The Making of a Nation Through Sport:
Australia and the Olympic Games from Athens to Berlin, 1898–1916

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Australians had been competing against individuals and teams from other countries sporadically during the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The relationship of these sporting exchanges and an awareness of Australia and Australians can be gleaned from the following selections from an article in Town Talk of London, which was reproduced in the Sydney Morning Herald of August 3, 1878. The article was entitled ‘What her athletes are doing for Australia’.

There was something wonderfully sensational in the victory of the colonials at Lord’s. Their defeat at Nottingham led the English cricketing world to underrate the real power of the new arrivals, and the intelligence of the rapid and decisive manner in which they disposed of our best men came like a thunderbolt on all who believed in the supremacy of Englishmen in a pastime which may be regarded as almost national. The subsequent successes of the Australians have aided in creating a widely-spread impression that the victory of Trickett in the match for the sculling championship of the world was more meritorious than our aquatic authorities would have us believe.

... ‘But what’, it may be asked, ‘has all this to do with social affairs?’ Everything. It is doing more than all the exertions of immigration agents to influence the country in which such scullers and such cricketers as those which have achieved such successes here are to be found will have wonderful attractions in the eyes of the million. Hitherto, it has been the fashion to regard Australia as a kind of place from which everybody sought to escape when sufficiently rich, and the impression has become confirmed by the large number of wealthy squatters and others who have taken up their residence permanently in this country. “Why”, it is asked, “should the poor man be required to emigrate to a country in which his richer brother refuses to dwell?” What answer can be made to such a question? But when the multitude see a man like Trickett come over here, lick our best sculler, and after patiently waiting for another opponent, quietly return to Australia, they begin to think that a country which produces such a man must be worth living in, especially when it can tempt its best children back across the ocean. It is the same with the cricketers. They do not conceal their preference for the land from whence they have arrived, or their eagerness to return when their campaign here has terminated. The result is a great rise of the Australian colonies in popular estimation.

This was 1878—Australia had beaten England in cricket and Trickett was the world champion in sculling. Australia was a land still comprised of six colonies embarking on a plan of federation in 1896 when the first multi-nation and multi-sport athletic competition—the Olympic Games in Athens—was conducted. The extent of awareness of the significance of such events by Australian sporting organisations and individuals to the ‘making of a nation’ and to an Australian identity are factors worthy of consideration. The term ‘national identity’ is simplistically defined as the identification of a distinctive
character and assignment of this identification to a collective of people as a whole. Nationalism has been defined by Louis Snyder as:

A condition of mind, feeling or sentiment of a group of people living in a well defined geographical area, speaking a common language, attached to common traditions and common customs, venerating its own heroes and, in some cases, having a common religion ... Nationalism should be considered first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness.1

Bearing this in mind, what did the Olympic Games mean to colonial Australians prior to and following these Athens Olympics in 1896?

Between the Olympics of Athens in 1896 and those proposed for Berlin in 1916 there were many developments which influenced the role and significance of sport in western societies generally. However, unlike most other western societies, a unique factor about this changing influence of sport in Australia during this double decade was that it coincided with Australia's transition from a collection of self-governing colonies to a federation of states. The Commonwealth of Australia had historical, political, social and economic bonds to Great Britain which remained strong for many decades. It is contended in this paper, however, that Australia's affinity to sport was such that its involvement and attitudes towards the early Olympic Games of the twentieth century had a nation-making effect in that it led to expressions of independent nationalism which were in conflict to loyalty to Great Britain and devotion to Empire.

A significant starting point is a consideration of the Pan-Britannic idea.

The concept of the Olympic Games had a 'rival' in the early 1890's: the Pan Britannic Festival. A letter from Yorkshireman, J. Astley Cooper, proposing a 'festival to draw closer the ties between the nations of the Empire' was published in the London Times of October 30, 1891.2 Cooper's letter included the following:

The future of the various portions of the Empire rest chiefly in the hands of the young men of the Empire—of young Britain, young Australia, young South Africa, young Canada ... an imperial athletic contest would be very attractive to most Britishers, whether settled in the United Kingdom or resident beyond the seas.

Richard Coombes, editor of the Sydney based sporting paper, The Referee, was one of the first individuals to respond in print. Coombes wrote prophetically in 1892: 'The signs of the times are that athletics will have a more powerful effect upon the Empire in time to come than has been the case for centuries.'3

In 1894, during discussions about Australia's possible involvement in the proposed Olympic Games, a columnist in The Australasian expressed surprise that a revival of the Olympic Games was being considered by Baron Pierre de Coubertin because:

The Australasian associations are pledged to Mr. Cooper's scheme, and Victoria and New South Wales are now trying to frame a scheme of suitable athletic contests in connection with it.4

Other countries, including New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and the United States, publicly supported Cooper's scheme for a multi-sport gathering. Curiously, England was silent.

There was considerable confusion in the colonies of Australia as to when the athletic festival might take place, with both July 1894 and July 1895 mentioned as possibilities in the Australian press. Richard Coombes reported in The Referee in 1893 that:

Mr. Cooper's scheme has been discussed and favourably commented upon in the abstract by the press throughout the English-speaking world. The colonial athletes have taken the matter up
warmly, and are preparing for the fray, at least the runners are, but the English association
appears to take not the least notice of or interest in the concern.5

However, it should be noted that even in the early years of Cooper’s scheme the
audience he was addressing through the press could be critical. In the early 1890’s, the
colonies were beginning to exercise some degree of independence and the concept of
nationalism was taking hold.6 In a column entitled ‘Colonial Gossip’ by ‘Outis’ in The
British Australasian of November 5, 1891, it was stated that:

... the rising generation in Australia is intensely patriotic, but the sentiment is local, and not
imperial. In their dear eyes old England does not loom so largely as it does before those of Mr.
Astley Cooper.

The schemes of Cooper and Coubertin were both grandiose, but the Baron actively
travelled and recruited support for the Olympic Games, while Cooper tended to
respond with various individuals. Coubertin’s more democratic and international
festival was successfully established in 1896. Cooper’s Pan-Britannic idea faded into the
background.7

Coubertin convened an Athletic Congress at the Sorbonne, Paris in 1894 purportedly to
discuss the problems associated with breaches of ‘amateurism’ in sport but it became a
focus for the revival of the Olympic Games. Even at this stage it was clear that there was
still concern for what a report in The Australasian of August 25, 1894, termed Astley
Cooper’s ‘Pan-Britannic Olympiad’. As late as May, 1895, The Referee still seemed to
pledge its preference to Australia’s participation in an empire athletic competition:

... we notice that some of the newspapers are confusing the establishment of the Olympic Games
with the ‘Pan-Britannic’ movement, which is quite a different idea and which was started in
1892. The most striking features of the proposed Olympic Games, no doubt, are borrowed from
the ‘Anglo-Saxon Olympiad’ and the ‘Pan-Britannic’ scheme. In the article referred to [The
Times] the writer remarks: ‘It may be said that the popularity of the Olympic Games among the
states and cities of Ancient Hellas depended upon a common standard of bodily
training, upon a
similarly of language, and upon religious and racial sympathies. There is something in this, and
the projected ‘Pan-Britannic’ festival might be referred to as enjoying such conditions more fully
than a grand international tournament of athletes could hope to enjoy them.8

Coverage of the Congress was sparse in the Australian daily press and one may
postulate that Australians viewed the proposed Olympic Games rather negatively. Factors
such as the political turmoil in France during the period of the Congress and the
allegiance to the Pan-Britannic Games might have explained this. There were few reports
in the Australian press of the progress of the proposed Athens games throughout 1895.9
Apparently, invitations to participate in the games were not sent to countries until
December, 1895, and were printed in French.10 The invitations were later presented in
German as well and, even later, in English by a private printer.11

An explanation for the relatively little press coverage in Australia of the Olympic
Games in Athens could have been that there were also few reports in the British press, and
there was still much “cabled news” from Britain appearing in the Australian periodicals at
that time. Perhaps an indication of the lack of significance of the Athens Games can be
gleaned from a report in the Sydney Morning Herald of May 25, 1896:

The Olympic Games at Athens began on 6th April. A few Englishmen, an Australian, and some
Yankee amateurs opposed the Greek amateur productions, also some Frenchmen were on the
scene ... as an athletic festival the whole affair is a Babel, it has brought a lot of different
nationalities together. The French, who got up the whole jumble, do not appear to have done very much.

Australians would have known little and cared less about the revived Olympic Games had they not had a ‘representative’ competing. He also happened to win two events. Edwin H. Flack was born in London but lived in Australia from infancy. Soon after leaving Melbourne Church of England Grammar School, where he studied Greek history, Flack became the one mile champion of Australasia in 1892 and 1893 and the two mile champion of N.S.W. and Victoria in 1894 and 1895, respectively.

Flack sailed to England in March, 1895, where, at the behest of his father, J. B. Flack, an influential accountant, he obtained an appointment with Price, Waterhouse and Company. Edwin Flack wrote these notes:

Before I left Australia I knew that the Olympic Games were coming off in Athens in 1896 and I decided then that if I could manage it I would take part in them, or at any rate, go and see them.

Well, I went across as a member of the London Athletic Club, but I ran in my old Melbourne colours.

Flack’s presence at the Athens Olympics was a surprise to his family and friends in Australia. He had taken a month’s holiday and travelled by train and boat to Greece and, unknowingly, became influential in the promotion of nationalism and national identity in Australia through his achievements.

As indicated previously, prior to their commencement in April, 1896, the Olympic Games were ‘no more than a line in the newspaper’. Australians were unaware that a fellow countryman was competing until cabled reports of Flack’s victories filtered through. Following Flack’s victories in the 800 and 1500 metres, his losses in the tennis singles and doubles, and his courageous efforts in the race from Marathon to Athens, the Australian daily and weekly newspapers noticeably gave more coverage to items pertinent to or associated with the Olympic Games. Richard Coombes reported in his column in The Referee that ‘Teddy Flack was made an inordinate fuss of, and was quite the Lion of Athens’, and in many cases, The Referee included lengthy extracts from Flack’s letters to his father.

Flack was the typical modest hero but it is noteworthy that over the next few years, especially after his return from London, he was frequently interviewed and featured in many publications throughout Australia. It is clear that Edwin Flack, ‘The Lion of Athens’, fostered nationalism: it was seen that Australian athletes could be successful in sporting competitions with countries other than Great Britain and those of her empire.

Despite this, the Sydney Morning Herald of May 25, 1895, had commented:

Olympic Games are played out, our modern amateur need not go to Athens to have his fill of running. Perhaps the next Olympian festival, which takes place in Paris in 1900, may be more successful.

Although Coubertin and the International Olympic Committee were enthusiastic about the second Olympic Games, the focus of attention in Paris in 1900 was the World Fair. The organisers of the World Fair were not cooperative and there was considerable confusion about the Games in Australia at the time. Stan Rowley, Australia’s only track representative, wrote in a letter home that the games ‘were treated by most of the competitors as a huge joke’.

The Olympic idea was certainly not conveyed to Australians. Throughout these games virtually the only coverage in the press was the reports of events in which Rowley,
swimmer, Freddy Lane and shooter, Donald McIntosh, competed. There were efforts to promote a national identity through the efforts to raise money for Stan Rowley which, on the eve of federation, may have been important.\textsuperscript{20} Coubertin is reported to have concluded that the ‘interesting results’ of the 1900 Games ‘had nothing Olympic about them ... we have made a hash of our work.’\textsuperscript{21} However, despite his desire for the Olympic Games not to again be associated with a ‘world fair’, the International Olympic Committee were unable to sever their relations with exhibitions in both 1904 and 1908.\textsuperscript{22}

Australia’s attitude towards, and involvement in the third Olympic Games, held in conjunction with the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904, was negligible. Although federation occurred in 1901, there seemed to be no feeling of a need to send an ‘Australian’ team to these games, which had not been well publicised and had created uncertainty by the interminable list of ‘Olympic’ contests.\textsuperscript{23} The N.S.W. Amateur Athletic Association decided that it was not in a position to subscribe anything toward sending athletes.\textsuperscript{24}

Two representatives from Victoria, C. H. Gardiner and L. MacPherson, both old boys of Melbourne Grammar School and members of the Melburnian Hares and Hounds, went to St. Louis but only Gardiner competed. Any Australians interested in these Games would have been disillusioned after reading excerpts from Gardiner’s letters which were published in \textit{The Australasian}:

There have not been more than 2,000 spectators, yet papers make out big crowds. They lie horribly about men who are to compete, etc. and their accounts of the marathon made me quite ill. The whole affair is described as a huge ‘graft’, with a good deal of political business worked in, and is certainly on the whole, a gigantic fake.\textsuperscript{25}

For the 1908 Olympic Games, held in conjunction with the Franco-British Exhibition in London, the IOC had agreed that the organisation and judging of the events should be the sole responsibility of the English. This important aspect will be considered in detail later.

It would appear that there was also a stirring of the national interest in Australians about these 1908 Games at this stage. \textit{The Australasian} in July, 1908, reported that many Australians were in London for the Franco-British Exhibition and that they also went to the Games.\textsuperscript{26} For the first time in the modern Olympics there were strict regulations regarding the nationality of competitors.\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps it was this factor that motivated Mr. Maloney to raise the matter of government involvement with the Prime Minister in the House of Representatives on March 20, 1908:

Mr. Maloney ... Subscriptions are being raised to enable representative Australians to compete in the marathon race in connexion with the revival of the Olympian Games. Since the representation of Australia at the carnival would do as much to advertise the Commonwealth as the visits of Australian cricket teams to the Old Country, does the Prime Minister think it would be possible for the Commonwealth government to subscribe, say, half the amount raised by the public for this purpose.

Mr. Deakin ... Commencing with an avowal of innocence as to what a ‘marathon’ race may be, but of full confidence in the capacity of Australians to hold their own in that or any other form of competition, I doubt whether it comes within the power of the Commonwealth, strictly interpreting the constitution, to interfere with the rights of the states in that matter. We shall consider that question.\textsuperscript{28}
Australasia was represented at the Olympic Games by five New Zealand and eighteen Australian athletes, which stretched the fund-raising efforts of the public: 'Victoria sent over a good bunch of men with scarcely enough money for bread and cheese.' There were several reports in the main daily periodicals of the placings of Australian competitors. The Australasian published a lengthy account of the marathon race as written by E. Robinson, a clubmate of one of the participants, V. Aitken. The article vividly depicted the scene and highlighted some aspects of patriotism:

... Aitken got a great reception as he passed along through the crowds. The cheers and clappings have been ringing in my ears ever since. As he came along with 'Australasia' on his vest, ladies standing in their carriages called out, 'Here's Australia!' and there were deafening cheers and cries of 'Buck up, Aitken', 'Buck up, Atkins', 'Stick to it', 'Orstrayler', 'Come on, colonies', 'Good old Melbourne', 'Good old Sydney', 'Good lad, Kangaroo', 'Coo-ee' and 'Bravo Australia'. An old grey-haired man waved his hat and yelled, 'Come on, the colonies and Great Britain, we'll down the Yankees yet.' Meantime Aitken was going strongly and well.

Aitken later collapsed and withdrew from the race. The Australian rugby team, known through the press as the 'Kangaroos', won a gold medal, but there was only one other team in the competition. Reginald 'Snowy' Baker received a silver medal in boxing, and competed in swimming and diving events. Frank Beaurepaire won medals in swimming.

After 1908, and certainly by the 1912 Stockholm Olympic Games, there was considerable evidence that the Olympic movement was taking root in Australia. After the Australian track and field championships were held in New Zealand in the season prior to the Olympic Games, there was much discussion about the selection of a 'representative' Australasian team and an indication that there would be a concerted appeal for funds from the Australian public and government. Approaches were made to Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, for a pound for pound subsidy to which he was reported to have responded that he 'did not see any insuperable difficulties ... but would have to bring the matter before his colleagues before a definite reply could be given.'

Australia sent twenty-one men and two women to Stockholm and followed their efforts with much enthusiasm and optimism:

The present team is a very formidable one and should have no difficulty in winning a majority of the events. (The Age, Melbourne, April 16, 1912)

The N.S.W. crew is famous the world over. (Sydney Morning Herald, February 23, 1912)

We only have to go into the water to win (Sydney Morning Herald, April 10, 1912)

There were several civic farewells for our national representatives. Perhaps this enthusiasm was in response to the suggestion of Theodore Cook, an International Olympic Committee member in Britain, whose statement, that an increase in 'international athleticism ... is the most significant factor in the intercourse of modern nations', appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald earlier in 1912. Some performances by Australian athletes were outstanding: Fanny Durack and Wilhelmina Wiley were first and second, respectively, in the 100m swimming; the men's 4 x 200 metres relay team won a gold medal; Cecil Healy won a silver medal in the 100m freestyle and the rowing eight were beaten by Leander of Great Britain, which went on to win the gold medal.

Although it was already established that the 1916 Games would be in Berlin, the enthusiasm was so great that it was even mooted that Perth should host the 1916 Olympic Games to coincide with the proposed opening of the Transcontinental Railway.
the significance of the Olympic Games to national pride was manifest in this ‘Perth’ notion:

... the value to the country of such a gathering can be understood and publicity gained by an influx of athletes and visitors from all parts of the world would be the finest advertisement that Australia could receive.36

Much of the preceding material is information which sets the scene for an examination and discussion of the nation-making effect of the Olympic Games from 1896-1916. In contrast to the Sydney Morning Herald’s report of the 1896 Olympics (that ‘as an athletic festival the whole affair is a farce’), an editorial in the Daily Mirror of London of July, 1912, stated that ‘however much the cult of athletics may be disparaged, victory in the Olympic Games is now regarded throughout the world as a test of national virility and energy’. A major reason for the increase in the significance of the Olympic Games to Australians was that two powerful antagonists, Britain and America, had developed a sporting rivalry; a rivalry which affected the relationship between Britain and her former colonies. It is necessary to return to the 1908 London Olympics to place this rivalry into context and to ascertain the effect it had on the development of Australian nationalism.

The 1908 Olympic Games were supposed to be held in Rome but some economic difficulties associated with the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius resulted in Lord Desborough, the British representative on the International Olympic Committee, being asked during the ‘Anniversary’ Games in Athens in 1906 whether it was possible for the Fourth Olympic Games to be held in London.37 The preparation prior to the London Olympics of 1908 was commendable but there was one aspect of the organisation which, as time would tell, was to be significant. The management of the Games was exclusively controlled by the individual British sporting associations. This factor was one of many which strained British-American sporting relationships38 with accusations and bitterness culminating with Theodore Cook of the British Olympic Council publishing a fifty-page statement entitled, ‘A reply to certain criticisms made by some American officials’.39 Cook stated:

The American papers have been flooded with reports from those who accompanied the American team ... as to the unfairness, discourtesy, and dishonesty with which the Americans had in every respect been treated.

Examples of some of the problems between British and American officials included the incident when American, J. C. Carpenter, was accused of spearing British runner, Lieutenant Wyndham Halswelle in the 400 metres event. A re-run of the event was arranged but none of the three American runners raced, so Halswelle won in a walk-over. In the marathon, Italian, Dorando Pietri, entered the stadium first but was so exhausted he collapsed to the track on several occasions and was helped, repeatedly, to his feet by British officials. Dorando crossed the line first and the next to do so was American, Johnny Hayes. A protest by the Americans against Dorando was upheld and Hayes was awarded first place. Later, Queen Victoria presented a special medal to the Italian for his courage and bravery.

A study of the reports of events during and after the Games in the press of the respective countries highlights the extent of the discord between Britain and America. A most vitriolic and passionate example is the publication by Thomas Rugby Burlford, American Hatred and British Folly, which included many examples of press statements and cartoons pertaining to the friction generated by the Olympics.40

A major point of argument was the method of point scoring used by the British which provided a clear ‘victory’ for Britain in 1908. This use of a ‘point system’ of five for first
place, three for second place and one for third place is significant when one compares the outcome of the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. In contrast to their outright success in both the medal count and point-scoring system in 1908, Britain did poorly at Stockholm in 1912, being outpointed by both Sweden and the United States.

However, when the medals won in 1912 by Great Britain and her ‘colonies’ were combined, the disparity was not so great. On September 21, 1912, the Sporting Chronicle of Manchester published a table depicting the ‘Empire’ tally:

**Table 1**

*The Empire Tally*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nations</th>
<th>Entries</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Order</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. United Kingdom</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>526</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Australasia*</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>177.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Canada</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>66.5</td>
<td>177.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. South Africa</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. France</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Austria</td>
<td>875</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bohemia</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Hungary</td>
<td>458</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sweden</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. U.S.A.</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Russia</td>
<td>593</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Finland</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Australia and New Zealand)*

The rivalry for medal supremacy at both the 1908 and 1912 Olympic Games had strained British-American sporting relationships. For example, soon after the 1912 Games began, a leading article in the *New York Times* suggested that ‘something really is the matter with Englishmen since they are no longer masters of the playground ... the saying that Waterloo was won on the playing fields, once a boast, is now a bitter prophecy.’

Some British sporting officials and commentators were so disappointed about their lack of sporting success that proposals for Great Britain’s withdrawal from the Olympic Games were promulgated and published. ‘Gareth’ of the London *Referee* wrote ‘our withdrawal is desirable, merely in the interests of fair play.’ It was in this athletic and political climate that the idea of a ‘British Empire Team’ was renewed for the 1916 Olympic Games in Berlin.

Following the inter-Empire sports championship in 1911 held as part of the Festival of Empire in London to commemorate the coronation of George V, Richard Coombes proposed his idea of a British Empire Team. During the celebratory dinner which concluded that sports carnival, Lord Desborough announced that arrangements were being made for the Australasian (Australian and New Zealand), Canadian, South African and
British teams to train together and go to Stockholm for the 1912 Olympics as an Empire team.44

Coombes was a very powerful figure; he was Australasian representative on the International Olympic Committee, President of the Australian Athletic Union, and editor of The Referee. Writing under his pseudonym ('Prodigal') in The Referee of September 27, 1911, Coombes provided a lengthy discourse on how such a 'team' might work.45

... the scheme, then, is that the Colonies—Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa—will select their teams and the whole contingent be brought together in London, say, a fortnight before they are due to leave for Stockholm. The British team will also be concentrated in London as far as is possible, and then the whole army will train together under the care of responsible coaches and trainers, and be got into the best possible condition for the descent on Sweden ... This is surely the very ideal of Empire—the forces of the Mother Country and her children, the Colonies, congregating on the shores of Britain to concentrate the forces of the Empire, and then voyaging to the battle-ground of Stockholm to challenge in friendly warfare the best of the world's athletes.

Although the short notice prevented an 'official' Empire team being organised and entered in time for the Stockholm Olympics the seeds had been sown for this idea to germinate after Britain's dismal performance at these Games, particularly against her arch-rival, the United States of America.46

It was following a letter from Arthur Conan Doyle, which was published in The Times of London in July 18, 1912, that the idea of a British Empire team for the Berlin Olympics of 1916 gained momentum.47

The editor of the New York Times reacted to Conan Doyle's suggestions by stating, on July 21, 1913,

... there is occasion for irony in the fact that the persons, who at first made light of the British failures at Stockholm on the grounds that it was more important to play the game than to win, are now eager to take up a scheme which they hope will dispossess the United States from its proud pre-eminence and head the list of scores with a pan-British total of victories.

The role and attitude of Australia as one of the Empire countries embroiled in the socio-political struggles between the Britain and the United States is worthy of specific consideration, especially in relation to the emerging nationalism and national identity.

The Commonwealth of Australia was established in 1901, a year in which more than 98 per cent of the Australian population was of English, Scottish, Welsh or Irish descent and 18 per cent had actually been born in Great Britain.48 The historical, political, economic, and social bonds to Great Britain remained strong. Australia's trade was mostly with Great Britain and almost three-quarters of the capital invested in Australian joint stock companies and public bonds was British: even the coins in usage bore the likenesses of Britannia and Queen Victoria on them, and the monarch was Australia's head of state.49 There was no national anthem and the flag, the result of a public competition with thirty-thousand entries, incorporated the Union Jack together with the Southern Cross. The flag was regarded by The Bulletin of September 28, 1901, as 'that bastard flag ... a true symbol of the bastard state of Australian opinion, still in large part biassed [sic] by British traditions, British customs, still lacking many years to the sufficiency of manhood which will determine a path of its own.'

Australia relied on Great Britain for its defence in these early years of the Commonwealth. Prior to Federation the Australian colonial governments had sent volunteers to the Boer War and the Commonwealth Government continued to encourage
this to the extent that more than 16,000 Australian volunteers had served with the British army in South Africa between 1899 and 1902. The Sydney Morning Herald stated that the ‘Lion’s cubs had rallied to the dam’. The front page of The Referee of December 6, 1899, featured a cartoon of a lion and kangaroo with the caption:

They have often met before and fought to gain supremacy in sport.
They fight again now side by side For freedom in the Empire wide.

Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, explained to Federal Parliament in 1907 ‘the bond of Empire is not one only of mere patriotism but also one of self-interest’.

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century Australia’s allegiance to the concept of Empire was becoming increasingly significant. In 1905, May 24th, the late Queen Victoria’s birthday, was proclaimed as the inaugural ‘Empire Day’ which was to become an annual public holiday. Specific school lessons were to be taught prior to that day to imbue children with the Imperial sentiment. Even The Bulletin, Australia’s most nationalistic periodical, expressed both national and imperial pride in its editorial policy in the latter years of the decade, atoning for 1905 when it labelled it ‘Vampire Day’ and considered it to be the glorification of the ‘blood-sucking British vampire’. As Sir John Foster Fraser wrote in 1910 in his book, Australia: the making of a nation: ‘there is loyalty in Australia, but it is loyalty to the Empire, not Great Britain’. This distinction may have seemed subtle at the beginning of Federation but, by the time of the Festival of Empire in 1911, there were signs that this sentiment was becoming stronger, especially in that significant socio-cultural aspect: sport.

As has already been stated, sport, and particularly success in sport, had already become important to Australians by the first decade of the twentieth century. Richard Coombes is regarded as having initiated the idea of forming an Empire team and, as editor of The Referee, he was able to ensure that the idea was given prominence. The Australian daily press also presented opinions about the scheme, some of which were divergent. In early August, the Sydney Morning Herald expressed that there was ‘a sentimental argument in favour of the linking up of the athletes of the Empire’ but the practicability of the scheme was questioned. The perspective that Australia would not like to lose its separate identity in the Olympic Games was frequently stated, but this was sometimes qualified by the comment that, for example, ‘they would sacrifice this if there was a real prospect of benefitting the Empire’.

The arguments against the scheme were many and varied: it was unsportsmanlike; it placed difficulties on an athlete to ‘peak’ for Empire selection trials and maintain that form for the Olympic events; there was the expense of sending athletes to London who may then not compete in Berlin; and the difficulty of representation on an Empire Council was a serious concern.

A most significant reason for Australians not supporting the scheme was related to the matter of loss of identity. This view was most clearly, and pragmatically, expressed in the Sydney Morning Herald of October 30, 1912:

At present any competitor sent from Australia competes in the Games as an Australasian, and any victory credited to him is recognised by the hoisting of an Australian flag. Apart from all questions of loyalty to the Empire, there is a narrower local patriotism for Australia, which is certainly gratified by the present system, which is also a tremendous advertisement to this
continent. And in this advertisement lies the Australian Council’s main hope in financing an Olympic team.

Although Richard Coombes and The Referee continued to press the relative merits of the ‘Empire scheme’ throughout 1912 and 1913, the enthusiasm of sports officials and commentators in other parts of Australia and the Empire dwindled. The matter was laid to rest when the Secretary of the British Olympic Association wrote that the question of an Empire team ‘has been settled by the International Olympic Committee that Great Britain and the overseas dominions shall compete separately.’

It seems that despite the many economic, political and historical ties with Great Britain which would remain for many more decades, an Australian cultural identity was emerging, especially that related to sport. The renowned poet, Henry Lawson, had stated that Australia was a ‘land where sport is sacred’, and in so doing had both echoed and heralded the sentiments of many others.

Australians had become aware of the importance of success in international sport and its relationship to fostering a national identity in the double decade 1896-1916. Although the idea of a British Empire team had been abandoned prior to the cancellation of the 1916 Berlin Olympics because of the outbreak of war, the proposition that, when it came to sporting competition between Great Britain or any other country at the Olympic Games, the opportunity for a patriotic and victorious Australian to emerge became paramount. Australians were ‘making a nation’ and seeking an ‘identity’ and their sporting prowess at the Olympic Games was becoming an avenue for it.
NOTES

2 Cooper also wrote articles about his proposal in the periodical, *The Nineteenth Century*, September, 1892, 380-388 and July, 1893, 81-93.
3 *The Referee*, Sydney, August 17, 1892, 1.
5 *The Referee*, Sydney, August 17, 1894, 1.
7 For further information about Cooper's ideas, refer to Ian Jobling, ‘Australia and the Commonwealth Games: the formative years’ *Quest*. Department of Education, Queensland (No.33, May, 1982) and Katharine Moore, op.cit.
8 *The Referee*, Sydney, May 8, 1895.
9 *The Australasian*, Melbourne, March 16 and March 30, 1895.
14 *The Age*, Melbourne, April 8, 1896; *The Australasian*, Melbourne, April 11, 1896; *The Referee*, April 15, 1896.
15 *The Referee*, May 20, 1896. Flack was beaten in tennis singles by Akratopoulos of Athens and he and partner, George Robertson of Oxford, were beaten by two Greeks, Kasdoglis and Kerrokokinnos.
17 *The Referee*, June 17, 1896. Flack mentions this expression in a letter to his father (April 18, 1896).
18 The author is grateful to Archivist, Megan Stevens, and the management of the Price Waterhouse Co., Melbourne, for their assistance and co-operation in making archival material pertaining to Edwin Flack available to him.
19 Keith Donald and Donald Selth, *Olympic Saga* (Sydney, 1957), 12.
20 Throughout March and April, 1900, *The Australasian* published a series of reports about appeals to raise finance to send Rowley overseas (March 10 and 24, April 14).
24 *Sydney Morning Herald*, June 27, 1904.
28 Hansard, House of Representatives, March 20, 1908, 1330.
30 The Bulletin, August 6, 1908. In the previous edition (July 30) it was reported that athletes had received some private help from friends and other enthusiastic amateurs.
31 The Australasian, Melbourne, September 19, 1908.
32 J. A. Cook, op. cit. The rugby team was touring the British Isles when it was decided that they would take part in the Olympic Games.
33 Sydney Morning Herald, January 2, 3, 25 and February 21, 1912; The Age, Melbourne, April 13, 1912.
34 Sydney Morning Herald, January 25, 1912.
35 Ibid., January 2, 1912.
36 Ibid., June 12, 1912.
41 New York Times, July 9, 1912.
42 The tone of the arguments presented in some cases were related to the different character of British sport and sportsmanship—see ‘England’s duty’ Revue Olympique, November, 1912.
43 The Referee, London, August 11, 1912. Gareth was endorsing an article written in The Sportsman of London of August 7, 1912 which stated: ‘America has adopted in her sports, at any rate in international sport, her own great business axiom—’beat the other fellow, fairly, if convenient, but beat him’, and we must accept the fact that our ideas of sportsmanship differ from theirs.’
44 The Referee, Sydney, September 20, 1911.
46 Curiously, the Empire team idea may have been re-kindled by the success of swimmer, ‘Duke’ Kahanamoku. In a letter to the New York Times, July 13, 1912, ‘Equality’ asked, ‘Can anybody tell me why when a Hawaiian gentleman, with a totally unpronounceable name, wins an Olympic event points are scored in the United States column, but when a native British subject residing in South Africa, Australia or Canada accomplishes a similar feat the points won are not credited to Great Britain.' Hawaii did not officially become a 'state' until 1959.
48 Gavan Souter, Lion and Kangaroo in Australia: 1901-1919, the rise of a nation. (Sydney, 1978).
49 Frank Crowley (Ed.) A new history of Australia (Melbourne, 1974).
50 Sydney Morning Herald, February 20, 1902.
51 Daily Telegraph, Sydney, May 24, 1905.
52 Gavan Souter, op. cit.
55 Sydney Morning Herald, August 8, 1912.
56 The Referee, Sydney, September 4, 1912.
57 Many arguments appeared in the press—refer to The Referee, Sydney Morning Herald, and The Leader, September-October, 1912.
58 Sydney Morning Herald, January 8, 1913; The Referee, Sydney, March 26, and June 13, 1918.
59 The Referee, Sydney, September 10, 1913.