

## *From the Kitchen*

21 October 2009

Here we go again. Another sports season. This time it's racing. Football (all codes) has only just gone. Cricket will be next, interspersed with sailing. Then back around to kicking balls of various shapes. As they currently advertise on ABC radio, "The sport continues; it's just the ball that changes." Oh, I forgot the Australian Open tennis and the Grand Prix. Give me a break!

But a break we won't get.

I think it's wonderful that people get enthusiastic about something – anything: sport, art, films, music, chess, photography ... What I don't understand, or appreciate, is the overkill with previews, analyses, post-mortems (is it dead yet?) and discussions. If these were only in the back sections of the newspapers and on dedicated TV and radio programs, I could avoid them. But they are a part of almost every news bulletin. I have to listen to the inanity while I wait for the weather forecast. As a consequence, I now get most of my news on-line.



I can understand people being interested in hearing descriptions and analysis of a game in progress and even some discussion of what happened and why. But how can you possibly 'preview' a football match or a tennis tournament? Why the fascination with sportspeople's (often sordid) private lives? What bearing does this have on their playing prowess?

It's not only the public and the media that exhibit skewed priorities. Governments seem no better. How can a State government justify paying tens of millions of dollars each year to the owner of a brand of motor racing while cutting the funding (amounting to less than one million) of a non-profit organisation helping homeless people? The (foreign) owner of the Grand Prix is already very rich, yet demands that the government cover any losses of having the race in Melbourne. It's good for the economy, we're told, and a wise investment. True, there is no immediate financial benefit in helping homeless people be less homeless. After all, as Sir Murray Rivers (alter ego of Bryan Dawe) once remarked: "Goodness, gracious! What are all these people doing sleeping out on the streets? Haven't they got homes to go to?"

I'm not anti-sport. I used to swim and run competitively and I can get carried away watching a tennis match between two good players, or a soccer game, or swimming races when I feel inclined to egg on the Australians. But the lives these people live are of no more importance than what Kevin Rudd does when he's not working for me and the other citizens. And film stars – let them entertain me through their acting on screen. Why do their lives need to take on more drama or comedy than those of the characters they play?

That Angelina Jolie is using her money and her notoriety to do good work with people who are struggling, is wonderful and worth reading about. That she is married to this or that actor who used to be married to another actress who is upset about ... is not newsworthy nor worthy of discussion or debate.

Sportspeople used to be regarded as role models, partly because they sacrificed much for their sport. They were unpaid and had to find time between work and family commitments to train and play. What was seen as worthy of emulation was their preparedness to push themselves to the limits of their physical and mental abilities and beyond, in order to improve and to be better than others. Now, most celebrity sportspeople are well paid for what they do,

which confuses that role – what motivates them and what about them is to be emulated by others.

I don't understand fashion (in clothing) either, other than that it can help people feel good about themselves. However, the models who squeeze themselves into clothes are not fit role models for impressionable young girls. On the whole, the examples they pose are disgusting and dangerous, because of the many girls who will make themselves sick trying to look like these unnaturals. And those under-dressed women freezing at the Caulfield Cup while their male partners kept themselves relatively warm in suits? I chose to look for horses in the local forest while my dog raced around, following the scent of rabbits.

Oh, I almost forgot. I am reading a fascinating book, *Celebrity for Dummies*, which contains a chapter on how I can become a rich celebrity author and travel the world and appear on TV interview shows and have my portrait on the cover of *Time* magazine and have journalists and photographers chasing me. I can't wait for the joy that notoriety will bring.