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Sport as a cultural offset in Aboriginal Australia?

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ABSTRACT

Sport-for-development is increasingly employed as a tool for domestic development within marginalized communities. In Australia, sport is assumed to have a 'natural fit' with Aboriginal communities – accordingly it is utilized in a variety of ways. In seeking to challenge and examine this situation and the dominant / unquestioned / invisible assumptions inherent, we propose the notion of cultural offsetting – whereby sport is positioned as a way of offsetting a variety of losses that Australian Aboriginal communities and peoples have experienced and continue to experience. Within the context of sport, this article examines whether cultural offsetting using sport is feasible and/or desirable. While the conclusion reached is that Aboriginal peoples have been using sport as a cultural offset for some time, serious questions remain regarding the capacity of sport-for-development programmes to offset the variety of losses (e.g. culture, language, identity) experienced by Aboriginal Australians.

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Introduction

Despite being characterized as under-theorized, dominated by rhetoric, and highly fragmented, the area of sport-for-development (SfD) has experienced tremendous growth in the past few decades (e.g. Burnett 2015; Coakley 2015; Coalter 2010; Giulianotti, Hognestad, and Spaaij 2016; Hartmann and Kwauk 2011; Schulenkorf, Sherry, and Rowe 2016). While most programmes and research agendas have been focused in the Two-Thirds World (variously referred to as low-middle income nations, developing nations, etc), SfD is increasingly being employed as a tool for domestic development within marginalized communities in the so-called 'developed' world (Baah-Boateng 2013). Australia is one such example.

Australia is a compelling and interesting example, because in Australia there is the pervasive assumption that sport is a 'natural fit' with Aboriginal people and their communities (Tatz 2009), and the widespread belief that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have a genetic advantage – 'an intangible, innate athletic ability' that can be characterized as 'Black Magic' (Godwell 2000, 13). Accordingly, sport is frequently the go-to entry point and vehicle for a range of Government policy initiatives, as well as commercial and philanthropic interventions into Indigenous affairs. The example we discuss here concerns the

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overlap of several of these agendas, where the development and maintenance of Aboriginal health and well-being is targeted through sport, driven by strategies that incorporate the political and welfare approaches of government, the commercial imperatives of mining companies and other extractives to provide compensatory support for Aboriginal cultural heritage, and the philanthropic programmes of the same corporations driven by market and shareholder expectations of corporate social responsibility (Rossi 2014). These overlapping agendas reveal a complex of assumptions about sports programmes, not the least of which is the link between these programmes and health and welfare improvements. The other major assumption is that funding sports programmes can compensate for historic and contemporary Aboriginal losses either in scale or substance.

In seeking to examine and challenge this latter assumption, we introduce the notion of offsets. The offsets metaphor was originally drawn from double-entry accounting practice, and particularly from the notion of offsetting liabilities with assets. Our use of offsets in relation to Aboriginal Australia in the context of the extractives industry is not original, and our research benefits from the empirical work conducted by a number of scholars in the past decade (see, e.g. Gibbons and Lindenmayer 2007; Gibson and O’Faircheallaigh 2010; Godwin 2014; Gordon et al. 2015; Holbrook and McDonald 2018; Kiesecker et al. 2009; Kujala et al. 2015; McKenna 1995; Moilanen et al. 2009; Saenz et al. 2013; Sheppard 2015). However, our use of cultural offsetting as both explanatory and critical frameworks is original and useful, as our account of SfD programmes here demonstrates.

We begin our account by first outlining what we understand as offsetting in the context of extractive industry practice in Australia and trace its logical development from narrow ecological concerns with the biological environment to applications with broader concerns encompassing the social and cultural environment, particularly that of Aboriginal peoples. We then use the critical framework of cultural offsetting to unpack the phenomena of SfD programmes funded by extractive companies as part of their environmental rehabilitation and philanthropic agendas. In doing so, we further explore some of the other core assumptions that underpin the use of Aboriginal sports programmes as a panacea for a range of historical and contemporary losses. Finally, we outline how Aboriginal peoples have used sport as a self-determination tool to offset the impacts of colonization, racism, structural violence and structural inequalities, and to celebrate their survival as First Nations peoples of Australia in a culturally-appropriate way with each other.

Offsetting

The basic principle of offsetting is that when the presumably beneficial offset is applied, it ‘cancels out’ (i.e. ‘offsets’) any costs associated with certain activities. In the context of mining, offsets are typically intended as a last resort, where developers seek to compensate for unavoidable and irreversible damage. The extractives industry is encouraged to engage in a form of ‘mitigation hierarchy’ that prioritizes strategies of avoidance, minimization, restoration, before eventually resorting to offsetting (Bull et al. 2013). However, the two most common offset mechanisms extractive industries use to compensate ‘for biodiversity value lost at an impact site ... [are those that] protect existing habitats or ... restore degraded sites elsewhere in the landscape’ (Kujala et al. 2015, 513).

Despite the existence of a mitigation hierarchy, offsets are frequently implemented as a first resort by extractive companies who find it more convenient to compensate for losses

caused by development than to mitigate against such losses from the outset (Goodland 2012; Gordon et al. 2015; Moilanen et al. 2009; Saenz et al. 2013). It is also problematic that not all extractive industries apply or implement, 'best practices in environmental management *sensu lato*, nor are the methods used to measure gains and losses standardized across industries [which] may potentially result in best practice offsetting achieving a result which is opposite to that intended' (Sheppard 2015, 11).

The dominance of bio-diversity models of offsetting

The predominant offset model is narrowly framed in relation to biodiversity. Biodiversity offsets are directed towards environmental values and specifically seek to balance any disruption and loss of biodiversity, ecosystem function, and systems due to development (Moreno-Mateos et al. 2015). When offsets are negotiated and applied on biodiversity or environmental grounds, it usually pertains to selected land clearing that is considered to be a zero-net loss in the overall condition and extent of native vegetation on similar lands near development (Gibbons and Lindenmayer 2007). Biodiversity offsets are premised on fungibility, whereby two areas may share the same characteristics and are therefore interchangeable, with no loss arising (Godwin 2011). Fungibility is generally thought to be a relatively straightforward characteristic when operating on a biodiversity model and as such, biodiversity offsets are a common feature in Australia and are used as a policy instrument in many Australian states (Coggan et al. 2013; Godwin 2011).

A variety of other factors concerning the design, implementation and compliance with biodiversity offsets, and issues of fungibility within offset policy are becoming increasingly controversial (Emerton 2000; Gordon et al. 2011; Maron et al. 2012). In part, this controversy relates to the problematic assumption that biodiversity within complex ecosystems can be isolated with respect to the spatial, evolutionary, historical, social, and moral contexts within which they operate (Moreno-Mateos et al. 2015). While a variety of other factors have been identified that limit the success of biodiversity offsets including measurability of the value being offset, temporal changes in losses and gains, and enforcement of compliance (Gibbons and Lindenmayer 2007; Maron et al. 2012; Moilanen et al. 2009).

Offsetting and Australian Aboriginal peoples

Losses related to resource development have impacted directly on Aboriginal peoples through both the environmental impacts on traditional Aboriginal countries as well as on the cultural and social well-being of Aboriginal peoples (Gillespie and Bennett 2012). Aboriginal peoples occupied Australia's mineral-rich continent before European settlement in 1788 (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). By 2013, an estimated ten million hectares of Aboriginal people's Traditional Country had been exploited for minerals by extractive industries (Grant 2013; see, e.g. Australian Mining c.2019). Before 1993 mining companies in Australia were not required to mitigate direct damage to tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage or intangible cultural heritage loss, nor offer compensation to Aboriginal peoples for their impacts (McKenna 1995). They operated as 'closed systems' that shielded them from the influence of public opinion, particularly when operating in frontier regions (Harvey and Brereton 2005).

Facing increasing and widespread criticism of how they interacted with communities (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) affected by their operations, extractive companies responded by formulating corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies and strategies (Jenkins 2004). The term 'corporate social responsibility' is both hard to define or envisage what it should be (Dahlsrud 2006; Levermore 2011). Particularly the meaning of 'social' which, within corporate social policy (CSP) debates, refers to what is, or is not, a social issue (Levermore 2011). However, in this paper, CSR refers to the contributions of mining companies to the social and environmental consequences of their business activities (Jenkins and Yakovleva 2006).

The globalised nature of opposition to mining development and the recognition of Aboriginal rights, shaped and formed the existing relationships between mining companies and their engagement with Aboriginal peoples (Tiplady and Barclay 2007). This type of relationship benefits extractive industries because partnering with Aboriginal communities demonstrates they are not only acting in good faith but also honouring their commitments to sustainable development (Jenkins 2004). However, extractive industry agendas concerning Aboriginal people are two-fold. First, this show of faith appears self-serving. Partnering with Aboriginal communities is a means whereby the business can enhance and build their standing and reputation within the community to show they are acting honestly and are ready to negotiate fairly with Aboriginal communities (Tiplady and Barclay 2007). From an extractive industry's perspective, CSR entails negotiating fairly while building and maintaining a good reputation with Aboriginal communities. However, the ability of extractive industries to negotiate, build, and/or maintain a good reputation with Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal communities is entirely constrained:

Mining must take place where ore deposits occur. There is little opportunity to choose the location of a mine on the basis of optimum social, environmental, logistical or economic factors. (Tiplady and Barclay 2007, 10)

Nevertheless, the drive of extractive companies for new and ongoing site access for operations, and shifts in governmental policies and resources, have seen CSR continue to expand.

The major adjustments and changes that have occurred over the past 35–40 years have altered how governments have moved from the former 'welfare state' (embedded liberalism) with associated financial and policy provisions, to a neoliberal state (Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell 2008). Under neoliberalism, 'private-public partnerships, tax advantages (and expectations) for ... [CSR] and the reduction of social solidarity [have] become key aspects of the new institutional framework' (Skinner, Zakus, and Cowell 2008, 254). It is therefore apparent that neoliberal philosophies have continued unabated, despite the notion that extractive corporations were 'supposedly 'good citizens' following civil society pressure during the 1990s (Hunt 2017).

Today, an increasing number of extractive industries have begun to operate as open systems (Harvey and Brereton 2005). From their perspective, ignoring the 'heightened stakeholder and community expectations, the glare of global scrutiny, the demise of the traditional mining town, and the growing influence of concepts such as "corporate social responsibility", "sustainable development" and "triple bottom line"' would be detrimental to their business (Harvey and Brereton 2005, 2). To maintain their standing and reputation while operating on Aboriginal country(s) in Australia (and globally), extractive industries

began developing relationships or partnerships with communities whose lands were subject to destruction (Harvey and Brereton 2005).

In Australia, the defining moment that changed how extractive industries engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples occurred following the passage of the *Native Title Act 1993* that formally recognized Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights to lands and waters (Rowse 1993). Thereafter, resource companies began to offer compensation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the impairment and/or destruction of cultural landscapes. Such compensation has frequently been monetary but has taken other forms such as the provision of employment opportunities or support for cultural activities including sport (Altman 2009; Altman and Martin 2009; Rio 2011).

The inclusion of sport in such offerings is a popular way to navigate the politically and socially charged landscape of CSR. Sport within CSR is increasingly viewed as an important vehicle to support various forms of economic and social development, particularly at the micro (individual) level (Erez and Gati 2004; Levermore 2011). However, substantive and transparent evidence demonstrating that SfD programmes 'actually' work, is lacking (Cairnduff 2001; Donnelly et al. 2011; Levermore 2011). Despite recently being endorsed by the United Nations (2006), the implications of multinational corporations' involvement in providing aid, professional support and authority over international development projects are yet to be empirically examined in SDP policies (Darnell and Hayhurst 2011). Particularly, CSR management criteria and how it measures its impact on communities (Levermore 2011). Therefore, further extensive evaluations of CSR for sport/development are needed to clarify their intended outcomes and how they contribute to their broader development objectives (Levermore 2011).

The dominance of the biodiversity model (particularly the principle of fungibility) and the narrow use of archaeological methodologies to make cultural heritage assessments has meant that there was little chance for aspects of continuing spiritual and cultural values to be assessed as part of any offset agreement (Atalay 2006; Ross 1996; Smith and Jackson 2006). Given the overall limitations of biodiversity models of offsetting, as well as the lack of any models of offsetting more specific to contemporary Aboriginal Australians, there have been attempts to provide alternative approaches to the assessment of heritage loss and the framing of what constitutes appropriate reparations (Altman 1995; Chino and DeBruyn 2006). One such approach is cultural offsetting.

Cultural offset models

Within the context of the extractives industry, cultural offset arrangements were intended to meet community-wide aspirations for heritage compensation and cultural place management as opposed to other compensatory models that gave primacy to individuals (Chino and DeBruyn 2006; Rio 2011). In pursuing this aim, cultural offset models encourage the adoption of anthropological models of assessment rather than exclusively archaeological models of assessment (Byrne 1991; Godwin and Weiner 2006). This permits a broader and more complete account of the significance of certain regions that go beyond physical artefacts (e.g. stone tools, artwork) and consider sites of spiritual and cultural significance (Byrne 1991; Godwin and Weiner 2006). Such an approach respects the experiences and epistemologies of Aboriginal peoples and helps avoid the replication of mainstream

(Western) archaeological practices that continue to be disadvantageous to Aboriginal peoples (Atalay 2008; Godwin 2014).

Cultural offset models also give primacy to ‘people’s use, history, and cultural (social, spiritual and aesthetic) values associated with heritage’ while still accounting for the composition and diversity of landscapes (Holbrook and McDonald 2018, 248). Such offsets increase the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to ‘look after environments, including research needed to inform better management’ (North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance 2019). However, if the methodologies for assessing cultural and social losses are fraught with complexities, there is a similar problem for the extractive industries with determining appropriate offsetting measures. Of interest in this paper, are how sports programmes intersect with issues of offsetting.

The use of sport for other purposes

Sport has a reputation across many social and political arenas for being able to achieve a variety of individual, community, national, and international outcomes (see, e.g. Coakley 2015; Giulianotti, Hognestad, and Spaaij 2016; Hartmann and Kwauk 2011; Schulenkorf, Sherry, and Rowe 2016). The positioning of sport as a vehicle via which many developmental interests might be served has seen sport included in social policy and justice agendas in many parts of the world (Burnett 2015; Coalter 2005, 2010; Kidd 2008; Rossi and Jeanes 2016). A particular target has been marginalized and/or traumatized youth (Burnett 2015; Donnelly et al. 2011; United Nations 2015a, 2015b; Van Eekeren, Horst, and Fictorie 2013).

The history of SfD in its most recognizable form began in the mid-nineteenth century with middle-class reformers such as Dr William Penny Brookes (Donnelly et al. 2011; Elias 1978; Mullins 1983). Even in their infancy, SfD programmes focused on and targeted those ‘perceived’ as needing a ‘hand up’ – in this early case, working-class English men, women and their children – specifically targeting their education and urban welfare (Mullins 1983). The purpose of using sport then, as now, was to develop character, fair play, teamwork, work discipline and other socially approved characteristics within their target populations (Mullins 1983; Van Eekeren, Horst, and Fictorie 2013). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, sport was viewed as a means of social, physical but also moral development, and an educational tool in facilitating change and character building (Atalay 2006; Levermore and Beacom 2009; Rynne 2016; Van Eekeren, Horst, and Fictorie 2013). These elements are often foundational and highly perceptible in modern SfD incarnations.

Problematising sport-for-development

Despite the seeming certainty with which proponents advocate the utility and impact of SfD programmes, the volume of empirical critique has grown. The overall suggestion that sport does unquestionable good has been labelled naïve and misleading, with a variety of scholars noting that SfD programmes are no panacea (see, e.g. Coalter [2010], Evans et al. [2015]; Nelson [2009]). Coakley (2015) in particular has spent a substantial portion of his career highlighting the Great Sport Myth so there are opportunities to challenge the taken-for-granted assumptions that feed the view that sport is inherently pure and good.

Further critiques of SfD indicate that it remains entrenched in traditional, top-down approaches that tend to come from a paternalistic colonial concern for the 'other'. Darnell (2007, 561) noted that the benevolent training mission of SfD volunteers to empower and assist is, to some extent, based upon a requirement to establish 'a dichotomy between the empowered and disempowered, the vocal and the silent, the "knowers" and the "known"'. Fuelling this concern for the 'other' are the modern neoliberal philosophies and values woven into SfD programme design such that participants (often marginalized young people) are framed as problems, with limited focus on the social determinants that have and continue to impact on those individuals and their communities (Coakley 2011; Dean 1994, 2014, 2015; Rose 2017; Rossi and Jeanes 2016; Rynne 2016).

By generally adopting deficit-based approaches that frame (young) people as problems and focus on weakness (e.g. anti-social behaviour, learning difficulties, drug abuse or psychological problems) there are limited opportunities to emphasise the potentialities of already disadvantaged individuals and groups (Government of Alberta, Centre for Child Wellbeing 2011; Paraschak 2011, 2013; Paraschak and Thompson 2013; Super et al. 2014). Further reinforcing these issues is that SfD programmes tend to be reactionary (i.e. addressing problems identified and framed by others) and offered on a 'this or nothing' basis (Dale 2012). Relatively rarely are programmes based on self-identified needs or operated with high levels of community involvement (beyond the often euphemistic notion of 'community consultation'). Yet another critique is that many programmes use a 'one-size-fits-all' approach whereby seemingly successful programmes are transported from one context to another without sufficient thought regarding applicability and relevance (Jarvie 2011). This has historically led to issues with compliance and outcomes for programmes that attempt to function similarly in different contexts even within the same country (rural and urban settings for example). Despite these critiques, SfD programmes have continued to proliferate throughout the world. In the following sections, attention is turned to Australia, and more specifically, the role that sport has and continues to play in relation to Australia's Aboriginal peoples.

Sport as 'natural fit' in Aboriginal Australia

In Australia, sport is assumed to have a 'natural fit' with Aboriginal communities and accordingly it is employed in a variety of ways. As noted in the introduction to this paper, the prominent discourse in Australia is that Aboriginal peoples have special talents and athletic endowments that mean they are genetically predisposed to sporting prowess (Adair and Stronach 2011; Nelson 2009; Tatz 1987). This is a view that remains pervasive amongst a wide cross-section of society and is reinforced by the comments, decisions, and behaviours of coaches, media commentators and spectators (Apoifis, Marlin, and Bennie 2017; Evans et al. 2015). Many believe that the success of Aboriginal athletes is due to their flare, heritage and natural ability – and very rarely attribute their success to their hard work and perseverance (Evans et al. 2015). Related to this largely deterministic and genetic view, is the no-less strong, but also mystifyingly contradictory view that Aboriginal sportspeople lack endurance, are mentally weak and are unwilling to work hard (Maynard 2012; Tatz 1995).

These racist discourses have, in many ways, informed SfD programming and policy in Australia such that the paternalistic and Euro-centric goals are served to the exclusion of all others (Adair and Stronach 2011; Maynard 2012; Wane 2008). Indeed, literature pertaining to the history of sport in Aboriginal Australia outlines how successive governments, missionaries, non-government organizations (NGOs) and extractive industries have used sport to 'protect', civilize and assimilate Aboriginal peoples into the settler society (Australian Human Rights Commission 2012; Commonwealth of Australia 1961; Kieza 2014; Tatz 1995).

It must be acknowledged, however, that sport has been shown to contribute to a variety of positive outcomes. For example, there is evidence that sport has the potential to support the development of values related to fair play, benevolence, equity, good manners, and justice (Lee and Cockman 1995; Leonard 1998). It has also been shown to have the potential to accrue benefits for the individual such as those related to status, popularity, skills, excitement, fun and enjoyment (Kirk 2002). Leonard (1998) also reports the potential development of social values related to character, discipline, competition, physical fitness, mental fitness, religiosity, and nationalism.

In Australia more specifically, eminent race scholar Colin Tatz highlighted that in the lives of Aboriginal peoples, sport plays a more significant role 'than any other sector of Australian society' (Tatz 1994, i). While this statement is open to substantial challenge, there are a variety of empirical works supporting its importance. For example, some scholars have suggested that contemporary Aboriginal peoples equate the positivity of sport to overcoming racism as well as building their sense of self-esteem and dignity (Besley et al. 2013; Cottle and Keys 2010; Phillips, Osmond, and Morgan 2014). Further, it has been suggested that in contrast to the more sorrowful bases upon which related and connected people from all over the country might gather (e.g. funerals) sport has historically given many Aboriginal peoples a joyous reason to come together (McHugh et al. 2015; Nelson 2009; Norman 2012). Even when under rigid missionary control and severe conditions (e.g. poor diet, rampant disease, frontier violence and killings), Aboriginal people's historically viewed sport as 'a passport to the white man's world, even to his respect and friendship' (Tatz 2005, 19).

However, as noted previously, mainstream/colonial sport was and continues to be used as a form of moral regulation that Dean (1994) observed to be an external and constraining force with regards to Aboriginal identities and subjectivities. Whereas, the culturally-informed, self-determined use of sport – outlined below- describes how sport has been used as a tool to counteract the effects of colonization by self-determining their future pathways – individually or as a group.

The uncomfortable irony of sport-for-development in Aboriginal Australia

Given the historical use of sport in Australia as a tool of colonization, there is an uncomfortable irony in the use of sport by modern governments and NGOs to combat the detrimental impacts of colonization. This includes efforts related to the ongoing effects of historical trauma (e.g. the removal of children from families and communities), structural violence that manifests in the form of social inequalities (e.g. less power, wealth and health relative to other groups), structural inequalities, and intergenerational cultural wounding (Barak 2003; Bretherton and Mellor 2006; Leach, Iyer, and Pedersen 2007). While the

Australian Government acknowledges that sport is not the only avenue to tackle Aboriginal disadvantage (Commonwealth of Australia 2009; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009), the perceived potential for sport to contribute to policy agendas (e.g. 'Closing the Gap' in the life and health expectancy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples) has given greater visibility to sport in relation to other avenues (Australian Human Rights Commission 2012; Commonwealth of Australia 2009).

However, given the developing critiques of SfD programmes and the historical use of sport by the state as a means of control, it is not unreasonable to suggest that using sport to intervene in the welfare of Aboriginal families is unlikely to be received as a benevolent gesture. Rather, Jacobs (2014) suggests that the policies are likely to be seen as self-serving for the government in enabling the continuation of settler colonial aims. In short, the imposition of European normative standards that exploit the passion Aboriginal young people have for sport does not recognize Aboriginal peoples' different ways of doing and seeing things. Although sport continues to be used as a tool to civilize Aboriginal peoples, in the following sections we make the case that Aboriginal peoples have been using sport to culturally and socially offset the harmful effects of colonization in Australia for many years.

Sport as a cultural offset

Inspired by racial activism in the United States and spurred on by the ongoing conditions affecting Aboriginal peoples in Australia, there were a variety of individuals and communities engaging in activism of their own with renewed confidence and vigour in the 1960s and 1970s in Australia (Adair and Stronach 2014; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2019). Adopting a perspective of cultural offsetting (i.e. giving primacy to Aboriginal peoples' use, history, and cultural values associated with heritage), we consider that a number of these activities represent the use of sport by Aboriginal peoples as a cultural offset. To exemplify this, we offer two brief examples of culturally-informed, self-determined sport as a cultural offset: Charles Perkins (and his involvement in The Freedom Ride of 1965), and the development of an all-Aboriginal Rugby League carnival.

Charles Perkins was born in 1936 near Alice Springs in central Australia. He was a member of the Stolen Generation (Read 1998) and among many notable achievements he was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from university, became the Secretary of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and was awarded an Order of Australia medal in 1987 (Adair and Stronach 2014; Read 1998). Most important in this paper, however, is his sporting prowess. Growing up during the Assimilation era, Perkins recalled his experiences of school and the role sport played during his childhood:

There was no person to sit down with us and say, 'Now listen, this is how you do this,' or 'Why don't you try this?' I failed so miserably that they said I had no future. I never had a real friend at school amongst the white children or teachers. Within myself I felt an outcast. I was a kind of loner. My only friends were fellow Aborigines. What united us as well was the common struggle to exist and find some happiness. The only happiness I found came through sports. This was generally the case with all of us [Aboriginal boys]. (Adair and Stronach 2014, 779)

Despite his early experiences of school, sport and attendant discrimination and abuse that Aboriginal young people were subjected to at that time, Perkins developed a love of sport

in his late teens, going on to play soccer in Australia and abroad. Such was his ability that he was able to achieve something that few Australian footballers have ever been able to achieve – playing professional football in the top divisions of England. After playing for Everton, upon his return to Australia, he played and coached with clubs in Adelaide and Sydney (Hay 2012; Read 1998).

His lived and sporting experiences drew Perkins into politics. Though beginning his political life as a reformer, Perkins soon became a radical, organizing the Freedom Ride in 1964 while a student at the University of Sydney (Adair and Stronach 2014). The Freedom Ride's objective was to expose the segregationist culture and racism inherent in country towns to city dwellers by drawing on the parallels with civil rights movements in the United States and elsewhere (Adair and Stronach 2014; National Museum of Australia 2007-2014a). The desire to expose racism extended to sport and recreation. During the Freedom Ride, Aboriginal members of a football club were reportedly 'forced to wait outside their clubhouse while their white team mates were presented with their team blazers' (Curthoys 2001, 191). In the Aboriginal community of Wellington, the school Principal described Aboriginal students as being 'good at sport' but not good at school despite evidence to the contrary (Curthoys 2001). Recreational activities such as swimming in local pools were also subject to discrimination and segregation in towns and Aboriginal communities the Freedom Ride passengers visited (Curthoys 2001). Perkins was to address these and many other issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders over the next forty years (Hay 2012). Even towards the end of his life Perkins continued to be active in politics and sport, leaving his position as Deputy Chair of the Northern Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, to mentor Aboriginal athletes as a consultant with the Australian Sports Commission (1995–1999) (Curthoys 2001).

But it was football that made his name and set him on the way to his later achievements (Hay 2012). Football was a means to an end for Perkins who later recalled:

Football [i.e. soccer] serves a three-fold purpose. The first was to provide me with finance for my study. Second, it enabled me to keep fit because I needed to study for such long hours. Third, it was the means whereby I could mix socially and enjoy myself comfortably. (Hay 2012)

In this respect, Perkins used sport to enable and self-determine his future pathway and as a means to offset the ongoing negative effects of colonization and attendant structural violence and structural inequalities Aboriginal peoples were experiencing and continue to experience. In keeping with the Australian Human Rights Commission's (2019) definition, Perkins' use of sport enabled him to engage in an 'ongoing process of choice' in meeting his social, cultural and economic needs. Of course, there were wider impacts of his actions.

The Freedom Ride and the subsequent 1967 Referendum landslide 'yes' vote, gave Aboriginal peoples cause to feel optimistic that self-determination was a very real prospect (McAllister 2018; Pratt and Bennett 2004). In 1970, six top-level Aboriginal rugby league players – disillusioned by the New South Wales state officialdom making it tough for Aboriginal players to break in – organized the first Koori Knockout in 1971 (the term 'Koori' is a regional term Aboriginal peoples from New South Wales and Victoria use to identify themselves and their location in Australia) (Jopson 2010; McAllister 2018; Norman 2006, 2012; Smith 2016; Sydney Barani 2013; Thackray 2018).

Initially, the concept of an all-Aboriginal rugby league carnival was intended to provide a stage for talented Aboriginal rugby league players who, for reasons of racism and lack of

country-based recruitment, had been overlooked by talent scouts (Norman 2006). Even in the initial stages, it was envisaged as a way of celebrating culture while also offsetting systemic disadvantage (in this case relating most obviously to the sport system). As Aboriginal peoples connected as kin and shared experience of moving from country towns to the city, the founders were more than aware and respectful of the experiences and epistemologies of Aboriginal peoples in the same situation (Norman 2006). However, the Koori Knockout has always been a site where political movements were formed, and discussion of politics took place (Jopson 2010; Norman 2006; Smith 2016). Although it was a different football code, Perkins himself, actually attended the Koori Knockout thirty or so years ago (Adair and Stronach 2014; Jopson 2010).

Today, the Koori Knockout is regarded as one of the biggest Indigenous cultural gatherings in the world (Jopson 2010; McAllister 2018; Norman 2012; Smith 2016; Sydney Barani 2013; Thackray 2018). Around 35,000 Aboriginal peoples (including 3,500 players) travel to the Koori Knockout from New South Wales and inter-state to 'congregate for the four day celebration of Aboriginal culture, tradition and rugby league, marking [it as] one of the most important cultural events in the country' (Smith 2016). Highlighting the reclamation of culture and strengthening of ties, Norman (2006, 170) emphasises that the Koori Knockout is

reminiscent of a four-day traditional ceremonial dance and celebration, but also enables new social and cultural practices to emerge. It is an opportunity for families to gather, reunite as a community and barrack for their home-town and mob, and commemorate past glories and those who have passed on.

Owen Craigie, a former professional Aboriginal rugby league player agreed, stating 'It's a bit like the modern day corroboree where all your family and friends and tribes and nations come here and represent the people in your community and your tribe, which is a good thing' (Smith 2016). According to Norman (2006, 170), the Knockout is understood as an adapted and modern medium 'for cultural performance and expression, for kinship-based modes of organization merged with state shaped communities, and for courtship and competition'. In these ways, the Koori Knockout expresses Aboriginal self-determination at a level beyond the individual. It is also being used to offset the impact of colonization by drawing Aboriginal peoples from the surrounding areas to participate in political, social and economic activities – that, pre-colonization served to tighten 'the bonds between groups, [created] stronger ties between people and groups, [and forged] networks and communities of people that endured long after the festivities had ended' (Whincop et al. 2011, 32; see, e.g. Willis 2005, 128, 129). The Koori Knockout is an example of giving primacy to social, spiritual, and aesthetic values associated with heritage. This is different from the extractive industry's cultural offsets who give primacy to mainstream (Western) archaeological practices that continue to create disadvantage in Aboriginal Australia (Atalay 2006; Godwin 2014).

The carnival is also used to offset environmental losses as well as those associated with spiritual and cultural significance. Historically, Aboriginal peoples were dispersed, forced to resettle from their traditional country onto reserves, while thousands of their children were separated from family and placed in institutions, resulting in a loss of connection to culture, family and country (Australian Law Reform Commission 2014). Opportunities to re-engage with country they had previously been excluded from for sporting purposes

remain minimal but not out of reach. All-Aboriginal sporting carnivals – such as the Koori Knockout (New South Wales) and Murri Rugby League Carnival (Queensland) – are of great significance to Aboriginal peoples as these events fulfil their social and cultural needs while sustaining community pride (Godwell 1997). These carnivals represent ‘all-Aboriginal spaces [that provide] invaluable opportunities for Aboriginal peoples to re-establish and maintain cultural ties within their community’ (Godwell 1997, ii). Within these all-Aboriginal spaces lies the:

Aboriginal concept of belonging to land [that] is often encapsulated by the Aboriginal English word ‘country’ ... defined ... as: “ ... multi-dimensional – it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings; underground, earth, soils, minerals and waters, air ... People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country”. (Burgess et al. 2007, 117)

Though held on unceded Aboriginal land, Traditional Owners (spectators and/or players) upon whose country the Knockout is being played remain strongly connected. While the Knockout for visiting spectators and players continues to reflect a continuity of the past to the present in the form of a modern-day corroboree. This suggests a broader and more complete account of the significance of certain regions that go beyond physical artefacts (e.g. stone tools, artwork) (Byrne 1991; Godwin and Weiner 2006) wherein, the Knockout sites are intangible – places of belonging that are both spiritually and culturally significant to Traditional Owners and those in attendance.

Importantly, it must be remembered that compensation in the form of cultural offsets to Aboriginal peoples for loss of land and cultural place management by extractive industries were not available until 1993 (McKenna 1995). Perkins and the Koori Knockout were Aboriginal pioneers who used sport to offset the effects of colonization and meet the community-wide aspirations of Aboriginal peoples via sports and politics.

Recommendations and conclusions

In this paper, we sought to explore the notion of offsetting as a way of bringing into focus the assumptions that underpin the use of sport in Aboriginal communities and as a way of framing future discussions about how sport may be meaningfully employed to support Aboriginal self-determination. We propose that when talking about the potential of sport from a cultural offsetting perspective, the primary consideration must be how Aboriginal people use sport for their cultural purposes. Sport as a cultural offset is not new – at least not from an Aboriginal perspective. Aboriginal peoples have successfully used sport to empower and self-determine their futures either individually or as a group, to avoid, minimize and restore the impacts of colonization on their culture and identity.

For example, Charles Perkins (Adair and Stronach 2014; Hay 2012; Read 1998), John Moriarty (National Museum of Australia 2007-2014b), and Nova Peris (Parliament of Australia 2019), used their sporting careers to leverage future careers in public administration, business and politics. While in Brisbane, Australia, the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (2018a, 2018b, 34) co-opted the Queensland Murri Carnival, partnered with the Brisbane Lions Australian Football League (Australian Football League 2019); Queensland-based Australian Rugby League clubs: the Brisbane Broncos, North Queensland

Cowboys, Gold Coast Titans; the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL); and Australian Rugby Union club, Queensland Reds (2016/2017, 2019; NSWRL 2019; Broncos Brisbane 2015; IUIH 2012). in deploying its Deadly Choices Brand.

However, the illusionary compatibility of sport and Aboriginal communities in Australia means that sport is often positioned as a way of offsetting a variety of losses that Australian Aboriginal communities and peoples have survived and continue to experience since colonization. Many of the current models of SfD serve to perpetuate damaging discourses and thwart opportunities for self-determination. What is clear is that sport is no panacea. Despite this, sport holds some potential for achieving developmental goals associated with the large-scale, systemic, and historically shaped problems related to health, employment, and education. This may only be achieved through the reimagining of programmes and models of SfD. For example, the following links the aforementioned ‘mitigation hierarchy’ to ways of addressing colonial forms of sport in Aboriginal Australia:

- *Avoid* the continuation of colonial ideology that Aboriginal peoples are ‘victims’ and in need of a helping hand. Instead, recognize that Aboriginal peoples have a demonstrated capacity to be resilient in overcoming past injustices and the legacies of colonialism – through sport.
- *Mitigate* the myth that Aboriginal peoples and sport are a ‘natural fit’; and recognize that the pressure on Aboriginal youngsters to ‘conform’ to rules and regulations that many cannot adhere to due to the bags of chaos they carry everyday (e.g. witnessing/experiencing domestic violence; inter-generational violence, lateral violence [violence on and between Aboriginal peoples]; structural violence and structural inequalities) are contributing factors to their disengagement from school and society.
- *Restore* Aboriginal peoples’ capacity to self-determine positive future pathways for themselves, their children and future generations.

Though Tatz (1994, i) noted that sport ‘provides a centrality, a sense of loyalty and cohesion’, what is most crucial is attending to Aboriginal perspectives of ‘centrality’, ‘loyalty’ and ‘cohesion’ (see, e.g. Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention 2018; Lohoar, Butera, and Kennedy 2014). Therefore, to address issues of Aboriginal youth disadvantage, it is imperative that the availability and delivery of culturally-based programmes based on the community’s values are prioritized rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach (Lohoar, Butera, and Kennedy 2014; Walker 2016). Said another way, any programme in Aboriginal communities should be designed and controlled by Aboriginal peoples so that they are better positioned to meet Aboriginal community members’ needs and aspirations, promote a strengths-based approach, promote self-determination, and celebrate culture. This would represent a significant shift in SfD wherein at present the preparation of youth for participation in Eurocentric education structures, future involvement in systems of competitive capitalism, and in societies where neoliberal logics prevail, have been the priorities (Hayhurst, Giles, and Wright 2016).

The cultural offsets model presents an opportunity to reject pathological accounts of Aboriginal peoples as needing fixing or saving, in favour of one where Aboriginal people choose the manner in which ongoing legacies of colonialism are offset. Moreover, cultural offsetting enables Aboriginal peoples’ development of capacity building as a

component of cultural heritage site/place management when protection or development mitigation is not an option (Chino and DeBruyn 2006). Aboriginal peoples have successfully worked for many years outside of the states' legislation to culturally offset their own lives using sport as a vehicle. We recommend that governments, NGOs and extractive industries stop viewing Aboriginal people as the problem and realize that sport can be used positively by engaging with Aboriginal peoples who have the capacity to self-determine their own lives using sport.

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