THE POLITICS OF V.F.L. FOOTBALL

Gary Wickham

Sociology Research Group in Cultural and Educational Studies, Department of Education, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Victoria, 3052.
It is not uncommon to hear football being denigrated as a pastime which distracts people from "real" political concerns, "real struggles". And nor is it uncommon to hear the politics of football discussed as a crude class politics; that is, for example, to hear that Carlton and Melbourne are "ruling class" clubs or that Collingwood, Fitzroy and Footscray are the only "true working class" clubs left. Neither of these formulations is of any worth for a serious political analysis of V.F.L. football, as neither of them allows a space for a politics of football as a site in itself. How then should such a politics be constructed? In this paper I want to attempt to answer this question through an examination of the way in which the politics of football is constructed in two recent books concerned with analysing football - Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner's *Up Where, Cazaly?* and Bob Stewart's *The Australian Football Business*. 1 Sadly, these two books are the only two books available which present a serious analysis of V.F.L. football (although there are several articles which present such an analysis2) and both are to be highly praised for doing so. However, my concern here is not with the process of reviewing, with condemning or condoning these two books; my concern is with a reading of them to determine what space they allow for a politics of football as a site in itself. I think we can divide both books' treatment of this question into two basic categories: one, where a space is provided for a politics of football which does treat it as a site in itself; and two, where a space is provided for a politics of football only in terms of some essence which exists external to the site of football and determines this site or some aspect of it. As well, in the case of Stewart's book there is a third category - where the analysis does treat football as a site in itself but in doing so promotes a position on certain issues which I feel should be challenged.
The first discussion in Sandercock and Turner's book which I would place in category one is that which deals with the 1896 crisis which led to the formation of the V.F.L. (Victorian Football League) as a breakaway from the V.F.A. (Victorian Football Association) (Chapter Five). This discussion allows a space for a non-essentialist politics of football in the sense that it is a good "history of the present" (to borrow Donzelot's and Foucault's term). It is not just a story of the "dead" past, it is a construction of the past in terms of the present. It does not celebrate or essentialize the past, it allows us to use a construction of the past as part of a non-essentialist appreciation of present politics. Sandercock and Turner, in this chapter, construct an aspect of the past in which the V.F.L. is born out of a desire by the financially strong clubs to rid themselves of the "burden" of the financially weak clubs. This is clearly an important contribution to a non-essentialist appreciation of the V.F.L.'s present financial drives.

This comment can also be made about Sandercock and Turner's treatment of the position of the players. Chapter Six contains a discussion of the "problem" (in the V.F.L.'s eyes) of player payments in the years before World War I - whether they should be paid at all, what amount they should be paid, whether there should be a sliding scale of payments (esp. pp. 59-60) and Chapter Eleven contains a similar discussion of this "problem" in the period 1945-60 (pp. 141-145). Both of these discussions are relevant to a contemporary analysis. Indeed, these discussions serve as a good basis for Sandercock and Turner's analysis of the position of the players today. In Chapter Fifteen they present detailed arguments against the proposition that players receive too much money, in favour of an active players' Association and against the way players are treated as the possessions, or even "slaves" of the clubs.
These arguments include: that while some "match-winning" players do receive very high incomes and fringe benefits (houses, cars, furnishings, etc.) from football, the large majority of players are not particularly well paid (pp. 206-207); that the Players' Association has done a lot to improve player payments and has an important role to play like "all associations whose members are engaged in the entertainment business" (protecting the interests of those who have little bargaining power, seeking better insurance, etc.) (pp. 204-209); and that the "...professional footballer is more tightly bound to his job than almost any other modern employee... He is destined by birth to be tied to his club...And, like a member of a religious order, the price of breaking the tie, without express permission is excommunication" (pp. 209-210ff) (an argument which has only been partly weakened by the Foschini case of this year). This analysis is a good non-essentialist analysis of the politics of one aspect of V.F.L. football.

Two other Sandercock and Turner discussions deserve to be singled out as fitting neatly into our first category - that on ground management in Chapter Eleven and that on the position of the clubs as individual entities in Chapter Fourteen. They construct a history of the problems associated with ground management in the 1950's - councils (as the grounds' owners) giving a disproportionate percentage of revenue to cricket clubs compared to football clubs (which generate most of the revenue), "unhygienic and unpleasant conditions" at grounds because councils refused to improve facilities (esp. pp. 136-138) - which is important to an understanding of a contemporary political issue. Their treatment of the position of clubs, particularly the financial problems facing most clubs today, also treats football as a political site in itself. They show the extent of the financial problems simply and clearly (pp. 183-189) and
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

then to their credit avoid the popular (especially for the V.F.L.) explanation of these problems - skyrocketing players payments. Instead they argue that most of the problems are caused by unwieldy and often unwise club management (pp. 189-202); their discussion of the internal politics of the Carlton club in the late 1970's and early 1980's (pp. 195-198) is particularly interesting in this regard.

In the case of Bob Stewart's book one relatively small section and two longer discussions stand out in terms of providing a space for a non-essentialist politics of football. The smaller section is Chapter Six which discusses the changing play patterns of V.F.L. football. This may not seem like a "hot" political issue, but in fact readings of the way the game is played are extremely important to the politics of the relationship between football and the media. Different television stations, radio stations and newspapers put a lot of effort into promoting their particular reading of the patterns of play, their particular style. One issue which has arisen in the context of this relationship is that concerning whether patterns of play are changing, or being changed, simply to suit certain broadcasting interests. Stewart argues convincingly that they are not, that changes which are taking place should be seen as part of a development of the game which owes nothing to "outside interests" and far from "cheapening" or "over-commercializing" the game they have made it more attractive. In posing this argument he advocates some changes in the way patterns of play are currently read by the media - urging the use of more precise terms like "wide receiver" instead of simply referring to a vague "running game" - and in doing so, I suggest, thereby contributes to a better understanding of one aspect of the politics of the game.

The first of the longer discussions is contained in Chapter Nine. This undoubtedly the best chapter in the book. Stewart presents an extremely
Gary Wickham, The Politics of V.F.L. Football
detailed picture of the financial operation of the V.F.L. He details eight
sources of V.F.L. funds: gate receipts (where he shows the extent to which
admission charges have outstripped the Consumer Price Index and explains
the way gate receipts are distributed); broadcasting rights (where he explains
how much television stations pay for broadcasting rights to the V.F.L.
and what they receive for their money and where he argues that the percentage
of V.F.L. revenue which comes from broadcasting (5%) is "meagre" compared
to the percentage (35%) from broadcasting gained by the American National
Football League); the marketing division; the "Football Record" (the
programme sold at the grounds which he shows to be a very profitable
publication); sponsorship (where he lists the major sponsors of the League
itself over the last few years and the current sponsors of the clubs and
the amounts they contribute and where he discusses the debate within business
circles as to whether sporting sponsorships are worthwhile); membership
income; social clubs and supporter groups (which he shows to be an
increasingly important source of funds); marketing and "quasi-business"
ventures (which he argues are not necessarily lucrative sources of funds for
individual clubs). The financial issues raised here are important political
issues and Stewart contributes enormously to an analysis of them.

The second longer discussion which should be included in category
one is contained in Chapter Ten. Here Stewart presents a detailed analysis
of the regulations covering the transfer of players between clubs. He, like
Sandercock and Turner, does not invoke any essence in considering this
complex issue - football here is treated as a site in itself. In fact
he provides more detail than Sandercock and Turner, discussing the specifics
of the zoning regulations and the specifics of the various court challenges
to the regulations (unfortunately his book was published only shortly before
the Foschini judgment was handed down) and the extent to which the V.F.L.
Gary Wickham, The Politics of V.F.L. Football

has gone in an attempt to keep cases from reaching court.

Our second category is that where the space for a politics of football is constructed in terms of an external, eternal essence. One essence which Sandercock and Turner draw on several times is that of a fairly crude "class structure". Throughout Chapter One, for instance, the space provided for a politics of football is one given by a general division between an "articulate, affluent" "middle class" and "workingmen and small farmers" (pp.8-9). The early history of football constructed in this chapter includes sentences like: "Active participation in sport was seen as an important social cement, a once-a-week camouflage of differences of income property and status (p.11)"; "It was the young men of the middle class who spoke out publicly for organized sport (p.14)"; and "The organized team-games of the English middle class adapted better to the needs of colonial town dwellers for recreation and entertainment than did the simple games of the villages and fairs (p.15)". Similarly, in Chapter Two a discussion of "the ideology of the game" in the 1860's revolves around explanations like: "Living in a more open society, the colonial devotees of football were not so confident of their class position... even though their game was firmly embedded in the colonial middle class (p.28)". Football here is not granted a politics of its own, a politics concerned with its specific conditions of existence. Rather, it is simply swept along in a grand, general class politics in which it is just another underling just another wholly determined site. Other examples of this problem are to be found in parts of Chapter Nine, where the popularity of football (for both players and spectators) during the depression years (1930-39) is explained in terms of the "needs" of the "working class" (esp. pp. 113-115) and in parts of Chapter Ten, where the politics of "players interests" during World War II is discussed in terms of their
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

"natural") interests as men from predominantly "working class" backgrounds, (esp. pp. 124-127).

Another essence which Sandercock and Turner use as the basis of an analysis of the politics of football is one of a general social structure, usually a general economic social structure. This structure is even more general than their "class structure". It is never specified as being represented or repeated in a certain form within the site of football. It is just there; presumably it is supposed to be an "obvious" ground of politics. Yet, I would argue, there is nothing obvious about it; it is just a vague construct which allows for nothing but a vague, meaningless politics. In Chapter Eight for example, the politics of football in the years 1919-29 is analysed solely in terms of an Australian "society" "...eager, even a little desperate to enjoy themselves, to forget, or pretend to..."(p.80)", a "society" defined mainly as an economic entity. The politics of football here is the politics of a general political and economic "climate" - where unemployment was high, the move to industrialization rapid, the motor car increasingly important, a house cost $1,000, the A.L.P. adopted a socialization objective, newspapers argued against militant unionism and Marxism, the Protestant church was active against increased drinking hours, etc. etc. (esp. pp. 80-82). Certainly this makes interesting reading but it does not allow us to analyse football as a specific political site with specific conditions of existence. Another example of a reliance on this essence is the analysis of the politics of football during World War II (in Chapter Ten) which involves arguments like, "As in the broader society, so too in the football world, as the war drew to a close a feeling developed that some sort of post-war reconstruction and rethinking should take place (p.123)". And in Chapter Eleven the politics of football in
the years 1946-1960 is the politics of a "society" where, among other things, there was an increased demand for Australian primary products, the population increased dramatically due to a baby boom and increased immigration, Melbourne spread outwards rapidly, "A car in every garage, a Victa mower for every lawn, and the house and garden on the quarter-acre block - the Great Australian Dream - began to be the statistical reality", etc., etc. (esp. pp. 128-131).

Before going on I must stress that in criticizing Sandercock and Turner for making use of an essence called "society" I am not denying that the sites that they discuss under this umbrella - the management of an economy, immigration, the production and consumption of particular goods and services, urban planning in Melbourne, the activities of the organized churches, the operation of various industries, etc. - have a politics. What I am denying is that we should falsely unify these disparate sites under the term "society" or "social structure" and give this grand meta-site a politics over and above the politics of these particular sites. As well, and just as importantly, if not more importantly, I am denying that the politics of these sites, either separately or unified as "society" or "social structure", is necessarily the politics of V.F.L. football.

In direct contrast with their treatment of the past in terms of the present, in terms of present politics, which I discussed earlier, Sandercock and Turner include several discussions which use the past as an essence. In these cases we have an analysis of the present politics of football which ignores its specificity in favour of a nostalgic celebration of the past. In Chapter Twelve Sandercock and Turner present an interesting history of the electronic media's involvement in football, but their analysis of the politics of the relationship between football and the media contained in this involves little more than the suggestion that television is ruining
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

...football and that things were much better before the relationship between football and the media became a close one (esp. pp. 164-165). There is no room for a serious analysis of political issues like whether media interests pay enough for the rights to broadcast football and what is the best way of distributing the money gained from media involvement. In Chapter Thirteen an analysis of the V.F.L.'s financial operation begins with statements like, "Between them, the media and the V.F.L. have turned Aussie Rules into a hard-sell industry (p.167)". While this leads into some discussion of important issues like the V.F.L.'s dominance of national football, Sunday football and the construction of V.F.L. Park, Waverley, the politics of these issues is not taken beyond the joint notions that most of the problems concerned with these issues are the result of the V.F.L.'s activities as a business corporation and that these problems would not have occurred in the "good old days" before the V.F.L. took on such activities - "Twenty years ago you couldn't have read the following in a V.F.L. annual report: 'Survey results strongly indicate that the V.F.L., in corporate image terms, is viewed as a reliable, blue-ribbon organization, both commercially and administratively' (p.175)". Another example of the way an essentialist construction of the past severely limits the space for a politics of the present occurs in Chapter Seventeen. This chapter is basically a critique of the direction in which the game is heading in the view of Sandercock and Turner. But rather than a detailed political analysis of this perceived direction we have only an opinion that just about everything concerned with modern-day football and its administration is bad, coupled with a lament that things used to be much better - "Old fashion notions of club loyalty have been cast aside by most players, coaches and club administrations. Spectators stubbornly cling to the old world. But for how much longer will this be possible? Where is it all going? (p.238)."
Gary Wickham, The Politics of V.F.L. Football

In the latter part of Chapter Thirteen Sandercock and Turner invoke an essence similar to that which I described earlier as a general, economic social structure. The difference here is that this structure is labelled a "capitalist" structure. In fact much of this discussion is a reasonable non-essentialist analysis of "the distribution of power within the football world" - the relationships between the V.F.L. and the V.F.A., the Victorian Country Football League and interstate leagues. Unfortunately however this analysis is swallowed up in an attempt to relate this specific site of power relations to an essentialist power site - "In a capitalist society power usually lies where the money is. The football world is no exception (p.176)". The fact that this attempt consists solely of an outlining of the background and business connections of the various V.F.L. presidents (pp. 179-182) emphasises the weakness of this approach to the politics of football..

The final essence I wish to expose in Sandercock and Turner's book is one drawn directly from psychology. In the latter part of Chapter Fifteen (pp. 218-223) the examination of the position of the players becomes an attempt to answer the question, "So why do footballers give so much of themselves to their game? (p.219)". We are told immediately: "The answer lies in the psychological rewards - the love of competition, the need to win, the desire to dominate, the hunger for applause and adulation, the pride in a job well done, the challenge of being the best...(pp. 219-220)". This answer is expanded and eventually even includes a discussion of "the personality pattern of the Australian footballer"(p.222). In Chapter Sixteen this essence of individual psychological needs is applied to football spectators. We are told that for many football spectators football is a "major part" of a process of "self-identification" (p.230), that football allows us each a chance to turn into "Mr Hyde" and "ventilate"
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

"the darker side of our nature" (p.232), that football allows Australians to express their "prejudices" in a "socially manageable" way (pp.232-233) and that football gives us a way of fulfilling our need to "belong" (p.234). And in Chapter Seventeen, in introducing their look at where football is heading, Sandercock and Turner say that football has a "deep" meaning in as much as, "It is part of a very deep-seated human fascination with the pursuit of beauty and excellence (p.237)". The use of this essence in these instances detracts from their non-essentialist analysis of the role of the players in the running of the game and also severely limits the possibility of producing analyses of political issues concerned with the rights of spectators (both at the grounds and in front of their television sets) and the direction of the game. Instead of treating these issues within the specific site of football and thereby seeing spectators (and players, coaches, and administrators) as specific agent forms produced within this site, Sandercock and Turner treat them as issues which cannot be understood without reference to this essence drawn from the discourses of the human psyche.

Several of the essences which Bob Stewart invokes in his book have to be seen in the context of the liberal empiricist framework in which his research is firmly rooted. One of these essences is the individual - the actions and attitudes of individual agents constructed as "natural" entities. This essence is part of a liberal empiricist framework in that this framework directs the production of knowledge towards these actions and attitudes as that which is obvious or basically "factual" in the social practices being studied. This framework provides no means of going beyond this level (indeed, in some of its variations it constructs "society" as no more than the sum of the actions and attitudes of individuals - something usually referred to as theoretical individualism or methodological individualism).
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

It does not allow us to understand the processes by which these actions and attitudes are produced, or to see the individuals themselves not as "natural" entities but as agents produced in particular forms in particular sites.

In Chapter One Stewart compares Australian Rules Football (as a participant sport, a "live" spectator sport and a television spectator sport) with other sports in Australia. This is done mainly through the reproduction of survey data concerned with people's attitudes to various sports. No space is allowed for a political analysis of the means by which these attitudes have been produced - they are just taken as given, as basic "facts".

In Chapter Five the attitudes of individuals are again used as an essence, as the essential means of understanding a particular issue. In this case the issue in question - the operation of the twelve constituent clubs of the V.F.L. - is not determined by the attitudes of the individuals involved in them, but by the individual as author, by Stewart himself.

A liberal empiricist framework can not only construct the actions and attitudes of individual subjects of practices being examined as central, but can also construct the individual or individuals doing the examining as central, as creative, free-thinking individuals unconstrained by theoretical frameworks whose ideas are able to define proper objects of research. In opposition to this I would argue that authors are agents produced in the form author in particular sites (research sites, publishing sites, etc.) and as such are constrained by theoretical frameworks through which knowledge is produced in these sites. The "ideas" attributed to authors are the products of this process and have no determining function whatsoever and usually have no political effectivity in the site being examined. The attitudes and opinions of Bob Stewart have no political effectivity in the twelve V.F.L. clubs and a political analysis of the clubs needs to move beyond statements like: "[Essendon] has a reputation for being
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

conservative and responsible (p.36)"; "Melbourne] is gentlemanly.
Supporters are given to polite hand clapping and reserved barracking...
(p.41)"; [Richmond, like Collingwood is viewed by opposing supporters as
defiant and arrogant. A good side to watch getting beaten (p.42)".

Similarly in the final chapter (Chapter Eighteen) a serious
political analysis of the directions in which the game is heading is
eschewed in favour of the presentation of Stewart's guesses as to what
football will be like in the late 1980's and the 1990's. These include
"Prior to the 1986 season, players will take prolonged strike action over
the refusal of the National Football League officials to raise their base
salaries to $30,000 per annum (p.137)"; and "By 2000 Australian Football
will become truly international as representative teams from the U.S.A.
Australia and Papua New Guinea will play competition matches (p.138)".

Another essence generated by the maintenance of a liberal
empiricist framework is that which might be called the essence of the
"primary definer". This term refers to those people or groups who have
a special status in the media - those people or groups whose views on
a particular issue come to define the limits of this issue. In Stewart's
book the liberal empiricist framework, which seeks to reveal "facts",
denying its own existence as a theoretical framework used in the production
of knowledge, does not allow the analysis it controls to move beyond the
"obvious". We have seen this in the case where the "obvious" is the
actions and attitudes of individuals and in the case where the "obvious"
is the opinions of the author (who we may call a special case of a
primary definer). In other instances the space for a politics of football
is limited to that space defined as "obvious" by certain primary definers
(the V.F.L. itself and some media commentators). In this way the primary
definers serve as an essence, for the politics of a particular issue have to be read in terms of their definitions of the issue; that is, the politics of a particular issue must be read in terms of only a limited range of views of what the issue is. In Chapter Four Stewart discusses the role of the V.F.L. in the total Australian Rules football scene. While he provides some useful background material on the national structure of Australian football (which shows the dominance of the V.F.L. over other bodies) he cannot take the analysis of the politics of this situation beyond the reproduction (with his own opinions thrown in) of the debate between the V.F.L. and "its critics" ("the print media", "the general public", "the State Government", "resident action groups" and "even club officials") over a range of issues (the payroll tax issue, sponsorship, lack of sensitivity shown by clubs in their dealings with players) (esp. pp. 28-31). In Chapter Thirteen an analysis of the issue of ground rationalisation (including the role of V.F.L. Park and whether it should be the venue for future grand finals) is really little more than the repetition of the V.F.L.'s arguments about why clubs should share grounds and why V.F.L. Park is a wonderful institution, contrasted against the arguments of the "general public" (which are constructed as uninformed) and the Victorian government (which are constructed as mindless, stubborn obstruction). Stewart does not take the opportunity to examine the deeper politics of this complex issue. He does not, for example, try to understand the politics of tradition in football - the way traditions are constructed in the present as part of specific political strategies and tactics or the role of government in sport and in planning. Towards the end of Chapter Ten the excellent non-essentialist analysis of the transfer regulations (referred to earlier) gives way to the repetition of the V.F.L.'s arguments as to why the transfer regulations are a good thing,
contrasted against a (very brief) exposition of two counter arguments (and followed by Stewart's "reasoned" judgments on the matter) (pp. 84-85). The space created for a worthwhile political analysis of this issue in the earlier part of the chapter is thereby darkened by the shadow of the essence of the primary definer.

One other essence which is invoked in Stewart's book is similar to one which was discussed earlier in the case of Sandercock and Turner's book: the essence of the human psyche. In Chapter Two this essence is accompanied by a simplistic anthropology to explain why football is important to spectators. We are told that football may function as a religion (p.12 and p.14), that it "...provides the male supporter in particular with a strong sense of identification (p.13)"", that it allows people to fantasise (p.13), that it is "...an effective and socially acceptable way of releasing one's pent-up aggressions and frustrations (p.13)"", that it allows Australians to express their prejudices (p.13), that it is "a quest for excitement" in an "unexciting society" (p.14), that it provides "...the sporting public with a satisfying aesthetic experience (p.15)"", that it satisfies "...the social demand for hero worship (p.15)"", that it provides "...the continuity and stability in one's life that is impossible in other areas like work and politics (p.15)"", that it may function "...as a modern counterpart to primeval hunting patterns (p.17)" and that it may be a cause of apathy (pp. 19-20). In Chapter Seven the essence of the human psyche is wheeled out again in analysing coaches and their role. We are told that most coaches possess a "high achievement drive" (p.52) and that they "frequently exhibit" characteristics like "aggression", "inflexibility", "self-assertiveness" and "conservatism" (pp. 55-56). The use of this essence limits or does not allow the production of analyses of political issues concerned with
spectators (such as those pointed to earlier in the discussion of Sandercock and Turner's use of this essence) and coaches (such as how coaches are constructed as crucial agents within clubs).

In moving into our third category I should point out that my discussions of the two issues I have picked out from Stewart's book as fitting into this category serve as examples of the sort of political analysis of football which should be produced.

In Chapter Eighteen (surrounding the opinionated crystal ball gazing which I criticized earlier) a non-essentialist analysis of the directions in which V.F.L. football is heading is the basis of an argument on the issue of the increasing "Americanization" of the game. Stewart talks of a situation like that which exists in the U.S.A. where major city teams compete across the country, where full professional players receive very high salaries, where the norm is multi-million dollar stadiums for 100,000 plus all-seated spectators, where individuals and corporations own and control players and teams, where universities and schools provide a "feeder system" of players, where television "...controls the length of contest to some degree, ruling, and generally paying the bill...", where governments have considerable control, where officials are highly paid professionals and where players are "...restricted by strong contractual agreements and use agents to establish contracts" (pp. 138-139). Indeed, he goes so far as to suggest that arguments against this trend are futile, because this situation is not just a "direction" - "It has already occurred (p.139)."

The main thing to be said in response to Stewart's argument here is that the "Americanization" of football has not occurred to anything like the extent he claims. While players may be restricted by strong contractual agreements and make use of agents, none of the other American conditions
he discusses exists in Australia: one team in Sydney, one in Geelong and
ten in Melbourne hardly constitutes major city teams competing across
the country; very few V.F.L. players are full professionals and (as I will
argue in more detail shortly) their payments are far from excessive;
Australia has no multi-million dollar stadium with room for 100,000 plus
all-seated spectators and only one (V.F.L. Park) which ever approaches that
capacity (and judging by attendances it is certainly not an unqualified
success); while players and teams enter into sponsorship deals these cannot
be said to add up to "ownership and control"; there is no school/university
"feeder system" of V.F.L. players; most officials are not highly-paid
professionals; and even though a night competition is run mainly in the
interests of television it remains a very minor competition and it is wrong
to generalize from this to an argument that television controls V.F.L.
football. In other words, each of the issues Stewart rolls into the issue
of "Americanization" is very much alive as a political issue and it only
serves the interests of the V.F.L. and perhaps the Seven television network
(who both argue for such a scenario) to treat them as issues which have
been finally decided.

On the issue of player payments Stewart argues that "...today's
V.F.L. footballer is handsomely paid for his efforts on the field (p.85)".
In Chapter Eleven he says that players had "some justification" in the period
up to 1977 for seeking increased payments, because in that period the minimum
match payment rarely represented more than half the average adult wage.
But in the period from 1978 onwards (including the present), he continues,
demands for more money by the players have to be seen as unreasonable
because after 1977 the minimum match payment increased at a far faster rate
than average weekly earnings, to the point where it exceeded (and still
exceeds) the average adult wage and also because player payments "...are
Gary Wickham, *The Politics of V.F.L. Football*

becoming an increasing cost burden on clubs (p.89)".

V.F.L. players are the major element in the production and presentation of V.F.L. football - a game which Stewart shows is a business, an important aspect of the entertainment industry. As such players are entitled to press for the greatest financial reward they can achieve, whether they have other jobs or not (which really seems to be something of a red herring in the debate on player payments, especially when consideration is given to the fact that players are expected to attend up to five training sessions per week (up to 48 weeks per year), various social functions and to adhere to whatever disciplinary measures coaches and club officials think appropriate, as well as playing in at least one match per week during the football season). To suggest that players can only seek increased payments up to the point of parity with the average adult weekly wage is absurd. If all Australian employees had always accepted wage rates in line with this logic the average weekly adult wage would still be at a level set in the eighteenth or nineteenth century. The average would not be at its present level if employees organized in certain industries had not fought to increase their wages above the average rate (which is after all a mark of what has been achieved, not at a "natural" upper limit). As for the suggestion that payment levels should not exceed the capacity of clubs to pay, that they should not be a "burden" on clubs, it must be asked why should payment levels be limited by the management capabilities of the clubs? Stewart demonstrated clearly in Chapter Nine that the potential sources of funds for clubs are limitless and that good management (such as that which he discusses at North Melbourne in the 1970's) allows more and more of these sources to be tapped. So it is ridiculous to suggest that players should humbly forego any attempts to increase their payments.
for as long as it takes clubs to achieve the standards of management which
the present hierarchy of the V.F.L. is so fond of loudly claiming they have
already achieved.5

I have tried to show that the politics of V.F.L. football is
the specific politics of a specific site, a site which is not necessarily
related to other sites. I have tried to show that the politics of V.F.L.
football should be analysed in terms of the specificity of each issue
involved, that it should be treated seriously as a political site in its
own right and that football should not be seen as a "frivolous" distraction
or as a practice whose only political effectivity is in some grand, undefined
political site (like a "class struggle" or "struggle for control of the
state"). This does not mean that V.F.L. football is politically meaningless
in other sites or that other sites are politically meaningless within the
site of V.F.L. football (and this clarification also applies to my earlier
argument that the politics of any other site cannot be directly transposed
on to the site of football to be automatically read as its politics). For
example, the site of football has a political effectivity in the site of
government (as the focus of debates about public beer consumption, the
value of Sunday as a "family day", the desirability or otherwise of more
gambling, etc.) and may have a political effectivity in some sites of
industrial relations (where it may be used as an exemplar by employees in
other fields of the entertainment industry in an attempt to gain better wages
and conditions, or, as is more likely, as an exemplar by employers in these
other fields in an attempt to gain more control over their employees). And,
in reverse, the site of government has a political effectivity in the site
of football (as the source of decisions about Sunday football, beer consumption
at grounds, expansion of V.F.L. Park, etc.) and some sites of industrial
relations may have a political effectivity in the site of football (where
Gary Wickham, The Politics of V.F.L. Football

they may be used as a precedent by the V.F.L. Player's Association, or by the V.F.L. itself, in disputes over pay and conditions). So the political relationship between the site of football and other sites is one whereby each only has effectivity within the others via specific instances involving specific reproduction or repetition or re-presentation of aspects of the others (using specifiable techniques such as the implementation and following of legislation and regulations or the following of procedures of debates and negotiations), not a general relationship which follows the pattern determination/subordination.

NOTES


2. Stewart's book (ibid) includes an excellent bibliography.

3. In Policing The Crisis (Macmillan, London, 1977, p.58, their emphasis) the term "primary definer" is discussed by the authors - Stuart Hall, et al. - in the context of "...the likelihood that those in powerful or high-status positions in society who offer opinions about controversial topics will have their definitions accepted, because such spokesmen are understood to have access to more accurate or more specialised information on particular topics than the majority of the population". They continue, "The result of this structured preference given in the media to the opinions of the powerful is that these 'spokesmen' become what we call the primary definers of topics".

4. This understanding of traditions comes mainly from Raymond Williams (especially Marxism And Literature, OUP, Oxford, 1977, pp. 115-117).

5. In arguing against Stewart here on the issue of player payments I am obviously indebted to the arguments of Sandercock and Turner examined earlier.