How the play element has changed in Australian football and the consequences of this change on the community

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Abstract

This thesis is a theoretical analysis of the importance of the play element in developing communities and culture, using the Australian Football League (AFL) as my case study. Using the historical observations of Johan Huizinga and combining them with Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital, a theoretical framework has been created to illuminate the importance of play in creating communities. By developing this theory and applying it to the AFL, this analysis highlights how the media and economic fields have transformed ‘play’ into ‘display’, which has changed the way AFL supporters relate to the game and subsequently weakened the AFL community.

In exploring the importance of play in developing communities, the theory extends to discuss the importance of the community in enabling individual citizens to make an active and meaningful contribution to society and therefore reach their full potential, which is linked to the principles and ideals that Australian democracy was committed to at its founding in 1901. Thus it can be argued that the consequences of play’s transformation can indeed impact the community, but also a citizen’s ability to freely and actively engage in society and community life.

The theory developed by combining Huizinga’s historical observations with Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital is used in this thesis as a means of understanding how the play element has changed and what this means for the community. I have chosen Australia’s indigenous game, Australian Football, and in particular, the Australian Football League (AFL) as my case-study and interviewed a number of AFL football club members to illuminate their relationship with the club they support and their club’s community.

While Huizinga has been widely read and written about, until now he has not been defended through Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital. I have provided Huizinga’s observations with a theoretical framework and structure that ensures his observations can be applied to today’s society to understand how and why the play element has changed and the consequences of such change for the community. Furthermore, while the commercialisation of sport (and even the AFL) is not a new study, understanding it through the combined theories of Huizinga and Bourdieu is.

In concluding this research the changing characteristics of the play element became strongly evident, as did the increased role of the economic and media fields in the AFL. The AFL is now, more than ever, dominated by neoliberal and economic rational criteria and as such the interests of the game’s communities appear to be subordinate to commercial interests. As this thesis will illuminate, the community has been undermined by economic capital and made substantially weaker.
Declaration

I, Samuel Keith Duncan, declare the examinable outcome that I am submitting, to the best of my knowledge does not contain material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome,

Or:

- Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the examinable outcome; and
- Where the work is based on joint research or publications I have disclosed the relative contributions of the respective workers or authors

Signed:

Samuel Keith Duncan
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Introduction:

The last 30 years has seen an unprecedented, rapid, almost universal, transformation of elite level sport. For many, today’s professional sporting organisations in Australia and, indeed, around the world, may seem almost unrecognisable to what they knew sport to be in the burgeoning semi-professional era of the 1970’s and 1980’s. No longer are professional athletes simply the best players in their sport, nor are professional sporting clubs simply the home of hopes, dreams and community aspiration. Today, many professional sports athletes are multi-millionaires (or even billionaires), employees of their club, ambassadors or sponsors of corporate organisations and their products and celebrities for society to see, hear and read about through an unquenchably thirsty media.

Likewise, professional sports clubs are no longer the hub of the community or a true representation of their supporters and members. They are now businesses which not only strive to win, but also profit. In fact, winning is considered by most sporting organisations as an essential ingredient to making a profit. Furthermore, professional sporting competitions and leagues are no longer simply where the best players go to play; they are now also an important part of the entertainment industry and a tool for athletes, coaches, administrators, sponsors and the media to make money. Today, sports athletes, coaches and administrators are some of society’s most recognisable, powerful and wealthy citizens.

Certainly it appears the dominance of neo-liberalism across many parts of the world over the past three decades has stretched well beyond the fields of economics, politics and business to now dominate many cultural fields, including sport. This study seeks to explore what this means for society. In particular, this study is concerned with the play element, which, while undeniably at the core of sport, can also be seen as foundational to community, culture, individual development, freedom and, ultimately, democracy.

Throughout this thesis, the important role of play in developing communities will be outlined to provide an understanding of how communities and democracy are weakened if play is corrupted. Using the insightful observations of Dutch historian, Johan Huizinga, and interpreting them through Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital, a theoretical framework has been created to illuminate the importance of play in creating genuine communities. This theoretical framework will then be expounded to discuss the importance of communities in enabling individual citizens to develop, make an active and meaningful contribution to society and reach their full potential. Furthermore, Huizinga’s observations will be utilised to argue that play is foundational to community
and any subsequent change, transformation or corruption of play also impacts a citizen’s ability to freely and actively engage in society and community life.

**From Play to Democracy**

Huizinga’s observations about the importance of play in stimulating community and upholding democracy are illustrated in the following diagram.

The analysis in this thesis is predominantly concerned with the link between play and community, and in particular, seeks to outline how the professionalization of sport has transformed the play element into an item of entertainment, which has subsequently weakened the game’s communities. However, as the above diagram illustrates, if play and community are understood to be foundational to the notions of culture, freedom, individual development and democracy then it is clear that any transformation of the play element, and any subsequent weakening of the community, has ongoing consequences for both the individual and democracy.

In this thesis, Pierre Bourdieu’s theories will be introduced as a means to interpret Huizinga’s analysis of play and understanding how play has changed. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s concepts will help provide Huizinga’s observations with a theoretical framework that can be applied to sport in the twenty first century to illuminate how the dominance of neoliberalism in modern sport can corrupt play and weaken communities.

While the theoretical framework developed in this thesis could be applied to most fields of society to interpret if and how the play element has changed, because play is most recognisable in, and associated with, sport, Australia’s Indigenous game of Australian football is utilised as a case study to explore if and how the play element has transformed over the last 30 years. In particular, the Australian Football League (AFL) is analysed to understand if the play element has changed and how any change has affected the AFL community.

This makes this study an original contribution to knowledge. While Huizinga has been widely read and written about, until now he has not been defended or interpreted though Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital. In providing Huizinga’s insightful observations with a theoretical framework and structure, Huizinga’s observations can be applied to today’s society to understand if and how the
play element has changed. Furthermore, analysing the AFL and its play element in this manner is also an original contribution to knowledge. While the professionalization and commercialisation of sport (and even the AFL) is not a new study, understanding and interpreting it through the observations and theories of Huizinga and Bourdieu, is. In this respect, this analysis is looking at something old in a new way.

This thesis begins with an analysis of the relationship Australians have shared with sport throughout the nation’s history, and illuminates the important role of sport and play in helping create, form and sustain Australia’s communities and culture. Through this analysis, it becomes clear how any change to play can also impact the nation’s communities. To further illustrate this relationship, the next chapters develop the theory underpinning the analysis of the AFL. In this section the concepts of play and community are defined and the relationship between play, community and democracy are highlighted to understand the overall importance of play for society and its citizens. Pierre Bourdieu’s theories are also introduced in this section to provide a theoretical rigour around Huizinga’s observations and defend Huizinga against his critics.

The second part of the thesis expounds this theory through an analysis of the AFL. Throughout this analysis the changing characteristics of the AFL’s play element and its consequences are explored. In particular, this section seeks to understand the influence neoliberalism has had on the AFL, its play element, and importantly, the AFL community.

To enrich this study, the thesis finishes by illuminating the observations of the AFL community to help understand how they relate to, and connect with, the AFL today. In doing so, the AFL’s ability (or inability) to create and sustain genuine communities becomes clear. While the observations of the AFL community are not the central aspect of this study, their insights make a significant contribution to the theory of this thesis and provide a means of enriching Huizinga’s historic observations of play.

To fully understand the effect neoliberalism has had on the AFL’s play element, its clubs and their communities, it is first necessary to understand the relationship between Australians and sport throughout its history and the important role that play has had in developing the culture and communities of Australian society. Chapter one seeks to do exactly that.
Chapter 1: Setting the scene: The importance of play in sport in Australian culture

Australian citizens have always shared a special relationship with sport. What is now often described as a national obsession with sport began as a pastime for men and women who wanted to maintain a certain level of fitness, or who enjoyed coming together with other citizens to participate in a free and vigorous activity. Sport and sporting clubs spawned in the early days of Australian settlement and developed into a cornerstone of local communities—whereby citizens found a form of identity through the games they played, the team they followed and the club they were part of. Indeed, these clubs were created by the people as an expression of their passion and as such, they were considered the spiritual home of the community.

Throughout Australia’s history, sport has been linked to the formation, growth and vibrancy of Australian communities and as such has defined and shaped Australia’s culture. In many instances, sport has stimulated and defined Australia’s evolving position on the world stage. Furthermore, it has acted as an image of the Australian ‘way of life’, helping Australians define their national identity and relate to their fellow citizens—both on a national and community level. Indeed many Australian historians have observed that sport has not only reflected the Australian identity, but has also helped shape the Australian character. As Alomes commented in his study of Australian sport, “sport brought a sense of shared Australianness.”

There have been many examples of play, games and sport stimulating the community and defining Australian culture that date back to the early years of the nineteenth century. These examples highlight the integral role sport has had in shaping Australia’s democracy by enabling citizens to come together to participate in and enjoy something they created and felt genuine ownership of. Australian sports, events and sporting clubs are the creation of the Australian people and as such sport is moulded in the Australian way of life, the community, spirit and identity. It is inextricably engrained in the culture of Australia. Perhaps the best way to highlight this is by discussing the powerful role of sport and sporting events in stimulating community activity throughout Australia’s history—in particular the Melbourne Cup, the 1983 America’s Cup and the creation and development of Australia’s Indigenous game—Australian football.

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1 Alomes, S, A nation at last?: the changing character of Australian nationalism 1880-1988, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, N.S.W., 1988, p. 16
The Melbourne Cup

Few sporting events around the world have captured the imagination of a nation quite like the Melbourne Cup has in Australia. The famous 3200m handicap horserace that now attracts the attention of leading horse racing enthusiasts from around the world is widely known in Australia as ‘the race that stops the nation’ as millions of Australians stop to experience a horse race that has become not only part of Australia’s culture, but indeed, helped create it.

The first Melbourne Cup was run on Thursday 7th November, 1861 in front of an estimated 4,000 men, women and children. Crowds were highly sought after by event organisers who would utilise the gate receipts to maintain the race course, upgrade training facilities and create new events. As such, large racing events such as the Melbourne Cup were always promoted to generate interest and encourage men, woman and children to attend the races, together. In the early years of the Melbourne Cup, most of the horses were locally owned and trained, with many racegoers sharing a friendship or association with a horse’s owners, trainer or even jockey. The crowd grew to 7,000 for the 1862 Melbourne Cup and by 1876 the attendance had swelled to 75,000 as the ‘race that stops the nation’ developed into a national, cultural event.

As Richard Cashman notes in his chapter, ‘Australian Sport and Culture before Federation,’ the Melbourne Cup, as with horseracing in general, quickly became an expression of the spirit of Melbourne. Indeed the very design of the race reflected the egalitarian values and way of life of the Australian people. As the nation’s most famous race, the Melbourne Cup is not contested by the best horses in the country, while handicapping is designed to achieve an equality of opportunity.

As John O’Hara commented:

“The real importance of the Melbourne Cup is to be found in what it symbolises. The inherent uncertainty of the race and its promotion of the concept of equality of opportunity symbolised colonial Australia.”

Horse racing was also egalitarian in its accessibility, with most Australian racetracks open, vast and free. As early as 1865, Melbourne Cup day was a half day holiday in Melbourne for public servants

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4 The History of the Melbourne Cup, online
7 Cashman, R., pp. 24-25
and bank officials. In 1873, the Victorian Government declared Melbourne Cup day a full day public holiday for Melbourne and most parts of Victoria. Two years later, the race was held on the first Tuesday of November for the first time, something which is now part of tradition. For Victorians, and in particular those who live in metropolitan Melbourne, the Melbourne Cup has developed into a carnival, spread over eight days, including four separate race meets, with usually 60,000 – 100,000 people attending each day of the carnival. The record Melbourne Cup crowd was set in 2003 when 122,736 people saw Makybe Diva win her first of three successive Melbourne Cups.

For those who don’t attend the Melbourne Cup, the day is often spent with family and friends enjoying a barbeque or watching the races on television. Others, particularly those in rural areas, might attend a country race meet in their local region to celebrate the day. Regardless of where Australians spend Melbourne Cup day, it is tradition for most to enjoy a small wager on the race. In the year 2000, over 80 per cent of Australian adults placed a bet on the Melbourne Cup, with most (of not all) stopping later in the day to watch or listen to the race.

Australia’s fascination with the Melbourne Cup has been captured in other cultural forms such as film, literature and, more specifically, poetry. In 1865, Adam Lindsay Gordon wrote a verse about the Melbourne Cup in which the Melbourne Cup winner was called Tim Whiffler. Two years later, Gordon’s fictional verse became reality when two horses called Tim Whiffler ran in the Melbourne Cup. To distinguish between the two horses, one was referred to as ‘Sydney’ Tim Whiffler and the other ‘Melbourne’ Tim Whiffler. ‘Sydney’ Tim Whiffler won the Cup. In 1986, writer Vivienne McCredie wrote A Race That Stops the Nation to describe in verse the unique ability of Australia’s most famous horse race to capture the hearts and minds of the Australian public.

Yet the hope, excitement, fun and enjoyment the Melbourne Cup has provided Australian citizens since it was first run in 1861 has not been restricted to the race itself. Some of the most captivating cultural stories that have become part of Australian cultural folklore are about the horses which have competed in, and won, the Melbourne Cup – none more so than Australia’s most famous horse, Phar Lap. Phar Lap won the Melbourne Cup in 1930 in the midst of his reign as the country’s

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8 'The History of the Melbourne Cup', online
9 'The History of the Melbourne Cup', online
11 Clarke, M., (ed), Poems by Adam Lindsay Gordon, Pub One Info, 2010, p. 51
13 McCredie, V., The Race That Stops the Nation: And other verses, Hydro Ideas, 2009, p.5
best horse at a time when Australian citizens were searching for hope and optimism during the Great Depression. At his best, Phar Lap was considered by many to be unbeatable and as Australians flocked to the races to see their champion win and have a flutter on ‘a sure thing’, he soon became ‘the people’s champion’ – a sign and symbol of hope and joy.  

When he first arrived in Australia from New Zealand, Phar Lap was described as awkward and gangly, but after a mediocre start to his career, he developed into a national icon, winning 37 races – including 14 in a row in 1931. Many experts claim that better horses may have competed in Australia after Phar Lap; however few argue about the social and cultural impact he had. As already mentioned, Phar Lap’s dominance came at the time when the Australian economy was in decline, with many Australians unemployed and battling to support their families. There were shortages of food and essential services and citizens carried little hope that the economy would improve or prosper. Phar Lap provided the grass roots community with an opportunity to celebrate something together – something which they could be part of and talk about throughout the week with wonderment and amazement. As such, he became far more than just a winning race horse – he was a symbol of hope and optimism, who helped people struggle through their week and look forward to the weekend. He enabled people to feel better, smile, laugh and even win a little extra money at the race track.  

Phar Lap ended his career in America, where he died in mysterious circumstances on April 5 1932. To this day the cause of his death is the subject of much speculation. On the night of his death, his strapper Tommy Woodcock found him in severe pain before he haemorrhaged and died. Vet results indicated Phar Lap died of an acute bacterial gastroenteritis, however many have speculated he was poisoned. The news of his death was met with enormous sadness in Australia and Phar Lap has been celebrated as an Australian cultural icon ever since, so much so that movies and songs have been written about him. He has also featured on Australian stamps and is even included on Australia’s citizenship test. His mounted hide is displayed at the ‘Melbourne Museum,’ his skeleton

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15 Phar Lap Story, online  
16 Phar Lap Story, online  
18 The Phar Lap Story, online  
19 Armstrong, G., Thompson, P., Melbourne Cup, 1930: How Phar Lap won Australia’s greatest race, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 2005, p. 74  
20 Armstrong, G., Thompson, P., Melbourne Cup, 1930, 2005, p. 80  
21 See image of stamp online at [http://www.australianstamp.com/images/large/0012460.jpg](http://www.australianstamp.com/images/large/0012460.jpg)
at the ‘Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa’ and his heart at the ‘National Museum of Australia’ in Canberra.  

It is true that the Melbourne Cup has developed and changed somewhat from what it was at its humble beginning in 1861. In 2013 the world’s best two mile handicap horses competed for over AUD6.5 million—a far cry from the modest prize of 710 gold sovereigns cash and a hand beaten gold watch on offer for the winner of the first Melbourne Cup.  

It is also true, that few horses (if any) have resonated with the Australian public as much as Phar Lap did. While some have come close, Phar Lap’s cultural and community impact, as well as his ability to help define a nation’s identity with hope and optimism at a time of genuine hardship, is unique to horse racing and probably of most sports.

However, another example of Australia’s culture and identity culminating in a national community celebration through a sporting event took place in the form of a yacht race some 51 years after Phar Lap won his last race—the 1983 America’s Cup.

**1983 America’s Cup**

Australia’s triumph in the 1983 America’s Cup was, in many ways, a triumph of Australian character. An Australian syndicate representing the Royal Perth Yacht Club entered the Australia II, skippered by John Bertrand and owned by Alan Bond. The defending champion, Liberty was skippered by Dennis Conner of the New York Yacht Club. The New York Yacht Club had defended their title as America’s Cup champion for an extraordinary 132 years—the longest winning streak in sporting history.  

Australia II gained extensive media attention in the lead up to the America’s Cup competition and was billed as one of the biggest threats to Liberty’s title defence. Of particular interest to the US media and sailing enthusiasts was the revolutionary ‘winged keel’ of the Australian yacht, which the New York Yacht Club claimed was illegal, stating the ‘winged keel boat’ was not a legal 12 metre yacht, nor was it designed by Australians. Instead, they argued, it was the work of Dutch engineers and designed in the Netherlands. America’s Cup rules stipulated that the design and manufacturing of the vessel had to take place in the country the boat was representing—in this case, Australia.  

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22 Armstrong, G., Thompson, P., *Melbourne Cup, 1930*, 2005, p. 84


Nevertheless, amongst much controversy and media attention the boat was ruled legal, with Alan Bond defiantly stating, “Let’s show the world!” This very comment suggests that Australia sees sport as a legitimate platform to capture the attention of the rest of the world.

The Australians went on to win their way through to the America’s Cup final where they met the defending champions, Liberty. The New York yacht won the first and second races of the best of seven race finals series by significant margins, however, the Australians fought back with considerable grit to win the third, fifth and sixth races. It was the first time in America’s Cup history that the America’s Cup final had gone beyond the fifth race.

In the lead up to the seventh race on September 26th 1983, much of Australia had been swept up in the story and excitement of Australia II with many Australian citizens gathering with their family and friends to cheer the Australian team. The final proved to be a fierce contest between two proud and skilful teams, however it was Australia II who crossed the finishing line first, becoming the first successful challenger in 132 years. The reaction in Australia following the Australian team’s triumph was bigger than what many may have expected with people across the country congregating in pubs, clubs, schools and even at work to celebrate their new national heroes. Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, led the national celebration by declaring that “any boss who sacks anyone for not turning up today is a bum.”

As many sporting and cultural historians have observed, Australia II’s triumph meant far more to Australia than simply winning a yacht race. The 1983 victory came at a time when Australia – still a relatively young nation – was still trying to forge an identity on the world stage. The 1983 America’s Cup victory was characterised by some of the most distinct features Australians believe to define their nation. It was as a victory characterised with a never give in, fighting attitude, innovation and skill. Furthermore, for many, it was a symbol and sign of confidence and belief in the quality of their nation and culture.

As Richard Cashman writes in his chapter The Imaginary Grandstand:

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27 Bertrand J., and Robinson P., Born to win, 1985, p. 14
28 Bertrand j., and Robinson P., Born to win, 1985, p. 48
“Australia gloried in this success because it demonstrated that an inventive underdog could topple the technology and might of the United States, which had not once lost the cup in 132 years.”

The fact that Australia had triumphed over the ‘mighty’ Americans was, for many, a sign that their young country was growing into a legitimate and maturing ‘world player’. Likewise, it gave many Australians a sense of pride in their innovative, fighting, ambitious culture, which was maturing to match, and even succeed, against the best in the world.

In doing so, the 1983 America’s Cup had become an important story in understanding the culture of the Australian people. It had brought a nation of people together to witness a triumph many believed mirrored the nation’s culture and in doing so, Australians felt a genuine and real ownership of the Australia II story. As this thesis will argue, throughout Australia’s history, it has been because play has developed from the grass roots and enabled citizens to come together to be ‘free’ with their fellow citizens, that it is such an important feature of Australian communities and culture. While this will be analysed through the various theories and historical observations outlined in the following chapters, in a practical sense, the creation and development of games from the grass roots and subsequent spawning of sports clubs, communities and culture is best highlighted by discussing the history of Australia’s native game – Australian football.

**Australian football**

Perhaps there has not been an item of play, a game or a sport that has helped create, shape and bind Australian communities and culture quite like Australian football.

While there are varying theories about exactly where and when the first forms of ‘football’ were played in Australia, the game of ‘Australian Rules football’ was invented and first played in Melbourne in 1858. Thomas Wentworth Wills published a letter in *Bell’s Life in Victoria* on the 10th July, 1858, calling for a ‘football club, a rifle club, or other athletic pursuits’ to keep cricketers fit, healthy, occupied and active during Melbourne’s winter months.

Letter by Tom Wills, published in *Bell’s Life in Victoria* on July 10, 1858:

“Dear Sir,

Now that cricket has been put aside for some few months to come, and cricketers have assumed somewhat of a chrysalis nature (for the time being only, it is true), but at length

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29 Cashman, R., ‘The Imaginary Grandstand’, 2011, p. 54
again will burst forth in all their varied hues, rather than allow this state of torpor to creep over them and stifle their now supple limbs, why cannot they, I say, form a football club, and form a committee of three or more to draw up a code of laws?

If a club of this sort was got up, it would be of vast benefit to any cricket ground to be trampled upon, and would make the turf firm and durable, besides which it would help those who are inclined to become stout and having their joints encased in useless superabundant flesh. If it were not possible to form a football club, why should these young men who have adopted this new country as their motherland — why, I say, do not they form themselves into a rifle club, so at any date they may be some day called upon to aid their adopted land against a tyrant who may sometime pop upon us when we least expect a foe at our own very doors. Surely our young cricketers are not afraid of a crack of a rifle when they face so courageously the leather sphere, and it would disgrace no one to learn in time to defend his country and hearth. A firm heart and a steady hand and a quick eye are all that are requisite, and with practice all these may be attained.

Trusting that someone will take up this matter and form either of the above clubs, or at any rate some athletic games, I remain, Yours Truly, T.W Wills."

Nearly one month after the above letter was published, on the 7th of August 1859, up to 80 men played what is often referred to as the first game of Australian Rules football in the parklands surrounding the Melbourne Cricket Ground, umpired by Tom Wills. The game was played over three afternoons on a field with the goal posts approximately 500 metres apart and the two competing teams, Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College, each fielded teams of 40 players. On each of the days the game was played, the contest was stopped at dark, and after the third day only one goal, from Scotch College, had been scored. The rules required the winner to score twice, so the match was deemed a draw.

Other, ‘experimental games’ were played in Melbourne and even Tasmania in 1858, with the rules continuing to evolve and develop through the advice and guidance of those who played the game. On the 17th May, 1959 the very first set of rules for playing ‘Australian football’ was developed. The Melbourne Football Club rules were established at the Parade Hotel in East Richmond, by Thomas Wills, William Hammersley, J.B Thompson, Thomas Smith, J. Sewell, Alex Bruce and T. Buttersworth

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and were widely distributed to community groups, local hotels and individuals who had quickly taken to playing the game.32

Many Australian football historians and cultural observers have noted that because Australian football was first played in Australia, by Australians, the first laws of the game and indeed the way the game was played reflected the characteristics of the Australian people. Australian football’s Latin motto, *Populi Ludos Populo* suggests exactly that—translated it means ‘the game of the people, for the people.’33 It was played with a spirit, passion, enthusiasm and vibrancy that reflected the ownership they had of the game and the pride they felt from representing their team and community. Indeed it is believed that when proposing a pastime for cricketers to play in Australia’s winter months, Wills, who was schooled in England, considered playing a form of rugby. However, it is believed he felt that rugby’s ‘offside’ rules would not suit players older than school boys, or the drier Australian conditions. Instead he famously declared, “No, we shall have a game of our own.”34

In fact, some Australian cultural theorists such as Flanagan, Poulter and Hutchison have suggested that, when creating Australian football and designing its rules, Wills was influenced by the Indigenous game of *Marngrook*.35 *Marngrook* was a football game played by Indigenous Australians, involving ‘large numbers of players punt-kicking and catching a stuffed ball.’ The earliest anecdotal account of *Marngrook* was in 1841, when William Thomas, a Protector of Aborigines in Victoria, claimed that he witnessed a group of Aborigines playing the game east of Melbourne.

“The men and boys joyfully assemble when this game is to be played. One makes a ball of possum skin, somewhat elastic, but firm and strong...The players of this game do not throw the ball as a white man might do, but drop it and at the same time kicks it with his foot, using the instep for this purpose...The tallest men have the best chance in this game...Some of them will leap as high as five feet from the ground to catch the ball. The person who secures the ball kicks it...This continues for hours and the natives never seem to tire of the exercise.”36

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33 Orive, S., *Victorian rules : Populi Ludos Populo - the game of the people for the people*, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, 1996
36 Smyth, R.B., *The aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania compiled from various sources for the government of Victoria*, Ferres, Melbourne, 1978, p. 176
Many of the characteristics described by Thomas were reflected in the first games of Australian Rules football – they are still a prominent part in the game today. In particular, historical observations of ‘playing on large ovals for long hours’ was also a distinct characteristic of the first games of Australian football.\textsuperscript{37} Indeed, Australian football is still played on relatively large ovals.

The fact that Wills was raised in Victoria’s western district, just outside of Moyston, and often played with Indigenous Australian children, led to historians such as Martin Flanagan postulating that Australian football grew out of the Indigenous game of \textit{Marngrook}. Flanagan contended that so close was the Wills family to the local indigenous community that Thomas Wills was fluent in the local indigenous dialect. Flanagan argued that it was likely that when he developed the game and designed the rules for Australian football, Wills was inspired by the game he played as a child.\textsuperscript{38}

AFL Historian, Col Hutchison, supported Flanagan’s claims in 1998 when he wrote:

“While playing as a child with aboriginal children in this area (Moyston) he (Tom Wills) developed a game which he later utilised in the formation of Australian Football.”\textsuperscript{39}

If the game of Australian Rules football did develop from the indigenous game of \textit{Marngrook}, it truly would make Australian football Australia’s native game; however, it should be noted that many other sports historians such as Hibbins, rejected these claims, describing them as fanciful and an ‘emotional belief’ lacking ‘any intellectual credibility.’ Instead, she contended that Australian football was inspired by an array of British games such as rugby and Irish football, culminating into a game appropriate for, and reflective of, the Australian character in the 1850’s.\textsuperscript{40}

In truth, perhaps English school football (rugby), Irish football and \textit{Marngrook} all influenced the foundations of Australian football. Regardless, the first set of rules, developed in 1859 stipulated:

1. The distance between the goal posts shall be decided upon by the captains of the sides playing.
2. The captains on each side shall toss for choice of goal. The side losing the toss has the kick-off from the centre-point between the goals.
3. The goal must be kicked fairly between the posts without touching either of them or a portion of the person of any player of either side.

\textsuperscript{37} Cashman, R., ‘Australian Sport and Culture before Federation’, 2011, p. 30
\textsuperscript{38} Flanagan, M., \textit{The Call} 1998, p. 8
\textsuperscript{39} As written on the plaque of the Thomas Wills monument in Moyston, donated by the Australian Football League in 1998
\textsuperscript{40} Weston, J., \textit{The Australian Game of Football}, Slattery Media Group, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 76
4. The game shall be played between the space of not more than 200 yards wide, the same to be measured equally on each side of the line drawn through the centre of the two goals and two posts to be called the ‘kick off points’ shall be erected at a distance of 200 yards on each side of the goal posts at both ends and in a straight line with them.

5. In case the ball is kicked behind the goals, anyone of the side whose goal it is kicked, may bring it back 20 yards in front of any portion of the space between the kick-off posts and shall kick it as nearly as possible in the line of the opposition goal.

6. Any player catching the ball directly from the boot may call ‘mark.’ He then has a free kick. No players from the opposite side being allowed to come into the spot marked.

7. Tripping and pushing are both allowed but no hacking when any player is in rapid motion or in possession of the ball except for the case provided by rule 6.

8. The ball may only be taken in hand only when caught from the boot or on the hop. In no case shall it be lifted from the ground.

9. When the ball goes out of bounds (the same being indicated by a row of posts) it shall be brought back to the point where it crossed the boundary line and thrown in right angles with that line.

10. The ball while in play may under no circumstances be thrown.\textsuperscript{41}

These rules continually changed and evolved over the following decades, however, many cultural and sporting historians have commented on the first rules of Australian football and their reflection of the Australian (and in particular, Melbourne) way of life in the 1850’s. One such historian, Richard Cashman, states that the game’s rules were an expression of Victoria’s ‘brash self-confidence,’ and ‘larrikinism’ evident in the 1850’s,\textsuperscript{42} while Bill Murray, in his introduction of Football: A History of the World Game, notes that Australian football, in its make-up and rules, maintained a greater degree of spontaneity than most other football codes, enabling players to play with a flair and freedom not seen in games with more restrictive rules.\textsuperscript{43} Margaret Lindsay supported this view when she stated:

“When bourgeois society organised male physicality for its particular purposes, Australia and Australian football somehow escaped...perhaps because of the off-centre immaturity of Australian capitalism at the time.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41} Weston, J., The Australian Game of Football, 2008, p. 14
\textsuperscript{42} Cashman, R., ‘Australian Sport and Culture before Federation’, 2011, p. 29
\textsuperscript{44} Lindsay, M., “Taking the Joke Too Far and Footballers’ Shorts”, in Hemphill, D., and Symonds, C., (eds), Gender, Sexuality and Sport: A Dangerous Mix, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2002, p. 66
She went on to describe the image of Australian football as one of “extraordinary grace and beauty as well as ferocity and determination. It is dangerously, beautifully wild — rollicking, rolling, airborne, swerving, twisting.”

Indeed the game, like Australia itself, was young, free and still developing, which, in many aspects of football (and life) led to an unrefined, loose and sometimes brash carelessness. Even the ovals, on which the games were played, were without a specific set of dimensions (something that is still the case today). Some of the larger grounds were twice the size of rugby and soccer pitches however, the general consensus among those who played and watched the game was that if a ground was ‘oval enough’ and ‘big enough,’ then a game of Australian football could be played.

Importantly, because Australian football was predominantly played in parks, it was almost completely free — enabling the community to enjoy playing and watching the game for free. As Blainey commented, this encouraged the people to further embrace their game:

“Australian football in its early years was a completely free sport. If a few pence had been charged for admission, football might not so quickly have become a sport for the people. The lack of grandstands and embankments did not much matter, because the contour of the sloping ground at Yarra Park enabled large crowds to view a match.”

Women, as much as men, became part of the Australian football culture from as early as the 1850’s. Unlike with many other sports, it was considered completely acceptable for women to be as fanatical about the game as men. Many historians, including Hess and McCalman, have suggested that this further reflects Australian football as the game of and for the people — all people. Because the game was founded from the grass roots, it reflected the way of life, values and characteristics of the whole community — including women. Thus, women felt ownership of the game as much as men; were included in the game’s development; and could relate to the spirit in which the game was played.

The game’s popularity grew substantially in the 1860’s, 1870’s and 1880’s, with many suburban clubs forming as a result of the passion and enthusiasm of the people. Indeed the rapid growth in popularity of the game and spawning of football clubs in Victoria mirrored the growth in suburban and regional settlements. In most instances, the football club was created by the people as an

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45 Lindsay, M., ‘Taking the Joke Too Far’, 2002, p. 65
46 Lindsay, M., ‘Taking the Joke Too Far’, 2002, p. 66
47 Blainey, G., A Game of Our Own, 1990, pp. 64-65
expression of their spirit and culture. From the players who played and the supporters who barracked, to the colours, nickname and motto of the club — it was created by the grass roots as a representation of the people and as such, the football club became the home and central hub of the community.

For example, the Essendon Football Club was formed sometime between 1871 and 1873 by the McCracken family — a well-known brewery family in the Essendon area whose Ascot Vale property hosted a team of local junior players. As the owner of several city hotels, particularly in the Essendon area, Robert McCracken was an integral part of the community. As city hotels were very much a meeting point for locals in Melbourne, McCracken soon learnt of the passion and enthusiasm the Essendon community had for the game of Australian football and set about using his influence in the community to establish a football club to represent his local community. McCracken was the founder and first president of the Essendon Football Club and his son Alex, was Essendon’s first secretary.49

Essendon played its first matches at Kent Street Oval in Ascot Vale, which was known by locals as ‘McCracken’s Paddock,’ before moving to Flemington Hill to play on the Essendon Cricket Ground. By playing their ‘home games’ in and around the Essendon area, the players and supporters could walk down to their local ground and meet in the club rooms afterwards to discuss the happenings of the day’s football match as well as other non-football community matters. As such, it quickly became an important part of the community. 50

However, in 1881 the City of Essendon Mayor, James Taylor, declared that the Essendon Cricket Ground was ‘to be suitable only for the gentleman’s game of cricket’ and as such, the Essendon Football Club was forced to move to East Melbourne. 51 The move was met with hostility from the Essendon community who felt their local team was taken away from them. Essendon’s move to East Melbourne led to the creation of another Essendon football team in 1900 — the Essendon A’s, who played in a lesser competition to Essendon’s original team. In 1922 the expansion of the Jolimont railway lines through the East Melbourne Cricket Ground meant that the Essendon Football Club was looking for a new home again. The Essendon City Council, which had forced them to abandon the Essendon area some 41 years earlier, offered the club 12,000 pounds to return to Essendon and play on the Essendon Cricket Oval, known as ‘Windy Hill.’ The 12,000 pounds was spent on upgrading the

50 Essendon Football Club, Club History, online September 10, 2012
scoreboard, building a new grand stand for local supporters and re-fencing the oval. In the early 20th century, while money was an essential and undeniable part of the game, it was not a dominating influence—certainly not to the extent that it is today.\textsuperscript{52}

The Essendon Football Club returned to the Essendon Cricket Ground in time for the 1922 season and played their home games there until 1991.\textsuperscript{53} At the end of the 2013 season, Essendon moved its headquarters from Windy Hill to a new, ‘state of the art’ facility in Tullamarine where the team will train and prepare for each weekend’s match in 2014 and beyond.

In many ways, the Essendon Football Club has always represented the Essendon community. Their knickname, ‘The Bombers’ was created in the 1940’s during the war years due to Windy Hill’s close proximity to the Essendon Aerodrome. Likewise, Essendon’s motto of ‘\textit{Sauviter in Modo, Fortiter in Re}’ (gentle in manner, resolute in execution) was created by the Essendon community as a statement about the culture of their community and as a means of defining the way they hoped to ‘play.’\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, at the time of the Essendon Football Club’s founding, the Essendon community was predominantly protestant in faith, which became one of the defining features of the football club’s playing group, coaching staff, administration and even supporter base. This characteristic remained a continuing feature of the club until Kevin Sheedy, a catholic, was appointed as ‘head coach’ in 1981 — the first ‘catholic’ coach the football club had had in its 110 year history.\textsuperscript{55}

Similarly, it is believed that the North Melbourne Football Club was established by the cricketers of the St Mary’s Church of England Cricket Club who wanted to keep themselves fit over the winter months. The colours of the St Mary’s cricket club – blue and white – are still reflected in the North Melbourne Football Club’s playing uniform today.\textsuperscript{56} The North Melbourne Football Club, while officially known as the Kangaroos, is often referred to as the ‘Shinboners.’ While the origins of the nickname remain unknown, many historians have suggested that the name arose after some North Melbourne players targeted the shin bones of opposition players during matches. Other historians

\textsuperscript{53} Maplestone, M., \textit{Flying Higher}, 1996, p. 40
\textsuperscript{54} Hutchison, C., ‘How the teams \textit{go} their names’, in Ross, J., (ed), \textit{100 Years of Australian Football 1897-1996: The Complete Story of the AFL, All the Big Stories, All the Great Pictures, All the Champions, Every AFL Season Reported}, Viking, Ringwood, 1996, p. 159
\textsuperscript{55} Essendon Football Club, \textit{Club History}, online, September 10, 2012
\textsuperscript{56} Rickard, J., \textit{An assemblage of decent men and women: a history of the Anglican parish of St Mary’s North Melbourne 1853-2000}, St Mary’s Anglican Church, North Melbourne, 2008, pp. 4-5
have claimed that the term was a reflection of local butchers showing their support for North Melbourne by dressing up beef leg bones in the club colours of blue and white. 57

Regardless of the competing claims, it seems the ‘Shinboner’ name was developed in relation to the way the team played Australian football or the way their community supported their club, which has been adopted by modern day supporters to describe their team’s culture.

“The clubs with bigger memberships, their supporters only touch their colours, but at North we have the Shinboner spirit. North people can touch that spirit – they are the real Shinboners, they are the club.”58

Essendon and North Melbourne are but just two examples of clubs that were created by their local community to represent the passion and up-rising of the people. In 1877 the South Australian Football Association was formed and three days later, the Victorian Football Association (VFA) was founded, which consisted of teams from Albert Park, Hotham, Inglewood, Melbourne, Rochester and St Kilda. Six of these clubs were from country Victoria. 59 The popularity of the game continued to grow as more teams entered the VFA competition, with crowds flocking to watch their local teams play. In 1886 a game between Geelong and South Melbourne drew a record crowd of 34,121 fans who congregated to watch the two teams compete to determine who would be announced as the competition’s premiers after both teams finished the season undefeated. Two trains bought thousands of supporters from Geelong and after they won the contest 4.19 to 1.5, the jubilant Geelong fans lined Clarendon Street in South Melbourne to cheer their players as they departed Melbourne for their home town.60

While the VFA continued to prosper and draw large crowds to each weekend’s matches, some senior VFA clubs were concerned with the unevenness of the competition and proposed a breakaway league consisting of the best performed VFA clubs and other clubs of their choosing. On October 2 1896 representatives from six VFA clubs held a meeting at Buxton’s Art Gallery in Collins Street Melbourne to form the Victorian Football League (VFL), which began at the start of the 1897 season and consisted of the Collingwood, Essendon, Fitzroy, Geelong, Melbourne and South Melbourne Football Clubs. Carlton and St Kilda were also invited to join the VFL by the other six teams to make

58 Joseph R., North Melbourne Football Club Best and Fairest, speech, October 1, 1996
60 Blainey, G., A Game of Our Own, 1990, pp. 74-75
it an eight team competition, which has grown, developed and evolved into the biggest football code in Australia, the fourth most attended sport in the world and a multi-billion dollar industry.61

While the evolution of the VFL will be discussed in following chapters, what is clear from the above discussion is that the game of Australian football was developed by the people, for the people and because of the people. The founding football clubs of the VFA and other regional competitions in the late 19th century were based on the passion of the players, their supporters and the community.

**Australian Sport in other Australian cultural forms**

Because of the game’s grass roots founding and its strong resonance with the Australian community, Australian Rules is also a prominent feature among other cultural forms such as film, music and literature. Plays such as *And the Big Men Fly* (1963), *Goodbye Ted* (1975), *The Club* (1977) and *The Royboys* (1987) are based on fictitious events, characters and themes relating to Australian football. *The Royboys* explored the threat of commercialisation for the game – a theme central to the research of this thesis. The narrative of the play tells the story of a battling working class family who barrack for the Fitzroy Football Club. Together they struggle to save their football club from being renamed ‘Fitzaki’ and relocated to Japan.62 While the stage show plays on exaggeration, as the following chapters of this thesis show, the fictitious play mirrored reality. Some ten years after the play was first performed, the real Fitzroy Football Club was forced to merge with, and relocated to, Brisbane due to the club’s inability to meet its financial and commercial obligations.

Australian football has also become part of Australian popular culture, with songs such as *Up There Cazaly*, *One Day in September* and *Aussie Rules I Thank You* written about footballers, football events and football moments. Furthermore, mainstream artists also make reference to Australian football in songs such as *Leaps and Bounds* (Paul Kelly), which describes the excitement of walking to the Melbourne Cricket Ground to watch a game of football at the beginning of the football season. Likewise, Australian football is regularly referred to in mainstream Australian TV dramas such as *Packed to the Rafters* and *Neighbours* as a means of connecting a character to the audience or to help express the character’s personality, lifestyle and interests.

The game of Australian Rules football also provides a way of people connecting in the workforce. In work offices around Australia, workers will most often partake in an office ‘footy tipping’ competition where participants will nominate which teams they think will win over the weekend. Office footy tipping is considered a staple part of the ‘office environment’ in Australia.

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The above analysis highlights the significance of sport, and in particular Australian football, in Australia’s history – both in helping create and bind communities and its culture. The unique relationship that Australian football has had with the people who created and developed the game was based upon the fact that it was built, and therefore owned, by the people. Those who played the game, founded the clubs and supported the teams felt a genuine part of it. Thus the game developed a strong representation in almost all forms of Australian culture.

As this thesis will highlight, while the game of Australian football at the elite level of the Australian Football League (AFL) has never been more popular or had a stronger presence in the Australian cultural landscape, the relationship the people share with the game is somewhat different to what is described above. The play element in the AFL has been transformed, the game has been commercialised, and most importantly, the people no longer have genuine ownership of it. What this means for the community is also explored throughout this thesis.

However, before we can understand the consequences of the game’s transformation we must first attempt to determine how and why the game and its play element changed. To do this we must understand how the cultural landscape of today is different to when the first game of Australian Rules football was played in 1858.

The following chapter attempts to do this by highlighting the influence of neoliberalism – often described as the most significant political and cultural philosophy of the modern era – and its impact on the Australian ‘way of life’, including the Australian Football League (AFL).
Chapter 2: An introduction to the theoretical model: The
AFL in the age of Neoliberalism

The rise and rise of neoliberalism

The dominance of neoliberal policy in Australia over the last three decades has stretched well beyond the boundaries of economics, politics and business and is now one of the most prominent and defining features of Australian culture. The political philosophy, which says that ‘money and markets can always do everything better than governments, bureaucracies and the law’ has profoundly affected the way we consume and interact with our culture and, indeed, each other.

The transformation in the Australian political and economic setting over the last three decades is seen more broadly as the triumph of ‘economic rationalism’ – the doctrine which states that to more rationally organize society all social forms and all social relations should be based on market principles and be subject to market imperatives. As such, new means and methods of making money have spawned in almost all forms and facets of Australian life – culture included.

While most forms of Australian culture are now imbedded in neoliberal and economic rational decision making, of particular interest to this study is the corporatization of sport. It is impossible to discuss the transformation of play, the consumption of sport and the commodification of the AFL brand without acknowledging the backdrop of Australia’s political transformation through the triumph of neoliberalism. The ideological shift to the right that domestic politics leapt towards in the 1980’s is by no means unique to Australia – indeed it was mirrored in various measures across the western world, led by the United States and the United Kingdom. Likewise, the subsequent commodification of play in the AFL merely mirrors the popularization of culture across the western world, and serves to highlight the domination of the market in shaping and defining our relationship with culture.

As the following chapters will highlight, our relationship with play in the AFL is increasingly determined by how it is packaged by the AFL and the media and by how we consume and engage with the AFL brand. At the heart of this study is the question of what this means for our communities. How has the domination of the market, the commodification of our culture and commercialization of play in the AFL affected the way we interact with each other? And does this

have any implications for the democratic ideals that Australia was committed to at its founding in 1901?

We cannot truly understand any of these questions without considering the key political and market ideology that has shaped our way of life and transformed our culture over the last three decades — neoliberalism.

**Neoliberalism in the political and cultural setting of the West – the 1970’s and 1980’s**

Neoliberalism came to prominence in the late 1970’s in response to stagnating economic growth, stagflation and increasing government budget deficits. After a generation of Keynesian economic rule based on macro-economic policy and the importance of government in stimulating economic activity and growth, Western leaders began placing a greater emphasis on micro-economic reform and market based imperatives, which fundamentally underline the characteristics of neoliberalism. 65

At the core of the neoliberal agenda is the unwavering belief that, when able to act freely and without government interference, the market will be self-regulating and produce the most efficient, productive and effective economic outcomes, therefore creating higher quality products and services at a more efficient cost. 66 Neoliberalism, claim advocates, is certain to create higher consumer demand, increased profits and, importantly, create employment opportunities. Most neoliberals are steadfastly united in their belief that government spending and interference in the operation of the market should be minimised, while the private sector should be able to act autonomously — producing better and more efficient outcomes than the government ever could. 67

Thus neoliberal governments, in particular Ronald Reagan’s America and Margaret Thatcher’s Britain, began implementing strict neoliberal policy, which, to differing degrees, much of the West followed, including Australia. The dominant features across most neoliberal economies in the 1980’s were increased privatisation, the deregulation of previously government regulated sectors and the reduced role and spending of government in the market. These distinguishing features, according to neoliberalists, were the fundamental cornerstone of ensuring consistent and genuine economic growth. 68

As such, political leaders in countries such as the USA, Great Britain and Australia began flexing their government muscles to privatisate and deregulate public industries, cut taxes, reduce spending on

65 Steger, M., Roy, R., ‘First-wave neoliberalism in the 1980’s: Reaganomics and Thatcherism’, 2010, p. 21
social welfare programs and encourage private sector spending and growth. The two biggest advocates of these strict neoliberal policies were USA President, Ronald Reagan and British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher. While each leader had somewhat different core neoliberal beliefs to the other, both set about transforming the economic and political landscape of their countries that rapidly came to define the West. Importantly, some neoliberal advocates such as Thatcher believed that government spending on social welfare programs were at the heart of economic inefficiency and as such, substantially cut government spending in these areas. What she did keep under government control, she applied strict management techniques and principles taken from the private sector – everything was measured in efficiency, productivity and profits.

It should also be noted that the neoliberal policies of privatisation, deregulation and reduced government spending that defined the transformation of most Western economies in the 1980’s were in opposition to the principles and government agenda that Australia was committed to when shaping democracy at its founding in 1901. In establishing a true and genuine democracy, Australian leaders believed that it was the State that was responsible for ensuring citizens were able to act freely in common with others to enable them to actively strive for a shared and common goal. For them, social welfare programs were fundamentally important in ensuring all citizens had the appropriate access to resources considered necessary to engage and participate freely in community life. Thus they strongly advocated government spending on welfare and the redistribution of wealth to those who needed it most. By doing this, they argued, the benefits would be felt not just by the individual, but for the broader society, which would evolve and develop into real and genuine communities. Indeed this is what Hegel argued as did neo-Hegelian British Idealists who helped shape and define Australia’s commitment to democracy at its founding in 1901.

That is not to say that economies and societies do not and should not evolve and change over time. However, when a distinct transformation and shift in not just a political system, but a way of life, is

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70 Steger, M., Roy, R., ‘First-wave neoliberalism in the 1980’s: Reaganomics and Thatcherism’, 2010, p. 31
implemented with such momentum as was neoliberalism in the 1980’s, is it vitally important to question the consequences of such change. Of particular interest to this study is the impact that the neoliberal way of life has had on society, community, culture, and in particular, play. This will be analysed later in this chapter.

**Neoliberalism and the Global Market in the 1990’s**

If neoliberalism in the 1980’s was characterised by free markets, deregulation, privatisation and imposing markets, the 1990’s were defined by globalisation, free trade and entrepreneurism. 74

Influential ‘centre left’ leaders of the West, such as US President Bill Clinton, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Australian Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, embraced much of the neoliberal reforms and principles established by their right wing counterparts in the 1980’s and began utilising these principles to extend market relations across the globe in the form of economic ‘globalisation.’ Certainly the economic emphasis on free markets and the digital revolution of the ‘Roaring 90’s’ ensured a significant rise of interconnected economies across the world while also ensuring the neoliberal agenda and way of life was further engrained into the psyche of the West. 75

Global market advocates firmly believed that by creating a global market for trade and investment across national boundaries, individual freedom and material progress could be ensured. Through the global market, they claimed, living standards in both the developing and developed world would improve. Consumers in Western markets would receive a greater choice of goods and services at more competitive prices. Competition would enhance the quality of goods and services and ensure competitive pricing for consumers. For a company to out-perform their competitors they would need to become more innovative, efficient and productive and offer better goods or services, with the benefits flowing onto the consumer. 76

Likewise, by allowing multi-national organisations to set up their factories in developing economies they could help stimulate job creation and relative wealth for their citizens. Previously unemployed citizens in third world economies could find employment in factories and earn a wage, which they would then spend in the economy, thus helping stimulate economic growth. Therefore, global neoliberalism was sold to the world by applying the principles of free markets, deregulation, privatisation and competition and appealing to the material self-interest of human beings.

76 Steger, M., Roy, R., ‘Second-wave neoliberalism in the 1990s’, 2010, p. 75
The information and communication revolution that was rapidly evolving at the same time simply served to intensify the speed at which the global market developed. It ensured the interconnectedness of the world by enabling immediate communications from one corner of the world to the other. A CEO of a multi-national organisation based in Australia could communicate instantly with their factory managers or employees on the other side of the world by sending an email, making a phone call or setting up a video conference. Neoliberal and global market advocates rejoiced as most western economies experienced unprecedented growth in a decade that was matched with growing government and private sector surpluses, low levels of unemployment and continued private sector investment.

Importantly, this move from neoliberal dominance within western countries to the world stage also served to engrain the neoliberal framework as ‘common sense’ – not just in an economic sense, but across several different functions of society. Its rapid acceleration throughout the 1990’s, matched with unprecedented economic and private sector growth encouraged entrepreneurism of all kinds. Nothing was off limits or out of bounds – everything that could be utilised to generate profit, was. Those industries which had always generated some level of money within its operation became fully embedded in the neoliberal mantra of ‘producing profit’. Even industries that were not fully privately owned or did not function to profit, still implemented neoliberal styles of management, which ensured the principles of efficiency, productivity and profit appeared as the norm in all facets of life. Indeed, the global market and its neoliberal policies were considered inevitable and irresistible.

Neoliberal leaders of the centre left are often attributed with recognising the importance of balancing neoliberal market based principles with social welfare spending and the importance of social and wealth equality, yet their critics would argue they succeeded only in engaging in symbolic rhetoric of community life, while applying the fundamental neoliberal policies of the 1980’s to the world stage to facilitate the globalisation process. They also claim that while these neoliberal measures generated extreme growth and wealth it also led to extreme levels of inequality, which harmed the ability of its citizens to freely and fully participate and engage in community life. These problems, along with a range of others, prominently came to the fore throughout the 2000’s, which ultimately resulted in a financial and economic crisis that impacted most of the western world.

The tipping point of neoliberalism in the 2000’s

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77 Steger, M., Roy, R., ‘Second-wave neoliberalism in the 1990s’, 2010, pp. 74-75
The dominance of neoliberal policy of the 1980’s and 1990’s along with a seemingly blind faith in self-regulating markets, led to extremely uncertain times in the 2000’s. The deregulation of the finance sector, the relaxing of many prudent lending and borrowing regulations and the encouragement of entrepreneurism through neoliberal policy stimulated an unforeseen frenzy of financial lending and borrowing activity. The deregulation of the finance sector began with many western governments lifting interest rate ceilings and removing restrictions on foreign financial organisations entering the domestic markets. Most neoliberal governments believed that encouraging competition within the finance sector would create more attractive services for the private sector, international investors and burgeoning entrepreneurs. For the most part of the preceding two decades, this had worked. However, it also came with high risk.

In the 1990’s and early 2000’s the real estate boom in the USA and indeed Australia, led to many corporate and individual investors borrowing large sums of money against the inflated value of their real estate assets, resulting in a massive transfer of wealth and income to the financial sector. At the same time, banks were borrowing from their competitors with the intention of lending the money they had borrowed at a higher interest rate. Coinciding with this was an increased level of foreign investment, which, it must be said, had steadily increased in almost all western economies since the advent of globalisation. Banks and other financial institutions began competing against each other to offer domestic and foreign borrowers the most attractive services at the most competitive rate of interest, all the while forgetting the prudent rules of lending.

This came to a head during the USA real estate bust, which reached a crisis point in 2008. The severe drop in real estate value meant that the overall value of assets in the banks’ possession significantly declined. This uncertainty led to an equally significant drop on the share market, with many borrowers left unable to pay back their loans. Subsequently, banks were left unable to meet their debt obligations and even when they reclaimed assets from bankrupt clients, they were left well short of what they were owed and, indeed, what they owed themselves.

Many financial organisations were declared bankrupt with governments in Europe and the USA expressing their dismay by imposing far stricter restrictions on borrowing and lending than the banks

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80 Pusey, M., Integrity Under Stress, p.232
themselves had imposed in the free market. However, these newly imposed restrictions on lending meant that many companies who relied on accessing credit to create investment or pay their creditors could no longer access the finance from the banks. As a result, many large multi-national corporations defaulted on their loans and also declared bankruptcy. The flow on effect of this was that financial investment was severely reduced, with job creation plummeting. Unemployment figures rose and economic activity reached a point of crisis. Thus, the ‘financial’ crisis had in effect become an ‘economic’ crisis. Furthermore, because of the interconnectedness of most western economies, few countries were spared the effects of this. It was indeed not just a crisis for the USA and Europe; it was a global financial and economic crisis.

Interestingly, in Australia, the Kevin Rudd led Labor government of the time chose to act by interfering in the free market. Convinced the ‘free market’ needed correcting, the Australian Prime Minister and his Treasurer, Wayne Swan, chose to stimulate economic activity by distributing one-off payments to citizens and encouraged them to spend the money in the market – therefore sustaining adequate levels of consumer spending and economic activity. The result of this was that the effects of the global financial crisis were significantly reduced.

However, it should also be noted that the Rudd Government’s decision to distribute their ‘stimulus’ payments was met with extreme hostility from defendants of neoliberalism and scepticism from the Australian electorate who perceived the government spending as unusual and even reckless and irresponsible. So used to the neoliberal style of management were the Australian electorate, that instead of receiving praise for keeping their economy largely removed from the effects of the global financial crisis, the Rudd Government was largely criticised for generating a budget deficit. The Rudd Government’s step away from neoliberal principles towards Keynesian economic principles was received with lukewarm enthusiasm by an Australian community who obviously saw neoliberal ideals as the natural and normal ‘way of life.’

This ‘way of life’ is not simply restricted to the way Australian’s ‘do business;’ rather it has also extended to the way we participate in and consume culture. Of particular interest to this study is how neoliberalism is reflected in the play element in the AFL, how this has transformed play and what this means for the community.

The effects of neoliberalism on the play element

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By understanding the dominance of neoliberalism in the political and economic landscape of most of the western world we are not only understanding an economic model, but also a way of life. Regardless of the subtle differences of the core neoliberal beliefs implemented by various western economies since the late 1970’s, neoliberal advocates are united in the belief that privatisation, deregulation, free markets, globalisation and reduced government spending and interference will lead to increased efficiency, productivity, higher quality goods and services, improved living standards, real economic growth and employment creation. To be fair, in many instances this has happened. However, as noted above, it is not without its consequences – many which are overlooked or dismissed as insignificant.

Many critics of neoliberalism point to the inequality that free markets can create. From the above discussion of the Global Financial Crisis it is safe to say that not all markets are perfectly self-regulating, nor do they always produce the best outcomes for everyone. It is one thing to claim that increased private sector profits will create employment opportunities and wealth; it is quite another to expect such wealth to be enjoyed by everybody equally. In fact, neoliberal style management can simply lead to the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer – exploited for their labour; asked to work more efficiently and productively; considered a vital part of the profit making process – yet often left largely unrewarded. Unless the profits are distributed evenly or fairly by senior managers or the private owners of the company, the profits can be, and often are, disproportionately distributed.

Likewise, if government spending on social welfare is minimised and industries such as the health and education sector are forced to pay for themselves, vital health services and necessary education become a core consumable service. This means that, as with other privatised industries, the cost of the service will be determined by the forces of demand and supply. If this is the case, the ‘right’ to be educated and the ‘need’ for health assistance may become unaffordable for the lower socio-economic class of society. If this is the case, it simply means that those who cannot afford such services are no longer able to be completely active citizens in society and are no longer ‘free’ in the community – simply because they cannot afford to be.

The second part of this, which is most relevant to the study of this thesis, is the impact that neoliberalism has had on our culture. The dominance of neoliberalism in society means that even industries that are not fully privatised are still managed to operate as private businesses. The AFL is an example of this. Culture, such as sport, was once considered an expression of its creators – the people. In most instances, culture is still an expression of its creators; however, it is now created by
the culture industry. Culture has largely been taken off the people and the community and sold back to them in the form of ‘popular’ culture.

This is an extension of the neoliberal ‘way of life’—every object and action can be commodified and every commodity can be packaged, advertised, marketed and sold. The process in between is analysed through measurements of efficiency, productivity and profit. Before the advent of neoliberalism in the culture industry, culture did not just represent and express the people who created it; it also provided a platform for citizens to engage in something meaningful with others and to build something from the grassroots. Through this evolution, communities were created and sustained.

However, it seems that with the advent of neoliberalism, this has changed. In 2014 the AFL is influenced and utilised by powerful, commercial, deregulated, privatised industries as a tool to generate profit. As will be extensively highlighted throughout this thesis, the relentless neoliberal drive for profit has altered the way culture is both characterised and consumed. It has also changed how culture is utilised and what it is utilised for. Because it is utilised by privately owned stakeholders such as the media to sell their product to consumers in the market, play now is packaged, commodified, marketed and sold. It is created from the ‘top-down’, and by extension, it is consumed by the masses rather than created or owned by the people. Furthermore, it would appear that the AFL is managed with the same principles and objectives as a private organisation. Although the AFL and its 18 clubs are not privately owned organisations, they operate as businesses, with money now the most dominating characteristic of the competition’s existence.

Finally, the neoliberal, private sector style of management adopted by the AFL and its clubs has also influenced the act of playing. Indeed today, the once carefree, spontaneous, creative nature of play has been compromised by neoliberal characteristics of efficiency, structure, team rules and set plays. Each individual and team performance is reviewed, analysed and judged as a business would be—by measure of efficiency and effectiveness through a range of modern day statistics such as ‘contested possession’, ‘hardball gets’, ‘loose ball gets’, ‘inside 50’s’, ‘clearances’ and other key performance indicators. Just like the private sector’s relentless drive for profit through neoliberal principles, AFL clubs are using the same principles in their relentless pursuit to be the best—both on and off the field.

The bigger question that is addressed in this thesis is how the neoliberal influence in society has transformed the play element and changed the way supporters of the AFL now relate and interact with the game. Furthermore, this thesis takes this analysis a step further to investigate how the
neoliberal influence in sport has affected play’s ability to help bring citizens together to enjoy something with others, which they feel genuine ownership of. Play, in its most autonomous sense, created, encouraged and stimulated meaningful relationships, which developed genuine communities. The advent of neoliberalism has compromised play’s ability to develop and sustain community; this thesis will show how.

Before we can analyse the transformation of play with the rise of neoliberalism and the impact this has had on the community, it is first necessary to take a step back and attempt to understand the concept of community and the important role of play in developing Australia’s community and culture which subsequently helped spawn and define the democratic ideals and values that Australia was committed to at its founding in 1901.

**The concept of community**

While this thesis is fundamentally a study of the transformation of play, and in particular, the increasing influence of neoliberal ideals in characterising the play element, it also seeks to understand the significance of this for society. The scope of this study does not allow for an overly extensive study of community, however to fully understand the significance of play for society and its citizens, it is necessary to at least begin to illuminate the notion of community and its importance in socialising and developing the individual. The concept of community is intricate and complex and indeed one that could be the subject of its own thesis. Up until the mid-1950s some ninety four definitions had been put forward in an attempt to understand exactly what community was and this has only amplified today.  

In essence, by illuminating play’s undermining at the hands of economic capital, this thesis is essentially exploring the strength of the modern community when compared to communities that were stimulated by an autonomous play element that was quite separate to today’s dominant neoliberal ideals. In particular, this study is relevant to communities which are formed from play in sport. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the notion of community will be defined through the conceptual understanding of the most prolific and classical theories, which, in most cases are still utilised as the starting point for modern theorists to develop their own understanding of what

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community is in the twenty first century. While some of the more classical theories and definitions of community are criticised for being out-dated, as this thesis explores, if today’s communities are as strong and genuine as those in past eras, it is vitally important to understand the original definitions of community as a means of comparison to the AFL’s modern communities today. By doing so, we can begin to understand how play’s transformation has changed the sense of community felt by those who play and follow the AFL today.

Genuine Community

The idea of community and its importance for society and the individual is often discussed through the concept of ‘social capital.’ Broadly speaking, social capital refers to the networks, connections and relationships required to achieve common, shared, positive outcomes. It can also be described as the expected collective benefits derived from cooperation between individuals and groups. The term ‘social capital’ was first used in 1961 by Jane Jacobs in her book *The Death and Life of the Great American Cities.* While writing about the social relationships formed by citizens within the typical American neighbourhood, Jacobs argued that neighbourhoods were built upon the social capital of its inhabitants. Jacobs believed that social capital was built from the organic development of the neighbourhood, where the power and authority within the neighbourhood was shared by its participants, rather than governments, business, town developers or bureaucracy. Jacobs also argued that when a neighbourhood could act as a self-sufficient, autonomous economy, the citizens within the neighbourhood would act to satisfy the needs, wants and wishes of each other, thus becoming a vibrant, diverse, efficient and productive hub of economic activity.

For Jacobs, if the members of a neighbourhood felt genuine ownership of, and responsibility for, their neighbourhood, they would be more likely to act as participants within the neighbourhood, rather than mere subjects. Furthermore, Jacobs argued that they would be more likely to actively engage within the community, form a sense of social solidarity with fellow members of the neighbourhood and actively participate together to enrich life within the neighbourhood.

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88 Some of the more classical conceptual contrasts of community were developed by Ferguson (1768), Maine (1890), Durkheim (1893) and Tönnies (1887) among others. This thesis will predominantly focus on the community concept as developed by Tönnies as it became the *locus classicus* in sociology.

89 Note that many theorists who have written about social capital have a slightly different definition of social capital to the next. Two of these theorists, Jacobs and Putnam will be discussed in this thesis in relation to community. Bourdieu will be discussed in the following chapter. See also Coleman (1988) and Fukuyama (2002).


91 Jacobs, J., *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 147

92 Jacobs, J., *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 143
According to Jacobs, social capital was built upon the trust between, and camaraderie of, the community’s participants and she argued that this social capital was necessary for the neighbourhood’s participants to work towards their common and shared goals. Jacobs believed that the decentralisation of power within the community was essential in ensuring citizens developed social capital. By feeling empowered to make a genuine, meaningful contribution to enrich the life of the community, they subsequently developed a certain bond and cohesion with their fellow neighbours based on a sense of trust and responsibility they shared with each other. Importantly, because they felt they could make a difference within their neighbourhood and enrich their life and the lives of their neighbours, they also felt a sense of individual satisfaction and self-worth.93

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs was extremely critical of ‘urban renewal’ including the redevelopment of established land, construction of high rise apartment buildings, destruction of existing structures, relocation of business and, importantly, the relocation of people. Jacobs believed that when neighbourhoods were subverted by urban developers, corporate businesses, governments or any other market forces, the neighbourhood lost its solidarity, cohesion and camaraderie. Jacobs took aim at the proposed redevelopment of New York City’s Greenwich Village to claim that ‘urban renewal’ disempowered the neighbourhood’s residents, with numerous processes and ‘red tape’ undermining citizens’ ability to actively work towards making a genuine and meaningful difference to the community.94

Instead of simply getting together to work on a project that they believe will benefit their fellow community members they are now forced to answer to several layers of bureaucracy to seek permission or approval before being able to act. This makes citizens feel far more like subjects than active participants.95 Jacobs argues this isolates citizens and alienates them from their neighbourhood, reducing their social capital and minimising the collective will to work together to enrich the life of the community. Thus, the community is weakened at the hands of money.

This argument is illuminated through the work of Robert Putnam. In his most famous books, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* and *Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*, Putnam speaks about the notion of community, and in particular, the decline of the community over the last 30 years. In doing so, Putnam outlines what he believes community could and, indeed, should be in order to illustrate the importance of social interaction and civic engagement in developing strong and genuine communities.

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93 Jacobs, J., *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 148
94 Jacobs, J., *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 143
95 Jacobs, J., *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, p. 143
For Putnam, social capital is at the heart of citizens engaging with each other and developing voluntary associations that form the foundation of interaction and discussion between society’s citizens. Furthermore, Putnam states that the social capital accumulated within these voluntary associations are the essence of true democracy.  

Describing social capital as “the features of social organisation such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit,” Putnam believes that the social capital accumulated through personal interaction and civic engagement is foundational to the fabric of their social lives.

According to Putnam, social capital has three components: moral obligations and norms, social values (especially trust) and social networks, which, he believes, are essential in sustaining strong democratic societies. In Making Democracy Work: Civic traditions in modern Italy, Putnam outlined the different government reforms of 1976-77 in Italy’s North compared to the South to argue the importance of social capital in sustaining strong civic engagement, community and, ultimately, democracy.

Putnam noted that the government reforms succeeded in Northern Italy because it was accompanied by strong civil engagement. As part of the Northern Italy reforms, government power was decentralised, with new local governments created to encourage and foster citizens to collectively participate in making a collective difference within their community. By providing citizens with a local voice and means to be heard, the Italian government was effectively encouraging citizens to act as participants within society with a choice of either enriching the life of the community or undermining it.

Putnam argued that this encouraged citizens to actively and voluntarily come together to interact with one another and collectively work towards shared and common goals. This fostered a sense of civic responsibility, trust, assistance and collaboration, which in turn, provided citizens with a sense of self-worth and satisfaction in making a meaningful contribution to society.

“In the North the crucial social, political, and even religious allegiance and alignments were horizontal, while those in the South were vertical. Collaboration, mutual assistance, civic obligation, and even trust – not universal, of course, but extending further beyond the limits of kinship than anywhere else in Europe in this era – were the distinguishing features in the

North. The chief virtue in the South, by contrast, was the imposition of hierarchy and order of latent anarchy.”

For Putnam, trust and a sense of obligation one citizen felt towards another was fundamental to freedom and democracy. Putnam argued that trust was at the heart of forming voluntary associations and fostering active, free participation within them. According to Putnam, voluntary organisations such as sports clubs, facilitate communication between individuals, improves the flow of information to and from individuals and increases the trust each individual has in each other. In doing so, the sense of obligation members feel towards each other to help achieve their collective goals also increases. It is this trust that binds the community together and enables members to freely participate within the organisation.

If an individual trusts the environment they are part of and the citizens they are engaged with, they will then feel the freedom to be their true self and to contribute to the life of the community. In doing so, they are able to work together towards a common, shared outcome, thereby attaining some sense of self-worth, reward and satisfaction. Putnam argued that this trust and freedom is foundational to democracy. He also warned that if the trust of a group is undermined or individuals begin to act outside the interests of the larger group, then the community will be weakened.

In Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital and Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Putnam argued that voluntary associations, such as sporting organisations, were founded upon the common interest of its members and the trust they formed through social interaction with each other. In turn, by engaging with each other and working collectively towards the goals of the larger group, the trust between members strengthened, thus fostering the necessary freedom they require to be active participants within the group.

However, Putnam noted a growing distrust within America and highlighted an aggregate loss in membership of many existing civic organisations. To illustrate why this is problematic to American democracy, Putnam used bowling as an example. Although the people who bowl in America had increased in the previous 20 years, the number of people who bowled in teams, leagues or organised competitions had decreased. Instead, people were choosing to bowl alone, meaning they were not participating in the personal interaction and discussion that might have occurred if they were bowling in a team or as part of a larger group. Putnam argued that this decline in social capital

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99 Putnam, R., Making Democracy Work, p. 130
100 Putnam, R., Making Democracy Work, p. 177
101 Putnam, R., Making Democracy Work, p. 171
is eroding communities and democracy in America and suggested that multiple media and technological advances over the last 30 years promote individualism and isolation and the expense of personal interaction.\(^{103}\)

While Putnam spent little time discussing where his theories of social capital, community and democracy fit in a historical context, the idea that genuine community is foundational to the development of individuals, their freedom and, indeed, democracy, is not a new one. Indeed it can be further understood through the theories of Tönnies, Hegel and a number of British Idealists writing around the time of Australia’s Federation in 1901.\(^{104}\)

To illuminate this theory it is necessary to attempt to understand what is meant when referring to genuine community. As stated above, this is a topic of much discussion, debate and critique and one that is difficult to summarise in brief. However, if we assume that most debates centre upon the most significant and original contributions made to the concept of social groups, we can also assume that this is a good place to start this analysis. In particular, the theories of German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies and his concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft provide an essential insight into the transforming nature of communities and an understanding of what the ‘ideal’ community might be.

Tönnies’ 1887 work of Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft argued that social ties can generally be categorised as either belonging to personal social interactions, roles, values and beliefs, based on such interaction (Gemeinschaft) or, as belonging to indirect interactions, impersonal roles, formal values and beliefs, based in such interactions (Gesellschaft).\(^{105}\) While written over one hundred years ago, the relevance of Tönnies’ work to this research is clear – Tönnies was attempting to understand the origins of community and, importantly, the subsequent influence of capitalism on the strength of these social groups. According to Tönnies, when social groups were homogenous and, importantly, autonomous, they were ‘genuine’. Indeed for him, Gemeinschaft was the ‘ideal’ social grouping, yet he was criticised by some for romanticising about what he hoped for, rather than what society

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\(^{105}\) To review Tönnies’ conceptual theory of the transformation from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft, see Tönnies’ classic theoretical essay: Tönnies, F., Community and Society, Translated by Loomis, C., Harper, New York, 1957
realistically reflected. Nevertheless, the characteristics that Tönnies associated with genuine community appear far from unrealistic and can be found, at least in some way, in many communities today.

Tönnies also claimed that Gemeinschaft provided a platform for citizens to come together to enjoy a common way of life, where, through experiencing the traditions, rituals and activities of Gemeinschaft, members were able to form a sense of identity and close social ties to other members of the group. These social bonds were often based upon an emotional connection, sense of loyalty, obligation and even responsibility to each other to help achieve their common goal, which ultimately tied the community together. Generally speaking, when Tönnies wrote about Gemeinschaft, he referred to a collective will, a common way of life, common beliefs, concentrated ties, frequent interaction, familiarity and emotional bonds. However, Tönnies argued that a weaker, less communal social grouping also existed, which was often influenced by money and other capitalist ideals such as individualism and self-interest—Gesellschaft.

For Tönnies, Gesellschaft describes the associations in which the collective purpose of a larger group never takes precedence over the individual’s self-interest. These social groups lack a sense of common and shared goals, whereby members are often concerned with self-status. They emphasise secondary relationships with a weaker sense of loyalty and weaker feelings of obligation and responsibility to the larger group. When discussing Gesellschaft, Tönnies referred to dissimilar ways of life, dissimilar beliefs, infrequent interaction and even regular competition between its members. It was the common interest in personal gain that ultimately bound these social groups together.

Therefore, from the above description, it is clear that Gemeinschaft is reflective of the ideal, genuine community, which was fundamentally characterised by the properties of;

- Dense and demanding ties; social attachments;
- Ritual occasions;
- A sense of loyalty;
- A sense of belonging and meaning; and
- A collective will.

However, as stated above, many sociologists insisted Tönnies was restricted by romanticising about an unrealistic ideal. Emile Durkheim (1893) preferred to view the community not as a social
structure or physical identity, but as a set of variable properties of human interactions that could be found not only by enacting old traditions, but also in modern social groups. Furthermore, more recent sociologists such as Erving Goffman, Travis Hirschi, Rosabeth Moss Kanter and William Julius Wilson have disaggregated Tönnies’ properties and characteristics of Gemeinschaft. They argue that while each property has a worthy place in characterising community, to consider that all can co-exist together in modern times appears little more than fantasy.\footnote{Goffman (1967), Hirschi (1969), Kanter (1972) and Wilson (1987) followed the work of Emile Durkheim (1893) who saw community as a set of variables, rather than as essential properties.}

Yet, regardless of this criticism, surely it is acceptable to suggest that when the collective properties of Gemeinschaft exist together within a community, the community can indeed be described as pure, genuine and real. Certainly when analysing modern grass roots communities such as local football clubs, they appear to be far more than just a distant reflection of what Tönnies described as Gemeinschaft. It is when they are corrupted by money and transformed into a tool of the economy that they become a weaker reflection of what they originally were. This will be highlighted further throughout this thesis.

However, in attempting to understand what genuine community might be, the importance of community in the development and socialisation of the individual must also be discussed. The properties that Tönnies uses to describe Gemeinschaft provide a clear basis for citizens to develop a distinct sense of community in order to create their own identity and develop their own unique personality.

**Sense of Community**

‘Sense of community’ is a concept developed in the field of community psychology and social psychology, which focusses on the ‘experience’ of community, rather than its structure, formation, setting or any other feature and can be used to support the idea that genuine community is one of the major bases of ‘self-definition.’\footnote{Key contributors to concept of social community include Sarason (1974 &1986), Gusfield (1975), Riger and Lavrakas (1981), McMillan and Charvis (1986) and Charvis and Pretty (1999)}

In their 1986 essay, ‘Sense of Community: A definition and theory,’ McMillan and Charvis argued that an individual’s sense of community refers to:

- A sense of belonging to the community;
- A sense of finding individual and collective meaning from participating in the community;

For more detail see:

Durkheim, E., *The Division of Labour in Society*, Free Press, New York, 1933; and

Durkheim, E., *Suicide*, Free Press, New York, 1951
- A sense of collectively being able to influence the decisions and actions of the community;
- Developing a sense of identity through the community;
- Developing emotional connections to fellow members of the community, which stimulate a sense of obligation and responsibility to each other and to help achieve the shared and common goals of the community.\textsuperscript{112}

Therefore, attaining a sense of community is fundamentally important to the socialising process of the individual. It is by actively participating in the community and engaging in its historically developed traditions and rituals that humans are able to develop their individuality and through reflecting upon these traditions and relationships within the community, individuals are able to develop a mind of their own. One may decide to embrace or even reject the community or the traditions within it, but to do so individual reasons, based on their own reflections, personality and thoughts are required. By virtue of beginning with community through which one gains a sense of identity and sense of belonging, one also accepts certain obligations and responsibilities, although how these are acted upon may vary from individual to individual.

Furthermore, the condition of identify and self-hood of the individual is formed through the community and one’s potential and sense of meaning is developed through first attaining a true sense of community. Importantly, for members of a social group to attain a true sense of community and therefore develop as individuals, the community must be genuine, autonomous and quite separate to neoliberal notions of profit, for if it is not, the process of socialisation is corrupted.

Therefore, the reference to genuine community throughout this thesis is referring to the community’s ability to enable citizens to feel a true sense of community within an autonomous setting, whereby members are able to:

- Come together to enjoy something in common with others;
- Feel a sense of belonging and meaning;
- Where strong, emotional ties are formed with other members of the community;
- Ensuring members feel a sense of loyalty, obligation or responsibility to each other; and
- Where members are able to influence and actively contribute to the shared and common goals of the community.

\textsuperscript{112} These elements of ‘sense of community’ are expounded in McMillan and Charvis (1986) who are two of the most validated and widely utilised contributors of this area in psychological literature. See: McMillan, D., & Charvis, D., ‘Sense of Community, A definition and theory’, in Journal of Community Psychology, 14, 1, pp. 6.
For citizens to feel a sense of community they must first be free to participate in community life. If they are restricted or inhibited in any way, the process of developing and socialising as individuals is harmed.

Upholding the notions of genuine community is important in ensuring the individual can attain a genuine sense of community, and therefore develop as an individual. This highlights the importance of play for community and the individual. If play loses its autonomy to the objectives of commercialism and other neo liberal ideals, the communities created from play cannot be considered as strong or genuine as those that maintain their sense of autonomy. If the communities that are developed from play lose their autonomy what does this mean for the community’s ability to enable its participants to feel a genuine sense of community? For example, if football clubs are now defined by business objectives what does this mean for the way they function? Does a true sense of community exist? Is loyalty compromised when financial contracts define a player’s participation with a club? Are members able to influence the decisions of a club when managers are put in place to make decisions on their behalf? Are fans able to feel a genuine part of their club when their membership begins with a financial transaction? These are but just some of the questions illuminated throughout this thesis when exploring if the transformation of play in the AFL has weakened the AFL community.

The scope of this thesis does not allow for a more thorough or extensive analysis to determine if the concept of experiencing a genuine sense of community still exists today. Indeed it does not seem unreasonable to assume that in some grassroots communities a genuine sense of community is still alive and well. However, by creating a definition and understanding of what the ideal, genuine community is, we can also begin to understand how far from this ideal professional sporting organisations have moved. Furthermore, we can also begin to explore the impact this transformation has had on the community. However, to illuminate this more clearly, it is fundamentally important to attain an understanding of the historic values, principles and characteristics of Australian community and culture and, importantly, the foundational role of play in creating these communities. This is best done through the theories and cultural observations of Johan Huizinga and supported by the theories of Hegel and neo Hegelian British Idealists writing around the time of Australia’s Federation.

**Australian Community and Culture**

In his most famous book, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Johan Huizinga writes that the ‘play element’ of a society is at the heart of how a society forms and defines its community
and culture. He explains how ‘play’, in its most autonomous sense, is responsible for allowing citizens to come together for a common and enjoyed activity. Huizinga goes on to say that through these play experiences, citizens begin to create a culture that ultimately stimulates and binds the community.113

Other modernists, such as Hegel and neo Hegelian British Idealists writing around the time of Australian Federation shared a similar view. They argue the underlying cornerstone of a political community is the active participation of its members in pursuit of the common good and general will of the community, for a common interest and common goal, where the relationships that the members of a community have are based on shared, common values and principles.114 According to Hegel, it was the culture of the community that is the binding force of this relationship.115 Huizinga takes this a step further back, stating that it is the ‘play element’ and the ‘games of the people’ that are responsible for creating a society’s community and culture.

Hegel argues that the state is a political community because it is a cultural community, because its constitution is grounded in a national culture, because its political institutions are deeply interwoven and interdependent with all other aspects of culture and similarly, they express the values of the national culture. He also claimed that the individual identified with the state through participation within the community (through play, for example) and that the state was responsible for fostering the ability of its members to reach their full potential. If people did not find their worth or identity through the community they would seek to do so through conspicuous consumption. He considered it the duty of the state to ensure that the market is directed at achieving the common good of the community.116

This idea was enriched towards the end of the nineteenth century by a new liberal or social liberal philosophy inspired by British Idealist philosopher, T.H Green. In developing Hegel’s philosophy, Green wrote that true democracy can only exist when all members of society are free to participate in their community. “When we speak of freedom”, he wrote “we mean a positive power or capacity

116 Hegel, G., Philosophy of Right, 1952, p. 153f
of doing or enjoying something, and that too, something we enjoy in common with others.”¹¹⁷

Green argued that pure freedom existed in the pursuit of the common good, as for Green, liberty meant the full participation in the life of the community. For a society to be truly democratic, its citizens need to be collectively active within the community.¹¹⁸

Green was arguing for an active citizenship and a collective will, oriented to the common good. He believed that through being able to freely and collectively work for an enjoyed and common goal, individuals within society could reach their full potential. The community was integral to what Green saw as necessary in how a democracy should be defined.¹¹⁹ As will be highlighted later, Huizinga saw the role of play as crucial in enabling citizens to be collectively active in the pursuit of enjoying something in common with others. In fact, he believed that the community and its culture spawned from play and developed in play forms.¹²⁰ Like Hegel, Green proposed that it was the role of the state, not the market, to nurture freedom and to ensure citizens could develop their full potential and function effectively within the community.

Idealists in Australia adopted, embraced and extended this theory, arguing for the importance of the community and active participation within it to achieve a true and genuine democracy. It was Huizinga’s strong belief that the community was initiated through the ‘play element’, which manifested into a society’s culture.

What ‘idealism’ meant to early Australia is most clearly evident in the work of Walter Murdoch. Murdoch, a friend of Alfred Deakin, embraced Green’s philosophy, arguing the importance of the state’s responsibility to nurture and develop the democracy of a community was to allow citizens to reach his or her highest potential. Murdoch was a social liberal who taught at ‘The College,’ Warrnambool, before becoming professor of English (1912) and later Chancellor of the University of Western Australia. In his bestselling book, The Australian Citizen: An Elementary Account of Civic Rights and Duties, Murdoch wrote that the state was responsible for allowing citizens to realise themselves by attaining a good which is common to themselves and other men, by nurturing the community.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Huizinga, J., Homo Ludens, 1955, pp. 14
¹²¹ Murdoch, W., The Australian Citizen: An Elementary Account of Civic Rights and Duties, Whitcombe and Tombs, Christchurch, 1926, pp. 8; see also: Lake, M., Alfred Deakin’s Dream of Independence, Deakin University, Melbourne, 2006
At the heart of this thesis is this view that the community is at the core of a democracy and the relationships that its citizens share with each other. It is also the community (as opposed to the market) that allows them to actively participate for a shared and common good. Furthermore, according to Huizinga, this process begins with the act of playing, which enables citizens to express themselves and the common and shared lifestyles of the community.

To fully understand how the play element stimulates active participation within the community and therefore its culture, it is necessary to explore the theories of Johan Huizinga and his definition of play.

The Play Element and Culture

Before any exploration of the ‘play element’ in today’s society and, indeed, in today’s popular sport can be conducted, it is important to first define play and to outline how play is intrinsically important in shaping the community and its culture. The next section of this chapter will provide a platform which highlights how this thesis will define play in its original form and therefore also provide a measure of how we can judge any change to the play element in today’s society.

However, this chapter has another, equally important, function – to highlight the importance of the ‘play element’ in developing a community’s culture and therefore the importance of how any subsequent change of the ‘play element’ can alter the way we define the culture of a society and the strength of a community and its democracy. Many Modernist Cultural Theorists believe that something fundamental to the legitimacy of a community and its democracy is lost when its culture is undermined or corrupted by money. Some of these cultural theorists will be discussed in this chapter, with their theories expounded later when exploring the play element in AFL football.

Before we can begin to explore how the play element has changed, why it has changed and what the subsequent consequences of such change has had for our culture and community, we must first define play and expand on its definition to outline how it is linked with society’s communities and culture.

In his book, ‘Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture’, Johan Huizinga provided what other, more recent theorists might describe as the ‘classical’ definition of the play element. While many theorists have since expanded upon Huizinga’s analysis of the play element and its links with

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122 Huizinga outlines his definition and characteristics of play in ‘Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon’, in Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in popular culture, pp. 7-13
culture and the community, they have generally provided a broader analysis of play, often incorporating it into more general definitions of ‘games’ and ‘sport.’

While play is undeniably a part of games and sport, Huizinga’s definition deals specifically with the act of ‘playing’ and therefore provides the best definition of play in its rawest and purest form. Later, when discussing how the ‘play element’ has changed he discusses the ‘play element’ in games and sport as a way of describing how play has evolved from what it was at its origins.

**Huizinga’s characterisation of play:**

In its purest and original form, Huizinga believed play was based on enjoyment and fun. He saw play as being free and spontaneous and as “a discharge of superabundant energy to seek the satisfaction of some imitative instinct.” For Huizinga, having ‘fun’ was at the core of the play element, but acknowledged that when engaged in the act of playing—and only when playing—play, could indeed be serious.

The notions of ‘fun’ ‘enjoyment’ and ‘freedom’ underpin all of Huizinga’s key play characteristics, for if a player was no longer having fun, or was not enjoying him or herself, or no longer felt free when playing, then, according to Huizinga, they were no longer playing.

To understand how the play element has changed and to determine how play might be defined today, it is first necessary to understand Huizinga’s definition of the play element.

**Play Characteristic Number One:**

‘**Play is free; in fact, it is freedom.**’

For Huizinga, ‘Play is free; in fact, it is freedom.’ This relates to Huizinga’s initial assumption that a player feels free when they are playing and they are bound by no restrictions other than, perhaps, a player’s ability to carry out a skill or level of fitness to play at a certain, desired level of intensity. Play is a voluntary action; one that a player should not feel obliged or forced to partake in and is done in free time where the player is not restricted by boundaries or time constraints.

According to Huizinga, it should also be free of cost and financial reward. Huizinga states in his study of the play element that citizens should never play for a wage, nor should it cost them anything to play. Play, he states, is free.

Remember, T.H Green, when discussing the characteristics of a democracy that Australia was committed to at its founding stated that in a true democracy, a citizen should be free to reach his or her potential. Furthermore, he argued the key characteristic of a community was for its citizens to
act freely in the pursuit of a common and enjoyed activity with others. According to Huizinga, the play element was defined by its freedom. In fact for him, ‘freedom’ was an essential characteristic of the culture, community and democracy that spawned from the ‘play element.’

**Play Characteristic Number Two:**

‘**Play is not ordinary or real.**’

Play, according to Huizinga, is distinctly different from and separate to ‘real life’. For Huizinga, play was inferior to real life, thus, while play could be serious, it could only be so during the play contest. No matter how intense, passionate or serious a battle when playing, its importance in real life was minimal as the players were ‘only playing.’

In the first chapter of his book, Huizinga writes that “the contest is largely devoid of purpose – that the action begins and ends in itself and the outcome does not contribute to the necessary life processes of the group.” Fundamental to this characteristic is the assumption that play was autonomous from the rest of society and that players were acting autonomously from the roles, responsibilities or power he or she may have in other parts of their life. Furthermore, because play was autonomous from what Huizinga defined as real or ordinary life, it could be stated that play was separate from the ordinary or real – indeed inferior to the ordinary or real.

**Play Characteristic Number Three:**

‘**Play is secluded and limited.**’

In extending his second characteristic of play, Huizinga argued that play was separate to real or ordinary life as it was limited in its locality and duration. Play, especially within games, could not go on forever, nor could they be played wherever. Games, such as Australian Football are played on a particular type of field for a particular length of time. Thus, these restrictions of locality actually enhance the distinction between play and real or ordinary life.

Furthermore, because play was limited in its duration and locality, it created a sense of certainty – not of what was going to happen when play commenced, for that was based on spontaneity and creativity – but of ‘when’ one could play and ‘where.’

It was this sense of certainty that underlines Huizinga’s fourth characteristic of play.

**Play Characteristic Number Four:**

‘**Play creates order, is order.**’
According to Huizinga, the play element and its secluded, limited environment created order within the play contest. Again, while ‘play’ was seen by Huizinga as being spontaneous and free, the knowledge of how to play and what one was playing brought a sense of order – in fact Huizinga stated it ‘was order’. For example, the rules of a game, the playing area on which it is played and the duration of play meant that while much could not be predicted of the play element, much could.

Thus, while one may not be able to provide a second by second prediction of how a game of football might unfold, the rules of the game, the size of the oval, the number of players on a team and the duration of the match means that the game will be played with some sense of order.

Huizinga goes onto write that this sense of order is reflected in sporting clubs that are formed around play. In fact, Huizinga states that they are separate to the outside and ordinary world. They have secrets and rules that distinguish themselves from the real world, which adds to a particular sense of belonging and charm from playing.

**Huizinga’s definition of play:**

In summing up his four main characteristics of the play element, Huizinga defines the play element as:

- A free activity standing quite outside the consciousness of ordinary life, as being ‘not serious’ but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space and according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It creates the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

For Huizinga, the social groupings which he described in his definition of play were in fact, what we would describe as sporting clubs today. Furthermore, he saw these organisations as vitally important in enabling citizens to take an active and meaningful role in the organisation that formed from play, even if a citizen were not physically playing. This level of engagement within the sporting club helped bind communities and importantly, helped enable citizens to actively engage with others in something they felt ownership of, therefore assisting them to reach their full potential.

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123 Huizinga outlines his definition and characteristics of play in ‘Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon’, in *Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in popular culture*, pp. 7-13
Furthermore, fundamental to Huizinga’s definition and characteristics of play is that he saw play as completely autonomous from society. It was because of this autonomy that play was seen by Huizinga as the fundamental cornerstone of building and establishing the culture and community of a society. According to Huizinga ‘culture arises in the form of play.’ Huizinga believed that culture came from play. He believed that play gave citizens an opportunity to come together and express themselves while participating in a shared and common experience and in doing so, create their culture. Fundamentally Huizinga believed that play was an expression of the people that enabled citizens to bond and work together for a common goal or pursuit. Thus citizens began to define their relationships through play and felt ownership of the principles, values and virtues that determined the spirit in which they played. The games that citizens played were essentially the games of the people. They were a result of the people expressing a common will and want to come together for a common and enjoyed activity. From this, argued Huizinga, came community and culture.\textsuperscript{124}

**The Importance of Being Free**

The importance of play in enabling citizens to be ‘free’ to form culture and communities was highlighted by Donald Winnicott in his book, *Playing and Reality.* In many ways, Winnicott’s insight in psychoanalysis confirms the insights of Huizinga – a cultural historian. An English paediatrician and psychoanalyst, Winnicott related the play element to psychoanalysis to argue that a patient cannot be completely open, honest or their whole self if they are not able to play.

According to Winnicott, “It is in playing, and only playing, that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.”\textsuperscript{125}

Winnicott argued that we are only truly free when we are playing. When we are playing, we are unrestricted, spontaneous, creative and our true selves. This is when our culture is formed. When citizens come together in an autonomous and unrestricted environment they are free to do or act as they please. The end result of what they do and how they act forms their culture.

Furthermore, Winnicott argued through the autonomy of play, a patient could get to know his or her environment, trust the environment and develop trust for others within the environment, enabling them to be completely open, honest and share their whole personality with their doctor. As such, he believed there was a “direct development from transitional phenomena to playing; and from playing

\textsuperscript{124} Huizinga, J., ‘Nature and significance of play as a cultural phenomenon’, in *Homo Ludens*, pp. 13

\textsuperscript{125} Winnicott, D.W., *Playing and Reality*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1974, p. 74
It is because of the autonomy of play that a player feels completely free to be their whole self; their creative self; their spontaneous self – and in doing so form real and genuine relationships with fellow ‘players.’ From these relationships they form communities and culture.

However, once the patient’s environment was compromised or restricted, so too was the freedom of the patient and their ability to communicate. As a result they could not be as open or as creative and the bond, trust and connection between patient and doctor had been harmed. For Winnicott, it was through play that a patient felt free to be their whole self and share their whole personality. In a broader context, it is only when we are free to play and be our whole selves that we can form true relationships, communities and ultimately, culture.

Play, Culture and it Commodification

As already stated, at the heart of Huizinga’s definition of play was the assumption that play was separate to the ordinary or real life and because of its autonomy, players could act freely and naturally develop a spirit and culture that would define the values and principles of the community.

However, Huizinga noted a change in the play element and the relationship play had with culture throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Fundamentally, Huizinga believed that play was losing its autonomy to the all-encompassing economic market and subsequently to the media and entertainment industries. Huizinga became hostile to those who he believed were using play as a tool for making money and eventually concluded that by the end of the nineteenth century, play was no longer free, no longer separate from the real or ordinary, no longer autonomous and that it no longer determined culture. Instead, he argued, play forms had been commodified and were merely a part of the culture industry – used as a tool to produce further economic capital.

How ‘play’ became commodified: From ‘play’ to ‘display’

While Huizinga identified the Industrial Revolution as the key moment in time when play became entertainment, he traced the origins of this transformation back to the Roman Empire and a time when play became as much about those watching play as it did those participating in play. According to Huizinga, the Romans recognised that play could be organised and treated as a tool to

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126 Winnicott, D.W., *Playing and Reality*, p. 75
127 Winnicott, D.W., *Playing and Reality*, p. 75
entertain crowds of keen and interested onlookers.\textsuperscript{129} Stadiums such as the Colosseum were packed with thousands of spectators watching a contest or performance. They were being entertained.

Huizinga argued that at this very moment, play had lost its innocence and was effectively being used as an item of entertainment. Play had been incorporated into the entertainment industry—used to amuse those watching. Furthermore, Huizinga argues that this move from ‘play to display’ was a deliberate attempt by the Ruling Class of the time to use play to distract the proletariat from their otherwise subordinated and ‘dull existence.’\textsuperscript{130} It was used by the ruling class as an item of escapism, to keep the masses at bay and engrain their position at the top of the social hierarchy. In being used as such a tool, according to Huizinga, play had lost its autonomy. It had become organised and owned by the Ruling Class; used to achieve a secondary result—an escapism or reward. Suddenly play had become a commodity and an organised product of entertainment with the crowd becoming ‘consumers’. Play had been undermined. Again, Huizinga believed that at the heart of this transformation was the belief that play had lost its autonomy to the burgeoning business bureaucratic model that gained momentum during Britain’s Industrial Revolution and flourished in the twentieth and now twenty first centuries.\textsuperscript{131}

Huizinga believed that from the time of the Industrial Revolution material interest and economic capital determined the course of the world. Play was becoming more organised, more structured and more influenced by economics and, more specifically, money. While play and games have been a part of society since the beginning of man-kind, the notion of organised sport as we know it today is a far more recent phenomenon. Sport, as a recognisable and structured organisation, is not universal, but in fact emerged in a particular location (Britain) at a particular time (early industrialisation).\textsuperscript{132}

Throughout industrialisation, games that included rough play or physicality were considered too unstructured in both rules and time and often caused injury and even death. Ruling elites became concerned with this behaviour and were of the opinion that able bodied men, during their time of leisure, should compete in purposeful sports. Therefore a more conscious effort was made to structure and organise play. Around this time a ‘moral panic’ emerged about the leisure time activities of the working class and as a result, pressure built for greater control over working class activities. Workers were expected to arrive at work fit, healthy and ready for demanding, arduous

\textsuperscript{129} Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 74
\textsuperscript{130} Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 13
\textsuperscript{131} Huizinga, J., ‘Western Civilisation’, p. 75
and sometimes demanding shifts. As a result, some ‘unorganised’ games were banned. However, at the same time there was a movement to promote healthy physical activity and to remove unhealthy urges among working citizens. It was believed that if a nation’s citizens were healthy, they were more likely to be more productive and efficient in the work place.\textsuperscript{133}

This was the beginning of organised sport. Sporting events were organised to enable the Ruling Class to ensure their workers were controlled in their leisure time; to keep them fit and healthy; and to offer them an ‘escape’ so they would return from their leisure time, content and ready to work.\textsuperscript{134}

Money also played an important role in the emergence of organised sport. For the emergent entrepreneurial capitalist class who accumulated wealth by making and selling goods and services, and for the working class who had no means of support other than their own labour power, the idea of professionalising sport and ‘playing for pay’ held great attraction. Thus, pure amateurism in sport quickly died and entrepreneurs, capitalists and workers alike all meshed to transform sport into a business where profits and income could be generated by all involved – from promoters to administrators to coaches and players. Sport was used as a tool to make money.

In losing its autonomy to the influence of money, Huizinga bemoaned that ‘play’ was no longer separate to the real and ordinary world; it was no longer free and in many instances it had lost an element of enjoyment and fun. As such, play could no longer act as the stimulus for creating a community’s culture.\textsuperscript{135}

**When play became sport**

In the final chapter of *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga concluded that never, to that point in history, had an age taken itself with more seriousness. He believed that culture had ceased to be played – instead, it was imposed from the top and sold to consumers as an item of entertainment.\textsuperscript{136}

Throughout the nineteenth century, and in particular the Industrial Revolution, the lives of the world’s inhabitants were restructured. Capitalist, urban, industrial and political revolutions began to unfold with the circulation of popular and more radical political movements. From this emerged an all-encompassing, dominant business bureaucratic model of living that placed the objectives of structure, organisation, regimentation, efficiency and, importantly, money at the forefront of

\textsuperscript{133} Rowe, D., ‘Understanding Sport and Media: A Socio-Historical Approach’, p. 20
\textsuperscript{134} Rowe, D., ‘Understanding Sport and Media: A Socio-Historical Approach’, p. 28
\textsuperscript{135} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 195
\textsuperscript{136} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 206
society. This, according to Huizinga, completely transformed the play element and the role it played in developing culture and stimulating active participation in society.\textsuperscript{137}

As play became organised and structured, it was transformed into sport and increasingly took on characteristics of serious business. “What we are concerned with here,” he writes, “is the transition from occasional amusement to the system of organised clubs and matches.”\textsuperscript{138}

Importantly, Huizinga stressed that as play became more structured and organised, it has also become more serious, “Ever since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, games, in the guise of sport, have been taken more and more seriously.”\textsuperscript{139} Huizinga argues that this is largely, if not solely, because the play element had lost its autonomy to the economic market and was therefore ‘used’ for a secondary purpose – to make money; to distract the masses; to keep labourers fit and healthy; to provide them with an escape. It was used as a tool and owned by the Culture Industry. It was serious. It was a business and as such, something of the pure play quality had been lost.

Huizinga writes:

“The spirit of the professional is no longer the true play spirit; it is lacking its spontaneity and carelessness. For the professional, playing is no longer just play. It is also work.”\textsuperscript{140}

Play had become serious because play had been incorporated into the economic market. Sport now imitated play. It also imitated a business. Play had become a commodity, a skill, an item of labour. It was a shadow of what Huizinga described play to be at its origin and therefore, its role in society and in stimulating culture had been reversed. No longer was civilisation developed in play forms; instead, civilisation, and in particular the dominant business bureaucratic model of its time, determined play. For Huizinga, sport was ‘false play’.

“Civilisation today is no longer played and even where it seems to be play, it is false play...it becomes increasingly difficult to tell where play ends and non-play begins.”\textsuperscript{141}

These ideas were enriched by Christopher Lasch in his book \textit{The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations}. In a chapter titled \textit{The Degradation of Sport}, Lasch discusses the play element in modern sport, arguing that sport and play could no longer be discussed as something ‘beyond’ the real and ordinary life. Play had been corrupted by money. For Lasch, all

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\item \textsuperscript{137} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 213
\item \textsuperscript{138} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 196
\item \textsuperscript{139} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 196
\item \textsuperscript{140} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 204
\item \textsuperscript{141} Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 206
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play forms within society – both in leisure time and at work – had been superseded by individualism and the necessary calculation, prudence, analysis and efficiency to accumulate economic capital. The dominant business bureaucratic model that shapes modern society does not allow for pure play. Therefore, citizens are increasingly turning to modern sport for their nourishment of play. Devoid of such activity at work, they seek forms of freedom and spontaneity outside of their ordinary life – through the leisure industry.¹⁴²

However, what they do not realise is that sport, like business, is now restricted by structure, analysis and a desire to succeed; or more particularly, to not fail. It is careful and concerned with image. It is hierarchical, with management and coaches calling the shots – not the players. It mirrors the very business bureaucratic model citizens seek to escape from. In fact, it is now part of the business bureaucratic model. Because it mirrors the neoliberal makeup of the rest of society, citizens cannot see that sport, and within that ‘play’, is no longer free, no longer completely spontaneous or separate from the ordinary or the real. It is a business – part of the entertainment industry. Players are entertainers who display their talents for consumers and the act of playing, at the elite and professional level of sport, is their work.

Writing about sport and the culture industry in the United States, Lasch claimed that the first stage of play becoming an object of mass consumption began with the establishment of ‘big time’ athletes in universities as early as 1878. In their quest for recognition and their desire to be better than their competitors, universities began using sport and their athletes to promote their brand. Increasingly universities used the reputations of their athletics winners and football captains to promote their academic courses and to attract enrolments and gain financial support from local businesses.¹⁴³ During this period, universities ceased functioning solely as universities, and, like sport, began functioning as businesses. Play was used as a tool to help universities promote their institution and sell their brand.

To maintain a positive image and reputation and to impress businesses who had invested in the university’s sports program, “there was a need to maintain a winning record: a new concern with system, efficiency and the elimination of risk.” A new emphasis on drill, discipline and teamwork became central to play and records and analysis arose from managements’ attempts to reduce winning, and play, to a routine measure of efficiency. Play had lost its sense of freedom and spontaneity. Instead it began to mirror the business of the sport it belonged to. Management

began calling the shots on how a player would play. Structures were introduced. Tactics were analysed and the inspirational appeals of old fashioned coaches were met with amused cynicism.\textsuperscript{144}

At the same time, a new form of journalism, one which sold sensationalism instead of reporting news, helped to professionalise amateur athletes, assimilate sport to promotion, and to turn professional athletes into entertainers. Newspapers reported the business side of play in the sport section. The sport section contained stories about clubs and their finances.\textsuperscript{145} As Huizinga stated in \textit{Homo Ludens}, it was difficult to tell where play finished and where non-play started. Certainly play was no longer separate from the ordinary or real and was, in fact, a business, with business characteristics.

Lasch bemoaned the role of money in play, particularly at the expense of loyalty.

According to Lasch:

“\textquote{The athlete, as a professional athlete, seeks above all to further his own interest and willingly sells his services to the highest bidder.}”\textsuperscript{146}

For Lasch, the sense of community from play had disintegrated. While it still may have existed in some form, it was fake, or secondary to the individual interests and financial wants of the player. Players increasingly saw themselves as the entertainers of a ‘show.’ Yet, these ‘entertainers’ no longer played with the same sense of carelessness, abandon and spontaneity that defined play at its origin. Instead they ‘performed’ within a team structure, with a game plan, with tactics, analysis of key performance indicators and efficiency. Prudence, caution and calculation, so prominent in everyday life, came to shape sport as they shape everything else.\textsuperscript{147}

\textbf{Consequences of the commodification of Play}

For Huizinga, the commodification of play had drastic consequences for society. In its purest form, the play element was a driving force behind citizens coming together to develop the values, principles, spirit and relationships that determined their culture. Because it was untouched and autonomous from the rest of society, play enabled citizens to act freely outside the ordinary and real and without a purpose other than one specific to play.

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\textsuperscript{144} Lasch, C., ‘The Degradation of Sport’, 1980, p. 59
\textsuperscript{145} Lasch, C., ‘The Degradation of Sport’, 1980, p. 60
\textsuperscript{146} Lasch, C., ‘The Degradation of Sport’, 1980, p. 61
\end{flushright}
However, when play lost its autonomy, the ownership of play and the prevailing values of playing were no longer owned by the community. Instead, play was owned by the Culture Industry and was sold to consumers. The values of play mirrored those of the business model in the capitalist world. Furthermore, the relationships that consumers shared with play, and with each other, were increasingly determined by their consumption of sport and therefore were based on the ideals, values and principles imposed by the Culture Industry. No longer was the culture of a society founded in the spontaneous, carefree, fun, autonomous element of play.\textsuperscript{148}

This can be further understood by exploring the theories of Jean Baudrillard, and particular his theory of \textit{simulacra}. Baudrillard was a social theorist and critic best known for his analysis of the modes of mediation and technological communication. Influenced by poststructuralism, Baudrillard constantly drew upon the notions of semiotics, arguing that signification and meaning are both only understandable in terms of how signs interrelate.

In his essay \textit{The Precession of the Simulacra}, Baudrillard writes that society has replaced all reality with symbols and signs, and that all human experience is of a simulation of reality, which he refers to as the \textit{simulacra}. He states that in some way everything is an imitation of something else – that one part of life simulates another and therefore all meaning of the ‘real’ was meaningless; for the ‘real’ only existed in the form of the signs that represented its existence.\textsuperscript{149}

According to Baudrillard:

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“It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double...which provides all the signs of the real and short circuits all its vicissitudes.”\textsuperscript{150}
\end{quote}

Sport is the operational double of play. It is viewed as play and has similar characteristics of play, but it is not real play – it is merely a model of what play was. It feigns to have the same characteristics of play, yet it hasn’t – it only has the symbols and signs of play. However, because organised sport, with its structured, regimented, controlled makeup, mirrors the neoliberal business model that encapsulates most, if not all, popular culture, it is difficult for citizens to recognise that

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\item \textsuperscript{148} Huizinga, J. \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 30
\item \textsuperscript{149} Baudrillard, J., ‘The precession of simulacra’, in Semiotexte, New York, 1983, p. 1
\item \textsuperscript{150} Baudrillard, J., ‘The precession of simulacra’, p. 4
\end{itemize}
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play on the sport field today is not real or what it was at its origin. As Baudrillard writes, “...simulation threatens the difference between ‘true’ and ‘false’, between ‘real and ‘imaginary.’”^151

If play is simulated, it is reduced to the signs which attest to its existence through sport. Because there are moments of carelessness, spontaneity and bursts of energy it is easy to believe that play, in its original form, still exists. However, underlying today’s play, and its consumption, is money – thus it is no longer free, no longer autonomous and no longer real. The signs of play are still present, yet they are only present to attest that play once existed.

Furthermore, as play has progressed and developed into ‘organised sport’, it now imitates and simulates a business. Certainly many sporting clubs are set up as a business would be. Sport and its controlled, structured, organised make-up reflect the same characteristics as the dominant business bureaucratic model of the capitalist world.

The consequences of such transformations have been discussed by many cultural theorists for hundreds of years. One of the first studies of the commodification of culture was by the Frankfurt School of Research, and in particular Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. In their most famous work, *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that when culture items, such as play, are commodified and incorporated into the Culture Industry, culture becomes homogenised and somewhat simplified. The values, principles and messages that consumers are exposed to through their consumption of such culture are limited. Furthermore, the dominant messages are no longer determined from folk culture such as play or the coming together of the grass roots of society, but are enforced from the top-down by ‘culture manufacturers.’ As such instead of communities forming through ‘play forms’, play was instead merely a mirror of the dominant ideals of the Culture Industry.\(^152\)

Therefore, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, the common good and common interest of a community that once developed in play forms is now lost. The culture of a community is no longer created from the grass roots of a society, or through play. Instead it is imposed and manufactured by an Industry concerned with generating economic capital. Play is used for a secondary purpose – to make money, to provide the masses with entertainment, an escape or distraction. The connection a citizen shares with his or her culture is flawed, making today’s communities less genuine. Furthermore, sport has increasingly taken on business characteristic and holds the

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economic objective of making money as a primary objective. As Huizinga writes, it is increasingly
difficult to tell where play ends and non-play begins.  

In his book, Understanding Power, Noam Chomsky discusses how sport and play is now very much a
part of the real and ordinary life of the community.

Chomsky noted that while we have experts within the sporting industry; every supporter of the
game considers themselves as an expert too. They often believe that their expertise and knowledge
of the game is as good as those who are paid to analyse the game. They believe that their
comments are as valid as any so called expert, and as a result, feel comfortable challenging almost
any coach or expert on any issue of the game. Chomsky noted that this is unusual and almost unique to sport.

Chomsky also noted that their willingness to challenge any expert shows that supporters and
consumers of popular sport give much of their time and attention to sport. It is a serious part of
their lives. When play was autonomous it was considered separate from the real and ordinary
elements of day to day living. While a contest could be considered serious during the play contest,
once the contest was over it carried little consequence as the players were ‘only playing.’

This is no longer the case. Play is no longer what it was at its origin. Play became display. It is now
sport and very much part of the entertainment industry. Sport is now a business, consumed by
spectators. It is serious and talked about every day of the week in newspapers, boardrooms, pubs
and lounge rooms. It is part of real and ordinary living, yet it is no longer able to develop active
participation within a community. As Chomsky writes, this newform of organised sport mirrors the
business world we live in. Furthermore, he, like Adorno and Horkheimer, argues that it serves as a
tool to distract the masses from being active participants within society.

What does this mean for the community and its democracy?

In his book, The Society of the Spectacle, French Marxist theorist and philosopher, Guy Debord,
argued that authentic social life had been replaced by the spectacle – a representation of authentic
life. Debord stated that “all that was once directly lived has become mere representation,”
arguing that active, genuine, authentic participation within society had been replaced by the

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153 Huizinga, J., ‘The play element in contemporary civilisation’, p. 206
154 Chomsky, N., Understanding Power: The Indispensable Chomsky, in Mitchell, R., and Schoeffel, J., (eds),
155 Chomsky, N., Understanding Power, p. 99
156 Chomsky, N., Understanding Power, p. 101
Massachusetts, 1994, Thesis 1
consumption of the spectacle. Debord argued that the spectacle simulated authentic social life, but was in reality a passive, corrupted version of social life. According to Debord, the relationship between the spectacle and the citizen had superseded the community. That is, the spectacle had supplanted genuine activity and “the social relationship between people is mediated by images.”

Furthermore, Debord argued that the ‘spectacular society’ and the economic principles which have stimulated the ‘entertainment and spectacle age’ has diminished the quality of life in society and the relationships between its citizens. As Debord stated in Thesis 1 of *The Society of the Spectacle*, “All that was once directly lived, has become mere representation.” This reduces the individual’s ability to attain a true sense of community and active participation in society. As such, citizens are less likely to feel a genuine sense of belonging and self-worth.

If play once enabled society’s citizens to form communities by coming together to enjoy a common, enjoyed activity that was autonomous and separate from other parts of society, then the commodification of play means the dynamic of the community and the way the community is formed and defined has changed.

The significance of this is illuminated by the work of Thomas Frank, who in his book, *One Market Under God*, argued that today’s definition of what constitutes a community is largely based on individual interests and has money at the core of an individual’s freedom within a community. Frank discusses the American Financial Industry to argue the shift towards individual incentives motivating citizens to participate within the community. He also argues that money today underlies the foundation and building blocks of community. In doing so, Frank argues that the financial industry has become the model of this new form of community, encouraging mass participation – meaning for the millions of people playing the stock exchange, the market represents *them* and acts in *their* interests and on *their* behalf. For them, playing the stock exchange reinforces the community and democratic notions that Australia, for example, was committed to at its founding – active participation, in common with others, as a community.

However, Frank argues that this type of community is not real. He argues that play on the stock exchange is based on the potential to accumulate economic capital and therefore participation in the stock exchange market is based more on individualism than a collective good. In this sense...

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158 Debord, G., *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 4
159 For examples of Debord arguing this point, see: Debord, G., *The Society of the Spectacle*, Thesis 6, 10, 16, 17, 19
161 Frank, T., *One Market under God*, pp. 95
playing the stock exchange serves to promote and justify neoliberal ideals of free trade, privatisation, deregulation and individualism.

Frank argues that participants playing on the stock exchange celebrated their economy doing well; however their freedom was increasingly dependent upon economic capital. Their freedom to reach their full potential within the community was determined by how much economic capital they could accumulate and how much it enabled them to consume.162

Using this example, the stock exchange provides a model for the whole of society – including sport. Increasingly, many of society’s institutions have placed the objective of profit-making at the forefront of their operation and decision making. In sport, this has happened to such an extent that the ‘play element’ has been commodified – money is made by players from playing, spectators pay money to stadiums and clubs to watch players display their talents and media outlets broadcasting play as an item of entertainment have reaped millions from broadcasting play as a form of entertainment to its consumers. Therefore, while communities still exist in some way through participating in play, money now underlies their existence.

It is clear from the above analysis that the play element has been transformed over time, and as will be argued, has been deformed by neoliberalism. Johan Huizinga’s definition of play provides an understanding of what play was, how it was characterised and how it helped shape the community ideals and values that were at the core of Australian democracy at its founding in 1901. However, as this thesis uses Huizinga’s definition of play as a means of understanding the ‘ideal’ play characteristics, it is necessary to extend the discussion of Huizinga, his broader insights as a cultural historian and the importance he placed on play phenomena in stimulating communities, culture and understanding human behaviour.

It should also be noted that Huizinga is not without his share of critics, many of whom challenge his position as a cultural historian, claiming his insightful observations lack conceptual rigour and theoretical framework. To apply Huizinga’s definition of play to modern Australian football, and to utilise Huizinga’s observations as a means of understanding the importance of play in developing genuine communities and culture in society, it is necessary to both defend and enrich Huizinga’s observations. In doing so we can ensure his observations can be used as a means of understanding the transformation of ‘play’ to ‘display’ in the Australian Football League. The next chapter of this thesis seeks to do exactly that by utilising the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to augment Huizinga’s

162 Frank, T., One Market under God, p. 98
arguments, provide a theoretical framework in support of his cultural insights and defend him against his critics.
Chapter 3: Huizinga’s Theory of Play: Huizinga as Cultural Historian

To understand Huizinga’s study of the play element, its strengths and the views of his critics it is necessary to first explore and develop an understanding of how he came to study play and how he developed an interest in play’s role in human behaviour and the make-up of community and culture.

Important to this discussion is the role of Huizinga as a ‘cultural historian.’ As a cultural historian, Huizinga had always been more interested in the arts, literature, rituals, manners and morals, styles and sentiments—phenomena more closely and obviously related to the imagination and play. Huizinga’s view of the world and of how history should be judged was strongly linked to ‘play phenomena’—and furthermore, he believed that through the study of play and play-like phenomena, the ‘truth’ of human activity throughout history could be uncovered.

Huizinga was particularly partial to Plato’s view of play. Plato believed that man was created as God’s ‘play thing’ and as a result he believed we should live as God intended us to live—in play forms.

“What I assert is this—that man ought to be in serious earnest about serious things, and not about trifles; and that the object really worthy of all serious and blessed effort is God, while man is created...to be a play thing of God, and the best part of him is surely just that; and thus I say that every man and woman ought to pass through life in accordance with his character, playing at the noblest of pastimes, being otherwise minded as than they now are.”

In developing his view of play and indeed the world, Huizinga also drew upon a passage in Schiller’s Aesthetic Education of Man:

“Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word man, and he is only wholly man when he plays.”

As outlined in the preceding chapter, similar views were shared and expressed by other modernist theorists such as Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger and supported by psychologists such as Winnicott.

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163 Plato, Laws, Book 7, section 803
164 Schiller, F., Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man, Biblio Bytes, Hoboken, N.J., 1909, p. 47
Huizinga’s view of what man is and the importance of play in understanding the meaning of human behaviour also influenced how he viewed the world and understood the past. He was not the first to discover the value of play in explaining human behaviour, but he was the first to attempt an exact definition of play and the way in which play infuses and manifests in all aspects of culture. This made his work a cornerstone of the study of play, which many theorists draw upon as foundational to their own arguments.

*Homo Ludens* was very much the culmination of Huizinga’s interest in ‘play’ and ‘play-like phenomena’ as a cultural historian. To understand Huizinga’s exploration of play as a tool for understanding human behaviour and developing the community and culture of society, it is of fundamental importance to first understand his position as a cultural historian. In doing so, it will become clearer how he reached the conclusions he did and will also provide a platform to expand upon his work and contribute to the study of the play element in the modern world. By examining his critics and defending his work, where necessary, through the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Huizinga’s work gains a vital structure and rigor that can be readily applied to play in sport today.

Huizinga defined history as “nothing less than the intellectual form in which a civilisation renders account to itself of the past.”¹⁶⁶ Like Kant, he believed the historian helps shape the history he writes about and importantly he believed that studying play phenomena provided the best means of uncovering the truths of the past and understanding the dominant ideals and beliefs of society.

In his major essay on historical method *The Task of Cultural History*, Huizinga sought to distinguish the importance of ‘cultural’ history from ‘political’ and ‘economic’ history:

> “Cultural history is distinct from political and economic history in that it is worthy of the name only to the extent that it concentrates on deeper, general themes. The state and commerce exist as configurations, but also in their details. Culture exists only as a configuration. The details of cultural history belong to the realms of morals, customs, folklore, antiquities...”²¹⁶⁷

That is not to say that Huizinga did not consider politics or economics as important, for he considered both a significant part of human life. However, he rejected the notion that politics and economics create human behavioural characteristics or that they are the ‘essence’ of human life. Instead, he believed politics and economics were a secondary part of life—a subsequent product; a

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¹⁶⁵ The views of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger are discussed in Alexos, K., *Vers la pensee planetaire*, Paris, 1964, chapter 1


¹⁶⁷ Huizinga, J., ‘The Task of Cultural History’, pp. 32
result of human behaviour and communal life—not a ‘primary’ cause of human behaviour and communal life. For Huizinga, community and culture did not rise in or as politics—they rose in and as culture.\textsuperscript{168}

**Huizinga in historical context**

In understanding Huizinga’s cultural observations and contribution to history, it is also necessary to understand the historical context of his views. Huizinga understood that a historian’s account of the past was indeed shaped by their own inquiries, attitudes, beliefs and views. He believed that a historian’s account of events could not be considered as objective, but rather a subjective contribution that enriched other accounts of history.

Thus, it is appropriate to consider what Huizinga’s views were and how they might have been shaped. It is also then appropriate to consider if his views and the inter-war period of his time shaped his observations and insight of play’s corruption.

Most of Huizinga’s significant and famous contributions were written between World War I and World War II—a culturally and politically divisive (and depressing) period for Western civilisation. While Huizinga was often criticised for never providing an expansive or direct analysis of politics, in truth he never really stopped thinking about it. It is true that Huizinga considered himself as a cultural conservative in a time of a growing mechanised and commercial society. In 1915, in the first year of the First World War, Huizinga was appointed to the chair of general history and historical geography at the University of Leiden.\textsuperscript{169} One of his first tasks was to prepare a series of lectures on American history, in which he touched on the role of sport in modern, mechanised America.\textsuperscript{170}

As discussed in the preceding chapter, Huizinga believed that above all else, play was characterised by the notions of freedom, creativity and spontaneity, which, he observed, helped citizens develop and express their individuality. However, Huizinga believed that the mechanisation of society in America was undermining the individual’s ability to develop their true self, their creative self, indeed their individual self. In his second work on America, \textit{Life and Thought in America}, published in 1926, Huizinga observed that the prevailing mechanised, commercial, political

\textsuperscript{168} Huizinga, J., ‘The Task of Cultural History’, p. 17


philosophy of the time had placed American modern civilisation on trial. Huizinga strongly argued that the mechanisation of life in America, the commercialisation and trivialisation of culture, the vulgar materialism and the anti-intellectualism of society had corrupted culture and transformed it into a product of the machine and not the creation of man. Of course, these types of criticisms of America were not uncommon in the 1920’s. When it came to lamenting the rise of mass culture, Huizinga’s voice was one of many.

Huizinga did not see these problems as features unique to America, however he did believe they were most pronounced there. Certainly the 1920’s was a period of growing angst and hostility towards modern society by cultural conservatives.

The inter-war years were also characterised by the rise of fascism, which alarmed and distressed Huizinga. In *In the Shadows of Tomorrow* (1936), Huizinga described Europe and its culture as being on the verge of collapse. Huizinga believed that the rise of social conformity, the threat of irresponsible mass action and the politicisation of life was destroying the culture created by the people. Huizinga was a classicist, who believed in the notion of following tradition (which he saw as a product of play) and adhering to standards of form, craftsmanship and restraint. In tradition, chivalry, honour and craftsmanship, Huizinga saw a range of high cultural practises born from play, which in turn helped characterise and determine individualism and help create and sustain community. This will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

For Huizinga, the rise of fascism and commercialisation undid this. The political ideologies concerned with control, sameness, mass production and mass action suffocated and repressed creativity, spontaneity and essentially, play. The consequences of this are expounded in *Homo Ludens*, published a year before the Second World War in 1938.

Furthermore, the political and cultural volatility of the war and inter-war years may have indeed shaped his views, attitudes, beliefs and observations, which by account of his own observations of historians, would have guided his own inquiry and historical account of play, what it should be and how it is being undermined and corrupted.

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173 Huizinga, J., *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*, p. 182
Except for his study of Haarlem, Huizinga made no great contribution to political or economic history, however, this is probably because he did not see them as the essence of human civilisation.\textsuperscript{176} As already stated, he believed that political and economic ideology should be born from culture, which he believed was created in and as play. In \textit{Homo Ludens}, he observed that the process had been reversed – politics and economics were pervading culture. His whole study of play is linked to political ideology – he was not blind to the power of economics or politics, however he did believe that culture was of greater importance.\textsuperscript{177}

Thus, while he bemoaned the corruption of culture and society, he certainly did not believe that manufacturing change in the political or economic sphere would help solve society’s problems. On the contrary, Huizinga believed that to enrich society, the culture of the community – in its purest and most authentic form – needed to be restored and upheld. The play element was a vital part of this process. Indeed for Huizinga, it was the vital part of this process.

\textbf{Understanding life and history through play and play related phenomena}

As stated, Huizinga had a strong belief that the study of play-related phenomena provided the best and most accurate understanding of, and insight into, the lives, communities and truths of history. As a cultural historian he believed that the study of play-related phenomena (as opposed to a politics or economics) enabled him to concentrate on deeper and more intricate themes. Furthermore, he believed that cultural analysis ensured the details of the cultural historian’s findings rest in the morals, customs, folklores and traditions of the time as opposed to economics and politics, where its details lie in itself. It was Huizinga’s firm belief that culture provided a greater and broader understanding of the world, the community, its citizens and their actions. The study of culture, he believed, explores and attempts to understand the behaviour of a society, and more specifically, the meaning of their behaviour. It was through play-like phenomena, such as the arts, that Huizinga was able to understand – or at the very least make claim to understand – the past.\textsuperscript{178}

For Huizinga, art, religion, chivalry, ritual and other cultural phenomena provided a ‘visual’ insight into a given time in history. For example, the art of a particular time, or the rituals of a given generation ‘visually’ depicted not just what life was to the artist, but also what it wasn’t; what the dream or aspirations of the time were; what people yearned for; what they wished to escape from and into; what the dominant ideals of society were. According to Huizinga, the aspirations and

\textsuperscript{177} Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 56
dreams of society, as well as an understanding of what a society wishes to escape from uncovers much about the society. From this analysis, Huizinga claimed the past and present of a society could be understood.\textsuperscript{179}

Furthermore, Huizinga believed that you must be able to ‘imagine’ the past to fully understand it. ‘Imagination’ is a ‘play thing’, which in the context of cultural history and the method of understanding human behaviour, is undoubtedly stimulated from the study and analysis of play like phenomena such as art and ‘visualising’ religious ceremonies, rituals and other traditions of the time.\textsuperscript{180}

However, this lends itself to some criticism. One of most prominent criticisms of ‘cultural historical’ thought as a means of understanding human behaviour is that it is merely a form of play itself. If this is true, what does it mean for its validity as a legitimate tool of discovering the truth of human behaviour throughout history? This question extends to the legitimacy of Huizinga’s definition of play and, more specifically, the problematic relationship between play and the ‘ordinary’ and ‘real’ and the question of whether or not play can provide ‘serious’ outcomes – such as uncovering the truth of real life throughout history.

Nevertheless, Huizinga believed that ‘play-like phenomena’ such as art, ritual, tradition, ceremony and chivalry provided a subjective insight into the past that could contribute to previous cultural insight and be enriched by cultural historians in the future. For Huizinga history, through the analysis of culture, should never be considered objective. The historian’s account of history and the understanding, meaning and truth uncovered by the historian must be subjective, as it is based on the questions, enquiries, interests and even beliefs of the historian. The historian’s enquiry is not based upon a given formula or data, but rather a search for the discovery of truth from the exploration of human behaviour – in the form of play phenomena and, ultimately, culture.

Furthermore, Huizinga believed that a cultural historian could add to the understanding of human behaviour by contributing in parts. Huizinga viewed life and history as many parts; configurations and contributions – like a bunch of flowers made up of many flowers, all contributing in some part to the bunch, or like a tree with many different branches.\textsuperscript{181}

Huizinga’s growing interest in play-like phenomena as a means of studying human behaviour and culture, led to Huizinga’s study of the play element in \textit{Homo Ludens}. Huizinga’s contribution to the

\textsuperscript{180} Huizinga, J., ‘The Aesthetic Element in Historical Thought’, p. 237
\textsuperscript{181} Huizinga, J., ‘The Task of Cultural History’, pp. 76
study of history was based on understanding the culture of the community. Huizinga believed that the culture of a society was the primary driver of the activities and behaviour of the community and its citizens. *Homo Ludens* takes a step back from this to explore what drives or creates the culture of a community – the relationships of its citizens, the structure of its politics and the ideals of its economy. Huizinga took a particular interest in the play element’s role in developing culture and thereby understanding the past.\(^\text{182}\)

Huizinga saw play as a culture-creating activity. Through his definition of play he argued that society had grown and developed through play patterns. He argued that religious rituals, language, war and law, poetry, music and dance have all developed in and as play – characterised by being separate to the ordinary and real, ordered within a certain time and space and separate from seriousness through the desire and contest for honour, glory, chivalry, pride and other noble outcomes.

However, Huizinga believed that once these play like phenomena became more complex or influenced by money and commerce, players ceased to be motivated by noble outcomes and instead were driven by economic objectives. When this happened, Huizinga argued that these play like phenomena no longer existed separately to the ordinary and real and as such, became non distinct from seriousness. He then takes this a step further to suggest that when this happens, life and society cease to be played. Play, by losing its autonomy, loses its sense of spontaneity and joy and instead becomes structured and organised in the image of business.

**Defending Huizinga: Applying a theoretical framework to his cultural observations**

There is an abundance of social theory that can be utilised as a means of understanding the social significance of sport. From the founding fathers of modern social theory to the more contemporary writers of today, the variety of theories that have been utilised to provide a theoretical lens through which we can view sport is rich and vast. Classical theories, critical theories, race and gender theories, contemporary post-dualist theories and post-structuralist theories have all been embraced by a growing community of sports scholars to answer questions about sport and enrich our understanding of its role in society.

For the many theoretical interpretations of sport, no single theoretical perspective prevails. On the contrary, the debate between different schools of thought are robust and, at times, even fractious. Indeed the theories of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, Adorno, Habermas, Giddens, Foucault, Baudrillard, Bourdieu and many other influential theorists have been utilised by modern sports

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scholars in their quest to enrich the sociological study of sport. Perhaps the best approach to understanding sport’s social significance is a cross-discipline approach.

However, the purpose of this thesis is not to discuss the anthology of sports studies that have drawn upon various theories to illuminate sport’s social importance. Nor is the purpose of this study to debate the merits of each theory in the study of sport or to argue the importance of sport through a theoretical lens. Rather, the purpose of this study is to provide Huizinga with a theoretical framework that can provide a means of interpreting his insightful cultural observations. This study is attempting to interpret Huizinga and his observations of play through social theory. Furthermore, by applying a theoretical framework to Huizinga’s observations, we can apply this theory to modern sport to illuminate the modern characteristics of play, sport and their relationship with the sport community.

While Huizinga’s work is often proclaimed as the classical theory of the play element and one which is still drawn upon by many cultural theorists to discuss the role of the play element in understanding human relationships, many theorists have criticised his definition of play and his discussion of the relationship play shares with ‘real life’ and, in particular, ‘seriousness.’ Structuralist theorists have been particularly critical of Huizinga’s method of analysing human behaviour based on cultural observation and the study of play phenomena. Indeed many of Huizinga’s critics claim that he pays little to no attention to social laws and societal structures such as politics, economics and law, and it is true that Huizinga believed these structures of society were a secondary feature of society; a consequence and by-product of human behaviour, which is problematic for many structuralist theorists.

However, as this thesis will illustrate, Huizinga can be defended by applying the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to Huizinga’s observations as a means of giving Huizinga’s insights a theoretical structure and rigour that many suggest it lacks. In doing so, we can begin to understand what has happened to the play element and determine why it has happened in both theory and practice. Furthermore, we can also appease structuralist theorists who claimed Huizinga’s insightful observations gave little attention to what they claim are the dominant, key structures of society.

As will be discussed in greater depth below, through his theoretical concepts of fields, capital and habitus, Bourdieu was effectively attempting to unite social phenomenology and structuralism – breaking from the prominent objective-subjective antinomy of the social sciences. By introducing the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, Huizinga’s cultural observations of play as a means of understanding

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For an overview of social theories and their application to sport, see: Giulianotti, R., Sport and Modern Social Theories, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2004
human interaction can be defended. In fact, his theories can be strengthened and given a renewed relevance to play in the twenty first century.

For example, one of the most significant and discussed claims Huizinga made in *Homo Ludens* is his claim that play had been corrupted and undermined by business objectives. To understand this claim, and therefore to understand how he reached this conclusion, it is first necessary to understand Huizinga’s conceptual view of how he saw the relationship between play and the ordinary and real and how Huizinga understood the change in the relationship between play and the ordinary and real when economic objectives began to dominate the play element. By applying Bourdieu’s theories of *fields*, *capital* and *habitus* to Huizinga’s cultural observations of play’s relationship with the ordinary and the real, the above points become clear. Huizinga did not write about the play element using Bourdieu’s terms of *fields*, *capital*, *habitus* and *autonomy*; however, when they are utilised to interpret Huizinga’s theories, the transformation of play is more easily understood.

Importantly, both Huizinga and Bourdieu believed that something fundamentally important to the relationships formed by citizens, their culture and the community was lost when economics came to dominate other areas of society. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework can be utilised to strengthen Huizinga’s theory and defend his arguments and observations against his critics in a manner Huizinga was unable to do himself. While many of Huizinga’s critics have made just claims which have enriched the study of play, some have failed to understand Huizinga’s observations about play, and in particular, its relationship with the ordinary and the real.

These criticisms will be highlighted and rebutted later in this chapter, but first it is essential to understand more about Pierre Bourdieu, his key terms and theories and how they can be applied to Huizinga’s study of play.

While Bourdieu has been utilised by many modern sports scholars when discussing sport as a sociology subject, most do so when attempting to illuminate the relationship between sport and social class. Theorists such as John Hargreaves, Jennifer Hargreaves, Gruneau, Back, Robson, Sage, Stamm and Lamprecht have all effectively utilised Bourdieu to analyse the link between sport and power relations. While it is important to acknowledge their work, this study is utilising Bourdieu’s

184 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 197
185 The following provide examples of Bourdieu’s concepts and theories being utilised by modern sports scholars to provide a theoretical lens of understanding sport’s social significance:
theories and concepts not to interpret sport’s relationship with social class or power relations, but rather to interpret Huizinga’s observations about play and its transformation.

**Pierre Bourdieu – fields, capital and habitus**

A French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu pioneered investigative frameworks and terminologies to help understand the dynamics of power relations in social life. In building his theoretical framework, Bourdieu developed his key terms of *capital, habitus* and *field* as a means of understanding the interactions of citizens within a given setting to gain power or recognition.  

From the school of genetic structuralism and critical sociology, Bourdieu was heavily influenced by traditional sociology theory, which he utilised to build upon through the development of his own theory. Max Weber’s theories, which centred upon the importance of domination and symbolic systems in social life, as well as the idea of social orders, were substantially drawn upon by Bourdieu to develop the notion of *field*. From Karl Marx, Bourdieu understood that ‘society’ was the product of a range of social relationships. As will be noted later in this chapter, Bourdieu built upon this to argue that these social relations constrained citizens to recognise each other and compete with each other for socially recognised forms of power.

Bourdieu also inherited a certain structuralist interpretation from the theories of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss. Integral to his theories of *field, capital* and *habitus* was Bourdieu’s claim that social structures tend to reproduce themselves. Yet, Bourdieu was also influenced by theories of phenomenology, particularly through the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who played an essential part in the formulation of Bourdieu’s focus on the body, action and practical disposition. These ideas manifested in Bourdieu’s theory of *habitus*.

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Robson, G., *No One Likes Us, We Don’t Care*, Berg, Oxford, 2000


Bourdieu’s theories of capital and habitus (and later, the concept of field) attempt to reconcile the contrasting objective-subjective antinomy of the social sciences. He wanted to unite social phenomenology and structuralism through his theories of habitus. An analysis of Bourdieu’s work and, in particular, a practical investigation of his theories of capital, habitus and field, is necessary to understand this more clearly.

Furthermore, understanding Bourdieu’s theories of capital, habitus and field will enable us to understand the broader, political and commercial transformation of society of the last thirty years, as discussed in the preceding chapter. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework can provide a means of describing not only how citizens relate to each other today, but also how they could or ought to relate to each other. How this relates to the play element will become clearer following an analysis of Bourdieu’s theory.

However, before we thoroughly explore his theoretical framework, it is important to note that Bourdieu did write about sport and, in particular, provide insight into how he saw sport as entertainment in the twentieth century. In his chapter, How can one be a sportsman? Bourdieu positions himself as somewhat of a sporting novice.

“I speak neither as a historian nor as a historian of sport, and so I appear as an amateur among professionals and can only ask you, as the phrase goes, to be a good sport.”

It should also be noted that Bourdieu did not discuss the play element in his discussion of sport, nor did he discuss play’s transformation into the sporting industry. Instead, he began his analysis of sport by recognising the sports field as an arm of the entertainment industry with an economic function and market based characteristics. Indeed he even referred to the relationship between sport (entertainment) and spectators (consumers of sport) as a relationship between ‘demand’ and ‘supply’. Much of this thesis analyses how we arrived at the point Bourdieu uses as the starting point of his discussion about sport, and while he briefly analyses the role of the media and entertainment field in changing the way we, as consumers, relate to and consume sport, the discussion at the centre of this thesis goes far beyond what Bourdieu offers in How can one be a sportsman?

Nevertheless, through Bourdieu’s discussion about sport and the sportsman, we can observe that he and Huizinga shared similar views about play’s transformation into a branch of the entertainment

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189 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’ In Sociology in Question, Sage Publications, 1993, p. 117
190 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’, pp. 117
industry and how his theories of fields, capital and habitus can be utilised as a means of understanding how play transformed into ‘display.’

Throughout the chapter, Bourdieu analyses the different role sport plays in the lives of citizens depending upon their social class, and in doing so supports much of what Huizinga observed through his cultural and historical insights. Bourdieu claimed that sport had become a commodified spectacle; part of a broader entertainment industry and a branch of showbiz.

“Sport as a spectacle would appear more clearly as a mass commodity, and the organisation of sporting entertainments as one branch among others of show business.”

Bourdieu claimed that a new ‘supply’ of sport had changed the way spectators consumed (demand) sport. Bourdieu recognised that sport had become an item of entertainment and as such, it was packaged, sold, consumed and indeed played far differently to how it was in the age of amateurism and before the advent of media and economic dominance. He claimed that the organisation of sport, which coincided with the rise of the sports star, began in public schools when headmasters and teachers would organise sports games and competitions to monitor their students and control what they were doing in their free time. In this sense, sport was used to promote the virtues of future leaders and as a training course in courage and manliness, forming character and developing a will to win, within the rules. In doing so, organised sport was also an extremely economical means of mobilising, occupying and controlling adolescents and creating competitive, organised activities that could be viewed by interested spectators, who, while watching the contest were also controlled and monitored.

Bourdieu claims that as the ‘spectacle’ element of sport (demand) grew, the relationship the play participants share with the game and the spectators (consumers) also changed. Before the media and economics began to dominate play, more noble outcomes such as fitness, teamwork and community, motivated the player and supporters. However, with the rising influence of economics and media in organised sport, the play participant began to be utilised by their sporting organisations to attract crowds, members and money. Furthermore, as most competitive, organised and professional sports developed a ‘win at all costs’ mentality, the play participant was considered a valuable commodity and asset by their sporting organisation in helping their team win and because of this, they, themselves, were packaged as commodities to help sell their team’s brand in the market. Their play ability was also valued in the sporting market and as such, the play participants were valued and then contracted to sporting clubs based on an agreed financial agreement. Thus

191 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’, p. 124
sport and the sports participant became part of the entertainment market whereby the relationships they shared with others within the sports field was, in many ways, defined through market imperatives of demand and supply.  

In concluding his chapter, Bourdieu stated that:

“The transformation of sporting practices and consumption has to be sought in the relationship between changes in the supply and changes in the demand.”

As stated above, as a sports novice, Bourdieu speaks generally about sport without first considering how play became display and then an arm of the entertainment industry. Even so, Bourdieu’s primary claim about the sports field is that it has developed through the entertainment industry to now reflect an entertainment package that is aimed and targeted at attracting more and more spectators who become consumers of sport, television and all associated sports products. According to Bourdieu, the relationship the fan has with sport is now a mirror of a market transaction of supply and demand. To understand what he means by this and indeed to understand how and why sport and the consumption of it changed, it is best to apply Bourdieu’s own terms of fields, capital and habitus to the sports field and indeed, to Huizinga’s cultural, historical insights about play.

Bourdieu developed the notions of habitus and capital while conducting ethnographic research of the Kabyle society in Algeria. Bourdieu noted that while what the Kabyle people said about who they should marry conformed to Levi-Strauss’ mode of kinship, who they actually married was quite different. Bourdieu argued that instead of understanding the actions of the Kabyle people through the structure and organisation of the village and typical house, they could be better explained by the generalisation of practices that varied from situation to situation as people endeavoured to accumulate various kinds of capital. The means to strive for more capital was fundamental to the actions, interactions and struggles of each individual. To account for this, Bourdieu developed the notion of habitus that allowed people to act in new situations based on a personal set of dispositions, yet influenced by the community’s social structures. That is to say the habitus enabled people’s actions and responses to these new situations to be coordinated. Furthermore, they saw the world in conformity to this habitus.

192 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’, pp. 118-119
193 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’, p. 130
194 Bourdieu, P., ‘How can one be a sportsman?’, p. 130
The pattern of these actions could be explicitly identified by observers of the community, but most of the people socialised to develop such a habitus and live accordingly, not reflect on this order, or the nature of the cosmos. Instead it is all embodied in the habitus, as people strive for capital that continually reproduces the social order that reproduces the habitus.

When Bourdieu returned to France and studied education, he accounted for how the education system operated to exclude citizens from poorer backgrounds from succeeding by using the concept of habitus. It was then that Bourdieu’s interest in social class developed. Later, Bourdieu developed the notion of field as the correlate of habitus, showing how fields are reproduced and boundaries maintained through and by the actions (or habitus) of the individuals within the field. Bourdieu also outlined how fields are differentiated and how each field can relate to other fields. The notion of fields, capital and habitus were continually elaborated upon throughout Bourdieu’s career and are further expounded below.

**Bourdieu’s theories of field, capital and habitus**

As outlined above, Bourdieu developed his theories of field, capital and habitus as a means of understanding how citizens related to each other and why they behaved the way they did in a certain time and space, which he described as the field. His notions of capital and habitus helped Bourdieu analyse and understand how citizens within the same field sought to gain power from each other from the limitations of the field of which they were a part. He concluded that the behaviour of citizens and the relationships they shared with each other were reflective of their environment and simply served to legitimise and reinforce the existing structure of their surrounds.¹⁹⁶

To fully understand this theory and how Bourdieu reached his conclusions it is essential to clearly define his notions of field, capital and habitus and how they relate to each other.

Bourdieu argued that what appeared to be autonomous individuals acting according to their own interests are actually products of an emergent historical system of social relations that constrain them to recognise each other and compete with each other for socially recognised forms of power, which he describes as capital. In the above context, capital is any form of power that allows actors to participate in a given field of society to gain further capital, thereby augmenting their position in the field. He extended the idea of capital into four groups — social capital; cultural capital; symbolic capital and economic capital.¹⁹⁷

Social Capital – resources based on group membership, relationships, networks or influence and support. Bourdieu described social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

Cultural Capital – non-financial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means. It refers to forms of knowledge, skills, education and advantages that a person has, which give them a higher status in society. Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system.

Symbolic Capital – refers to the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige or recognition.

Economic Capital – command over economic resources, for example, cash and financial assets.¹⁹⁸

These types of capital, through which Bourdieu claims citizens augment and establish their position in society, are fundamentally linked to the concepts of fields and habitus. For Bourdieu, the modern social world is broken into various fields. A field can be any structure of social relations; it is the site in which citizens compete for capital, and in doing so, struggle against each other to establish their position within that space. Among the main fields in modern society, Bourdieu cited the arts, education, law, politics and the economy. Particularly important to this discussion is the fact that Bourdieu believed that generally, the different actors within each field tend to strive for capital specific to the field they were participating in and independent of the capital of any other field. That is to say that Bourdieu believed each field of society was autonomous and independent of the influences and characteristics of other fields. He held that the economic field was the most dominant, powerful and increasingly influential field and claimed that it was essential to maintain the autonomy of other fields in order to limit the power of those with economic capital.

Importantly, Bourdieu believed that the struggle between citizens for power was constrained by limited characteristics of the field of which they were part. Furthermore, Bourdieu stated that this

¹⁹⁸ Bourdieu outlines his definition of cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and economic capital in ‘The Forms of Capital’, p. 245
struggle for capital also served to augment and reproduce the existing, dominant structure of the field.\textsuperscript{199}

However, if a field lost its autonomy to other, more dominant fields (such as the economic field) the struggle for capital would change to reflect the limitations of the dominant field. Thus citizens would increasingly battle for the most dominant forms of capital, which in turn would further augment and change the structure and characteristics of the field. Furthermore, he stated that if the economic field began to merge with most other fields of society, each field would begin to mirror the next as would the struggle for capital within each field.\textsuperscript{200} This process was highlighted in the study of neoliberalism in the previous chapter.

The nature of this can be further clarified through Bourdieu’s notion of \textit{habitus}. Bourdieu claimed that capital and power can be gained by the actors within a field as a result of their habitus. Habitus can be defined as a system of dispositions developed in response to the objective conditions of the field. That is to say that an individual’s ‘feel for the game’ and struggle for capital is constrained by the dominant characteristics of their surrounds. However, Bourdieu also argued that the characteristics of the field are augmented and reproduced by the habitus of the individual. Having absorbed objective social structures into a personal set of dispositions, the subjective nature of an individual’s actions reinforces the characteristics of the field and the relationships within it.\textsuperscript{201}

This point is fundamentally important in understanding why Bourdieu’s theories of \textit{fields}, \textit{capital} and \textit{habitus} are particularly relevant to Huizinga’s observations and why Bourdieu’s concepts, above all others, have been chosen to interpret Huizinga’s observations about play’s transformation. Huizinga was arguing that when the sport field is autonomous, play is foundational to the culture, relationships and habitus of the field. Play was responsible for shaping the characteristics, culture and spirit of its communities. For example, in an autonomous sport field, sports clubs are created from play. The culture and spirit that characterise these clubs are founded from play. In other words, the culture of the club is founded in the way its members play. However, this process is disrupted when the sport field loses its autonomy to other fields, such as the economic or media fields. When

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\textsuperscript{200} Bourdieu, P., ‘The Forms of Capital’, p. 246
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this happens, the pursuit of economic capital begins to dominate the actions of those participating within the field. As such, the culture, spirit and relationships formed within the field are characterised by their pursuit of, and struggle for, economic capital, which ultimately corrupts play and weakens the community. Play is no longer foundational to the culture and spirit of the football club. Instead the process was reversed—the dominant neoliberal, business characteristics of the football club determine (or corrupt) play.

While this will be illustrated more extensively in the below sections of this thesis, what is important to note here is that Bourdieu’s concepts of fields, capital and habitus helps us understand the transformation of play (action) influencing the structures around it, to the dominant structures of society (such as the economic field) influencing the characteristics of play.

**The influence of the economic field**

Bourdieu claimed that the economic field had undermined the autonomy of most other fields in society, meaning the habitus of the actors within each field was limited to the structure and characteristics of the economic field and each individual’s desire to accumulate economic capital. He believed that the struggle for economic capital began to define the relationships citizens shared with each other, as well as reaffirm the dominating influence of economic ideals across most fields of society. Indeed, he suggested that the influence of the economic field was so prevalent that all fields began to reflect the economic field and as such, look the same. 202

As was highlighted in the preceding chapter, the economic and political philosophy of neoliberalism is now a defining characteristic of almost every field in society. Today, each field—be it private or public—appears to be characterised, and even defined, by neoliberal economics. Likewise, the disposition of each individual is increasingly determined through the constraints of the market and the struggle for economic capital, which, according to Bourdieu’s theory, simply serves to reinforce and legitimise the dominating features of the economic field. Because the economic field and its dominant philosophies have merged with most other fields of society, each field now reflects the other. Furthermore, the habitus, struggle for capital and relationships between the actors of the field also mirror those of other fields, making neoliberalism the dominating norm for society. If it is true, as Bourdieu argues, that individuals relate to each other through their habitus, the limitations of their surrounds and the struggle for capital, then in a field dominated by neoliberal ideals, the relationships formed and shared by citizens must be defined through the market.

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When considering Huizinga’s observations of play, the dominance of the economic field is particularly significant. In effect, Huizinga was arguing that the sport field had lost its autonomy to the economic field. He argued that the merger between the sport field and the economic field meant that the characteristics of play had become subversive to economics, and as such, the habitus of the players and their struggles for capital began to reflect those which you would commonly associate with the economic field. Measurements of statistics, structures of sporting clubs, team tactics and player instructions – all in the pursuit of success – now characterise the sport field.

Through his insightful observations, Huizinga argued that this reflected business. In today’s society, Huizinga would argue it mirrors neoliberalism, which indeed characterises most fields in the western capitalist world.

Of even more importance to this thesis are the consequences of this. Huizinga claimed that the merger between the economic field and sport field and the subsequent dominance of economic capital changed the very definition of the play element. In making this claim, he argued this had consequences for the community, culture and even democracy. As outlined earlier in this thesis, Huizinga believed that play was foundational to developing and sustaining communities and culture. He claimed that when the sport field was autonomous, play was separate to the ordinary and real, and as such, the players were able to come together to play with spontaneity and flair, without the restrictions or constraints of ordinary and real life. In being free, Huizinga claimed that each individual could be their whole self and therefore develop relationships that were meaningful and based upon citizens coming together, to enjoy something in common with others – quite separate from the economic limitations that he considered one of the defining features of ordinary and real life. He argued this enabled citizens to form communities and define their culture.²⁰³

However, when the sport field merged with the economic field, play effectively merged with the rest of society. That is to say, play was no longer autonomous from, or separate to, the ordinary or real. Players effectively stopped playing with as much flair, freedom and spontaneity and began to be managed to perform in accordance with the team rules, tactics, plans and structures outlined by the coach and managers. Performance was analysed in forms of efficiency, effectiveness and a range of statistics reflective of any business performance review. As such, play began to reflect business.

This effectively means the disposition of players, clubs and supporters are now defined by and through the constraints of economics and neoliberalism. The relationships players have with their clubs are now based on financial contracts; the support provided by fans to their clubs is now defined by financial memberships; the performance of individual players and teams are, to some

²⁰³ Huizinga, J., *Homo Ludens*, p. 16
extent, determined by economic capital. As stated in the previous chapter, Huizinga believed that something fundamentally significant was lost when relationships were defined through the market, claiming participants within the sport field were no longer free. Instead, their actions were limited by the economic field.

The influence of the media field

Also important to Huizinga’s study of play is the role and influence of the media – or, as Bourdieu would refer to it – the media field. Huizinga believed that the media field, already influenced by the economic field, had merged with the sport field and subsequently ensured play was utilised by the media as a product they could market and sell to a mass consumer audience in order to profit. He argued that the merger between the media field and the sport field also changed the characteristics of the play element, transforming play into display – a product football fans consumed as entertainment. By becoming consumers of the play ‘product’ fans effectively began to define their relationship with play (at least in some part) through the market. This will be highlighted in a practical sense in the following chapters of this thesis.  

By applying Bourdieu’s theory to these observations, a theoretical framework can be developed to understand what has happened to the play element in modern sport. If we interpret Huizinga through the concepts and terms introduced by Bourdieu, it becomes clear that Huizinga was claiming the economic field had merged with the sport field. As such, the sport field began to mirror the economic field, constraining the actions and operations within the field to a process of developing, packaging and selling play as display. Furthermore, the individuals within the sport field began to develop relationships with the play element through the dominant principles of neoliberalism. Thus the play product is now utilised by the key stakeholders of the field as a tool to accumulate economic capital. This process reinforces the dominant economic characteristics of the field.

Of fundamental importance when considering the consequences of this for the community is the subsequent transformation of the way participants within the sport field relate to the play element and, indeed, each other. Huizinga believed that when play was autonomous from other fields in society, it allowed citizens to freely come together to enjoy something in common with others and strive towards a common and shared goal. They felt ownership of the play element, the games they played and the clubs that spawned from the grass roots. However, when the play element was transformed by the influence of the economic field and subsequently consumed as display, the play

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204 Huizinga, J., ‘Western Civilisation sub specie ludi, and Play Element in Contemporary Civilisation’, in Homo Ludens, p. 177
element was effectively taken from those who once owned it and sold back to them in the form of a commercial product.\textsuperscript{205} Huizinga would most likely argue today that consuming entertainment with your friends at a football match is far different to coming together to enjoy something which you have genuine ownership of, or which you have helped create from the grass roots. Huizinga believed the relationship individuals share with play when it is defined through the market were not as genuine or real, and as such, would argue that today’s communities are now somewhat weaker.

As mentioned above, while many theorists were critical of Huizinga’s cultural observations, by interpreting his insights through Bourdieu’s concepts of fields, capital and habitus, Huizinga can be defended and enriched and furthermore, applied to the game of Australian Rules football to understand the transformation of play to display in the AFL today and its effects on the AFL community.

Answering Huizinga’s critics

As mentioned above, while Huizinga’s study of play in \textit{Homo Ludens} is considered one of the classical studies of play, it is impossible to ignore the fact that it was written seventy seven years ago. Indeed, more recent play theorists may consider Huizinga’s observations as out dated. Since \textit{Homo Ludens} was published in 1938, many theorists have expanded upon Huizinga’s observations to develop their own play definitions. Certainly when studying the multitude of play theories presented by a wide range of theorists, it becomes clear that while some theorists deviate significantly from Huizinga’s characteristics of play, many don’t. In fact, over seventy seven years, Huizinga’s key characteristics of play have endured and strongly resonate in many modern studies of play.

Many theorists go to great lengths to illuminate the ambiguous nature of the play element. In her essay, \textit{What is Play? In search of a Universal Definition}, Gwen Gordon writes:

“The ambiguous, variable and paradoxical nature of the play concept is so widely accepted, that most play theorists consider the search for a universal definition to be pure folly...There are few subjects that have been poked and prodded by as many disciplines as play has. And, like the famous blind men describing their limited section of the elephant, each elephant has come to a different conclusion about the nature of play.”\textsuperscript{206}

Certainly the notion of play can be studied in different ways, within different disciplines and in different forms, however, perhaps because of Huizinga’s limited scope, his study is relatively

\textsuperscript{205} Huizinga, J., Nature and Significance of Play, in \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 27
uncomplicated. Huizinga was not discussing the sport field in its many, various forms. Nor was he discussing play across many, various disciplines. Huizinga was a cultural historian who was predominantly discussing the contest orientation of play. Furthermore, he was predominantly concerned with play’s link to a society’s culture and, ultimately, community. This makes Huizinga particular relevant to this study.

Many theorists such as Caillois, Hans, Millar and Sutton-Smith\textsuperscript{207} have critiqued Huizinga’s study of play and utilised \textit{Homo Ludens} as a starting point to further develop the play concept and introduce notions of play forms, games and rhetoric, however, most play theorists appear united in believing that play has a number of fundamental characteristics at the core of its existence—in any form and across any discipline. Furthermore, these fundamental characteristics arise in Huizinga’s study of play and are particularly significant in understanding what Huizinga believed was the corruption of play.

The most common, agreed upon fundamental characteristics of play are: play must be fun; play must be free and voluntary; play must be spontaneous; play must be separate from the ordinary and real. While Huizinga’s exact terms may not be universal amongst all play theorists, when studying the most agreed upon characteristics of play, it is clear that Huizinga’s observations of play being fun, free, spontaneous and separate to the ordinary and real are reflective in most notable works.

In her classic work, \textit{The Psychology of Play}, Susanna Millar writes that at the core of play is “an attitude of throwing off constraint.” Whether the ‘constraint’ is emotional, social or physical, once one breaks free of the constraints of real and ordinary work and plays within an autonomous sport field, they can be spontaneous, instinctive, and, importantly, free.\textsuperscript{208} Most works on play characterise it as being separate to the ordinary and real through the meta message of “this is play.”\textsuperscript{209} generally meaning that play indicates a shift to a new, separate and autonomous field with its own rules and procedures.

The link between play’s detachment from real life and its ability to produce spontaneous, creative, impulsive, free actions is fundamental to understanding Huizinga’s study and of play and its corruption. It is when play is free from objectives or outcomes concerned with, or inhibited by, the

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\textsuperscript{207} See: Caillois, R., The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games, in \textit{The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology}, Salen, K., and Zimmerman, E., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, 2006
\textsuperscript{208} Sutton-Smith, B., \textit{The ambiguity of play}, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1997
\textsuperscript{209} Hans, J. S., \textit{The play of the world}, University of Massachusetts Press, Boston, 1981
\textsuperscript{208} Millar, S., \textit{The psychology of play}, Penguin Books Ltd, Oxford, 1968, p. 21
\end{footnotesize}
fear of real life outcomes that it can be spontaneous and creative, for the outcome only matters within the sport field. Once the boundaries become blurred between the sport field and other fields of society, the outcome of the play contest can have real life consequences. Thus the play element is no longer completely free from real life constraints, meaning play participants are no longer completely free.

Furthermore, when individuals are able to throw off the constraints and burdens of real life, they are able to leave behind their real life roles, responsibilities and limitations and fully embrace the autonomous sport field environment. Because they are unrestricted or uninhibited, the individual is free to be spontaneous and give their full self when playing. As Viola Spolin writes:

“In spontaneity, personal freedom is released, and the total person, physically, intellectually, and intuitively, is awakened. This causes enough excitation for the student to transcend himself or herself—he or she is freed to go out into the environment, to explore, adventure and face all dangers unafraid...Every part of the person functions together as a working unit, one small organic whole within the larger organic whole of the agreed environment which is the game structure.”

In this description, Spolin captures the main characteristics of play. Play is fun and free and its spontaneous creativity arises when we throw off the constraints of real life and when play is not influenced by real life.

The notions of fun, freedom, spontaneity and separation from the ordinary and real were largely embraced and enriched by French writer and philosopher, Roger Caillois, who, in Man, Play and Games expanded on Huizinga’s more contest orientated notion of play to include a range of play forms. While Caillois adopted most of Huizinga’s characteristics of play when developing his own definition, he was also critical of Huizinga for not expanding his study beyond the contest orientation of play. Caillois argued that Huizinga’s study did not extend to discuss play in its various forms and as such, developed four fundamental categories of games and two types of play to illuminate the complexity of play beyond Huizinga’s study of contested play. While Caillois’ study of play can be utilised to critique Homo Ludens, it can also be utilised to enrich Huizinga’s study. Indeed, Caillois’ forms of play can be seen as a means of understanding and interpreting Huizinga’s study of play’s

212 Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, p. 123
corruption. In fact, Huizinga’s observation of play’s transformation becomes clearer when interpreted through Caillois notions of *agon*, *paidia* and *ludus*.

Caillois argues that we can understand the complexity of games by referring to four play forms: *agon* (competition); *alea* (chance); *mimicry* (role playing); *ilinx* (the sense of altering perceptions).\(^{213}\)

Because this study is concerned with the study of play in the Australian Football League, and because Huizinga was primarily concerned with the contest orientation of play, the play form of *agon* is by far the most relevant to this study.

According to Caillois, *agon* is a group of games that would seem to be competitive, like a combat in which equality of chances is artificially created in order that the adversaries should confront each other under real conditions, whereby the question of rivalry (or who will win) hinges on qualities such as speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity within the defined limits of the play environment and without outside assistance. This ensures the winner appears to be better than the loser in a certain category of exploits. The practice of *agon* presupposes substantial attention, training, application and a will to win. It has rules and the aim is not to antagonise or cause injury, but to demonstrate superiority.\(^{214}\)

In summarising Caillois’ definition of *agon*, it is clear that Huizinga’s study of play is, in fact, a study of play in *agon*. The contest, which is the defining feature of *agon*, is at the heart of Huizinga’s study of play. This provides some context and clarity to the play forms at the core of Huizinga’s observations. Furthermore, Caillois’ claim that within *agon* the question of rivalry hinges on qualities exhibited within the confines of the play environment and without outside assistance is also of particular interest in understanding Huizinga’s observations on the corruption of play. Huizinga would argue that if outside influences begin to influence the play element within *agon*, it is corrupted. Put another way, if outside influences, such as the media or economic capital, begin to influence the contest, how does this affect the play element within *agon*?

This is perhaps best understood through a discussion about Caillois’ two distinct types of play, *paidia* and *ludus*. In his study, Caillois placed play on an evolving continuum from *paidia* to *ludus*. Caillois described *paidia* as being unstructured, spontaneous activities associated with notions of instinct and impulsive exuberance. *Ludus*, on the other hand, is structured and is associated with rules, regulation and discipline. Caillois writes that all play may be founded in *paidia*, but human instinct and tendency ensures *paidia* is transformed into *ludus*. Caillois argues that it is human instinct to

\(^{213}\) Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, p. 131

\(^{214}\) Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, pp. 131-133
provide play with rules, objectives, goals and desired outcomes. It is part of its institutionalisation into sport. This is an important point and one relevant to Huizinga’s study of contest oriented play. While Caillois’ terms of *paidia* and *ludus* are the result of Caillois addressing complexities of the play element Huizinga otherwise ignored, in actual fact, it serves to strengthen Huizinga’s claims about play’s corruption.

While Caillois has categorised play as *paidia* and *ludus*, Huizinga would argue that play’s transformation from *paidia* to *ludus* can be a result of play losing its autonomy to external influences. Providing play remains separate to ordinary and real life, the implementation of rules and discipline within the play element does not jeopardise its authenticity. However, if the structures, systems, game plans, tactics and micro management of play that are now synonymous with modern day professional sport is a result of the influence of the media and economic fields, then the transformation of play is corrupt. While it is reasonable to assume that all contest oriented games fit into the category of *ludus*, those at the extreme end of the continuum—the most structured, the most regulated, with the most serious outcomes—are more than likely professional sports whose play element has been corrupted by economic capital. This will be illuminated throughout this thesis when discussing the transformation of play in the AFL.

However, while Caillois embraced many of Huizinga’s observations of play to develop his own definition and theories of play forms, he was also critical of Huizinga for ignoring the role and influence money can have in play. In *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois writes:

“...the part of Huizinga’s definition, which views play as action denuded of all material interests, simply excludes bets and games of chance – for example, gambling houses, casinos, racetracks, and lotteries – which, for better or worse, occupy and important part of the economy and daily life for various cultures. It is true that the kinds of games are infinitely varied, but the constant relationship between chance and profit is very striking. Games of chance played for money have practically no place in Huizinga’s work. Such an omission is not without consequences.”

Caillois does not see the act of playing for money or profit as an example of play’s corruption as playing for money does not change the fact that play, in this instance, is completely unproductive. As Caillois states, “the sum of the winnings at best would only equal the losses of the other players. Nearly always, the winnings are less.” Huizinga would disagree. While his definition is

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215 Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, p. 141
216 Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, p. 124
217 Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, p. 124
uncompromising, it is also clear. For Huizinga, play must be free. One must not play for pay and, importantly, play must be separate to the ordinary and real. If an individual is playing for the reward of profit, then he or she is also playing for pay. Furthermore, using Bourdieu’s terms, if a player is playing to win economic capital, it is clear the economic field has merged with the sport field, ensuring that play is no longer separate to the ordinary and real. That is, he or she is no longer simply playing. They are also winning or losing money. They are profiting or incurring losses. The consequences of this transcend into real life.

Indeed, if a player in a casino gambles only a dollar and wins or loses a small amount, then the outcomes are relatively inconsequential. However, what if he or she gambles thousands of dollars and loses thousands more? What if this means he or she can longer meet other financial, family or social obligations? No longer is he or she ‘only playing.’ In this instance, play is no longer unproductive. Rather it has been destructive. Thus, Huizinga’s ‘line in the sand’ when determining when play was corrupted was simple, once it was influenced by money, play’s corruption had begun.

This thesis does not pretend that money was not a part of Australian football and its football clubs at the game’s founding. The notion that Australian football once existed without the influence of money is fanciful. However, it does seek to illuminate how the growing influence of economic capital has transformed the play element and seeks to understand the impact of this for society. The best way to understand this is through Huizinga’s clear understanding of what play is, how it is transformed and, ultimately, how it is corrupted.

However, not all play theorists believe that play is transformed. Some tend to think it has naturally evolved. In his expansive study of play, *The Ambiguity of Play*, Brian Sutton-Smith cites evolution biologist, Stephen Jay Gould, to link play’s characteristics with Gould’s principles of evolution. Gould argues that evolution is determined by adaptive variability, characterised by “sloppiness, broad potential, quirkiness, unpredictability, and above all, massive redundancy. The key is flexibility, not precision.” Sutton-Smith finds a link between the characteristics of play and each of Gould’s principles, stating that “if quirkiness, redundancy and flexibility are keys to evolution, then finding play to be itself quirky, redundant, and flexible certainly suggests that play may have a similar biological base”.

Certainly, this is an interesting argument and one with merit. Indeed it can be drawn upon to understand the progression from *paidia* to *ludus*, or play to games. Caillois argues that it is a matter of natural human instinct that sees play ‘evolve’ into games with rules, objectives and desired

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219 Sutton-Smith, B., *The ambiguity of play*, p. 222
outcomes. This is an example of humans perhaps becoming bored with play and play becoming redundant. To add elements of unpredictability and quirkiness to play, players draw on play’s flexibility to add rules, objectives and desired outcomes. The process is then followed and more rules, or different rules, are added.

Huizinga’s study of play does not mention this, as he predominantly discusses the contest orientation of play—that is, his study of play assumes rules and objectives exist. He does not refer to play’s evolution, but he does make it clear that rules, structure and objectives are part of play as long as they are not dictated to by real life influences. If rule changes are the result of economic or commercial influences (such as television) then Huizinga would see this as a result of play’s transformation, not evolution. In this instance, the game’s natural evolution has been undermined and corrupted by forces outside of the sport field. For Huizinga, play’s corruption is concerned with its transformation, not evolution.

Another major criticism of Huizinga’s cultural observations of play was made by Caillois and Carlo Antoni, who separately, but effectively, criticised Huizinga for overlooking the importance of politics and economics in the study of human behaviour and interaction. Critics proclaim this is of particular interest because the time Huizinga was writing was a politically volatile period of Nazi domination, oppression and, ultimately, war. Caillois also suggested that Huizinga failed to understand that cultural historians—by virtue of the subjective nature of their findings—are themselves political beings. Their interests, enquiries, principles, ideals, life experiences and views often determine the type of research they conduct and the meaning they give to their findings. They are not, therefore, without political prejudice themselves.

However, Huizinga does not dismiss politics or the economy as unimportant or irrelevant when attempting to understand history, human actions or culture—he merely rejects the argument that they create human behavioural characteristics or that they are the essence of human life. He saw the political field as a secondary part of human life; a result of the dominant ideals and principles of the time and the culture of the community. He dismissed the argument that community and culture arose in or through politics.

More enlightening are the criticisms aimed at Huizinga by Carlo Antoni. In his essay, *From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking*, published in 1937 (a year before *Homo Ludens*),

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220 Caillois, R., ‘The Definition of Play and The Classification of Games’, pp. 141-142
222 Huizinga, J., *Homo Ludens*, p. 206
Ludens appeared), Antoni dismissed historiography as being ‘a legitimate method of understanding human behaviour in any age’ believing it ‘lacked conceptual rigor and structure.’ In particular, Antoni criticised Huizinga’s conception of the relationship shared between play and reality. This was a common criticism of Huizinga’s work and one which needs to be addressed and defended.\footnote{Antoni, C., \textit{From History to Sociology: The Transition in German Historical Thinking}, Wiley, Stafford, 1959}

Both Antoni and Huizinga describe and define reality with characteristics that are underlined by the notion of seriousness. In \textit{Homo Ludens}, Huizinga argues that play does not exclude seriousness, but also states that ‘seriousness should be restricted to the contest or battle within play.’ Fundamental to this claim is the autonomy of the sport field. Assuming the sport field was autonomous, play could indeed be serious, but only during the contest of play. That is not to say that play does not have serious outcomes. Ideas, relationships, traditions and, importantly, culture, arose from play – all of these could be considered serious. However, for this to be true, Huizinga believed that play was, and should always be, separate from the ordinary and the real. If the sport field lost its autonomy and degenerated into business, play – and the consequent outcomes of play – would be corrupted and considered less genuine.\footnote{Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, pp. 26} Thus Antoni argued that using Huizinga’s concept of play and reality made it impossible to tell when play finished and when it began. The boundaries of the sport field had been blurred. Interestingly, this same criticism is one which Huizinga levelled at the modern world when discussing his belief that the play element had been undermined by economics and characterised through business ideals.\footnote{Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 206}

Huizinga’s distinction between play and the ordinary and real was based on the assumption that play was autonomous. However, he did recognise that their relationship changed when play was influenced by other fields such as the economic and media fields. When play lost its autonomy to these fields it was no longer separate from the ordinary or the real meaning it had serious implications for those playing. Play was transformed into an item of entertainment and a tool to make money. The sport field came to be analysed as a business would and as such, Huizinga claimed it was indeed difficult to tell when play finished and non-play began.

However, this had little to do with Huizinga’s conceptual view of the ‘relationship between play and the ordinary and real’ being unclear. Huizinga believed that the play element should not be influenced by any other field of society for when it did, play was no longer separate to the ordinary or the real and the outcomes generated from play (serious or otherwise) were underlined by money. When this happened it was economic capital, and not play, that had the greatest influence on the
relationships, ideals, culture and community born from play. He called this the ‘corruption of society’.  

Huizinga became increasingly hostile towards the influence the economic field had on the sport field, believing that citizens did not recognise that the play element had adopted business-like characteristics, nor did they recognise that the sport field they were escaping to, mirrored what they wished to escape from.  

Linguist, Emile Benveniste, was also critical of Huizinga’s view of the relationship between play and seriousness. He argued that play was ‘seriousness minus any rational or empirical motivation.’ In making this claim, Benveniste used examples of the sacred and religious ritual to highlight his differences with Huizinga. Benveniste claimed that a sacred or religious ceremony was ‘play’ when any form of reason, such as religious rite, tradition or even myth, was removed. He believed play was a lower form or order of reality. However, Huizinga would disagree with this. He believed that play was part of all religious and sacred ceremonies – largely because he believed, like play, they were separate to the ordinary and real and ordered by a specific duration of time. The outcomes of these ceremonies were not meaningless, nor were they without ‘rational motivation.’ On the contrary, Huizinga believed that the outcomes were born from play characteristics such as nobility, chivalry and honour and as such were of fundamental importance to the culture, community and human behaviour of the time.

Huizinga believed that play stimulated ceremony and the nobility, honour and chivalry born out of these rituals, which he claimed stimulated culture. He did not see religious or sacred ceremony as a result of removing its rational, meaningful motivation. As Anchor asked in his essay History and Play, if Benveniste was correct, what would the difference be between play and other mindless (and even harmful) activity such as crime, looting, stealing and other gratuitous activity?  

However, it is the criticisms of Jacques Ehrmann that perhaps best challenges Huizinga’s theory of play’s relationship with the rest of social reality. He argues that play does not take place in isolation from or in opposition to the rest of social reality. While Huizinga concludes that reality is seen as ‘corrupted play’ and play as being ‘devoid of reality,’ Ehrmann disputes this by arguing that play does exist within reality and that it could never be separated from the real world. Ehrmann believes that play was an accompaniment or complement of ‘serious’ and disputes Huizinga’s argument that ‘the

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226 Huizinga, J., Homo Ludens, p. 52  
227 Huizinga, J., Homo Ludens, p. 200  
breakdown of the distinction between play and seriousness eventually contaminated both spheres.\textsuperscript{230} Ehrmann believes it was Huizinga’s inability to see play as part of the ordinary and in particular, as an economic function, that exposed his weakness. Ehrmann claimed that the economic function of play made it part of reality. In making this claim he argued that play indeed consumed time, energy and space in exchange for power, prestige, glory, superiority and even revenge. This exchange of consumption for an end outcome reflects the same characteristics and function of the market – an integral and obvious part of real life.\textsuperscript{231}

Indeed this is a valid criticism – play does consume energy, time and space just as it provides an outcome, feeling, status or product. However, it was the exchange of money that Huizinga was most hostile towards. It is one thing to mirror economics or the operation of the market, it is quite another to operate as a business or market would. Huizinga claimed that it was economic capital and commercialisation that corrupted play. His hostility was directed towards the fact that play came to reflect reality because of its economic function—which once did not exist. When the sport field lost its autonomy to the economic field, it no longer mirrored business, it became a business. Play’s exchange no longer reflected the market; it operated as a market. It became a source of profit making. Ehrmann spoke of play’s exchange of time, energy and space for glory, prestige power and revenge as a form of economics, however, the exchange he outlined did not include or account for play producing profit. Rather, he spoke in idealistic terms. Quite rightly, Huizinga went beyond this to explore how play was transformed when the exchange was defined by commerce. And, as already stated, he concluded that it led to the corruption of play.\textsuperscript{232}

The relationship of play and reality is also the subject of Eugene Fink’s writings. Fink agrees with Huizinga that play is a unique phenomenon, but denies that play is the only such phenomenon or that it is unique because it stands apart from, or in opposition to, the rest of reality. According to Fink, it is the ‘symbolic function and quality’ of play that gives it a double character:

1) Man plays in the real world and knows himself to be playing; yet

2) When man is playing within the play sphere, the play sphere appears autonomous and unrelated to the real world.\textsuperscript{233}

Thus the player simultaneously exists in two spheres—the real and the play. Furthermore, Fink argues that it is the objects of reality, transformed by the imagination in the play sphere, that align

\textsuperscript{230} Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, p. 201
\textsuperscript{232} Huizinga, J., \textit{Homo Ludens}, pp. 212-213
\textsuperscript{233} Fink, E., ‘The Oasis of Happiness: Towards an Ontology of Play’, in \textit{Game, Play, Literature}, p. 19
the two spheres. Thus, he argues, the relationship between reality and play is not antithetical, but rather symbiotic. The play sphere is not separate to the ordinary or the real as it always has a real setting and real objects, which are transformed by the player when he or she is playing. Therefore, *play is a mirror of reality.*

However, Huizinga argued that in fact reality should mirror play, or more to the point, that culture was developed through play. He claimed that when the reverse is true it is because the dominant economic and commercial characteristics of reality dominate play. In this instance play merely serves to enhance and reproduce the dominant ideals of society. The real objects and real settings are no longer transformed by the player. Instead the play sphere is transformed to mirror reality. The symbiotic relationship between play and reality is corrupted by the economic field.

It is clear that the concept of play remains difficult to define. Indeed it appears that from the many, varied studies of play the most commonly agreed upon characteristic of play is its ambiguity. However, Huizinga’s contribution to the study of play has undoubtedly endured. In fact, his key characteristics of play are the starting point for almost all play theorists to begin their quest for understanding play. Furthermore, while most contributions to the field have developed their own unique definition of what play might be, many of them are too vague and, therefore, too restricted. Of those who do have more structure around their play definition (such as Caillios), play to them, seems very much like what play seemed to Huizinga. While it is true that Huizinga’s observations of play primarily revolved around the contest orientation of play, it is also true that this study is also a study of the contest orientation of play. While many play theorists have added significant and worthy contributions to the play element across many disciplines including psychology, biology and zoology, this study is concerned with the contest orientation of play, its relationship with developing communities and, importantly, is transformation. Therefore, some seventy five years after it was first published, Huizinga’s clear, definitive study of play in *Homo Ludens* provides the best means of understanding play’s transformation in the AFL and the consequences this has had for society.

Furthermore, while many of Huizinga’s critics make valid contributions to the discussion and study of play, many appear confused about Huizinga’s insightful observations concerning the influence of the economic field in the sport field. Certainly the observational nature of Huizinga’s 1938 study has in many respects been eclipsed by more up to date theories of human behaviour and culture; however, by applying Bourdieu’s concepts to Huizinga’s historical observations, Huizinga’s study of play is

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*Fink, E., ‘The Oasis of Happiness’, pp.19–24 and p. 28
Also see: Hans, J. S., *The play of the world*, University of Massachusetts Press, Boston, 1981.*
given fresh perspective, a more meaningful theoretical framework and a stronger defence against his critics – especially when discussing play’s relationship with ordinary and real life, and in particular, the notion of seriousness. The conceptual relationship between play, real life and seriousness is fundamental to Huizinga’s entire argument about the play element – from his definition of play, his discussion about the function of play and importantly, his argument about the corruption of play. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework when discussed in context to Huizinga’s observation, defend this argument.

To fully understand Huizinga’s argument it is best to interpret his observations through the concepts of Bourdieu in a practical analysis of play in today’s modern, professional sporting landscape. The following chapters aim to do this using the Australian Football League (AFL) as a case study to explore the influence of economic capital in the sport field and the consequences of this for the community and culture of society.
Chapter 4: Play, Money and the Media: A history of the play element in the Australian Football League (AFL)

Play in the AFL today

“The AFL is a brand, a business and a form of entertainment that has to compete for the hearts and minds of Australians, just as all other forms of entertainment do.”


The above description of the former AFL by Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, discusses the play element in the AFL as it undoubtedly and undeniably is—a brand, a business and a form of entertainment.

Furthermore, the former CEO’s acknowledgement that the game is now a brand, business and form of entertainment also highlights the obvious influence of the economic field and entertainment field within the sport field. Indeed the AFL today is a multi-billion dollar industry that reaches all states and territories of the nation and mirrors the capitalist and business bureaucratic model of western civilisation.

In 2013, the AFL’s 18 competing clubs participated in 207 games, at 12 venues in each state and territory of Australia, over 24 weeks of the Toyota AFL Premiership season. The Premiership season was followed by four weeks of the Toyota AFL Finals Series, including 8 Finals and a Grand Final. The average television audience each week of the 2013 AFL Premiership Season was 4.729 million Australians, with another 1.22 million listening on radio. Throughout the season, some 6,368,346 Australians attended AFL games live at the ground, while an average of 3.634 million Australians watched the AFL Grand Final from home on television.237

The 207 games of the AFL Premiership season were played at venues in every state and territory of Australia, commonly named after their corporate partners who had paid millions upon millions of dollars for the naming rights of the grounds and stadiums—grounds such as Etihad Stadium, AAMI Stadium, ANZ Stadium, Patterson Stadium, Skilled Stadium and Aurora Stadium. Gone are the

traditional, suburban grounds and their folksy names that characterised their location or quirky characteristics. *Windy Hill*, the *Western Oval*, the *Junction Oval, Moorabbin, Princess Park, Punt Road Oval, Victoria Park, Glenferrie Oval* and Arden Street Oval are now mere training venues for their multi-million dollar clubs and players – in fact, some are no longer even that.

In 2014, the AFL is bigger than it has ever been before. Structured with economic rational philosophies at the forefront of its vision and direction, the AFL has introduced new teams in Queensland and New South Wales to capture new, growing, dynamic markets in an attempt to win the ‘hearts and minds’ of a fresh market of consumers. In 2014 the AFL is represented by 10 teams from Victoria and two each from Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

The AFL and its clubs are broadcast quite literally to every corner of the nation by an unquenchably thirsty media, who now insist on covering the game, both on-field and off, for 365 days a year, seven days a week for 12 months of the year. The media interest in the AFL is almost like no other industry (sport of otherwise) in the world. In 1998, 621 accredited journalists and broadcasters covered the AFL. By 2013, this figure had almost doubled to 1073.

As the AFL’s Head of Corporate Affairs and Communications, Brian Walsh, stated in his 2010 Annual Report:

> “The coverage of Australian Football has moved from a seasonal pursuit to 24-7, 365 day a year coverage where the growth in traditional media coverage has been matched or exceeded by the growth in online coverage.”

Indeed the major metropolitan newspapers, particularly in the AFL stronghold states of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia, have identified that the AFL sells papers – regardless of the time of year. Newspapers such as Australia’s number one selling paper, the *Herald Sun*, provide extensive coverage of the AFL and its games all year ‘round. Throughout the football season the sports supplements of these papers will often dedicate up to 20 pages to AFL related stories, with columnists and so called football experts generating conversation about the game and its issues with columns upon columns of news and opinions. Often, an AFL story will be sensationaly splashed across the front pages of the daily newspapers to increase sales. Football and its players

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sell newspapers even in the summer months of the AFL’s ‘off season.’ For example, on Friday December 9, 2011, Australia’s number one selling newspaper, the Herald Sun, contained up to nine AFL related stories spread over six pages of the paper’s sports section. Despite being in the middle of the AFL’s off season, the AFL coverage in the Herald Sun outweighed the coverage of all other sports. This type of extensive coverage was once limited to the AFL’s football season and to reports about on-field results and player performances, but now the AFL is written about, spoken about and debated in every week and month of the year, largely as recognition by newspaper proprietors that the AFL’s popularity helps sell papers.

Likewise, many radio stations cover the AFL extensively and have incorporated the game as an integral part of their scheduling. Throughout the AFL season, radio stations 3AW, the ABC, Triple M, SEN, K Rock, 6PR, SAA, the National Indigenous Radio Services Network and AFL Live (Crocmedia) combined to broadcast all AFL games to over 1 million people each week of the AFL’s Home and Away season and finals.

Furthermore, these radio stations have built many magazine style sports programs into their scheduling, many during the high rating drive time radio timeslot, to attract as many listeners as possible. Programs such as Sports Today on Melbourne’s 3AW and The Rush Hour on Melbourne’s Triple M are sports based programs, hosted by ex AFL players and personalities, and anchored extensively by AFL football – the on field performance (play) of players and teams as well as off field issues about players, AFL personalities and clubs. During the AFL season, AFL football contributes most of the content for these ‘drive time’ and highly popular programs.

In 2004, Melbourne’s Sports Entertainment Network (SEN) became the second radio station, behind the Racing and Sports Network (RSN) (previously Sports 927), to launch as a station dedicated wholly and completely to sport – targeted at sports enthusiasts. Most of the program hosts are ex AFL football players or current AFL commentators, and most of the station’s content involves discussions about the AFL, its players, clubs, teams and the game’s on field and off field issues.

However, it is undoubtedly television that has had the greatest impact and influence on the play element in the AFL. In 2011, the AFL sold the television broadcasting rights to broadcast all AFL Pre-Season, Home and Away and Finals Series games to the Seven Network and pay-television network.

240 Herald Sun, December 9, 2011
241 McLachlan, G, 2010 Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure Report
Foxtel, for a record amount of $1.253 billion. As part of the deal, Seven show four games each weekend of the AFL season at, or near live, on Friday night, Saturday afternoon, Saturday night and Sunday. Foxtel re-created its AFL only channel, Fox Footy and broadcast all nine AFL games each week of the AFL Home and Away season. Fox Footy will show all AFL games live or on replay throughout the week as well as a host of AFL specific magazine style programs such as AFL Teams, On the Couch, AFL 360, and After the Bounce.

Australia's free to air stations have also embraced the AFL as a ratings winner and means of generating large audiences for waiting advertisers. Throughout the 2014 season AFL specific magazine style programs that discuss play in the AFL and the issues around the game, made up a relatively large portion of each network's program scheduling. AFL specific programs on free to air television throughout the 2014 season included the Seven Network's Game Day, Network Ten's Before the Game and The Fifth Quarter, One HD's One Week at a Time and the Nine Network's Sunday Football Show, Football Classified and The Footy Show, which entered its twenty first season in 2014.

For the media, play in the AFL today is a vital commodity and form of entertainment that helps produce huge audiences in return for substantial advertising revenue. Essentially, 'play' as 'display' is a tool that is used, managed and manipulated by television to make money. The players are considered entertainers and celebrities and are marketed and sold to consumers to attract large audiences for eager advertisers. Play in the AFL is now an important product in the entertainment and media industry and an important tool used by television networks, radio stations, newspapers and online media to increase their bottom line.

Likewise, the structure of each club is also set up as a business would be. All 18 AFL clubs are governed by a board of directors who are charged with the responsibility of structuring their club in a way that will ensure it is financially viable. While each club may be slightly different in its hierarchical structure, each board employs a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and relevant department managers to operate their club as a business to generate on field and off field success. Club boards are now commonly made up of businessmen such as Collingwood's Alex Wailitz. Wailitz is a millionaire businessman and friend of Collingwood President and media personality Eddie McGuire. Collingwood is the AFL's biggest club, with more than 60,000 members and an average home and

away crowd of 63,256 — almost double the average home crowd of the AFL (36,908). In 2011, Collingwood posted total revenue earnings of $75,592,030 and a profit of $2,141,436 after winning 20 games over 22 rounds of the AFL Home and Away Season, before losing the Grand Final to Geelong. Wailitz points out that Collingwood’s on field and off field success is largely because it is governed and operated as a business. “You can’t afford not to be a business as the cost of fielding a football team is enormous — between $9 million and $12 million a year.”

In recent times, high profile and often high flying businessmen such as John Elliott (Carlton), Christopher Skase (Brisbane Bears) and Geoffrey Edelston (Sydney Swans) of the 1980’s and ‘90’s and Joseph Gutnick (Melbourne), David Smorgan (Western Bulldogs), Paul Gardiner (Melbourne), Frank Costa (Geelong), Jeff Kennett (Hawthorn), Eddie McGuire (Collingwood), Richard Pratt (Carlton) and David Evans (Essendon) of the 2000’s, are examples of AFL clubs turning to businessmen and women with a feel and knowledge of business and economic objectives to preside over the operations of their club; as opposed to ex-players and influential supporters in the community who dominated club governance up until as late as the 1990’s.

However, as will be noted later in this thesis, the relationship between the AFL and the media is a mutually beneficial one that helps both commercial organisations in their drive and quest for profit. Indeed play in the AFL, and the sport around it, is spoken about and measured as a business would be. The AFL’s 2013 Annual Report revealed that in 2013 the AFL’s total revenue increased by $21 million to $446 million, it recorded a record operating surplus of $310 million, recorded a net profit of $16.6 million and accumulated net assets to the value of $110.894 million. The influence of the economic field in the AFL will be highlighted with a greater analysis later in the thesis however, what these figures show is the fact that the AFL is now undeniably a business and simulates the business bureaucratic model that dominates the western world. Play is now a commodity and product within the sporting industry and, more broadly speaking, the entertainment industry. As former AFL Chief Executive Officer, Andrew Demetriou, pointed out in his 2006 Annual Report, the AFL is a ‘brand’, competing for the ‘hearts and minds’ of Australian ‘consumers’. The AFL is reliant upon the media

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246 Cited in Grigg, A., ‘Gentleman’s Code’, 2006, p. 70
to help it sell its product and attract the market to its brand, yet it is also used by the media to assist them attract advertisers and, ultimately profits.

As mentioned, the influence of the economic field and the media field will be scrutinised very closely in the following chapters, however, to fully grasp how economic capital and entertainment has come to dominate and even define the play element in the AFL, it is first necessary to explore and understand the play element as it was when Australian football was first played in 1858. By doing this and contrasting play in Australian football in 1858 with play in the AFL today, the influence of the economic field and media field in the sport field, and how they have changed the ‘play element’, will become clearer.

**Play as it was – a history of the Victorian Football League**

As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, the very first game of Australian Football was played in 1858 between Melbourne Grammar and Scotch College at what is now the parklands surrounding the famous Melbourne Cricket Ground. The rules of the game were created by Tom Wills, a cricketer who developed the game of Australian Rules as a winter pastime for cricketers who wished to stay amused and fit during Melbourne’s cooler seasons. As with all folk culture, the games of Australian Rules stimulated great joy for those who came to play and watch the game, and as such the Australian football community quickly swelled to include thousands of Victorians and stimulated a culture that quickly became engrained in the city of which the game was born.

Clubs began to spawn across Melbourne from an uprising of community passion, spirit and interest and in 1859 the Melbourne Football Club became the first official Australian football team in Australia. By the 1870’s the Melbourne Football Club was attracting as many as 10,000 supporters to matches against other Australian football teams of the time such as the Carlton Football Club. In 1877, the Australian Football Association was formed, with the game’s popularity continuing to grow due to the game’s unique ability to generate a collective spirit and support from citizens of all ages and genders. In 1886, Geelong and South Melbourne generated a record crowd of 34,000 to a game at Albert Park Lake. The average crowd for most professional sports around the world in 2013 is less than this figure. At the time, Melbourne’s population was about 80,000 meaning more than one in three Melbournians were at Albert Park that day.

Following the winter of 1896, eight teams from the Victorian Football Association – Collingwood, South Melbourne, Essendon, Fitzroy, Melbourne, Geelong, St Kilda and Carlton – broke away from the VFA to form the Victorian Football League (VFL), taking with them a huge following that ensured...
the game continued to grow and flourish within Victoria. The very fact that eight Victorian teams broke away from the city’s amateur competition to form a professional league suggests that money has always been part of the ‘play element’ in Australian football, and furthermore it has long been at the heart of the decisions, structure and formula of the game.\textsuperscript{249}

As Geoff Slattery noted in his historical account of Australian football, \textit{The Australian Game of Football}:

\begin{quote}
“The major reason (for clubs breaking away from the VFA to form the VFL) could be summed up in one word: money. The powerful clubs – with central grounds and crowd pulling ability – wielded enormous power and a cycle of dependency had enveloped the wealthier clubs. They commissioned grandstands to improve comfort for their members and borrowed heavily to build them; to service such loans they needed continuous large cash flow from the gate; to ensure the paying crowds kept coming, they had to have a well performed team on the field; to ensure they kept winning, they had to pay players… and so it went.”\textsuperscript{250}
\end{quote}

In 1908, the community of the inner, working class suburb of Richmond, created and entered the Richmond Football Club into the VFL, along with University (who lasted only until 1914) and in 1925, three more community clubs – Hawthorn, North Melbourne and Footscray – were introduced to expand the competition to 12 Victorian teams, made up of 11 suburban teams and one provincial team, Geelong.\textsuperscript{251}

The twelve team competition that made up the Victorian Football League was one that included an emphasis on economic capital and business objectives. Players were paid to play the game and supporters paid a small fee to the clubs to attend matches. Furthermore, economic capital was a necessity to maintain and upgrade each club’s training facilities, home ground, clubrooms and social club facilities. Each club often relied upon and received very generous donations from wealthy businessmen of their community who supported the club. Certainly to recruit the most talented players to their club, administrators would have to raise the necessary funds to attract the players.


Throughout the 1940’s and 1950’s the Collingwood Football Club received many ‘generous’ donations from tote operator and sports entrepreneur, John West. West was part of the Collingwood community who would gather with like-minded Collingwood folk at Collingwood games each weekend. As a wealthy and influential supporter of the club, West often donated to players and to the club to lure the best available talent to Collingwood and to ensure Collingwood had the most up to date facilities and resources at its disposal. Likewise, Australian football’s oldest club, the Melbourne Football Club, was an offshoot of the Melbourne Cricket Club (MCC) and as a result, benefited from the financial wealth of the MCC, establishing themselves as one of the most powerful clubs in the early years of competition. And, as already touched upon, the administration and governance of all VFL clubs, to some extent reflected the business orientation of society. Small business owners and influential businessmen of each club’s community governed each club as members of their board of directors, making financial donations to their club along the way.

However, while economic capital was part of the game it was certainly not the dominating feature of the game it is today. In the early decades of the game, players were not paid enough money to live — playing Australian football at the elite level was more like a paid hobby or pastime. In the 1940’s the maximum player payment was fixed around the four to five pound mark, which equated to about two thirds of the basic wage in the wider community. Players played the game as a recreational pursuit, in-common with other like-minded and talented members of the community. It was a means of being part of a community and helped create and develop the culture of the community. Unlike today, all players had employment outside of playing football — many players even missed some games due to work commitments.

The game of Australian Rules football, even at the elite level, was not considered a brand, product, commodity or a form of entertainment. As mentioned, while money was part of the game, it was subordinate to the spirit, community and culture of the game. Players played for fun, not for money. Business entrepreneurs had not yet recognised the potential of the VFL as a means of generating profits. The media had also not yet recognised the VFL as a tool that it could use to attract large numbers of consumers for hungry advertisers. It was a game that was literally considered a pastime, a recreational pursuit and leisure time activity that was separate to the economic field. Football training was held after business hours and matches were played on Saturday afternoon with large sections of the community gathering at the match to watch the game and socialise. And because the VFL was largely separate from the business world within the

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252 Slattery, G., *The Australian game of football since 1858*, 2008, p. 56
253 Slattery, G., *The Australian game of football since 1858*, 2008, p.57
economic field, it helped in stimulating the community’s culture – where doctors, teachers, tradesmen, government officials, managers and blue collar workers could gather as one, outside the hierarchical structure of the business bureaucratic model, and enjoy something in common with each other.

The VFL’s 12 suburban clubs brought with them a sense of tribalism and community with the loyalty that the supporters and players formed for their clubs entrenched through generations of family support, based on bonds and attachments with their community and being able to share a pastime that they all enjoyed. The make-up of these football clubs – from the players, coaches and administrators to the supporters in the outer – reflected the community of which they were part and were all able to relate to the roots from which their club spawned. The teams trained and played in their community on their own suburban grounds and formed strong attachments to their ground and their supporters. As Trevor Grant notes in his article, Battle Grounds;

“They were places of secular worship where people gathered with other rabid devotees to spurn timid opposition on Saturdays and socialise during the week. For some it would be where their ashes would be scattered.”

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As Grant alluded to, the clubrooms were the centrepiece of the community and its social setting. As Huizinga noted in Homo Ludens, these clubs were sacred places, separate from the ordinary and real with their own rules and regulations where different members of the broader community were able to come together and connect. They helped stimulate the culture of the community, which was ultimately enjoying play, together, in common with each other. Money did not dominate the landscape of the game as it does today.

The merging of the economic and media fields with the sport field evolved gradually throughout the history of play in the Victoria Football League (VFL) and later the Australian Football League (AFL). This will be analysed in some detail later in the thesis. However, the influence of the economic field and economic capital was heightened in the 1980’s and certainly in the 1990’s with the growth of the VFL into new, non-traditional markets that saw the elite competition of Australian Rules football, re-named the ‘Australian Football League (AFL).”

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In 1982 the VFL moved out of Victoria with its first step towards the national stage. South Melbourne was declared financially unviable at the end of the 1981 season and subsequently relocated to Sydney in 1982. Five years later, the VFL expanded to Western Australia and

256 AFL, AFL History, retrieved May 5, 2013
Queensland with the introduction of the West Coast Eagles and Brisbane Bears. The move to introduce a team in a non-traditional football state such as Queensland was particularly bold and proved the VFL’s determination to reach new markets and sell their brand to untapped consumers. This will be outlined in far greater detail later in this thesis.

In 1990 the Victorian Football League (VFL) was renamed the Australian Football League (AFL) and a year later, the competition grew to South Australia with the introduction of the Adelaide Crows. In 1995, Western Australia was granted a second team in the Fremantle Dockers and at the end of 1996, the Fitzroy Football Club was forced to merge with the Brisbane Bears due to their inability to maintain the required level of financial stability and viability to stand alone as a club in the AFL. Port Adelaide Power joined the competition in 1997 and in 2011 and 2012 the AFL played its boldest and possibly bravest move by introducing their 17th and 18th teams into the competition in the form of the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney (GWS) Giants. As with their neighbours in Brisbane and Sydney, Gold Coast and GWS are fundamentally different in their make-up to the foundation clubs in Victoria and even the ‘new’ clubs in Western Australia and South Australia. The Suns and the Giants were not built from the ‘bottom up’ or upon the uprising of passion and spirit of a supporter or playing group; instead they were built from the ‘top-down.’ The AFL identified a new market with a fresh group of consumers for them to sell their brand to. The South East Queensland and Greater Western Sydney markets have been identified as new markets that the AFL can generate economic capital.

Instead of these clubs entering the competition based on the collective will and want of the ir community, they have entered as a business, eager to sell their brand and style of play to consumers as their preferred form of entertainment. Indeed play is sold as entertainment and the community of these clubs will first and foremost be made up of consumers, viewing the game as entertainment. The idea that the Gold Coast and GWS clubrooms will be the centrepiece of these clubs seems fanciful—they are more than ever a brand and product in the entertainment industry, competing against other brands and products for the hearts and minds of the market. Indeed the expansion of the AFL into New South Wales and Queensland has been based on economic rational principles—something that will be discussed at length in the following chapters of this thesis. The push into the northern states has ensured new markets of millions of consumers are touched in some way by the AFL brand, giving the AFL the opportunity to attract new consumers and advertisers, which are essentially, new sources of economic capital.

Football writer and AFL historian, Martin Flanagan, agrees:

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257 AFL, AFL History, retrieved May 5, 2013
“The best discussion about economic rationalism in the 1980’s was about the Fitzroy Football Club. Fitzroy merged with the Brisbane Bears following the end of the 1996 season. No amount of passion or supporter backlash could stop the merger – it was a matter of finance and economic decision making. Fitzroy could not stand alone because they simply could not afford to do so. So, the club made what they believed to be the only economically rational decision – they merged.”

In many ways, the shift towards economic rationalism and neo liberalism in the AFL is merely a reflection of the economic landscape in Australia, and indeed most of the Western World. While Huizinga argued that the sport field should be separate from the ordinary and real, the reality today is that it is very much part of the economic field – thus it is no coincidence that the rapid emergence of economic capital and commercialism in the game since the early 1980’s mirrors the dominant economic policies in Australian politics, economics and business. The commercial boom and popularisation of Australian culture can be traced back to the rise of neo liberalism in Australia’s political policy making under Malcolm Fraser in the late 1970’s and then the Hawke and Keating governments from 1983. As Tom O’Regan writes in his historical account of *The Rise and Fall of Entrepreneurial Television*, the deregulation of the finance sector – which saw foreign financial institutions able to enter the Australian financial markets and compete for customers, and the government lifting regulations on interest rates – resulted in an increase in competition within the finance field, ultimately leading to an entrepreneurial boom that most definitely included the media and sport fields.

As already mentioned in chapter two of this thesis, banks became eager to lend and unfathomably even found themselves in bidding wars with each other – seeking potential lenders, fighting against each other to service bigger and bigger debts of increasingly indebted clients. As banks and other financial institutions lent millions upon millions of dollars to a new age of businesses entrepreneurs, they turned to media advertising, and even sport, to sell their product. Thus the media had at its disposal a growing group of advertisers wanting to use their services to reach consumers to sell their product. Because advertisers were willing to pay millions of dollars to various media outlets to reach mass audiences (consumers), the media increasingly looked towards sport to grow its audience and ensure continued advertising revenue. The relationship between sport, advertisers and the media is a result of the influence of the economic and media fields with the sport field.

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Therefore, the landscape of play in the VFL/AFL has changed dramatically over the last 150 years. As stated throughout the chapter, money has always been part of play and the game at the highest level of the sport however, the influence of the economic field and media field has grown and intensified over the last 30 years. This chapter has provided a snap shot of the game as it was at its founding compared to what it is now in the AFL – from a community-held, grassroots, item of folk-culture in Victoria, to a multi-billion dollar entertainment industry with a truly national reach. The following chapters seek to define and understand the growing influence of the economic field and media field in the AFL and the influence of these fields in changing the play element from play to display (entertainment). Once this is understood we can investigate the impact this has had on the game’s community and its culture.
Chapter 5: Understanding the influence of the economic field and the media field in the sport field: The ‘play, money, media cycle’

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the landscape of the AFL today is vastly different to the make-up of the game at the competition’s founding in 1897. The influence of the economic field and media field is now undeniable. In fact, the two most prevailing influences on ‘play’ in the AFL are economic capital and the media. While it has already been acknowledged that the AFL/VFL has always been influenced by money, today it is dominated by money and the media.

The AFL is now part of the entertainment industry and ‘play’ is now a form of entertainment. Because of the media’s stranglehold on the play element, play has been commodified and packaged as a form of entertainment that competes for the hearts and minds of Australian consumers. In this sense, play in the AFL is utilised by the media as a tool for generating economic capital. By analysing the relationship money and the media share with the play element in the AFL, we can develop an insight into how play has been commodified and packaged to make money for the AFL and those who broadcast the game. Furthermore this insight provides further evidence that play in the AFL, and the clubs of the AFL, can be defined through business characteristics that mirror the dominant business bureaucratic model of today’s society. Play is no longer separate to ordinary and real life; it is no longer free; it is no longer without serious outcomes that are limited only to the field of play; it is no longer a grass roots item of folk culture, stimulated by communal passion, spirit and action. It is instead imposed upon and sold to consumers by the media and the economic field as entertainment. Ultimately, it is a tool for making money.

The cycle – Play as a tool for making money

The commodification of play in the AFL and the influence of the economic and media fields in the sport field is best explained by the relationship play now shares with economic capital (money) and the media. While the influences of economic capital and the media on the sport field are plentiful, the most significant influence is the transformation of play to display, or put another way, from play to entertainment.

Play in the VFL at its founding in 1897 was almost completely autonomous from the economic field and the media field. Money was required for the upkeep of training facilities, the football grounds play was contested upon and the clubrooms where the community met to enjoy the game together.
There was also some level of promotion of the games to ensure the community was informed of when and where their community team was playing and of any upcoming club social events.

Today, the relationship play shares with the economic field and the media field is far different. As discussed earlier in this thesis it has lost its autonomy to the media and economic fields, with economic capital becoming the key feature of play in the AFL today.

This is best explained through the following diagrams:

**Play in the VFL at its founding**
Play in the AFL today

The ‘play, money, media cycle’

Advertisers willing to pay money to the AFL and AFL media partners to reach mass audiences

Play in the AFL

Play in the AFL sold to the Seven Network for $1.253 Billion

Media package and sell the play element in the AFL to consumers as entertainment

Audience

Play is consumed as entertainment in the form of mass media audiences

Advertisers

Media

Economic Field

Media Field

Sport Field
As the rest of this chapter will highlight, almost all decisions made in the AFL today are based in some way on this cycle and the financial outcomes it offers for all relevant stakeholders. As the diagram attests, play in the AFL is a popular and widely consumed item of popular culture – largely due to the influence of the media. In recognising the popularity of the play element in the Australian popular culture landscape, the Australian media have sought to use it to help them grow their profit margins. In 2011, the Seven Network, along with Pay Television company, Foxtel, paid a record amount of $1.253 billion to the AFL to attain the exclusive rights of broadcasting play in the AFL on television. To utilise this investment for a maximum return, the media has sought to package, market and ultimately sell the game as entertainment to as many consumers as possible. By doing this they are able to attract advertising demand and revenue, which ultimately increases their revenues and profit. Advertisers are attracted to the large audiences that televised sport provides. So, while this cycle undoubtedly favours media broadcasters and advertisers, it also works to ensure the AFL, its clubs and players increasingly develop business and market characteristics. Furthermore, because the money the AFL need and desire is generated through their relationship with the media, the cycle becomes one that feeds itself and continually mirrors and justifies the business bureaucratic model of the broader society of which it is part.

To fully understand how the play, money, media cycle has come to dominate and define the play-element in the AFL today, a broader analysis of the relationship between the AFL and the media is required. This will provide the platform for discussing the consequences of this cycle for play in the AFL and, importantly, determining what the transformation of ‘play’ to ‘display’ means for our culture and community.

The history of the media in Australian Football

The latest television broadcasting rights deal the AFL negotiated with the Seven Network and Foxtel towards the end of 2011 is possibly the strongest example of the ever powerful relationship between play and the media. Indeed at the professional level of Australian football, play and the media seem inseparable. However, this has not always been the case. The interest key stakeholders of the VFL/AFL had in the media was once modest to say the least. In 1976 the Seven Network purchased the exclusive right to broadcast play in the VFL for just $3 million a year. At the time Seven’s broadcast comprised of a highlights and replay package each Saturday evening of the VFL Home and Away Season with the VFL Grand Final shown live.

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A decade later, the same rights were sold to the Christopher Skase owned Seven Network for $6 million a year – twice the figure from 10 years before. Much of the money generated from its media rights deal was spent by the VFL to sustain the financial ailing Fitzroy and Footscray Football Clubs, who were unable to independently stand as financially viable organisations. This was one of the first insights into the growing importance of the television broadcasting rights revenue for the VFL/AFL to support and sustain its clubs. By 2007 the amount required by the Seven Network, Network Ten and Foxtel consortium to purchase the exclusive right to broadcast play in the AFL had grown to $780 million over five years – a staggering jump from the $6 million paid just two decades earlier.\(^{263}\) Five years later, the record amount of $1.253 billion was agreed upon by all negotiating parties.

These figures alone paint an imposing picture of the growing influence of the media and economic capital in the VFL/AFL and the growing interest both stakeholders have in the other. However, the figures also show that the dramatic increase in the money paid by the television networks to broadcast play in the AFL is a fairly recent phenomenon. The media’s relationship with the play element, while obviously strong today, has grown from rather humble beginnings.

The growing influence of the media field in the sport field has changed dramatically throughout the history of the game. At the game’s founding in 1858, and indeed throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century, the media played a far more conservative and modest role in broadcasting play.\(^{264}\) Until the commercial boom in sport of the last three decades the media mostly sought to uphold the dominant social view concerning the social purpose of sport in the Australian setting. Certainly when the VFL was formed in 1897 many of the newspaper journalists reporting on the game were private school educated members of the Australia’s middleclass and their reports on the competition’s weekend matches generally reflected the values that play and games had in maintaining traditions, conventions and the status quo of society’s culture.\(^{265}\) At the time the VFL was a leisure time pursuit – played for fun. Players did not play for money and its clubs did not function to profit. The sport field was reasonably untouched by the media and economic field and the media coverage of the game reflected this. The newspaper coverage of play in the early years of the VFL consisted of reports and summaries of the events of the game – there was little sensationalism or fan-fare involved.

Foreshadowing later developments, newspaper proprietors detected a pattern in recording sports results and newspaper sales. They noticed that sport was becoming an increasingly popular pastime


\(^{265}\) Stoddart, B., Saturday Afternoon Fever, p. 84
and entertainment among the masses and quickly drew the conclusion that ‘sport helped sell newspapers.’ Ellis Cashmore reports in his book *Making Sense of Sport* that the *Bell’s Life*, founded in 1822, detected its circulation rising as it included sports results and detailed summary reports about the games people watched and played. *Bell’s Life* had a monopoly of these sports results until 1865 when *The Sporting Life* was issued with immediate success; consequently stimulating a worldwide boom in sporting coverage in print media. This was one of the first examples of the media recognising play as a tool that could be used to increase their circulation figures, sales and advertising demand.²⁶⁶

This grew and intensified in Australia throughout the 1920’s and 1930’s with the emergence of radio. Recognising the popularity of sport, radio began the process of packaging and promoting the game as entertainment to attract as many listeners as possible – from all backgrounds and interests – to their broadcast. To increase their listenership, radio stations quickly realised the value of personalities – both in football and in their broadcast, and as a result the broadcast of the game (and the game being broadcast) became increasingly about personalities and celebrity.²⁶⁷ This is more evident now than ever, with all current radio broadcasters of the AFL selling and promoting their talent and personalities to the public to attract listeners to their station.

However, it should be noted that at this point in history the merger between the sport field, the media field and the economic field was far from entrenched. In fact, most sporting organisations in the VFL felt threatened by any form of live coverage of the game. While they felt comfortable with, and even encouraged print media reporting on the game to increase awareness of the sport, they worried that live coverage of the sport would encourage people to stay at home and listen on their radio rather than attend the game live. This, they feared, would significantly reduce their gate receipts, which at this point of sporting history was the primary (albeit relatively modest) source of revenue for the VFL and its clubs.²⁶⁸ Ultimately though, for the radio stations that had embraced sport as a tool for attracting listeners, advertising revenue was flourishing – gladdening the hearts of many a radio proprietor.

It was also at this time that play began to transform into display as listeners of the game began to consume the game as entertainment.²⁶⁹ As already touched on, radio had begun packaging and selling the game as entertainment – drawing on personalities and stimulating the advent of celebrity

²⁶⁷ Stoddart, B., *Saturday Afternoon Fever*, pp. 91-95
²⁶⁹ Goldlust discusses the transformation of ‘play to display in ‘Sport as Entertainment: the role of mass communication’ and ‘Television and Sport: a match made in heaven’, in *Playing for Keeps*, 1987, p. 78
in sport. It signified the beginning of the *play, money, media cycle* confirming the merger of the sport, economic and media fields. Subsequently, and possibly unknowingly, supporters of the game were seen by radio proprietors as consumers of their broadcast package that could be utilised to attract advertisers to their station and, ultimately increase their profit margins.  

This was further enhanced by television, which was first introduced into Australian households in time for the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. The fact that it was a sporting event that stimulated the introduction and subsequent growth in Australian television sales in many ways shows the significance of the media’s relationship with sport. As Goldlust writes in his book *Playing for Keeps: Sport, the Media and Society*, “the relationship between sport and television penetration should not be underestimated.”

The advent of television broadcasting play in the VFL brought with it a greater emphasis on packaging and marketing the game to a wide and varied demographic with the aim of increasing audience figures for advertisers to reach. However, it must be said that this is indeed a more recent phenomenon. Initially, television’s broadcast of play in the VFL had little influence on the game and was viewed as a tool for enabling all Australians to enjoy one of Australia’s most enduring pastimes and items of grass roots culture – Australian Football. The *play, money, media cycle* that has enveloped the game today was understood by all stakeholders in a far more modest way.

This began to change in 1975 with the introduction of colour television. The game appeared more aesthetically attractive on television and subsequently reached even higher levels of popularity among Australians eager to see their team play on national television. At this time advertisers began to recognise television audiences as a market of consumers waiting for them to sell their products and services to. The biggest beneficiaries of this were the broadcasters who sought to maximise their advertising revenue through the popularity of broadcasting play. The mutual success of the *play, money, media cycle* for the media, advertising and sport industries has ensured that the money generated through the cycle has become the most prominent feature of play in the AFL today. To fully understand the consequences of this, it is first necessary to explain the *play, money, media cycle* at work within the AFL today.

**Explaining the *play, money, media cycle* – Play as a tool for making money**

The popularity of the AFL in the Australian popular culture setting is undeniable. This is largely because of the media saturation of the modern game, but also because it has been at the forefront

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270 Cashmore, E., *Making Sense of Sport*, p. 319
272 Goldlust, J., *Playing for Keeps*, p. 112
of the hearts and minds of Australians for more than a century. In 2013 a total of 6,368,346 Australians attended AFL football matches live during the premiership season. The average crowd during the AFL’s home and away season was 32,163 – the fourth highest average crowd attendance of all professional sport in the world. Only the USA’s National Football League (67,591), Germany’s Buurdesliga Football League (45,116) and the English Premier League (34,602) attracted bigger crowds.  

The popularity of play in the AFL has been both augmented by the media industry and utilised by the media to attract advertisers and revenue to their brand. It is the popularity of the AFL that makes it so appealing to the media. By packaging, marketing and selling play as entertainment to their audiences, they have successfully converted millions of football supporters into consumers of televised play.

The average television audience of AFL matches during the 2013 season was 4.729 million per week, with another 1.5 million tuning in to listen to the game’s broadcast on radio or through live website or app streams. Over 3.63 million Australians tuned into watch the 2013 Grand Final between Hawthorn and Sydney. Furthermore, the AFL’s online network attracted over 170 million visits throughout the entire 2013 season.

The media’s interest in the AFL is almost like no other industry (sport or otherwise) in the world. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the coverage of Australian football has moved from a seasonal pursuit to an all year ‘round coverage with newspapers filling the pages of their publication with AFL stories outside the regular football season to help increase sales figures.  

The high attendance figures of the AFL and the increasing consumption of the game through the media is a strong asset and tool for both the AFL and the media industry. The AFL has used the popularity of the game to continually negotiate record amounts of money from the media for the exclusive rights to broadcast play in the AFL. Once they have purchased the right to broadcast play in the AFL, the media are able to package the game as entertainment to increase their ratings and effectively sell their audience to advertisers. Naturally, the higher the ratings of the media network, the larger the advertising demand and revenue received. The AFL has proven to be a ratings winner for its broadcasters, who reap the spoils through the sale of their audience to advertisers.

273 AFL, 2013 AFL Highlights, online,
274 McLachlan, G., 2013 Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure Report, online,
In 2010, the Seven Network accumulated an estimated $1 million for every five minutes of advertising during the AFL Grand Final replay, with one 30 second national advertisement costing up to $100,000. For the television networks, the high ratings of the Grand Final resulted in escalating advertising revenues, while advertisers were able to capture a mass audience – some of whom would be persuaded enough through the advertisement to purchase their product.276

Of course, because of the AFL’s popularity and saturated media coverage, commercial organisations don’t simply restrict their advertising to the television, radio, newspaper, online, digital and social mediums. They also view the AFL, its clubs and collateral as effective tools for reaching the mass market. Indeed all grounds are named after their corporate partners; all clubs have major sponsors who advertise their logos on the playing jumpers or shorts of the team they are partnered with; AFL finals series, award ceremonies and training venues are sponsored by corporate organisations who are rewarded with naming rights and even players are sponsored by commercial companies looking to benefit from the success or popularity of the performer they have invested in.

Commercial organisations generally believe that by sponsoring a league, team, event or even player they can increase the awareness of their company brand and products or services, while also improving the image of their brand. Sponsorship in sport also provides a vehicle for companies to reach a new demographic or audience, while at the same time ensuring revenue for the AFL.

Fundamental to this relationship is the media. As Sleight writes in his book, Sponsorship: What it is and how to use it:

“Media coverage is often the most crucial single element within the reasons for a company entering into a sponsorship and it is certainly the one into which most effort must be put if you are going to ensure successful and continued results.”277

This, of course, helps emphasise the play, money, media cycle dominating play in the AFL. It is because of the media’s influence in the AFL that sponsors wish to utilise the AFL to sell their brand to football consumers—all the while delighting the AFL with much sought after revenue.

Packaging play: From ‘play’ to ‘display’

Traditionally play in the AFL was consumed through the media by the game’s most enthusiastic followers—mostly men and women in Australia’s southern and western states. Recognising the need to compete with other forms of entertainment and the potential of the game to resonate with previously untapped demographics and markets in Australia, the AFL and the media sought to

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increase the game’s appeal in Australia’s northern markets. For the AFL, the incentive was to draw larger crowds and consumers to their product to increase their income and bargaining power with media broadcasters. For the media the incentive was equally simple – increased audiences transferred quickly into higher advertising revenues.

As Cashmore writes:

“Television offers to deliver to advertisers an audience of several million consumers, many of whom will be influenced enough by the ‘commercial images’ to spend their money on the advertised product, whether it be soap, cars, financial services or whatever.”

With this philosophy at the forefront of their minds, the media began to manipulate the game, transforming play into display. To provide advertisers with a more varied audience the media has ultimately transformed play in the AFL into an entertainment package that can be watched and indeed enjoyed by men, women, children and families. The broadcast of the game (and by virtue, the game itself) has become a show.

John Goldlust, in his book, Playing for Keeps: Sport, the media and society, refers to this process as the transformation of ‘play’ to ‘display,’ where television networks moved to broaden the appeal of play by packaging it as entertainment. Therefore, to make the match day broadcast as popular and appealing as possible, many new entertainment devices were added to the broadcast – pre-taped interviews, live interviews during the match, background music, emotive colour pieces, close up shots of the players and crowd, slow motion replays, graphics, symbols and statistics all became part of television’s package of play in the AFL.

As an extension of this, play in the AFL – in the form of packaged entertainment – has become an increasingly regular part of television scheduling. As discussed earlier, as well as the actual broadcast of the game, television and radio stations now include sport stories in their general news bulletins and provide football specific magazine style programs to attract as many viewers and listeners to the sport as possible. Programs such as The Footy Show, The Sunday Footy Show, Game Day, Before the Bounce and Football Classified are all commercial magazine-style AFL football shows that appeal to a wide, broad and large audience, providing the AFL with a free form of advertising. This ensures the popularity of the game remains high, which serves to benefit the AFL, its official broadcasters and advertisers wishing to reach mass numbers of consumers.

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278 Cashmore, E., Making Sense of Sport, p. 319
279 Goldlust, Playing for Keeps, p. 91
One of the more interesting consequences of this transformation from play to display has been the changing role of the commentator in the broadcast. While commentators were once describers of what was happening on the play-field they are now seen as entertainers and even promoters of the AFL brand. This was highlighted in 2006 when certain clubs, such as the Sydney Swans, along with the AFL, stated they were not happy with certain commentators’ negative comments about their style of play. The AFL claimed *Network Ten* commentators Tim Lane and Malcolm Blight had become too negative about Sydney’s game plan and in fact were seen to be ‘trashing the AFL’s brand.’

Because of the *play, money, media cycle*, it seems the commentator is not free to speak openly or broadcast the game as they wish. In many aspects, the commentator needs to entertain their audience to keep them watching or listening to ensure their television (or radio) ratings remain high. Furthermore, to ensure play (their brand) remains a popular item of consumption in the entertainment industry, the AFL expects their media partners to help sell their product. The then AFL Executive in charge of NSW football, Dale Holmes, suggested as much with his statement:

“We take our game seriously and so we want informed commentary, but we also want to entertain as well.”

*Seven Network* commentator, Tim Watson, further highlighted the influence of the *play, money, media cycle* when he stated:

“There is a fine line here. When you are employed, you are employed by a radio broadcaster or a television network, so your responsibility is to your employer and therefore, you have to keep people there watching to the radio or you have got to keep them there watching the television...it is an entertainment and as a commentator your responsibility is to provide entertainment.”

Rex Hunt, radio and television broadcaster of more than 30 years also supported this claim:

“It is an entertainment industry and when I am getting paid a serious amount of money to put the game into the houses of people, I have a responsibility to entertain, because we are...

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280 This was covered extensively in the media in 2006. Two articles for reference include:
281 Wilson, C., ‘Roos Fuming at Ten’s commentary’, 2006, p. 86
282 Watson, T., Personal Interview, 15 September, 2007, p. 79
a commercial network...and because we are a commercial network and we live and die by
the ratings, we have to be entertaining to make sure people listen to us.”

Commentators are indeed now just one aspect of the broadcasting package – along with the slow
motions replays, the close up angles, the half time interviews, obsessive statistics, colourful graphics
and pre match colour pieces. Yet, for the package to remain popular among the masses, the game
itself must remain entertaining. The AFL has assisted the media in ensuring the on field contest is as
close, unpredictable, enthralling and entertaining as it possibly can be through the implementation
of its equalisation policy.

The equalisation policy has been fundamental to the AFL’s strategy since 1985. The AFL
commission views the AFL’s equalisation policy as fundamentally important to the long term health
of the competition. On the surface the AFL’s equalisation policy is socialistic in its function, purpose
and outcomes. However, as will be highlighted, it also helps feed the play, money, media cycle and
emphasises the importance of ensuring play in the AFL is above all else, entertaining.

According to AFL reports, the equalisation policy ensures that revenues generated by the AFL in such
areas of broadcasting, corporate sponsorship, finals income, the pre-season competition, corporate
hospitality, the AFL record and AFL merchandise sales is distributed equally to all clubs. In particular,
the equalisation policy is highlighted by the process of the AFL National Draft (where the lowest
ranked team from the previous year has the first selection to pick the best available talent on offer,
while the first ranked team has the last pick of the first round of the draft) and the Total Player
Payments (Salary Cap), which limits the total player payments of each club to an equal amount to
ensure the competition’s wealthier clubs cannot purchase the best players by simply offering them
more money to play than the competition’s less wealthy clubs.

In 2014, the salary cap figure for AFL clubs was $164,340,000 ($9.13 million for each club), while the
AFL also evenly distributed $209.2 million to its 18 competing clubs. The AFL also gave a total of
$30.6 million to its 18 clubs as part of their Club Future Fund – including 20.2 million to expansion
clubs Greater Western Sydney and Gold Coast.

Fundamentally, through the equalisation policy, the AFL is helping its clubs reach their full potential
and ensuring all clubs can be active and successful participants in the AFL competition. As the AFL
website states:

283 Hunt, R., Personal Interview, 10 October, 2007
“The equalisation policy promotes, but does not guarantee, greater financial stability for individual clubs. It also promotes competitiveness and evenness on the field, allowing for uncertainty of outcomes and the opportunity for surprise results.”

It would seem that the equalisation policy in the AFL is indeed working on this level. Since it was introduced in 1985 all clubs have made the finals series (except the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney, who joined the competition in 2011 and 2012 respectively), only the Western Bulldogs and Richmond have not played off in an AFL Grand Final since 1985 and the Premiership has been shared by eleven different clubs. Furthermore, throughout any given AFL season, it is true that teams near the bottom of the ladder can and do defeat teams near the top of the ladder, meaning there is ‘uncertainty of outcomes and the opportunity for surprise results.’

It is this objective that highlights the influence of the economic and media field in the sport field and also emphasises the importance of the equalisation policy as a tool utilised by the AFL to draw support and generate revenue. Put simply, the equalisation policy helps the AFL package play as entertainment. By implementing this seemingly socialist strategy in limiting the power of the rich and distributing wealth to the poor, the AFL is ultimately ensuring the contest on the field remains as close, enthralling and entertaining as possible. By doing this, the AFL can maintain support from every club’s supporter base who genuinely believe their team can win or compete against all opposition, regardless of their ladder position. This support translates into television, radio and online audiences and therefore, for the AFL, increased broadcasting rights revenue. It also ensures steady streams of gate receipts, membership revenue and corporate sponsorship, which all help enhance the AFL brand.

So, while the equalisation policy can be viewed as a socialistic form of AFL intervention designed to ensure all participants within the competition can reach their full potential and realistically win the premiership, it is also a means of helping the AFL package the game and sell it to broadcasters and consumers as entertainment. As the AFL Record editor Peter Di Sisto states:

“It (the equalisation policy) has a duel emphasis. It is designed to make all clubs competitive and generally the cycle works, but the bigger issue is that it is a really clever device in that it does work in a business manner was well. It provides a big package that comes together and

286 AFL, A policy of equalisation
287 AFL, A policy of equalisation, retrieved May 11, 2013
generates a lot of money. The competition remains competitive so that the interest builds and is covered ad-nauseam.”

Closing the cycle – the AFL as a business

As the play, money, media cycle diagram shown at the beginning of this chapter suggests, the AFL now functions as a business. The business characteristics of the AFL are largely both a cause of the play, money, media cycle and a consequence of it. In many ways, the AFL actively seeks revenue to help promote and grow the game, however the media’s strong influence in the game has also exacerbated the commercialisation and commodification of the AFL brand. Regardless of whether the AFL’s need and desire for money is a cause or consequence of the play, money, media cycle what is clear is the AFL now no longer seeks capital autonomous to other fields. As shown above, it actively pursues economic capital and media exposure and even assists with packaging the game as entertainment to attract consumers. The AFL functions as a business and in doing so can be used as an example to highlight the consequences for the community and our culture when the sport field merges with the economic and media fields.

The influence of economic capital in the AFL extends to the way the game is viewed, measured and spoken about. In this context, the discussion about the game mirrors discussions about business and simulates language one might use when discussing the market. As part of the AFL 2013 Annual Report the AFL measures its performance as a business would. The AFL’s key financial indicators are highlighted as a means of measuring the success of the competition. The AFL states that in 2013 its revenue increased by $17 million to $446 million, its operating surplus increased by $14 million to $310 million, its net profit increased to $17 million, while they also noted its total operating expenditure increased by over $3 million to $137 million and its distributions to clubs increased to $209 million. Furthermore, the AFL stated that eleven of its eighteen clubs recorded a profit in 2013.

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288 Di Sisto, P., Personal Interview, March 14, 2006
For complete overview of the AFL’s 2013 Annual Report Documents also see: Fitzpatrick, M., 2013 Chairman’s Report
Demetriou, A., 2013 CEO’s Report
Evans, M., 2013 Football Operations Report
Dillon, A., 2013 Legal, Integrity and Compliance Report
McLachlan, G., 2013 Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure Report
Campbell, P., 2013 AFL Media Report
Hisgrove, D., 2013 People, Customer and Community Report
It should be noted that the net profit of $17 million is a relatively small number compared to other professional sporting competitions around the world—largely due to the fact the AFL puts most of its revenue back into the game in the form of distributions to its eighteen clubs. This helps highlight the importance of the television broadcasting rights to the AFL. Without the $1.253 billion in revenue generated from the television broadcasting rights, many of the AFL’s clubs would simply not be able to survive in the business environment of the AFL. Indeed it goes some way in showing that some clubs have had trouble adapting and transforming from an item of grass roots community folk culture, into a commercial brand and business in the entertainment industry. Furthermore, it proves the power of the media and the reliance the AFL has on the media industry to ensure their competition remains a vibrant industry and an exciting entertainment product for Australian consumers.

Therefore, it seems the AFL is undeniably a business within the entertainment industry. At the heart of its operation is both the need and desire for economic capital that is exacerbated by the play, money, media cycle and a result of the sport field’s merger with the economic and media fields. The end result is that the play element in the AFL today is no longer what it was at its founding, or what Huizinga would describe it should be. It is no longer free; it is no longer separate from ordinary or real life; it is no longer without serious outcomes that are limited only to the field of play; it is no longer a grass roots item of folk culture, stimulated by communal passion, spirit and action. It is instead imposed upon and sold to consumers by the media and the economic field as entertainment.

The following chapter will examine the consequences of the transformation of play to entertainment in practical terms—using the AFL as a case study. This will provide a foundation and platform to explore what play’s transformation from play to display means for our community and culture.

Graham, S., Strategy and Club Services Report
AFL, Highlights of 2013
Chapter 6: The consequences of the play, money, media cycle for the AFL

The merger of the sport field with the economic and media fields, and the subsequent play, money, media cycle operating within this new field of entertainment, has transformed the play element and the key characteristics that dominate its makeup. The play element in the AFL today is vastly different to the play element Huizinga defined in *Homo Ludens* and the play element that characterised the game of Australian Rules football at its founding in 1858. As this chapter will illustrate, the influence of money and the media field in the sport field has meant the AFL and the play element within it is now characterised through business characteristics. Indeed today it appears that play in the AFL today is business; play is work; play is serious; play is entertainment.

**Play and the AFL as business**

In 2014 the AFL is organised to function as a business. Furthermore, the AFL’s 18 clubs, reflect, mirror and act like 18 competing organisations operating as part of an industry. They are selling their product (play) and their brand to consumers with the aim of generating enough revenue and profit to survive in the AFL and gain a competitive advantage against their 17 counterparts. Such is the influence of economic capital in the AFL, there now appears to be a link between economic capital and play performance. It appears that the accumulation of economic capital and the subsequent ability to spend significantly higher amounts of money on their football department (relative to other clubs) can correlate to better performance in the field. The ability of a club to outlay economic capital on elite coaches, training equipment, sports sciences and recovery initiatives can, and often does, enable their players to reach their potential and perform at a higher level of skill than opposition clubs who spend less money in this area. As such, it is often the wealthier clubs, with more economic capital at their disposal, who perform better on the field.

This can be illustrated best not so much by analysing who has won the AFL premiership since the advent of the commercialisation of play, but rather by who has not. In particular, the Fitzroy Football Club was forced to merge with the Brisbane Football Club at the completion of the 1996 season because they were financially unable to stand alone as a viable and sustainable entity in the AFL. Their on-field performance reflected this with the Lions only managing to win seven of their last sixty six AFL matches. Furthermore, traditionally financially insecure clubs such as the Western Bulldogs, the Melbourne Football Club and the St Kilda Football Club have not won the VFL/AFL Premiership since 1954, 1964 and 1966 respectively. The one exception to this theory is the North
Melbourne Football Club, which as one of the financially poorer clubs of the AFL won the premiership in 1996 and 1999.

There also appears to be a direct link between the amount of economic capital a club can spend on their football department and the overall success of a team in an AFL season.

For example, in 2010, the AFL premiership team, Collingwood, spent $19.5 million on their football department – the highest level of football department expenditure in the league. Furthermore, three of the top four spending clubs – Collingwood, St Kilda and Geelong – finished the season in the top three positions. Collingwood also spent more money than their counterparts on other football spending such as recruiting, list management and fitness and conditioning resources and innovations. The average cost of operating a football department in 2010 was $16.4 million. Six clubs spent less than that figure on their football department – Adelaide, Melbourne, Port Adelaide, Richmond, the Western Bulldogs and North Melbourne – and coincidentally, five of those six teams finished in the bottom half of the ladder and did not make the finals series.

These statistics highlight the influence of the economic field in the sport field. Like most businesses, the AFL clubs who have the most economic capital and resources at their disposal tend to have the most success. Thus, play in the AFL appears to be indeed influenced by money. This has also been felt by the participants in the sport field – the players.

**Play as work**

Play is the tool used by the AFL and its 18 clubs to generate interest in and consumption of their brand. Therefore, it has become imperative for clubs to invest considerably in the play element and in particular the players of the game. In doing so, play has become employment. While Huizi nga argued that play should be free and that one should never play for pay, the merger of the sport field with the economic and media fields has ensured that play and pay in the AFL are now undoubtedly forever linked. As already described, play is now a form of entertainment, or display which effectively makes the players of the game the entertainers. Players are now employed by their clubs to display their talents and are rewarded with a wage. While the best players have always been paid a small wage to represent their club and attract supporters to their games, the amount of money they now receive, along with the rise of celebrity status in the sport field has escalated with the rise of commercialism and the dominance of economic capital over the last two decades. In particular,

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291 For details of individual club football department spending, see club annual reports. Also see: Denham, G., ‘Collingwood Magpies spend $20m to buy flag’, *The Australian*, May 4 2011
the increasing AFL broadcasting rights revenue generated by the AFL has resulted in AFL players earning significantly increased wages as the entertainers and performers of the AFL’s entertainment package.

The total player earnings across the AFL’s playing list in the 2013 season totalled $197.5 million. The average salary of an AFL player in 2013 was $251,559. Just over half the players in the AFL (50.89%) earned between $100,000 and $300,000 for the season. By contrast, just twenty years earlier (1990) only 1.5% of players earned between $100,000 and $200,000, while not one player earned over $200,000 a year. Furthermore, in 2013 22.6% of the AFL’s players were paid between $300,000 and $500,000, while just ten years before (2000) only 5% of players recorded earnings in this range. Collectively the total player payment limit (AFL Salary Cap) in the AFL in 2013 was $173,717,042, while twelve years earlier the figure was some $52,400,000 less ($74,800,000). 292

The above statistics highlight the influence of money in play and also proves that play as it was – as Huizinga defined it to be in *Homo Ludens* – is no longer. 293 Play is now a mirror of what play was. It simulates pure play but in reality is false play. It is now work within a business and a tool within the entertainment industry. Furthermore, participants in the sport field (the players) are now entertainers who seek to earn capital heteronomous to the sport field. The fact players are now paid to play puts modern play at odds with the play element Huizinga describes in *Homo Ludens*. As already stated, Huizinga described play as being free, yet the influence of economic capital in the sport field has compromised the free characteristic of play on several fronts: if a player is paid to play then he is not entirely free. He is, as a result of the financial relationship he has with his club, an employee of his club and committed to his club and the game by a binding financial contract. Player are also not free to play for whoever they like, and as such, the team they play for and the players they play with is often determined by a matter of finance. The make-up of an AFL club’s team list is influenced by the Total Player Payments Limit imposed by the AFL and as such, players are often traded or delisted because clubs cannot afford to pay them their market value or the market value of their teammates.

Because players play for pay and seek money from playing football to make a living, the notion of loyalty in the form of playing for the love of the club, the jumper and the community has also been compromised. The lure of money has placed club loyalty, community spirit and passion at odds with a player’s individual desire for financial security and prosperity.

292 For overview of Total Player Payments in AFL, see:
Money V Loyalty in the sport field

Since the AFL’s expansion into the northern markets of Australia and the subsequent increase in media broadcasting rights revenue, players have increasingly been utilised to ‘sell’ play in the AFL to consumers in these previously untapped markets. The prominence of money in the sport field has placed old fashion notions of loyalty and community under threat. It was once an unwritten law and understanding amongst the VFL’s playing fraternity that a player’s love for the game and the club they represented was more important to them than the opportunity to earn more money elsewhere – the capital players played for was autonomous to the sport field. However, the merger of the sport field with the economic and media field has ensured this is no longer the case.

It should be noted that the conflict between club loyalty and individual ambition for economic capital is not new to the game. The first instance of club loyalty being subordinated to individual ambition was raised in 1964 when Melbourne Football Club champion, Ron Barassi, walked out on the Melbourne Football Club to captain and coach the Carlton Football Club. It was the first time a champion player of his status had departed his club and community to represent a rival club because of individual desire, ambition and greater financial prosperity.

“It was an appointment that sent shockwaves reverberating through the entire world of Australian football. To some it seemed as if the very foundation on which the game itself was built had been torn asunder – indeed some maintain that the game has never been the same since.”

It seemed to many that in 1964 the impending age of professionalism in VFL/AFL football was changing the mentality of the key stakeholders within the game – the players. In particular it was challenging the relationship players had, to that point in history, shared with their club and the club’s community. The game was quickly becoming a business and play was evolving into a form of entertainment and employment. As a result traditional foundations of the game – loyalty, community and tribal spirit – were crumbling.

“It was accepted as one of the truisms of Australian football that at that moment the old creed of playing for your guernsey – which had been the staple during the Jack Dyer years and so much of the mythology of Australian football around it – was openly challenged.

Barassi went to Melbourne and then North Melbourne and evolves the notion of professionalism. It’s a fundamentally different idea of the way you play the game.”

However, the AFL’s Equalisation Policy has meant that up until their expansion into the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney, there have been very few examples of ‘big name’ players leaving their club for more money. Indeed most AFL players have remained loyal to the club they were first recruited to. Because each club’s expenditure on its players is capped equally by the AFL, rival AFL clubs have found it difficult to lure players from their original club by offering them more money because their ability to buy players is minimised by and limited to the AFL’s Player Salary Cap.

Indeed the Equalisation Policy and the Player Salary Cap was introduced for this very reason. Thus, throughout the 1990’s and the 2000’s, while some high profile players such as Nathan Brown and Chris Judd left their original clubs for more money at a rival club, most stayed loyal to the club that drafted them.

However, the AFL’s expansion into the northern markets along with their intense desire for their brand to appeal to consumers in South East Queensland and Northern and Western NSW has seen the mechanics of the AFL Equalisation Policy compromised and the notion of loyalty threatened more than ever before. The AFL has excluded the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney Giants from their strict Player Payments Salary Cap, instead giving them $750,000 and $1,000,000 respectively more than their sixteen counterparts to spend on attracting high profile players to their club as part of building their playing list. This has given them a greater power and ability to recruit players through financial incentives and has resulted in some of the biggest names in Australian Football – and indeed the Australian sporting landscape – abandon their home club and community for the opportunity to earn significantly more money by playing for the Gold Coast Suns or the Greater Western Sydney Giants.

In 2009, ex National Rugby League (NRL) player, Karmichael Hunt, shocked the Australian sporting industry when he declared that he was defecting from the NRL to play Australian Football in the AFL, signing on to play for the Gold Coast Suns. It was reported at the time of his defection that Hunt had signed a contract to play for the Gold Coast Suns for $3,000,000 over three years effectively making him one of the most highly paid players in the AFL. Hunt’s defection from the NRL to the AFL

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297 While AFL clubs do not disclose how much each individual player is paid, it was reported in the AFL media that Hunt was to receive $3m over three years when he joined the Suns. For an example see: Denham, G., ‘Karmichael Hunt turns his back on NRL offers to extend his time with the Suns’, in The Australian, March 6, 2012
caused unprecedented furore amongst the AFL fraternity and its players as Hunt’s new financial contract with the Suns meant that a man who had never previously played the game of Australian Rules football at the highest level, and would be far from the ‘best’ player in ‘sport field’, had become one of the highest paid players in the AFL competition. 298

It can be argued that economic capital had lured Hunt away from the game he knew and played with spontaneous instinct from his childhood (rugby league) to a game he had played sparingly as a teenager and never in a professional setting (Australian Rules football). Thus, Hunt’s recruitment to the AFL was a shining example of the commodification of the game and the AFL’s undeniable desire to attract new consumers to its product. The AFL recruited Hunt as a tool to sell the Gold Coast Suns’ brand to the Gold Coast market. The AFL and the Gold Coast Suns effectively invested $3 million into a player to provide the club and the game with a financial return in the form of advertising, public relations and promotion in the Gold Coast market. Hunt was recruited to market and sell the AFL and Suns brand – to generate back page stories and discussion – and to attract new supporters to the game, and importantly, to their television sets to watch Hunt and his teammates play.

A little over a year later the lure of economic capital trumped the notion of loyalty when arguably the best player in the AFL, Gary Ablett, defected from his original club, the Geelong Cats, to the Gold Coast Suns for a reported estimated figure of $9 million over five years. 299 What made this triumph of economic capital even more remarkable was the fact that Ablett’s connection to the Geelong Football Club and the Geelong community was greater than simply being drafted to the Cats as a seventeen year old. Ablett grew up barracking for Geelong as a child as his father, Gary Ablett Senior, played 242 games for Geelong as one of the greatest VFL/AFL players of all time. Ablett Senior’s thirteen year career with Geelong meant that Ablett Junior was selected by the Cats under the AFL’s Father Son Rule. Ablett Junior played 192 games for Geelong, won two of Best and Fairest Awards for the Club, a Brownlow Medal and played in two Geelong premiership teams. He was a Geelong supporter as a child and teenager who became a Geelong champion player. Indeed the Ablett name has been an integral part of the Geelong Football Club and community for more than 20 years.

298 This was written about by many AFL and NRL journalists and commentators. For an example see: Colman, M., ‘AFL hangs league convert Karmichael Hunt out to dry’, Sunday Mail, August 16 2009, p. 101
299 For an example of these reports, see: Elsworth, S., ‘Gary Ablett Jnr signs deal with Gold Coast Suns’, Courier Mail, September 29 2010, p. 94
Wilson, C., and Brodie, W., ‘Footy’s favourite son rises to Gold Coast Challenge’, September 29, 2010, p. 91
However, the enticement of $9 million over five years was enough for Ablett to defect from Geelong to the Gold Coast Suns. Indeed the prospect of pioneering the development of a new club and the offer of being the first Gold Coast Captain would have undoubtedly influenced Ablett’s decision, but it’s difficult to imagine that the Geelong champion would have departed Geelong for the Gold Coast if offered the same or similar money from the Suns. The Gold Coast Suns were assisted by the AFL to offer significant amounts of economic capital to high profile, celebrity players to assist the club in selling its brand to the Gold Coast and Queensland consumers. Like their recruitment of Hunt, the investment in recruiting Gary Ablett was not simply an on field investment— it was equally an investment to sell and market the Suns’ brand, generate interest among the Gold Coast community and encourage Gold Coast consumers to watch and support the Gold Coast Suns. Ablett, like Hunt, has been utilised as a tool by both the Suns and the AFL to help increase their supporter base and television audience.

In 2010, the AFL enticed another NRL player, Israel Folau, to defect from the NRL to play in the AFL for the competition’s newest franchise, the Greater Western Sydney Giants. The Giants recruited Folau for a reported $6 million over four years. Folau effectively became the highest paid Australian Rules footballer in the country when he signed for the Giants, yet had never played Australian Rules football at any level of competition in his life. A well-known identity in Sydney and a native of the Greater Western Sydney region, Folau was recruited to the Giants to help sell their team and brand to the Greater Western Sydney market. Like Hunt and Ablett before him, Folau was recruited as a marketing tool to help sell the Giants brand, increase attendance numbers and grow television audiences in the northern markets of Australia. Largely this has worked. The announcement of Folau’s defection from the NRL to the AFL generated more than 6,311 newspaper, TV and radio media stories, which was valued to be $12.3 million worth of media coverage for the AFL and the Greater Western Sydney Giants. The announcement also featured on the front and back pages of newspapers on 46 occasions in the first two days of Folau signing with the Giants, with the vast majority of coverage being in the AFL’s target growth markets of NSW and Queensland.

However, it should be noted that Folau’s defection from the NRL to the AFL did not receive universal support across the NRL and AFL landscape. In particular, many within the AFL bemoaned the move and were hostile towards the idea that the game’s highest paid athlete would be a 22 year old man.

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301 For an example of these reports, see: Cowley, M., and Baumgart, S., ‘Revealed: how Kevin Sheedy and GWS got their man’, Sydney Morning Herald, June 1 2010, p. 89
who had never played the game at any level of competition in his life. Many also held the view that because Folau had not played the game as a child, he would lack a certain sense or feel for the game that his opponents and teammates would enjoy from playing the game their whole life. As such many felt Folau did not deserve more money than his teammates or opponents who would perform better during a game.  

The Folau recruitment by the Greater Western Sydney Giants says much about the influence of money and media in the sport field. Folau defected from a game he loved to play, to a game he had never played before, for money—not because he enjoyed playing Australian Rules football more than Rugby League. Likewise, the AFL recruited him as a promotional and publicity tool that would help promote play in the AFL above all other items of entertainment that compete for the hearts and minds of Australian consumers in the NSW and Queensland markets.

Following the recruitment of Folau, the Greater Western Sydney Giants were able to utilise their financial concessions to recruit other players from their original clubs, such as Melbourne’s Tom Scully and the Western Bulldog’s Callan Ward, who both defected from their respective clubs to earn substantially greater sums of money at the Giants. Indeed the recruitment of Hunt and Ablett to the Suns and Folau, Ward and Scully to the Giants can be viewed as a triumph for economic capital in the sport field and serves to highlight how play has changed in the AFL since the game was founded in 1858. Furthermore, the influence of economic capital and the antagonistic relationship it shares with the notions of loyalty and community was amplified with the introduction of Free Agency in the AFL at the end of the 2012 season.

Free Agency – ‘show me the money’

Free Agency in the AFL is yet another example of the commodification of play in the AFL and the triumph of economic capital’s influence in participating in the sport field. With the introduction of Free Agency in 2013, rival clubs are now able to approach players who have played more than eight seasons with their current club and offer them a financial contract—based on an offer of more than what they are receiving from their current club. If the player is one of the ten highest paid players at their current club, the club has the right to match the offer put forward by the rival club. The player can then choose which club he wishes to play for.

If the player is not one of the ten highest paid players at his original club, his club does not have the right to match the offer put forward by the rival club and the player can move to the rival club if he

wishes to. This means that the clubs who have the most money available under their Total Player Payment Salary Cap can offer rival players a significant pay rise to defect from their original club. Importantly, it also means that players will increasingly determine who they will play for based on how much money they can earn at any given club. Economic capital becomes the most influential bargaining tool and determining factor of a player’s participation in the sport field. Clubs can, and most likely will, continue to depend upon notions of loyalty and creeds of playing for the jumper, but the influence of economic capital in the sport field is difficult to ignore. It was difficult for Gary Ablett, Karmichael Hunt and Israel Folau to ignore and proved to be a significant factor in the decision they all made to defect from their original clubs to their new homes.  

The advent of Free Agency stands to place economic capital at the forefront of the sport field and potentially diminish the notions of loyalty and significance of community as the reason for representing an AFL club. Players still undoubtedly enjoy some sense of community and friendship among the players and supporters of the clubs they represent, yet no player in the AFL plays for free and considering they are the performers of the show, nobody would expect them to. Play has been transformed from a semi-professional, leisure time pursuit, into a full time, professional form of employment. This is fundamentally different to the game and participation in the sport field when the VFL was founded up until the early to middle 1990’s. Retired Essendon, Brisbane and Collingwood defender, Mal Michael, touched on this when he stated, “The problem is we sign contracts and when they expire that’s it – there is no loyalty.”

The new age of Free Agency in the AFL was highlighted more so than ever at the conclusion of the 2013 AFL season when Hawthorn forward, Lance ‘Buddy’ Franklin declared just two days after Hawthorn had triumphed in the Grand Final to win the 2013 AFL Premiership, that he was leaving Hawthorn to play with the Sydney Swans in 2014. Franklin signed a nine year $10 million contract to play for the Swans – a financial offer Hawthorn could simply not match.

Franklin’s departure from Hawthorn for Sydney is an example of the influence money now has in the decision making of players. For Franklin, it appears the lure of $10 million was too enticing to refuse, thus he placed the incentive of earning more money ahead of the bond and connection he had formed with his Hawthorn teammates and the Hawthorn community while playing for the Hawks. In this instance, it appears that economic capital triumphed over loyalty and community.

For information about the mechanics of the AFL’s Free Agency see:  

The merger of the sport field with the economic field and the media field has ensured that AFL football now mirrors the business bureaucratic model of western society, so much so that all key stakeholders—players, coaches, administrators and board members alike, make decisions based on economic rational objectives. Furthermore, it has ensured that a player’s profile and income potential is not restricted only to the sport field. Because of the saturated media coverage of the game, players are exposed through all forms of media more than ever before. Players are now interviewed during, before and after television broadcasts of games, profiled by print, TV and radio programs, appear on entertainment programs such as The Footy Show and Before the Game and draw mass followers and fans through their own social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook. The transformation of play to display has transformed players into celebrities who have recognition and power both inside and outside the sport field. As such, they are utilised by companies external to the AFL as a tool to help market, advertise and sell their products and services. These companies believe that by having a popular sport celebrity endorse and promote their product, their product will gain popularity by association. This process has enabled many players to earn even greater amounts of money outside the field of play.

However, this is at odds with Huizinga’s statement in Homo Ludens that one should not ‘play for pay’ as he feared the influence of economic capital in the sport field would come to damage the essential play characteristics of fun and spontaneity. Indeed it can be argued that the increased influence of economic capital in the AFL has coincided with a decrease in the fun and enjoyment a player experiences when actively participating in play in the AFL.

Play as serious

The increased demands and commitment of being an AFL Footballer that has come with the professionalization of the game since the mid 1990’s has changed dramatically since the semi-professional demands of the VFL era. While football training once consisted of two training sessions a week, today players are required to complete some form of training on all but one or two days of any given week. In an interview given with Melbourne News Limited newspaper publication, the Herald Sun in 2006, former St. Kilda defender and midfielder, Austin Jones, estimated that most players trained with the team for 30 – 40 hours a week, with most players doing an extra 15 – 20 hours extra work on their own in the form of stretching, recovery, rehabilitation and gym work.

Furthermore, players now have extra media and community work commitments, meaning life as an AFL footballer is not merely a semi-professional, leisure time pursuit, but rather a full time, seven

306 Huizinga, J., Homo Ludens, p.51
days a week profession. Jones suggests to the *Herald Sun* that this has implications for the fun and enjoyment characteristics of the play element.

“I just think the fun in the game has dwindled so much. There’s no light moments. It’s just a business and that’s the sole aim.”

In his final year of football, Jones received almost a quarter of a million dollars to play for the St. Kilda Football Club – three times the amount he began with when he started his career some ten years earlier. However, the passion and enjoyment he felt when participating in the AFL had undoubtedly decreased as the game became more professional and serious and the demands on AFL players increased. These sentiments were shared by former Essendon Football Club champion and current coach, James Hird. Hird, who debuted for the Bombers in the semi-professional era of the game (1992) and retired in the fully professional era of the current decade, noted that the difference for a player playing in the AFL today, compared to when he began his playing career was stark.

“The thing I miss is, you finish a game of footy, you can’t just go out with the whole team and have a few beers. Now if you play at night the recovery finishes at 1.00 am and that prevents that whole team bonding...the footy club is the footy club, but not in the traditional sense anymore because of the professionalism you have to keep.”

The comments and observations made by Jones and Hird illuminate the influence of economic capital in the AFL and in particular, the subsequent impact it has had on the enjoyment and fun characteristics of play. The merger of the economic and media fields with the sport field has ensured that play is now serious and no longer separate to the ordinary and real – the serious element of play is no longer restricted solely to the contest. As such, players are no longer entirely free within the sport field and may play with less spontaneity. Some, such as Austin Jones, have publically claimed that playing AFL football is less fun to play today than it was when they began their careers.

However, the consequences of the *play, money, media cycle* are not restricted to players. Indeed the AFL clubs and their communities have been increasingly compromised by economic capital’s growing influence in the sport field. As already noted in this thesis, the AFL’s clubs now need money to survive and flourish as a business within the AFL, and more broadly, the entertainment industry. As such, clubs now function as a business and act with economic principles and objectives at the

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308 Hird, J., ‘Home is where the heart and soul is’, in *Herald Sun*, 12 April 2006, p. 90
forefront of their purpose. As such, this has changed the relationship that many supporters who make up the club’s community, share with their club.

In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga described a typical sporting club as a vibrant, central hub of activity where the community would meet to enjoy something in common with others. The people who would fill the clubrooms, and the conversations they would share, were representative of their broader community and relationships they shared with one another. 309 The football club was a meeting point for citizens to connect to their community. 310 However, the transformation of the AFL’s clubs into businesses and their desire to accumulate economic capital has altered the characteristics of the AFL clubs and often placed the need of generating economic capital ahead of the grass roots of the club’s foundation—the community. It should be noted, however, that in many instances this has been driven by a need, rather than a desire, to ensure the club remains a viable, vibrant and successful entity within the AFL and broader entertainment industry.

As mentioned in the preceding chapter of this thesis, all clubs founded in the VFL in the first three decades of its formation were built from the grass roots—stimulated by a common interest and passion from the community. They were built from the ‘bottom up’ and as such, genuinely represented the community and suburbs of which they were created. However, the influence of economic capital and the subsequent transformation of play into an item of entertainment (display) has also transformed the make-up and primary purpose of their existence. Like the industry of which it is part, AFL football clubs are characterised by their need to sell their brand, their players, their style of play and the club itself in order to generate the necessary levels of revenue to survive. The consequence of this is that the communities who built the club and the supporters who follow the club—some their whole life—are now treated as a source of revenue. They are considered by the AFL and the eighteen AFL clubs as consumers of the play element. To be part of the club’s community they are required to purchase club memberships to financially buy a place in their club’s community and, importantly, financially support their club. The community is sold the message that by purchasing a club membership they are showing ‘real’ support for their club and displaying loyalty and passion in return for a level of ownership of their club. However, in reality in can be argued they are merely contributing to the revenue needed by clubs to survive, flourish and ultimately perform at their optimum in the sport field.

This point highlights the transformation of the VFL/AFL football club from a grass roots organisation—created and owned by the community—into a business who sells its product (play) to its

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community (who have subsequently become consumers). Before the commodification of play, supporters of the club were considered a genuine part and custodian of their club even without contributing to the club’s membership base and revenue streams. Furthermore, because club memberships make up such a significant portion of club revenue, traditional, suburban football clubs have sought to look beyond their traditional roots for support, membership and subsequent revenue. This has often disengaged the grass roots supporter base of clubs who place financial needs and opportunities ahead of their community and traditional supporter base. This was highlighted in 1997 when the Footscray Football Club changed their name to the Western Bulldogs in an attempt to attract supporters from the entire western suburbs of Melbourne, not just the small suburb of Footscray. Just two years later, the North Melbourne Football Club changed their name to be simply known as the Kangaroos. The name change was implemented with the ambition of attracting membership revenue from around the nation, rather than only their home suburb of North Melbourne.

The need for revenue has also physically dis-attached many clubs from their grass roots foundations. The last three decades has seen most Victorian clubs leave their traditional home grounds to play at state of the art venues such as the Melbourne Cricket Ground and Etihad Stadium. No longer do Richmond play at Punt Road Oval, Collingwood at Victoria Park or Essendon at Windy Hill – they all now play their home games at two stadiums located outside their home suburbs. Furthermore, many clubs have abandoned their suburban and community training venues and headquarters to move beyond their spiritual supporter base to new locations that carry scant meaning to their 100 year history. In 2004, the Collingwood Football Club officially moved from their home base of Victoria Park in Collingwood, to the Lexus Centre in Melbourne (it is now known as the Westpac Centre). Soon after, Hawthorn moved their headquarters from Hawthorn to Waverley Park in Mulgrave, St Kilda departed Moorabbin for Seaford, while in 2014 Essendon departed their spiritual home of Windy Hill, bound for Tullamarine.

Furthermore, several AFL clubs – particularly those who are more financially vulnerable than their competitors and who wish to sell and promote their brand to new markets in Australia – have sold home games to interstate venues and State Governments in return for significant financial gain. Hawthorn has a financial agreement with the Tasmanian Government to play four games per year at

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313 For more information about the history of each club, visit: Australian Football: Celebrating the history of the great Australian game, online, http://australianfootball.com/clubs, retrieved March 28, 2013
Aurora Stadium in Launceston for an estimated $3.4 million plus an extra $1 million from bar sales, gate receipts and sponsorships. North Melbourne reached a similar agreement with the Tasmanian Government to play two games in Hobart for an estimated $1 million per year. Other clubs to sell home games to interstate venues in 2014 include the Melbourne Football Club, the Western Bulldogs Football Club, the Richmond Football Club and the Port Adelaide Football Club – ultimately meaning their supporter base and community will be unable to attend their matches on these occasions. The need for money has, in this instance, trumped the community and ultimately highlighted the influence of economic capital in the AFL, the transformation of clubs into businesses and supporters into consumers. By moving their headquarters from their spiritual home and selling home games to interstate locations, clubs are effectively announcing the triumph of the entertainment age – where grass roots supporters are treated as consumers, a TV audience and a source of revenue. Furthermore, it is an age where clubs are forced to place the need of economic capital ahead of their traditional and historical roots.

**Play as entertainment**

The triumph of economic capital in the AFL has also transformed the way supporters now interact and relate to the play element and the football clubs they support. As already highlighted in this chapter, the supporters of the club were once the heart and soul of the club — the reason for the club’s existence. Today, it seems they are very much consumers of the AFL product, to the point the AFL’s two newest teams, the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney were established without a community or a supporter base — instead they were targeted at a market to attract new consumers to the AFL’s brand. In order to ensure the play element remains an attractive item of entertainment, the AFL has often regulated and changed the game’s rules. The purpose of most rule changes has been to add to the entertainment aspect of the play element and designed to increase the movement and speed of the game. Consequently, rules such as ‘deliberate out of bounds’, ‘deliberate rushed behind’, time limits on how long a player can take when lining up for goal, allowing a player to kick out immediately after the opposition has scored a behind, reducing the number of players on the interchange bench and introducing a substitute player have all been

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introduced to make the game and play element more aesthetically pleasing and entertaining. This is yet another example of play’s transformation into display.

Furthermore, consumers of the AFL are now entertained by and through off field extensions of the play element such as the previously mentioned magazine style football programs, and more recently online games such as Dream Team and Super Coach. Dream Team (operated through the AFL website) and Super Coach (operated through the Herald Sun website) allow consumers to choose their own fantasy team within the restrictions of the AFL imposed Total Player Payment Salary Cap. Players are scored and then valued based on how many possessions they accumulate each weekend and by how efficient they are with their disposals. Both Dream Team and Super Coach are examples of the business-like micro-analysis of each player’s performance in the AFL today, where a player’s output and success is measured in business-like terms such as efficiency, effectiveness and cost. It can also be argued that the function of these online games encourage individualism and micro-analysis at the expense of a more holistic team analysis.

Dream Team and Super Coach mirror the AFL, just as the AFL mirrors business. In many ways, these games blur the distinction play has with ordinary and real life as it becomes increasingly difficult to tell when play begins and when it ends. Huizinga stressed in Homo Ludens that the lack of distinction between play and ordinary and real life is a characteristic of the corruption of play. Furthermore, Dream Team and Super Coach also illuminate the strengthening ties between play in the AFL, money and the media. Dream Team is played by 259,927 Australians, while 340,441 are registered Super Coach players, meaning a total of 600,368 consumers visit the Herald Sun and/or AFL website each week to play these games.

This chapter has shown that the merger of the sport, economic and media fields and the subsequent domination of economic capital in the AFL has resonated amongst the players of the game, the AFL’s eighteen clubs, the AFL community and the supporters of the game. Play has been transformed into display; display has become an item of entertainment; the players have become entertainers and performers, contracted to and paid by their clubs, who in turn leverage their talents to not only try to win games of football, but also to help sell their brand to consumers across the country. Notions of loyalty, tradition, and to some extent, enjoyment, fun and spontaneity—which were once

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fundamental and prominent characteristics of the play element – are now subordinated to the need and desire for money.

The dominance of economic capital and entertainment in the sport field has altered the relationship players have with the play element and their club, and equally, the business structure of each AFL club has also fundamentally changed the relationship the community and supporters now have with the play element, the game and importantly, the club they support. It is this changing relationship that the following chapters of this thesis will analyse and attempt to understand.

Furthermore, the AFL’s transformation into a business and form of entertainment now has fundamental links to the performance of each AFL team on the field. Economic capital has inextricably linked on-field success (winning) with off field success (financial growth). Likewise, it seems if an AFL club is financially prosperous, their team is more likely to be successful on the field. As the next chapter will highlight, this has direct consequences for the play element, the integrity of the game and strength of the AFL community.
Chapter 7: Striving to be number one on the field and off it: 
The manipulation and corruption of play

Since the game of Australian Rules football was created in 1858, there has always been an emphasis on winning. Individuals who have played the game, and teams who have represented the communities from which they spawned, have always taken great pride in playing to their optimum capability and being better than their opponents. Likewise, those who watch and barrack for their club are known to commonly admire the most skilful, talented and fairest teams and individuals.

The very structure and rules of the game promotes recognition of ‘the best’, or at the very least, the ‘better team on the day.’ For example, keeping score throughout the game of Australian Rules football determines a winner, which in turn determines the better team. A ladder is kept within the season, ordering teams on their performance by recording their season record of wins, losses and draws. At the end of the home and away season, the best teams (with the most wins) enter and contest a finals series where two teams will make the Grand Final and the winner will be declared the Premiership Team. Winning the premiership is often the described goal of (and even reason for) players playing the game, supporters barracking and clubs existing—they are all working together for a shared and common passion with an agreed upon end goal.

Likewise, individual players have always been recognised and rewarded for being the best. All clubs competing in the AFL have a Best and Fairest award which recognises the player judged as the fairest and best player for their team and whose contribution to the team has helped them win most often. Many of the AFL’s oldest clubs have a long and proud history of recognising their most talented, skilful and courageous players who are presented with a range of awards and rewards at the end of the season, many of which are named after former champion players of the club. Indeed one of the AFL’s most prestigious awards is the Brownlow Medal, which is awarded to the player judged as the AFL’s fairest and best by the umpires. The Brownlow Medal is widely considered the highest individual honour an AFL player can receive, however it is by no means the only individual honour awarded at the end of the season. As well as the Brownlow Medal and Club Best and Fairest awards, other individual awards include the Most Valuable Player (awarded by the Player’s Association), the Coaches Award (awarded by the competition’s 18 coaches) and the All Australian Team, which recognises the best 22 players of the season.

318 To learn more about the Laws of the AFL game, visit: 
However, it should be noted that team success has always been considered the primary objective of players in the VFL/AFL and that any individual award that may be awarded to them would be merely recognition of their contribution to the team. While most AFL players would say that the purpose of training, working hard and contributing to the team is to win the premiership, few (if any) would proclaim their purpose was to win an individual award. However, should they be recognised for the contribution they have made to their team, they would happily accept the award.

Therefore, there is nothing new in trying to win and striving to be the best, for wanting to win has always been part of the game. However, before the AFL was influenced by other fields, and when it could be defined as an autonomous field, those who were successful in the field of play, both in terms of team success and individual success, were recognised, respected and even adored mostly by those who were also key participants within the sport field. While those around them would cheer and even marvel at their skill, team work, desire, conviction and overall performance, they were not rewarded by accumulating capital in other fields. While the Premiershi p Team or Brownlow Medal winner would grow in reputation within the AFL (i.e. their social capital would be enhanced) their reputation and power outside the AFL would not increase as significantly. Achieving success on the field with their teammates and celebrating with those who had worked hard to achieve a common goal (coaches, supporters and administrators) was largely considered reward enough.

While the Brownlow Medal winner and Premiership Team had the satisfaction of knowing that they were the ‘best’, they were not rewarded with large sums of economic capital and nor did the on field success of the team greatly influence the off field stability of the club. This is no longer the case. As the sport field has become increasingly influenced by the economic field, the emphasis on winning (and the subsequent by-product of being recognised as the best) is increasingly linked to the economic field and, in particular, money.

As discussed, because all AFL clubs now operate as businesses within the entertainment industry, a team’s performance on the field now affects the club’s brand, which it relies upon to generate revenue. Without going over territory already addressed in the earlier parts of this thesis, by winning more often than not, clubs can attract more supporters, more members and more spectators to attend their games. They can also sell more club merchandise, attract the interest (and dollars) of corporate sponsors, play more games during Prime Time television (in front of bigger television audiences), and therefore, make more money. This money can be spent on attracting and developing the best available coaches, acquiring the best available training equipment and implementing the best (and often most expensive) training and player development programs.

320 North Melbourne champion Wayne Carey discussed this point on 3AW: Carey, W., 3AW football, April 14, 2007, 2.00 pm
Resources such as these are then utilised to ensure the on field performance of the team is such that it is given every possible chance to continue to win more often than not, ensuring their brand remains attractive to other prospective sources of revenue (members, sponsors, television audiences etc.).

Likewise, if players receive individual recognition, reward and praise through any of the various individual awards mentioned above, they can rightly expect sponsors to approach them to act as ambassadors or endorsers of the company’s brand or products. This can earn players thousands of dollars (on top of their earnings from their club) and they can also be utilised by their club to help sell the club brand.

It should also be noted that the opposite is true for those teams who consistently lose more often than they win. The off field consequences of poor on field performance is that their brand will not be as attractive and they will have a diminished capacity to earn money. Therefore, today, a significant by-product of winning is increasing the club’s capacity to increase revenue. While this has been the case since the VFL was created before the 1897 season, it has never been more blatant than it is today. While team success was once defined as achieving a shared goal with the club’s community, it is now also a vehicle to drive revenue. As a result, the AFL’s clubs tend to now operate less as communities and more as businesses.

Therefore, because of the influence of the economic field, being successful on the field has never been more important and because of this, some clubs have been willing to manipulate the play element in order to achieve a desired result (winning). In most instances, the manipulation of play has been facilitated by the economic field with the objective of ensuring both on-field and off-field success.

This is best highlighted through the following examples, which have occurred in the AFL over the last five seasons.

**To ‘tank’ or not to ‘tank’, that is the question: The Melbourne Football Club**

During the 2012 AFL football season, the AFL’s Integrity Unit began an investigation into the on-field performance of the Melbourne Football Club during the 2009 AFL Premiership Season. Allegations had been made that Melbourne had tanked in order to win a priority selection in the upcoming 2009 AFL National Draft. During the 2009 season, under the AFL’s Equalisation Policy, if a team finished the season with no more than four wins over the course of the 22 game season, they would receive an extra draft pick (on top of the one they already had) at the beginning of the draft, effectively giving them two draft selections to secure the best young talent in the country. Therefore, if
Melbourne finished at the bottom of the AFL ladder in 2009 with no more than four wins, they would receive the first draft pick in the 2009 AFL National Draft (for finishing last) and a priority selection (for finishing with no more than four wins), giving them the first two selections in the National Draft.  

Tanking in a sporting sense refers to the act of giving up a match or ‘throwing it away’, losing intentionally or not competing. In many ways, it is the antithesis of what Huizinga described as play in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*. At the heart of Huizinga’s description of play was the understanding that above all else, play was free and spontaneous. On the contrary, tanking is achieved by the manipulation, management and corruption of play whereby players, coaches or management control the play element in order to contrive a desired result. Furthermore, to tank is to deliberately lose, or to not try to win – notions that stand in direct opposition of what sporting clubs stand for, why they were created and how they build their communities. Throughout the competition’s history, VFL and AFL clubs had helped stimulate and bind communities through the collective will of its members, supporters, administrators, coaches and players to work together to achieve a common and shared goal – trying your best to win the premiership.

Furthermore, Hegel argued that this type of positive community engagement was essential for each individual to reach his or her full potential in society. Therefore, should the play element be corrupted by administrators, coaches or players who no longer wish to allow the players to play with freedom, flair and spontaneity, instead preferring to manipulate play to achieve a desired result, play’s ability to generate communities seems all but shattered.

While accusations had been made by many supporters, commentators and observers that Melbourne had tanked in the 2009 Premiership Season to ensure they received the first two selections in the 2009 AFL National Draft later that year, the AFL’s Integrity Unit began their investigation after current Carlton and former Melbourne player, Brock McLean (who played for Melbourne during the 2009 season), stated on *Fox Footy’s On the Couch* program that ‘Blind Freddie’ could see that Melbourne had deliberately not tried to win some games of football in the 2009 season. While few doubted that the players who took the field tried their best to win every game

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they participated in, many argued that the coaches and administrators had selected teams that
could not win and played players in positions that ensured the team could not perform at its best,
inadvertently damaging their chances to win. In effect, according to their accusers, Melbourne’s
coaches and administrators had tried to manipulate the play element in order to lose by ensuring
their team would not perform at their optimum when they played. In effect, they had placed the
importance of receiving the first two draft selections in the upcoming 2009 AFL National Draft ahead
of the very essence of what football clubs had traditionally been built on – working together to
achieve a common goal – winning.

It was believed by many at the time that Melbourne didn’t think it could be successful and climb the
AFL ladder unless it added young talent to its playing list. Furthermore, they wanted the best young
talent available. By losing in 2009, Melbourne believed it could draft the key players necessary to
ensure they were more successful in the following years and as such were willing to suffer some
short term pain for long term gain. As articulated above, because of the influence of the economic
field in the AFL, winning was becoming increasingly important for each club in order to sell their
brand and generate revenue.

As part of the AFL’s investigation into the on-field performance of the Melbourne Football Club
during the 2009 season, they conducted 58 interviews, comprising both current and former players,
coaches, administrators and officials of the club. The AFL also undertook forensic analysis of the
Melbourne Football Club’s computers, files and email system. After considering the evidence
gathered by the AFL, the AFL’s findings were as follows:

- There had not been a directive from the Melbourne Football Club board or executive
  management that the team should deliberately lose matches in any game throughout the
  2009 premiership season.

- The Melbourne Football Club, its coach and team did not set out to deliberately lose in any
  matches during the 2009 premiership season.

- Melbourne Football Club 2009 General Manager of Football Operations, Chris Connolly
during the 2009 premiership season had acted in a manner concerning pre game planning,
  comprising comments to a football department meeting, which was prejudicial to the
  interests of the AFL.
- Melbourne Football Club 2009 Senior Coach, Dean Bailey, having regard to Mr Connolly’s comments, during the 2009 premiership season had acted in a manner which was prejudicial to the interests of the AFL.\(^{326}\)

As a result of the above findings, which were released on February 19, 2013, the sanctions were listed as follows:

- Chris Connolly to be suspended until February 1, 2014 from occupying any office or performing any function (including attending matches or training sessions) for or on behalf of any club, such suspension to commence Monday, February 25, 2013.

- Dean Bailey to be suspended from coaching for the first 16 rounds of the 2013 premiership season. During this time, he will not be permitted to have any match day role working with players, but he may remain employed by the Adelaide Football Club if it so chooses.

- The Melbourne Football Club accepts that in relation to this matter it must bear ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the club personal in key roles, and has accordingly agreed with the AFL to a fine of $500,000.\(^{327}\)

The AFL also stated that:

- The Draft rules allow for the distribution of elite talent among the AFL to clubs and help to ensure the long-term future of the AFL clubs. However the rules absolutely do not provide for teams to manipulate the draft of Total Player Payments (TPP) provisions for their own ends.

- At the start of the 2012 season, the AFL announced the alteration of the rules to make it harder to qualify for a Priority Selection for poor performance.\(^{328}\)

So, Melbourne was not found guilty of tanking on match days as the AFL found “no evidence that Melbourne did not do everything to the best of its ability to win on match days.”\(^{329}\) However, Melbourne’s Senior Coach, Dean Bailey, and General Manager of Football Operations, Chris Connolly, were both suspended because they had acted in ways prejudicial to the interest of the competition—that is, they prepared teams to lose, or had selected teams that probably would not win.


\(^{327}\) AFL, A full statement: Melbourne Tanking Penalties

\(^{328}\) AFL, A full statement: Melbourne Tanking Penalties

\(^{329}\) AFL, A full statement: Melbourne Tanking Penalties
Chris Connolly was suspended because he was alleged to have warned an estimated 15 Melbourne officials against the perils of winning more than four games for the season, while Coach Bailey was found guilty of acting in a manner prejudicial to the AFL (perhaps acting on Connolly’s advice), but not trying to lose on match days.

So, what does this mean for the play element? Was it manipulated or corrupted? And if it was manipulated or corrupted, why was it?

Throughout this debate, few (if anyone) have ever suggested that the Melbourne players who took to the field each weekend did not try their best to play their best and win each match. However, the AFL’s findings suggest that the play element was managed, controlled, manipulated and corrupted to ensure that Melbourne did not win more than four games for the season. In effect, the players were positioned to ensure that more often than not, they were not able to reach their full potential and given the best chance of winning.

As mentioned above, this stands in direct opposition to what Huizinga defined as pure play. Furthermore, if coaches and administrators are conspiring to lose games of football, it means the club is no longer genuinely working together to achieve the common, shared goal of winning, which has traditionally been the driving will of the club’s community. Surely this means the community of the club is weakened as the fans and players no longer share the support of some coaches and administrators in working together to win. If this is the purpose and foundation on which teams are built, what does it mean for the club, when some within the club are corrupting the play element in order to conspire to lose games of football? Surely it must weaken the play element, the club and its community.

This also says much about the influence of the economic field in the sport field. In this instance, not only were two club officials willing to manipulate the play element in order to lose, the structure of the modern football club allowed them to influence the outcome of a match. The two individuals found guilty by the AFL of acting in a manner prejudicial to the interests of the AFL were not players and one of them was not even a coach. If the AFL was an autonomous organisation, the outcome of a game would be determined by the players and coaches who all worked together to perform at their best, and in doing so, hoped to win. Supporters accepted and expected the players and coaches to prepare and play in such a manner that ensured they would play at or near their best and therefore they supported them to help them achieve success.

However, the Melbourne tanking issue highlights the influence the economic field has had in reshaping the structure of the football club to mirror a business, and as such, various levels of
management (such as the Melbourne Manager of Football Operations, Chris Connolly) can influence the outcome of a match. It can be argued play has become micromanaged by various levels of management within football clubs, which is a direct reflection of the influence of the economic field in the sport field. Furthermore, because football clubs reflect the structure of business, this is perceived by many as common sense.

It can be argued that Connolly did not influence the play element during games of football and therefore the integrity of the play element was not harmed, however, he did affect the team’s potential to play at their best, reach their potential and hopefully win, which damages the very principle on which teams and their communities were created.

Importantly, the very reason that some within the Melbourne Football Club were willing to lose more often than not throughout the 2009 season was a direct influence of the commercialisation of the AFL. While some within Melbourne were happy to lose in 2009, they were only doing so because they wanted to be successful in the years to come, which, as outlined above and in earlier sections of this thesis, would improve the image of their brand and provide them with a more significant potential to earn more money, thus enabling them to remain successful on the field and off it. For those who advocated tanking, it was a means of eventually improving the brand of the club by accumulating a player list good enough to win more often than not, climb the ladder and attract more supporters, members, sponsors and so on. Many would argue that the issue of tanking is a result of the influence of money and the commercial benefits that winning provides. In many instances this has led to a ‘whatever it takes’ and ‘win at all costs’ mentality within the AFL, with many clubs drawing on the influence of other notable fields to gain an advantage over their opponents.

One such field is the science field, which is facilitated by the economic field and utilised to assist clubs in improving the performance of their players to win more often than not. However, this too has the potential to manipulate and corrupt the play element.

**Sports Science in the sport field**

The increasingly influential role of the science field in the AFL was illuminated on February 6th 2013 when the Essendon Football Club asked the AFL and the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency (ASADA) to investigate their club amid uncertainty over the legality of substances administered to players during the 2012 pre-season.

The Essendon Football Club asked the AFL and ASADA to determine if the substances their players were administered in 2012 were legal. At the centre of ASADA’s investigation into Essendon’s 2012
The supplement program is the club’s use of peptides and the way in which the supplements were administered. Peptides are a compound made of amino acid molecules – many of which are legal for elite athletes to take. However, some peptides promote muscle growth and have similar properties to human growth hormone (HgH). According to WebMD.com, HgH is produced by the pituitary gland and spurs growth in children and adolescents. It also helps to regulate the body composition, body fluids, muscle and bone growth, sugar and fat metabolism, and possibly heart function. Importantly, HgH is prohibited both in and out of competition under the World Anti-Doping Authority (WADA) List of Prohibited Substances and Methods.

If any player is caught with any prohibited substances in their system, the penalties are severe. For example, Rugby Union players, Trent Anderson and Mitchell Spackman both received two year suspensions for their involvement with Growth Hormone Peptide 6 (GHRP-6). Anderson’s sanction was possession and attempted use, while Spackman’s was for attempted use. If a player is found to have used or attempted to use banned substances, they are affectively found guilty of cheating. In using substances which enable the body to perform above its natural capability and potential, the athlete is eliminating the essence of fair play in the contest as they have an unfair and unnatural advantage.

In the instance that competitors within the sport field are gaining an unfair advantage through the act of cheating, the very fabric on which sport is built and defined is threatened. In particular, the play element is no longer pure for it is manipulated and corrupted by the science field to the point where the contest is no longer fair. The consequences of this extend beyond individual or team sanctions. As mentioned above, sports clubs and communities are built upon a shared and common passion (play) which is utilised by its members to work together to achieve a shared, common and understood objective (winning). For sporting clubs to be able to stimulate communities, not only must those involved have a shared passion for play, but they must also believe that the shared objective (of winning) is achievable. Importantly they must believe that it is achievable to reach their goal within the rules and that their competitors are also working together and acting within the rules.

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Also see 2012 Prohibited List
rules. This ensures the integrity of the sport field is maintained. If an individual or club is cheating this directly corrupts play and its ability to stimulate communities.

At the time of submitting this thesis, ASADA had completed only an interim report of its investigation of the Essendon Football Club and as such, it must be stated that the Essendon Football Club had not been found guilty of substance abuse or cheating of any kind by ASADA. However, the AFL utilised the interim report to charge four Essendon officials of bringing the game into disrepute. Senior Coach, James Hird, was subsequently banned from working at Essendon, or any other AFL club, for twelve months.

The above discussion highlights how the influence of the science field can corrupt and manipulate the play element in professional sport. Because of the importance of winning for both on-field and off-field stability and prosperity, sports clubs and athletes are increasingly pushing the boundary of what’s considered fair and legal in order to gain an advantage over their opponents. Not only is the influence of the economic field one of the reasons clubs and athletes appear to have adopted a ‘win at all costs’ attitude to play, but it is also a key facilitator of the increasing role sports science is having in the AFL. While once players would rely on hard work and ability to win games of football, today they are assisted by sports scientists providing supplements and dietary advice in order to ensure players and teams can play at their maximum potential and provide sustained maximum output.

While this is perfectly legal (unless a breach of ASADA regulations occurs), it illuminates the increased management of play from various levels of administration within AFL football clubs. As mentioned in earlier parts of this thesis, one of the stark by-products of the economic field’s influence in the AFL is that the AFL and its 18 clubs now mirror business and, as such, they are now set up and structured as a business, characterised by various levels of managements and departments within each club—all of which can influence their product and brand (play). As such the play element can be influenced by those outside of the playing and coaching group. In this instance, the sports science department is influencing the sport field and in some sports it is corrupting play.

Two days after Essendon asked the AFL and ASADA to assist them in reviewing their 2012 supplements program, the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) released results from a twelve month investigation, which found strong evidence of the use of banned substances among multiple athletes and sporting codes. While the report did not identify which club or sports were under investigation, the report did state:
“The level of suspected use of peptides varies between some sporting codes, however officials from a club have been identified as administering, via injections and intravenous drips, a variety of substances, possibly including peptides. Moreover, the substances were administered at levels which were possibly in breach of World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) anti-doping rules.”

Other key aspects of Australian Crime Commission’s report which highlight the influence the science field is having in the sport field includes:

- Widespread use of peptides has been identified, or is suspected by the ACC, in a number of professional sporting codes in Australia. Multiple players (in one code) from a number of clubs are suspected of currently using or having previously used peptides.

- An instance of team-based doping, orchestrated by some club officials and coaching staff, has also been identified. Officials from one club have been identified as administering, via injections and intravenous drips, a variety of substances, possibly including peptides. The substances were administered at levels which were possibly in breach of WADA anti-doping rules.

- Some medical practitioners have been identified as one of the key conduits through which individuals are obtaining performance and image enhancing drugs (PIEDs).

- The ACC also identified lax and fraudulent prescribing practices by some doctors with links to sporting clubs and anti-ageing clinics. These practices include writing scripts in false names, providing prescriptions without consulting the patient and prescribing hormones without conducting the necessary blood test normally carried out prior to the prescription of these substances.

- Some of these doctors are also implicated in experimenting on players, by providing them with different substances in order to determine the effects on their performance.

- In Australian football codes, sports scientists have gained increasing influence over decision-making within the clubs. Some of these scientists are playing a critical role in pushing legal and regulatory boundaries in relation to sport supplementation programs and medical treatments given to players.

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- The ACC has identified specific high-performance staff, sports scientists and coaches within some codes who have condoned and/or orchestrated the administration of prohibited substances and substances not yet approved for human consumption.

- In some cases, peptides and other substances were administered to players without them understanding the nature of the substances, and without the knowledge of the team doctor or club medical staff.

- The ACC has identified a range of substances that have limited to no history of use in humans, are not approved for human use, or their use is considered 'off-label'. While these substances are not prohibited by WADA, due to a lack of long-term clinical studies on the use of these substances or their 'off-label' use, their potential impact on the health of players – both short and long-term – is unknown.

- Sports scientists can play a critical role in taking training programs and the preparation of athletes to the edge of, and sometimes beyond, what is permitted by WADA. 

Therefore, the science field is clearly increasingly influencing the sport field and as such, the play element is increasingly being managed by sports scientists. As stated above, this has ensured the sport field is no longer autonomous – it has merged with the media field and the economic field, which has facilitated the growth of other fields, such as the science field, in the sport field. And, as evident from the ACC Report, in some instances it is corrupting play.

Furthermore, the ACC Report also found that the corruption of play is not limited to the influence of the science field, but in fact has linked the use of illegal substances with organised crime and match fixing. The ACC Report stated:

- The presence of organised criminal identities and groups in the performance and image enhancing drugs (PIEDs) market presents a threat to the integrity of Australian professional sport as a direct consequence of the increased likelihood of criminal identities and groups interacting with professional athletes and the potential exploitation of these relationships for criminal purposes.

- Relationships between athletes and organised crime identities can be exploited by criminals to corrupt the athlete. The ACC's 2011 assessment of Threats to the Integrity of Professional Sport in Australia noted that as the amount of money wagered on sport increases,

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335 ACC, Organised Crime and Drugs in Sport, February 9, 2013
associations with athletes or other individuals with the ability to influence a sporting contest, or provide inside information, will be increasingly sought after.\footnote{ACC, Organised Crime and Drugs in Sport, February 9, 2013}

In their response to the ACC Report, the AFL stated:

- The AFL is strongly supportive of a National Match Fixing Policy as agreed to by Federal and State Governments in 2011. Last year, the NSW Government passed legislation introducing a criminal offence for match fixing with a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment and the AFL looks forward to the introduction of similar legislation in other states.\footnote{AFL, Full Statement from the AFL, online, www.afl.com.au/news/2013-02-07/full-statement-from-the-afl, Feb 7, 2013}

- The AFL also recognises that athletes can be vulnerable to ‘grooming’ by criminals who want to compromise them for match-fixing purposes. The AFL is currently delivering an education program to players and club officials that warns about doping and includes a specific section on the AFL’s gambling regulations and the risks that players could face.\footnote{Cambridge Dictionaries Online, match-fixing, online, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/match-fixing, retrieved May 28, 2013}

\textbf{Match Fixing in sport: Using play as a tool to make money}

According to the Cambridge dictionary, match fixing refers to:

“\textit{Any dishonest activity to make sure that one team wins a particular sports match.}”\footnote{Oxford Dictionaries, match-fixing, online, http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/match-fixing, retrieved May 28, 2013}

The Oxford dictionary defines it as:

“\textit{(In sport) the action or practice of dishonestly determining the outcome of a match before it is played.}”\footnote{Cambridge Dictionaries Online, match-fixing, online, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/match-fixing, retrieved May 28, 2013}

Match fixing, like tanking and cheating through the use of prohibited substances, stands in direct opposition to what Huizinga described play to be at its origin. Should an individual or group of individuals choose to deliberately influence the outcome of a contest by cheating within the sport field, the play element is corrupted. Be it through the act of not trying to win, or assisting criminals to win money through gambling by providing them with ‘inside information’ or manipulating play to help achieve a contrived or pre-determined outcome, match fixing ensures the innocence of play is lost.
Should a match be fixed whereby the outcome is predetermined, play is therefore no longer free nor is it spontaneous. Instead, it is staged, manipulated, managed, fixed and corrupted whereby the consequence of the contest is no longer only felt within the sport field. In this respect, match fixing highlights the negative consequences of the sport field losing its autonomy to the economic field. As already mentioned, when the sport field was autonomous, the significance of the contest was restricted to the sport field. While those who won or were judged the ‘best’ accumulated social capital (through received adulation, respect, satisfaction, honour etc.) their status and power within other fields of society remained relatively unchanged. Furthermore, those from outside the sport field could not utilise play as a means of accumulating capital and power.

The influence of the economic field has changed this. In fact, in the instance of match fixing, the influence of the economic field and economic capital within the sport field has facilitated cheating. If, as is stated in the ACC Report, organised criminal identities and groups are attempting to influence the outcome of sporting matches, the integrity of the sport field has been threatened. The ACC report suggests that criminals are attempting to influence the outcome of play contests in order to make money. In doing so, they are utilising play and sport as a tool for generating economic capital by betting large amounts of money on a particular outcome and then attempting to influence players to manipulate the contest so that they can contrive their desired result.

While it should be noted that there have not been any examples of match fixing in the history of VFL/AFL football, there has been several examples of this type of corruption of the play element in other sports across the world such as cricket, English Premier League Soccer, and horse racing where players have conspired with organised criminals to dishonestly and deliberately manipulate the play contest to achieve a predetermined, desired outcome in order to accumulate large sums of economic capital. It is fair to say that the saturation of money within the sport field has led to this corruption of play. In particular, the growing influence of gambling on sporting contests, whereby play and sport is used as a tool to make money, has threatened the integrity of play.

In most instances of match fixing, games have been deliberately lost in order for criminals to win money from gambling on the outcome of the play contest. While this has never happened in the AFL, the threat of match fixing in the AFL as a result of gambling was highlighted in 2011 when two Collingwood players were sanctioned after breaking the AFL’s anti-gambling rules.

On July 15th, 2011, Collingwood’s Heath Shaw was suspended for fourteen matches, with six suspended, and fined $20,000 for placing a $10 bet on teammate and captain, Nick Maxwell, to kick

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340 ACC, Organised Crime and Drugs in Sport, February 2013
the first goal of their match against Adelaide in Round 9. Shaw placed his bet after learning that Maxwell, who usually plays for Collingwood in the back line, was going to start the match in Collingwood’s forward line. At the time Shaw placed his bet, Maxwell’s odds to kick the first goal was 100-1. A friend of Shaw’s also placed a $10 bet on Maxwell to kick the game’s first goal. Maxwell was also fined $10,000, with half that figure suspended after his family placed bets on him. Maxwell had earlier told his family that he would start the Round 9 game in the forward line and that information was used by his brother and mother in law to place bets totalling $85 on Maxwell to kick the first goal of the match. In sharing this information, Maxwell had breached the AFL’s anti-gambling rules stating that a player cannot share sensitive or ‘inside’ information with members of the general public in case that information is used to influence the outcome of the game. 

While neither Maxwell nor Shaw had placed bets on the end outcome of the game, nor had they tried to influence the end result of the game in a manner that could be considered a form or match fixing or cheating, this example highlights the influence of money in the sport field and how the play element can be (and indeed, in many instances has been) transformed into a tool for generating money – not just for those who play, but also for those who watch.

Rules that don’t allow players to pass on sensitive and privileged information to people who watch the game are designed to ensure that play cannot be used as a means for people to make money from play. While this is not the same as match fixing, it is certainly an example of the economic field’s dominating influence in transforming play into a tool for making money, where thousands of dollars are gambled each week on the outcome of matches or moments within matches. Today, gambling appears to be integrated within the AFL’s play element with odds on the end outcome of matches shown regularly in advertisements throughout television broadcasts, integrated within radio broadcasts and even shown live on scoreboards at the ground. Punters can bet on a range of outcomes including who will win, how much they will win by, who will kick the first goal of the match or quarter, which player will kick the most goals for the match, who will win each quarter of the match and how much they will win it by. As such, the play element within the AFL is utilised by both punters and gambling companies to make money. According to Huizinga, when play is utilised for a secondary purpose, such as generating money, it is less genuine than it was at its origin.

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Also see news articles such as:

Wilson, C., ‘Heath Shaw suspended for betting on football’, in The Age, 15 July 2011, p. 84

Furthermore, if gambling on the end outcome of play contests is extended to match fixing, play’s ability to build communities is harmed. As stated above, if active participants within the sport field (players, coaches, administrators and supporters) discover that what they are working together to achieve is not real and that it is in fact corrupt, the bond generated through pure play is harmed.

The above examples of tanking, the role of the science field in the sport field and the issue of gambling in sport, illuminate how the growing influence of the economic field can potentially corrupt the play element. It must be made very clear, that at the time of submitting this thesis the AFL has not found any examples of tanking, or the use of prohibited substances or examples of match fixing taking place at any AFL club in any AFL season. However, at the very least, each of the above examples highlight that the play element is now influenced by many levels of management and by various departments – be it the Sports Science Department, Football Operations Managers or criminals attempting to influence the outcome of play contests.

While this highlights that the play element has lost its autonomy to the economic field, it also highlights how sports organisations, such as AFL clubs, now mirror business in the way they are structured and in the way they function. As play has been transformed into a brand, many administrators seem to be willing to do whatever it takes for their brand to remain attractive to potential consumers. As such, those who are influencing and managing the play performance of AFL players and teams now extend beyond the players and coaches and certainly well beyond the supporters and fans who once influenced the decisions of their club more than any other stakeholder in the game. In many instances, just like the play element itself, they now appear to be little more than a tool used by more influential stakeholders to make money.

The next chapter will highlight how the manipulation of the play element and the transformation of the game into a business have resulted in the interests of the fans being undermined and largely replaced by money. In many instances the fans are now merely treated as consumers and their relationship is increasingly defined through the market.
Chapter 8: The business of football: How football communities were replaced by markets

This thesis states that real and genuine communities can be formed when citizens are able and willing to come together to actively participate in something they enjoy, and importantly, which they feel genuine ownership of, or which they helped create. By feeling this ownership and involvement, they are able to contribute meaningfully to their community, influence its structure and spirit and contribute to its culture. Therefore, they are able to develop as individuals.

As shown earlier in this thesis, play at Australian football’s founding most definitely stimulated genuine and real communities and community experiences. Citizens enjoyed coming together to enjoy playing Australian football and watch those who played. Furthermore, it was the people who played and watched the game in its earliest years who were largely responsible for the uprisings and development of Australia’s first Australian Rules football clubs — many of which still exist in the AFL today. As such, the members of each football club’s community were considered the number one stakeholders of the game. The fans were considered the owners and custodians of the game and the game represented the collective will, want, lifestyles and personality of the people.

However, it appears this is no longer the case. Today it appears the game (and the play element) has been taken off of the people, transformed and packaged by the media field and then sold back to the fans in the form of entertainment (display). The football fans and supporters appear to be no longer the number one stakeholders of the game; the game no longer necessarily represents the will and want of the people – instead it now increasingly reflects the dominating influence of the economic field and the media field, and importantly, the neoliberal ideals which appear to dominate most fields of society.

This observation is best demonstrated by analysing some of the biggest changes of the Victorian Football League (VFL) and the Australian Football League (AFL) throughout its history, which have influenced the competition’s direction, make-up and relationship with its fans. Each of the changes and decisions discussed in this chapter can be explained and understood through the theory developed and explained earlier in this thesis and, in particular the play, money, media cycle outlined in chapter five. These changes have occurred because of the influence of the economic and media fields in the sport field, and as such, they have enhanced the commodification of the game. As such, the AFL now acts as and mirrors most other fields of entertainment, which, like most fields in society, reflects neoliberalism. Importantly, the examples outlined below highlight the evolving
relationship the game shares with its community of supporters—from the owners of the game, to consumers of the game—as well as the evolution of the VFL/AFL from a game of and for the people, to a commercial business.

As discussed in the preceding chapters of this thesis, today, the way play in the AFL relates to the community is defined through the market, where a product (display/entertainment) is sold to the market’s consumers. While the VFL/AFL’s clubs were once created by the grass roots and in the reflection of the community, more recently they have been implemented into markets and sold as entertainment to consumers who relate to the team (product) through their consumption of display. However these consumers have not played a significant role in the club’s formation. Thus, any reflection of their community or culture in the image of the club has been manufactured and contrived by the media and marketing field as a tool of marketing the product to consumers.

While clubs were once developed from the bottom-up, they are now sold from the top-down. Furthermore, while the VFL’s first clubs were created within the community, they are now created by the AFL for television. This is best highlighted by the following three examples: South Melbourne’s relocation to Sydney; Fitzroy’s merger with Brisbane; and the AFL’s 17th and 18th club licenses to the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney versus Tasmania’s campaign for an AFL club.

The increasing influence of economic capital in the VFL

The late 1970’s and the 1980’s were a time of great change in the VFL. As the Australian economic landscape began to embrace neoliberalism and economic rational objectives, so too did most elite sporting organisations, including the VFL. The sport field had begun to merge with the economic and media fields, thereby embracing their growing neoliberal characteristics. As such, many of the key participants within the sport field (players, coaches, club officials and the VFL administration) began placing a greater emphasis on the importance and significance of economic capital. This meant the VFL began to mirror most other fields of society in that it functioned as a commercial business. One of the consequences of this was that the importance of money—for the players, coaches, club officials and the VFL body—was beginning to override the importance of the community. Of particular importance to the VFL was the accumulation of economic capital through the commercialisation of the game, highlighted by the increased role of the media in selling the VFL brand into new markets (NSW and Queensland). Indeed the demise of the South Melbourne and

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Fitzroy Football Clubs could be seen as a result of the VFL’s economic and commercial strategy designed to expand the VFL product into previously ‘untouched’ markets of New South Wales and Queensland. By packaging and selling their product (play) to new markets of consumers, the VFL could attract higher television audiences, and, therefore, increase their revenue.

It could be argued that the commercial benefits of expanding the VFL brand into NSW and Queensland helped determine the relocation of South Melbourne to Sydney and the merger of Fitzroy with (and relocation to) Brisbane. As will be highlighted below, because of the growing significance of money in the VFL/AFL, two foundation clubs of the VFL were removed from their respective communities against the will and want of the large majority of their supporters and fans—and relocated to largely foreign markets where Australian football was ‘sold’ to new markets of consumers. The communities who created the club, developed the club, characterised the club and who the club originally represented, proved helpless in their quest to keep their club in their community. They were defeated by the dominant struggle for economic capital within the VFL/AFL.

**Sydney or bust – South Melbourne’s relocation to Sydney**

South Melbourne was one of Australia’s first Australian Rules Football Clubs – created in 1874 as the Cecil Football Club, which later changed its name to the South Melbourne Football Club to reflect its South Melbourne origins in the South Melbourne community. The club enjoyed success in the Victorian Football Association (VFA) competition between 1881 and 1890 and at the end of the 1896 season South Melbourne joined seven other clubs in breaking away from the VFA to form the VFL. South Melbourne won their first VFL premiership in 1909 before waiting until 1933 to win their next premiership. From 1933 to 1936, South Melbourne played in four consecutive Grand Finals and although it won only one of these Grand Finals (1933) it was their most successful period in the VFL. South’s success in the 1930’s was largely a result of an influx of money, whereby the club and its supporters embarked on a fundraising effort that enabled the club to recruit quality players from interstate teams (predominantly Western Australia). Thus, even as early as the 1930’s, the link between economic capital and the sport field was evident in on-field success.

Nevertheless, for South Melbourne, on field success and off field financial security was all but restricted to the 1930’s. From 1946 until 1981 the club only made the VFL finals series twice—both during the 1970’s. Their on-field record was the worst in the VFL competition.

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345 Devaney, J., *Australian Football, Club Bio - Sydney*
In the mid to late 1970’s, the Australian economic landscape was taking on significant change. Neoliberal economics were being embraced by most fields within the nation—and not just in the world of politics or economics. At the same time, the VFL’s clubs began to restructure as small businesses and place a greater emphasis on off field stability and economic growth through sponsorship and by increasing their supporter base outside their traditional suburban communities. However, South Melbourne’s lack of on-field success coincided with something of an off-field crisis. Because their on-field performance had been worse than any other club in the competition for four decades, the South Melbourne supporter base had been in decline since the 1940’s. While a loyal community of fans continued to support their club, many within the South Melbourne community moved to outer suburbs and largely stopped attending South Melbourne matches live.

Likewise, prospective sponsors were unwilling to form a commercial partnership with a football club who had commonly become associated with losing. As such, from the 1940’s until the beginning of the 1980 season the South Melbourne Football Club had steadily accumulated consistent and escalating debts. It was reported in 1981 that the Swans had recorded an operating loss of $150,000 per year for five years to that point. Remember at this point in Australia’s history neoliberalism had been widely accepted as the prevailing economic model of most fields within society and economic capital was of fundamental importance to the actions, struggles and decision making of the key participants within the VFL—including club officials, players and coaches. Making money—to gain recognition, power, influence and success—in the VFL field was at the heart of its function.

In the case of the South Melbourne Football Club, their inability to generate revenue and accumulate economic capital meant that the club officials of the time began to make ‘business decisions’ with the objective of transforming the South Melbourne Football Club into a viable and profitable entity. In July 1981, the South Melbourne administration and board of directors announced that they had submitted a proposal to the VFL outlining details of a plan to play all of their away games in Sydney and all of its home games at VFL Park in Waverley—thereby leaving their traditional ground of 108 years in South Melbourne—the Lake Oval. The South Melbourne Board of Directors proposed that the move to Sydney would turn an operating loss of $180,000 in 1980 into an operating profit in 1982.

To justify their decision to their loyal South Melbourne community and the broader VFL community (many of whom were battling to come to terms with the increasing role of economic capital in the

346 Devaney, J., Australian Football, Club Bio - Sydney
game), the South Melbourne board developed an economic rational framework which was utilised by journalists covering the issue, and indeed by the VFL, to legitimise the move to Sydney as economically sensible. This highlighted the growing influence of the economic field in the sport field, and more particularly, it highlighted the influence of economic capital in the actions, struggles and decisions made by the key actors within the sport field.

Interestingly, the players who represented the South Melbourne Football Club and community enthusiastically endorsed the board’s proposal to abandon their South Melbourne home and play all of their away games in Sydney in 1982. Their reasons for supporting the move to Sydney were largely the same as the other key participants in the evolving sport field – money. Many of South Melbourne’s players either had not been paid their full player wages or were not able to demand the amount of money they might be able to attract at a more financially secure club. While player payments had always been a part of the game, the late 1970’s, and indeed the 1980’s, saw an increased emphasis on players being financially rewarded for providing a form of entertainment and were increasingly being utilised as a tool to attract consumers to the VFL brand. They were, after all, the star attraction of the show. As such, the South Melbourne players were an example of the mindset of players within the VFL at the time. They no longer played and competed for capital autonomous to other fields of society – instead they struggled for economic capital, which provided them with power, success and recognition and augmented the characteristics of the economic field (neoliberalism) as the dominating feature of the transforming sport field.

It should be noted that the VFL also supported South’s proposal to relocate half of their games to Sydney. A significant aspect of the VFL’s financial and economic strategy was to expand the VFL product (play) into the northern markets of Australia, in particular, Sydney and Brisbane. By doing so, the VFL’s aim was to sell their play product to new markets and potential revenue sources. The influence of the media field should also not be understated in the VFL’s strategy of national expansion. As outlined earlier in this thesis, the play, media, money cycle was fundamental to the VFL’s strategy. By expanding the VFL product into Australia’s northern markets, and importantly, by introducing teams into Sydney and Brisbane, the VFL (with the assistance of the media) could market, package, promote and sell their product to new consumers and generate higher television audiences for VFL games. By generating higher television audiences, the VFL could potentially demand more from television broadcasters for the right to broadcast play in the VFL, which would provide the VFL with an increase in revenue. Money was the underlying determinant of activity within the VFL. With South Melbourne already damaging the VFL brand due to their poor on-field performance, the VFL saw this move as a way to rejuvenate their brand and attract new fans.

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348 Nicholson, M., *Sydney or Bust*, pp. 120-121
349 Nicholson, M., *Sydney or Bust*, p. 132
and off-field performance, it seems the VFL believed the financial and commercial benefits of South Melbourne playing in Sydney would help the VFL reach its commercial objectives.

However, while many of the key participants and actors within the VFL endorsed the move to Sydney, the South Melbourne community and supporter base—who felt genuine ownership of the club, and who represented those who created the club more than 100 years ago—fought to keep what they believed was theirs. In July 1981, over 1,000 South Melbourne supporters protested at the Lake Oval in South Melbourne in a bid to ensure their club remained in their community. At the same time, a group of South Melbourne supporters came together to form the Keep South at South group, who then created a petition against the South Melbourne Board’s decision to play eleven games in Sydney the following year. The petition generated enough supporter signatures (183) to force an extraordinary general meeting where the matter could be presented to, and discussed by, the club’s members and supporters—many of whom still considered themselves as the number one stakeholders of their club. Unlike the other key stakeholders within the sport field, the fans of the game were still participating within the field by forming relationships with each other and the game itself, based on a common and shared passion for the game and their club, which they still felt genuine ownership of. While the South Melbourne Board, players and coaches and the VFL administration saw the Sydney proposal as a ‘professional business proposition,’ the fans saw it as a case of their club being taken away from them.  

At the Extraordinary General Meeting, held on 22\textsuperscript{nd} September, 1981, eighty per cent of South Melbourne members who voted on the Sydney proposal, voted to keep South Melbourne at South Melbourne. As such, the Keep South at South Board was granted a mandate to replace the South Melbourne Board to govern the South Melbourne Football Club.

Yet, according to The Herald’s Ron Reed

“Although South Melbourne’s extraordinary meeting was an emotional occasion, where much mention was made of things like loyalty and tradition, the argument boiled down, purely and simply, to the most necessary of evils, money.”

With the increasing influence of the economic field and its prevailing neoliberal ideals, it seemed that of all the participants within the sport field, only the supporters, members and fans believed that community, loyalty and tradition were more important than money.

Reed went on to write:

\begin{itemize}
\item[350] Nicholson, M., ‘Sydney or Bust’, p. 128
\item[351] Reed, R., ‘Swans sparks but no flair’, in Herald, September 23 1981, p.41
\end{itemize}
“A couple of blokes in red jumpers selling raffle tickets was not enough to put goals on the scoreboard.”

This was a clear indication that economic capital was not only influencing the actions and decisions of the key participants in the VFL, it was also affecting the results of matches played on the field.

Therefore, while the Keep South at South Board had the support of 80 per cent of South Melbourne members, it did not have the support of the South Melbourne players, or the VFL administration. The situation continued to disintegrate as discussions between Keep South at South and the players failed to reach a resolution leading to the players boycotting training. Mike Sheahan wrote in The Herald, that “it was time for emotion to make way for common sense.” Clearly for Sheahan, the ‘common sense’ approach he referred to was to place economic stability ahead of tradition, history and the South Melbourne community.

Eventually, the influence of the economic field and the significance of economic capital as the primary influence of the actions and decisions made by the VFL’s key stakeholders proved too great a battle for the South Melbourne community. In November 1981 seventeen South Melbourne players issued South Melbourne with a summons claiming more than $79,000 was owed to players by the club as a result of them not being paid since round ten the previous season. By December, the VFL, who had agreed to donate $400,000 to South Melbourne under the condition the Keep South at South administration would commit to playing in Sydney for the next two years, then intervened in the club’s dispute with its players by constructing a merger between the old South Melbourne Board and Keep South at South, ensuring all players were paid what was owed to them. Under the agreement South Melbourne negotiated with the VFL, they played all of their home games in Sydney in 1982 and were renamed ‘the Swans.’ In 1983, the Swans permanently relocated to Sydney meaning that after 108 years of history, the South Melbourne Football Club no longer played in, or represented the South Melbourne community. Furthermore, for the first time in history, it was made clear from South’s relocation to Sydney that the game’s number one stakeholders were determined by their ability to generate revenue.

The South Melbourne relocation could be seen as a result of a clash between those who refused to acknowledge the growing influence of economic capital in the sport field and those who had embraced it as an inevitable part of the game’s future. For the first time in the VFL’s history, it was

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352 Reed, R., ‘Swans sparks but no flair’, in Herald, September 23 1981, p. 41
353 Nicholson M., ‘Sydney or Bust’, p. 122
354 Sheahan, M., ‘South needs compromise’, in Herald, 7 October, 1981, p. 52
355 Nicholson, M., Sydney or Bust, pp. 140-141
the players, and their desire to accumulate economic capital, that determined the future of a football club. In doing so, they confirmed the game as a business whose economic rational and neoliberal objectives would determine the direction of the game in the following decades.\textsuperscript{356}

The AFL’s continued expansion

Following South’s relocation to Sydney at the beginning of the 1982 season, the VFL continued to expand the game into new markets around the country. In 1987 two new teams were introduced into the VFL competition – the West Coast Eagles (based in Perth) and the Brisbane Bears. The introduction of the Western Australian team appeared to many as common sense as the Western Australian population had played, followed and supported Australian football for up to 150 years. However, the introduction of Queensland’s team appeared to be less natural. The Brisbane Bears were not formed by the grass roots of the Brisbane community. Prior to their manufactured creation there had been little demand for a VFL team from the Brisbane community as they tended to prefer playing and following Rugby League and Rugby Union than following Australian football.

Nevertheless, the VFL seemed determined to expand the game into new markets with the aim of attracting new supporters and television audiences to the VFL. To reflect their growing national reach, and to state their intention to continue to expand the VFL across the entire nation, the Victorian Football League (VFL) changed their name to the Australian Football League (AFL) before the 1990 season. In 1991 the Adelaide Crows were introduced into the competition, followed by a second Western Australian team in 1995 – the Fremantle Dockers. Two years later, the Port Adelaide Power was introduced into the AFL.\textsuperscript{357} It seems the ‘expansion’ clubs of Adelaide, Fremantle and Port Adelaide were as much a result of a push from the grass-roots, who had been lobbying for representation in the elite competition of Australian football for decades, as it was an example of the AFL implementing its economic rational model of expansion into new markets of consumers.

However, while the AFL’s expansion strategy began to develop, many of its foundation clubs in Victoria began to struggle with the economic demands of the new business model of which they were now forced to conform to for survival. For example, in 1996, West Coast attracted 27,681 members, while the Adelaide Crows attracted 42,483. Fitzroy, in a city (and market) of nine teams

\textsuperscript{356} For further accounts of South Melbourne’s relocation to Sydney, read: Taylor, K., \textit{The Sydney Swans: the complete history, 1874-1986}, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1987

competing for members, could attract only 7,628.\textsuperscript{358} So, while West Coast and Adelaide could spend
the income generated from their membership sales on, say, upgrading their grounds, improving
their training facilities, investing in coaching development, sports science and technology, Fitzroy
battled to stay in existence. This was reflected in their on-field performance with Fitzroy winning
only three matches in their final two seasons.\textsuperscript{359} As already discussed in outlining South Melbourne’s
relocation to Sydney, the struggle for economic capital within the sport field had become of
fundamental importance for power, recognition and influence—both on the field and off it.

The Fitzroy Football Club was formed in 1883 to represent the inner suburb of Melbourne, Fitzroy.
The ‘Lions’ were a foundation club of the VFL and won eight premierships from 1897 to 1944.
However, like South Melbourne, when the VFL embraced the dominant neoliberal ideals of the
1970’s and, in particular the 1980’s, Fitzroy struggled to accumulate its share of economic capital in
a somewhat crowded Melbourne market. In 1978, the Lions reported a loss of $120,000 at a time
when that was not an insignificant amount of money. By July, 1980, Fitzroy was announced as
‘technically bankrupt,’ and as such, the Fitzroy Board of Directors began considering alternative,
economically ‘sound and responsible’ options—including relocating to Sydney. This proposal was
defeated by the members and the Fitzroy Football Club remained in Fitzroy.\textsuperscript{360}

However, due to a lack of economic capital required to maintain and upgrade their home ground,
Fitzroy was forced to move from its home ground in Fitzroy – Brunswick Street Oval – in 1966.
Furthermore, from 1984 until 1996, the club had four different ‘home grounds’, none of which were
in Fitzroy.\textsuperscript{361}

Due to their inability to meet their financial obligations in the evolving sport/economic field,
Fitzroy’s Board of Directors began considering merging their club with another Victorian Club –
Melbourne. This was met with hostility from the Fitzroy (and Melbourne) members and fans and
the proposal was subsequently defeated. When the merger proposal fell through, Fitzroy President,
Leon Wiergard stated that there was only 50 per cent chance the club would survive in its own right.
As part of their strategy to expand the VFL into the northern markets of NSW and Queensland, the
VFL proposed a relocation package for Fitzroy, to Brisbane. Fitzroy’s Board initially accepted the

\textsuperscript{358} AFL, \textit{AFL Record Season Guide}, Slattery Media, Melbourne, 2012
\textsuperscript{359} Devaney, J., \textit{Australian Football: Celebrating the history of the great Australian game}, Fitzroy, online,
\url{http://australianfootball.com/clubs/stats/Fitzroy/31}, retrieved February 9, 2013
\textsuperscript{360} Devaney, J., \textit{Fitzroy}
\textsuperscript{361} Devaney, J., \textit{Fitzroy}
VFL’s invitation, however, this was defeated when corporate organisation Hecron, joined the Fitzroy Football Club as a major sponsor, offering the club enough money to stay in Melbourne.  

This financial reprieve lasted only three years before Fitzroy, once again unable to meet its financial obligations, agreed to merge with the Footscray Football Club, who were also struggling to meet the financial demands of the VFL in the 1980’s. However, like most merger proposals before it, the Fitzroy-Footscray merger was defeated when the Footscray community, led by supporter Irene Chatfield, rallied to raise enough economic capital to keep the Footscray Football Club alive in their own right. Their survival, however, did come with a cost. To increase the club’s marketability beyond that of its original community, Footscray changed its name to the ‘Western Bulldogs’ in 1996. By changing their name from Footscray to the Western Bulldogs, the club was inadvertently marketing their brand as ‘the club that represents the west’—not just Footscray. The name change was met with relatively little resistance from the Footscray community of supporters, who generally preferred their club to change its name than to merge with another club or relocate to another market.  

However, it should also be noted that apart from the initial merger and relocation discussions with Melbourne and Brisbane, the Fitzroy members and supports seemed to be largely helpless. It appeared that the only thing that would keep their club in Melbourne and maintain their independence was economic capital, and because the Fitzroy community of supporters could not contribute enough economic capital to ensure the financial security of their club, they were replaced as the number one decision makers of their club’s future. Instead, it seemed as though the future of the club was determined by other participants within the sport field who had a better understanding of the economic field (and its neoliberal characteristics) and a better ability to accumulate economic capital. VFL football was no longer an item of folk culture, owned and developed from the grass roots. It was now a business—and operated as such.

By 1996 the Fitzroy Football Club was once again bankrupt. In June 1996, the Nauru Insurance company, a creditor of the Fitzroy Football Club, appointed their own administrator, Michael Brennan, to administer the financial affairs of the club and to help ensure a loan of $1.25 million was  

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363 For a full account of the proposed Footscray-Fitzroy merger, see: Nicholson M., ‘Fight back: The Footscray Football Club’s fight to survive in 1989’, in Print Media Representation of Crisis Events in Australian Football, Victoria University, Melbourne, 2000

re-paid by Fitzroy to Nauru Insurance. According to newspaper reports at the time, Fitzroy’s $1.25 million debt to Nauru Insurance was part of an overall $4.5 million total debt to creditors. One month later, in July, the Fitzroy Football Club and the North Melbourne Football Club had agreed on terms for a merger, however the Brisbane Bears had also expressed interest in merging with Fitzroy. While discussions between Fitzroy and North Melbourne stalled over ‘emotional’ issues based on history and tradition – such as the name of the new club, the colours they would wear, the nickname of the new club, how the board of the merged club would be structured and how many players from each club would be include on the merged team’s playing list – the AFL, and the majority of its clubs endorsed, and then voted for Fitzroy to merge with Brisbane and become known as the ‘Brisbane Lions.’

North Melbourne officials claimed the AFL’s endorsement of Fitzroy’s merger with the Brisbane Bears was part of its strategy to create an attractive product for the Queensland market. However, according to the Brisbane President at the time, Noel Gordon, it was a matter of Brisbane having a superior knowledge of economic capital. Gordon claimed that “while they (Fitzroy and North Melbourne) might have agreed between themselves what they wanted to do, there were certain (financial) obligations Fitzroy had to honour...such as the debt to the Nauruan Government.”

Gordon believed that Fitzroy merged with Brisbane, and not North Melbourne, because Brisbane’s administrators had a better understanding of ‘corporate law’ and finance and was able to remove itself from the ‘emotional’ influences of 100 years of tradition, history and community.  

Like South Melbourne’s relocation to Sydney, Fitzroy’s merger with Brisbane highlights that the actions, struggles and decisions made by the key participants of the VFL/AFL field from the 1970’s were no longer autonomous from other fields of society. Instead, their actions and decisions were dominated by the economic field and its defining ideology – neoliberalism. AFL clubs and players had begun struggling and competing for economic capital. Furthermore, the actions of many participants within the field shaped the structure of the field, augmenting the economic structure of the AFL and ultimately transforming it into a business. Business decisions were being made by club officials with the objective of generating economic capital. This was highlighted by South Melbourne’s players advocating to move to Sydney based on individual economic and financial prosperity. Furthermore, the Fitzroy Football Club’s future was largely taken out of the control of

Also see:
the club’s community of supporters. No amount of passion, tradition or loyalty could save them. Economic capital, in the form of money, was the only thing that could save the club from merging or relocating, and as such, when the supporters could no longer provide enough money for the club to survive in Melbourne, they were replaced as the number one stakeholders of the club. In the end, the decisions to relocate South Melbourne to Sydney and merge Fitzroy with Brisbane were financial decisions based on neoliberal rationale, which highlights the sport field’s transformation from an autonomous field into a business whose number one stakeholders are those who provide the industry with money.

The influence of the media field in transforming the play element into display should not be understated, nor should the media’s influence in the decisions made by the key stakeholders of the AFL when determining the future make-up of the game. As discussed when outlining the mechanics of the play, media, money cycle earlier in this thesis, the media’s influence in the AFL is linked with the AFL’s ability to generate economic capital. The media has utilised the play element in the AFL to generate mass audiences for advertisers, thus ensuring the potential to generate increased advertising revenues. For the AFL, the media has proven to be their most powerful stakeholder in ensuring the game is promoted to new markets and, importantly, is their biggest contributor of revenue. As articulated earlier in this thesis, the more people who watch the AFL on television, the more bargaining power the AFL has when selling the right to broadcast play in the AFL.

Furthermore, by establishing teams in the new northern markets of Sydney and Brisbane, the AFL was ensuring that the game’s television audience grew beyond the traditional Australia Rules football markets of Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. As highlighted above, the VFL/AFL’s desire to expand the game into the northern markets was arguably a key and influential factor when determining the future of the South Melbourne Football Club and the Fitzroy Football Club. However, it was also a key, determining factor for the AFL when deciding the league’s seventeenth and eighteenth licenses.

**Tasmania’s grass roots bid for an AFL team overlooked for northern expansion**

In 2009, the AFL announced that its seventeenth AFL team would be located on the Gold Coast. A year later they announced their eighteenth licence had been granted to the Greater Western Sydney. The fact that the AFL had looked beyond the traditional heartland of Australian football to the northern markets of Queensland and NSW was, for many, far from surprising. However, it did reconfirm the AFL’s commitment to expand the game into new markets with the aim of reaching new consumers and television audiences. As the biggest contributor of the AFL’s total revenue, the media’s influence appears to be substantial when determining how and where the AFL would
expand the game. However, of particular importance to this thesis is the fact that the expansion of the AFL into the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney markets was almost entirely driven by the AFL, not the communities of the Gold Coast and Western Sydney. In fact, the announcement that the eighteenth team would be placed in Western Sydney was met with hostility in some parts of the Western Sydney community who believed the AFL was ‘invading’ a National Rugby League heartland.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, while clubs were once the creation of the people, the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney Giants were ‘placed’ in new markets that had relatively little affinity for Australian football and little desire for an AFL team. This distinction appears especially stark when considering Tasmania’s bid for an AFL team, which was defeated by the AFL’s desire to expand the game into new markets to sell the game to new consumers.

According to the *Tasmania, it’s time* website, Tasmania’s history of playing and watching Australian football dates back to the 1860’s.

> “Ours was the first state outside of Victoria to play the game, with football clubs established in New Town, Derwent and Stowell in and round 1864.”

The Tasmanian Football League, which grew in and around the Hobart community, was created in 1879 and the Northern Tasmanian Football Association was formed in 1886. Tasmanian football has generated many VFL and AFL footballers, including Darrel Baldock, Royce Hart, Peter Hudson, Ian Stewart, Alistair Lynch and Matthew Richardson. Today, the participation rate of Australian football in Tasmania is higher than in any state or territory in Australia, except for the Northern Territory (who also do not have an AFL team).

Throughout the last century, the VFL and AFL have played many exhibition and home and away matches in Tasmania, and have encouraged Victorian clubs experiencing financial difficulties (such as Fitzroy) to turn to Tasmania in a bid to attract support. AFL clubs who have played ‘home’ matches in Tasmania include Fitzroy and St Kilda, while today, Hawthorn and North Melbourne have agreements with the Tasmanian government to play matches in Launceston and Hobart each year. Hawthorn has been playing four ‘home’ games in Launceston since 2003 and will continue to play there until at least 2017 in a deal with the Tasmanian Government worth $17 million over five years.

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367 Tassie Footy Team, *Tasmania in Competition*, online
North Melbourne began playing two home games at Bellerive Oval in Hobart in 2012. As such, Tasmania’s relationship with the AFL has largely been based on money with AFL clubs looking to the Tasmanian market as a means of increasing their revenues and membership base. There has not been a particularly high level of demand from the grass roots supporters for either North Melbourne or Hawthorn to play home games in Tasmania, however, both clubs are marketing their respective clubs as ‘Tasmania’s team’ to ensure their brand appears attractive to the Tasmanian market. In 2013, Hawthorn had over 8,000 Tasmanian based members, which generate approximately $1,000,000 in revenue, along with their deal with the Tasmanian government, estimated to be worth $3.4 million a year. The fact that the AFL and Tasmanian government have committed to two AFL clubs playing in Tasmania until at least 2017 may have compromised their bid for their own AFL team, however, the reason their bid to play in the AFL was defeated, seems more likely to be a matter of media audiences than anything else.

On Tasmania, it’s time – a website set up to advocate for a Tasmanian AFL team as part of their 2008 bid - ten key points are listed to argue why Tasmania should have its own team.

1. We’ve been playing footy in this state since 1864 – surely our long and proud footy heritage means we should at least get a look in.

2. We’ve proven that Tasmania can produce AFL stars of the highest calibre. Some of the great names in Australian football have come from Tasmania: Stewart, Baldoek, Hart, Hudson, Eade, Lynch and Richardson to name a few.

3. We’re a footy state – our participation rates are amongst the highest in the country.

4. We’ve got great facilities and Aurora Stadium is already up to AFL standards.

5. We have the economy and population to sustain an AFL team.

6. We believe a Tasmanian AFL team would attract strong corporate support and investment into the state.

7. We can compete with the best in the country – just look at our cricket team.

8. We want one. There is overwhelming community support both locally and nationally for a Tasmanian team.

9. We’d support the team and go to the games – live AFL attracts crowds of between 15,000 and 20,000 people per match and a Tassie team of our own would attract even more.

10. It’s not truly a national competition without a Tasmanian team.

Furthermore, the website included testimonials from influential Tasmanians such as AFL Sports Commentator, Tim Lane, who stated:

“A Tasmanian team in the AFL is the island state’s football entitlement and its only appropriate destiny. It would unify the island state like nothing before it and bring a bold new story to a vibrant sporting competition. Tasmania in the AFL is an idea whose time has come.”

Tasmanian VFL footballer, Peter Hudson, stated:

“Nobody could question that Tasmania is more than entitled to a team in the AFL. This is overwhelmingly supported by the number of players that Tasmania has produced to play AFL football at the highest level, and also Tasmania is one of the foundation States of our great game. Tasmania deserves this opportunity.”

It is clear that the Tasmanian bid was very much built around old fashioned grass roots and community sentiments such as participation, history, passion and the State’s ability to generate elite level footballers. However, it also acknowledged the influence of the economic field and the necessity to attract members and corporate sponsorship. In fact, as part of the Tasmania’s 2008 bid, they had confirmed Mars as a sponsor willing to contribute $4 million per year to the proposed club. Furthermore, the website outlined that at the time of their bid (2008), the average annual revenue for an AFL club was $30 million and should Tasmania be granted an AFL license they would need to accumulate revenues totalling at least $30 million from memberships and corporate sponsorship – including naming rights sponsors, 10 second tier sponsors and 100 business supporters.

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However, the Tasmanian bid may have underestimated the influence of the media field in determining the success of their bid. As outlined above, the media field and the economic field are inextricably linked. In simple terms, by increasing television audiences of AFL football across the country, and by attracting new television viewers from new markets, the television broadcasters and the AFL could expect an increase in revenue and profit. Thus, it could be argued that the Tasmanian bid for an AFL team was never part of the AFL’s strategic, financial or commercial plan.

As the *Tasmania, it’s time* website notes, Tasmanians have played Australian football for more than 150 years and have followed VFL and AFL football for almost as long. Even without a Tasmanian football club, Tasmanians have traditional allegiances to Victorian clubs – many of which might go back generations. Therefore, even without a Tasmanian team, Tasmanians will continue to consume play in the AFL and watch it on television. A new Tasmanian team would not increase the television audience of AFL games. Indeed, Tasmania is already a captive market, consuming the AFL, watching it on TV and contributing to the revenue flows of both the AFL and the media broadcasters of the AFL.

It can be argued that this is why the AFL’s strategy was to place two new AFL teams into new markets, which had little demand for the AFL, instead of allowing a club to rise from within a traditional AFL community. By expanding the AFL into two new markets of almost five million people, the AFL had the potential to ‘sell’ their brand to millions of new consumers. Likewise, it meant that television broadcasters could potentially increase their ratings by capturing new markets of consumers for advertisers to sell their products and services to. By doing so, the AFL could expect to sell the right to broadcast AFL matches to television broadcasters for a higher amount than previous deals. This strategy appears to have worked with the AFL negotiating a record television broadcasting deal with the *Seven Network* and *Foxtel* of $1.253 Billion dollars following the announcement of the AFL’s two newest teams.

Unlike Tasmania, most of the NSW and Queensland community do not have a traditional love of, or passion for Australian football. The Greater Western Sydney Giants and Gold Coast Suns have been manufactured by the AFL to attract new consumers to their brand. Marketing and media strategies have been implemented to sell the game of AFL to the consumers of the Gold Coast and Western Sydney as entertainment and they have even designed the clubs to reflect the communities in which they have been placed. For example, the Gold Coast’s nickname of the ‘Suns’ reflects the climate of the Gold Coast, while the colours of the Greater Western Sydney (blue, orange and white) were designed to reflect the colours of the Blue Mountains which are located to the west of Sydney. However, any reflection of the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney communities in these clubs
appears to be manufactured, not created from the grass roots. Unlike the proposed Tasmanian team, the Gold Coast and Greater Western Sydney were not developed by the people, for the people and in the image of the people. Instead, they were built by the AFL, for television to generate more money. The interests of the media, and the influence of the economic field, appeared to override the interests of the grass roots footy fans in Tasmania.

It should be noted that other reasons have been provided by the AFL and AFL historians to explain why the Tasmanian bid for an AFL team failed, however most of them appear to be based upon matters concerned with economic capital. In particular, Tasmania’s potential inability to generate enough members and corporate sponsorship has been cited as key reasons why the AFL did not embrace Tasmania’s bid for an AFL team. These reasons further highlight the influence of the economic field in the AFL.

The influence of the economic field and media field has elevated key financial contributors such as the media and corporate sponsors to the number one stakeholders of the AFL, replacing the fans, who now appear to have little meaningful ownership of their club or the game. Furthermore, it appears that the key actors within the AFL field are now basing their decisions on, and indeed acting upon, the influence of the economic and media field and in particular, the neoliberal principles which dominate both fields. As such, the AFL now mirrors most other fields in its pursuit of money, however, as the above analysis highlights, it appears to have been at the expense of the community.

However, play’s transformation in the AFL is not unique to the AFL, but is in fact just one example of what is undoubtedly a world trend. In fact many would argue that when compared to many other professional sporting leagues, such as the English Premier League (EPL), the influence of money in the AFL appears to be rather modest. Whether this is true or not, by analysing play’s transformation in the AFL compared with other professional sports we can begin to understand where the AFL might be headed and what may be in store for the AFL community as the game they built and once owned continues to evolve and transform into a business.
Chapter 9: The transitional phase of play in the AFL: From play to display in the AFL on a world scale

It is almost unquestionably true that the play element in the AFL has been compromised and transformed by the influence of economic capital and the media. However, to attain a greater understanding of this transformation it is necessary to understand how the play element in Australia’s native game compares to the transformation of play in other elite and professional games around the world.

The merger of the sport field with the economic and media fields and the subsequent transformation of ‘play’ to ‘display’ is not unique to the AFL. As this chapter will highlight the influence of the media field and economic field in the sport field, which have stimulated the commodification of the play element, are even more distinct and severe in other, more commercialised, sports around the world.

While it is impossible to analyse other sports to the extent this thesis analyses AFL football, a short analysis of soccer can adequately confirm the merger of the media and economic field with the sport field as a world trend. By doing so, we can begin to build a platform of understanding where play in the AFL is currently situated in its transformation phase. It can show how the play element in the AFL has transformed from its origins as well as highlight the potential for it to continually transform in the future.

Without question, the ‘world game’ (soccer) is one of the most commercialised and commodified games in world sport. Most of its premier leagues around the world, and indeed the competing clubs in the sport’s various elite competitions, function as a business. The business orientation of the game cannot be ignored. Many of the competing clubs in the English Premier League (EPL) are privately owned entities, listed on the stock exchange, trading in play and spending millions of dollars on ensuring success – both on the field and off it. Indeed the level of economic activity and the relationship between money and play in soccer is significantly greater than in the AFL.

Money appears to be at the heart of play within the game of soccer – for the many leagues around the world, the clubs who compete and players who play. For example, players participating in the Premier Leagues in Europe are paid enormous amounts of money per match to represent their club. Unlike the AFL, the governing body of leagues such as the EPL do not impose a salary cap on the total player payments of any of the league’s teams, meaning the richer clubs can often find themselves in a bidding war for the best players. More often than not the winner of the bidding war
is the club who can offer the player the most money to play. As such, the richest clubs in the world such as Manchester United, Manchester City, Chelsea, Barcelona, Real Madrid and Inter Malan attract the most elite players to their club with the incentive of earning significantly more economic capital than they would elsewhere. Because these clubs are rich in economic capital, they can also invest in the best training equipment, recovery methods and sports science—all but ensuring the players on their list are more skilful, better prepared and ultimately more successful in the sport field. Unsurprisingly, the teams that finish higher on the ladder in these soccer competitions also happen to be the most financially wealthy.

Furthermore, the highest paid soccer players in the world earn significantly more money than their AFL counterparts. Players such as Ronaldo, Messi, Beckham, Eto’o Torres and Rooney can earn over 30 million euros per year. In 2013, English football star David Beckham was the world’s highest paid footballer, earning 36 million euros for the year, followed by Barcelona’s Lionel Messi who earned 33 million euros for the year. Cristiano Ronaldo of Real Madrid, reportedly earned 30 million euros in 2013, while Samuel Eto’o accumulated 24 million euros. This extreme influence of economic capital in professional soccer reached these excessive levels in 2007 when perhaps the world’s most famous soccer player, David Beckham, signed a contract to play for the Los Angeles Galaxy for $175,000 a day for five years, which equates to $1.2 million per week and $320 million over the life of the contract. The situation was similar in Europe. In Spain, rich and resource wealthy club, Real Madrid bought a host of players in the early 2000’s—namely Figo in 2000, Zidane in 2002 and Beckham in 2003 for about 2000 million euros each.

The influence of economic capital in the sport field has transformed the play element in soccer to a far greater extent than the AFL. When the influence of money in the sport field is as distinct as it is in professional soccer, it is appropriate to wonder how the play element and money can be separated or discussed in isolation of each other. The richest players in professional soccer do not just play for pay; they now play for millions upon millions of dollars. The relationship they share with their club is based on million dollar contracts that make them not just some of the wealthiest people in the sport field, the sporting field and the entertainment field, but indeed in society. Because of that, considering the trend of play’s transformation into an item of entertainment and the game’s transformation into a business, it is difficult to imagine a player turning down a contract worth an

373 This was recorded in various media outlets, including: Sportseology.com, Top 10 Highest Paid Soccer Players in the World 2013, online, http://sportseology.com/top-10-highest-paid-soccer-players-in-the-world/, retrieved April 27, 2013

increase of millions of dollars to stay at their current club to uphold the notions of loyalty and community.

Indeed, one wonders how much emotional connection to a club a player can have when they, too, are treated like commodities. Play in the soccer field appears to have been transformed so much it is now a commodity utilised by both players and clubs to generate success—both in the sport field and in terms of profits. Players competing in the world’s strongest and richest soccer leagues are traded, lent, leased and borrowed to rival clubs in order to make money, save money or even simply win games. The connection a player has to a club appears to be subversive to winning and making money. For example, players can be traded within two ‘transfer periods’ in the calendar year, one which takes place between seasons and the other which occurs within the season, meaning a player can finish playing the season for a club quite different to the one he began the season with.

Furthermore, clubs are able to loan or lease their players to a rival club throughout the season to save money or to help develop them without having to play them in their team. For example, an English Premier League club, such as, say, Manchester United, can opt to lend a player to, say, Tottenham for an agreed amount of games throughout the season. In this agreement, the borrowing club (Tottenham) would pay a percentage of the player’s wage (often 100 per cent) to have them in their team for those games. The loaning club, (Manchester United) would save money on the wages they would have had to pay the player and also has the added bonus of ensuring their player is getting match practice and development at the club they have lent him to.

This sort of arrangement generally happens between a richer club and poorer club where the rich club will lend their players to other clubs to ensure they receive game time and development while they play their higher paid players at the same time. For the player it simply means they are representing a club they have been lent to—as if they are some sort of commodity. This makes the play element a mirror of a business agreement—a tool to make or save money and quite distinct from playing for a love or passion for the community or club. How can a player play for, or represent, the community of their club if they are lent to another? If they are to form a bond or meaningful relationship with the club they have been lent to, how do they feel when the loan period ends and they have to return to their original club? Furthermore, how do the supporters of the club feel about these players who are lent or borrowed?

Another example of this extreme commodification of play was discussed by David Conn in his book *A Beautiful Game? Searching for the soul of football*. Conn writes of two English Football Clubs – Leeds and Bradford – selling players to a hire purchase company based in Guernsey and then leasing them back from the company to save money and increase their profit margin. The players were treated as mere commodities and a means for making money. The hire purchase company wanted to utilise them as ambassadors or as a tool to advocate and sell their service, while the clubs recognised the opportunity to sell their players to increase their profits. This highlights the commodification of play and players and furthermore goes some way to highlighting the power players have outside the sport field – and even the entertainment field – when the sport field has merged with the economic and media fields.

These forms of trade, borrowing, lending and leasing are distinctly different to play in the AFL. While players are traded, the AFL’s trade period happens between seasons, meaning a player cannot play for any other team than the one he started the season with. Likewise, AFL rules stipulate that a player cannot be leased, loaned or borrowed to another club throughout the season, and because of the AFL imposed salary cap, this system would fail even if allowed. Indeed the AFL Salary Cap has served to ensure a certain sense of evenness, equality and egalitarianism in the AFL. Furthermore, it has ensured that some sense of community spirit and loyalty has remained part of the defining characteristics of the play element in the AFL.

The fact that AFL players are paid very modestly in comparison with elite soccer players also means that loyalty to the club and a player’s teammates is of greater significance in the AFL. Because players are not paid millions of dollars to play, other aspects of playing still carry great significance. While this thesis argues that play in the AFL is increasingly being influenced and dominated by economic capital, it has not yet lost all elements of its folk culture characteristics to the economic field. The question we need to address is; will it eventually evolve as play has in soccer? And what will this mean for the community?

Certainly it appears that the media field’s influence in the sport field has also distanced the game from the community, while heightening the transformation of play to display. Pay television networks BSkyB and BT purchased the exclusive rights to broadcast all matches played in the English Premier League (EPL) for 3.018 Billion British Pounds on June 13 2012, effectively meaning that supporters of the game can no longer watch their team play for free. Instead, since BSkyB won the rights to broadcast all EPL games in 1992, fans have had to pay a subscription fee to watch their

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team play. This is distinctly different to the television broadcasting right of play in the AFL. As already stated earlier in this thesis, four games each week of the AFL Home and Away season are shown on free to air television, ensuring that grass roots football fans can still watch their team play for free. Pay television network, Foxtel, own the rights to broadcast all nine games live, giving football the fans the options of either paying for the right to watch all games live, or watching four games each week for free.

The exclusive ownership of BSkyB and BT have to broadcast all EPL games is a stark example of the play element in English soccer being taken away from the grass roots supporters of the game and sold back to them in the form of entertainment to ensure television broadcasters can profit. Supporters of the game are treated as consumers of entertainment who, by paying to watch their team play, are in effect buying the right to consume play as entertainment as packaged by the networks. While play in the AFL is indeed packaged by both pay television and free to air networks to appeal to the hearts and minds of Australian consumers, fans maintain the privilege of receiving it for free unless they choose to pay for the right to watch extra games. This, as has been highlighted, still signifies a significant transformation of play in the AFL, however, it leaves this transformation well short of that which has taken place in English soccer.

Yet it can be argued that more than any other game, soccer has the rare ability of bringing diverse people together to enjoy and appreciate something in common with others. The World Cup, for example, is a competition held every four years between countries all striving to be the world champions. Players come from most continents of the world to represent their country against other, equally passionate nations. Countries from Africa can play countries from Europe; American nations can compete against Asian counterparts and so forth. In the grandstands men and women of various cultures, backgrounds, religions and political persuasions can sit together, enjoying the play element in the world game.

However, even this celebration of togetherness cannot be analysed without noting the influence of economic capital in the sport field. The distinction in equipment, infrastructure and resources between the rich nations and the poor can be stark. As such, the poorer, African nations with less funding and resources than their European counterparts often battle to succeed and win on the field. The link between wealth and play again comes to define play in the soccer field. It should also be noted that the uniting effect of such tournaments is more momentary than lasting.  


This is written about in:
sporting clubs and teams were once the hub of social and community activity, defined by a common
grass roots appreciation for the club, the players or the community from which it spawned, teams in
the World Cup are considered so professional and elite that they are often ‘out of reach’ of the grass
roots footy fan. Instead, the fans unite with their friends and fellow compatriots in the grandstands,
without having any personal connection to the players or the team. It is therefore appropriate to ask
– what happens when they leave? Does the community generated in the grandstands endure?

This is also somewhat different to the AFL and its relationship with the community. It should be
noted that clubs within the AFL competition still have some sort of relationship with their
community and grass roots supporter base – albeit a weaker and perhaps less meaningful one than
when the play element was less transformed.

Grassroots Football

Before discussing the AFL’s community ties and contribution to community football today, it is first
necessary to acknowledge the role of Australian football at the grassroots roots level – below the
elite, professional, organised and commercial level of the AFL. Throughout this analysis of the AFL
we have explored how the play element of the VFL/AFL has been transformed by the forces of
economic capital and argued, using Huizinga’s historical and insightful observations, that the sport’s
communities have been weakened, which has reduced the ability of the individual to reach his or her
potential while subsequently undermining democracy.

At the heart of understanding play’s corruption, has been the notion that the sport field has merged
with the economic field and the media field, which has elevated economic capital as the most
dominating feature of the field – characterising (and even defining) the battles and struggles of
participants within the field, and the relationships they form. As Huizinga argues, this makes the
relationships within the field (and subsequently the communities within the field) less genuine than
those formed in autonomous fields of society.379

However, Chapter One and Four of this thesis also outlined the birth and formation of Australian
Football – from the people, and in reflection of the people, where the clubs they formed were
owned by those who created them. In short, the first Australian Football Clubs were developed by
citizens coming together to enjoy something in common with others, where they felt genuine
ownership of the club and where they made a genuine and significant contribution to helping

Tomlinson, A., and Young, C., National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics and Spectacle in the

379Huizinga, J., Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture, (1938), Beacon Press, Boston 1950, p. 21
achieve an agreed upon set of goals. Within the club, members felt an obligation towards other members and could positively influence the decisions made by the club. In their formative years, most VFL clubs were indeed reflective of a true and genuine community. Furthermore, the clubs played in the true spirit of their club.

Several other chapters of this thesis have been dedicated to highlighting how this has changed to the point where today’s communities are a mere image of what genuine community is or should be.

Yet, it should be noted (and in some detail) that the ability of Australian Football Clubs to form genuine and real communities is not completely dead. While the AFL has been infiltrated with commercially interested stakeholders driving the game further and further towards capitalist and neoliberal means and methods of operating, in regional and suburban Australia, there are football clubs that exist today just as most AFL clubs existed at their founding. That is, they exist for, and on behalf of, their members, who have genuine ownership of their club and who actively contribute to the goals and objectives they have outlined together.

These are clubs that rely on economic capital for simple and functional means such as ground maintenance and clubroom repairs. Yet, the defining feature of these clubs is that the people who fill the clubrooms before the game, after the game and indeed, during the week, also have the ability to influence the decisions and actions made by the club. That is, they are all there because they enjoy a common interest. But even more importantly, they are active participants within the club who have a very real and genuine ownership of what they (or those before them) have created.

In the forward of *Footy Town: Stories of Australia’s Game*, community football historian, Paul Daffey noted the active participation of club members at the local, grassroots level of Australian Football. Rather than being restricted to mere ‘financial members’ who contributed through financial payments and by attending games to simply barrack and cheer, these members had the opportunity to help the club operate and function. In making this point, Daffey told the story of an encounter with the President of Swifts Creek Football Club, Ray Gallagher.

“Ray had just finished a stint on the front gate, while dressed in his footy gear, socks pulled up and jumper tucked in. He was now attending a few last minute items before jogging onto the field to take his place in the back pocket.”

Put simply, Ray was not only a player, but an off field volunteer too, and without him, the club would be absent of not only a player, but also an un-paid contributor of the club.

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Daffey also noted the role of football clubs as a meeting place and spiritual home of not only the club members, but also the community where players and supporters alike gathered to ‘share appraisals of the game and stories of significant events from the past.’

This point was also illuminated in Frost, Halabi and Lightbody's study of expanding social inclusion in rural Australian Football clubs. In completing their research, the three scholars analysed an extensive body of evidence presented to the Parliament of Victoria Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee's 2004 Inquiry into Country Football. Submissions were called for from state and local government agencies, individuals and clubs affiliated with the Victorian Country Football League, with 67 written submissions being received, many of which described the local football club as the heart of the community - a place where club members and locals alike could gather, in common with others, to enjoy the game and make a collective contribution to the club and community.

A submission by Wimmera Regional Sports highlighted this point:

"Football also provides the actual opportunity for people to meet and to share memories...and to focus on a positive in their lives...Most clubs host social functions before and after the game. Sometimes that is the only social connection or activity for the local population to engage with."

Perhaps this point is most starkly realised when football clubs are taken away from the community. Tom Hafey, a former VFL coach and champion of grassroots football, observed that football matches might be the only regular social event on offer for the community.

"I was doing a sportsmen's night down at Portland... An old fellow said to me, 'Tommy, since our little football-netball club at Yambuk closed down' - which was five or six years at that stage - 'I have not seen my next door neighbour. I see his car whizzing down the highway.' The football-netball club used to bring everybody out."

Furthermore, they used to bring people together. This was explained in one submission, by Dr R Moodie of VicHealth:

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382 Daffey, P., & Harms, J., Footy Town: Stories of Australia’s Game, p. 3
384 Frost, L., Lightbody, M., & Halabi, A., Expanding social inclusion in community sports organisations: evidence from rural Australian Football Clubs, p. 30
385 Frost, L., Lightbody, M., & Halabi, A., Expanding social inclusion in community sports organisations: evidence from rural Australian Football Clubs, p. 30
"Football clubs provide a sense of belonging to the local community for thousands of people as they provide a place to gather and interact with others. This brings people from all walks of life together in supporting a local community actively, which might not happen in any other form. Doctors, farmers, local businesses, tradesmen, police, school teachers might all belong to the football club." 386

The importance of ‘active’ support and participation should be underlined here. A true sense of community exists when members of the club and the community are empowered to come together to actively contribute to help the community to reach their shared and agreed upon goals. In doing so they feel a sense of obligation towards each other, and in helping others achieve their goals, they can also feel a sense of fulfilment.

Importantly, in Footy Town: Stories of Australia’s Game, Daffey also described an example of genuine community stimulating the growth of individuals, helping them achieve their potential and develop as members of the community.

“In WA (Western Australia), I discovered a simple tradition that I gather extends throughout the state. It was at Beacon, in the country, just before the paddocks meet the desert. Every player – no exclusions – who won an award had to say a few words when he went up the front to collect his award. Every player is encouraged to grow.”

Indeed Australian Football Clubs when acting autonomous from other, more commercial, fields of society can still stimulate genuine relationships, community and personal growth.

This point can also be expounded by discussing the formation of the Associated Judaean Athletic Club (Ajax) in the Victoria Amateur Football Association (VAFA) in 1957. 387 The Ajax Football Club was created by the Jewish community who, by the 1950’s had well and truly embraced Australian Football and wanted to create a football club of their own – reflecting the shared enthusiasm they had for Australia’s native game. The foundations of the Ajax Football Club were defined by the beliefs, values and personality of their (mostly) Jewish members. It was a

club for the Jewish community, by the Jewish community and indeed, in the reflection of the Jewish community.  

Ajax Football Club historian, Barry Markoff (1980) noted that while money was not an essential ingredient of the club’s survival, any money that was required to run the club came through fundraising events, such as barbeques, open to the entire Jewish community, who responded ‘by turning up in their droves.’  

Also of particular importance was Markoff’s observation that:

“Additionally, the club provided a point of social contact for Jewish immigrants coming to Australian after World War II and the existence of the Ajax Football Club no doubt contributed to a greater acceptance of Jewish people within Australian society.”

This observation relates to one of the prevailing beliefs of former AFL Chief Executive, Andrew Demetriou, who argued that Australian Football was all encompassing and inclusive – integrating, accepting, multicultural, transcending class and ethnicity. While this may be true to some extent within the AFL, it is certainly a prevailing feature of community sport, where a common, shared and enjoyed pursuit (such as play in Australian Football) can break down social, cultural, ethnical and gender barriers.

However, the Ajax Football Club example proves that this has not been (and still is not) always the case. In 1972, religion and Australian Football collided. The Ajax Football Club Reserves team qualified for the VAFA Grand Final, which was scheduled to be played on September 9, coinciding with the Jewish New Year celebration, Rosh Hashanah. The Jewish religion does not permit the playing of sport on that day as it is one of the three most sacred days of the Jewish faith.

Thus, Ajax Football Club made attempts to reschedule the Grand Final date – firstly by sending a letter to the Victorian Amateur Football Association (VAFA) and then to all other VAFA competing

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390 Markoff, B., *The Road to A Grade: A History of the Ajax Football Club*, p. 15
392 Markoff, B., *The Road to A Grade*, p. 92
clubs. However, neither the VAFA nor the clubs (except for Marcellin Football Club) were willing to move the date of the Grand Final. As such, Ajax was forced to forfeit.  

While the decision by the VAFA had little (if anything) to do with commercialism, neoliberalism or the dominance of economic capital, Ajax’s decision to forfeit can be seen as an example of community at work (even if not complete acceptance of different communities). The Ajax community, together, decided not to play in the Grand Final. Together, they made the decision, and then acted, to uphold the beliefs, values and personality that characterised their club and its community. Indeed without the beliefs, values and personality of the club’s members, the club itself would not exist and would therefore certainly not have qualified for the Grand Final.

The next time this conflict arose in 1999, the VAFA changed the date of the Grand Final to ensure the Ajax Football Club could play in the Grand Final against their opponents, Monash Blues. Acceptance of different communities and the values, spirit and beliefs that shaped clubs when they were founded was recognised and, importantly, respected.

Therefore, it appears that at the local, grassroots level, football clubs are still generating and stimulating a form of culture and community that is more reflective of what Huizinga described as authentic culture than what the AFL appears to today, but also mirrors what the VFL was at its founding. Indeed grassroots football appears to mirror what Hess and Stewart described the VFL to be in *More than a Game: An Unauthorised History of Australian Rules Football*. Hess and Stewart described founding VFL football clubs as being an integral part of cultural life within community - just as many country and suburban clubs appear to be today. Importantly, the play element of these grassroots clubs still provides a sense of enjoyment for its players and supporters and, perhaps more evidently, still empowers them to come together, to enjoy something in common with others, where they are able to actively engage with their fellow members to contribute to the goals and objectives of the club. Furthermore, they feel an ownership of their club and in actively engaging within their club, they are able to feel a sense of self growth.

However, this should be observed with caution. It is true that these football clubs mirror many of the foundation VFL football clubs when they were created in the mid 1800's. That being the case, the path the VFL/AFL has taken is a stark reminder of where suburban and country football leagues

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393 Markoff, B., *The Road to A Grade*, p. 93
could be headed. It is difficult to imagine that they will ever be as structured, organised and commercial as what the AFL is today, however it should not be denied that money is already infiltrating the playing lists of many country football clubs, to the point where economic capital is determining which teams have the most success.

Take, for example, the Ovens and Murray Football League in country northern Victoria. For the past six years only two teams have played off in the Grand Final - the Albury Tigers and the Yarrawonga Pigeons. Coincidentally, it has been reported that these two clubs have substantially out spent their rivals on payments to players, meaning they have had relatively more economic capital at their disposal to recruit the best available talent to ensure they win far more often than not.  

Not only does this mean that economic capital is a driving factor in the play performance of teams, it can also mean that even country football leagues are being transformed into semi-professional businesses and a form of employment for their players. For example, some country footballers are paid up to $60,000 - $70,000 a year – more than the average individual wage in Australia ($57,980). As already highlighted in the preceding chapters, this may mean that as the economic field’s influence grows so too will the restrictions on the player playing the game. Winning becomes more important. Play is then measured and increasingly characterised more by structures, rules, set plays, planning, statistics, efficiency and seriousness, and less by creativity, spontaneity, freedom and fun.

As Alomes writes in his chapter, *Grassroots: the game of the people, for the people*:

"Footy is played for love - but, like some marriages, also for money. Even in the amateurs, coaches can receive five figure sums, and rumours abound of cotra-deals that attract top players who still play under the hat of amateur status... Money matters in the semi-professional, if part-time, culture of local footy."

Alomes also notes that former AFL players, especially those participating as playing coaches of suburban teams, can usually earn sums of up to $50,000 a year, while most top players can earn $400-$500 a game, or more. Thus, Alomes declares, "Money, even more than alcohol, makes the local footy world go round.

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398 Lanigan, R., online
400 Alomes, S., *Australian Football The People’s Game 1958-2058*, p. 102
Furthermore, off field, it should also be noted that not even these vibrant suburban, regional and rural football communities are completely shielded from, or autonomous to, the economic field. Many country football clubs have either merged with other football clubs around them, or simply ceased to exist because of a changing regional landscape. While once locals who were born and raised in the community were likely to graduate to be community leaders of their town, today they are more likely to move to city areas to find employment. This has not only meant that football clubs are battling to field a team to play, but to also find members who are able to volunteer their time to make an active contribution to the club.\textsuperscript{401}

Furthermore, many country and suburban clubs are more likely to rely on small sponsorships from local businesses to fundraise and generate revenue, rather than active participation from club members in the form of organised activities such as the Jewish community organising barbeques to raise money, as outlined above. Indeed local businesses are still making a contribution to the football club through financial sponsorships, however, much like the AFL, their 'active' participation in the club is then limited to a financial transaction.\textsuperscript{402}

The consequences of the above are twofold. Firstly, individual pursuit (and need) of economic capital has led to many young members of the community leaving town as soon as they finish school, therefore, no longer participating in their local football club as either a player or volunteer. Secondly (and possibly because of this), clubs are no longer engaging their members as much as they once did to actively contribute to the necessary (if still relatively modest) revenue streams for the club. Instead they are relying on financial donations, in the form of sponsorships, from local community. Thus the economic field appears ever present - even in local, community, grassroots football clubs.

Yet, this is a far cry from the monetary saturation and commercialism that characterises the English Premier League (EPL), as highlighted above. It is also important to note that the sense of community that defined the VFL in its formative years still flickers, albeit somewhat modestly, today.

The AFL in the community

The AFL and its eighteen clubs are still actively part of the community through various activities such as visiting schools, hospitals and country football clubs. They assist in raising awareness of

\textsuperscript{401} Frost, L., Lightbody, M., & Halabi, A., \textit{Expanding social inclusion in community sports organisations: evidence from rural Australian Football Clubs}, p. 14

\textsuperscript{402} Frost, L., Lightbody, M., & Halabi, A., \textit{Expanding social inclusion in community sports organisations: evidence from rural Australian Football Clubs}, p. 15
significant social issues and participate in fundraising for charity organisations. In fact, in 2012, the AFL’s players and clubs reached 402,562 students across Australia, including 266,591 primary school students and 135,971 secondary school students. Furthermore, the AFL reached another 172,069 primary school aged children through their Auskick program, while the total domestic participation in Australian football increased by 11% to 938,069. The AFL has also developed programs to engage and develop youth, such as NAB AFL Auskick, Sports Ready Trainee Program, AFL Foundation and Community Camps. In 2012 the AFL’s Community Camps, saw the AFL’s teams combine to visit all Australian states and territories with players visiting 412 primary and secondary schools and the AFL raised more than $76,067 for junior football and community projects.

The AFL also engages with other community groups in society, by either developing or supporting programs and initiatives such as Indigenous programs, youth causes, women’s organisations, health awareness initiatives and employment programs.

Each club within the AFL also contributes to the community by either initiating or supporting local community programs and causes. For example, in 2012 the Essendon Football Club announced that their community engagement vision was to:

“Become the benchmark by making a real difference. We aim to be the best sporting organisation from a community perspective in Australia. This will be achieved through our community programs and activities, strong and lasting partnerships and living our own values. We must be genuine in our desire to make a real and significant difference in the community.”

To achieve this vision, the Essendon Football Club has developed and supported many community organisations, programs and initiatives within the broader community and the community that, at least in history, has represented the grass roots support of the football club. In 2013, the Essendon Football Club was a partner or leader in some nineteen youth, school, multicultural, Indigenous and community programs. Furthermore, the Essendon Football Club has helped the Cancer Council of Victoria raise in excess of $1 million over the last four years, including $750,000 raised from the Essendon Football Club’s 2011 Windy Hill Relay for Life. The club’s multicultural school’s program was established to engage students of different and diverse backgrounds in Australian football,

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while promoting cultural diversity. In 2011, the program engaged in excess of 2,500 students in Essendon’s traditional grass roots community of Melbourne’s north-west suburbs.405

According to the Essendon Football Club, they are still a fundamental stimulant of communities:

“Sporting clubs at all levels play a significant role in our community. They make a substantial contribution to the fabric of society by providing a focus for the community. They are places where people congregate and become connected to one another.”406

This sounds remarkably like what Huizinga described a sporting club to be when play was at its most pure, genuine and was autonomous from the influence of economic capital and the media.

Furthermore, like the soccer World Cup, the play element in the AFL does still unite people of difference. While the viewing experience is more based upon the consumption of entertainment than any personal relationship or connection to the club, the grandstands of any football match represent the many various backgrounds and cultures that make up Australian society in 2014. Men, women and children of various religions, race and culture can sit together – enjoying something in common with each other – at the football. Their connection is based upon an appreciation and passion for the game, which can be shared and enjoyed equally, regardless of social status, wealth or associated power – Australian Rules football can be a great equaliser and binding force of society.

However, while it is evident from the above data that the AFL and its eighteen football clubs are still actively engaged within the community, it does not appear to be a genuine stimulus of the community – regardless of what the Essendon Football Club website states. While clubs such as Essendon do make a very real and significant contribution to the community through their many, various community partnerships and initiatives, their contribution to the community is separate to the play element. They contribute – as an organisation and business – to and within the community however, this is distinctly different to the play element stimulating a community from the bottom up. Essendon contribute in the community through lending brand support, monetary assistance, reputation and the popularity of the current day play element. That is not to say that the AFL and its clubs don’t contribute significantly to the community, for the above evidence would suggest they most definitely do. However, this should not be confused for play naturally creating the community and the culture of the community, as it once did.

When play was at its most pure, it was able to engage the citizens of society to participate in something fun, spontaneous, unattached to economic capital and quite separate to the real and

405 Essendon Football Club, Essendon FC Community Engagement, online
406 Essendon Football Club, Essendon FC Community Engagement, online
ordinary world. In doing so it helped enable participants to act without restriction as the sport field was autonomous. As such, players were able to show their whole self, act with freedom and abandon and form meaningful and lasting relationships with fellow participants within the sport field. Thus the play element was responsible for stimulating, building and then binding the community.

The engagement the AFL and its clubs now have with the community is distinctly different. It is participation within the community or society, but falls short of creating communities. And where it may create communities, it does so because of partnering with other organisations or building something separate to the club and leveraging the popularity of its brand and today’s play package. For example, the Essendon Football Club’s Multicultural Schools Program aims to unite people of diverse backgrounds through the creation of a program quite separate to the play element within the football club. Because the Essendon Football Club and the play element has been transformed from an item of folk culture to a business and item of entertainment, it has the ability to establish and fund such initiatives—which do have a positive influence and impact on society. However, it can also be argued that if play was still autonomous and football clubs were still an expression of the community, uniting people of diversity would be a natural product of participating within the autonomous sport field. Instead this is manufactured by football clubs, acting as business.

Furthermore, the AFL and its clubs view the community as very much a market of consumers. Thus, ‘getting out into the community’ is yet another way of selling the AFL and club brand. Furthermore, the AFL players are contracted to appear and visit AFL and community events, meaning they are not engaging with the community for free. The current group of AFL players are paid more money than any group of Australian footballers before them and part of their job is visit schools, hospitals, junior football clubs and community organisations to promote their football club and the AFL brand. That is not to say that the players don’t enjoy their time in the community, however, it is a distinctly different level of engagement to that of play when it was autonomous and unaffected by money.

Even the community created in the grandstands appears momentary, rather than enduring. People come together for two hours to appreciate play in common with one another. However, they do not meet back in the football club’s social club rooms to discuss their community, the important issues of society and matters of interest or concern – as was the case when the play element was part of folk culture at the game’s founding. Indeed, all supporters will meet and greet their fellow fans in the grandstands where they will barrack, cheer, curse, vent their frustrations and share a somewhat emotional experience. However, then what?

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407 Essendon Football Club, Essendon FC Community Engagement, online
Furthermore, the viewing experience for the football fan is also influenced by economic capital. As if to mirror society, the AFL grandstands are structured in relation to social status. The seats at the very top of the stadium are the least expensive. The seats down the bottom, close to the action, are more expensive. The middle level seats—often equipped with television sets and cushioned seats—are even more expensive, while the ground’s corporate boxes host society’s leading businesses and business associates. These different sections of seating virtually mean that even the viewing experience of play has been commodified and sold to consumers depending upon how much they are willing to pay to view the game.

As Peter Di Sisto explained:

“There is definite inequality in the grandstands. The rich sit in the best seats with the best memberships and even in corporate boxes. Those that cannot afford it sit way up the back of the grandstands.”

Therefore, the consumption of play—much like the play element itself—has been commercialised, commodified, packaged and sold back to the fans. The grass roots fans pay to view the game and their viewing experience is largely determined by their wealth. This is yet another example of the influence of the economic field in the sport field—in this instance, influencing the viewer’s consumption of play in the grandstands.

The current transformation phase of play in the AFL

This chapter has been effective in placing the transformation of play in the AFL in a world perspective. Certainly the AFL’s play element today is still very much in a transformational phase, somewhere between what it was at its origins and what play has become in the English Premier League (EPL). Play in the AFL is not yet as severely commercialised and commodified as play in the EPL as it still shows elements of evenness, fairness, equality and egalitarianism and football supporters can still watch their team play on television for free. Likewise, the AFL and its clubs do make a genuine effort to positively influence the community and in some sense, players still play with an element of mateship, togetherness and community spirit.

However, as shown in previous chapters, the play element in the AFL today seems to me rely simulate what play was when the game was invented in Melbourne in 1858. As noted above, even the AFL’s community engagement is somewhat manufactured—it is not a natural evolution of participating in play. The AFL and its clubs participate in and influence the community, but the play

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408 Di Sisto, P., Personal Interview, March 14, 2006
element and the football club does not seem to create and bind communities like they once did. Likewise the consumption of play, even at the ground, is also influenced by money. This would suggest that the relationship supporters have with the play element, the players they watch and clubs they support is now different to what it was when play was an autonomous element and separate to the economic and media fields.

Supporters are now consumers, but what does this mean for them? Do they still feel part of the football club? Does the play element still enable them to form meaningful relationships with each other? Has the community spirit and culture of the AFL been compromised through the commodification of play? Or does the community that was once generated and stimulated by the pure play element still somehow endure?

The following chapters seek to enrich the theory of this thesis by illuminating the perspective of the AFL community and exploring if they support the notion that play in the AFL has been transformed by the economic and media fields. By doing so, we can begin to understand the influence any transformation of the play element in the AFL has had on the community and the broader implications of this for society and democracy.
Chapter 10: Illuminating the perspective of the AFL community

So far, this thesis has created a theoretical framework using the historical observations of Johan Huizinga and combining them with Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of fields and capital to argue that the influence of the economic and media fields in the sports field has transformed play into display and, in doing so, corrupted the play element to the point where it is now analysed and managed as a function of a business. Also of concern to this study, are the consequences of this transformation. Indeed through the perspective of Huizinga, the corruption of the play element has led to the decline of the community.

Throughout the preceding chapters of this thesis, the AFL, as a case study, has been analysed through the point of view of Huizinga (and supported by utilising Bourdieu’s terms and concepts) to argue how the commodification of play has been transformed into a tool of the economy. However, to enrich the understanding of the transformation of the sport field through the combined theories of Huizinga and Bourdieu, it is necessary to illuminate the impact the game’s transformation has had on the community through the point of view of the fans. That is, in order to enrich the theory developed in this thesis, it is necessary to highlight the AFL community’s point of view.

The following chapters of this research seek to do exactly that by highlighting the thoughts, opinions, views and emotions of the fans, who as a collective, make up the AFL’s community. The purpose of the following chapters is to understand if the AFL community sees the game’s transformation in the same way Huizinga did when he was writing *Homo Ludens*. By asking football fans to express their views about the game today, comparisons between their views and the overarching theory of this thesis can be analysed and understood. So too, can any disparities between the prevailing arguments of this thesis and the views of today’s AFL community. As Huizinga was a cultural historian whose insights were fundamentally based on his own historical observations it is important to understand the observations of those who follow the game today. By doing so, the theory of this thesis can be augmented and potentially justified as a legitimate means of understanding the transformation of play in modern-day professional sport. If today’s AFL fans share similar views to Huizinga, or can be understood through the theories and concepts of Bourdieu then they can be interpreted as a means of supporting the claims already made throughout this thesis. Similarly, if the views expressed by the fans interviewed for this thesis contrast to the historical observations made by Huizinga or cannot be interpreted through Bourdieu’s theories and concepts then the limitations of Huizinga and Bourdieu’s theories as a means of understanding the transformation of the play
element in the twenty first century will be exposed. Either way the theory developed in this thesis will be enriched.

To best illuminate the thoughts, views and opinions of the football community, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten interview participants. Semi structured interviews were chosen as the best method of investigation for this thesis primarily due to the nature and topic of this thesis. As Noam Chomsky observed in his book, Understanding Power, many sports fans consider themselves the equal of any learned expert. This, he states, is unusual and unique to the sport field. For example, more often than not, if a home owner needed their plumbing fixed, they would seek the advice or services of a professional plumber, who would be considered an expert in his or her field. A similar process would be followed in most fields where the novice would seek out or respect the views of the field’s experts.

However, Chomsky claimed that many sports fans considered themselves as an expert and their opinions just as valid and worthy as those considered as the game’s experts. Chomsky believed that fans spent so much of their time reading, watching, listening to and thinking about sport that a majority of fans felt comfortable challenging the actions and opinions of coaches, managers, expert commentators or sports journalists. Certainly when it comes to the AFL, it is not uncommon to hear AFL fans calling talkback radio on any day of the week to challenge or dispute the views of the game’s experts.

Therefore, to restrict the interview participants to closed answers through interviews, surveys or questionnaires does not seem sufficient. In fact, it would suppress their views and not do justice to their educated opinions and the contribution they could make to understanding the transformation of the play element. As such semi structured interviews were utilised as the best way to illuminate the thoughts and observations of the football community as they allow the interview participants to express their views and feelings in their own terms. Furthermore, by their very nature, semi-structured interviews encourage open dialogue, extended ideas, explanations and reasoning. They also allow for further probing, follow up questions and insights that may either confirm what is already known or provide an insight into new learnings. Furthermore, they can provide reliable, comparable, qualitative data that can be analysed to highlight common themes and arguments.

Therefore, to attain a comprehensive insight into the typical AFL supporter’s view about the influence of the media and money in the game today, its influence on the play element and the

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410 Chomsky, N., Understanding Power, p. 98
relationship they share with the club they support, a thorough, expansive, open ended interview was necessary. As such, 10 football fans of various ages and club support were interviewed to attain an insight into the views and opinions of AFL fans.

While interviewing 10 AFL supporters cannot be considered an overall representation of the views and thoughts of every AFL football fan, for the purpose of this study, it can be considered a fair representation of views to contribute to the theory developed earlier in this thesis. As this study is primarily a theoretical study of the play element, using the combined theories of Huizinga and Bourdieu as a means of interpreting and understanding play's transformation, the interviews are not the primary aspect or focus of this study. However, they do play an important role in contributing to the theory and as such it was important to ensure a fair representation of views was included to provide an insight into the fans thoughts, observations and opinions. Due to the expansive nature of the interviews, researching the views of 10 interview participants was considered adequate for this study.

The 10 interview participants were recruited as ‘actively engaged’ followers of AFL football. That is, the 10 interview participants were required to be a member of either the AFL or one of the AFL’s 18 clubs. Furthermore, they all attended AFL matches live either on their own, with family or with friends and engaged with the AFL through various media, be it by watching AFL football on TV, listening to AFL related programs on radio, reading about AFL games or related issues in newspapers or relevant websites or engaging with the AFL or one of the AFL’s clubs via their websites or social media channels such as Facebook or Twitter. It was also preferred that each interview participant had played, or been a part of, some form of Australian football for a grassroots, local, community club.

The ages of the interview participants ranged from 23 to 53. While it was important to ensure a wide range of historical observations were represented, more important than the age of each interview participant was the length of time they had been following VFL/AFL football. As this thesis acknowledges that the last 15-20 years as the most dynamic in terms of the economic and media field’s growing influence of the game it was important that each interview participant had been following the game for at least 15 years. Certainly it can be argued that those aged in their 20’s do not have the historical experience or knowledge that, say, a 60 year old would. However, it can also be argued that a 60 year old may be inclined to romanticise about the ‘good old days’ more than a young supporter who has embraced the AFL, as entertainment, in the twenty first century.
It is true that various in depth analyses could be expounded to highlight patterns and themes concerned with gender, demographics, socio economic status and other sociological categories. However, to do this properly, the interviews would need to be the primary focus of the research, not as a tool utilised to enrich the theory. As such detecting patterns of gender, age, demographics and socio economic status sits quite outside the focus and scope of this research. This research is simply concerned with illuminating the views of the football community to determine if they support the theory outlined earlier in this thesis. By doing so, the theory will be enriched. Furthermore, if the theory is supported through the thoughts and observations of the interview participants, it suggests that the theoretical model of interpreting Huizinga through Bourdieus’s concepts and theories is indeed a legitimate means of understanding the transformation of play in the AFL in the twenty first century and its possible consequences for society.

At the heart of this thesis is the argument that the influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL has transformed the play element into a function of a business, which has consequently weakened the AFL community. As such, the major themes explored throughout the semi structured interviews sought to focus on these themes from the point of view of the fans.

The three main themes of focus during the interviews were – the influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL; the play element in the AFL today; and the way AFL fans relate to, or consume, the AFL and the club they support. By focussing on these three key themes, an insight into the play element in the AFL today, from the point of view of the AFL community, can be illustrated. Furthermore, an insight into the modern day AFL community can also be enlightened.

Importantly, it is one thing to create a theoretical means of understanding how sport has changed and argue the consequences of such change – it is quite another to legitimise this theory through the observations and opinions of the football community. By interviewing members of the football community this section of the thesis seeks to illuminate the theory developed in this thesis and even determine if it can be augmented, supported and enriched by the observations of the fans.

**The influence of the economic and media field in the AFL – The AFL as a business**

When discussing the influence of the economic field and the media field in the AFL, this thesis argues that the AFL has ultimately been transformed into a business where most decisions made and actions of the key stakeholders and participants within the AFL can be explained by the *play, money, media cycle* outlined in chapter five. The AFL and its clubs are now set up as a business, managed as a business and operate as a business. Furthermore, the play element is now utilised as a means of making money for the AFL, its clubs, players and the media. The media is utilised by the AFL to help
promote, market and sell the AFL product and, in turn, the media utilises the AFL to generate audiences, readers, listeners and higher ratings to attract advertising revenue. It is a mutually beneficial relationship.

At the heart of the play, money, media cycle is the notion of the AFL now defining itself as a business because of the dominating influence of the economic and media fields. The idea that the AFL is now a business was one supported by the interview participants, particularly when describing the make-up of the football club they supported. Furthermore, many see the transformation of the AFL and its clubs into a business as something that is fundamentally important and necessary to the survival of the game.

Brisbane Lions supporter, Tom Gallimore, highlighted this when asked if he would describe the AFL as a business:

“Yeah, I think if you look at, let’s take Collingwood as an example, it is a business. Eddie McGuire (president) runs it very well. So I think its half fans, but they’ve always got their eye on, ‘well, we need to keep generating revenue and money to be a successful club.’ I mean if you don’t do that, with any company or any organisation, if you don’t make money, you won’t be around.”

Likewise, Sydney Swans member, Phil Wild:

“I think so. It is, at its heart, it’s a business. It might be...a not-for-profit business, in that its business aims are not the same as a typical corporation. It obviously doesn’t aim to make money, its aim is basically to promote the game of AFL, benefit the players, benefit the supporters, but it still has to be run like a business because its main competitors are other sports...if you don’t protect your territory, if you don’t try and expand the game, if you don’t try and keep the game free of prejudice...then somebody else will take that turf off you and it’s always a competitive landscape like anything. If you don’t react to the marketplace and try to take steps to protect your position then you’re going to get found out.”

Essendon supporter, Jason Lee, described the AFL by stating:

“...the AFL is obviously a national competition, professional, organised, it’s a business, you know, it’s a multi-billion dollar organisation now and it’s glamorous.”

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411 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
Furthermore, when describing their football club, many interview participants reflected upon how their club mirrored the make-up of a business. As Bourdieu argued, because of the influence of the economic field and, indeed the dominance of economic capital within it, each field in society has come to mirror the next, ensuring that the struggle for economic capital becomes the dominating feature of the struggles within each field.

Interview participant, Stuart Osbourne, highlighted this when he reflected on how his football club— the Essendon Football Club— had evolved from a semi-professional organisation in the 1980’s to a fully-fledged business today.

“...in the 1980’s they (players) were going to training two nights a week and playing a game on Saturday and going out for a few cans after the game. So, basically you’ve got full time footballers and full time departments. I mean ten years ago, there weren’t even football departments. You had a coach and a few runners or trainers or whatever and a doctor, of course. But these days, it’s just a function of the professionals...which comes back to the money that’s come into the game...players are (now) full time and they’re surrounded by full time support staff because there’s so much money in the game.”

Likewise, Collingwood member, Jeremiah Ryan, supported this when he spoke about who makes decisions within football clubs.

“I’d certainly say the president and the coach...I think Gary Pert might be the CEO and Nathan Buckley’s the coach. I think they’ve each got their own department that they look after and they look after them well. I always thought, whether it’s the Collingwood Football Club or the St Michael’s Football Club...or the Swinburne Football Club...the president takes care of business, the coach coaches the team and the captain represents the players. Now, I think it’s the same at Collingwood, it was the same at St Michael’s – it was the same at Swinburne.”

The importance of economic capital within football clubs was also not understated by the interview participants. This thesis argues that as the influence of the economic field has grown within the AFL, so too has the dominance of economic capital. As the sport field merged with the economic field, participants within the sport field began striving for capital heteronomous to the sports field. That is, they began to realise the benefits of accumulating economic capital in order to succeed within the

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415 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
field. As such, this began to redefine the sport field, further strengthening the economic field’s influence within the sport field.

Many interview participants highlighted the importance of their football club generating economic capital in order for them to prosper both on the field and off it. That is, they recognised that money and winning appeared inextricably linked, whereby accumulating economic capital assisted a team to win more often and, likewise, winning assisted the club to generate money.

Take, for example, the comments made by Geelong member, Neil Duncan, when discussing the importance of a stable club management structure for sustained on field success.

“Frank Costa (President), Brian Cook (Chief Executive Officer) and ‘Bomber’ Thompson (coach)…are probably the three people I think of because they took us (Geelong) from debt, millions of dollars in debt, and a club that was really a rabble – our captain had walked out…and now three premierships later, (we have) a new ground that is now going to hold close to 40,000 (spectators) with lights…they were the three people who took the club from nowhere to where it is. One was the coach who turned the playing group around and then you’ve got the two guys who actually run the club – the President and the CEO.”

Neil then went on to outline that the President, CEO and coach had taken the Geelong Football Club “from a broke club that didn’t look like playing finals to a club that is profitable, admired and...a thriving business that is developing, increasing membership, a new ground with lights and threatening to at least make finals and win premierships most years.”

Geelong member, Scott Hutchins, shared a similar sentiment when asked if he believed there was a link between how much money a club has at their disposal and their ability to perform well on the field.

“I think there would be a direct link...it definitely helps to be a strong club (financially). You can employ a greater number of coaching staff, have more sought after coaching staff, and obviously that goes to the back room people like sport scientists. And particularly now with free agents...the bigger clubs are more likely to command more free agents (players) and bigger names.”

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Michael Westland, an Essendon supporter and member of the AFL, also supported the argument that economic capital is intrinsically linked to on-field success. When asked if, in his opinion, there is a link between money and on-field success, Michael responded by saying that there was.

“You would have to assume and you would annually observe that the teams with more (money), with better facilities...are generally at the top for longer.”

The concept of economic capital becoming the most dominant feature of the sport field has been discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. With the merger of the economic field with the sport field came the domination of economic capital, which ultimately now defines the struggles, battles and actions of the key players within the field. However, while the economic field’s role in this has been profound, the impact of the media field should not be underestimated. The play, money, media cycle outlined in chapter five of this thesis highlighted how the media and economic field has transformed play into a commodity, which is utilised by both the AFL and the media to generate revenue. In fact, this thesis argues that it is economic capital that links play with the media and the media with the AFL. Because the media provides over a billion dollars to the AFL through its media broadcasting rights, it could be argued that the media has replaced the footy fan as the number one stakeholder.

For the football supporters interviewed for this thesis, the role and importance of the media for the AFL and the attractiveness of the AFL’s play element for the media, was not overlooked. For example, when discussing the introduction of the AFL’s two newest teams — the Greater Western Sydney Giants and the Gold Coast Suns — Essendon Football Club member, Zak Kardachi, stated that it was the money generated from the media that was the driving factor of the AFL’s decision to implement the seventeenth and eighteenth teams in Sydney’s West and Queensland’s South East.

“I think that (introducing a new team in Western Sydney and on the Gold Coast) is to grow the game and overall make the game more profitable...if those teams are successful, you then get more people watching the game on TV, you get higher broadcast deals, larger broadcast deals, you get more people buying merchandise, more people going to the games (meaning) revenue overall grows.”

Supporting the argument made earlier in this thesis when discussing the introduction of Greater Western Sydney and the Gold Coast ahead of Tasmania, Zak believes the AFL placed the importance of money ahead of supporter passion when expanding the competition. In the West of Sydney and

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418 Westland, M., Personal interview, May 16, 2013
the Gold Coast, the AFL has two new markets to attract new consumers, and, potentially, new television viewers. In Tasmania, the AFL has a relatively smaller market of consumers who already consumed the game on TV – regardless of having a Tasmanian team or not.

“If the AFL really wanted to love the game…and viewed by the people who really want to see it...they’d probably have a team in Tasmania, where there is support – perhaps not commercially as viable support as Greater Western Sydney or the Gold Coast, but definitely a support that is growing for that.”

The idea that the media utilised the play element in the AFL as a tool for generating revenue was also supported by research participant, Phil Wild.

When asked why the AFL is such a dominant part of media’s reporting and scheduling, Phil responded by saying:

“Well I guess it’s the age old sort of thing, I mean eyeballs mean dollars…it means ratings, it means dollars, I mean it’s a pretty simple business equation.”

As inferred above and stated several times throughout this thesis, the television media alone paid $1.253 billion for the right to be the exclusive broadcaster of the AFL making it one of the biggest contributors to the AFL’s overall revenue streams, and therefore one of the biggest stakeholders of the AFL.

Sydney Swans member, Phil Wild, supported this theory. When asked if the media has the biggest say in the decisions made, and the direction of the AFL, Phil’s response was that they do.

“I think so...at the end of the day they do. I think you’d be a bit naïve not to think that. While generally what the media want and what the fans want would hopefully be sort of congruent (where) we’re pushing in the same direction, (however) when push comes to shove...”

Phil went on to say:

“I mean money talks unfortunately, and without that money the AFL wouldn’t be able to do things like expand into Greater Western Sydney, to prop up clubs that might need it...The

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money does go to a purpose, so I don’t begrudge that, but at the end of the day that’s a lot of memberships.”

Essendon member, Stuart Osbourne, reflected that the influence of the media has superseded the interests of the football fans when it comes to the scheduling of AFL matches.

“There are too many bloody timeslots. And I know it’s all done for TV so that every game can be shown live, but it’s frigging impossible to plan your weekend when you go to the footy now. It’s like there’s a 1.10pm game, a 1.40pm game, there’s a 2.10pm game, there’s a 4.10pm game, there’s a 7.10pm, a 7.40pm – and it’s all driven by broadcasters because they want every game live.”

As outlined in the earlier chapters of this thesis, the increased influence of the media field and the economic field has ultimately transformed play into display. As discussed when outlining the function of the play, money, media cycle the relationship between the AFL and the media is a mutually beneficial one. While the AFL is utilised by the media as a tool to generate increased ratings, advertising premiums and revenue, the media is a vital source of revenue for the AFL. Furthermore, because the media has recognised the popularity of the AFL, its coverage has not only increased, but also changed to extend beyond the contest of play during the weekend’s matches to entertain readers, viewers and listeners for seven days a week. In doing so, the media has transformed the game into an item of entertainment that can be consumed from Monday to Sunday, 365 days a year. This increased coverage of play means that AFL football is covered by the media on a daily basis, with off-field issues and incidents generally filling the pages of newspapers and airwaves during the week.

The media’s increased and evolving coverage of the AFL was not lost on the football supporters interviewed for this thesis, with many clearly outlining their perception of the media’s increased coverage of the game and its growing tendency to report about off field instances as much as (if not more than) on-field matters.

When asked how the media’s coverage of the AFL had changed during their time following the game, the interview participants’ responses illuminated how the influence of the media field has increased:

Jason Lee:

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“Huge amount. One of the biggest changes in the game. It’s certainly amazing to see the change...the coverage is now 24 hours, it’s on multiple television channels, every radio station, newspapers, front and back. Footballers have now become celebrities, not sports people. The scrutiny on them is far greater than it’s ever been, and on the coaches, and on any staff member of the club. With the advent of social media, you know – Twitter, Facebook – an incident simultaneously just goes viral into the community...The media has had a massive change and it’s certainly had a huge impact on the way the game’s seen.”  

Jeremiah Ryan:

“Well it has certainly multiplied many, many times...now there's just so much analysis. Where I work we've got Fox Footy. That’s a whole channel. All it does is talk about footy. That wasn’t there 30 years ago. It just wasn’t. And the way it’s delivered...I've got the AFL app on my iPad and I use that for scores when I’m at work or when I’m travelling...and I can watch a replay of Collingwood when I’m at work if I missed it. It (the media coverage of the AFL) exploded about seven years ago and I think then it sort of hasn’t contracted.”

Scott Hutchins:

“It’s obviously a lot more saturated. When I was a kid, I probably didn’t look for it as much, but there were also no footy channels. The Footy Show was the only dedicated football show outside the football coverage itself, whereas now we’ve got Fox Footy – there’s Gerard Whately and Mark Robinson giving their thoughts on the game every night of the week.”

Michael Westland:

“I remember football growing up as Friday night, Saturday night, Sunday. And the reason I say that is because every Saturday afternoon was consumed by local football. So, football for me was always Friday night, Saturday night and Sunday...But these days footy is all encompassing. I’m a huge fan of Fox Footy and I can plan my night purely based around Fox Footy. My weekends are...unless I’m doing anything else, I’m watching football.”

Furthermore, many interview participants also highlighted the way the media had changed their coverage of the game to incorporate off field incidents and issues and subsequently transformed the game into an item of entertainment, which could be consumed every day of the week.

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426 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
When discussing the role of the media in the AFL today, Zak Kardachi stated:

“...something that I would’ve liked to have researched is what do you write about as a news outlet when the news only happens two days a week...you have to fill seven days’ worth of news and I think that’s added to a lot of sensationalism, a lot of off-field talk that perhaps wasn’t there before. I mean ten to fifteen years ago who would’ve known who the CEO of the club was and who would’ve cared if they resigned..?”  

Jason Lee also highlighted the increased coverage of off-field matters:

“It’s a new phenomenon. I know probably by name four or five people on the Essendon board. If you asked me that ten or fifteen years ago, I would have no idea. One, that could be because of my age, because I was younger then, but also two, no doubt, their names are printed in articles – the level of information is far more readily available on what’s happening at a club. The media’s had a massive role to play in that.”

Nevertheless, one of the fundamental factors at the heart of the play, money, media cycle is the understanding that the AFL ‘sells’ – that is, the Australian public seems to have an unquenchable thirst to consume the game. Whether it is the media driving the public’s appetite for the game or the demand from the fans feeding the increased AFL media coverage, the popularity of the AFL brand is one of the fundamental necessities for the play, money, media cycle to work.

As articulated in chapter five, because of the popularity of the AFL brand, the Australian media’s television networks are willing to pay billions of dollars for the exclusive right to broadcast AFL matches, believing it will increase the network’s ratings, attract advertisers and ultimately increase revenue. For the AFL, increased television exposure of its brand can lead to growth in sponsorship opportunities, club and AFL memberships and ultimately, even higher revenues generated from the sale of media broadcasting rights.

The popularity of the AFL brand and consumption of the game by the fans through the media was illuminated by the responses of the following interview participants who provided substantial evidence to suggest the AFL indeed ‘sells.’ Take, for example, the following responses in relation to consumption of AFL football through the media.

Zak Kardachi:

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“It (AFL football) sells because it just sells. It sells in Melbourne particularly – no matter what.”

Michael Westland:

“I surround myself with it. It’s actually embarrassing. I do, I do... if I open the Herald Sun (on the internet)... I open probably twelve windows of articles I want to read, half will be football, half will be other. When I go to work in the morning I listen to Triple M (with) Eddie McGuire, Luke Darcy and Mick Molloy, of which 80 per cent of the conversation is about football. On the way home from work I listen to James Brayshaw and Billy Brownless who are consumed nearly wholly with football. And when I’m at work I often listen to SEN which is again consumed nearly wholly by football. And it’s purely, it’s entertaining. I find it entertaining. I find it informative and entertaining. And I love it.”

Stuart Osbourne:

“...I check The Age website on my phone... I’ll have to go through the general news to get down to (the) sport (section), but I’ll particularly go to sport and go into the sport page more so. And the AFL app – in terms of my media consumption, it would be one of my more frequent apps, especially on the weekends – not just for Essendon games, but for other games too and then obviously SEN in terms of the radio. So my media consumption is almost, I’d say, 100 per cent (football) because I listen to SEN and it’s really all they talk about. In terms of my phone, most of it would be footy and then TV is about the only more balanced thing...”

When asked how often he consumed AFL football through the media, Scott Hutchins replied:

“Really just basically Friday night... through to Sunday 7 o’clock, when the twilight game finishes. I would usually probably average attending one game a week and I’d probably watch three to four games on TV. If I couldn’t watch my TV, I’d listen to the (game) they’ve got on the radio if I had access to it. And if I didn’t have access to any of that, I would be checking the scores on my phone.”

When asked how much of his media consumption was sports related, Scott Hutchins replied:

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“90 per cent plus.”\textsuperscript{435}

Jason Lee shared a similar sentiment when asked the same question.

“Probably 60, 70 per cent during the footy season.”\textsuperscript{436}

For Josh Forte, his AFL consumption was less than Jason and Scott, yet still substantial:

“I’d say 50 per cent...I will read just about any article that will come up during the day. I just like to be across it, but I regard AFL (to be) in that news frame, because it’s something that impacts me. It’s big business.”\textsuperscript{437}

The above responses have highlighted that the influence of the media field has significantly increased throughout time. As articulated in the earlier chapters of this chapter, linking the play, media, money cycle is, indeed, money. Because of the increasing influence of the media field and the economic field in the sport field, the actions and decisions made by the key stakeholders in the sport field are increasingly defined by their struggle for economic capital. Furthermore, because the AFL and its clubs now function as a business, at the core of their operation is the accumulation of money and it seems that now extends to the play element.

As articulated throughout this thesis, the influence of the media and economic fields has transformed the AFL and its 18 clubs into an entertainment business who, to be successful on and off the field, need to sell their brand. As such, the importance of winning has been exacerbated. Because a team’s on field performance is fundamental to its image and brand, consequences of winning now stretch beyond a team’s position on the ladder. Winning is now imperative to attract new supporters and members, increase crowd attendances and merchandise sales, increase exposure on television – which all contributes to the club’s revenue. This money can potentially be spent on a club’s football department, therefore improving the team’s on-field performance, and the cycle continues.

This was highlighted by Tom Gallimore. When discussing the link between off field and on field success for the Brisbane Lions, Tom highlighted how the play element, and in particular ‘winning’ was an important tool for the club to attract supporters and sponsors to the club in order to generate revenue.

\textsuperscript{435} Hutchins, S., Personal interview, May 22, 2013.
\textsuperscript{436} Lee, J., Personal interview, June 13, 2013.
\textsuperscript{437} Forte, J., Personal interview, May 30, 2013.
“Look, I think with any sporting code, if they’re not winning, it makes it tough. It flows down from the players through the coaches, through the sponsors, through the fans. I mean, the sponsors want the club that they’re associated with to be winning. They want to be seen in a positive light and it gets fans through the gate and it gets fans engaged in their brand as well.”

When asked if there are off-field consequences for a club who is performing poorly on the field, Tom responded:

“Well I think we’ve seen that recently with the Lions. I think they lost their two major sponsors only a week ago, or two weeks ago, which is huge...I think management and the club boards and organisations hope like hell that their team wins as much as possible because it just relieves pressure on partnerships, sponsors, but it also keeps fans engaged, excited, coming through the gates, all turning up and purchasing merchandise, or watching it online and paying that way.”

Furthermore, it is argued in this thesis that while clubs have transformed into businesses who utilise the play element as a means of attracting consumers to their brand, those who play the game have also been transformed into commodities and used to sell their club’s brand. Just as play has been transformed into display, the players have been transformed into entertainers who are treated as celebrities by the media and utilised by their employers to help sell their band. Furthermore, because clubs are now businesses and winning is the primary key performance indicator for on-field and off-field success, the players are now considered as employees of their club who are rewarded as most employees of businesses are—with money. Like all industries, those who perform better than others or who play a significant role in ensuring the team reaches their goals, are rewarded with increased salaries. Thus, just as clubs within the sports field strive for economic capital, so too do the players.

This was illuminated by those interviewed for this thesis. When asked if they believed players had transformed into entertainers or celebrities, the overwhelming sentiment was that they had. Furthermore, most participants believed that the players deserved the large sums of money they earned.

When asked if he considered AFL footballers to be celebrities, Neil Duncan stated he believed they were.

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438 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
“Yes, nowadays I do, actually... I think they deserve the appropriate proportion of revenue that comes into the game because they are the stars. So if that is proportional to what the game is bringing in they deserve it, yep, definitely.”\textsuperscript{440}

The majority of interview participants shared this view. For example:

Jeremiah Ryan:

“The money’s there. The league makes the money and the players are the ones that are providing the product so they are entitled to it. So, it’s not yet at a point where it’s like soccer or American football or basketball where they’re making hundreds of millions of dollars. It’s at the point where they’re making a million dollars a year. And yes, that’s a lot of money, but if you’re the very best at what you do, fair enough.”\textsuperscript{441}

Zak Kardachi:

“You know the average salary I believe is around two hundred and fifty thousand. The rookie’s salary, first year, is sixty thousand – it’s higher than the average Australian wage for playing football. I think that’s pretty good and I think that’s where comparisons to overseas leagues where they get millions and millions of dollars is a bit unfair...You know, it’s in the public spotlight, but there are a lot of things that come with that that are positives. There are some negatives and players always harp on about those and they say how six weeks of holidays isn’t enough but I think it’s definitely adequate.”\textsuperscript{442}

Tom Gallimore:

“...they get paid an enormous amount of money to do that and, look, I wouldn’t want to see their salary increased too much more. I think they’re sitting about where they should be – I think the majority of them are sitting where they should be paid and there are some that are getting paid probably more than they should.”\textsuperscript{443}

Scott Hutchins:

“They definitely deserve the money they’re getting, and I’m certain there are more, but I don’t think you’d say they don’t deserve what they’re getting. They’re the exhibition, that’s what we watch the game for – to see the players do what they do. I’m not entirely sure of

\textsuperscript{440} Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.
\textsuperscript{441} Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
\textsuperscript{442} Kardachi, Z., Personal interview, May 23, 2013.
\textsuperscript{443} Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
the percentage of the regular TV revenue they get, that they ought to be getting what others are getting, but I follow the English Premier League quite intently, and these guys (AFL players) could be earning (much more) – a lot of them (AFL players) get 10 per cent of, you know, (what) a decent Premier League player (gets)."\[444\]

Michael Westland:

“The entertainment I get from the players... and you (multiply) that by every person that goes to a game or watches the game on TV, they absolutely deserve every dollar they get.”\[445\]

Stuart Osbourne:

“I think they get paid very well for what they do, but it’s a pretty big pie when you think about all the broadcast dollars that the AFL gets paid. So, I actually think they deserve it. They’re the ones that put on a show so they deserve to be paid really well.”\[446\]

However, Josh Forte had a different view, believing AFL players were paid too much:

“Considering it’s a full time job, the riggers they go through, I still think they’re paid too much. I think people forget the opportunities of being in a football club at AFL level also offers enormous potential for earnings post football. They’re looked after, educated so well. It goes back to me saying that these men are no one special, they’re just good at playing sport. The media scrutiny on them is absolutely enormous, but they’re also getting to play a sport for a living. It’s just a game... if the AFL went tomorrow, we’d be shattered, but life would go on. If doctors went tomorrow, we’d be stuffed... so honestly, despite my love for the game, it’s just sport, so I think they’re paid too much, definitely.”\[447\]

The above comments highlight that the majority of footy fans interviewed believe the players are the ‘stars of the show’ and should be paid accordingly. Furthermore, it highlights that they view the game as a business, which is part of the entertainment industry. Huizinga would argue that this is evidence that because of the influence of the media and economic field in the sport field, the sport field now mirrors all other fields, ensuring play is no longer separate to the ordinary and real. Furthermore, because the sport field now mirrors other fields influenced by the economic field, the participants within the field (including the players) now strive for economic capital.

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446 Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
Huizinga would argue that because the AFL mirrors most other fields of society, citizens, such as those interviewed for this thesis, have lost the ability to consider that that AFL could be different. The fact that it was once an autonomous field appears lost on most football supporters. They now see it as it is – a business, and few appear to question it.

As such, most interview participants highlighted that the desire for economic capital is a dominating factor for players when making decisions in the sport field. The game a player chooses to play and the club a player chooses to play for can be determined by how much money they are paid. This thesis highlighted this with an extensive discussion about Gary Ablett’s decision to leave Geelong for the Gold Coast and the defection of Karmichael Hunt and Israel Folau from the National Rugby League to play in the AFL.

As reflected upon earlier, at the conclusion of the 2010 AFL season, Gary Ablett decided to leave his home town and club, Geelong, to play for the Gold Coast Suns. Ablett was drafted to Geelong under the ‘father/son’ rule as his father, Gary Senior, had played 242 games for Geelong. Gary Ablett Junior played 192 games for Geelong, where he won two premierships and a Brownlow Medal. He was offered a lucrative multi-million dollar contract to leave Geelong for the Gold Coast Suns, and while some argued his decision to defect was influenced by factors such as the opportunity to be captain of a new, developing club, a change in environment and lifestyle and the opportunity to move to a better climate, the majority of those who were interviewed believed money was at the forefront of his decision.

When asked why they believed Ablett defected from Geelong to Gold Coast, the interview participants answered with the following comments:

Jason Lee:

“Money no doubt had an impact, and a significant one.”

Neil Duncan:

“Yeah, I think money was the overriding motivator. I think the other issues are the opening of a new frontier and all that were all pluses, but I think at the end of the day he got an offer too good to refuse and I don’t begrudge him that...”

Zak Kardachi:

\[448 \text{Lee, J., Personal interview, June 13, 2013.}\]
\[449 \text{Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.}\]
“Money…his dad played for the club, he’d played for the club, he’d won premierships, he won a Brownlow Medal there, he’d, you know, grown up in Geelong. How much more money do you need for more money.”  

Scott Hutchins:

“I would say money is the main factor, you can’t argue that. I don’t blame him for it one little bit.”

Josh Forte:

“I think he left 100% for money and I think it was the wrong decision. I know he argues that he did it to experience a tremendous opportunity (at his new) club. I think if you’re not good enough to captain a club in a champion side that is a very defeatist attitude to then leave. I think he would’ve had sustained success at Geelong if he had of stayed. I think, yeah, he absolutely chased the money and to say he could move up (to the Gold Coast Suns) for a better climate, I mean he can do whatever he wants in a couple of years, he can do what he wants.”

Tom Gallimore:

“I think…to be brutally honest, it probably was money and I think, as I said before about player management and what not…there’s only a certain amount of time you’re going to be able to make money.”

Stuart Osbourne:

“Money…I don’t begrudge him…it was hard, like he’d been offered money that sets him up for life, that Geelong could never match…I don’t begrudge him the decision at all.”

Michael Westland:

“Money…look, I consider myself a loyal person – quite a fierce loyal person (and) to give up (a) big part of you for money when you probably don’t need it when living on 500 grand or a million and half (a year)...I think I wouldn’t have made the same decision…”

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As the above illuminates, the football community believes that money played some role in Gary Ablett’s decision to defect from Geelong to the Gold Coast. In fact, many believe it was the driving influence. And, while some believed that he made the wrong decision, the majority stated that they did not begrudge him for leaving Geelong for financial gain at the Suns.

The above highlights the football community do indeed see play as a means for players to make money. Play is now their job; their source of income and in instances such as Gary Ablett’s defection to the Gold Coast, the football community believe it is perfectly reasonable to place the importance of economic capital ahead of notions of loyalty and tradition.

Likewise, it appears the interview participants also recognised money as the primary motivator when National Rugby League converts Karmichael Hunt and Isreal Folau defecte d from the National Rugby League (NRL) to play Australian football in the AFL. The majority of interview participants supported the claim that Hunt and Folau were transformed into commodities by the AFL and utilised to sell the AFL brand to Queensland and NSW consumers. Furthermore, they believed that in choosing to play in the AFL ahead of the NRL, Hunt and Folau were making money their priority and purpose of participating in play. As such, it would appear that not only have the players been commodified and utilised by the AFL to make money, but so too has the play element which is now a tool, utilised by the players, to accumulate economic capital. This is highlighted in the following responses provided by interview participants when asked why Hunt and Folau defected from the NRL to the AFL and why the AFL was so keen to pursue them:

Jason Lee:

“Well I think A, they did it because it was a branding exercise, purely. You’re getting two central figures in another code (and) converting them over. They (the AFL) wanted to hit the target audience of the young kids following NRL and Karmichael Hunt was playing NRL as well.”

Jeremiah Ryan:

“The AFL didn’t go out and pay for players. They went out and bought profiles. They went out and identified players that were already popular with sports viewers in these areas where the AFL was trying to expand. Karmichael Hunt I think played for the (Brisbane) Broncos, so he would’ve been popular in the Gold Coast area, so straightaway when that club starts up and they’re trying to get people to come and watch their team – the people


that are going to go and watch – they already know a player, that’s Karmichael Hunt...They bought their profile for marketing.”

Scott Hutchins:

“They’re (Hunt and Folau) marketing tools. (The) AFL was using them to try and expand the game into those areas and to attract new fans. And that’s clearly the way doing it, trying to establish fans in rugby states. I guess (recruiting) two of rugby’s biggest stars is obviously a great way to go about marketing the game.”

Josh Forte:

“Well it was purely for marketing purposes in the states where these clubs were – New South Wales and Queensland. I think it was a terrific decision...it may not have made an NRL fan become an AFL fan, but it certainly made them think about the game and it would’ve flooded the media in those northern states...Yes they (Hunt and Folau) got obscene amounts of money, but it’s big business there, so I think it was warranted.”

Phil Wild:

“I think it (recruiting Hunt and Folau) was purely marketing. I think it was getting a name, getting names that New South Wales, Sydney-siders in particular, would look at and stand up and take notice.”

When asked if they believed that Hunt and Folau had made the correct decision to leave the NRL for the lucrative financial offer afforded to them by the AFL, and if the AFL had spent their money wisely in recruiting two players from the NRL to market the AFL brand, the responses were varied. This is best summarised by the following responses:

Michael Westland:

“Obviously I have to preface this (by saying) I don’t work in marketing and I don’t work in PR or anything like that but I feel the AFL were absolutely right to do what they did because I think if you were trying to make a foothold in a new market, I think you’ve got to find some way of relating to the people in the market. But more than that, you have to make waves. You have to get on the back page of the paper...I think I understand how important it is to be

457 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
read and to be heard and to be seen. So I think the AFL made absolutely the right decision. They were investing a lot of money, so when you think about the total investment and how much they invested in those two players, it’s a scratch on the surface. And I think if you can get the marketing dollar or the PR value out of those two players that’s arguable again.”

Neil Duncan:

“…From a distance and from what I understand, if you are very good at a certain sport why compromise that and go to another sport? No…it think they made the wrong move, both those guys you talked about were the elites in their particular sport….I would think that I would probably be sticking to the game that I grew up with and become elite at – and I would probably stick at that.”

Zak Kardachi:

“Well he (Karmichael Hunt) made the right decision, it doesn’t affect him. What does he care? He’s Karmichael Hunt and he’s laughing all the way to the bank. He lived up there anyway, he’s just getting a lot more money for playing a different game now…and they’re seen as disloyal anyway. I mean Israel Folau went from rugby league…came to the AFL…and went to union. And why would he go to union? Oh for a new challenge…I tell you what, he went to rugby union because there’s more money in rugby union, whatever rhetoric they want to spit out.”

Zak went on to say:

“All that marketing that Israel Folau got, in my opinion is now worth nothing because he spat in the face of the game after a year and just left, took his money and he left…I don’t think (the decision to recruit Folau) was worth the prostitution of the game…To give someone a million bucks, come and be the face of the organisation and then he nicks off. I think that was terrible.”

The above comments highlight the transformation of play into a tool utilised by athletes to make money and that athletes, too, are a brand and commodity utilised to generate awareness of the AFL. No longer do players simply play for enjoyment and fun. As argued throughout this thesis and

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illuminated above, the play element is now also a tool that is utilised by players to make money. Likewise, players are now celebrities, they are a commodity and they are utilised by the AFL to help sell the game to consumers.

By applying the theories of Huizinga and Bourdieu to the above, it appears clear the comments of the interview participants support the argument that because of the dominating influence of the economic and media fields in the sport field, the key participants within the field—the media, the AFL’s football clubs and the players—are constantly battling for economic capital to achieve success.

Interestingly, it appears that the fans were more hostile towards Karmichael Hunt and Israel Folau (and the AFL) when discussing their defection from the NRL to the AFL than they were towards Gary Ablett, who transferred from Geelong to the Gold Coast. While most interview participants stated they believed Ablett placed the incentive of making more money ahead of loyalty, community and tradition, he is still playing Australian football. Furthermore, most interview participants believed he was being paid accordingly for his talents and skill.

However, Hunt and Folau defected from playing the game they had been playing at the game’s elite level for a lucrative financial offer to play a game they had not previously played professionally. Furthermore, in many ways, the AFL treated them like a commodity or means of selling the AFL brand than as football players. Certainly it would seem Hunt and Folau were paid more than most other AFL players for marketing purposes rather than because of their skill or talent on the field.

This raises the question of what this means for the authenticity of the play element. If play is now utilised by the players to generate economic capital and, furthermore, if it is packaged by the AFL and media as an item of entertainment to sell to consumers, has the play element been corrupted? Furthermore, if the play element (and those who play the game) is utilised by the AFL and their clubs to attract corporate sponsors, media attention and, ultimately, increase revenue, does this change the way players and the football community relate to the game?

This chapter has illuminated the fans view of the increased role the economic field and, more specifically, the media field now has in the AFL. One of the fundamental arguments presented throughout this thesis is that the influence of the economic and media fields has transformed the play element, changed the way football fans relate the game and weakened the community around the game. It would appear from the above evidence that the football community does indeed recognise the dominating influence of the media and economic fields in the AFL and the transformation of the AFL into a business, the play element into a commodity and players into entertainers.
The next chapter of this thesis seeks to illuminate whether or not this has affected the authenticity of the play element and if so, how.
Chapter 11: The evolution of the play element in AFL

The preceding chapter of this thesis sought to illuminate the increasing influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL and the dominating influence of economic capital in defining the structure of the AFL and the actions of its participants. From the analysis of the AFL earlier in this thesis and supported by the views highlighted in chapter ten, it seems clear that the AFL and its stakeholders are now inextricably linked with economic capital. However, the aim of this thesis is to also look beyond this to explore the consequences of money’s dominating role in sport for the play element and, most importantly, the community.

Huizinga argued that the transformation of play weakened the community. In fact, he argued that when community was manipulated by money, it also harmed democracy. While the theories of Bourdieu have been applied to Huizinga’s cultural observations as a means of understanding how play has been transformed into an item of entertainment and the consequences of this, the supporters’ view is vital in enriching this theoretical framework as a legitimate model that can be used to understand how the sport field has lost its autonomy to the economic and media fields. Furthermore, the view of the supporters interviewed for this research can also illuminate the consequences of this for the play element and the AFL community.

The views highlighted in the previous chapter support the argument that the AFL has indeed lost its autonomy with economic capital at the core of the activity within the AFL. This chapter aims to understand the consequences this has for the play element from the fans’ point of view. One of the key, underlying narratives of this thesis is that the increasing influence of the economic and media fields in the sport field has transformed play into display and made it a primary function of the AFL’s business objectives. That is, the play element is now a product which is packaged and sold by the AFL to consumers to generate revenue. In doing so, the play element has changed. In Homo Ludens, Huizinga describes play as free, fun, creative, spontaneous, something that is separate from the ordinary and real and which enables people to come together, uninhibited, to enjoy something in common with others. While this thesis argues the influence of money has ensured this is no longer necessarily the case, this chapter seeks to understand if and how the fans believe the play element has changed in the time they have been following the AFL/VFL competition.

The professionalization of the AFL

One the dominant themes emanating from interviews conducted for this research was the evolving change in, and management of, the AFL’s play element. While avid followers of the AFL, many of the
interview participants also play, or have previously played, Australian football at the grass roots level, or followed community football teams in country or suburban Australian Football Leagues. When asked if the play element in the AFL was the same as the play element at the grass roots level of Australian football, most interview participants believed the play product in the AFL had evolved over time and was characterised by features distinctly different to what it was and what is still evident in grass roots football today. The following responses provide an insight into this.

Zak Kardachi:

“...I would honestly say....they (the AFL) changed the game to a point where if you show someone who had never seen AFL, the game ten, fifteen years ago and the game now, without being too hyperbolic, it’s almost unrecognisable as a game and so many things have changed...perhaps that is partly tactics, but I think the tactics were bred out of the change in physicality, a change in the increasing sports science and things like that.”  

Neil Duncan:

“No, I think there is a fairly obvious difference nowadays between AFL and country football, or local football. (The AFL has) a lot more strategy, set plays, structures and although that filters down to a degree, not to that level and so therefore the contested footy that you see at your local level where it is generally man on man...I think that is a little bit different to what AFL is.”

Michael Westland:

“The only word I can think of (to describe the AFL), the best is clinical. AFL is a clinical sport, a clinical game. Everything from the dynamics of the athletes, it’s clinical, to their running, to their skills. Everything is amped up like, you hear the players talk about the speed of the game and I can’t imagine what it’s like going to AFL, but you go from the Under 17’s at North Albury to the thirds, or you go from the seconds at Swinburne to the firsts and the game speeds up...it’s a different level and then you raise that by about tenfold when you get to the AFL.”

Stuart Osbourne:

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466 Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.
“It’s a very polished product the AFL these days, so I think the game’s great. I don’t buy into the whole ‘the game was better in my day’ thing. If I go back now and watch any of the games from the ‘90’s or even the ‘80’s, it is so far different in terms of the skill level (when compared to today)... the skill level and the intensity and the physicality of today’s game is better than it’s probably ever been.”

Scott Hutchins:

“They (AFL football and grass roots football) look like different games. It’s just a world apart. Obviously the skill level is a lot lower (at grass roots level); so, too, is the general way that they play the game; the tactics are a lot vaguer (at the grassroots level). You feel like you can watch the (grass roots) game and go ‘Geez, what’s the coach doing, why aren’t they doing that?’ And I often compare it to the way Geelong have played over the last few years, and certain things like – Geelong, whenever there’s a pack in years gone by, first thing they do is they turn around and feed it backwards towards our own goal, to a player who’s got the field ahead of him and the blokes running past him and they can feed off. It just doesn’t happen at this (grassroots) level.”

Scott went on to say:

“I’d say it (the gap between play in the AFL and play at the grass roots level) probably would be getting bigger, because it is becoming more of a business, with more money being invested into it, more time. Its’ now a fully professional sport. So once you do get to the top, your scope for improvement is a lot higher than it was previously...”

Jeremiah Ryan:

“(The AFL) is much faster, it’s much harder, the game plans themselves are much more complex...and the gap just continues to get wider because a Scott Pendlebury will get recruited at 18 and the second he turns up at Collingwood, they’ve got him on a weight regime and they’ve got him on a diet and he is doing this, he’s taking supplements and he’s doing all sorts of stuff, whereas his mate who he probably played junior footy with, he’s now a brickies labourer, he’s not on the same weight regime, he’s got a bad back, he eats pies for lunch, he drinks beer all week. It’s from that one moment when one player goes to the AFL
and the other player just goes to suburban or country footy, they just start going in entirely
different directions.”

The above responses illuminate the fact that the play element in the AFL has changed from what it
was at its origins and indeed, from what is still a feature of grass roots football today. The interview
participants described the AFL as more professional, clinical, tactical, skilful and polished than what
is evident in country and suburban football. This thesis takes this idea a step further to argue that
because of the influence of the economic field in the AFL, the play element is now the primary
function of the business. In short, it is the play element that is sold to consumers and television
broadcasters in order to generate revenue. Without an attractive play product, the AFL would not
survive within the sports and entertainment industry.

As such, the play element is now managed and analysed like any important product would be in any
commercial business. Furthermore, because the play element is at the heart of each AFL club’s
image and brand, being successful on the field of play (winning) is vitally important to the vibrancy
of the club’s business operations. Therefore, as a business, it is imperative that each club spends
significant time, effort and resources in ensuring the on field (play) performance of their team is a
success. As such, significant money is now spent by football clubs in forming Football Departments
within the business structure of the club and equipping them with the necessary resources to ensure
on field success.

The role of coaches in play

One indication of the importance of the play element from a business perspective is the increased
number of coaches employed by each AFL club. The number of those responsible for ‘managing’ the
athletes and play element has significantly increased with the professionalization of the game, as has
their influence on the way the game is played. This was illuminated by the football fans interviewed
for this thesis. When asked if the coaches had a bigger influence in the game today when compared
to past eras, most interview participants argued that they did. The following comments highlight the
growing influence of the coaches from the point of view of the fans:

Jason Lee:

“I think the coaches had influence back then (prior to the professionalization of the AFL), but
I think their influence is different now. I think back in those days it was more, you know, sort
of fire and brimstone sort of stuff that the coach would deliver – you know, fire up, motivate

471 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013
the players…it was a different role. Now it’s very strategic. It’s tactical, there’s sports science involved…they analyse the opposition very closely. So the influence is still there, but it’s totally changed…Far more goes into it, but I think the number of staff has exploded in the last 20 years, you know. Sports science, physicians...statistical gathering during a game, tactical information that comes through, different line coaches, you know, a forward coach, a back coach, a mid coach, a ruck coach, a specialist coach for kicking, you know, a coach for marking. These are all things that have only been in the game I think probably 15 years. Twenty years ago you had one coach and it was his message and that was the way it was.”  

Jeremiah Ryan:

“If you look back at footy in the 90’s the size of the footy department would have been miniscule compared to the footy department these days. Back in those days you probably had a head coach, a forward line coach, mid field coach and a back line coach – (and) that’s probably one of the rich clubs. Whereas these days they’ve got developing coaches and tactical analysts and guys that don’t even see their own club play. All they do is watch the team their club is playing next week. They do all their research on the opposition. And then you’ve got the mid field coach and he might have a couple of assistants; forward line coach and he might have a couple of assistants and a back line coach and he might have a couple of assistants. There’s coaches and coaches and coaches and they’ve got all this data to fall back on and you can’t for a minute think that footy hasn’t changed with regards to tactics and the development and innovation of how they process information.”

Neil Duncan:

“…the professionalism of the sport has increased over time, they (players) get paid much more money, they have more coaching personnel…it’s much more professional, much more money, the football department years ago might have been one coach who looked after everything, now you might have 10-15 coaches, we’ve got medical staff, it’s much more professional…”

Further highlighting the increasing role of the coaching staff in managing the play element were the comments made by many of the interview participants in relation to who has the most significant influence in determining how an AFL football team plays and, therefore, who is the most important influence in achieving success on the field. While some of the interview participants argued that the

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473 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
athletes who play the game still have the most significant influence in how a team plays, most stated that the coaches’ control of the team made them the most significant influence in defining how a team plays in the AFL.

The following comments highlight this belief:

Michael Westland:

“The influence (of the coach) over 44 players has to outweigh the influence over 40 touches in the game. I mean, you hear players talk, I heard a player for Hawthorn mention that you only actually had the ball for about 40 or 50 seconds in a game, in a game of 120 minutes. Whereas a coach has influence over how the game’s played and the mindset of the players, and the performance of players and I think that would far outweigh the (influence of) the best player.”

Stuart Osbourne:

“The coaches do (have the biggest influence) ultimately because I think they dictate the way…they want their team to play. So there’s an environment for footy that’s been created I think by the amount of money that’s in the game now and, as we were talking about before, the full time players, full time club resources and just generally all that money in the full time (era) and professionalism of the whole thing…But it’s the coaches—they’ve got all those resources at their hand and they’re really the ones that I think dictate the way they apply those resources. So, you know you can talk about recruiting and a lot of other factors, but I think there has to be a vision that comes from the coach or the football manager…I think the coaches then dictate. I suppose the trends, again it’s another modern term, but the trend in football and the way the game has changed over the last ten years has been driven by coaches trying to get the best competitive advantage on the field.”

Jason Lee:

“I think the coaches have a real control over (the way the game is played) and are able to put their blueprint down for how the side wants to play. The player’s obviously responsible for carrying that out, but the coach provides the mandate and the plan. So I think the coaches have the bigger influence.”

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Neil Duncan:

“I think the coach ultimately (has the greatest influence)...we are playing to his game plan. How it is executed of course, is up to the players, but I think, no, the coach, definitely the coach.”

When asked who had the biggest impact on how the Hawthorn Football Club plays, Hawthorn supporter and member, Joshua Forte, responded by saying, “The coach, 100 per cent.”

He went on to say:

“I just think the head coach – and I can only talk for Hawthorn – I just think he was the visionary for our club, he’s had this core group of players from since they were young men, and now they’re all growing up and evolving with him. I just feel the players really do play for the coach; they’re so well drilled with the game plan. I have no doubt that before the game, the coach’s philosophies are being drummed into them and then more often than not, adhered to on the ground. So, I definitely think the coach.”

Jeremiah Ryan stated that he believes the play element is influenced by the players, the AFL and, indeed the coaches:

“I definitely think the players have the greater influence because they’re the ones who kick the scores, but year on year it’s the coaches that have the influences and I think the AFL’s really been wrestling with the coaches to try and get it (the play product) to what the AFL wants it to look like. But the coaches don’t care about how the footy looks, the coaches care about winning games and if your team wins by kicking five goals and the opposition only kicks four then the coach will take that. The coach would be happy...But the AFL’s going to be jumping up and down saying ‘we don’t want that, we want to kick 20 goals kicked in a game, not nine...’ And that’s why the AFL’s been sort of changing certain rules and things like that and I think it pushes against the way coaches have been trying to take the game. So I think it’s a bit of back and forth between the AFL and the coaches.”

However, it should be noted that not all interview participants believed that the coaches now had the biggest influence in the play element and how the game is played. Geelong member, Scott Hutchins, stated that the players still have the biggest influence on how the game is played at Geelong.

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480 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
“...Obviously the coaching staff has a lot to with it, but I’d say it’s a lot to do with – you’ve got about 10 or 12 guys (players) who have been at the club for a long time and have played some successful football and they’ve played mostly in the same manner...they’re still our most influential players, so they sort of dictate in a sense how they play.”

Nevertheless, there is enough anecdotal evidence to support the argument that the play element is now, to some extent, shaped and defined by influences outside of those playing. The above comments highlight that the play element is now affected by members of each football team’s football department – in particular, the coaches, who analyse play just like any manager would analyse any key function of a business. As such, play in the AFL is no longer only an exuberant, energetic contest between two teams striving towards a shared and common goal. It is now also an important function of a business and winning is a core key performance indicator for the club’s business objectives. No longer does the outcome and result of a match only have consequences for those who played, coached or supported the team to win – it now also has consequences for other business objectives of the club. Membership and merchandise sales, crowd attendances and television ratings are all dependent upon the on field success of the club’s team.

Thus, each AFL match is now planned for meticulously by the coaches and players ensuring the way the athletes play, as individuals and as a team, is monitored, analysed and ultimately managed by coaches to ensure their team has the best chance of winning, or at the very least, performs at their optimum. This thesis argues that this has resulted in the alteration of play in the AFL. Indeed, it appears difficult to argue against the increased influence coaches now have in the AFL’s play element. Players are now expected to carry out the instructions of coaches, play certain roles within the team and, as a team, players are expected to play within the confines of the over-arching tactics and structures implemented by the coaches.

This argument was illuminated by several interview participants who highlighted how play in the AFL has changed with the increased structures, tactics, game plans and set plays within AFL games:

Phil Wild:

“Certainly the analysis of it (AFL games) has (increased). I think, though, as well a lot of strategy is sort of converging a bit...I mean 10 years ago you might have said, “just kick it to Jonathon Brown, he’ll take care of it.” Now I think it’s coming towards everyone playing a similar style of game, with a few modifications, based on maybe a few star players. Everyone’s playing sort of fast break football and while coaches have a large influence on

how their actual team plays, to a large extent...you are reacting to what the opposition throws at you...you react accordingly, which is to play the same sort of style (as other teams) to be honest."\(^{482}\)

Michael Westland:

“...you only have to listen to player’s interviews about structures these days. It’s all about marking areas, marking zones and it’s no longer about me manning Joe Bloggs for 120 minutes. It’s about me marking, playing as a defender and me and my other five defenders marking a zone, an area of about 50 (metres) that the ball no longer penetrates in. We might have to mark our man for any length of time but as long as we, as five or six do our jobs together we will win more games than we lose. And then...that six becomes eight becomes twelve becomes eighteen on a field – all marking areas and zones rather than beating their individual opponents.”\(^{483}\)

Above, Phil and Michael articulate how players are carrying out the instructions of their coach to the point of protecting an area on the field rather than simply playing on instinct. Phil describes a homogenous process, where each team’s game plan and style begins to mirror the next. Michael’s description suggests that players are asked by their coaches to play certain roles within the team structure and are therefore restricted to play within the confines of the team’s game plan. Therefore, the question has to be asked, is play in the AFL still pure play or has it been corrupted?

**The new play in the AFL**

Huizinga believed play was based on enjoyment and fun. He saw play as being free and spontaneous and as “a discharge of superabundant energy to seek the satisfaction of some imitative instinct.” For Huizinga, having ‘fun’ was at the core of the play element, but he also acknowledged that within the sport field – and only in the sport field – play, could indeed be serious.\(^{484}\)

The notions of fun, enjoyment and freedom underpin all of Huizinga’s key play characteristics, for if a player was no longer having fun, or was not enjoying him or herself, or no longer felt free within the sport field, then, according to Huizinga, they were no longer playing.

Thus, if players are asked by their coaches to execute tactics and play within the confines of the coaches’ game plan, what effect does this have on the play element? If players are asked to play a particular role within the team’s structure, are they also still able to play with the same flair,

\(^{482}\) Wild, P., Personal interview, May 28, 2013.

\(^{483}\) Westland, M., Personal interview, May 16, 2013.

\(^{484}\) Huizinga, J., *Homo Ludens: a study of the play element in popular culture*, p.13
freedom, spontaneity, creativity and enjoyment that they once could? When responding to this question, the majority of interview participants suggested that the answer was clear—overall they believed the enjoyment, fun and freedom of play had been compromised by the increased influence of the coach.

Neil Duncan:

“I think they (the players) are controlled somewhat. I think...most players are controlled to a degree...I still think the champions in the game will show that (flair). If you are talking (about) Ablett, Franklin, Rioli, the guys of that ilk, they will play with flair and spontaneity...if they are well coached they will be able to do that, but I think most players play within the confines of what the coach is asking for...to go out and play they are restricted, I guess, by what the coach has said they are allowed and not allowed to do.”

Phil Wild:

“From the outside looking in, of course, I’d say they’re (the players) more restricted by the game plan...While there is a bit of room for spontaneity and flair, I guess it’s more up forward and then probably few and far between...So I think there is a bit less space for creativity mainly because of the way the game’s being played these days.”

Josh Forte:

“...there’s far less spontaneity of players and creativity and there’s far less independence of players now. From when we grew up in the late 80s and 90s, you’d find players with so much flair, so much personality on the field. I’m not talking about off it. (There used to be) so much creativity for their team and maybe not the most athletically gifted, which is brilliant football to watch. Whereas now you find more brilliant teams than brilliant players.”

Jeremiah Ryan:

“Oh no, I definitely think in a well drilled team it plays the way the coach wants them to play. They (the players) have almost no creative control. Especially on a broad scale like where they’re going to run, if they run to the centre in the back line the coaches aren’t going to like that because if the ball gets kicked to them and turned over, the opposition, they’ve got a shot in front of goal...so they (the players) will be told to run deep into the pockets, so if it’s

turned over, it’s not easy for them to kick a goal...and it’s your (the players) job, as part of the team.”

Jason Lee:

“I think it depends on the player a little bit, but the majority I certainly feel would have the team mantra and the strategy and the way that the coach wants them to play in their mind throughout the whole game. I think there’d be no doubt about that. There might be the odd exception to the rule, the real mercurial or creative players—it probably it’s harder to get the strategy into them. They probably just play the way they play and certain types of players fit that bill, but the majority I think would be overwhelmed I think at times by the strategy and the tactical way that the coach wants him to play.”

Tom Gallimore:

“I think it depends on who you are as a player, how much trust the coach has in you as a player. I think you need to be able to manage and temper your flair and your creativity. But I think good players can do that. The good players can step up when they need to and show individual brilliance and flair, but they can equally know when to offload to a player that’s 20 metres out in front of them, that guarantees you get a goal.”

Stuart Osbourne:

“I think all players in all teams play a role as part of the system of play that their coach wants them to play. I don’t think, however, there are any players that fully go out there and play with freedom and flair...I think every player goes out there to play the role, but because it’s so systematic, it means that players who do have that freedom and flair to play actually have more ability to shine.”

Michael Westland:

“I don’t think you’ll ever take the individual flair and spontaneity and decision making away from an individual. More and more they’re playing more to a game plan, a structure...but when a player gets the ball...you can’t remove that decision making prowess from an individual, but more and more when the ball’s not with them, or the ball’s moved away from

488 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
490 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
491 Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
their area, they no longer think (for themselves)... (they now think) where does the coach want me to be, and that’s where they go..."^492

However, it should be noted that while all interview participants acknowledged the coaches influence in the play element and the increased expectations of players to play within a role and within the structure and game plan of the team, some argued that players were still able to play with the same amount of freedom, fun, flair and spontaneity. This was highlighted by the response provided by Scott Hutchins when asked if the players were more restricted than they once were.

Scott Hutchins:

“...I don’t think so. I think over the last 10 or so years, there has been more and more talk about the structures and systems that a team wants to play, but I think the players with individual flair, there’s as many in the competition now as there’s ever been. I don’t need to name them – we all know who they are."^493

Scott added:

“...There’s plenty of them (players playing with flair) out there and they still get a chance to show their flair. When they’re out on the field, it’s obviously not down to the pure structure. I think structures in the way they teach them where to – generally where to be more than anything else. Team orientation is obviously important... (but) I think a player’s individual flair and brilliance is always going to overshadow the coaches’ team structures and systems."^494

Nevertheless, the majority of the above comments support the argument that the play element in the AFL has been altered by the management of play from the coaches. The increased analysis of play as a function of the overarching business imperatives of each club, has led to a micro-analysis of the play element and the performance of each athlete on the ground. As such, players are now expected to play a role, rather than play with unrestricted abandon. While this is clearly evident in the AFL, some interview participants believe the transformation of play is not restricted to the AFL, but is also evident, to some extent, within local and grass roots football matches. This was illuminated by two interview participants who spoke about their own personal experience playing football for local, grass roots football teams.

Phil Wild described when he has played within the game plan and structure of a team, rather than with complete freedom. When asked if there had been occasions when he was required to play within the requirements of his coaches’ instructions, Phil answered that there had.

“Yeah, definitely at a personal level. I mean, playing back line as I do, there’s...to be honest, it fluctuates a little bit depending on how well you’ve been disposing the football, but there’ll always be talk (from the coaches) to say ‘look to the open side, don’t kick it down the line.’ Other times it might be ‘know your capabilities, kick it down the line and let’s make a contest.’ Because of my great kick I guess it comes to me a bit more, but we’re often told not to just look down the line, to switch the ball, so we’ll go in short. (We’re told) ‘Don’t be afraid to possess the ball, and try and look for an option that opens up up-field...”

When discussing his football career for a country football club, Joshua Forte stated that being paid by his club to play changed his experience of playing.

“To be honest, it did (change the play experience). When I was 18, 19, realising it was not just a result on the line – there was also money, selfishness certainly crept in, and football loses its innocence. There’s nothing better than running out there when I was 17 and 18, there was just a joy to be playing in front of such a big crowd. It could’ve been 1,000 people, but that’s such a big crowd and it’s exciting and it’s terrific. And then when you do get the money, of course I don’t think effort dropped off, but mentally I was like ‘look, if we do lose this, I’m driving back up the highway with a few hundred dollars, back to Melbourne, I’ll get over it a bit quicker.’ But losses when I wasn’t getting paid, living at home, used to really eat away at me, but I think that financial certainty softened the blow.”

When Joshua Forte was asked if getting paid by his local club to play made play more serious, he responded by saying:

“Absolutely...of course (getting paid meant) a lot of added pressure, but I like that. I certainly didn’t shy away from it, but that added pressure and your family’s expectations as well, because they understand this is a club you grew up in, they don’t want you to hold that club to ransom.”

Furthermore, as was illuminated in Chapter Seven of this thesis, the management of the play element also has the potential to corrupt the outcome of AFL football matches. Chapter Seven

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outlined how the senior coach, Dean Bailey, and the Football Manager at the Melbourne Football Club, Chris Connolly, were charged by the AFL for bringing the game into disrepute by conspiring to select teams that did not give their club the best possible chance of winning. In other words, many argued they were trying to lose in order to finish as low as needed to attain a priority draft selection in the AFL National Draft to have the opportunity to select the best young players available. This is commonly referred to as tanking.

However, in managing the selection of the team with the intent to lose, play had been corrupted to the point where the outcome of the match had been manipulated. There were no suggestions in the AFL charges against the Melbourne Football Club that the players had not tried their best to win, however, there was evidence to suggest the coaches and managers of the club had attempted to ensure they would lose. As argued earlier in this thesis, this not only corrupts the play element, but also the club’s community. Assuming the community is built upon the notion of citizens coming together to enjoy something in common with each other while all striving towards a shared and common outcome or goal, if the common goal the majority of club members are working towards (winning) is corrupted by coaches or administrators, then surely the community is also corrupted. No longer is the whole community working for the same outcome.

Yet, not all football fans interviewed for this thesis were against the idea of their team tanking in order to receive a priority draft selection at the AFL National Draft. When asked if they would support their club tanking to receive a priority draft selection if it was evident their team could not win the premiership, some interview participants said they would.

When asked if he would prefer his team to win or lose if they were in a position to secure a priority draft selection by losing, Collingwood supporter Jeremiah Ryan stated:

“...I’m hoping that we lose. I’m hoping that we drop our half dozen best players and play an extra six kids and give them exposure to senior football.”

Josh Forte and Michael Westland shared a similar view:

Josh Forte:

“...I think it would be remiss of a club not to tank...with the prizes on offer for failing that has been brought forward by the AFL, priority picks, you would be crazy not to influence games

498 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
to lose. So I would be – as a supporter, I’d never like losing, but knowing there’s a prize at the end of it with the top priority draft pick, go for it.”

Michael Westland:

“I probably would (support my team tanking). I think, I probably would because I think statistically, if you looked at it in an analytical view the further you go down the draft the less games are played by every pick. I mean...analytically, you’re better off having the (number) one (draft) pick than having the 21st pick. So if then it came to my club and they had a decision to make whether it came to losing a game to get that top pick, if I went (to the game) and my team was three (wins) and 17 (loses)...going to the last game would I want them to win? I’m not sure I’d want them to win. I would want the players to go out there and give their all, absolutely...if they won that game and we lost a priority pick how would I feel? About the same as I feel with a draw.”

Therefore, it is clear from the above responses that some AFL fans are happy for play to manipulate a certain outcome if it will provide their team with the opportunity to draft the best talent at the AFL National Draft to help them one day be successful. However, if play is corrupted in such a manner, what does this mean for the culture and community of the club? If some within the club are not coming together to help achieve a common and shared goal, surely the corruption of play damages the strength of the community? How can the community be sustained if the common, shared outcome the players and supporters are working towards cannot be achieved because coaches or administrators have conspired to ensure it does not happen?

The fact that some AFL football fans support the notion of tanking illuminates the overarching business characteristics of the AFL. For them, winning can be compromised in the short term in order to achieve long term success, which, as articulated throughout this thesis, can be sustained on and off the field.

However, it should be noted that other footy fans were opposed to their club tanking, believing it had the potential to corrupt the culture of their club. This was highlighted by the following interview participants who stated they would not support their club tanking, even if it meant they would attain a priority draft selection.

Scott Hutchins:

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“I think the fact that you can encourage people to go out there and not so much encourage them to lose the game, but planting the seed in their mind that winning is not the ultimate game, that’s not what they’re there for (and it) is a bit detrimental in the long term. I think it can get ingrained in people (and) they can lose their appetite for the contest, and that is one part where Melbourne (is) the prime example where I think that might have happened a bit.”

Scott later added:

“By going out there and not intending to win a game, I think it can sort of become endemic – it can catch onto players that, you know, winning is not the be all and end all…”

Stuart Osbourne:

“No, it (tanking) would not sit well with me...because I think it’s fundamental to competitive sport that both teams go out with the intent to try to win.”

When describing the consequences of the Melbourne Football Club allegedly tanking, Stuart said:

“...culture is very important to a club and I think if you create a culture where anything but winning is acceptable, or anything but giving it your most (is acceptable) then you create a losing culture and therefore it becomes hard to win.”

Later in the interview, Stuart added:

“For me, there’s no question that the Melbourne players who took the field did that (played to win), but I find it disturbing the hierarchy and the coaching staff and the administration could be involved in a plot (to lose) because again, I just think it’s easy to sit here now particularly when the proof’s in the pudding and say ‘well it didn’t serve Melbourne that well, they got the priority picks and one of them went off to bloody GWS anyway and they’re basically no better off now than they were half a dozen years ago.”

Tom Gallimore:

“I think the broad answer is it’s un-Australian in my eyes (to tank), and I think a lot of people would see it as that. These guys get paid a lot of money and some teams aren’t going to

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504 Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
505 Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
have a great year, but you should go out there and give it your all and try your best. You’re getting paid a lot of money to do so and you should be having fun regardless. Look, it’s tough to get out there and get flogged every week, but try and improve every week and try and make the gap a little bit smaller every week if you’re not going to win. So I would feel a little gutted if I found out that that (tanking) was a deliberate tactic (used) by my team.”

Jason Lee:

“I would be hoping that they (my team) would win. I think as a player, and as a supporter, you always want to see your team with a desire to achieve and the minute that stops I think you can destroy the soul of a club, and I think you’ve seen that with what’s happened at Melbourne. That’s a club that’s just forgotten how to win, and I think that it’s been borne partly out of the fact that they had a mantra from the top down at one stage there to not win. And I see it as a cancer. I think the moment you let that into a club or an organisation that hey, we’re not giving it 100% here, that’s a very dangerous psyche to bring into a club and it’s very hard to get it out, and I think Melbourne are seeing that at the moment.”

When asked if he would be happy for his team to tank in order to attain priority draft selections, Essendon supporter, Zak Kardachi, said, “Absolutely not.”

“Because it’s the same as stealing, it’s the same as dishonesty – you always know that you effectively cheated. You broke the rules, you subverted the rules, you took advantage of the rules and you did something that is not in the spirit of the game or the spirit of the club in order to possibly secure a future.”

From the above comments, it would seem reasonable to suggest that the fans do indeed recognise that the play element can be managed and even manipulated by coaches and administrators to pre-determine the outcome of the play contest. Furthermore, the responses from Zak, Jason, Tom, Stuart and Scott suggest the fans also recognise the impact manipulating play to deliberately lose can have for the culture and community of a club. If a club, such as Melbourne, set out to lose matches, the club’s culture and the community can be weakened.

While the previous chapter analysed the increasing influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL from the perspective of the fans, this chapter has sought to utilise the views of the interview participants to illuminate the consequences of this for the play element in the AFL. Certainly the

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506 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
majority of the fans interviewed believe play in the AFL today is somewhat different to what it was when they were growing up. Furthermore, they believe it is also increasingly dissimilar to the football they play or watch at a local, grass roots level. Likewise, many interview participants highlighted the increased role of coaches in managing the play element by implementing game plans, structures, tactics and asking players to execute instructions and carry out a particular role. Most of the football fans interviewed pointed out that while the game plans, structures and tactics are not new in AFL/VFL football, the influence of the coach appears to be more significant today than ever before. The consequence of this is that the play element has evolved and changed from what it was. Most interview participants supported the argument that because AFL players are expected to often carry out instructions or play a role within their team’s game plan, they are no longer able to play with the same amount of freedom, spontaneity, flair, fun and creativity that they were when football departments had a far less significant influence in the play element.

When considered in context to the previous chapter, it can be argued that play in the AFL has evolved to reflect a function of business. While there is no doubt those playing still play with exuberant energy and moments of creativity and instinct, it appears this has been reduced over time. Because the consequences of the team’s performance on the field now extend to the commercial operations of the club, play is, in many ways, treated as a function within a business and is therefore scrutinised as such. This has been illuminated by the comments of the footy fans outlined in this chapter.

The next chapter seeks to determine if the increased scrutiny of the play element and its subsequent transformation into a function of the AFL business has changed the way the fans relate to game and the club they support. In doing so, it will become clearer if the evolution of AFL football clubs into a business and the transformation of play to display has changed the football experience for the fans and AFL community of which they are a part.
Chapter 12: The fans perspective of the AFL community today

The two preceding chapters have illuminated the influence of the economic field and the media field in the AFL and on the AFL’s play element by highlighting the views and opinions of the football supporters interviewed for this research. This chapter seeks to take this a step further to explore if and how the transformation of play has changed the way AFL fans relate to the play element and the football clubs they support. In other words, this chapter seeks to understand if and how the domination of the economic and media fields in the AFL has impacted the AFL community.

Before illuminating this through the responses of the fans interviewed for this thesis, it is first necessary to understand the importance of this chapter and understand where it fits in the broader context of enriching the theory that underpins this research. To do this we must reflect on the major themes and arguments made throughout this thesis so far. By doing so we can then understand why this chapter is important in enriching the underlying theory of this thesis.

The underlying argument made throughout this thesis is that the economic field and media field now dominate many fields in society, so much so that now one field now mirrors the next. Because of this, the actions, activities, relationships and culture that were once specific to individual fields and autonomous to other fields, are increasingly defined by economic capital. That is, the pursuit of money now plays an increasingly significant role in the purpose of what people participate in, how they act, the decisions they make and the culture they consume. Indeed, everything seems to be about the objective of making money, including the consumption of culture, which appears to have been increasingly commercialised, popularised and commodified in order for the culture industry to generate money. The economic and media fields have not only been fundamental in reshaping and re-characterising fields in society, they are also dominating the actions and activities of the participants within these fields. Their dominance also ensures that one field mirrors the next, making the pursuit of money appear as normal and common sense.

Huizinga argued that one of the most significant consequences of this is that the community has been undermined. Huizinga believes that play in its most autonomous sense was foundational to stimulating communities. He believed that when citizens were playing, they were able to come together to enjoy something in common with others in an unrestricted, autonomous setting, where they were able to act freely without inhibitions, where they could show their whole self and therefore form real and genuine relationships. Huizinga went onto state that these relationships
were generally enriched by the formation of clubs and organisations which enabled citizens to come together to not only enjoy playing with fellow citizens, but to also actively participate in striving to achieve a set of shared and agreed upon outcomes or goals.

However, Huizinga was adamant that for this natural process to work effectively, play must be autonomous, for if economic capital came to dominate play, real and genuine relationships could not be developed for they were undermined by money. To understand Huizinga’s cultural observations with a greater degree of theoretical rigour, Bourdieu’s theories of fields and capital were introduced to reflect how the merger of the economic field and media field with the sport field changed the dynamics of the *habitus* within the field, fundamentally changing the sport element and undermining its ability to stimulate strong communities.

To illuminate this theory in a practical sense, the AFL has been utilised as a case study. This thesis has so far analysed how the AFL has merged with the economic field and media field to become a multi-billion dollar business, which is now part of an ever bigger entertainment industry. Furthermore, the AFL’s play element has been utilised as a case study to highlight how the dominating impact of economic capital can indeed impact and even transform play into a tool for generating profit. Importantly, this thesis seeks to understand the consequences of this by exploring if the AFL’s play element (as a source of revenue for the AFL and the media) is still able to stimulate real and genuine communities.

This thesis has cited numerous examples of play’s transformation into a tool of the economy, highlighting how this has weakening the community. However, this chapter seeks to augment this theory by understanding how football fans relate to the AFL, the club they support and the AFL’s play element today. The two preceding chapters of this thesis have highlighted that the AFL fans interviewed for this thesis believe the influence of the economic field and media field in the AFL has significantly increased and had a significant impact in characterising the play element. However, has this changed the way fans relate to the game, the play element, the club they support and the relationships they form with each other? Have the influences of the economic field and the media field in the AFL, and the subsequent transformation of play, weakened the AFL community, or is it just as strong as it has always been? This chapter seeks insight into these questions through the views of the fans.

**What is community?**

Before we can determine if the play element in the AFL is still able to stimulate strong communities, it is necessary to recall the characteristics that are fundamental to defining strong and legitimate
communities. Once this has been established, we can determine how many of the fundamental characteristics of a community exist within the AFL. This will provide an indication of whether or not the AFL’s play element is still stimulating genuine communities.

As highlighted in Chapter Two, when referring to genuine community, this thesis is referring to the community’s ability to enable citizens to feel a true sense of community within an autonomous setting, whereby members are able to:

- Come together to enjoy something in common with others;
- Feel a sense of belonging and meaning;
- Where strong, emotional ties are formed with other members of the community;
- Ensuring members feel a sense of loyalty, obligation or responsibility to each other; and
- Where members are able to influence and actively contribute to the shared and common goals of the community

The above characteristics will be utilised as a means of judging if the AFL and its clubs are still able to generate genuine communities through a shared interested in the AFL’s play element. Likewise, they will be utilised to determine if the influence of economic capital has corrupted the process of play stimulating community in the AFL.

In seeking to understand play’s role in developing communities today, this chapter will seek to answer the following questions by illuminating the observations, thoughts and opinions of the AFL football fans interviewed for this thesis.

- Do fans still come together to enjoy play in common with fellow supporters?
- Do AFL fans feel a sense of belonging and meaning within the club they support?
- Do AFL fans develop strong, emotional ties to other members of the community?
- Do they feel a sense of loyalty, obligation or responsibility to each other?
- Are members able to influence and actively contribute to the shared and common goals of the community?

**Coming together to enjoy play with others**

As part of understanding if the AFL is still able to stimulate community, it is necessary to understand how football fans come together, how they relate to the club they barrack for and how they communicate with each other. Fundamental to this is understanding the relationship football fans share with the club they support. As highlighted earlier in this thesis, most of the original VFL/AFL clubs were created by the grass roots of society to represent the local community. Clubs such as the
Essendon Football Club, the North Melbourne Football Club and the Richmond Football Club were developed by people in the local community who shared an interest in, and passion for, the game of Australian Rules football. They were formed by local families or church groups or in local pubs and were developed as organisations that attracted people within the local area who could come together to enjoy something in common with other. Thus the relationships formed within these sporting clubs were largely based on the common enjoyment of playing and watching Australian football and the shared pursuit of success. The clubrooms of these football clubs were often a hive of activity and discussion, with locals coming together to discuss not only the game they’d played or witnessed, but also the issues, events or activities relevant to the local community. The local football club was in many respects the spiritual home of the community, with club allegiance largely dictated by family, friends and the proximity of the local football club to where you lived.

While it has been highlighted throughout this thesis that the AFL and its clubs now market themselves to target consumers across all communities, regardless of their location or proximity, it should also be noted that the majority of football fans interviewed for this thesis support their club for reasons beyond money and marketing or the attractiveness of any one club’s brand. Most interview participants barrack for their team based on more traditional reasons such as family relationships, friendships and proximity. Indeed many of the interview participants have very little recollection of ever making a decision to barrack for their team. More often than not, they barrack for their club because their father or brother does or because they formed relationships with their friends while watching a particular club play.

This is best illuminated by the following responses, which outline the traditional reasons that ultimately determined how each interview participant came to barrack for the team they do.

Neil Duncan (Geelong supporter):

“(It was) an older brother influence, actually. I was born in a country town, Yarrawonga, and he barracked for Geelong and he influenced a lot of things that I did at the time, so…”

Zak Kardachi (Essendon supporter):

“...I lived with my dad in a country town in New South Wales. He’s an Essendon supporter, his mother is an Essendon supporter, or she was before she died, I assume she still is...so as long as I can remember I barracked for Essendon and it’s just been a family thing.”

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509 Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.
Jason Lee (Essendon supporter):

“I can’t actually recall making a decision to barrack for Essendon. I have just always barracked for them. My father barracked for Essendon and my entire family barracks for Essendon, and it’s something that I’ve just always done. As I said, I can’t recall making the decision. It was just sort of, I guess, made for me.”

Scott Hutchins (Geelong supporter):

“Dad was a Geelong fan, and I remember following them before I knew what they looked like, just because Dad was a Cats fan, and so was I...I’m glad I did follow my dad, really, because it’s worked out okay, it has worked out okay and now that we’re hours and hours apart, it’s the one thing we regularly talk about. So it’s the first thing we bond over.”

Stuart Osbourne (Essendon supporter):

“My father is an Essendon supporter, which is quite unusual because he actually grew up in a Hawthorn supporting family that lived near Glenferrie Road in Hawthorn back in the days when Hawthorn used to play there. So he somehow broke from that and became an Essendon supporter. My mother, you know, she’s a St Kilda supporter and the rest of her family’s Essendon, so there’s Essendon on my mother’s side except for my mother and then my dad. So, I don’t know, my dad won the battle.”

Joshua Forte (Hawthorn supporter):

“My father is a born and bred Hawthorn man. I think his dad went for Hawthorn. I was born in (the) 1986 premiership year, so I think my dad was pretty happy as well and my baby photos, I’ve got a (Hawthorn) beanie on. So you can only follow what your father does.”

Jeremiah Ryan (Collingwood supporter):

“I barrack for the Pies because when I first went to primary school my three best friends all followed Collingwood. There was never any pressure from my family as to who to follow. My

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dad follows North Melbourne and my mum’s a passionate Sydney supporter but they never really pushed me to follow their team.”

Importantly, many of the interview participants recounted memories of coming together with members of their family to enjoy their common passion for AFL football, enabling them to strengthen their existing family bond.

Scott Hutchins:

“The last two (Geelong) premierships have all been very favourable memories. My favourite one probably…I went to the 2009 premiership with my dad…and when Paul Chapman kicked that match winning goal in the last minute, we both just jumped up and hugged, and I think that’s probably the only time I’ve ever hugged my dad in my adult life, or even before that…the one thing I always remember about 2009 (is) where I was, watching it with my dad, celebrating that match winning goal.”

Joshua Forte:

“Last year’s preliminary final win over Adelaide (was a memorable moment). I got to share it with my brother which was nice, just the two of us…I’m close with my brother, but we’re very different people. I wouldn’t say he’s a sportsman or sports fan, but when it comes to the Hawks, I don’t know, it was a close bond and you find yourself hugging and kissing each other. It’s outrageous, but I don’t know, it goes back to when we were younger. Growing up you might hate each other during the week, but when your family drives up to Waverley Park, it’s common ground, you’re barracking for the home club.”

However, not all interview participants barracked for their team based on family tradition. For Queenslander Tom Gallimore, it was a matter of proximity and barracking for the team he believed represented the community he felt a part of.

Tom Gallimore (Brisbane Lions supporter):

“I’ve lived in Brisbane the majority of my life and that’s been my team. I remember the three premierships with fond memories. It was a long time ago, but I’ve always followed the Lions…they’re my home team. They represent who I am, where I’m from, and that’s why I go for them…I think Queenslanders are pretty passionate about their sports. I think, again, if

515 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
you go onto a code with State of Origin and what-not, we get very passionate about it and very loyal to our teams up there.”

Tom later stated that he and his father feel a connection to the Brisbane Lions, based on the fact they represent his home state.

“...my father was – he’s not a sports fan as such, but he appreciates sport and he barracks fiercely for Queensland and Brisbane teams. He gets excited when he goes to watch a Brisbane or Queensland team and he can appreciate the athleticism on the field. But I also think he’s proud that that’s his state that he’s there for and that he’s watching and that’s his city...I’m a lot more passionate about the Queensland perspective than a Brisbane perspective.”

Therefore, whether a cause of family, friends or proximity, most interview participants clearly barrack for their team because of family ritual or tradition. This is an important point. In Chapter Three, this thesis discussed that Huizinga believed traditions were stimulated by play and stood quite separately to the ordinary and real life, which, he argued, was characterised by neo-liberal and economic rational ideals. That is, Huizinga argued that family, religious or even sporting traditions and rituals were play-like phenomena that were not dictated by economic reasoning. In fact, he believed play like phenomena, such as tradition and ritual, was formed when play functioned quite separately to economic rationalism. As such, it was through play like-phenomena such as ritual and traditional that a true insight into the culture of a community could be gained. So, while football clubs increasingly mirror businesses which increasingly market and package themselves to attract new supporters and consumers of their brand, in truth, it seems that club loyalty, in many cases, is still a matter of family tradition and the old fashioned notion of barracking for the team that represents your community.

However, once aligned to a particular club, is community developed? Outside of a few memorable moments of bonding with family and friends or feelings of pride, how do fans interact with their club? How do they communicate with the club they are part of? Indeed, how do they communicate with each other? As discussed throughout this thesis (and referred to above), football clubs were once considered the spiritual home of the community, where members of the community would meet to discuss club and community issues. Huizinga believed that play was able to stimulate culture and community because it brought people together to enjoy something without inhibition or restriction. In relation to the VFL/AFL, the play element and the football clubs that spawned from the

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518 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
519 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
grass roots enabled people to come together and reveal their true, full and whole self. In doing so, they were able to develop as individuals, form genuine bonds and relationships and work together to achieve shared outcomes and goals.

Is this still the case? How do people relate to each other today? How do they interact with each other and indeed their club? Do football fans still come together to meet at their football club? Is the football club still the hub and centrepiece of the community?

Before answering these questions, it should be acknowledged that Huizinga wrote at a time when electronic media and social media channels were not even thought of. Indeed when Huizinga wrote *Homo Ludens*, the power of traditional media in generating and shaping messages had not yet been fully realised—in fact, they may not have been fully realised even today. Thus it goes without saying that methods of communication in the AFL, just as in the broader society, have changed. However, the necessary characteristics of people communicating to form genuine relationships and community still remain. Whichever way people choose to communicate, if it enables people to express their true and whole self and enable them to work together towards achieving their AFL club’s shared and common goal, then the means of communication can indeed help foster genuine community.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand how football fans communicate with each other, and in particular, their club. Not surprisingly, it seems that today communication between clubs and supporters is dominated by the use of electronic and social media channels, which are utilised to provide members with news, information and insights into what’s happening at the club. This is highlighted in the following responses of the AFL club members interviewed for this thesis.

Neil Duncan:

“…they (Geelong Football Club) keep you in informed and it is more recently through social media…I have felt more included lately but it is more through just keeping you advised of each year to renew your membership, what functions are on…”

Zak Kardachi:

“…you’ve got things like social media now, which are very active and not only social media, you’ve got all the newspapers (which) are obviously online and the Essendon website is

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520 Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.
online and people can comment and people can have their say in a way they couldn’t
before...”

Jason Lee:

“I think the club (Essendon) has become a lot better (at communicating) and very
good at including you...if you’re a member, getting emails, you’re getting updates, you’re getting
alerts on what’s happening in the club...you’re looking at the website all the time, you’re
seeing press releases and updates from the chairman and from the coach to the members,
you know, and I think the club has got better in engaging its supporters.”

Joshua Forte:

“Today with social media, I’m following players on Twitter, getting emails with membership
drives and offers to come to the club (to) do this, do that...I think their social media, and this
is my following them, but then getting on the front foot with videos (which includes) Luke
Hodge addressing the members weekly, the CEO weekly...”

Phil Wild:

“...you get the emails and you know what’s going on with the club, you get your Facebook
updates and that sort of stuff, it makes you feel part of it...The emails are ostensibly what’s
going on at the club, like a lot of other football clubs have – they’ll have videos saying ‘Swans
TV’, here’s an interview with Jarrad McVeigh talking about his latest addition to the
family...the (Swans) Facebook (page) is obviously keeping you up to date with the game if
you weren’t actually there, or a bit of post-match stuff...Facebook, like Twitter is something
just to see what’s happening right at the moment. The emails are more ‘here’s what’s going
on at your club in the next month.’ Typically those emails only go out once a month.”

Jeremiah Ryan:

“I get a couple of email from the club every week. I really like one of the emails each week
(of) Nathan Buckley talking basically directly to a camera and just going over a few things
from, the week past...”

525 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
Therefore, it would seem most AFL clubs are increasing their use of social and digital media channels to engage and include their members, and importantly, inform them about what is happening at their club. However, does this type of communication stimulate genuine communities? From the evidence provided by the interview participants, it appears that members are gathering information and receiving various communications from their club, but not communicating back to their club. In other words, the communication between club and member appears one-way.

Furthermore, it appears that while clubs are informing their members about what is happening at their club, they are not inviting them to collectively contribute to assist the club achieve their goals or objectives. While many of the interview participants highlighted that their club was able to communicate to them more now more than ever, few clubs appear to be encouraging their members to communicate back to them and then engage them in ongoing conversation. One wonders how football supporters can come together to contribute to the shared and common goals of the group when the communication between the club and its supporters is limited and predominantly one-way.

Likewise, if the major channels of communication between the club and its members do not provide a platform for members to engage in ongoing conversation with the club and contribute to the decisions made by the managers of the club, do the members still feel a sense of belonging to their club?

Feeling a sense of belonging

As mentioned throughout this thesis and stated clearly above, genuine community can be stimulated when citizens can come together to enjoy something in common with others, which they helped create or feel a sense of belonging to. In Chapter One we highlighted how members of the local communities came together to build football clubs such as Essendon and North Melbourne based on their shared passion and enjoyment of Australian football. Thus, the community felt a genuine sense of belonging to their club and the game which they created. Indeed Australian football’s Latin motto, *Populi Ludos Populo* suggests exactly that – translated it means ‘the game of the people, for the people.’

Is this still the case? This thesis argues that the dominant influence of the economic and media field has ensured that the fans are no longer the outright number one priority of the game. As AFL football clubs have evolved into professional businesses, the needs and wants of the supporters has

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been replaced by the financial and commercial necessities of the club, ensuring the stakeholders who contribute the most money are elevated to number one status, subsequently gaining the most power. As illuminated in Chapter Eight, no amount of fight or protesting from the fans could stop South Melbourne’s relocation to Sydney or Fitzroy’s eventual merger and relocation to Brisbane. Nor could the grass roots supporters of Australian football in Tasmania succeed in their attempts to win the AFL’s 17th or 18th licence. Those decisions were based on economic rational objectives and commercial outcomes, largely dictated by the media field.

Therefore, do the football fans still feel as though they are the number one stakeholders of the game and indeed the club they support, and if so, how? And importantly, if they no longer feel a genuine sense of belonging to their club, what does this mean for the AFL’s ability to create genuine and real communities?

The best way to answer this question is by exploring if the interview participants are still able to influence the decisions and actions of their club or generate change at their club. If they are not able to make a meaningful difference at their club, then it is difficult to argue that they, as fans, are still the number one stakeholders in the AFL.

Many of the interview participants believe the fans are still the most important participants in the game and of the club they support. When asked if the supporters and members are the number one priority of the club he barraks for, Geelong member, Neil Duncan, stated, “Yes, the members are, no doubt about that.”

He went on to say:

“...I think ultimately it (the AFL) is still for the fans, I mean, without the fans I don’t think you’ve got a product really. So, no, I think the game is still for the fans, but whether I agree with some of the decisions, or sometimes it is influenced by forces outside the fan base...but I think ultimately they are trying to keep it as mass appeal and that means making sure it appeals to the fans.”

Other interview participants shared a similar view:

Scott Hutchins:

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“I think the fans are the number one stakeholder, because without the fans there’s no game. Without the interest of the fans, there’s no TV money, there’s no betting money. It all dries up.”

Michael Westland:

“I’d say the members are first and foremost (the number one priority of the game) because they have invested in the club...a lot of people invest more than money but they’ve made a statement by giving up financially that they want to be part of the club.”

However, more important than supporters stating that they believe they are still the primary custodians of their club is evidence that they can still stimulate change and directly influence the club’s actions and decisions. Importantly, most of the interview participants were able to provide examples of instances where they were able to rally with their fellow members and supporters to drive key decisions and actions made by their club.

When asked if there had been times when the fans had been the drivers of significant changes, decisions or actions made by their club, the interview participants cited the following examples.

Essendon member, Michael Westland, believes that the Essendon Football Club’s decision to terminate the contract of then coach Matthew Knights was primarily stimulated by the disenchantment the Essendon supporters and members felt about the inconsistency of the team’s performance when Knights was in charge.

According to Michael:

“...the people voted with their feet. We were a team that could rock up one week and win. We would lose Anzac Day and beat Collingwood later in the year or we’d beat St Kilda who had been in four preliminary finals in a row. But we weren’t consistent enough and we weren’t playing the type of footy that everyone knew you had to play to be a good side. And the people (supporters) voted with their feet and then the media got on board which I think they got a fair idea from the supporter base...(so) after getting a two year extension before his contract was up, (Matthew Knights) was sacked...You’d have to talk to the people who made the decisions, but I’d like to think the supporter base let their feelings be known and that influenced – if not the final decision – it influenced the questions being asked in the first place.”

“I mean, you can’t listen to everything said by all the supporters, obviously...it’s a passionate game and people are passionate and emotions take over...but when your crowds drop off so significantly there’s something wrong.” ⁵³⁰

Fellow Essendon supporters, Stuart Osbourne and Zak Kardachi, cited the same example when recalling an instance when the supporters had been the primary influence of an important decision made by Essendon club officials.

Stuart Osbourne:

“I think Matthew Knights getting sacked (was a decision the supporters influenced)...In his (Matthew Knights’) second year, they made the finals and everything was good. (In the) third year, things went a little pear shaped and members were pretty unhappy and pretty critical of him...but I think what also didn’t help Matthew Knights, of course, was that there were quite a few high profile (fans) who were also quite vocal in their disapproval of Matthew Knights. So, whether it was the volume of supporters who were against it or the fact that we just had some pretty high profile members who were also against it...” ⁵³¹

Zak Kardachi:

“...it was not a specific movement as in a march up Spring Street to Parliament House, but I think the sacking of Matthew Knights came from a lack of faith from the whole Essendon community and I mean we’re talking about a guy who had a quite mediocre career at Richmond...I think (Essendon supporters) lost faith in him. They couldn’t see the positives, he didn’t connect with the supporters, he didn’t seem to hurt the way we hurt when we lost and I think the support for his sacking (by fans) contributed to it (the club’s decision to sack him).” ⁵³²

Following Matthew Knights’ dismissal as Essendon’s coach in 2009, Essendon announced that club legend, James Hird, would be the club’s next coach. Hugely popular with Essendon’s supporter base, Hird’s appointment was greeted with overwhelming approval from the Essendon members.

Essendon member, Jason Lee, believes Essendon’s decision to appoint James Hird as Essendon’s senior coach was largely driven by the members.

“I think the hiring of James Hird as senior coach was a time when the members were listened to, and the club made a decision based on a supporter base and what they would want. I think certainly there was a feeling in the community, or the Essendon community, that Hird was the man to lead the side, and it probably wasn’t the feeling in a lot of football circles, but I think the club listened to the people on that one and employed him.”

Likewise, Sydney Swans member, Phil Wild believes the appointment of Paul Roos as Sydney’s coach in 2002 was a direct result of the club administrators listening to the wishes of the Sydney supporter base. Midway through the 2002 AFL season, Rodney Eade was sacked as the Sydney coach. Paul Roos was appointed as the interim coach until the end of the season. Many media outlets reported that the Sydney Board of Directors had agreed to appoint Western Bulldogs coach, Terry Wallace, as the Sydney coach in 2003 however, Phil believes the strong support of the Sydney fans for Paul Roos changed the Sydney Board’s decision.

“During the season there was obviously a bit of trouble with Rodney Eade and so on and the team wasn’t going too well, they thought it was a bit of a time for change and initially they (the Sydney Board) say “well we’ll put Paul Roos in as basically a caretaker sort of coach,” and because of the reputation he had with the club that blossomed (throughout the year), the board then basically said “oh you’ve got the job if you want it,” and I suppose we’re not naïve enough to say that (the board) is purely pandering (to the fans), but he’s such a beloved member of the club and held in such high regard that (the fans views) definitely would’ve been a factor...”

Therefore, the above responses from the interview participants provide some evidence of how club supporters feel a sense of belonging to their club and, indeed the game of Australian football in the AFL. Furthermore, the above comments also provide evidence of how the supporters are able to generate change within ‘their’ club. As highlighted throughout this thesis, AFL football clubs have been generally structured to ensure that the controlling power of the club still sits with the members, who are represented by the Board of Directors. Those who sit on any AFL club Board of Directors are elected by the members and it is their responsibility to act for, and on behalf of, the members. In theory, the managers and administrators who make the day to day decisions at the club are answerable to the members.

However, as AFL clubs have evolved to increasingly mirror and act like a business, the relationship with the club and its supporters has also evolved. While the fans were once active and engaged

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members of the club’s community who would come together to work towards a shared and common goal, they are now also a vital source of revenue. Thus, it is very important for each club to remain engaged with its members, for if membership revenue, merchandise sales, crowd attendances and gate receipts decline, so too will the overall income of the club. Therefore, to alienate the members would ultimately be to disengage one of the most significant sources of revenue for the club.

This is supported by Essendon member Stuart Osbourne, who believes the fans are now treated as brand advocates and have been replaced by other, more financially powerful stakeholders as the clubs primary custodians. When asked if he believes the Essendon supporters are the number one stakeholder of the club, Stuart responded by saying:

“That’s an interesting question. No. But I don’t know who is.”

When asked why he believed he, as a supporter, was no longer the number one stakeholder of the club, Stuart stated:

“Well I’ll tell you why. Because if we were the number one stakeholder, then I think we would have input into the decisions of the club.”

Stuart then provided examples of when key decisions were made by the Essendon Football Club without significant consultation with the members. According to Stuart, Essendon’s decision to relocate from the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) to Etihad Stadium to play the majority of its home games was based on commercial or financial objectives, which were used to influence the opinion of the Essendon members.

“When Essendon left the MCG it was a business decision basically. They made what was a solid, strong business recommendation to the members – they basically made the recommendation to the members, put it to a vote and basically said we’re going – our recommendation is to strongly go…and I didn’t really want us to go and I wasn’t (for) that decision to go. But I’m pretty sure they put it to a vote and the vote was overwhelmingly in favour of going to Etihad (Stadium), so they went to Etihad – a good business decision. I enjoy going to Etihad to watch the games, but I just think that’s an example where they (the club) pretty much made up their mind from a business perspective what was a best…it was a quasi-consultation of the members – they sort of went to the members and said what do

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you think? So I don’t think we are the number one stakeholder. I think there are other stakeholders that make the decisions.\textsuperscript{536}

When asked why the members are important to football clubs, Stuart responded by stating they are an important financial contributor to their club.

“There’s a financial element to it. We all sign up and pay memberships, so there’s a financial input, which is important, but whether it’s as important as the financial input they get from sponsors…I don’t deny that clubs recognise the importance of members. I think their (the members) importance is more from an advocacy point of view because I think we’re all sort of like brand advocates of the brand that is (the) Essendon Football Club. I wear their gear and I go out and I talk about the company, so essentially…(for example) if you were (a member of) Apple, just talking about your lovely new Apple phone, that’s great advocacy for Apple…I do that about Essendon every day, every week. So I think it’s important in that regard, absolutely.”\textsuperscript{537}

Stuart was not alone in believing that decisions are made by football clubs based primarily on business objectives and without proper consultation of the members. Fellow Essendon supporter, Zak Kardachi, shared a similar sentiment when discussing Essendon’s home ground. When asked if he thinks decisions made by his football club are made for and on behalf of the supporters, Zak response was:

“It pains me to say this, but I don’t think so as much as I would like to think so. I’d like to see a couple of things change and I know there’s contractual issues and I know there’s monetary issues, but I don’t think we should play at Etihad Stadium as a home ground. I think it’s too small and I don’t think the supporters like it. I think they feel their home is the MCG and that’s the feel I get from a lot of supporters…so in that way I don’t think it’s entirely driven by the supporters, in some ways it is, but not entirely.”\textsuperscript{538}

Likewise, Essendon supporter Jason Lee believes that while club members do have an avenue to be heard at their club, their input into the decisions made by the club is minimal.

“I think the members have an avenue, but I do think that it needs to get better…do the members have an impact on the future and the direction (of the club)? I think they do (but)

\textsuperscript{536} Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
\textsuperscript{537} Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
\textsuperscript{538} Kardachi, Z., Personal interview, May 23, 2013.
it’s probably minimal at this stage, in my opinion. I think the club needs to get better at
giving the members a greater voice.”

When asked if he could recount a time when the Essendon administrators had made a decision on
behalf of the club and its members that he was not happy about and felt helpless to change, Jason
cited the extension of coach Matthew Knights’ contract towards the end of 2009.

“I think the hiring and extension of the contract of Matthew Knights was something that, in
chats with a number of friends who are also Essendon people and are all followers and
supporters, was something that upset a lot of people. You know, just coaching decisions,
decisions (made by) hierarchy and the top level employment is something that everyone will
have an opinion on, and that was a time when we all sort of thought, gee, that’s not the
right call to make.”

Supporters from other clubs also felt marginalised in the decision making process of their club.
Hawthorn supporter, Josh Forte believes that the Hawthorn Football Club’s decision to play four
home games each year in Tasmania was based on the financial gains made by the club for ‘selling’
games to Tasmania and that the fans had little input into the decision.

“We (Hawthorn) substitute four Melbourne games (for) four in Launceston now, but I also
see the enormous financial windfalls in doing that...as a member, I think that’s an enormous
amount of games. That’s four home games gone, which members miss out on. We get
replacement games as part of our membership, to go see other games, but I just think our
club, where we’re at, at present, deserve to be at the MCG or any other stadium like the
MCG.”

Therefore, as the above illuminates, the key decisions made by AFL club executives are generally
largely influences by business outcomes or goals. While most interview participants acknowledged
that there have been times when they have been able to rally together to generate a desired
outcome, there has also been numerous occasions when the interests or wishes of the members
have been superseded by the need to generate revenue. Considering AFL clubs have been
transformed into a business this is hardly surprising. While each club ultimately exists to win
premierships, each club can only exist if it is equipped with necessary revenue streams to ensure
their team can be competitive on the field. As argued throughout this thesis, the link between on
field success and off field prosperity (and vice versa) is undeniable. Thus, clubs will always make

decisions with the ‘bottom line’ in mind—even if it means making a decision without seriously considering the needs and wishes of the club members.

As stated above, club members provide a vitally important source of revenue for each club. Along with money generated from crowd attendances, television broadcasting revenue and sponsorship, club members are one of the key revenue streams of any AFL club. Furthermore, members are likely to add to the income of their AFL club through the purchase of club merchandise and by paying to attend matches. Therefore, while club members were once the predominant contributors of the club, they are now one of many stakeholders who are making an important financial contribution to the club’s financial viability.

This begs the question, because the fans, supporters and members are no longer necessarily the primary decision makers of AFL clubs and are now also a key source of revenue, how has this changed the way fans relate to their club? How do they engage with their club and make a meaningful contribution to club? Are they able to genuinly help the club reach their goal of winning the premiership and if so, how?

These questions are at the heart of the next discussion that needs to be addressed in order to determine if the AFL can stimulate genuine communities.

Playing a meaningful role and making a meaningful contribution to collectively achieve the shared and common goals of the club

As discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis, most AFL football clubs were born from the enthusiasm the community had for the game of Australian football. Each club was developed from the ‘bottom up’ by the grass roots who would come together to enjoy the game with others. Each club was considered an expression of those who built it and as such, it became the spiritual home or hub of the community. While this thesis has argued that the relationship between the clubs and supporters has changed on many levels, one of the most significant changes that is particularly relevant to this discussion is that AFL football clubs are now ‘top down’ organisations. That is, they appear to stand quite separately to the supporters. It is true that each AFL club would probably not exist without the financial support of its members, however it is also true that supporters are asked to ‘buy a membership’ in order to contribute to the club and become a member of the club’s community. This is a fundamentally different way of forming communities and one that is based on a financial contribution rather than active participation within the club. While clubs were once formed from the grass roots, it now appears that to join the community of any AFL club, you are first
required to purchase a membership meaning the relationship between AFL clubs and their members is based on a financial transaction.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the significance of this is illuminated by the work of Thomas Frank, who in his book, *One Market Under God*, argued that today’s definition of what constitutes a community is largely based on individual interests and has economic capital at the core of freedom within a community. Frank discusses the American Financial Industry to argue the shift towards individual incentives motivating citizens to participate within the community. He also argues that economic capital today underlies the foundation and building blocks of community. In doing so, Frank argues that the financial industry has become the model of this new form of community, encouraging mass participation – meaning for the millions of people playing the stock exchange, the market represents *them* and acts in *their* interests and on *their* behalf. For them, playing the stock exchange reinforces the community and democratic notions that Australia, for example, was committed to at its founding – active participation, in common with others, as a community.

However, Frank argues that this type of community is not real. He argues that play on the stock exchange is based on the potential to accumulate economic capital and therefore participation in the stock exchange market is based more on individualism than a collective good. In this sense playing the stock exchange serves to promote and justify neoliberal ideals of free trade, privatisation, deregulation and individualism.

Therefore, does the fact that the relationship between AFL football clubs and its members starts with a financial transaction render the AFL community as ‘not real’? Do club supporters purchase a membership to make a meaningful contribution to their club, or, as Frank suggests, do they purchase club memberships for more individual and self-centred reasons? And, apart from purchasing a membership are fans able to make an active contribution to their club?

Many of the AFL club members interviewed for this thesis stated they purchased their club membership to contribute to their club and help them work towards a shared and common outcome or goal, which, according to Essendon member, Michael Westland, was defined by on field success.

“I think the club and all its members all have a common goal, and the common goal is success.”

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543 Frank, T., *One Market under God*, p. 98
Geelong member, Neil Duncan, stated that he wanted to contribute to his club when they were met with financial distress in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

“Well I wasn’t a member for a long time, but I joined when Geelong got into financial difficulty in the late 1980s and ’90s and thought, ‘Well, I don’t want to see them go into extinction, so I better do my little bit and join up as a member.”  

For Collingwood member, Jeremiah Ryan, being a member legitimates his support for his club:

“I am a Collingwood member because I’ve always been involved in football...I was 30 (when I purchased my membership) and I’ve just sort of always felt as though if you say you’re a member you’re more a part of a club than if you just say you’re a supporter. If you’re a member...your money is where your mouth is. If you’re a supporter, you’re fly-by-night. Like Collingwood had a terrible run in the 90s and a supporter is the sort of person who’s not following the club when they’re having that kind of bad run. A member, they’ve paid their money and they’re always there.”

And, as stated above, for many fans, being a member makes many club supporters feel as though they are contributing to their club to help them achieve their desired goal and to be as successful on the field as possible. Such is the dominance of economic capital within the sports field that fans and clubs alike see it as fundamentally necessary to the on-field success of their team. As such, fans feel that by making a financial contribution to their club they are actively ‘doing their little bit’ to help the club raise enough revenue to spend in their football department, and, ultimately reach the club’s shared goal of making the finals and winning the premiership. Furthermore, by doing so, members feel a part of their club’s community.

Essendon member, Stuart Osbourne:

“I want to do my bit (for the club) and (buying a membership) might be the only bit that I do every year. We sign up and pay (our) membership fee and I might say ‘no’ to all of the other fundraising things they throw my way. For me it’s about supporting the club and I suppose being a part...of the club and to feel like I’m doing my bit and it’s part of that whole experience of knowing that I’m one of 50,000 or 60,000 members.”

Hawthorn member, Josh Forte:

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545 Duncan, N., Personal interview, May 15, 2013.
546 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
547 Osbourne, S., Personal interview, May 20, 2013.
“I like to feel like I’m part of it. I know Hawthorn might have 60,000 members now and it might be difficult to stay part of it, but Hawthorn has based themselves on this family club, all inclusive sort of an organisation. And honestly, even if I buy a membership and I don’t go to a game the whole year, I like to give back to an organisation or a club that has given me so much joy, and does give me so much joy. And now (paying my membership) just feels like it’s part of paying my Telstra phone bill. I pay my membership monthly, it’s automatic.”

Essendon member, Jason Lee:

“I’m a member because I just love the club. It’s my greatest interest outside of family and work. It’s a wonderful club. I think it stands for a great deal and I just get a huge enjoyment from watching the side there week to week…I think (being a member) is a sense of contribution, you know, you feel like you’re part of something if you’re a member. You’re handing over some money and then in turn, back for that, you’re getting a membership, you’re getting sort of an item that includes you in a group of people, and I think you feel more part of it when you’re a member.”

Yet not all club members stated that they purchased their membership to contribute to the income of their club in order to reach a shared or common goal, or indeed to feel more part of their clubs community. Some members had more individual reasons for purchasing a club membership that largely highlighted the influence of economic capital in the AFL. While many of the interview participants claimed that purchasing a membership legitimated their support for their club or made them feel as though they had made an active (financial) contribution to their club, for some purchasing a membership was largely based around ensuring their consumption of play as entertainment.

For Essendon member, Zak Kardachi, purchasing a membership was essential to ensure he could attend games.

“I’m a member so I can go to games...if you want good seats, if you want to be at every game, then you buy a membership, but it’s also good value.”

Fellow Essendon supporter, Michael Westland, is not a member of his football club. Instead, he has chosen to purchase memberships to the Melbourne Cricket Club and the AFL.

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“I can tell you a hundred per cent why we signed up for both of those. The MCC has the best rights…and (being an AFL member) is basically to get grand final tickets. We’ve been to nearly every grand final ever since, that I can remember.”

Fellow AFL and Geelong member, Scott Hutchins, shared similar sentiments when discussing why he was an AFL member.

“I (buy a membership) for me basically…it’s good to be able to say that you are a paid up member, and you feel like you contribute your bit, but it’s mostly just for me.”

Therefore, some club supporters and members did not purchase memberships to contribute to their club and help them achieve on field success. Instead, they had purchased their memberships for far more personal and individual reasons that ensured they could attend matches, Grand Finals or simply guarantee that they are free to attend games when they wanted to. Frank touched on this when he discussed the stock exchange as a means of understanding the definition of community today. He argued that economic capital was at the heart of modern community whereby today’s definition of what constitutes a community is largely based on individual interests and has economic capital at the core of freedom within a community.

Furthermore, even those who did purchase memberships to engage with their club or to feel a part of their club’s community did so by making a financial contribution rather than an active or social contribution. Apart from making a financial donation to their club, few other examples of actively engaging with their club were given by the interview participants. The fact that club members felt they had to ‘buy into’ their club’s community to play a small role in helping the club achieve its end goal supports Frank’s assertion that that ‘economic capital’ today underlies the foundation and building blocks of community.

However, it should be noted that purchasing a membership or simply barracking for their team did ensure some interview participants did feel part of their club’s community.

When asked if they felt part of their club’s community, the following interview participants stated that they did.

Zak Kardachi:

“Very much so…I’ve barracked for Essendon my whole life and my grandmother and grandfather actually have a tile. If you walk up to Windy Hill there are tiles and people have

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their names on them and perhaps a small message and they (my grandparents) have one there and I always like seeing that.\textsuperscript{553}

Jason Lee:

“I spend a lot of time talking to family and friends about the footy. I think it ties into the community. You know, you can be in a cab with a stranger you’ve never met and you ask them who they barrack for and straight away there’s a connection and you’re talking, you know, pretty heatedly about football and it’s just a great connector.”\textsuperscript{554}

However, not all fans felt the same way – instead claiming that as members and supporters who attended matches in the grand stands, they felt more detached from their club than those who were part of the ‘inner sanctum’ of the club. The inner sanctum could, and indeed would, make a genuine and active contribution to the club and engage within the club, rather than around it. Take, for example, the following responses.

Michael Westland:

“I do (feel part of the club’s community), (but) I think there’s probably different levels of how you feel part of that community in that if you’re a part of the inner sanctum you’d feel a lot closer (to the community) than I am. Or you may be part of a supporters group...”\textsuperscript{555}

Jeremiah Ryan:

“Yeah I’d say I do feel a little bit detached...I realise that I’m one of about 70,000 members. So I’m not going to always get a really sort of personal sort of feeling from the club.”\textsuperscript{556}

Geelong member, Scott Hutchins, shared a similar view. When asked if he felt part of the Geelong community, his response was:

“But not as much...I’ve got a good mate who lives in Geelong, grew up there, and I feel like he’s very much part of the community, but having never lived in Geelong...I feel a little bit out of it.”\textsuperscript{557}

Therefore, it appears from the above analysis that the ‘active’ contribution football fans make to their club to help them achieve their goal of winning enough matches to make the finals and,  

\textsuperscript{553} Kardachi, Z., Personal interview, May 23, 2013.  
\textsuperscript{554} Lee, J., Personal interview, June 13, 2013.  
\textsuperscript{555} Westland, M., Personal interview, May 16, 2013.  
\textsuperscript{556} Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.  
\textsuperscript{557} Hutchins, S., Personal interview, May 22, 2013.
ultimately, winning a premiership, centres predominantly upon purchasing a club membership. By
doing so, fans are able to contribute to the great necessity of success and, indeed existence —
revenue. By purchasing a membership fans also feel as though they are legitimating their support
for their club and ‘buy into’ their club’s community.

However, one wonders if purchasing a club membership can be defined as making an ‘active
contribution’ or indeed considered as ‘active engagement in the club.’ As the AFL has lost its
autonomy to the economic field and media field, there is little doubt the relationship between the
club and supporters has changed. Clubs rely on their members, along with sponsors, gate receipts,
merchandise sales, television broadcasters and other revenue streams to survive. As such, members
are described as the ‘heart and soul’ of the football club; the very reason a club exists; the number
one stake holders; the community. Yet, the formation of the club’s community appears to be
fundamentally different to what it was when the VFL was relatively autonomous. As already
discussed, clubs were born from the community as a reflection of the community. And as such, it
was the community who came together to work towards a shared and common goal. Today, fans are
asked to purchase a membership to become a part of the community. They are asked to contribute
by making a financial donation. They no longer work towards a shared and common goal; instead
they contribute to the revenue streams of the business to ensure the administrators of the club can
work towards achieving success.

Indeed fans still seem to come together to enjoy the play element within the AFL, but do the football
clubs facilitate this, or are fans stimulating their own quasi-communities around the game, based on
their shared enjoyment of watching, barracking and cheering for their team? Do they now form
social bonds from chatting with their friends and family in pubs and restaurants or in the
grandstands of multi-million dollar, multi-purpose stadiums instead of within the clubrooms of the
cub they support? And if so, do AFL football club still have the ability to stimulate genuine
communities from within, or are their fans forming their own social bonds through the shared
enjoyment of consuming play in the AFL?

Connecting with the game and each other

From the interviews conducted for this thesis it appears there is little doubt that the AFL still brings
people together to enjoy something in common with others. When speaking about their ‘AFL
football experience’ most interview participants spoke of the social experience of watching their
team play. When watching games of AFL football, most interview participants said they watched
the game with family or friends, often meeting them before and after to congregate together in
pubs, cafés or restaurants to discuss the game they love. This was evident in the following responses by the interview participants when describing their typical day or night at the football.

Jeremiah Ryan:

“More often than not I will catch up with someone beforehand for a few beers and we’ll talk about the game. We’ll generally trash whoever we’re playing pretty badly and if we have to go and sit in different areas we’ll try to tee up to meet up after the game. If we win we will meet up after the game. We’ll have plenty of beer; we’ll have a great time. If we lose, I don’t really feel like going out...”

Scott Hutchins:

“Well (for example), on a Friday night it would be the same as another Friday night. I’d meet up with the same group of mates; a couple of Geelong fans, a few neutrals, you know, we’d go for a few beers and maybe a feed before the game. And we’d go to the game, I’d get quite nervous...and then usually after the game we’d have a couple of beers, go home.”

Josh Forte:

“I’ll meet my brother in Richmond, have a few beers, walk over to the ground. Though I’m a member, I’ve got a reserved seat. I’ll buy a couple of MCC reserve tickets and we’ll go to the bar downstairs before the game...it’s a big social thing. The first quarter is just me and my brother, we spend a bit of time together before the game we watch that first quarter together and then it’s a catch up with some friends, watch a bit of football, then talk with others...So it’s a big social opportunity.”

Jason Lee:

“I’m always with someone else (at the football). It’s either my in-laws, my father in law, my brother in law, my own family or close friends. Yeah I haven’t been to a game on my own for a long time. So there’s usually another one or two people there...it’s a good place to catch up with people, family or friends. It is very much a social thing as well.”

Stuart Osbourne:

Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
“(Going to the footy) would (typically) be very much meet before the game, have a drink before the game, talk about the game for, you know, what our expectations of the game are beforehand, take our seats, watch the game, go to the pub afterwards for a post-match diagnosis. If it’s been a good win, then maybe kick on with a few more VBs and really enjoy it. So, generally for me, it’s not just the two hours of game time. It will be pre-match and post-match.”

Phil Wild:

“I’d (generally) stay out and have dinner somewhere, maybe a couple of drinks beforehand, and then go and see the game, and then depending on the interest afterwards, I guess, we’d go across and maybe have a beer afterwards and digest (the game).”

Tom Gallimore:

“I prefer to be watching (the game) with mates...if they’re not members, or if it’s easier to go round (to their place) – my best mate has a little boy, so I’ll go and watch the game at his place. I would prefer to do that, hang out with someone that I enjoy hanging out with and watching the game that I enjoy watching...it does connect us. I hang out with people that share a common interest and my mates share a common interest in sport. I think a lot of males bond over sport, and females. But I think that’s one of the things we enjoy doing with our mates.”

Neil Duncan:

“Nowadays I go with a family member or family members, and friends from work. But occasionally I will go with friends from school...we generally meet up before the game, have a few drinks through the game and then, sometimes, a few drinks after. I love the occasion, I love the drinks before the game, I like meeting people, I like interacting with people and I love (watching) the game live as it is a much better experience than watching it on television...I think it’s the whole social fabric around it, you have a drink and you have a chat, Monday morning you can’t wait to talk about it...”

Therefore there is little doubt the AFL still stimulates people coming together to enjoy and consume something in common with others. Furthermore, it appears that the AFL is a stimulus for people

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564 Gallimore, T., Personal interview, May 21, 2013.
coming together before and after the game in pubs to socialise and actively engage in conversation about the game. This mirrors the activity that once occurred within the clubrooms of the VFL/AFL clubs and which still occurs within local, grassroots, community clubs.

However, this raises further questions of the legitimacy of the AFL’s ability to generate community. Is catching up with friends for a few beers and a meal at the football or within pubs the same as community? Or is it merely a simulation of what a genuine community is? Furthermore, does this type of interaction stimulate an emotional connection whereby footy fans feel a sense of loyalty, obligation and responsibility to each other or to contribute to the club’s shared goals?

Considering the majority of the interaction between supporters appears to take place outside the football club, it is hard to imagine how it could. Certainly it seems that for the most part, fans now interact with each other in pubs, bars and restaurants because they feel a sense of enjoyment and fun from meeting up with friends to chat about the game. This social interaction between fans is fundamentally based on a common and shared enjoyment in consuming AFL football. It does not seem to be based on a common sense of loyalty, obligation or responsibility to work together to help their club achieve their shared goals. Any emotional connection that fans feel towards each other or to the club they support does not appear to translate into a sense of obligation or responsibility. While they enjoy barracking, chatting about the game in pubs and perhaps even feel obliged to purchase a club membership to financially assist their club, all of this is done outside of the club. Few fans seem to feel obliged to roll up their sleeves, head out to their club and actively contribute to the club’s goal of winning a premiership. Nor are they provided with the opportunity to do so by their club even if they wish to.

This thesis is not arguing that AFL football is without the ability to create meaningful social bonds and friendships however, it appears that the play element and the 18 AFL clubs are no longer driving the community. Fans are still coming together to enjoy something in common with others, but they are doing so in the grandstands or in pubs surrounding the ground. They are no longer meeting within the football club, nor do they appear to be actively engaging with their club to help make a genuine difference or to help them reach a common, shared goal. Apart from purchasing memberships, most interaction with the club, and indeed fellow fans, occurs outside or around the club. Consuming play in the AFL is creating and maintaining social bonds and social interaction, however it is not creating ‘community’ as Huizinga described it should.

So, while the social activity and interaction between fans is in some part community, it is not community in its fullest sense. To understand this it is perhaps necessary to revisit the theories of
Jean Baudrillard, and in particular, his theory of ‘simulacra.’ Baudrillard writes that society has replaced all reality with symbols and signs, and that all human experience is of a simulation of reality, which he refers to as the ‘simulacra.’ He states that in some way everything is an imitation of something else—that one part of life simulates another and therefore all meaning of the ‘real’ was meaningless; for the ‘real’ only existed in the form of the signs that represented its existence.566

According to Baudrillard, “It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself, that is, an operation to deter every real process by its operational double...which provides all the signs of the real and short circuits all its vicissitudes.”567

In other words, the social interaction and experience of football fans appears to be a simulation of community. That is not to say that the social interaction between fans is pointless or in complete opposition to community. On the contrary, coming together to enjoy something, such as play, in common with others is at the heart of what defines community. However, it appears that fans are now just one of many important financial stakeholders, are less engaged in the decision making process of their club and increasingly seem less engaged in actively working within the club to help them reach their common or shared goal of on field success. Certainly most fans are willing to purchase memberships and head along to matches to barrack and cheer for their team. However, it must be said that beyond that, their input is limited.

This is further illuminated when comparing the role fans play in the actions and decision made by AFL clubs with the active engagement and participation of players and supporters who are part of grassroots and community clubs who are largely still autonomous from the economic and media fields.

When describing how they engage with their local club, the interview participants spoke of a genuine community experience where they come together to enjoy something (play) in common with others; where they are the primary contributors and felt a genuine sense of belonging to the club they were part of; where they actively engaged with and contributed to helping the club reach a shared and common goal; and where they congregated, together, in person, within the clubrooms to interact and discuss the game or other community issues of interest.

567 Baudrillard, J., The precession of simulacra, p. 4
This was highlighted by interview participant, Jeremiah Ryan, when he was discussing how he engaged with the local, grassroots club who he played football for, the Swinburne Razorbacks Amateur Football Club.

“Swinburne was a really struggling sort of club for money, sponsorship, for players, for support staff, for everything. I served for two years as President for the club. My secretary and treasurer were both players. The majority of the committee were players. It (the club) was generally driven by the people who wanted to play football. So you really couldn’t get a more stark contrast to the Collingwood Football Club, which is possibly the biggest football club in Australia...so they really are two worlds apart. I felt like Swinburne really needed me. Like if myself and maybe two or three other people died in our sleep the club wouldn’t exist the following morning whereas with Collingwood I know it’ll run until the cockroaches are dead.”

“The people there (at the Swinburne Football Club) are still some of my best friends. (I) talk to them regularly. We won the premiership in 2007 and I got a tattoo of the club logo. I felt very, very close to the club...Swinburne needed people and they needed people to have hands on beyond the ground (to be) working the scoreboard or running the boundary or playing or waving a flag doing whatever whereas Collingwood is different – Collingwood is a professional club...they don’t need a refrigeration mechanic coming down and telling them how to balance the books.”

Fellow Swinburne player Phil Wild, shared similar sentiments to Jeremiah when asked to compare how he engages with his local club, Swinburne, compared to how he engages with the AFL club he supports, the Sydney Swans.

“I guess it’s the same sort of feeling, but even more amplified (towards Swinburne) because...you know the players a lot more intimately at your (local) club and you know them as people, I guess. That really means that you have more of a connection with the club, I guess, and especially where I play at the moment, (at) the Swinburne footy club there’s a lot of social events and a lot of ties between the guys...it’s a really good thing to have.”

“Personally I’m on the committee at the moment, so that obviously means I’ve got a large amount of say in what the actual comings and goings of the club are. I mean, being a university club we don’t have a lot of old boys and so forth, so the people who are on board – the board, the committee – are actually current players. So if there’s something that’s

568 Ryan, J., Personal interview, June 6, 2013.
affecting us and we’d like to change, then we have a very direct ability to change that by changing a part of the way the club operates. We obviously don’t have that opportunity at something like the Swans.”

Phil later described how he felt part of the Swinburne Amateur Football Club community:

“...that feeling of playing with the guys every week and seeing the results come in and so on and hopefully towards the end of the year, getting into the finals, it’s not something you get in any other part of life...even with the Swans...the Swans won the premiership last year, it was amazing (but) I don’t think that would be as good as if my team, Swinburne, won the premiership as well because you’re involved in it a little more closely.”

Phil also actively engages with other members at the club – not only when playing, but also during the week:

“Well, there’s obviously training, so that would be twice a week, probably two hours a go...there’s committee meetings once a month as well, which typically go for an hour and a half. Personally I’m involved in all the social events and so on, so I’ll send out a match report every Thursday or Friday. In between that I guess I’m in contact with the footy club...probably a good extra four or five hours a week...and I do it because I love it, of course.”

Neil Duncan said that he felt more ownership of his grassroots club, than he did his AFL club:

“I knew the people (at my grassroots club) and they were the people I wanted to be with. There are a lot of people (at Geelong) and we’ve got something in common...but they are not the people I necessarily want to mix with every minute of the day. When I was playing football with a local club that was much different situation...I had much more ownership than I will ever have at an AFL level.”

Michael Westland and Scott Hutchins shared similar views:

Michael Westland:

“I’d say 80 per cent of the people I hang around with regularly are from (my local clubs) the Northcote Cricket Club and the Swinburne Football Club. And being part of that in ner
sanctum, you make a generation of friends. And that’s what being part of an inner sanctum of a football club is...it’s a collection of people with similar beliefs that are choosing to be part of that community...they’re the key stakeholders. You know, they invest their time and their emotions in that community...”

Scott Hutchins:

“From a community sense (I) definitely (feel closer to my local club), because after a game I’d stay at the club on a Saturday night, or you’d have functions during the week or a working bee on a Sunday...whereas Geelong, I’d go to the games. I don’t go to events outside of football. So I definitely feel much closer ties to the clubs that I’ve actually been involved in.”

While for Zak Kardachi, football at a local, grass roots level was as play, according to Huizinga, should be — fun.

“It’s a recreation thing, it’s a fun thing...I mean, the club I played for, it wasn’t a really serious club...it’s not life or death that drives your week.”

The above comments made by Phil, Jeremiah, Neil, Michael, Scott and Zak reflect genuine community. Both Jeremiah and Phil discussed feeling a distinct closeness to their club and forming strong social bonds with their fellow club members based upon their active participation within the club. They are able to actively make a difference and feel a sense of obligation to contribute to help the club prosper and attempt to reach their shared and common goals. This stands in stark contrast to the somewhat passive engagement and minimal participation of AFL members with their club, which appears largely centred upon purchasing a membership, interacting with the club through their various digital and social media channels and gathering in pubs to discuss the game.

Furthermore, Jeremiah’s comment that he felt needed by his club goes to the heart of why community, and in particular, the freedom to participate within the community is so important. As highlighted in Chapter Two when discussing the theories of T.H Green and Tännies, being free to participate in the community was central to individuals attaining a feeling of self-worth and, ultimately reaching their full potential. Green wrote that true democracy can only exist when all members of society are free to participate in their community. “When we speak of freedom”, he wrote “We mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something, and that too,

something we enjoy in common with others.”  Green argued that pure freedom existed in the
pursuit of the common good, as for Green, liberty meant the full participation in the life of the
community. For a society to be truly democratic, its citizens need to be collectively active within the
community.

Green was arguing for an active citizenship and a collective will, oriented to the common good. He
believed that through being able to freely and collectively work for an enjoyed and common goal,
individuals within society could reach their full potential. It would appear that this freedom is
compromised or undermined when the sport field loses its autonomy to the economic and media
field.

This chapter has examined the extent to which the AFL can still create genuine communities, by
illuminating the thoughts, views and observations of the AFL football fans interviewed for this thesis.
While the preceding chapters have outlined how the game has been influenced by the economic
field and the media field and how this has transformed the play element, this chapter attempted to
understand if the way fans engage with each other and, importantly their club, reflects genuine
community. There is little doubt that some fundamental community characteristics are still evident
in the way fans engage with their club and, indeed each other, however, as discussed above, to
suggest the AFL is able to generate genuine communities (as Huizinga described them to be) may be
a bridge too far. As the AFL has lost its autonomy to the economic and media field, the ability of the
fans to actively engage with their club to collectively work towards a common good or goal has been
compromised, other than to contribute financially to their club by purchasing a club membership
and barracking in the stands. This has undermined the AFL’s ability to create genuine communities.
While AFL fans are still able to come together to enjoy watching the game with others, they are
seemingly unable to participate within the club, thus they are now more likely to form social bonds
with fellow club members outside and around the club – in pubs, restaurants, on-line, or in the
grandstands. Yet even these interactions don’t appear to translate into a strong sense of obligation
to actively assist their club reach their goal. Some fans may join the cheer-squad, others may sell
raffle tickets, yet it seems the very large majority don’t. Instead they are likely to contribute by
purchasing a club membership. While these social activities do simulate community, it seems the
dominating influence of the economic and media fields in the AFL, which has transformed the AFL

Green: Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings, Cambridge, Cambridge University
Press, 1986, p. 199
and its clubs into businesses, has ultimately undermined the game’s ability to engage its members and stimulate genuine communities.
Conclusion:

The sport field has lost its autonomy. Its merger with the economic and media fields has transformed the sport field into a multi-billion dollar entertainment industry. Consequently, neoliberal ideals and principles dominate the decisions and actions of the field’s participants. The endless pursuit of economic capital and an increasingly intense drive to generate profits has stimulated the transformation of play to display, ensuring the characteristics of play now mirror the dominant ideals of neoliberalism. Play in the AFL is not what it was. Play characteristics of spontaneity, flair, creativity and freedom have been compromised and subverted to carefully managed game plans, set plays, tactics, structures and detailed micro analysis to ensure victory, and ultimately, money.

As such, play’s ability to stimulate genuine communities appears to have been corrupted. The ongoing struggle within the sport field for economic capital has largely replaced old fashioned notions of loyalty, tradition, ritual and active participation of the community within the football club. By utilising the AFL as a case study throughout this thesis, not only has the transformation of play been illuminated, but also so too have the consequences of this for the game, the players, and importantly, the AFL community.

By applying Huizinga’s insightful historical observations of play to the AFL today and interpreting them through the terms and concepts of Bourdieu, Huizinga’s observations have been largely confirmed. Indeed it appears from the analysis conducted throughout this thesis that play in the AFL has been transformed by money. Furthermore, it appears that the decisions and actions of the AFL, its clubs and even its players are increasingly based upon their desire to accumulate economic capital. While money has always been a part of the game, its influence has amplified and intensified over time. Today, neoliberal ideals and principles are now entrenched within the AFL, as characterised by the operation of the play, money media cycle, which is today at the heart of the AFL’s existence.

As discussed when illustrating the play, money, media cycle in Chapter Five, the relationship between the media and the AFL is ultimately defined by the economic and commercial benefit one party is able to leverage from the other. The increased revenue generated from unprecedented television broadcasting rights deals over the last decade has provided an enormous injection of money into the AFL and can also help explain the transformation of the AFL and its play element over the last 30 years.
For the Australian media, the AFL is utilised as a tool to attract large audiences. Indeed, as far as the television media is concerned, the larger the number of viewers watching, the better. Not only do large audiences often translate into high levels of revenue from advertisers, who are eager to sell their products and services to the television audience, but it also provides the broadcasting networks with the opportunity to promote their other programs, ensuring some (if not most) of the audience continues to watch their programs well after the AFL match is finished. Because the AFL is utilised as a tool by the media to make money, it is packaged, marketed, promoted and sold to consumers as an item of entertainment. Indeed, the broadcast of the game has been transformed into a show with the football players, its stars.

However, the media is also an important tool utilised by the AFL to generate the necessary revenue required to survive and thrive in an ever competitive entertainment industry. As such, the influence of the media field in the AFL has stretched well beyond the television screen and is now at the forefront of the decision making and actions of the AFL and its primary participants. The players, for one, are now utilised by the AFL, their clubs and the media as a tool to promote and sell the game. Indeed it has been argued throughout this thesis that Gary Ablett, Karmichael Hunt and Israel Folau were recruited to their respective clubs to promote, market and sell their club’s brand to a new frontier of consumers. As such, today’s AFL players are paid more than any group before them. Furthermore, their participation in play is no longer something they do for fun, fitness or simple enjoyment. It is now their job and as such, it is serious and no longer separate to the ordinary and real. Money, and not old fashioned notions of loyalty and community, is at the heart of their relationship with their club.

Likewise, the AFL clubs are now also preoccupied with generating revenue. Indeed, economic capital is now an essential resource for the survival and success for all eighteen AFL clubs. They are now structured as businesses, with football departments, various levels of management and a Board of Directors whose primary objective is not only to win games of football, but to remain financially viable. Indeed, the play element and those who participate in play (the players) are seen as their primary assets. As such, winning has been reduced to a function of business, resulting in the notions of spontaneity, creativity, flair and enjoyment being subverted to high paying coaches and managers carefully micro managing play in order to ensure their team is playing in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The fact that coaches, managers and even sports scientists have such a significant influence in the AFL’s play element has threatened the integrity of play. Indeed the notions of tanking, match fixing and even illegal substance abuse have been highlighted throughout
this thesis to illuminate the ongoing threat of play’s corruption at the hands of an unquenchable thirst to accumulate economic capital.

The saturation of economic capital in the AFL has also reduced the AFL supporters and members to a source of revenue. Certainly, the media’s stake in the game appears to have grown, as have other key financial contributors such as corporate sponsors and partners. Likewise, the AFL’s overall business strategy over the past thirty years appears to have been based around ensuring the AFL has evolved into a national product with a national television audience in order to attract increasing amounts of revenue from the sale of their television and other media broadcasting rights. The relocation of South Melbourne to Sydney, Fitzroy’s merger with Brisbane and the introduction of the Gold Coast Suns and Greater Western Sydney Giants ahead of Tasmania’s bid for an AFL team, have been highlighted throughout this thesis as a means of illustrating the influence of the media in determining the strategic direction of the AFL since the late 1970’s.

Furthermore, those examples also illuminated the transformation of the VFL/AFL fans and supporters from the creators and ‘heart and soul’ of the club to a mere source of revenue. While the oldest VFL clubs were built for and by the people, in their image and as an expression of their shared passion for the game, the newest AFL clubs are now ‘sold’ to new consumers as an attractive item of entertainment. Moreover, while AFL fans and supporters once felt a genuine part of their community who were able to enrich and contribute to life within their club and who felt an obligation to help their club and other supporters work toward their common goals, today they appear to have been subverted to the powers of economic capital. Neither the South Melbourne nor Fitzroy community could stop their clubs from relocating and merging to the northern states. Their club’s demise was a simple matter of finance. Likewise the community uprising and passion the people of Tasmania has for the game of Australian football was not enough for the AFL to grant them with the AFL’s 17th or 18th licence. The AFL was more concerned with growing their game into new markets such as the Gold Coast and Western Sydney, to attract new television audiences.

Importantly, the observations of the AFL supporters and members interviewed for this thesis confirm Huizinga’s observations about play and many of the arguments made throughout the thesis. The 10 interview participants largely recognised the AFL as a business and confirmed the increasing influence of money and the media in the AFL. Furthermore, while some claimed that today’s AFL players were still able to play with the same spontaneity and flair that they have always been afforded, most believed the growing influence of coaches and management at each club meant that there are now more set plays, game plans, structures and instructions for players to adhere to than ever before, which, they observed, has reduced the creativity and inventiveness of players.
Importantly, their observations about how they related to the AFL today illuminated that the AFL and its clubs are unable to stimulate genuine communities as Huizinga described they should. In chapter two of this thesis, genuine community was described as the community’s ability to enable citizens to feel a true sense of community within an autonomous setting, whereby members are able to:

- Come together to enjoy something in common with others;
- Feel a sense of belonging and meaning;
- Where strong, emotional ties are formed with other members of the community;
- Ensuring members feel a sense of loyalty, obligation or responsibility to each other; and
- Where members are able to influence and actively contribute to the shared and common goals of the community

Indeed it appears that AFL football is still a platform for citizens to come together to enjoy something in common with others, yet they appear to be doing it outside the football club, instead meeting for a drink or a meal at pubs, restaurants, cafés or within the stadium rather than within the club they support. Likewise, while some interview participants stated that they did feel part of their club’s community and illustrated occasions when the game had invoked emotional ties with fellow supporters, outside of purchasing a club membership and barracking in the grandstands, their active contribution to their club appeared almost non-existent. Most supporters saw their financial contribution to their club in the form of purchasing a membership as a legitimate means of actively engaging with, and contributing to, their club, yet this is also an example of AFL supporters being used by their club as a source of revenue.

Furthermore, while AFL clubs are increasingly promoting their club to their members through a variety of social and digital media channels, it does not appear that they are inviting their fans to make an active contribution to their club, nor are they empowering their supporters to help make important decisions within their club. As each club is now structured as a business, they have managers in place to make decisions about the club’s future and as such, the members are treated more like consumers who provide an important source of revenue that ensures the club can survive. However, this has left some AFL fans feeling alienated or unable to actively participate within, or enrich, their club’s community. It seems that the only way most AFL supporters can make a meaningful contribution to help their club work towards its shared and common goals is by making a financial contribution through purchasing a membership. They are not free to act within their club’s
community and as such, their participation in their club’s community is somewhat restricted and passive.

The analysis of the AFL throughout this thesis does not suggest the AFL is devoid of creating some sense of community, but it certainly does suggest that the sense of community within the AFL today is substantially weaker than it was at the game’s founding. Certainly when the interview participants recounted the personal connection they felt towards their local, grassroots football club of which they felt a genuine part of, the inability of the AFL to stimulate the same sense of belonging, empowerment, freedom, active engagement and sense of obligation and responsibility to fellow members that stimulated feelings of satisfaction and self-worth from enriching the community, appears stark.

Importantly, the AFL and its play element appear to be still transforming. Certainly when comparing the AFL to other professional and commercialised sporting organisations around the world, such as the English Premier League (EPL), it is clear that the AFL has maintained a relative sense of egalitarianism, accessibility, fairness and equality that represented Australia’s democratic values at its founding in 1901. Indeed the AFL and its clubs are active within the community, its players are still relatively modestly paid, it is still relatively affordable to attend AFL matches live and it can be consumed on TV and radio for free through the services of the AFL’s free to air, commercial broadcasting partners. However, the stark capitalist, neoliberal, economic rational characteristics of some sporting organisations around the world should be seen as a warning of where the AFL may be headed towards should its current transformation continue.

The analysis of the AFL and the direction it has taken over the last 30 years has served to strengthen and confirm Huizinga’s insightful observations about play. By interpreting the transformation of play in the AFL through Bourdieu’s concepts and terms of fields, capital and habitus, the influence of the economic and media fields is clear. Furthermore, utilising Bourdieu’s concepts to interpret Huizinga’s observations has proven to be a very effective means of understanding the increasing dominance of neoliberalism in characterising the play element in the AFL and the AFL’s transformation into the entertainment industry. In fact, Bourdieu’s concepts could indeed be extended beyond this analysis of play in the AFL to be utilised as a means of understanding what has happened to most fields in society – be it sport, music, politics or education.

From the analysis of the AFL in this thesis, it can be concluded that Huizinga’s observations about play in *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* can indeed be applied to modern professional sport to understand the transformation of the play element and its consequences for
the community. In fact, Huizinga’s observations have been strengthened and confirmed. Professional sport, such as the AFL, appears to have lost its autonomy and is now influenced more than ever by money, which has transformed play and weakened the relationship fans share with the game. This has ultimately weakened the game's communities, which has the potential to corrupt the development of the individual, restrict their ability to reach their full potential and undermine the democratic ideals Australia was committed to at its founding.
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Appendix 1: Confirmation of Ethics Approval

From: Keith Wilkins <kwilkins@swin.edu.au>
Sent: Thursday, 28 March 2013 5:34 PM
To: Arran Gare
Cc: RES Ethics; Kaye Goldenberg; FLSS Research
Subject: SUHREC Project 2013/022 Ethics Clearance

To: A/Prof Arran Gare, FLSS/ Mr Samuel K Duncan

[Bcc: Mr Samuel K Duncan]

Dear Arran and Sam

SUHREC Project 2013/022 How 'play' in the AFL has transformed from 'play' to 'display' and the subsequent influences this has had for the community

A/Prof A Gare, FLSS; Mr Samuel Duncan

Approved Duration: 28/03/2013 to 31/10/2014 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol undertaken on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) by a SUHREC Subcommittee (SHESC3) at a meeting held on 22 February 2013. Your response to the review as e-mailed on 11 March 2013 was reviewed by a SHESC3 delegate.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard ongoing ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.

The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.

A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.
Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance or you need a signed ethics clearance certificate, citing the SUHREC project number. A copy of this clearance email should be retained as part of project record-keeping.

Best wishes for the project.

Yours sincerely

Keith Wilkins

for

Kaye Goldenberg

Secretary, SHESC3
Appendix 2: Ethics Declaration

I, Samuel Keith Duncan, declare that all conditions pertaining to the ethics clearance were properly met, and that all annual and final reports have been submitted.

Signed:

Samuel Keith Duncan