

Bond University  
Research Repository



**Sport rules - OK? A study of media usage in 2005**

Patching, Roger

[Link to output in Bond University research repository.](#)

*Recommended citation(APA):*

Patching, R. (2006). *Sport rules - OK? A study of media usage in 2005*. 1-18. Paper presented at Jeanz/JEA annual conference, Auckland, New Zealand.

**General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

December 2006

# Sport Rules - OK? A Study of Media Usage in 2005

Roger Patching

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

Follow this and additional works at: [http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss\\_pubs](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs)

---

## Recommended Citation

Roger Patching. "Sport Rules - OK? A Study of Media Usage in 2005" Dec. 2006.

[http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss\\_pubs/92](http://epublications.bond.edu.au/hss_pubs/92)

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at [ePublications@bond](mailto:epublications@bond). It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities & Social Sciences papers by an authorized administrator of [ePublications@bond](mailto:epublications@bond). For more information, please contact [Bond University's Repository Coordinator](#).

## **Sport rules – OK? A study of media usage in 2005**

By Roger Patching

### **Abstract**

*They say there are only two certainties in life – death and taxes. The author suggests you add another for the average Australian: the need to know ‘the latest score’. The author has ‘crunched the numbers’ on the News Value column in The Australian’s media section during 2005 to demonstrate the overwhelming popularity of sports coverage in the Australian media. Of the ‘top five’ stories nominated in the column in the 44 weeks surveyed, 41% involved sports coverage, nearly double the next category. There are also preliminary findings of a study of the first 41 weeks of the surveys for 2006. The author asks why sports’ reporting is not offered in more tertiary journalism courses?*

### **Introduction**

Australia is a nation of sport lovers. Nothing gets anything else off the front pages faster than an outstanding sporting performance or a sporting controversy. But how important is the coverage of sport to the nation’s media – the potential employees of graduates from tertiary journalism courses? The importance of AFL to television was seen in the “silly season” of 2005 - 2006 when an ailing Kerry Packer offered \$780 million for the rights to televise AFL on *Nine* for five years from 2007. *Seven* had earlier paid \$20 million for the right to match the offer, which they did in consortium with *Ten*. That’s an increase of more than 50 percent on the price paid by the *Nine – Ten – Foxtel* bid of \$500 million for the rights for the previous five years. It is understandable that such high fees should be paid for the rights to broadcast AFL games when the latest survey by Sweeney Sports shows that AFL has overtaken swimming as the nation’s most popular sport (Sinclair, 2006a). Almost three out of every five Australians (59%) has 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%), soccer (41%) and rugby union (40%) (Sinclair, 2006a). But there are other indicators of the importance of sports coverage to the nation’s broadcast and print media. It is one of the biggest sections in daily newspapers, a regular part of radio and television newscasts, popular on the internet news sites as well as being one of the biggest sections on the local newsagents’ magazines racks.

## **Background**

It is the author’s contention that tertiary journalism courses are not giving sport its rightful place of importance in their curricula. While a couple of courses have subjects specifically in sports journalism (the author has taught sports journalism as a discrete subject at three Australian universities at various times in the past 10 years), 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 “glad-bag” of areas which require the same batch of skills. There is also the other argument that any general reporter should be able to cover any specialist area without any specific training. While this may be true to a degree, specialist knowledge of a particular area of reportage could be the final, telling factor that gets a journalism graduate a job.

## **Methodology**

The “Crunching the Numbers” almost half-page of *The Australian’s* weekly media section on Thursdays was used to establish the top-rating TV programs for 2005, but more importantly, the *News Value* list provided a tool for a comparison of the most-mentioned items across all media. *The Australian’s* weekly listings covered the 44-week period between week seven, 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 people-meters on the 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* told the author (Sampson, 2006) his lists covered all commercial radio and television stations, the ABC and the 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 its 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 various 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. It should be acknowledged that this might distort some of the figures for the major sports, given their results sections, although it didn't seem to bump up 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 Melbourne Cup. Overall the number crunching shows that viewers flock to their couches when sport is on the telly, and the nation's print and broadcast media saturate their publications with sports coverage. The only overseas comparison available to the author was a reference in Boyle's *Sports journalism: Context and issues* which quoted UK research showing over a 30-year period from 1968, editorial space devoted to sports in the London tabloids, the *Sun* and the *Mirror* averaged between 25 percent and 33 percent. The *Sunday Mirror* regularly devoted 38 percent of its editorial space to sports coverage (Boyle, 2006, p 49).

## **Watching TV**

The most watched TV program last year was the final of the Australian Open tennis in late January, featuring "our Lleyton" Hewitt going down to Marat Safin which drew 4.04 million (Sinclair, 2006b), albeit outside the ratings period measured for this paper. It was the highest rated program since 2001 (Dale, 2006). The top six programs nationally during the 44-week ratings period (across the five mainland capitals – Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth) by a wide margin were all sporting events. Coverage of the AFL Grand Final attracted 3.394 million viewers across the mainland capitals to be 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 another 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 only the Eastern states' regionals were included, it would be fair to estimate the total audience nationwide watching the Sydney Swans win at closer to five million, upwards of 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 (Ibid). Another six sports-related programs made the mainland capitals' Top 50 and three more were in the regional Top 10 (The top 50 TV programs and top 10 regional programs, September 19, 2005).

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, October 13, 2005) 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, October 13, 2005).

Fourth on the annual list was that work-stopper on the first Tuesday in November, the Melbourne Cup, which drew just over 2.5 million people away from their desks in the five mainland capitals (The top 50 TV programs, November 10). Nearly a million more (986,122) watched Makybe Diva create racing history with the "threepeat" in the Eastern states' regional areas (Top 10 regional programs, November 10, 2005) and countless others in pubs and clubs around the nation.

As mentioned above, the AFL Grand Final day pre-match festivities was the fifth most-watched TV program of 2005. The sixth most popular program was a triumph for SBS – the Socceroos qualifying for the World Cup in late November with 2.484 million viewers in the five mainland capitals – more than three million probably nationwide (The top 50 TV programs, November 24, 2005).

By way of comparison, Seven's US imports, *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*, regularly one and two in the Top 50 listings throughout the year (often alternating in the top spot, but more often than not one/two) averaged around two to 2.2 million viewers when they topped the ratings for the week. Locally, *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). Half of the top 50 programs since 2001 involve coverage of sporting events (Dale, 2006).

Rugby league remained Queensland's favourite sport in 2005. The Grand Final (involving the North Queensland Cowboys losing), 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).

By way of comparison, up to week 45 of 2006 (that just includes the Melbourne Cup) six of the top eight TV programs nationally were sport. Predictably, the opening ceremony of the Melbourne Commonwealth Games was a ratings winner for the Nine Network, attracting a whopping 3.56 million viewers in the five mainland capitals, more than a million in the eastern states regionals, and including the probable viewers in Tasmania, the Northern Territory, the ACT, and the regionals in SA, WA and Tasmania, more than five million people probably tuned in (The top 50 TV programs, 2006). The AFL final came in second with more than three million viewers in the five mainland capitals. The third most popular program was *The Great Escape*, the Beaconsfield miners telling their tale of survival to Nine's Tracey Grimshaw in a deal that really lifted the bar in chequebook journalism deals. Roger Federer winning the Australian Open tennis was fourth, followed by the Commonwealth Games closing ceremony. The final of *Dancing with the Stars* temporarily interrupted the run of top sporting events, coming in at number six, followed by the Rugby League Grand Final and the AFL Grand Final wrap-up program. So six of the eight top-rating TV programs, up to November 10, 2006, involved sporting contests, and involved more than 2.5 million viewers in the mainland capitals, and probably another million or more in the other states and regional areas.

### **But is the popularity of sports coverage reflected across all media?**

There are a couple of caveats that need to be made before the details of the 2005 number crunching exercise are outlined. Because the period covered does not include January 2005, there was very scant reference to the biggest natural disaster in recent memory, the Boxing Day (2004) tsunami that dominated media coverage in early 2005. It was still one of the top stories in the first week of the surveys (February 7-13) garnering 5,524 mentions in all media, the third highest number for that week (*News value*, February 17, 2005). Had the mentions made to this massive disaster for January been collated, it would have probably exceeded the most-mentioned (other than sport) story – the ongoing Schapelle Corby drug case saga in Bali, which rated in the top five lists on 10 different occasions in 2005, totalling almost 100,000 mentions in the nation's media.

From a sports perspective, January and December are among the busiest months for the nation's sporting elite. Not included in the listings from January 2005, for instance, 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, which, as mentioned earlier, featured Lleyton Hewitt in the final, and Stuart Appleby winning the season-opening US PGA event in Hawaii. By finishing their lists with the week of December 5 – 11, the ratings' listings omitted two of the biggest sporting events on the Australian sporting calendar – the Sydney Hobart yacht race and the Boxing Day cricket test in Melbourne – and earlier, the Chappell – Hadlee one-day series in New Zealand. As if to prove the author's point, the first "crunching the numbers" list of 2006 covered the top 100 TV programs Australians watched over the summer – from week 49 of 2005 to week 4 of 2006. The top two programs were sporting contests – the Australian Tennis Open men's final, and the 20/20 cricket match between Australia and South Africa (The top 100 TV programs 2006). Eight of the top 10 programs involved sporting coverage. The only non-sport programs to rate in the top 10 in popularity over the summer were the ABC's *Da Kath and Kym code* and the annual *Carols by Candlelight* on Nine (The top 100 programs 2006).

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, so there's a maximum of 220 mentions and obviously only the most important – or most widely-covered stories nationally – rate a mention each week. This disadvantages major local stories that don't have a national impact. It would appear to favour popular sports, but equally, it could be expected to favour major political issues, and various personalities in the news. For a story to have an impact on the overall totals, it would have to be in the news for a number of weeks – like the July 7 London terrorist attacks and their aftermath, Hurricanes Katrina and Hilda, drug smuggler Schapelle Corby, Iraq hostage Douglas Wood, the hanging of Van Nguyen, speculation about the sale of Telstra, and the Michelle Leslie saga.

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

**Table 1:** News Value lists totalled by category.

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

## The results

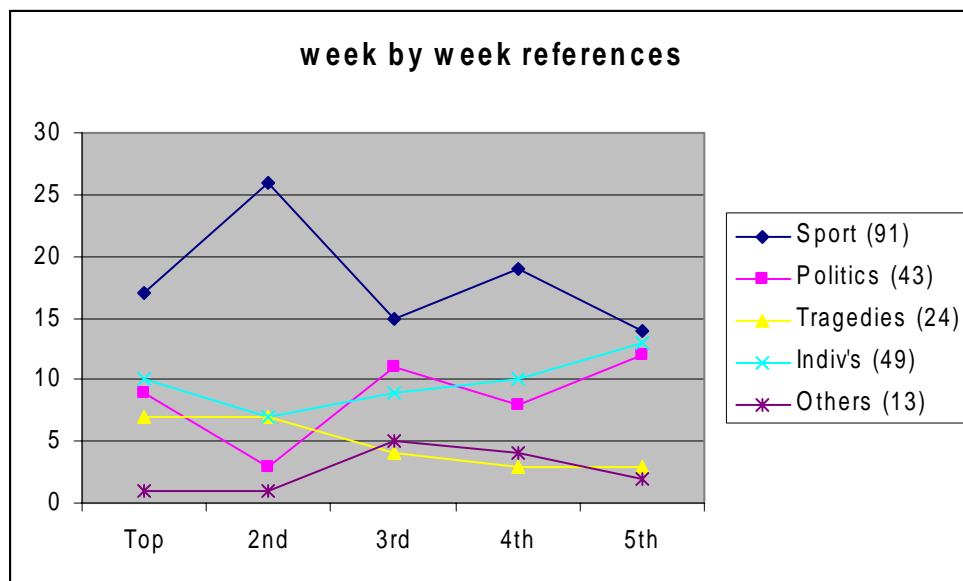
Collating the various “top 5” lists for the 44 weeks surveyed (see figure 1 above) shows that sports stories dominated the Australian news agenda, with nearly twice as many references as its nearest competitor category (91 sporting references to 49 for the “individuals” category). The “individuals” in the news last year included the aforementioned Schapelle Corby, Douglas Wood, Van Nguyen, and Michelle Leslie who all were in the news for more than four weeks of the surveyed period – Corby topping the list, as mentioned above with mentions over 10 scattered weeks. 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 two million collated involved sport.

**Table 2:** Where the various categories rated week by week.

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

**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 – ie: where were the stories between one and five. Table 2 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 with the highest number every time. For 17 weeks (38.6%) sports stories were the most-mentioned in the nation’s media. For 26 weeks (59%) a sports story was second on the list – and on six of those 26 occasions, another sports story was also the most-mentioned story of the week. A total of 15 times (34%) a sports story was third, 19 times (43.2%) it was fourth, and a further 14 times (31.8%) 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.

*Table 3: The top 25 stories on a weekly basis.*

1	Bali bombings	39,350
2	London bombings	31,048
3	AFL Grand Final	30,607
4	Nguyen hanging	29,344
5	Hurricane Katrina	28,349
6	Hurricane Katrina	26,831
7	Terror arrests	25,398
8	Melbourne Cup	24,673
9	Schapelle Corby	20,650
10	Pope dies	20,478
11	Schapelle Corby	20,432
12	Socceroos	19,786
13	Carr resigns	17,421
14	Indo quake	16,412
15	Brogden	16,283
16	Federal Budget	16,452
17	Ashes cricket	16,350
18	Horse racing	15,978
19	Douglas Wood	15,827
20	AFL	15,733
21	AFL	15,620
22	AFL	15,304
23	Ashes cricket	15,280
24	AFL	15,080
25	AFL	14,994

The top 25 stories for a single week include 11 sports stories, with the AFL Grand Final with 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 in January, 2004), the Bali bombings and the London terror attacks rated more mentions than coverage of the fairytale Sydney Swans victory on the “last Saturday in September” at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The other sporting event known for a particular day in Melbourne – the first Tuesday in November – and another fairytale ending with “the Diva” making it three Melbourne Cups in a row 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 was 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 tellingly, with the exception of a second Ashes mention, AFL coverage filled the five remaining positions between 20<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> on the weekly list.

**Table 4:** Sports by weeks in list and total number of stories.

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

**Figure 2:** Pie-chart distribution of the various categories

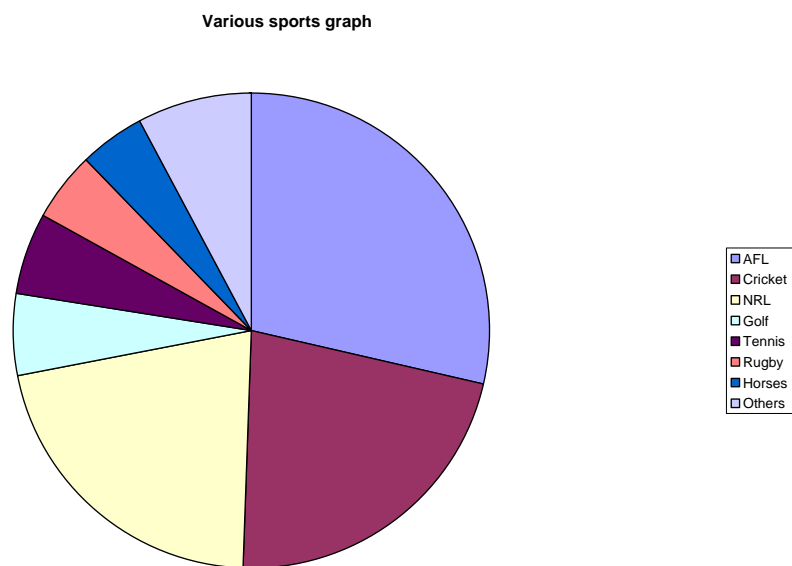
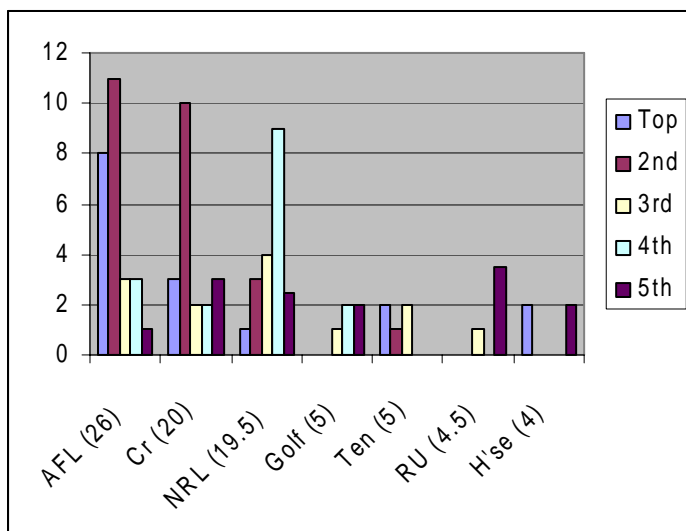


Table 4 and Figure 2 (above) show the dominance of AFL in sports coverage in the nation’s media. It appeared in the “top 5” list for 26 of the 44 weeks, with a total number of mentions in excess of 322,000 – more than a third of sport’s 900,000-plus total. Cricket comes in second with mentions in 20 weeks (almost half) of the survey period, but with a total number of stories not much more than half that of the AFL. A strong argument can be made that cricket would rate higher if the lists had covered January and part of February, and the remainder of December of 2004 – that is, the eight weeks missing from the lists are the high season for cricket (and tennis). This is counter-balanced in the opinion of the author 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, understandable since it is limited to the eastern mainland states. By way of explanation, the “half mention” shared with rugby was the list’s combining of the 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.

**Figure 3:** *Distribution of sports mentions first to fifth.*



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

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

The dominance of AFL is also demonstrated in the distribution of the mentions in the “top 5” *News Value* lists. Nearly 80 percent of their mentions were either top or second on the list – 19 of the 26. On the other hand about the same percentage of the rugby league mentions were in the lower 60 percent of the lists – That is, either third, fourth or fifth. Only on one occasion – coverage of the NRL Grand Final (and another fairytale result with the Wests Tigers taking out their first premiership as a combined club) 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 it the top story of the week. While the NRL might make the lists almost as many times as cricket, the sport is nowhere near as popular (as measured by the total number of mentions) as AFL (Table 6 and figure 4 below).

**Table 6: Sports categories by total number of mentions.**

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

**Figure 4:** Sports compared by total number of mentions.

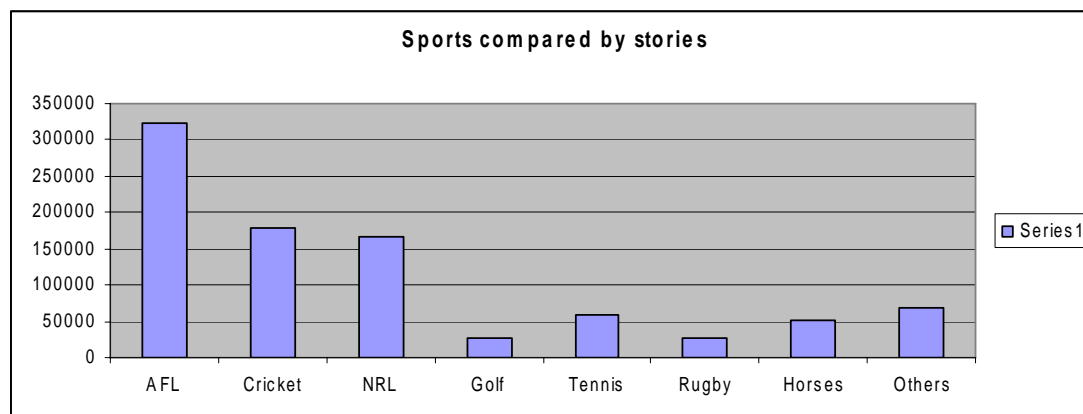


Table 6 demonstrates that AFL totalled upwards of 150,000 more mentions than its nearest competitor, cricket, and almost twice as many stories as the third most popular sport – rugby league. The disparity is shown even more graphically in Figure 3. There was only one week in the surveyed period ((February 28 – March 6) when a sporting story did not make the ‘top five’.

Women received scant mention, aside from the “Diva”. Women players were mentioned as part of the coverage of the three overseas tennis majors – the US and French Opens, and Wimbledon. The only women to rate is a ‘top five’ list during the period, tragically, was cyclist Amy Gillett, killed in a road accident while training in Europe.

### **And now the latest news...**

By way of a late-2006 update, preliminary examination of the *News Value* lists for weeks five to 45 (January 30 – November 12) show some interesting trends. Two major sporting carnivals dominated media coverage in Australia in the first half of the year. They were the Commonwealth Games in March, and the soccer World Cup (with Australia competing) in Germany in June and early July. In the four weeks between February 27 and March 26, mentions of the Commonwealth Games topped all four weeks’ *News Value* lists. In the week covering the Games’ opening ceremony

(March 13 – 19), the games received a total of 49,048 mentions in the nation's media, with cricket coming a distant second with 8,109 mentions. Next best was the burial of the former Yugoslavian indicted war criminal Slobodan Milosevic with 3,858 mentions (*News Value*, March 23). It was the highest number of mentions for any story in a given week for the year. A week later, and the figures included the closing ceremony, and the games again topped the *News Value* list with 46,294 mentions, the second-highest figure for the year, but relief efforts were swinging into action in far north Queensland in the wake of Cyclone Larry and coverage of the natural disaster was the second most important story of the week with 19,695 mentions (*News Value*, March 30). In total, over the four weeks, the Commonwealth Games registered 126,552 mentions in the nation's media, only slightly less than the total over six weeks registered by the Lebanon conflict (129,907) and far more than the Beaconsfield mine rescue (91,600 over six weeks) and the total for the story which appeared the most times in the lists – the Australian Wheat Board scandal – which appeared in 10 weekly lists for a total of 87,593 media mentions.

The Soccer World Cup captivated our media for six weeks – from early June until mid-July. For the first five weeks it was the most-mentioned story in the nation's media, and it dropped to second in the final week, presumably because Australia was knocked out in the round of 16. Over the period, a total of a staggering 149,863 mentions were made of the World Cup in Australia's mass media. The peak was in the week of June 18 – 24, when the Socceroos (and the world Cup) rated 39,063 mentions (*News Value*, June 29). The Socceroos game against Croatia was the second most popular program that week, and the game against Brazil scraped into the top 10 at ninth (The top 50 TV programs, June 29). The Croatian game drew more than two million viewers in the mainland capitals. The game against Italy that saw Australia's exit from the tournament was the top-rating program for the week, drawing almost 2.3 million viewers (The top 50 TV programs, July 6).

Although the *News Value* season has not yet ended, some interesting trends have emerged. For the 41 weeks so far examined, of a possible 205 possible mentions, sports stories registered a total of 66 – almost a third (32%). The most mentioned sport was soccer (10 mentions), followed closely by cricket (9), then tennis (7), and the winter Olympics and the Commonwealth Games both registering five weekly



mentions. The Rugby League State of Origin rated four times, as did the spring racing carnival. The surprise, given their dominant showing in 2005, was the AFL, which figured in the *News Value* lists on only three occasions during the entire season 2006, the same number of times as rugby union, rugby league (without the State of Origin), the Tour de France, and the untimely death of Peter Brock.

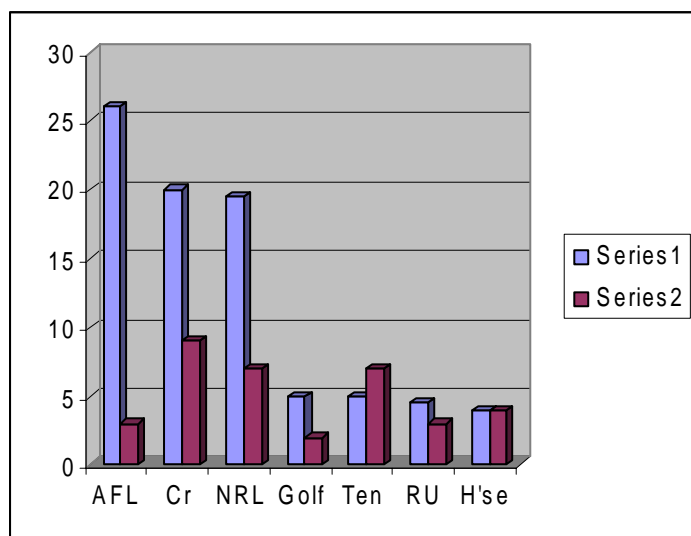
There were five weeks this year when a sports story didn't make the top five, including three of the six weeks that the Beaconsfield mine rescue dominated the headlines. One sports story rated in the figures in 13 weeks, two were mentioned 16 times and in seven lists there were three sports stories. Sports stories topped the *News Value* lists thus far in 2006 for 16 weeks, were the second story for 16 weeks, were third in 13 weeks, fourth in eight weekly lists and fifth on 13 different occasions. While women were mentioned in swimming, tennis and Commonwealth Games coverage, the only woman to rate a 'stand alone' mention was Alisa Camplin for her bronze medal in the aerials at the Winter Olympics.

The most interesting comparison is in which sports rated mentions in the most weeks last year, compared to 2006 to date. Taking the top seven sports last year (AFL, cricket, NRL, golf, tennis, rugby and horse racing) and charting them against the number of times they were mentioned in the *News Value* lists so far this year, you get Table 7 and Figure 5.

**Table 7:** *Most mentioned sports 2005 v. 2006*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2006</b>
AFL	26	3
Cricket	20	9
NRL	19.5	7
Golf	5	2
Tennis	5	7
Rugby	4.5	3
Horse racing	4	4

*Figure 5: Top seven sports in 2005 v. 2006.*



Three sports that didn't rate a mention in 2005, because they weren't contested that year (the winter Olympics, the Commonwealth Games and the soccer World Cup) figured in the top five of the most-mentioned sports in 2006. The most mentions (10) went to soccer, almost exclusively because of Australia's appearance in the World Cup in Germany. The most-mentioned sport of 2005 – the AFL – was swamped by other sports this year. Its only three mentions were two for the finals series, and one for a drugs scandal. The second most-mentioned sport in 2005 was cricket, and although the Ashes were yet to start at the time of the author's cut-off point for 2006 (the end of the Melbourne Cup carnival), it was already maintaining its second position, but with only half as many mentions. The NRL slumped in 2006, too. Half of the seven mentions were for State of Origin clashes, two for the finals series, and one for Andrew Johns' dummy-spit at an umpire in one match. Golf would probably improve with the home season to start in mid-November, and the final three (tennis, rugby and horse racing) were holding their own. The author hasn't had time to do more than a brief comparison. That will have to wait until after the Christmas holiday break, and the end of the Ashes series and the one-dayers.

## Conclusion

But what all the figures demonstrate is the popularity of sport among the nation's media consumers, and its dominance in media coverage. So why isn't it covered more widely in tertiary journalism courses? Surely with an ageing population, increased leisure time, the rising popularity of pay-TV with its smorgasbord of sports offerings, and the need for up-to-the-minute coverage on a myriad of Internet web sites, the job opportunities are increasing. It has been a popular offering where the author has taught, and deserves more than a passing mention.

## References

- Boyle, R. (2006). *Sports journalism: Context and issues*. London: Sage.
- Dale, D. (2006, May 10). Australia's all time favourite TV shows. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved May 18 at:  
[http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/the\\_tribal\\_mind/002630.html](http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/the_tribal_mind/002630.html).
- McLean, S. ( 2004, November 26-27) Sport Shines for Nine. *The Courier Mail*, p. 13.
- News Value*. (2005, February 17). *The Australian*, p. 22.
- News Value*. (2006, March 23). *The Australian*, p.40.
- News Value*. (2006, March 30). *The Australian*, p.20.
- News Value*, (2006, , June 29). *The Australian*, p.16.
- Sampson, S. (2006, January 11). Personal conversation.
- Sinclair, L. (2006a, January 12). When it comes to popularity, Aussie rules. *The Australian*, p.3.
- Sinclair, L. ( 2006b, January 14-15). No second 20/20 match. *The Weekend Australian*, p.4.
- The ratings process, [http://www.oztam.com.au/pdf/tv\\_ratings/ratingsprocess.pdf](http://www.oztam.com.au/pdf/tv_ratings/ratingsprocess.pdf)  
Retrieved January 18, 2006.
- The top 50 TV programs. (2005, September 19). *The Australian*, p.18.
- The top 10 regional programs. (2005, September 19). *The Australian*, p.18.
- The top 50 TV programs. (2005, October 13). *The Australian*, p.18.

The top 10 regional programs. (2005, October 13).*The Australian*, p.18.

The top 50 TV programs. (2005, November 10).*The Australian*, p.18.

The top 10 regional Programs. (2005, November 10).*The Australian*, p18.

The top 50 TV programs. (2005, November 10).*The Australian*, p.16.

The top 50 TV programs. (2005, April 28). *The Australian*, p.20.

The top 100 TV programs. (2006, February 2). *The Australian*, p.16.

The top 50 TV programs. (2006, March 23). *The Australian*, p.40.

The top 50 TV programs. (2006, March 30). *The Australian*, p.20.

The top 50 TV programs. (2006, June 29). *The Australian*, p.16.

The top 50 TV programs. (2006, July 6). *The Australian*, p.18.

---

Roger Patching is an Associate Professor of Journalism at Bond University on Queensland's Gold Coast. He is a life member of the Journalism Education Association, having served in various executive positions (including twice as president) for a total of 17 years. He spent 17 years as a journalist, working in Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane in newspapers, radio, television and for Australian Associated Press. He has spent the past 27 years as a journalism educator in Bathurst, Brisbane and on the Gold Coast. He is the co-author of *Journalism ethics: Issues and cases* with Martin Hirst and teaches broadcast journalism, ethics and sports reporting.

© Roger Patching