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Why the world needs a good Australian sports science and sports medicine journal

Australians in general are happy with our status as one of the world's best-kept secrets. We live in a world where geographical location and population size are important determinants of a country's circle of influence and both these factors conspire to make Australia a minnow. It is a cliché to say that Australians love sport, because it has been said so often and because the citizens of most countries love sport for the unscripted drama it provides. We Australians like to insist though that we love sport more than anyone else, and it may be because it is in the sporting arena that Australia graduates from being a tiny irrelevance to being of genuine international importance. Australians happen to be very good at sport, on the whole, and a probable explanation for this is that we have more space and a more generous climate to play it in than just about anyone else.

At the moment, you are reading Australia's only PubMed-listed sports science and sports medicine journal and more specifically the viewpoints of one of its new Assistant Editors. In choosing the new Editorial Board, Sports Medicine Australia needed to consider a significant body of opinion that there was no point bothering with a journal at all. There is a rationalist school of thought that there are too many scientific journals (in sports medicine as much as any other area of science). According to the rationalists, we should leave peer-review publications

to the 'big' countries in North America and Europe. No one argued that Australians don't make great authors of sports science papers, but some people think that we are too small a nation to be good publishers.

I can't argue with the proposition that there are already too many sports science and sports medicine journals for any one individual to read, let alone subscribe to. But does anyone complain that there are too many newspapers or magazines or books on the market for one individual to read, or too many television stations or movies to watch? Thankfully there are review services and journal clubs. Scientific publications need to be diverse, and if a group has performed a good quality study it should be able to get it published. If a journal is losing money, doesn't have subscribers or readers or is accepting poor quality papers to fill its contents, then its demise is inevitable. If the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* can continue to attract its fair share of authors, reviewers and readers, then it should not be condemned because it doesn't have the market share of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*.

The continuing proliferation of the World Wide Web will mean that journals will face rising costs, but also will be presented with greater opportunities for raising income. In the past, the 'average' scientist or clinician may have subscribed to 1-3 scientific journals, and therefore may have had 100-200 scientific articles arrive in the mail each year. In the future, the same average person will probably have 100-200 articles arrive in the mail each year, but they will arrive in the 'email' Inbox, and the papers will perhaps come from 20-30 different journals and be pre-selected by the keywords of each subscriber (e.g. 'FOOTBALL' or 'SHOULDER'). From these virtual journals, the subscriber will then nominate highly relevant issues that he or she wishes (retrospectively) to receive in hard cover. If I am correct in this prediction of subscriber patterns, then it may not necessarily mean that journals need to focus their entire contents, but that to stay profitable they may need to focus the contents of specific issues. *Clinics in Sports Medicine* has been doing this for many years and although I have never subscribed to this *Journal* I have bought many single issues that have been personally relevant. Most general sports medicine journals are starting to follow suit with specific feature issues. We have planned a feature issue of the *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport* on the topic of tennis, to be published in January 2003 and to be released during the Australian Open tournament. This will feature both Australian and International research. This may not increase the subscriber base for the journal by much, but perhaps tennis doctors, researchers and coaches around the world will want to spend approximately US\$15 to own a copy of this issue.

I can't see less diversity in the range of sports medicine journals in the foreseeable future, and in this context Australia certainly has a significant role to play. I would need to put on a barrister's wig to argue that Australia is the No. 1 sporting nation in the world, but I think a sincere argument can be made that Australia has the most diverse sporting culture in the world. The real No. 1 sporting nation in the world - the USA - is by nature inward looking, whereas Australia is outward looking. To illustrate this point: if you submit a paper on sports such as cricket, rugby, or netball to an American sports medicine journal, the reviewers will insist that you describe the rules of the game as part of the paper. This is because the average well-educated American reader would not have ever bothered to take an interest in a sport that wasn't commonly played in the

USA. To give credit where it is due, the USA has a second-tier sporting system (at the college level) that is better organised and resourced than the first-tier of professional sport in most countries. The USA also shares Australia's amazing combination of ski resorts and surf beaches within hours of each other. But the USA does not have a stadium like the Melbourne Cricket Ground, which has hosted crowds of more than 80,000 in more than half a dozen different types of sport. Neither does any other country. Most Americans would not be aware that there are at least six distinct codes of football, and would not understand the compliment if you told them that Michael Jordan was the Don Bradman of basketball.

Australia does not have the cultural diversity of Europe, but probably has more sporting diversity. One of my favourite European jokes is that "Heaven is an English policeman, a French chef, a German engineer, an Italian lover, and everything organised by the Swiss, whereas Hell is an English chef, a French engineer, a German policeman, a Swiss lover and everything organised by the Italians". If Australians were included in this joke, then the Aussie in Heaven would be an athlete, whereas the Aussie in Hell would be, sadly, an academic. This leaves Australians who conduct scientific research into sport somewhere near the equator. A scientific journal dedicated to sport, which by nature has the opportunity to attract media attention both in Australia and internationally, is another good way to improve the regard in which researchers in general are held in this country.

Whilst this *Journal* does - and will I hope continue to - attract good quality international papers, it should also be a journal in which the top Australian researchers can be proud to submit their best work. The future should see more sports medicine and science research emanating from Australia. The Australian Football League, Australian Cricket Board and New South Wales Sporting Injuries Committee now each have budgets of well over A\$100,000 p.a. committed to scientific research grants for sports performance and injury prevention research, and other major Australian sporting bodies may soon follow suit. The Australian College of Sports Physicians requires that all Fellows publish a peer-reviewed paper as a strict graduation requirement. There are increasing numbers of Australian PhD students with sports-related theses. Sometimes the processes of reviewing and making decisions on papers, meeting deadlines and sticking to budgets are going to make publishing a scientific journal difficult. We don't live in a perfect world. But if there were such a thing as a perfect country in which to publish an international scientific sporting journal then it would have a lot of resemblance to Australia.

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