at various times in the past 10 years.

<sup>8</sup> *The Australian*, ultimately published by News Corporation

Australia, the United States, Britain, Asia and the South Pacific (for full list, including acronyms, see endnote <sup>1</sup>). Only seven titles (*Table 1*) reflect any sport content in any articles. While it is noted that some articles might have researched aspects of sport not reflected in the title, academic publishing conventions suggest this limitation would be minimal.

1. Baird, Katrina (1994), "Attitudes of Australian women sports journalists", *ASJ*, 3: 231-253.
2. Brown, Peter (1995), "Gender, the press and history: Coverage of women's sport in the Newcastle Herald 1890-1990", *MIA*, 75: 24-34.
3. Henningham, John (1995), "A profile of Australian sports journalists", *ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal*, 42 (3) [149]: 13-17.
4. Hodge, Errol & Zhang Weihong (1995), "Sydney's Olympics and the Beijing People's Daily", *AJR*, 17 (1): 119-124.
5. McGregor, Judy & Susan Fountaine (1999), "The loneliness of the long distance gender researcher: Are journalists right about the coverage of women's sport?", *AJR*, 21 (3): 113-126.
6. Breit, Rhonda (2001), "Give us a fair go! Legal obstacles to reporting sport on the Internet", *Ejournalist*, Vol 1, No1.
7. Cryle, Denis (2002), "Press and protest: The Springbok tour of 1971", *ASJ*, 10/11: 206-222.

*Table 1: sports research in the sampled outlets: 1992-2002*

### *Study 2 – gender among journalism students and academics in Australia*

Most Australian journalism course enrolments are skewed towards females and graduates tend to be female<sup>2</sup>: between 60 percent and 80 percent depending on the course (May, 2003)<sup>9</sup>. Since evidence (Phillips 2003; Alysen 2005) suggests that between 66 percent and 94 percent

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<sup>9</sup> In one case, of the students who took a subject called "Sports Journalism" as an elective in one university in the May semester of 2006, 16 of the 18 enrolments were female, and the females, for the most part, were just as keen on reporting sport as the two males.



of journalism graduates achieve employment either directly in journalism or in journalism-related fields such as public relations and government communications roles, this suggests that about 40 percent of entry-level journalists across all departments are women, and this aligns closely with industry figures in the dominant Western, English-speaking markets (Cokley 2004: 189). Membership figures<sup>10</sup> from the Journalism Education Association of Australia in 2006 (Jenkins 2006, personal communication) support this overall industry position but disrupt any position that females are similarly over-represented among journalism academics:

Among all those listed as financial and unfinancial, the numbers are: male, 58; female 39. Among the current 2006 financial members only, the numbers are: male, 27; female 25 (Jenkins 2006, personal communication).

The gender division of journalists and journalism academics in Australian universities (Jenkins 2006, personal communication) therefore follows national and international trends (Cokley 2004: 189): mostly dominated by older males.

### **Research question**

These formative studies prompted the research question: why is sports journalism – which combines two of the most culturally

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<sup>10</sup> On August 17, 2006

significant and economically influential forces of our epoch – barely visible in the journals featuring the research of journalism educators and in Australian journalism curricula. The following hypothesis is suggested: Given (1): that journalism and communication academics are more likely to be male; (2): that their students are more likely to be female, and (3): that sports newsrooms are populated with male journalists and thus sport reporting is arguably anti-female; then (4): female journalism students are more likely to seek non-sports genre journalism instruction and work experience, reducing demand for sports research among their mentoring academics and consequently reducing the number of articles being researched and published about sport by those academics.

## **Literature review**

### *Hegemony*

Oxford University Press's blurb for Conley and Lamble's third edition of Australian journalism education's most widely used text – *The Daily Miracle: An Introduction to Journalism* – states the book is “a comprehensive guide to all types of journalism” but sport doesn't rate a single index entry. This omission is due to be addressed in the next edition of the text (Lamble 2006, personal communication) but the feature is widespread: two other influential broadcast and electronic journalism texts – Phillips and Lindgren's *Australian Broadcast Journalism* and Alysen's *The Electronic Reporter* – also keep sport “on

the bench”. However, Alysén et al’s *Reporting in a Multimedia World*<sup>11</sup> does include a sport section.

Sports journalism “is the little red caboose behind the powerful steam engine of institutional news reporting (i.e., government, the courts, crime, education, business, religion, etc.) within the Fourth Estate”, notes McCleneghan (1997:338), who attributes the lack of research into sports reporting to scholars not recognising “its division as an ally to legitimated institutions”. Some media academics and critics widely believe that “sports journalism is an oxymoron” (Mason 2005) and there resides among some journalism educators and researchers a notion that “it’s just sports”: that the sports department is viewed by other journalists as the “toy department” of a news organisation (Schultz 2005).

The personal experience of the current authors is supported by studies such as Henningham’s (1995) profile of Australian sport journalists, in which sports departments in both print and broadcast organisations were described as “their own little empires” (Henningham 1995:13), most often a WASP male citadel that sat in splendid isolation from the workplace culture and editorial concerns found in other departments of the newsroom. The “ghetto structure of sports departments in newspapers and print media organisations” makes the division analogous to an occupational cul-de-sac

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<sup>11</sup> Among the authors of that text was one of this article’s authors

(Henningham 1995:13). Within the hierarchy of collegial regard that exists inside large newsrooms – where political and investigatory journalism sits atop of the respect heap and entertainment finds itself at the other end – sports journalism, suffering from the dual ignominies “of popular appeal and a focus on the body rather than the mind”, is more likely to gravitate towards the lower end of the hierarchy of esteem (Rowe 1999:39). Despite such professional misgivings, sport is journalism's biggest sub-discipline (Salwen and Garrison 1998) but even so, sport journalists, more than those in any other sub-discipline, suffer from having cultivated “shabby reputations” that shadow them in an age of professionalism and accountability (Salwen and Garrison 1998: 98).

### *Gender*

Recent studies in the United States (Eastman & Billings 2000:192) suggest a “very high degree of embedded favouritism toward men’s sports and men athletes, even at times when major women’s sporting events were peaking in newsworthiness”. This favouritism was more evident in the broadcast media<sup>12</sup> than in the print publications<sup>13</sup> studied, the authors reported. But within the print sample, this gender bias within the *New York Times* far exceeded that in *USA Today*. This research is supported by a review by McGinnis et al (2003: n.p.) which suggests that, especially in the areas of sport and

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<sup>12</sup> ESPN and CNN

<sup>13</sup> The *New York Times* and *USA Today*

leisure, what is associated with men and masculinity is valued over what is associated with women and femininity. Their research further indicates that even when athletes try to blur gender meanings they risk being labelled deviant (2003: n.p.) and this apprehension of deviance can have quantifiable effects in sponsorship and fees received. The same applies to sportscasters in the electronic media (Toro 2005: 1) such that male sportscasters appear to have greater credibility than female sportscasters and thus the employability of males is enhanced. This could be the result of exclusionary practices in sports journalism (Claringbould et al 2004: 709) which those researchers suggest depend on processes of division of labour, images and discourses, interactions, and identity work and which result in a situation whereby “most journalists are White men” (Claringbould et al 2004: 709).

The nexus between sport, financial return and political power is identified even more clearly by Helland (2004: 11) and Whitlam & Preston (1998: 194) who identify a strong symbiosis between sport, sponsors and the media, which, Helland suggests, carries clear implications in terms for sport politics and media politics:

The kinds of sport which draw considerable media attention also attract the biggest and richest heroes or villains and henceforth obtain considerable financial resources ... the question of gender is key here, as is the choice of sports ... this

entails that the media which ideally should have treated the sport/media complex with a critical perspective, themselves are implicated in this complex. (Helland 2004: 11-12)

In fact, sport has been used as a signifier of defiance against the terrorism witnessed since the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001 (Toohey & Taylor 2006: 88) and those authors note this illustrates how media create propaganda links between sport and terrorism and “hegemonic tropes are created around sport and terrorism” (Toohey & Taylor 2006: 71) so that a distilled message of good and evil enables homilies of sport to be employed in metaphors for western society and its values. Similar “war metaphors” are identified by Carmeli (2001: 65) during a study of Israeli soccer journalism. He notes (2001: 67):

Sports writing ... constructs and disseminates a simplified and polarized conception of reality – both that of the game and that which it mirrors.

There is also a strong relationship between critical reflection and the professionalisation of journalism, notes Schade (2005:1) which suggests also that the inverse is true: that where critical reflection is absent, professionalisation is low.

## **The central study**

### *Methodology*

The “Crunching the Numbers” section of *The Australian* newspaper’s weekly (Thursday) *Media* section was used to establish the top-rating TV programs for 2005. The accompanying “News Value” list provided a comparison of the most-mentioned items across all media. *The Australian*’s weekly listings covered the 44-week period between week seven of 2005, beginning on February 7, the first official TV ratings week of the year, and week 50, ending on December 10 and from February 7 to December 11 for the “News Value” comparison.

*OzTam* provided the TV ratings and *Media Monitors Australia* the lists of the most-mentioned stories. *Oztam* uses a “peplemeter” on each TV in each selected house to record and store four critical pieces of data: time, whether the set is on or off, the channel to which the set is tuned, and how many people are watching (OzTam, 2006).

Sean Sampson, who produced the 2005 “News Value” segments for *Media Monitors Australia* (Sampson, 2006), noted that the lists covered all commercial radio and television stations, the ABC and SBS. He said allowances were made for the fact that, say, Channel 9’s *Today* show is seen on about 45 different capital city and regional stations, so a reference to a story on *Today* or in their regular newscasts, would be weighted to take that into account, as would a mention on the *John Laws* program (or the news) syndicated from 2UE in Sydney to more

than 60 stations around the country. Sampson also noted that newspaper mentions were calculated by a simple word search on, for instance (his example), “AFL” and “Grand Final” to arrive at the number of mentions.

While it should be acknowledged that this might distort some of the figures for the major sports, given their results sections, there is no evidence that this artificially increased the figures for horse racing (given the pages and pages of detailed results every day in newspapers). The only time horse racing made the “top 5 listing” was during the Spring racing carnival leading up to the annual Melbourne Cup race in November. Overall the “number crunching” shows that viewers flock to their couches when sport is broadcast, and the nation’s print and broadcast media saturate their publications with sports coverage.

### **The data**

The most watched TV program in Australia in 2005, albeit in a non-ratings period, was the final of the Australian Open tennis in late January, featuring local hero Lleyton Hewitt being defeated by Marat Safin: this drew an audience of 4.04 million (Sinclair, 2006b). The top six programs nationally during the 44-week ratings period (across the five mainland capitals – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth) were all sporting events. Coverage of the AFL Grand Final attracted 3.394 million viewers across the mainland capitals and was



the top-rating program that week and for the ratings year (The Top 50 TV programs, September 19, 2005).

It was also the second-most watched program on regional TV around New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, attracting almost 909,000 viewers (Top 10 Regional programs, September 19, 2005). Given that Hobart and Darwin don't rate in the national figures, and both are AFL heartlands, and that only the Eastern states' regional figures were included, the total nationwide audience watching the Sydney Swans win was possibly around 5 million, or approximately a quarter of the Australian population. The Grand Final wrap-up was the second most watched program that week and for the year (3.031 million viewers with another 858,000 in the regionals in the Eastern states), and the pre-match program came in at number three that week with 2.487 million viewers to be the fifth most-watched program for the year (The Top 150 TV programs, *ibid*). Another six sports-related programs made the mainland capitals' Top 50 that week and three more were in the regional Top 10 (The Top 50 TV programs, *ibid*, and Top 10 Regional programs, *ibid*).

The third highest-rating TV program for the year was the Rugby League Grand Final with 2.563 million viewers in the mainland capitals (The Top 50 TV programs, October 13, 2005), and another 1.494 million regional viewers (Top 10 Regional programs, October 13, 2005). The NRL Grand Final presentation was the second most

watched TV program in regional areas of the Eastern states that week, and the Grand Final entertainment program the third most watched (Top 10 regional programs, *ibid*) while those two programs came in 24<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> respectively in the capital cities (The Top 50 TV programs, *ibid*).

Fourth on the list was the annual Melbourne Cup horse race<sup>14</sup>, which drew just over 2.5 million people in the five mainland capitals (The Top 50 TV programs, November 10). Nearly a million more (986,122) watched in the Eastern states' regional areas (Top 10 Regional Programs, November 10, 2005).

As mentioned above, the broadcast of the AFL Grand Final day pre-match festivities was the fifth most-watched TV program of 2005. The sixth most popular program was the Socceroos qualifying match for the World Cup in late November. The match had 2.484 million viewers in the five mainland capitals and quite probably more than 3 million nationwide viewers (The Top 50 TV programs, November 24, 2005).

By comparison, Seven's US entertainment imports, *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*, regularly rating as first and second in the Top 50 listings throughout 2005 (often alternating in the top spot, but more often than not one/two) averaged 2 million to 2.2 million viewers when they topped the ratings for the week. Locally, the light-

entertainment reality show *Dancing with the Stars* was a ratings winner, again for Seven, but even the final did not come within 140,000 of the audience for the World Cup qualifier (The Top 50 TV programs, April 28, 2005).

Rugby league remained Queensland's favourite sport in 2005. The Grand Final (involving the North Queensland Cowboys), the three State of Origin games, the grand final entertainment and the second preliminary final filled the top six programs for the year (McLean, November 26-27, 2005).

#### *Limitations in the data*

The period investigated in this article does not include December 2004-January 2005, so the Boxing Day (2004) tsunami is not mentioned in the data, even though it dominated media coverage in early 2005. The tsunami and the relief effort was still one of the top stories in the first week of the surveys (February 7-13) achieving 5524 mentions in all media, the third highest number for that week (News Value, February 17, 2005). Also not included in the study are the New Year's cricket Test in Sydney, the one-day cricket series, tennis tournaments in the run-up to the Australian Open title, and Australian golfer Stuart Appleby winning the second of his three successive titles in the season-opening US PGA event in Hawaii. Because the data lists concluded with the week of December 5-11,

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<sup>14</sup> Held on the first Tuesday in November

also omitted are two of the biggest events on the Australian sporting calendar – the Sydney-to-Hobart yacht race and the Boxing Day cricket Test in Melbourne – and earlier, the Chappell-Hadlee one-day series in New Zealand.

Further limitations were introduced by the data collection methods: For each of the 44 weeks under discussion, *Media Monitors Australia* provided a list of the five most-mentioned stories in the nation's media, and a brief commentary. Only the top five stories nationwide are included, a maximum of 220 “mentions”. Only the most important – or most widely-covered stories nationally – rates a mention each week and it is noted that this is likely to disadvantage major local stories that don't have national impact. It would also appear to favour popular sports, but equally, it is likely to favour major political issues, and various people in the news. For a story to have impact on the totals, it would have to be in the news for a number of weeks – such as the London terrorist attacks and their aftermath, Hurricanes Katrina and Hilda, Iraq hostage Douglas Wood, the hanging of Van Nguyen, speculation about the sale of Telstra, and the Michelle Leslie saga.

### **Discussion of the data: main study**

#### *Summary of findings*

The data collected suggests an almost total domination of television non-fiction programming – including news reporting – by sport

content. It also suggests by implication, supported by Helland (2004), that this domination is a result of the financial and socio-political power of sports backers and promoters, among whom are the major journalistic employers around the world (Law et al 2002). These backers and promoters are, in turn, mostly male, since male hegemonic dominance is operative in newsrooms as standard practice (Louw 2001; Cokley 2004) and especially in sports newsrooms (Claringbould 2004).

*Explanation of findings in detail: an exposition of domination*

In order to compare the various stories, the authors decided on five categories – sport, politics, tragedies, individuals and “others”.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Weeks mentioned</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Total number of stories</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Sport</b>	91	41.4	902,800	41.9
<b>Politics</b>	43	19.5	369,407	17.1
<b>Tragedies</b>	24	10.9	319,527	14.8
<b>Individuals</b>	49	22.3	453,021	21
<b>Others</b>	13	5.9	112,455	5.2
	220		2,157,210	

*Table 2: News value lists totalled by category.*

Collation of the various “top 5” lists for the 44 weeks surveyed (Table 2) showed that sports stories dominated the Australian news agenda, with nearly twice as many references as its nearest competitor category (91 sporting references to 49 for the “individuals” category). The “individuals” in the news last year included Douglas Wood, Nguyen Van, Michelle Leslie – all in the news for more than four weeks

of the surveyed period – and the Schapelle Corby case. Both measures used – the number of weeks mentioned (and as a percentage) and the total number of stories (and as a percentage) – showed sports coverage as the standout. More than 41 percent of all the top stories measured in the 44-week period involved sport. A total of more than 900,000 stories of the roughly 2 million collated involved sport.

<b>Area</b>	<b>Top</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>Sport (91)</b>	17	26	15	19	14
<b>Politics (43)</b>	9	3	11	8	12
<b>Tragedies (24)</b>	7	7	4	3	3
<b>Individuals (49)</b>	10	7	9	10	13
<b>Others (13)</b>	1	1	5	4	2

Table 3: Where the various categories “rated” week by week.

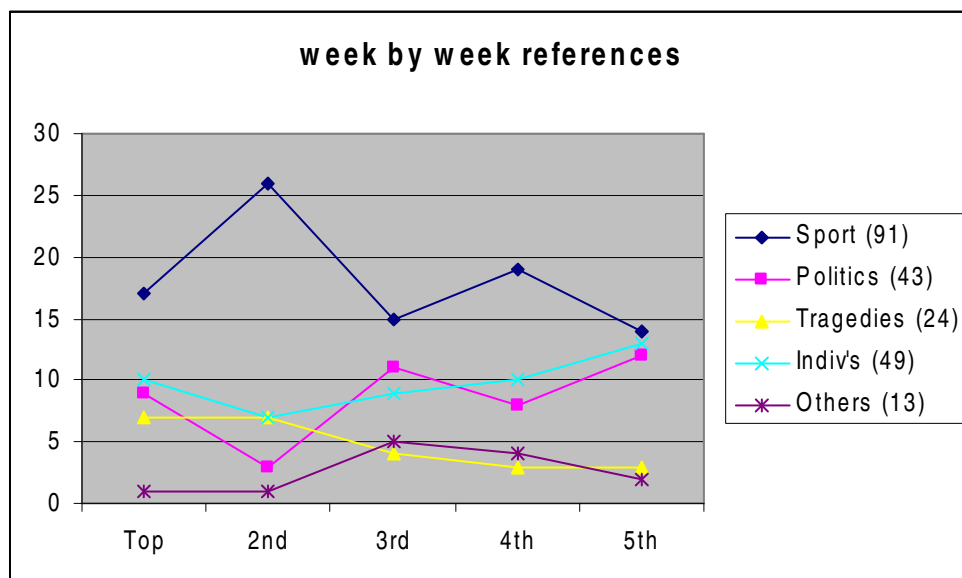


Figure 1: How various categories “rated”

Another way of showing the dominance of sport overall is to look at the spread of the various categories in the 44 weeks of lists – i.e. where were the stories between one and five. Table 3 and Figure 1 show how many times the various categories were either the top story of the week, second, third, fourth or fifth. Again sport dominates the list with the highest number every time. For 17 weeks (38.6 percent) stories on sport were the most-mentioned in the nation’s media for the week. For 26 weeks (59 percent) a sports story was second on the list – and on six of those 26 occasions, a sports story has also been to most-mentioned story of the week. A total of 15 times (34 percent) a sports story was third, 19 times (43.2 percent) it was fourth, and a further 14 times (31.8 percent) a sports story was the fifth most-mentioned story.

Figure 1 is a graphic illustration of the dominance of sport in overall national media coverage.

<b>Top stories for a week...</b>		
<b>1</b>	Bali bombings	39,350
<b>2</b>	London bombings	31,048
<b>3</b>	AFL Grand Final	30,607
<b>4</b>	Nguyen hanging	29,344
<b>5</b>	H'cane Katrina	28,349
<b>6</b>	H'cane Katrina	26,831
<b>7</b>	Terror arrests	25,398
<b>8</b>	Melbourne Cup	24,673
<b>9</b>	Schapelle Corby	20,650
<b>10</b>	Pope dies	20,478
<b>11</b>	Schapelle Corby	20,432
<b>12</b>	Socceroos	19,786
<b>13</b>	Carr resigns	17,421
<b>14</b>	Indo quake	16,412
<b>15</b>	Brogden	16,283
<b>16</b>	Federal Budget	16,452

<b>17</b>	Ashes cricket	16,350
<b>18</b>	Horse racing	15,978
<b>19</b>	Douglas Wood	15,827
<b>20</b>	AFL	15,733
<b>21</b>	AFL	15,620
<b>22</b>	AFL	15,304
<b>23</b>	Ashes cricket	15,280
<b>24</b>	AFL	15,080
<b>25</b>	AFL	14,994

*Table 4: The top 25 stories on a weekly basis.*

The top 25 stories for a single week include 11 sports stories, with the AFL Grand Final having the third highest total of media mentions in a single week. Only two of the biggest stories of the year (given there are no figures for Tsunami coverage), the Bali bombings and the London terror attacks, rated more mentions than coverage of the Sydney Swans' AFL victory at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The Melbourne Cup was the eighth highest mentioned story in a single week, the Socceroos making the World Cup came in 12<sup>th</sup>, the loss of the cricket Ashes were 17<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Spring racing carnival was the 18<sup>th</sup> most mentioned story in an individual week, and AFL coverage filled the five remaining positions between 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> on the weekly list.



<b>Sport</b>	<b>weeks</b>	<b>Total number of stories</b>
<b>AFL</b>	26	322812
<b>Cricket</b>	20	179526
<b>NRL</b>	19.5	166348
<b>Golf</b>	5	27,092
<b>Tennis</b>	5	59096
<b>Rugby</b>	4.5	27613
<b>Horses</b>	4	51625
<b>Others</b>	7	68908

Table 5: Sports by weeks in list and total number of stories.

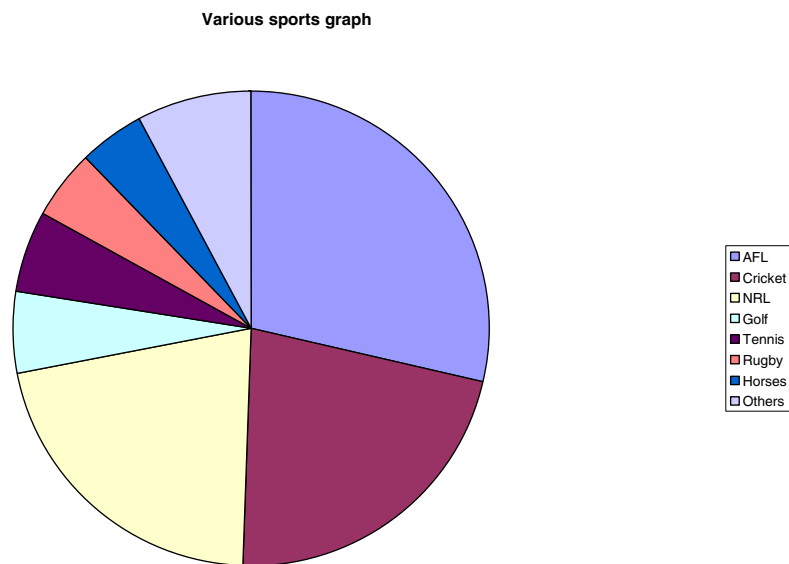


Figure 2: Pie-chart distribution of the various categories

Figure 2 and Table 5 (above) show the dominance of AFL in sports coverage in the nation's media. It appeared in the "top 5" list for 26 of the 44 weeks, with a total number of mentions in excess of 322,000 – more than a third of sport's 900,000-plus total. Cricket came in

second with mentions in 20 weeks of the survey period, but its total was little more than half that of the AFL. An argument could be made that cricket would rate higher if the lists had covered January and part of February, and the remainder of December of 2004 – i.e. the eight weeks missing from the lists are the “high season” for cricket (and tennis). This is counter-balanced by the fact that 11 of the 20 cricket listings were from the Ashes-losing tour of England.

Rugby league is the third most-popular sport with the nation’s media, and this is understandable as it is largely limited to the eastern mainland states. By way of explanation, the “half mention” shared with rugby was the list’s combining of that week when both the Wallabies and the Kangaroos lost in Europe. After the top three, the totals drop dramatically to five for golf, mainly aided by Robert Allenby’s winning of all three Australian titles in late 2005, five for tennis – the Grand Slams of the French and US Open and Wimbledon – four (and a half) for the out-of-form Wallabies, and four for the Spring horse racing carnival and the Melbourne Cup.

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Top</b>	<b>2nd</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	<b>4th</b>	<b>5th</b>
<b>AFL (26)</b>	8	11	3	3	1
<b>Cricket (20)</b>	3	10	2	2	3
<b>NRL (19.5)</b>	1	3	4	9	2.5
<b>Golf (5)</b>	0	0	1	2	2
<b>Tennis (5)</b>	2	1	2	0	0
<b>Rugby (4.5)</b>	0	0	1	0	3.5
<b>Horses (4)</b>	2	0	0	0	2

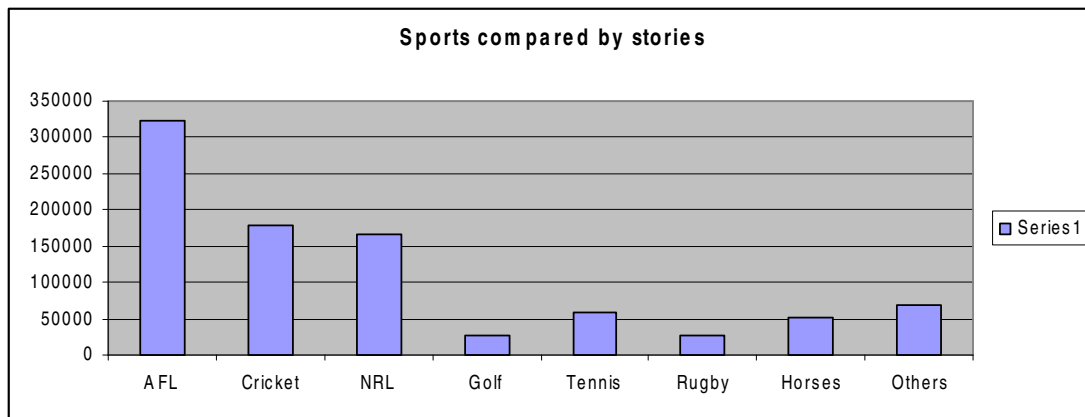
*Table 6: Distribution in “Top 5” News Value lists of major sports categories.*

The dominance of AFL is also demonstrated in the distribution of the mentions in the “top 5” *New Value* lists. Nineteen of the 26 (nearly 80 percent) mentions of AFL were either top or second on the list. About the same percentage of rugby league mentions were in the lower 60 percent of the lists – i.e. either third, fourth or fifth. Only on one occasion – coverage of the NRL Grand Final – did the NRL top the list of the most-mentioned stories of the week.

About two-thirds of the listings for cricket (13 of 20) were either as the top story of the week, or the second most-mentioned, but only on three occasions was cricket the top story of the week. While the NRL might get nearly as many mentions on the lists as cricket, the sport is nowhere near as popular (as measured by the number of stories published) as either AFL or cricket (Table 7 and Figure 3 below).

<b>Sport</b>	<b>Story total</b>
<b>AFL</b>	322812
<b>Cricket</b>	179526
<b>NRL</b>	166348
<b>Golf</b>	27,092
<b>Tennis</b>	59096
<b>Rugby</b>	27613
<b>Horses</b>	51625
<b>Others</b>	68908

*Table 7: Sports categories by total number of stories.*



*Figure 3: Sports compared by total stories.*

Table 7 demonstrates that AFL generated 150,000 more stories than its nearest competitor, cricket, and almost twice as many stories as the third most popular sport – rugby league. The disparity is shown even more graphically in Figure 3.

### **Discussion of the combined data**

The strong relationship between critical reflection and the professionalisation of journalism (Schade 2005:1) together with the simplification of journalism by its sport-focussed practitioners (Carmeli 2001: 65) and the data from the Dobinson bibliography support a conclusion that professional reflection regarding sport among journalism academics is low, which suggests that journalism academics have a limited professional interest in sport. Results from Claringbould et al (2004) that sports journalism excludes women and people of colour, and the perception data collected from journalists at work (Henningham 1995:13), combine with demographic data concerning female bias among journalism students to support the

hypothesis that demand for sports research is reduced by perceptions among female journalism students that the industry of sports journalism is dominated by white males. The large amount of content data collected from the main study supports the conclusion that the “war” discourse of sport (Carmeli 2001) continues to be one of wealth and power and almost completely codified and dominated by “blokey” male behaviour. This behaviour is found in males who appear comfortable and “at home” on the sidelines of rough play, in sweaty change rooms and in pubs and clubs where conversation is loud and drink is strong (see also Kofoed 1932, Helland 2004, Toohey & Taylor 2006).

The demographic data from the Journalism Education Association (Jenkins 2006) support the hypothesis that the above perceptions are further strengthened by the dominance of males among journalism academics, further reducing demand for sport-related instruction and work experience, and demand for sports research among academics. This is strongly supported by the absence of sport as subject material in the dominant university texts available to journalism students.

## **Conclusions**

It is axiomatic that tertiary students believe that their studies will lead to employment in the field they have chosen to study and this is supported by recent evidence (Phillips 2003; Alysén 2005). Exactly why a disproportionately high number of females continues to enrol in

tertiary journalism courses – even though a strong connection has been shown between sport, financial return and political power, and there are data that the “war” discourse of sport (Carmeli 2001) continues to be one of wealth and power and almost completely codified and dominated by “blokey” male behaviour – is yet to be explained. It is possible, for instance, that female students have formed the opinion – not supported at this stage by evidence – that sheer numbers of female journalists will disrupt the dominant male hegemony evident in journalism and their careers will prosper in the long run. In any case, the evidence suggests that the resulting gender imbalance among tertiary journalism students is driving down the quantum of sports research and publishing conducted by Australian journalism academics, and thus driving down the amount of reflection and potential professionalisation of sports journalism in particular (and it must be said, journalism in general, given the clear importance of sports to the industry).

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended, based on the data presented in this article, that the Journalism Education Association (JEA) allocates specific resources to the promotion of sports research among its members, and sports-research publishing in its peer-reviewed journal and its annual conferences. This would most simply be carried out by the establishment of a sport journalism chapter within the JEA to foster, guide and maximise results of such sports-related journalism

research. It is also suggested that sports researchers in the JEA establish links with members of the Australian Society for Sports History<sup>15</sup>.

Such an approach by the JEA would assist in developing a critical and reflective approach to sports journalism in both the academy and industry and further provide the opportunity for improvement of sports journalism's "blokey" reputation.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sporthistory.org/About.htm>

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<sup>1</sup> Source journals (publishers current in 2002; some have changed)

1. APME: Asia Pacific Media Educator, Graduate School of Journalism, University of Wollongong in collaboration with Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology; and Department of Communication Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia; Department of Journalism, Monash University, Australia.

2. AJC: Australian Journal of Communication, School of English, Media Studies and Art History, University of Queensland.

3. AJPS: Australian Journal of Political Science, Department of Politics at the Australian Defence Force Academy on behalf of the Australasian Political Studies Association.

4. AJR: Australian Journalism Review, Journalism Education Association, Australia.

5. AJM: Australian Journalism Monographs, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Queensland.

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6. ASJ: Australian Studies in Journalism, School of Journalism and Communication, University of Queensland.
  7. BJR: British Journalism Review, British Journalism Review Publishing Ltd.
  8. CJC: Canadian Journal of Communication, Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation, a collaborative venture between the Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology and the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing.
  9. TCP: The Contemporary Pacific, Centre for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawaii Press.
  10. DB: Development Bulletin, Development Studies Network, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra.
  11. Ejournalist, Central Queensland University.
  12. IPI Global Journalist, (formerly IPI Report) International Press Institute, Missouri School of Journalism.
  13. JDC: Journal of Development Communication, Asian Institute for Development Communication, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
  14. JS: Journalism Studies, Routledge.
  15. JMCQ: Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, in co-operation with the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of South Carolina, Columbia.
  16. MCS: Media, Culture & Society, Sage Publications.
  17. MIA: Media International Australia, then published by the Australian Film Television & Radio School.
  18. Metro, Australian Teachers of Media, with assistance from the Australian Film Commission, Cinemedia and the NSW Film and Television Office.
  19. PICJ: Pacific Islands Communication Journal, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific.
  20. PJR: Pacific Journalism Review, School of Communication Studies, Auckland University of Technology.
  21. PC: Political Communication, Taylor & Francis.
  22. TRT: The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs. Carfax Publishing.
  23. Transformations, Central Queensland University.

<sup>2</sup> **Journalism enrolments skewed to female**

Graduation Statistics supplied by RMIT Journalism after author Cokley posed an enquiry on the JEANET list-serv, early 2003:

<i>Graduate Diploma</i>				<i>Bachelor of Arts (Journalism)</i>			
Year	Male	Female	Total	Year	Male	Female	Total
1996	3	7	10	1996	13	18	31
1997	1	10	11	1997	10	22	32
1998	6	6	12	1998	13	27	40
1999	5	7	12	1999	15	25	40
2000	3	20	23	2000	12	74	87
2001	0	3	3	2001	16	29	45
2002	2	8	10	2002	12	24	36