

Rapid Hobart - A history of acculturation

Eva Meidl, University of Tasmania

Soccer fever grips the world every four years when the drama of the World Cup is played out. Tasmania too, had gripping soccer years in the second half of last century, mainly due to post-war migrants from Europe. The Mercury's sports reporter 'Winger' attests this with headlines such as 'Migrants' Big Soccer Role this Season' (Mercury 1/4/1958, 29) Indeed, it was migrants, particularly Austrians, who changed the face of Tasmanian soccer in the late 1950s. This essay explores the sporting history of German speaking immigrants and their children and the extent of their involvement in soccer at local levels in Tasmania. I will also show how soccer, apart from being the world's most popular game, functioned as an acculturation practice in Australia. I rely on John W. Berry's widely used definition of acculturation. Berry takes a multidimensional approach that places both cultures on different continuums indicating an individual's ability to maintain their culture of origin while adopting characteristics from other groups deemed appropriate for cultural adaptation (2005).

After the Second World War, Australia felt the need to increase its population intake. With the White Australia Policy still intact, Australia looked to Europe and signed immigration policies with countries such as Austria and Germany in 1952. In the *Encyclopaedia of the Nation* (Jupp, 67) we find that

Australia gained the freedom to select desirable migrants (...) by means of treaties negotiated with a number of European countries, beginning with the Netherlands in February and with Italy in March 1951. Migration agreements were signed with Austria, Belgium, West Germany, Greece and Spain the following year.

This sparked a new wave of German speaking migrants to Australia, long after the first large-scale immigration wave from Germany in the nineteenth century. By the mid-twentieth century, the early migrants had settled and integrated into Australian society. Networks established by them had long since disappeared and were therefore not available to the German-speaking newcomers. As Ian Burnley notes, "While there had been significant German immigration to Australia in the nineteenth century and small-scale migration of refugee intelligentsia in the late 1930s from Germany, the post-war German settlers had to organise their own social institutions" (Burnley, 32).

While, as Stephen Alomes (2001, 130) points out, the established monoculture faced a number of challenges with the arrival of post-war immigrants from Europe, including “the multiculture of the shopping mall; the related multiculture of lifestyle diversity; and, rather less important, the multiculture of ethnically derived traditions,” the new migrants faced the opposite challenge: how to gain a foothold in what they sometimes perceived as a hostile environment that rejected diversity. Some migrant groups concentrated in the inner urban areas of Australian mainland cities. European migrants arriving in Hobart during the 1950s often settled in the Springfield area where the newly released residential land afforded them cheap housing. It has been postulated that ethnic concentration “protected them from racism and discrimination, and made it easier for them to maintain and develop their own cultures, and formal institutions and informal networks of mutual aid that were vital both to newcomers and to other members of the community” (Burnley, 21).

Not familiar with cricket or Australian Rules football, the global sport of soccer provided European migrants in the twentieth century a transition from their home country to Australia. According to Roy Hay, soccer clubs “helped migrants to establish an identity that was both Australian and related to their homeland” (2002, 45). Many young European migrants enjoyed playing soccer and getting together with other people from their home-countries. Southern Tasmania had several soccer clubs with predominately ethnic identities such as Dutch, Greek, Italian and Scottish as well as two Australian teams. Like Ian Burnley, Johnny Warren also suggests that playing soccer provided migrants an escape from racism (2002, 28). Certainly, the links between sport and the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions cannot be overlooked (Polley, 4)

While on the mainland several Austrian soccer clubs had sprung up in the capital cities, Tasmania’s Austrian migrant population was too small to put up its own team. The Austrian soccer player Otto Frick, for example, played with the Italian team Juventus. Otto Frick had migrated to Australia in 1954 in response to advertisements placed by the Australian government in Austrian newspapers to attract skilled migrants to Australia. Initially he worked at Butler’s Gorge for ‘Hoch und Tief Tasmania’ and played for the ‘Black Bears’ of Liawenee, a German soccer team made up mainly of Hydro workers (Frick 2007). Frick was one of many young migrants from Austria who responded to Australia’s drive for European migrants. In 1957 Frick met fellow Austrian Hubert Kaiser who was touring Tasmania on holiday. Kaiser and his brother August lived in Canberra and played soccer for the A.C.T. with soccer legends such as Les Scheinpflug (1994, 375), who as captain of the Australian team, achieved the first score in a World

Cup qualifier. “Many good players had arrived in Australia during the post-war influx, even though they went largely unrecognised by the Australian local community, and the quality of some of the new clubs that they formed was very high”, remembers Johnny Warren (28).

Spurred on by the success of the FK Austria Vienna team that toured Australia in 1957, Otto Frick and Hubert Kaiser decided that Tasmania also needed an Austrian soccer team. Kaiser promised to persuade some of his Austrian friends and fellow soccer players in Canberra to move to Tasmania so that a team could be founded. He kept his word and managed to entice not only his brother but also fellow Austrians Josef Deutsch, Karl Weber, Fritz Hattinger, Josef Rader and their Yugoslavian friends Ivo Krusic and H Becker to move to Tasmania for the all important task of setting up a soccer team (Rader, 2007).

The young footballers arrived in 1958 in Hobart and put up at a boarding house in Lefroy Street, North Hobart, which was run by an Austrian woman called Elizabeth Grassl. The elderly lady took care of the young men and, as a way of showing their gratitude the young footballers called Grassl ‘Mama’. It is ironic that the all-important discussions regarding a name for the newly formed soccer team were held at these digs in Lefroy Street, because an Australian Rules Club named ‘Lefroy’ (after Governor Lefroy) had existed in Tasmania since 1897 (Frick, 2007; Young , 83)



29 Lefroy Street, the building no longer exists

Photo: courtesy J Rader

The founding members considered the name Austria-Hobart, but Josef (Joe) Rader proposed Rapid after his favourite Austrian team. This was agreed upon. However, when the team’s name was registered with the Tasmanian Soccer Association the club secretary changed it to ‘Rapide’ after his favourite German team. (This club was founded in 1893 in Berlin Wedding and is now called SV Nordwedding.) His

unilateral decision to add an ‘e’ to the club’s name did not increase his popularity with the rest of the team (Young, 83). In 1969 the spelling of the club’s name was officially changed to the intended Rapid. The green and white strip of the much admired Austrian club Rapid was already used by another team and so red and white was chosen, making the team look even more like an Austrian team, since the national flag of Austria is red-white-red. The well-known German folk song ‘Oh du schöner Westerwald’ was chosen as the club’s song.

The new soccer club, called for now ‘Rapide’, was built around a group of Austrian migrants who were formerly Australian Capital Territory players and was predominantly Austrian, but German, Polish, Greek and Yugoslav players made up the numbers. Jan Zurascek, a friend of Otto Frick, became the trainer of the newly founded team. The former Juventus forward, Zuraszek, a migrant from Poland, was some twenty years older than the young Austrians. Being childless, he looked after the young players in a paternal fashion, making sure they were in bed by 10pm on Friday evenings so that they would be in top condition for the game on Saturday. The young soccer players affectionately called 42-year-old Zurascek ‘Papa’. The surrogate family set-up in the Lefroy Street boarding house made the early years in Tasmania for these young migrants safe, providing a cushion between themselves and an alien world.

Zurascek spoke good German and the training sessions were generally held in German. To instruct the Greek and Yugoslav players Zurascek used English. In the beginning any park or green field where they could kick a ball in preparation for their first public appearance, served as training ground for the young migrants. Rapide made their debut on Saturday 5 April 1958 defeating the Australian club South Hobart 2-1. Two days later the Saturday edition of the *Mercury* wrote, “A crowd of 800 saw the new Rapide club make an impressive debut. Rapide started off very fast” (*Mercury* 7/4/1958). This first win was the start of a sequence of victories over the established clubs. By 28 April, the new club earned its first headline: “Rapide still unbeaten in Div 1 Soccer”. The reporter continued that “A crowd of more than 1000 saw Rapide retain their unbeaten record in Div. 1 soccer on Saturday, with a smashing 5-1 win over Hobart Rangers at South Hobart.” Winning almost all first division games in 1958, the German Rapide player Frank Gmelch was awarded the player of the year award and later played for the Australian National Soccer team. Chris Hudson writes that Rapide’s “style of play was new to say the least, becoming known as ‘the clever’ team, for their artistry on the ball, seldom seen in Tasmania (1998, 326).



1958 Team photo courtesy J. Rader

Jan Zuraszek (Polish – Captain/Coach foundation member), **Otto Frick** (Austrian – Goal keeper, foundation member), **Josef (Joe) Rader** (Austrian, foundation member), **August (Gustl) Kaiser** (Austrian, foundation member), **Walter Nikolai** (German), **Chris Syrginis** (Greek), **Frank Gmelch** (German), **Freddie Pieper** (German), **Joe Deutsch** (Austrian), **Ivo Krusic** (Yugoslavian), **Hubert (Hubi) Kaiser** (Austrian, foundation member)

Representative sport acted as a location for identity and acceptance and it is therefore not surprising that the Rapid Hobart Club had become a weekend haven for the young Austrians as had other soccer clubs for their migrant communities. Johnny Warren's suggestion that soccer eased the way, and provided safer passage for migrants into mainstream society certainly held true for these young Austrians (216). Indeed, the weekly reports in the local papers, the crowds on the weekends and the fans, many of them female, would have contributed in no small way to the young migrants' acceptance of the foreign culture and to being accepted by the host society. The growing perception of football as a form of entertainment meant that some of the players enjoyed minor star status in Tasmania, something they would have rarely achieved in their home countries, where soccer had a longer tradition and the competition was stronger. Soccer served as a forum for public display of the New Australians' status and identity. The stadium, the 'theatre of the great', has according to Polley, "shown how different classes have assumed specific roles within individual sports, based upon wider divisions of labour and wealth, with sports serving to mirror and reproduce wider social relations" (111). What Polley writes about black immigrants to the United Kingdom also holds true for immigrants in Australia, namely that

Sport, as a popular phenomenon, has had a significant role to play in the gradual process of allowing (black) immigrants and their children to earn some form of respect and acceptance from (white) society. The assumptions underlining this position are optimistically functional. Sport is held as a means of meritocratic

social mobility, as well as a way in which national unity can be redefined and promoted in a multicultural setting (Polley, 142).

While adult male migrants could use soccer, a sport popular in their home country and accepted in Australia, as a cultural link, the stress endured by non-English speaking migrants was felt most by some children of school age, who migrated with their parents to Australia. Arriving in Hobart in 1957, ten-year old Othmar (Otto) Bachinger was put into an all-English speaking classroom. His father, wishing to protect his son, instructed him, to answer 'no' to anything he was not sure about. Understanding very little of what was going on in the classroom, the most enjoyable thing to look forward to during school hours was morning recess and lunch time, which meant kicking a soccer ball around the school ground with his new school mates. This pleasure was soon to end, as the constant answer 'no' created a situation where his newfound mates seemed to have turned against him and refused to let him partake in an activity, which he so much anticipated. Moving to another school, this did not happen again, even though the scenario was similar. When a Scottish boy at the second school asked Othmar to join in the soccer game, he got the impression that Othmar did not really understand what was being asked. The Scottish boy knew that a female teacher could speak German and took him to her to have his offer 'whether he would like to play soccer for the school team' translated. Othmar agreed, but later on, when the physical education teacher lined up the boys, Othmar feared that this was a selection process and that he, the foreigner, would be rejected yet again. When he received the school's soccer top with the other boys, he was so happy that he slept in the soccer T-shirt that night! It was only many years later that the rejection Othmar experienced at his first Tasmanian school was explained. Meeting up with one of the former school-mates from his first school Othmar was told that the boys were keen for him to play for the school team and, seeing that he kept refusing they in turn rejected him (Bachinger, 2007).

Rapid Hobart was never a purely Austrian or even purely German speaking soccer club. While within the soccer teams camaraderie transcended class and ethnicity, belonging to the club also meant the defence of tribal territory. The club song and the club dress strengthened the loyalty and produced an identity the players and their fans could be proud of. Soccer proved a successful vehicle for integration into mainstream society because it offered "a transcendent social, as well as visually and theatrically artistic, expression" (Alomes, 124). The euphoria created for the players by soccer in Tasmania translated to the women who supported their teams, and Rapid became pioneers of women's soccer in Tasmania. The first

women's soccer match was a charity match between Rapid and City-United, but unfortunately the outcome is unknown.

Over the years the configuration of the players and the fortunes of the club varied. Coached by Alex Sarfalvy, Rapid won the Southern Tasmanian title, the Ascot Cup and the Charles Lucas Memorial Trophy in 1961 (Hudson, 137-8). Called 'classy' by Hudson, the team still had seven German-speaking players in its first division. One of the most memorable years of Rapid was 1964 when the club won the Tasmanian's State Championship and also the Championship for the southern region. Yet this year unfortunately also saw a cultural change in the previously friendly competitions and the emergence of hooliganism. Unwilling to accept the judgement of a referee, Juventus players and supporters sought revenge at the final game against Rapid's reserve division (*Mercury*, 6/7/1964, 17.) Police had to intervene, restore calm and protect the referee. In spite of the melee Rapid won the Southern Tasmanian Premiership: 'As a result of their smashing 7-1 win – the biggest defeat Juventus have suffered in this division – Rapid deservedly won the Southern Tasmanian premiership as no other team can now beat them on points or match their fine goal average' (Hudson, 152). Still playing with some of the original founders of Rapid in the team they went on to represent Tasmania at the Australian cup competition in Melbourne. However, the curiously named "Melbourne Just" team knocked out Rapid in their match at the Melbourne Showgrounds (*Mercury*, 29/4/1968, 17).

In 1965 the founding father of Rapid Hobart, Otto Frick, became the coach of his club. By 1968 Rapid had rejuvenated itself and the team of talented young players gave Rapid a new lease of life. However, only a few of the new Rapid players were of Austrian extraction. Dubbed the 'Rapid babes' by Gordon Burnett the club "gave the most refreshing exhibition of soccer seen at South Hobart for some years..." (Hudson, 152). New and exciting times lay ahead of the now well-established club which could field a complete team with an average age under 21 years. Othmar Bachinger, the boy whose life in Tasmania was turned around by soccer, was one of the 'Rapid babes'.

Many migrants had prospered in Australia and much of their new wealth was spent on their soccer clubs. Many of the migrants had married local girls who supported their husbands' love of soccer. In some migrant families every family member supported the club with passion as player, coach, president, vice president, committee member or fund-raiser (Rader, 2007). During these glory days of soccer in Tasmania, Rapid set up its own social club in Liverpool Street which functioned not only as a meeting place after a match, but also as a night club frequented by

people not associated with soccer. Unlike many other migrant clubs, the Rapid club could not rely on a large enough Austrian migrant pool, complete with talented musicians, to offer traditional Austrian folk music on a regular basis. Hiring the well-known Bossa Nova Band ‘Bob Shirley’, the Rapid club became popular with many young Australians (*ibid.*). This meant that the social club became not only central to the lives of the migrants and their families, but it also became a meeting place for other Australians, thus helping to forge friendships outside the narrow confines of the playing-field. What Berry describes as “a relative preference for maintaining one’s heritage, culture and identity and a relative preference for having contact with and participating in the larger society along with other ethno-cultural groups” was perfectly borne out by the Rapid Social Club (Berry, 296). While ‘card nights’ proved popular with the older migrants, ‘dance nights’ drew crowds from the general population. By 1968 the club expanded into the ‘Rapid Sports Club’ also incorporating a women’s soccer team and a woman’s netball team. But the heyday of the Rapid Sports Club was short lived. Poor management and internal friction led to the demise of the sports club and the premises in Liverpool Street had to be given up in 1972.

Nevertheless, two years on, the Rapid soccer team enjoyed another memorable season, winning the Ampol Cup for the first time in 1974. No doubt, the fact that the Australian soccer team had made it to the World Cup in Munich had helped soccer to become more popular and competitive in Australia. The success of Australian soccer, which rested on the presence of immigrants in the national team, also proved inspiring for local teams profiting from renewed interest. While not winning the State title in 1974 (which was won by Croatia), Rapid brought home the Ampol Cup: “After turning on a thrilling performance to win the Ampol Cup for the first time, Rapid could not match Croatia’s fitness yesterday in their last rostered match. They wilted in the second half” (*Mercury*, 16/9/1974, 15.)

The Ampol Cup went to Rapid in three future seasons too, in 1979, 1980 and 1984. Soccer seemed established in Tasmania and sponsors lined up to secure naming rights. Advertising in the post-war period and the arrival of commercial television were some of the reasons that necessitated sponsorship. Rapid played in division one from 1958 until 1977 when the state wide league was established to which Rapid gained entry in 1978. The club found sponsorship from Wrest Point Casino, but had to share the South Hobart ground. Coached by the professional Ken Morton, Rapid won the Tasmanian State Championship in 1979 and 1980. Now known as Rapid Wrest Point the club joined the southern premier league, after the short-lived state-wide league folded in 1981. A similar pattern occurred in other sports as in the failure of the state-wide league in Australian Rules Football.

Giving up their red-white-red apparel, they now wore green and white, the colours of the fabled Rapid Vienna Club after which Rapid Hobart had been named. Yet this first class soccer club, dubbed the ‘green machine’ at that time had no longer any first-generation Austrian players and the German language had long since disappeared from the soccer field. The two Kannegiesser brothers who played for Rapid in the 1980s had German parentage, but were born in Australia. The only player with Austrian parentage Gary Schmull, was also born in Australia and, like the Kannegiesser brothers, could not speak German. Under their new name, Rapid Wrest Point added another premiership in 1982 to the club’s laurels and won the Ampol Cup for the fourth time.

In the 1980s the semi-professional basis of soccer was costly and, as David Young points out, “The prize money available to clubs was insufficient to sustain the wages, transfer fees and travel money that state-wide semi-professional soccer demanded. Some clubs found themselves on the brink of collapse” (287). Hans Zoetsch, an Austrian who had played for Rapid after his arrival in Tasmania in 1960, lamented the fact that succession happened no longer by a natural evolution through the ranks within the club. In an interview with Gordon Burnett he said: ‘Professionalism has ruined the game in this state, young kids who work up through the juniors and reserves aren’t getting a fair go. Their place is being taken by a player simply bought from another club” (cited in Hudson, 172).

Times had changed and club loyalties were no longer paramount concerns for players as evidenced by the variety of clubs for which Karl Schwesinger had played in his long career: “I arrived from Vienna in 1961, and after coming to Hobart, I soon signed for Rapid after training with them. I have also played for Hobart Rangers, Olympia, Juventus, South Hobart, White Eagles and Clarence, with my most successful time being at Hobart Juventus in the late sixties” (*ibid.*, 168). In the meantime Rapid’s women’s soccer team, dubbed ‘Rapidettes,’ had come of age. On July 20th 1982 a *Mercury* sports article reported that “Metro suffered their first defeat of the season at the hands of Rapid in the Women’s Soccer League on Sunday and lost the ladder leadership in the process”.

Lisa Rader, a daughter of Rapid founding member Joe Rader, took to soccer with gusto. In her career as a soccer player she ‘bagged’ a total of 24 goals and helped win Rapid the southern title in 1984 (Hudson, 238). Elizabeth Elliott remembers: “(...) one cannot forget Lisa Rader who, with her father Joe, the former Rapid full-back, did so much for the sport in the early eighties” (cited in Hudson, 240). The league title went to the Rapid women again in 1987 and Lisa Rader and Christine Kannegiesser (the daughter of the Rapid player Philip Kannegiesser) were selected

for the Tasmanian team and sent to the Australian Women's Soccer Championship in Alice Springs (Hudson, 254). However, in 1990 the first division women disassociated themselves from Rapid, and played under the name of Hobart Raiders until this team folded at the end of the decade (Hudson, 327-8).

When Soccer Australia was formed in 1994, it issued an edict banning all ethnic titles from club names. It was felt by the authorities that the continuation of old loyalties ought to be given up and clubs should be associated with local districts. David Young remarked about the re-naming of the soccer clubs:

In the main, this was accomplished with ease: White Eagles became New Town Eagles, Croatia-Glenorchy became Glenorchy Knights and Hobart Olympia became Hobart Olympic. Only Caledonia lost its identity in this process, amalgamating with Kingborough to form the largest club in Tasmania, with over 500 players on its books (289).

However, this ruling also effectively spelled the end of Rapid. That this edict was a moot point as far as Rapid was concerned, escaped the authorities, for no first generation immigrant from Austria played for Rapid at that time. Furthermore, the word 'rapid' simply means 'fast' and does not bear any connotations for any specific ethnic group. Now known as Kingston Cannons the club relocated to Gormley Park, Kingsborough. The loss of the club's name and culture and the re-location resulted in the loss of continuity. Dropped from first division, Kingston Cannons only field second and third division teams as well as a second division women's team, which folded in 2000. In 2006, only two former Rapid players played for Kingston Cannons, and only one of them is Austrian: Othmar Bachinger.

Rapid Hobart had helped with the acculturation of two generations of migrant soccer players, and the need to keep the link to the great idol Rapid Vienna no longer seemed urgent. The decline in migrant membership and a lack of interest by the grandchildren of the migrants had further led to the decline of the club. Already the children of the migrants reconciled the two cultures within themselves, identifying as Australians and not needing the club as a shelter from an alien world. They and their children have little or no connection to the homeland of their migrant ancestors and do not speak their language. The grandchildren play cricket and Aussie rules football and have little knowledge of the important role Rapid Hobart played in their grandparents' lives. Perhaps because there was no longer a strong connection to the German speaking migrant group represented in the original Rapid soccer team, the name change of Rapid

Hobart went ahead unopposed in 1997 and the once proud soccer club lost its link to the past.

For 26 years (between 1958, the year of their foundation, and 1984), Rapid was the most successful soccer club in Tasmania winning the Tasmanian's State Championship five times (1964, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1982). Rapid were the southern region champions four times (1961, 1964, 1976, 1982). They also won the Falkinder Cup in 1969 and the Ampol Cup in 1974, 1979, 1980 and 1984 (Hudson, 405-7). The many trophies won during Rapid's glory days now gathered dust in cardboard boxes in the changing rooms of Gormley Park. At the end of the 2006 soccer season the club had to re-locate again and now plays at Sherburd Park in Blackmans Bay, about 20 km south of Hobart.

Glossary

AMPOL CUP: founded by the AMPOL company, first held in Victoria on a few occasions around the time of WW II. In the Fifties the Cup was extended to other states.

CROATIA: here the name of a Tasmanian football team.

FALKINDER CUP: The South's Premier Football Cup competition from 1913 until 1970.

NORTHERN PREMIER LEAGUE : Top level football league in Northern Tasmania. Tasmania was divided in two leagues, the second being the „Southern Premier League“.

PREMIERSHIP: League champions

Bibliography

Alomes, Stephen: "Tribal Territories to Theatregoers Seats: The Changing Character of Australian Football Stadiums and Spectatorship", in *Tasmanian Historical Studies*, Volume 7, No. 2, 2001, 119-133.

Bachinger, Othmar: personal information, 2007.

Berry, John W.: "Acculturation", in Wolfgang Friedlmeir (ed.), *Culture and Human Development: The Importance of Cross-cultural Research for the Social Sciences*, New York: Psychology Press, 2005, 291-302.

Burnley, Ian H.: *The Impact of Immigration on Australia: A Demographic Approach*, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Frick, Otto: personal information on the early years of Rapid Hobart, 2007.

Hay, Roy: "Oral History, Migration and Soccer in Australia, 1880-2000", in A. James Hammerton and Eric Richards (eds.), *Speaking to Immigrants. Oral*

- Testimony and the History of Australian Migration. Visible Immigrants: Six.* Canberra: History Program and Centre for Immigration and Multicultural Studies, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University, 2002, 39-61.
- Hudson, Chris: *A Century of Soccer: A Tasmanian History*, West Hobart: Peacock Publishers, 1998.
- Jupp, James (ed.), *The Australian People: An Encyclopaedia of the Nation, Its People and their Origins* (Second Edition), CUP, 2001.
- Polley, Martin: *Moving the Goalposts. A history of sport and society since 1945*, Routledge, 1998.
- Rader Joe and Rader Kay: personal information on the early years of Rapid Hobart, 2007.
- Scheinpflug, Les, entry to *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, OUP, 1994.
- Warren, Johnny: *Sheilas, wogs & poofters. An incomplete biography of Johnny Warren and soccer in Australia*, Sydney: Random House, 2002.
- Young, David: *Sporting Island: A history of sport and recreation in Tasmania*, Hobart: Sport and Recreation Tasmania, 2005.