The Cricket Season

The cricket season is upon us again. We are relaxed, on holidays, well-disposed to share a Toohey's or two with our working class hero Doug Walters, eager to be told of the famous Gatting 'grittiness' and to view with pleasure the inevitable Border boundaries. We are prepared, in other words, to be entertained.

So it's with interest that we read that Greg Matthews, the 'punk of the pitch', really just wants to 'get married and buy a nice house in a good area, hopefully with a backyard for the kids'. We are asked to share the misery of Andrew Hilditch, who, though on top of the ACB payment scale, can no longer keep his place in the State team. We are required to applaud Geoff Lawson's courage and determination in overcoming a stress fracture in his back to return to the Test arena. We are taken behind the scenes to hear of Chris Matthews' dislike of televised cricket, and of the 'aggressiveness' of Merv Hughes, who has obviously been forgiven his errant ways.

And of course there is the larger-than-life Ian Botham, or 'Rambotham' as he has been dubbed by the English press. Botham's name is likely to appear as prominently in the gossip columns as in the sports features this summer. He has brought his mother with him on the trip — presumably as a ploy to defuse the constant sniping and media innuendos about his extra-curricular activities. Unfortunately for Ian it is likely that the presence of his mother will simply add to the media speculation. But fortunately for Ian he does have the services of an opportunistic publicity manager. If he does get some bad press, there is always the possibility that he'll embark upon a charity walk from Cape York to Wilson's promontory.

With all this media hype it is important that we don't miss another media event taking place this season. No, I'm not referring to the cricket, but to the strategies of the multinational corporations involved in sports sponsorship and promotion. What we will see on our screens this summer is further evidence of the penetration of cricket by big business.

Let me explain. In the pre-war years of corner-store capitalism — before the Age of Television — little advantage could be gained by a small firm which embarked upon an extensive (and expensive) advertising campaign at a sports fixture. An 'Eat MacDonal's' Hamburgers' sign placed on a picket fence in the 1930s would not have had much impact: it would after all have been viewed only by the spectators at the ground. And if poor old MacDonald had only one small milk bar (say in Caringbah or Coburg) it is unlikely that even the hungriest of fans would have taken the bus or tram from the ground to sample his wares.

Things have changed with the advent of television and the growth of transnational capital. Today's corporate firms not only have the resources to pour millions into advertising, but they recognise also that any modern advertising strategy requires constant brand exposure to foster sales and build corporate image. Our corner-store MacDonald has gone the way of the dodo, to be replaced by a transnational of the same name. More importantly, this corporate 'family' store has a branch in Caringbah and Coburg, and four or five more in the vicinity of any major sports ground.

For years the ABC, as the guardian of Australian 'high' culture, had a preserve in the quasi-religious ritual of televising Test matches. A reliable and receptive audience had been built up over this time, an audience which corporate capital was unable to exploit. It tried, of course. The first
evidence of change was the appearance of company names on the picket fences at all major cricket grounds. The growth of this form of advertising was the corporate response to the Australian government's decision in 1976 to ban tobacco advertising from television screens. One of the ironic side-effects of the ban was that the picket-fence promotions enabled the sponsoring tobacco firms to obtain exclusive coverage on the ABC — a non-commercial network officially off-limits to all forms of advertising! In value-for-money terms the cigarette sponsors appear to be doing particularly well out of brand-name exposure. It is a relatively cheap form of advertising which heightens public recognition of the role of tobacco forms in sports promotion — something essential in ensuring continued community acceptance of tobacco products. As sports writer Bob Stewart noted in the recent book *Power Play*:

Whereas in 1978 some $50 million was spent on corporate sponsorship, by 1983 it had risen to $150 million, with the tobacco and alcohol industries collectively contributing between fifteen and twenty per cent of total sponsored funding.

Unlike the cigarette firms, which are left with no option but to advertise at the grounds, many of the other corporations (including alcohol companies) have been keen to extend their penetration of televised sport. It was Kerry Packer who recognised that if he were to gain control of Test cricket he would be able to sell this audience — as a form of commodity — to prospective advertisers. It was also no co-incidence that at the time Packer made his move on cricket, Australia's commercial stations were placed in the somewhat difficult position of having to increase Australian content while pursuing general cost reductions. It was estimated that an hour of Australian drama cost something in the order of seven times that of an hour's cricket coverage. Cricket clearly won the day in the cheap entertainment stakes.

The rest, of course, is history. While Packer failed in his 1977 bid for exclusive rights to televise cricket, his not-so-subtle strategy of purchasing the entire Test team (transforming the players, in the process, into rather expensive commodities) paid dividends. In a 1979 out-of-court settlement TCN gained exclusive rights to the Tests and one-day fixtures. Thanks to Packer we now have the pleasure of listening to the profundities of Bill Lawry, and the computer-chip recollections of Ritchie Benaud, in between advertisement for MacDonalds, Toyota, Meadow Lea and Tooheys. In some cases a player holding up a Big Mac or a can of beer will be the same one who has cracked the ball for six in the previous over. In this way the key players become symbols of corporate power, transferring their prestige and credibility to the products they have chosen to endorse.

Advertising now saturates the TV screen. The needs of advertisers rather than the interests and concerns of viewers become the overriding preoccupation of the TV stations. The style and format of the one-day games — the breaks between overs and fall of wicket, the commentary, the camera angles, the replays — are all part of the media's contrived tension. And while the 'Bewdy Border' signs and other messages of hero worship from dedicated supporters may hang for a while in front of the coveted corporate signs, these little symbols of genuine enthusiasm are quickly and unceremoniously removed by the security guards, whose job it is to see that the roving cameras gain maximum coverage of the sponsors' brand names.

What happens when sport becomes totally commercialised? There are several obvious outcomes. For one, the players, most of whom were attracted to sport for its intrinsic pleasure, become little more than entertainers 'producing' performances for their sponsors. Behaviour which is aggressive, confrontationist and spectacular is highlighted. The crowd is persuaded that the only legitimate excitement in sport comes through gladiatorial combat. Successful players are judged according to their 'productivity', measured by arun-rate or strike rate. Those with style, flair and genuine team spirit may soon discover that
these qualities fall well behind performance and reliability in the hierarchy of desirable characteristics.

Moreover, Ian Harriss has argued that the demise of leg spin and the virtual disappearance of batsmen with the ability and temperament of players like Victor Trumper has mirrored a broader change taking place within society. He argues that efficiency and risk minimisation in bowling and batting parallels the technico-bureaucratic concerns of modern-day capitalists, rather than the aristocratic, 'gentlemanly' preoccupations found among the eighteenth century agrarian bourgeoisie.

A final outcome of the growing commercialisation of cricket is the increased incidence of player and spectator violence. Colin Tatz, writing in Power Play argues that commercialisation and corruption have gone hand in hand as two of the main features of professionalised sport. In international cricket, 'sledging' and intimidation have become normal features of the game. Crowd disorder has been of growing concern to the authorities. In January 1986 beer cans, concrete and metal strips were among objects hurled by rival Australian and New Zealand fans at a one-day international at the SCG. Eighty-eight police were subsequently arrested. In January 1985 extra police were mobilised to curb violence during an Australia vs West Indies fixture. In February 1984 fifty-three people were arrested after brawls broke out on the Hill at the SCG. A month before eighty-nine people had been arrested for brawling. The summer before sixty were arrested in a single day after a policewoman was attacked while patrolling the ground. In January 1982 seventy-nine fans were arrested in a single day after a beer can fight. And these incidents relate only to the SCG!

What sports psychologists and sociologists have come to recognise is that aggression, violence and intimidation on the field of play, as well as the social construction of violence via media commentary, actually increases the likelihood of imitative violence among spectators. And, of course, that violence is more than likely to occur when crowds are dominated by young males with access to alcohol — the very same alcohol promoted by the sponsors. As cricket becomes, or is construed to have become, more 'combative', so we are likely to witness the growth of violence in the grandstands.

A NSW Government report released in mid-1985 confirmed that limited-over night matches were the games likely to promote the most violence and disorder.

We should not be content to criticise the manipulated action and 'language of warfare' on the TV screens without mentioning similar developments in the popular press. And we need not look far for examples. In an introduction to this season's England tour the Daily Mirror brought Jeff Thomson back from obscurity to preview the series. In Thommo's words:

I could never cop the Poms...As soon as they lobbed in here in '74 I couldn't wait to have a crack at 'em. I thought 'stuff that stiff upper lip'. Let's see how stiff it is when it's split'.

He readily acknowledged that he had a 'taste for Pom's blood'. Thomson is trading upon our nationalism, our dislike of English pretensions, our support for the cocky but competent working class boy made good. But he is also trading up on
to alcohol — the very same alcohol promoted by the sponsors. As cricket becomes, or is construed to have become, more 'combative', so we are likely to witness the growth of violence in the grandstands. A NSW Government report released in mid-1985 confirmed that limited-over night matches were the games likely to promote the most violence and disorder.

We should not be content to criticise the manipulated action and 'language of warfare' on the TV screens without mentioning similar developments in the popular press. And we need not look far for examples. In an introduction to this season's England tour the Daily Mirror brought Jeff Thomson back from obscurity to preview the series. In Thommo's words:

I could never cop the Poms...As soon as they lobbed in here in '74 I couldn't wait to have a crack at 'em. I thought 'stuff that stiff upper lip'. Let's see how stiff it is when it's split'.

He readily acknowledged that he had a 'taste for Pom's blood'. Thomson is trading upon our nationalism, our dislike of English pretensions, our support for the cocky but competent working class boy made good. But he is also trading up on

to alcohol — the very same alcohol promoted by the sponsors. As cricket becomes, or is construed to have become, more 'combative', so we are likely to witness the growth of violence in the grandstands. A NSW Government report released in mid-1985 confirmed that limited-over night matches were the games likely to promote the most violence and disorder.

We should not be content to criticise the manipulated action and 'language of warfare' on the TV screens without mentioning similar developments in the popular press. And we need not look far for examples. In an introduction to this season's England tour the Daily Mirror brought Jeff Thomson back from obscurity to preview the series. In Thommo's words:

I could never cop the Poms...As soon as they lobbed in here in '74 I couldn't wait to have a crack at 'em. I thought 'stuff that stiff upper lip'. Let's see how stiff it is when it's split'.

He readily acknowledged that he had a 'taste for Pom's blood'. Thomson is trading upon our nationalism, our dislike of English pretensions, our support for the cocky but competent working class boy made good. But he is also trading up on

to alcohol — the very same alcohol promoted by the sponsors. As cricket becomes, or is construed to have become, more 'combative', so we are likely to witness the growth of violence in the grandstands. A NSW Government report released in mid-1985 confirmed that limited-over night matches were the games likely to promote the most violence and disorder.

We should not be content to criticise the manipulated action and 'language of warfare' on the TV screens without mentioning similar developments in the popular press. And we need not look far for examples. In an introduction to this season's England tour the Daily Mirror brought Jeff Thomson back from obscurity to preview the series. In Thommo's words:

I could never cop the Poms...As soon as they lobbed in here in '74 I couldn't wait to have a crack at 'em. I thought 'stuff that stiff upper lip'. Let's see how stiff it is when it's split'.

He readily acknowledged that he had a 'taste for Pom's blood'. Thomson is trading upon our nationalism, our dislike of English pretensions, our support for the cocky but competent working class boy made good. But he is also trading up on

Op-shop fashion

Most people like to dress nicely (leaving aside for a moment the definition of nice) but it's pretty expensive trying to do it on the dole, or even on the average wage. So how do you do it? Quite simply, with second-hand clothes.

Second-hand clothes are hand-me-downs, other people's throw-outs or, most often, goods purchased from an opportunity shop or fete. For a lot of us, before we can even think of dressing fashionably in second-hand clothes, we have to get over the fear/shame/bad memories thrown up by wearing someone else's clothes. I, for one, spent many an adolescent hour closeted in my room too ashamed to go to the school dance dressed in my St. Vincent de Paul specials. Somehow they seemed even worse than my sister's (or brother's) hand-me-downs, especially when a tell-tale fifty cents price tag would seem to appear suddenly on the cuff of my shirt just as my newest heart-throb approached. And certainly I felt a lot worse off than those who had newly-purchased clothes, no matter how daggy I thought they were in other ways. It was bad enough that my jeans came from the Best & Less boys' department, without the obligatory (or so I thought at age fifteen) Levi's tag, but to think that my "best dress", most of my