

Links between libraries and sport

Brendan Lambe and Darryl Tiggeman

A healthy mind in a healthy body Juvenal

Libraries and sport? Surely the two don't mix? Libraries are quiet, reflective sanctuaries. Sports are noisy and passionate and sweaty. Yet libraries and sport go together, and we don't mean the 20-metre dash through the stacks, hurdling the book trolley, or the world speed-reshelving championship!

Although they could at first glance seem poles apart, the links between libraries and sport are strong and important. From the perspective of preserving the history of sport – the treasures of The Bradman Collection at the State Library of South Australia and the collection of historical sporting records held by the State Library of New South Wales – nobody can doubt the enduring role of libraries in preserving these valuable items. Old tales and faded photographs of the glories of previous generations wait in the back issues of newspaper collections for club historians to pore over.

In what other way can libraries and sport interact? Bill Crowley, Professor of Library and Information science at Dominican University, Illinois, asserted in 2005 that libraries could not compete in the information marketplace. His idea was that libraries should reposition themselves as educational facilities. An alternative to that is as a community node, serving the local population in more ways than the old-fashioned idea of books and serials.

Libraries have already expanded into nurturing the mind with the whole array of learning formats, having embraced the internet, CDs, DVDs, and so on. Another way in which public libraries benefit their patrons is by providing toy libraries. Now some public libraries are loaning out sports equipment. Calliope Shire Regional Sports Library in Queensland provides sporting equipment on a 3-week loan. It is possible to borrow basketballs, hockey sets, kanga cricket sets, netballs, even a parachute! (1 set/item per member.)

At Park Holme Library in South Australia, there are around 100 sports items for loan, including soccer balls and goals and cricket bats. This service was made possible by a grant from the Office for Recreation and Sport. Primarily aimed at children, this will be reviewed most likely at end of 2006.

With increasing concern in the community about rates of childhood obesity this should be seen as a laudable and pro-active approach by libraries to explore new ways of enfranchising and benefiting their community as a whole, and chang-

ing the lives of individuals. It is often stated that libraries change lives. This is one of many positive means of doing so.

There are many advantages to playing any form of sport or physical activity. The main one is the health benefits associated with sport. It is well-known that physical activity keeps the body fit and healthy – along with a sensible diet – and with a healthy body comes a healthy mind. If a person is physically fit they may be more 'switched on' therefore eager to study and be able to absorb information.

Physical benefits are only one of the advantages. Sport is also very helpful socially, both personally and on a group level. Individuals playing sport have higher levels of confidence and self-belief – that they can do it, whatever it may be, and can apply that confidence to other aspects of their lives such as work or study. Sport can also be a great way to meet new people, network and gain confidence communication and working with others.

The internet is now a mainstream part of libraries services in Australia. It is great for contacting people half a world away and making friends, but isn't the World Wide Web doing on a global scale what libraries have been accomplishing for generations? Providing information, education and pleasure. Like the internet, the local library is a place where people connect. Local sporting clubs and associations could be encouraged to promote themselves through the library, so that people can be inspired to develop a more healthy and emotionally enriching lifestyle.

Libraries offer so much already, but their boundaries are limited only by imagination. Like the child who sits reading a book about the Olympics, dreaming of what may be.

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Brendan is a resident of Murray Bridge, and commutes the 70km to Adelaide to study. He is 19 years old and plays for the Ramblers Football Club in Murray Bridge, usually in the B side. In summer he plays tennis for the Brinkley Tennis Club, and at other times can be found playing in a local league's 8-ball competition, or following his favourite AFL football team, the Adelaide Crows.

Darryl is 39 years old, and while not an active player of organised sports himself, maintains an interest in sports and sports history. He did however once have a rather effective off-spin technique in cricket.

More information

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