

Sports Racism in Australia: A Fifty Year Study of Bigotry and the Culture of Silence, from Mexico City to Melbourne

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Abstract : The 1968 Summer Olympics will forever be remembered for the silent protest against racism exhibited by American athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos. Also standing on the medal podium was Australian Peter Norman, whose silent solidarity as a white sportsman completes the powerful, evocative image of that night in Mexico City. In the 50 years since Norman's stance of solidarity with his American counterparts, Australian sports has traveled a wide arc of racism narratives, with athletes still experiencing episodes of bigotry, both on the pitch and elsewhere. Aboriginal athletes, like tennis champion Yvonne Goolagong, have endured the plaudits of appreciation for their achievements on both the national and international stage, while simultaneously being subject to both prejudice and even questions as to their right to represent their country as full, acceptable citizens. Racism in Australia is directed toward Australian athletes of colour as well as foreign sportspeople who visit the country. The complex, mutating nature of racism in Australia is also informed by the culture of silence, where fellow athletes stand mute in light of their colleagues' experience with bigotry. This paper analyses the phenomenon of sports racism in Australia over the past fifty years, culminating in the most recent showdown between Heretier Lumumba, former Collingwood football player, and his public allegations of racism experienced by team mates over his 10 year career. It shall examine the treatment and mistreatment of athletes because of their race and will further assess how such public perceptions both shape Australian culture or are themselves a manifestation of preexisting pathologies of bigotry. Further, it will examine the efficacy of anti-racism initiatives in responding to this hate. This paper will analyse the growing influence of corporate and media entities in crafting the economics of Australian sports and assess the role of such factors in creating the narrative of racism in the nation, both as a sociological reality as well as a marker of national identity. Finally, this paper will examine the political, social and economic forces that contribute to the culture of silence in Australian society in defying racism.

Keywords : aboriginal, Australia, corporations, silence

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