

A SPORTING NATION

The prosperity of the 1950s not only resulted in more leisure time for people to enjoy sport, but also created the resources needed to develop sporting facilities. Working class people were now able to enjoy sports such as tennis, golf and lawn bowls, which had previously only been available to the wealthy. A common piece of advice given to young men of the time was that regardless of what football code they played, a 'well-rounded young man should learn to play tennis and golf, and learn how to dance'. The influence of the United States had yet to make an impact on this aspect of Australian culture, as radio and television brought little news of US sports. Because of this, sports were still mostly British or distinctly Australian in origin; however, European migrants did bring their love of soccer, gymnastics and volleyball onto the landscape.

GOLDEN ERA

The 1950s and 1960s were part of a golden era for Australian sport. Australians such as Ken Rosewall, Rod Laver, Roy Emerson, Lew Hoad and Frank Sedgman dominated international tennis. Australians won the Wimbledon gentlemen's singles titles from 1956 to 1958, along with eight of the singles championships in the 1960s, and claimed the gentlemen's doubles crowns from 1950 to 1956. Australia also defeated the United States on eight occasions to win the Davis Cup.



SOURCE 4.2.6 US Vice President Richard Nixon (on right) congratulating Australia's Davis Cup tennis winners, 28 August 1955. Australia defeated the United States 5–0 in the challenge round – the worst defeat suffered by the United States in twenty years of Davis Cup competition.

Q How would the absence of the caption for the photograph alter the usefulness of this source to a historian?

Tennis was not the only sport where Australians experienced success. Jimmy Carruthers was the world bantamweight boxing champion from 1952 to 1954, with Johnny Famechon and Lionel Rose winning world titles in the 1960s. Jack Brabham won the world Formula One driving championships in 1959, 1960 and 1966. Surfers 'Midget' Farrelly and 'Nat' Young enjoyed international success throughout the 1960s.

Despite Sir Donald Bradman's retirement in 1948, the Australian cricket team won more series than they lost. Stars of the period were the likes of Richie Benaud, Neil Harvey, Bob Simpson and Bill Lawry. Improved transport was having an impact on all sports of the period as sportspeople could travel further to compete in international competitions. Australia started playing cricket against countries such as India, Pakistan and the West Indies, rather than just mostly England and South Africa.

Huge numbers of people attended sporting fixtures, but also listened to radio broadcasts of sporting events in their car or while sitting on the beach using portable radios. Sport had become Australia's **national pastime**.

MELBOURNE OLYMPICS

The 1956 summer Olympics in Melbourne were the first to be staged in the southern hemisphere. Australia's quick recovery from World War II was partly responsible for its successful bid for the event. Hosting the Olympics triggered the introduction of television into Australia so that the event could be watched across the country and the globe. Channel Nine won the rights to televise the games. Images of Australia filled the lounge rooms of people in Europe and the United States. Australians that did not have a television crowded into the homes of friends or outside shop windows to keep up with the latest news. Australia's sporting heroes became household names with success on the track by athletes such as Shirley Strickland and Betty Cuthbert, as well as in the pool by Dawn Fraser, Lorraine Crapp, Murray Rose and Jon Hendricks.

DID YOU KNOW? The 1956 Olympic Games held in Melbourne was one of the most successful Olympic campaigns for Australia's athletes. Three hundred and twenty-five athletes competed under the Australian flag, and Australia placed third on the medal tally (thirteen gold, eight silver and fourteen bronze medals) behind the Soviet Union and the United States.



SOURCE 4.2.7 Betty Cuthbert (second from left) running across the finish line at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games to claim the gold medal for the Women's 4 x 100 metres relay team

Q What evidence is there in this photograph of the differences between sports technology and conditions for athletes in 1956 compared to today?

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Remembering and understanding

- 1 Define the terms below.
 - the Australian dream
 - cooperative organisations
 - hire purchase
 - 'lucky country'
 - national pastime
 - (post-war) reconstruction
- 2 What were the priorities of Australian governments after World War II?
- 3 Construct a mind map with the central heading 'Living the Australian dream'. Allow a full page in your workbook and add the sub-headings 'Housing', 'Creature comforts', 'Automobiles' and 'Air travel'. Complete the mind map by adding details relevant to each of these headings.
- 4 Apart from motor cars, what else contributed to the development of surfing in Australia?
- 5 List the sports that Australians achieved success in during the 1950s and 1960s.
- 6 Explain why sport was more accessible to Australians in the post-World War II period.

Understanding and analysing

- 7 Design a table with the heading 'Impacts of post-World War II developments on Australian society', with two columns entitled 'Cause' and 'Effect'. Note how each of the following 'causes' had an 'effect' on Australian society after World War II: cheap housing loans,

baby boom, increased migration, modern electrical appliances, supermarkets, mass produced motor vehicles, cheaper air travel.

- 8 What conclusions about Australian society in the 1950s and early 1960s can be drawn from the knowledge that many people still had their milk delivered by horse and cart?

Evaluating

- 9 Why do you think that many Australians associated 'the Australian dream' with owning their own house? Is this still the case today and, if so, is it for the same reason?
- 10 Do you think that the portrayal of the Australian dream in this unit could be considered a stereotype? Use evidence from the text to support your assessment.
- 11 Look at the list of 'causes' in your table from Activity 7.
 - a Which do you think had the most significant impact on Australian society? Explain your answer. Is this cause still relevant today?
 - b Identify three significant developments in technology or types of products that have an influence on Australian society. Explain their impact on modern Australia.

Creating

- 12 Using the information in this unit as a starting point, research the achievements of Australian athletes at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956 and write a front-page newspaper article reporting on their success.