They’re off in the Canberra Cup

The media’s focus on opinion polls, who’s in front, how close the election result will be and what the odds are in an election campaign is often criticized as horse race journalism.

The NT News took this to a new level yesterday with their cover equating the election with the Darwin Cup.
WE’RE OFF TO THE RACES ...

ULTIMATE CUP GUIDE

B-PAGE RACE LIFTOUT

YOUR LAST MINUTE CUP SWEEP

ALL THE JOCKEYS' COLOURS

EXPERTS' TIPS FOR EACH RACE

INSIDE

THE NT'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE NEWS COVERAGE
NT News…off to the races NT News

*The NT News* weren’t the only ones to go with a sporting metaphor. *The Advertiser* in Adelaide went with a split cover contrasting the “showdown” between two local AFL teams and the upcoming showdown of the election.
POWER STORM TO A THRILLING VICTORY

SHOWDOWN II
AUSTRALIA DECIDES - SEPT 7

POWER IS IN YOUR HANDS

ELECTION 2013 SPECIAL EDITION
My media panel colleague Sinclair Davidson speculated that local imperatives – speaking to the perceived concerns of local readers – rather than purely ideological concerns might in part explain the difference between the militant cover of Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* and the more objective tone of its stable mate in Brisbane.

The NT and SA covers show even more clearly how tabloid newspapers play off local concerns. In Adelaide, the narrow victory Port Adelaide secured against their rivals in the last minutes of the game was perceived as overshadowing the significance of the election announcement. In Darwin the key day on the local racing calendar was similarly front of mind.

But interestingly the editors didn’t have to struggle too hard to meld the two stories. Both came up with clever segues that linked the events.

This is because we are so used to seeing politics as a contest and research has shown that it is often covered in the language of sport and war. Scholars call this the “strategic game frame”. Studies seem to suggest that this type of coverage is increasing and some scholars have suggested that it plays a part in “the spiral of cynicism” that disengages citizens from politics. However, other scholars have argued that it adds excitement to the coverage and thus increases attention and engagement.

Unfortunately *The NT Daily* front page will not be remembered just as an unusual juxtaposition of horse race and politics. The fun day promised by the paper’s headline was tragically overshadowed by the fall and death of jockey Simone Montgomerie.

This is a powerful reminder that the completely unexpected can so easily shatter our neat constructions of the everyday.

A sobering thought for both journalists and politicians.