

Refereed Articles: September 11

Terrorism in the Sports Pages.

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A Preliminary Look at New Zealand Print Media Reaction to the September 11 (September 12) Terror Attacks in New York and Washington.

New Zealand's major daily and Sunday print outlets were as surprised as all other media at the sudden terror attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The story was front page news for weeks but how did the sports writers in the print media react to such an apparently non sports story?

This paper is a preliminary look at the first weeks of sports coverage in two major New Zealand dailies representing two ownership groups and the leading Sunday newspaper. It will examine news selection, editorial opinion and local impact of the developing world crisis. In addition some sports stories flowed over into the general and international news pages where the symbolic nature of sport became the key factor in choosing copy and photographs. (McKernan 1979 p.1)

Sport is symbolic of a settled way of life in New Zealand and the United States. (Seagrave 2000 p.61) This perception was surely rent, forever according to some media commentators, by the images flowing from the World Trade Center. Sports writers and sports people had a brutal awakening to their apparently redefined place in a dramatically unsettled world. How was this represented in the sports pages in Auckland and Wellington?

Theory concerning media coverage of traumatic events and the relationship between government policy and media content may prove helpful in analysing New Zealand print media coverage of the terror attacks.

However very little seems to have been written specifically about sports news selection and orientation in such an event.

Nonetheless we need to make the effort to analyse the issues using existing scholarship as a guide to further research. Weimann and Winn (1994) investigated the actual media effects of terrorism in their *The Theater of Terror: Mass Media and International Terrorism* with particular reference to what the terrorists groups themselves hoped to achieve in recognition and support.

Susan Carruthers (2000), in her *The Media at War*, takes a wide ranging look at twentieth century warfare and the media in particular in what she calls "forging the bonds of sentiment" in which the media plays the critical role of providing what Martin Bell calls "military mood music." (Carruthers p.5)

Dwayne Winseck's *Gulf War in the Global Village: CNN, Democracy and the Information Age* examines globalised media responses to warfare in the late twentieth century. This paper is not about television but Winseck's main conclusion about the myth of diversity (Winseck p.71) may still apply to print media in a small country with a relatively homogeneous press corps. Is this reflected in the sports pages or is it just a main news pages phenomenon?

There is an assumption that sport as an aspect of 'normalcy' has a role to play in marshalling national resolve in the United States. Does sport, as seen by the sports press, play such a role in New Zealand?

Was there a feeling in the sporting community and the sports pages that sports people had a responsibility to tour, play and compete in order for the terrorists not to 'win'?

Some theorists have developed the view that major sport is simply "athletic entertainment" (Lowes 1999 p.9) and the sporting press reflects this with reporting which does not challenge existing social and political arrangements.

Does this extend to the New Zealand print media examined in the weeks following the World Trade Center attack? How could we measure such a stance and what conclusions could we draw?

The writer examined the period September 11 to September 30 extensively and then surveyed the period to mid-October with reference to the sports pages alone. What editorial stance did the sports press take? How was the impact assessed? Whose opinions and reactions were sought? Was there evidence of a change in priority in sports news selection and placement to reflect changing political times?

We will argue that print media sports departments feature work practices focussed on round reporting which does not allow for a pro-active professional journalism response to a major political crisis.

The period immediately before September 12 (New Zealand date of the attacks) was taken up with reports by staff reporters on the woes of the All Black lineout, the New Zealand Warriors playoff chances and the imaginatively titled 'Choking on Humble Pie: Another All Black meltdown angers the rugby nation' (Sunday Star Times, 9/9.01) while the front page of the NZ Herald on the day before the attacks in the United States proclaimed 'Air New Zealand in Crisis' and Malcolm Evans' editorial cartoon showed Uncle Sam's market cold symptoms giving world markets the flu.

The Herald's Dialogue page featured, rather prophetically, articles on Afghanistan ('Tragedy on a vast scale in land the world forgot' by Shauk at Zamani) and the Middle East ('More violence, more deaths as hopes for peace talks recede').

The sports pages were more inadvertently prescient with lead articles on the New Zealand Black Caps cricket team's tour to Pakistan and an Aussie tennis star winning the US Open in New York.

The Dominion led with 'It's all yours, Air NZ tells Aussies' and the editorial was about Afghan boat people.

In the sports section a rugby referee had 'infuriated' Wellington rugby and Pete Sampras had lost the U.S. Open tennis to Aussie Lleyton Hewitt.

Pretty standard fare; a mix of local and international sports news with a heavy slant in all three papers towards rugby 'controversy'.

How everything was to change dramatically overnight.

The Herald recalled and remade its front cover completely to reflect the events of 2.45 am NZ time. ' Terror strikes USA' and a large photo of the World Trade Center towers on fire. Jim Anderton provided some New Zealand reaction. Air New Zealand was relegated to page A3 and the back page of Section A was taken up with colour photos from the U.S.

The Herald editorial was quite evidently prepared pre-attack with comment on issues in the New Zealand Defence Forces.

The sports pages featured Michael Jordan's return 'almost confirmed' (he would soon postpone his announcement) and Lleyton Hewitt "took his dancing feet to 42nd Street". Inadvertently insensitive in the circumstances.

The Dominion for September 12th led with US UNDER ATTACK accompanied by photos, 'People jump from Buildings' and a story from Australia about the Tampa boat people. Helen Clark and Michael Cullen were pushed inside to page 2 with a photo and story about the expected demise of Ansett Australia.

The editorial railed against "political correctness gone mad" in the appointment of government boards. Given the Air New Zealand-Ansett mess it seemed a bit precious calling for "old-fashioned commercial nous."

Sport led with 'Umaga in charge' and 'Tipoki broke hands in fight- not in gym'. Jim Kayes Sports view column was on the subject of 'Assigning referees to teams might help educate players.' in rugby.

The international news mentioned Michael Jordan's expected comeback announcement and Lleyton Hewitt's new "likeable" image after winning the U.S. Open tennis in New York.

It is evident the Dominion sports staff weren't held back to write new stories and columns after the attacks on New York and Washington.

The Herald devoted all of its Thursday, September 13 front page to the WTC ruins and 'World seeks answers', 'Focus on bin Laden' and 'Economy in turmoil'. All of A2,3,4,5 and 6 were taken up with hijack stories, FBI clues and the like. One paragraph on A6 mentioned the New Zealand cricket team in Singapore "isolation" .

Malcolm Evans' emotional editorial cartoon of the Statue of Liberty rising above the smoke accompanied the editorial ' No justification for this senseless act.'

The sports section led with the Rua Tipoki broken hand story about a North Harbour rugby player who broke his hand fighting in an unauthorised game and then tried to cover it up. There was even a photo of the contrite athlete. No reference to terror affecting rugby at all. Wasn't there an All Black tour soon?

Bob Pearce's piece on the Rally of New Zealand 'Rush for teams to arrive on time' was the first full story (11 pars) to feature the impact of the terror attacks on New Zealand sport.

Wire service stories on Tiger Woods' reaction, the Ryder Cup 'players call for delay', Winter Olympics security, the Italian Grand Prix and U.S. sport disruptions made up much of the inside pages. Is it fair to conclude that the Herald sports staff were not ready to be pro-active in getting New Zealand sports stories but instead waiting for the news to come to them?

Wellington's Dominion was not ready either. The news lead was a cover special 'America's Agony' with full colour photos with the regular front inside featuring 'Apocalypse Now', 'Pilot among five suspects as America mourns its dead'.

Ansett Australia still made the front page but the first real Kiwi story was on the side of the front 'Kiwi killed on board terror plane'.

The editorial 'A deadly new evil' mirrored confused and angry opinion around the Western nations.

Sport led with Peter Bidwell's 'Rennie maintains faith with players' along with an NPC story about Counties' coach and a 'Tearful Tipoki' story similar to the Herald's. There was no reference to terrorism in the Petrolhead column by Bernard Carpinter and it wasn't until the Shorts that we found out that the Black Caps were staying in Singapore rather than flying on to Pakistan and European soccer had been postponed in the wake of the attacks.

We can only assume that the Dominion sports department were also unable or unwilling to chase the stories about the impact of the attacks on New Zealand sport.

The alternative explanation is even more worrying from the viewpoint that journalism is curious, pro-active and questioning; the sports journalists don't see any political activities, especially international ones, as being relevant to them or their readers.

Sports writing has been described by Ron Palenski as "writing for experts" (in Tucker 2000 p.277) but we have to ask experts on what? Surely sport has a place in the 'real world' and is impacted by major world events. Neither the Dominion nor the Herald showed any significant sign of acknowledging the relationship between news and sports news, journalism and sports journalism, in the first two days of post attack coverage.

By Friday September 14th the Herald sports section had a lead story in 'Teams returning home for safety'. The Black Caps were being recalled from Singapore rather than going on to tour Pakistan and the New Zealand A side's tour of India had been cancelled.

Neither tour was regarded as "a prudent option" in Richard Boock's article. Otherwise wire service stories and a couple of paragraphs in a Rally article had to be enough for the sports readership.

The front news sections of both the Herald and Dominion still were dominated by Terror in America stories and more news was emerging about New Zealanders who were or were not in the WTC on the fateful morning.

Air New Zealand's woes sneaked back onto the Dominion's front page. Meanwhile the Dominion sports section had the Black Caps return story by Peter Bidwell leading as well as a Jim Kayes' story about Tana Umaga's return to the Wellington NPC rugby side.

A Reuters story reported that fans at Monza were being asked to tone down celebrations as "a mark of respect in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the United States." Six Shorts had no reference to the attacks.

Buried 3 pages further inside the sports section there were references to the attacks in a wire service story on European soccer, the IOC, baseball, women's tennis and boxing, golf, the U.S. Grand Prix "doubts" and American soccer.

Dominion reporters generated five stories on the NPC as well as a commentary by rugby writer Lindsay Knight in which he lambasted the IRB but did not mention the terrorist attacks. Perhaps rugby was immune.

New Zealand stories covering rugby league, basketball, soccer and hockey made no mention of terrorist actions.

The Weekend New Zealand Herald (September 15-16) led with a major emotive piece by an American reporter entitled "We shall overcome" and the story about Helen Clark's extended sojourn in Australia. 'Ansett storm leaves angry PM stranded' was relegated to page A8.

The editorial 'Protection must not weaken liberty' was a plea to uphold democratic values in the face of the violence of the previous week.

Paul Ekers' cartoon celebrated the bravery of New York firemen with the appropriate line from the U.S. national anthem.

At last the sports section inclined a nod toward the world outside the sports enclave with editor David Leggat's commentary appropriately entitled 'Nonsense put in perspective'. And it contained a reference to Auckland rugby coach Wayne Pivac noting that his players "had found it hard to concentrate at training this week."

There was no follow up story by any staff writer about what the rugger players might have thought or felt about the events of September 11th.

Leggat reflected on New Zealand cricket's past experience with car bombs in Sri Lanka but his best was left to the end when he commented on the big rugby stories of the week. "They were both marked by stupidity," he remarked.

He concluded with the comment that "none of this really matters this week. It is, after all, just nonsense."

Despite this from the editor there was little or no reference to terror in the staff reporters' stories. Seven NPC stories and two rugby columns avoided the subject completely but the wire service stories from the U.S and Italy both referred to terrorist attacks and their aftermath.

The U.S. article summed up a serious issue. 'Play on, some say, others believe it's too soon yet.' Americans were divided over the role of sport as an aspect of 'normalcy' which needed to go ahead (Lowes p.99) while others wanted a decent period of mourning before resuming play. Later, much later, in mid-October NZRFU head David Rutherford commented on this debate in rallying "Churchillian" tones when referring to the All Black tour to Britain and Ireland. There is no evidence that he was asked about this by Herald or Dominion reporters in the week after the terror attacks on New York and Washington.

The Dominion led its Saturday edition with more America's Agony stories about the thwarting of hijackings and plans for "payback" but 'Air Force rescues Clark' made it onto page 1 as well.

The editorial was a fluffy piece about Rua Tipoki's embarrassing gaff in lying to the ever-vigilant sporting press about how he broke his hand. Leggat, in the Herald, had put the story in its proper perspective but the Dominion devoted an editorial to it.

The sports lead was a rugby article by Peter Bidwell about Umaga's captaincy.

Finally someone of stature and thoughtfulness wrote a piece commenting on the events of the world's week. Ron Palenski's On Reflection had 11 pars about mostly rugby but then put it in perspective with this insight: "But sport didn't matter this week. How could it when put in the sort of perspective that the events in New York and Washington provided?"

One paragraph of commentary in four days generated by the Dominion sports staff. At least it was a sensitive and sensible one.

Three rugby league and 4 NPC stories filled the inside pages but there was one full story which showed the impact of the terrorist attacks on New Zealand sport. 'Joyce likely to skip Qatar tournament' (she eventually did go) and a Black Caps story and photo in which captain Stephen Fleming acknowledged that he could "understand the decision" to bring the team home from Singapore.

The sports staff at the Sunday Star-Times had four days to respond to the terror attacks in the U.S. They largely missed the opportunity. In fifteen and a half pages of sports news there were two Briefs from wire services about Jordan's postponed announcement and golf fundraising for victims. Formula One's "engines were silent in grim tribute" in a longer overseas-sourced story.

Staff writer Marc Hinton had Greg Turner playing golf with Tiger Woods and Andrew Sanders wrote about Grant Dalton's choice of boat.

Sports editor Duncan Johnstone told us about the NZRFU's support for the "embattled" All Blacks coaches. (Surely a bad sign for them.)

The main news pages carried a story headed 'The brink of war' and the editorial said 'History will judge us all' on the same topic. Ellison's editorial cartoon showed the Statue of Liberty holding an assault rifle high.

By Monday September 17th the NZ Herald sports staff were into day six of the crisis. Plenty of time for the nation's largest print outlet to get onto the sports stories reflecting altered political circumstances.

The news section carried a sports story on A2 'Different lives-one shared fate' in which it was reported that two Los Angeles Kings ice hockey scouts were on one of the doomed flights to the WTC.

The Monday sports section is usually full of rugby, especially NPC, and this edition was no exception. The Rally of New Zealand and athletics vied with the All Black coaching issue for front page space in sports. The German 500 had been renamed the American Memorial 500 and a wire story told us that 'Baseball players eye resumption of play as others stay on the sideline.' Tucked safely inside on page C6 were overseas stories on Winter Olympic security reviews and the same story as the Star-Times ran the day before about golfers raising money for survivors of the attacks.

In Wellington The Dominion front page led with 'Aussie anger may sink Air NZ' and a local story about an airport security breach 'Christchurch man takes knives on plane'. Helen Clark's anger over her treatment in Australia made the front along with 'U.S. ready to smoke out enemies'.

NPC rugby led the sports section along with a boxed story about Greg Turner's "about-turn" on playing in the N.Z. Open. In the Shorts Michael Jordan's postponed return announcement and the NFL schedule change made it in, otherwise five pages of sports including two pages of rugby carried no reference to the terror attacks at all.

On Tuesday, September 18th the NZ Herald finally ran a story about a New Zealand sports personality's reaction to the terror. Julie Ash's 'Open not safe enough for Owens' opened "World number 2 Carol Owens doubts she will compete in the Qatar Open (squash) if it goes ahead in the Middle East next month."

Richard Boock followed up the cricket tour to Pakistan story with 'Pakistan attempts to woo NZ back'. We had the first signs of substantial reporting linking New Zealand sport to the world crisis.

The Dominion of September 18th led its sports pages with 'Day of judgement for Smith and Gilbert' and Ron Palenski's On Reflection column was about the NZRFU's "tough questions". Apparently Osama bin Laden was not to be among those questions.

There were references to terrorism in the basketball story about the return of New Zealand Tall Blacks stars Kirk Penney and Sean Marks from the United States for the series against Australia.

In the end neither returned, Penney because his coach feared his flying and Marks because he was trying out for an NBA professional contract.

Peter Bidwell's 11 par boxed story 'Pakistan likely to remain off limits' showed the Dominion was ready to write full pieces about New Zealand sport's relationship to the events in America and the aftermath.

The Shorts featured four paragraphs 'Sport in America resumes today' in which baseball, American football and PGA golf returned a sense of normality to a key element of American life.

One week after it had remade its front page for the initial shocking stories from New York and Washington the NZ Herald of September 19th was leading with 'World faces war, threat of recession' and a human interest story and photos of a nine year old New Zealand boy returning from America after a Koru Care trip.

The back page of the front section featured the return of baseball to American sports grounds.

A large colour photo of a massive U.S. flag held over the diamond by baseball players. "Baseball the game they call America's pastime was awash with red, white and blue as crowds returned" after a six day hiatus.

The sports pages had missed the boat a week earlier largely due to time constraints facing the print media generally. Had they caught up a week later?

Not in stories by their reporters. The Herald had not carried on the work started by Ash and Boock the day before. An overseas story mentioned that the Formula One champion would race at the U.S. Grand Prix and Bob Pearce reported that Fords were being finally flown from the U.K. after being held up by the security at British airports.

The Dominion led with 'WAR AND RECESSION' and editorialised about issues in the New Zealand military which surfaced before the terror attacks.

NPC rugby and NRL rugby league led the sports section. The Schumacher story mentioned terrorism and Michael Jordan was in the paper again along with a relocated international cricket meeting and U.S. baseball starting again. These were the only reference to terror in two full pages of sport.

The next day the Herald ran a number of overseas shorts mentioning the NFL, New York Marathon and a major boxing match in New York. There was also a wire story that the U.S.-based Tall Blacks were definitely not coming for the Australian series.

Boock wrote a piece about cricket star Chris Cairns and threw in this gem; "presuming New Zealand Cricket does not lose its mind and send the national side back to Pakistan."

Wellingtonians read much the same but Dominion sportswriter Kent Gray wrote a basketball piece.

'Tough times for ex-New Yorker' was about a member of the Australian Boomers side in town for the World Qualifying Series versus New Zealand.

It was becoming evident that there was to be little reference to the world crisis in stories by staff reporters other than cricket, squash and to some extent motor racing. These were based on what was happening at the moment with no view to the future.

Other than reference to cricket and an overseas short about the Ryder Cup's new dates there was to be nothing in the Herald Weekend's seven and a half pages of sport.

The Saturday Dominion sports pages led with the Tall Blacks' historic basketball victory over Australia in Wellington the night before but failed to mention the moving singing of three national anthems at the start of the match. The atmosphere at the game was very emotional long before the New Zealand win. Television captured the singing of The Star Spangled Banner brilliantly but the print media failed to convey any of it to their readers.

The Sunday Star-Times staffers did not refer to terrorism once except to run a short from the U.S. about baseball in New York.

Our survey begs the question: Are the New Zealand sports pages passive receptacles for news generated by their round sources? There seemed to be no evidence that round reporters in rugby, for example, were being pro-active in chasing opinion and plans of action at the NZRFU regarding upcoming tours to the Northern Hemisphere. Would it be too much to wonder if they were waiting for the press release? Further research to ask this question is warranted.

It is even more disturbing to imagine that sports reporters do not think to ask relevant questions outside the culture of fandom surrounding them. Do they imagine their readers to be only sports fans with no real interest in citizenship and international affairs? Does sport exist in a vacuum for them?

These are relevant questions. As the crisis developed there were signs that sports editors were aware of the issues which involved New Zealand sport.

Two weeks after the attacks Julie Ash followed up her squash story with 'Owens leads Qatar boycott call'.

Peter Jessup's story on Tall Black Coach Tab Baldwin 'Coach ready to take on the world' did not refer to the terror attacks and their implications for New Zealand sport. Didn't the reporter think to ask the U.S.-born man of the moment?

Ash had another squash story on September 28th but the rest of the sports pages for that day were business as usual. The next day the Weekend Herald wrote about the "month of horror" but concluded that sport managed to "shine on". Maybe New Zealand sport played on but U.S., Canadian and European sport were seriously disrupted. Otherwise the All Black coaching drama continued to dominate the news.

The Dominion in the same week ran an NZPA story about fines for boycotting squash players and quoted Carol Owens, "I can't believe they are holding it. It's just crazy."

The capital's daily also went with a Bidwell story about Black Cap captain Stephen Fleming's feelings about the postponed Pakistan tour. He was "happy to be home", Bidwell reported and the break was a "big bonus".

Did the reporter think to ask him how he felt about the world crisis and the tragedies in New York and Afghanistan? We don't know.

The Sunday Star-Times did think to ask Tab Baldwin what he thought about the situation in the U.S. Marc Hinton's story included 16 paragraphs about the world situation and Baldwin's thoughts.

Andrew Sanders' golf piece 'Americans on way to hunt with Tiger' referred to the terror situation and its relevance to New Zealand sport.

At September's end Kent Gray wrote a longer piece on Tab Baldwin.

Gray quoted him as saying "I'm devastated by this (attack on America)." The report ran opposite the editorial page under the banner 'A bittersweet victory'.

Bidwell wrote a nine par story based on an interview with Carol Owens.

So far the top sources for opinion and reporting on the crisis in the sports pages were New Zealand Cricket and two leading players along with Australian-born Carol Owens and U.S.-born Tab Baldwin. Kiwi Leilani Joyce was the other prime source for opinion and news.

The major winter codes finally got involved in October when the Australian (League) Kangaroos pulled out and then accepted a shorter tour to the U.K. The British media dubbed the Kangaroos the 'Kanga Wussies' which must have hurt. New Zealand's Kiwis were never seriously likely to replace the 'Roos on tour although it was suggested.

The Australian Rugby team decided it would go despite misgivings but star winger Andrew Walker disappeared from training camp and did not travel.

On October 8th The Dominion, through NZPA, reported that Joyce would go to Qatar.

The paper carried Jim Kayes' piece 'All Blacks to be given choice' on October 12th. Rugby Union chief executive David Rutherford was quoted as saying "We have a duty to ensure the security and safety of our teams but there is another duty that we all have in this situation, and that's to go about our business and not be cowed by the actions of these terrorists."

This was the first rugby story in the major print media to refer to terror and the changed world situation. And that story quoted the NZRFU head extensively perhaps illustrating Lowes contention that "in the sports press there is little room for news that doesn't promote the industry" (p.99) and that the ideology of the sports press "legitimises the power of a dominant group or social class."(p.99).

New Zealand's alliance on the side of the U.S.-led anti-terrorist coalition was getting much needed support from Rutherford and the nation's leading sporting code on the sports pages.

There was also direct reference to the terror attacks in a local golf story by Kent Gray and also his story on the NZ A basketball tour to the U.S. (The latter went ahead in November.)

The October 13th Dominion carried Ron Palenski's thoughtful piece 'On Reflection' about the upcoming All Black tour. Palenski argued that "calling off the tour would only hurt fringe candidates". He went on to write "Players could have genuine concerns about travelling at a time of global uncertainty and those concerns need to be respected."

"Calling it (tour) off would not be a tragedy for rugby," Palenski wrote. Not exactly what David Rutherford had in mind.

Interestingly two players not selected for the tour (Christian Cullen and Justin Marshall) were the most vociferous in their doubts about travelling in the midst of crisis and international tension.

Miles Davis' column in the Sunday News of October 14th carried the title 'Bin Laden is hurting our sport' in which he argued that "Osama bin Laden is fast becoming the most influential figure in world sport" and went on to say "I see the cancellation of sporting events as a victory for world terrorism."

Although the Sunday News was outside the scope of this study Davis' piece was significant in that the other papers seem to have missed writing such an overview.

By October 17th a Reuters story in the Dominion predicted "indefinite disruption ahead in world sport" and an NZPA story notified readers that a women's softball tour to the U.S. was off.

We were now over a month past the date of the original attacks in the U.S. We did not have the assurance that Mitchell Stephens has about news that it is "more than a form of entertainment." (quoted in Berry 2000 p.270)

The Weekend Herald of October 20-21 declared in an editorial that it was "Time to get up and get on with life." The opening sentence went straight to sport as an example of how this was to be achieved. "It is good that the Australian Rugby League team is going ahead with their scheduled British tour.....For a little while it seemed terror had the better of them."

The editorial went on to say that the All Black tour to the U.K. was "fortunately ... going ahead."

The support for this view came from the same mindset as the NZRFU's David Rutherford and Davis' Sunday News column of the week before. "To take fright and cancel travel plans is to hand terrorists the victory they seek." Is this indicative of what Nick Trujillo (in Burrell & McDonald 2000 p.14) calls "hegemonic masculinity" where traditional males virtues are trumpeted in the press?

The sports pages included an AFP story 'Security fears distort Uefa Cup result'. An Israeli club had beaten top English side Chelsea 2-0 after six star players cited "the worsening security situation in the region " as a reason not to travel.

Chris Laidlaw devoted an entire column to the subject of picking an All Black touring team in times of such disruption and uncertainty. "Everyone seems to be frozen in bin Laden's headlights. Nobody seems to be sure whether to tour or not to tour. In the rugby world, that is." Laidlaw eventually advised the Rugby Union to wait another week.

Finally a balanced, thoughtful and cautious opinion developed by a rugby writer in a major print outlet. We were six weeks into the world crisis.

What are we to make of the sports pages coverage of sport in a time of tension and insecurity?

First, it seems the sporting print media did not take a pro-active role in ferreting out the news in major New Zealand sports. The first big stories in cricket and squash largely came to them.

Second, sports editors seemed unwilling or unable to take a thoughtful editorial stance going beyond surface reflection, particularly in the early days of the crisis. (McGregor 2000 p.194)

Third, the sports pages relied almost exclusively on wire services for sports stories related to the terror attacks and their aftermath.

Can we conclude that 'it has little to do with us' was the prevailing mood?

Fourth, most New Zealand reporting in the sports pages reflected a "business as usual" attitude when clearly the front pages and editorials took a radically different stance in news selection and emphasis. (Hallin 1997 p.219)

Finally, this research requires interview data collected from sports reporters and editors in order to draw some conclusions about how they felt about their job in this critical time.

Did reporters and editors feel constrained by their normal work practices in an abnormal time? (Wolfsfeld 2000 p.2)

Do internal constraints exist in newspaper management keeping the sports pages largely in the "athletic entertainment" box while the main news pages do the 'serious' reporting?

Is there any anticipation at the sports desk that the sporting public might react negatively if the sports pages stopped "writing for experts" and raised difficult political questions even in a crisis context?

It may be too facile to conclude, as I have in a previous paper, that "sports journalism is an oxymoron".

There may be more subtle forces at work in the culture of the print sports department.

We had better ask them.

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