

# *History in the Making and the Making of History: Stories and the Social Construction of a Sport*<sup>1</sup>

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Previously known as pedestrianism and once popular, professional running is now a minor and declining sport, perhaps in its dying throes, especially in the face of the professionalisation of 'amateur' athletics. Professional running is now mostly played out in Australia, particularly in the state of Victoria, where a circuit of meetings is administered by the Victorian Athletic League (VAL).<sup>2</sup> This circuit culminates in the sport's most prestigious gathering, at the country town of Stawell over the Easter weekend, where the program includes the Stawell Easter Gift, a 120 metres sprint, which is professional running's most sought after prize.

Stories are a part of professional running. There is little about it that cannot be told as a story drawn from the tellers' memories about themselves, about others they have known or concerning events that they have witnessed. In this paper, I examine how memories are evoked and stories are told to inform the way in which this sport is reconstructed on a day-to-day basis. But memories are not archived, to be recalled as accurate accounts of the happenings they reputedly retell. Memories lack what Samuel has referred to as a 'developmental sense of time',<sup>3</sup> yet shared understandings of prior happenings and assumed ways of doing things feature significantly in the construction of the present. Halbwachs<sup>4</sup> suggests that remembering is structured by the social context in which the memories are evoked. The social positioning of those doing the remembering influences the interpretations that they place on the past and the uses to which they are put in the present.

The narratives told as a part of professional running are the recollections of its practitioners cast in the frame of the here-and-now. As Sutton notes, memories are 'not laid down independently once and for all', rather they, 'are reconstructed rather than reproduced'. He continues that as such, memories are 'attuned to the configurations of [the] culture in which cognition and remembering are situated'.<sup>5</sup> The use of the past in this sport lies in the seamless conflation of selected past events with the socially situated imperatives of the present. The past is used to model the present but that which is reconstructed as the past is informed by the present. Stories, which are constituted by people's deconstruction of the past, legitimate and guide the social construction of the

present. Meaning is given to stories -to the past -by the demands of the present. Memory involves an imaging of prior happenings that is pertinent to the construction of the social situation in which the remembering takes place. Contemporary exponents of the sport use examples of past exploits, as related in oral narratives, to reproduce the *ways* of the sport, but these ways, of necessity, are relevant to the present. The 'demands of specific situations' structures remembering, affecting, 'the *content* as well as the expression of a memory'.<sup>6</sup> The past is slave to the here-and-now.

Together with dog racing, league football and the like, professional running has been and largely remains a working-class sport, from which men have sought a supplementary source of income or, ideally, a big win that would set them up for life.<sup>7</sup> Generally, runners are 'battlers', an Australian term referring to people from backgrounds characterised by relatively meagre, often insecure incomes. Coming from a wide spread of rural and urban blue-collar and some routine white-collar occupations, few runners have been brought-up in comfortable middle-class lifestyles.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the term 'battlers' also implies a cultural orientation that derives from the shared experiences of toughing it out economically. Such *dispositions*, coming from the *habitus* structured from the sport's participants' social origins, are worked out in particular *fields* of social action - the social contexts in which people construct their behaviour.<sup>9</sup> Professional running constitutes a field situating the sport's sub-culture as a simultaneous product of the participants' *habitus* and the conditions unique to the sport.

Following Rigauer's<sup>10</sup> argument that sports replicate and actively contribute to the practices and social inequalities of the wider society, I suggest that professional running projects an ideology of personal achievement in a 'dog-eat-dog', acquisitive capitalist society. One form of working-class response to social inequality is to strive for social mobility through mimicking the ways assumed to characterise the financially successful. Rather than the model of collective improvement fostered by class-based politics, professional running projects a highly individualistic model of success. A large win can provide what people in the sport refer to as a 'kick-on' in life. Yet winning hinges on the 'team' of runner, trainer and stable-mates, a necessary co-operation between individuals that also contains threats to individual achievement; the individual/team tension has fuelled many of professional running's stories. More than just hard work is needed to win, though, and the odds must be loaded in one's favour to counter the possibility that someone else may win the race. So, the ways of *doing* this sport are means used by its practitioners to try to make it pay. For them, 'amateurism' is an ill-afforded luxury; acquisitiveness, gambling and deception ('cheating', some call it) are responses they make to their economic position in the society.

The objective of professional running (and, apparently, that of horse racing and greyhound racing also) is not to win every race, but to win the race of one's choosing. This, as with many working-class sports, is a gambling sport.<sup>11</sup> Winners can land a large return from prize money and gambling winnings. Planning that win involves the successful concealment of the runner's ability from others in the sport and from its officials, for professional running uses handicaps, in the form of staggered starts, intended to level the differences between athletes and create an even race. In practice, runners systematically 'run dead' or lose races, in which they pretend to be trying their hardest, to deceive the handicapper into giving them more of a head start, and so place the athletes in a position from which they increase their chances of becoming 'dark horses' and winning major races of their choosing. Good prospects also need to be concealed from others in the sport, who seek out the 'dark horses' with the intention of taking the best betting odds for themselves.<sup>12</sup>

The need to conceal the potential of a prospective winner means that success in this sport typically involves secrecy, trickery and deception - things that frequently figure in the sport's stories. While professional running's stories differ in content, each one can be placed into an insider's category that reflects a way of the sport. They are categories, moreover, displaying an approximate continuity from the earlier years of the sport. This continuity is evident from nineteenth century newspaper reports of the sport, but is unknown to its present practitioners. For people associated with the sport today, the relevant 'history' comes from their memories. Similarly, there are legendary figures - renowned trainers, scintillating runners - but the 'legends' of one generation fade from view as they are replaced by those that feature more prominently in the memories of the next. Stories tell of how crafty trainers trick officials, of how prospects manage to conceal form before scoring big wins, of the care needed to ensure that secrets are kept, of successful betting plunges, of lost gambling 'markets', and so on. Each story fits into one or more of the insiders' categories and each category reflects a fundamental property of the informal organisation of the sport.

The stories that follow are all oral narratives that bring attention to the ways of the sport, though those recounted here are limited to issues of secrecy and deception, so vital to scoring the big win. These tales provide consistent interpretations of the sport. I heard few incongruent yarns telling of alternative ways of doing professional running. In relating how others are reported to have constructed the sport, these stories frame how it *can be* done and how it *is* done. Interestingly, the coming of 'open athletics' (which allowed amateurs to run on the professional circuit and *vice versa*) and of women's events, brought into professional running athletes not aware of the ways of the sport. Professional runners commented on how some good athletes would never win

a big race because of their ignorance of the 'pro' ways. These athletes had not been exposed to professional running's ways, nor to stories through which these ways could have been learned.<sup>15</sup>

The telling of stories about the sport is a feature of professional running. These tales are told in the form of a person relating their own exploits, or as yams about another known to the teller. The stories related in this paper were all told to me in the course of interviews and field research. There is nothing exceptional in this, because the sport's narratives typically are told in one-to-one or small group encounters. But these are not myths telling the insiders' accounts of the sport's origins; such narratives do not exist. Rather, the significance of the professional runners' stories resides in their content. Those in the sport whom I got to know especially well, and who knew that I was speaking to many others, sometimes would ask what stories I had been told. Occasionally, while pointedly omitting names, I would tell them one. This would elicit smiles, laughs, grunts and nods of agreement. Never did my acquaintances show surprise because, while they may not have heard these stories before, they had heard and told many like them.

The stories recounted here are drawn from more than a hundred interviews (most were tape-recorded) and from ethnographic field research conducted over about three years. Interviews were completed with Stawell Gift winners, other current and retired runners, trainers and the sport's officials mostly in Victoria, but some were conducted in Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales. Interviewees ranged from men who were active in professional running in the desperate years of the Great Depression through to those who were still active in the sport at the time of my research. None were from wealthy backgrounds, although some had subsequently achieved relatively prestigious positions and secure incomes in the course of their working lives. Many had known tough times in their earlier years and relatively poor circumstances had accompanied others through their lives.

## Stories

In a fragmented, patchwork way, the stories of professional running contribute to an insider's imagery of the sport. There are no long renditions, nor myths of origin nor sessions in which story-tellers piece together fables and interpretations of fact as instruction for novitiates. There are just many little stories about how the tellers and others have done the sport.

The narratives that follow are all to do with concealment, which involves keeping secret the runner's true ability. Professional runners need to conceal their actual ability, often for several years, before they 'go-off' in an event of their choosing in an attempt to win and scoop large sums from the bookmakers.

A problem besetting all would-be dark horses is that someone 'takes the market', by scooping the longest odds from the bookmakers before the runner's stable<sup>14</sup> lays its bets.<sup>15</sup>

The real ability of runners may be evident only in the training sessions of their stables, particularly when 'trailing' with other stable members to gauge their true racing performances. Betting markets are lost when the potential of a runner becomes known to people outside the stable. This can occur through snoopers watching the stable train and timing their trials. It may also occur through 'leaks' from the stable. Trainers frequently keep their secrets to themselves, or limit them to trusted senior members of the stable. People in the sport always are trying to find out what is going on in other stables: this might occur through attempts at infiltration, by prompting an unguarded remark or by spying on training sessions and trials. I now explore these issues through the stories related by men in the sport.

Snoopers: Trialling involves a full-speed run over the race distance. This is a dangerous time because spying eyes might discern runners' secrets. Tony Holborn<sup>16</sup> was trained by Charlie Davis, an older man originating from an inner-city working-class Melbourne suburb. Charlie had struggled through the tough years of the Depression, eking a living from his sports of professional running and boxing. Tony talks of the secretive ways in which Davis conducted trials and of the consequences that could befall snoopers.

*Holborn:* We couldn't talk out of the stable, at all ... Before running the trials he [Davis] would get some binoculars and look around the tree tops, you know, to make sure that there was no one out there watching. We used to laugh at this until one day he found someone up there with a stopwatch - we had to chase him off. Years ago Charlie said that he found a guy and they tarred and feathered him, in the Depression years. They tarred and feathered this bloke. Because, fair comment, they had to win to eat. That was a very serious offence.  
(taped interview)

Holborn's story tells of the importance of keeping the trial to within the stable. More than that, it tells of his and stablemates' different formative experiences a half century on from those of their mentor. While winning and the ways of attaining it remained important to Holborn, it was no longer the 'survival strategy' that it had been for Charlie Davis during the Depression years. By the time that Holborn was in the sport, improved overall economic circumstances had mollified the battlers' lot, making the reported tarring and feathering episode understandable in the circumstances of Davis' formative years rather than those of Holborn. The context of being a battler had changed

between the generations of these men, subtly altering the meanings they each placed on concealment, but, nonetheless, also emphasising the need for secrecy.

The following narrative, set in the Depression years, draws attention to some consequences of when the stable's secrecy is breached. Dick Gilmour trained runners on his farm, where he had prepared a trialling track to resemble the sprint lanes at Stawell. From the times clocked on this track, Gilmour could estimate the potential times of athletes in the coveted Stawell Easter Gift. Others knew of this track and spied on it. Tom Walsh was a runner under Dick Gilmour's guidance during the Depression; here he tells of how some snoopers, the Knights, supposedly stole the market on Fred Jones, another runner in the stable.

*Walsh:* When Fred got to Stawell on the Friday - he had given up smoking, he had saved all his money... to make a future for himself. Dick Gilmour trained him. When they got to Stawell in [year] nobody knew a thing about him. You know he was a real dark horse, or was supposed to have been - there is no such thing as a dark horse. So, when they got there, he, Dick Gilmour, said,

'Who's the favourite for Stawell?' This was on the Good Friday

They said, 'Your man'.

He said 'Who!?'

'Your man, Fred Jones'.

'No, can't be right'.

Anyhow it was right. ...

Some low down buggers ... some low down buggers, their name was Knight, little short buggers, they sneaked up in the crop and laid down and seen Fred Jones stand Mick Lear ... seen Mick Lear beaten. Fred beat Mick Lear by a fair bit. ...

This was at a trial which might have been a week before [Easter].

So he waited until the next morning [that is, Easter Saturday morning]. ... Dick Gilmour said to Fred on Saturday morning, 'Well Fred, what are you going to do? Are you going to pull up, or are you going to [go for it]...?'

He [Fred] said, 'Give me so long to think about it, Dick' and he said - they didn't know who had done it then [that is, beat them to the market]. Fred said, 'No. Bugger them Dick. The blokes that have taken the market. I am going to pull up ... They'll do their money'.

... The next year, they took him back ... he won it the next year. ...

He had no money to put on himself. You know it was the start of the Depression ...

(taped interview)

Tom Walsh's story points to the difficulties that beset runners trying to win big races and secure a kick-on in life. This tale shows how others will seek to uncover and profit from one's secrets and it emphasises the cost when concealment breaks down. Tom's claim that there is no such thing as a 'dark horse' points to a sense of hopelessness of the battler's lot - try as hard as one might, there are always those who will take the rewards of one's labour. It is a sad story, because everything worked out in the second year except that, because of the Depression, Fred Jones had no money to put on himself, compounding the bad luck of the previous year.

Other trusted trainers brought their charges to Dick's farm, to trial on his specially prepared track. It is said that neither Dick nor these other men would use to their own advantage any information on runners in other stables gained from such exercises. Wilf O'Toole frequently collaborated with Dick Gilmour, Wilf bringing runners to trial on Dick's farm and each frequently seeking the other's opinion on and assessment of their runners. By most reports they trusted one another, but trust has its limits, it seems. Covert attention is not welcomed, but central players in the sport, as well as its followers, have been caught trying to wrest secrets from their rivals. Percy Ford told of how Wilf found a runner that he wanted to keep from Dick's attention:

*Ford:* Wilf O'Toole had this fellow and Dick Gilmour wanted to see how good he was. So Wilf decided he wouldn't train him at [the town], he'd train him at a paddock. It was a wheat paddock. You can't believe this, but he's got this track marked out in the middle of a wheat paddock. They tell the story that he had a bloke called Don Webster, he ran second at Stawell. He was trying to trial Don and Wilf saw Dick Gilmour hiding. So he lit the wheat paddock! Can you imagine that! It just couldn't happen today Dick Gilmour was there with the binoculars watching him and next thing the bloody wheat starts to bum.

(taped interview)

Covert surveillance by trainers can be threatening in that, by watching runners in training rather than simply in competition at meets, they can assess their potential, make an informed guess about the races in which they could go off, and possibly take the market. This story also points to a view that people should not be taken at their word. It draws attention to a world of transitory, shifting alliances that last only for as long as they work to the mutual pecuniary

advantage of those involved. It also suggests that anything goes in getting information that may be used to a person's own advantage and that, equally, it is quite legitimate to deter transgressors.

Some trainers, knowing the difficulty of ensuring that there are not any prying eyes, follow the simple expedient of slightly altering the length of the trial track, to make useless the times clocked by any snoopers. Archie Fairbrother was a trainer who kept times and exact track lengths to himself, so that he was the sole judge of whether his runners could win a specified race. And, in a magnificent deception, he even tricked one of his runners into trialling without him knowing about it. George Brown told of how Fairbrother set him for a half mile race.

*Brown:* ... one night I'd been training for a while and he [Archie] said to me, 'Listen, I won't be down tomorrow night. You know where we start from for our circle events, I want you to get down on your mark when you've warmed up, I want you to do two laps flat out, just as though you're in a race, see how you can go and let me know. I won't be there but see you do it'.

Well, I'd have run through a brick wall for Archie and I did what I was told. I did my two laps just as though it was a race. And when I got up there for a rub, Archie said, 'Did you do what I told you?' I said 'Yes'.

'I suppose you bludged' [said Archie]. You didn't get any praise from Arch.

I said, 'No, I did the best I could'.

'Huh' [replied Archie], a very sort of doubtful 'Huh' too.

(tape recorded recollections from Brown)

Brown had been entering half mile races to deceive the handicapper into thinking that he was a middle distance runner rather than a sprinter. In the week following his flat-out training run, Brown arrived at a meeting in which he had entered for the 880 yards, only for Archie to tell him:

*Brown:* [Archie said] 'I'm backing you tonight, see you win'.

I said, 'But how did you know I can run a half mile, I never run a half mile [to win]'.

'You run one the other night, and the time you ran was good enough for this [race]' [Archie replied].

Well the cunning old fox had had his field glasses on me from at

least half a mile away and he clocked me, and that was good enough for him.

(tape recorded recollections from Brown)

Brown won that race and Archie had made sure of his winnings by keeping to himself his knowledge of Brown's performance. This, perhaps, was a perfect deception. A snooper would not have clocked Brown doing laps by himself. Neither the runner nor anyone else in the stable knew that Archie was timing him, moreover. Jason Tighe trained with Archie many years later, but this legendary deception still featured as a prominent story about the trainer's cunning. But Tighe adds to the story by noting that, because of the Depression, Brown had no money to bet on himself. However, Archie made so much money from the bookmakers on this race that he gave Brown the equivalent of three months wages.

**Public Gaze:** Runners are in the public gaze each time that they compete. Concealment thus has to be achieved through deception. Runners seeking a big win need to deceive others into thinking that they lack any real ability. One Stawell Gift winner told of how he came from an area that contained a number of professional running stables. He had friends living in the same street, also professional runners, but who trained with a different stable. He tells of how they went to the cinema together and of how they would race home at the end of the show. Only he would run dead, so that he gave no inkling of his actual ability, something that may otherwise have come to light, perhaps just in the casual conversation of his friends with their stablemates.

Identical twins provide intriguing possibilities for deception, because these siblings can create immense confusion about who is actually running. The complexity of working out when a runner is to go for a win is compounded with twins because a 'switch', in which one twin runs under the name of the other, may occur at any time. Whether they do switch places is less relevant than the expectation by others that twins will change places to work the sport to their own advantage. Stories about the few sets of identical twins to have competed in the sport invariably underline the use of deception as a way used in the sport to conceal a potential winner.

Successful runners usually have their individual stories of how they were concealed until the moment of going-off in a race. Ian Cheyne, also one of Archie Fairbrother's runners, told of how he ran with an awful wobble until he slipped into a smooth, trained style to win a big race. Chris Harris acted as a dolt so that no one took him seriously, until he won. Harris used this simpleton image to get 'lifts'<sup>17</sup> from the handicapper and also to deceive others. He recalls how, when going down on the blocks in a heat of a minor meeting, one of the competitors turned to another and said, 'Don't worry about him, he's a fucking

idiot'. Harris remembered this and on meeting this person again, after his big win, asked him, 'Who is the fucking idiot now?'

Archie Fairbrother used all types of subterfuge to ensure good handicaps and good betting odds for his runners. Being under a successful trainer meant that Archie's runners were in the spotlight, possibly receiving greater scrutiny and tighter handicaps. Commonly, such runners will conceal their association with their trainer. Ian Cheyne pretended to have nothing to do with Archie Fairbrother - they even ignored one another if they passed in the street. Another of Archie's runners, Vince Robbins, pretended that his father trained him. Robbins explained the subterfuge that he used to become openly associated with Archie's stable shortly before his big win.

*Robbins:* When I first started Archie didn't put me on his list so I was running as just an ordinary runner. When we used to go to meetings I never associated with them. I'd drive up there with them and then I would disappear. [But then I said] 'I don't want to run without being your runner'.

He [Archie] said, 'We've got to do something about it. Tell you what', he said, 'Ron [another runner in Archie's stable] is in the police force and so is this official called Doherty. When you finish your run make sure you bump into Doherty. Tell him you saw a fellow [ie. Ron] who went to school with your brother and could he introduce you to his [Ron's] trainer because you've been running for a year and half and your Dad [Robbins' supposed trainer] doesn't know enough'.

So we went through this pantomime and sure enough Mr Doherty said, 'That's Ron. He works for the police force. Archie Fairbrother's his trainer'.

I said, '.... do you think you can introduce me'. So we got introduced....

Later that night Archie made sure that he knocked into Fred Grimshaw [the handicapper]. He [Archie] was sitting there talking and he said, 'By the way Fred, Doherty introduced me to some young kid'. He explained the circumstances.

Grimshaw said, 'Oh yes. He's not a bad little runner. He'll never win a big race, might win a good little one for you'.

(taped interview)

Just five weeks later Robbins won the sport's biggest race. But by the time that he openly associated with Archie's stable, the handicapper had formed his

opinion of the runner's ability so this move did not affect his mark. Whereas Archie had been forged by the tough years of the Depression, Vince Robbins' achievements were made in the much more affluent years of the post WWII boom. Another ex-runner from this period pointed to the change that had occurred from the more desperate use of the sport by men who lived in and had faced a life of poverty in the Depression years, to a context in which the sport could still provide a 'kick-on' but jobs and money were nevertheless available. So a subtle change occurred in that while the money remained important, there developed a more aesthetic appreciation of the craft and guile of the sport. Archie Fairbrother's 'foxiness' came to be appreciated in its own right and Vince Robbins' desire to be openly associated with him reflects this shift in the sport - a shift of attitude and cultural reflexion that accorded with the post WWII changes in Australian society.

**Leaks:** Runners also tell stories of how they were set for a race, sometimes winning it, but they lost the market because their deceptions failed. Many a tale of woe is told about the seemingly perfectly executed operation that falls apart at the last moment because of the lost market. Tom Walsh's story about how Fred Jones lost the market because of snoopers is paralleled by accounts of how runners have been stymied because of leaks from their stables. Losing the market does not stop runners from winning, but it does mean that they cannot get the long betting odds. They are then faced with the choice, as was Fred Jones, of pulling-up and hoping that they will get another chance of going for a big win, or of winning anyway and pocketing the prize money and what reduced amounts they might make from their bets.

Many trainers keep important information to themselves. The fewer people that are entrusted with vital information, the less the possibility of a leak. John Whitson, one of Wilf O'Toole's runners said:

*Whitson:* I can remember the very first trial that I had under Wilf's guidance ... I said after the run, 'Wilf, what time did I run?' He looked at his watch and said, 'A quarter to six'. I never asked him again.

(taped interview)

There are many ways in which leaks can occur. Runners can leave stables and carry with them privileged information, using this knowledge to their advantage. Rob Monaghan started to train runners in the 1940s and he developed an impressive reputation as a highly skilled player in the ways of professional running. When he had Chris Harris ready to go off in a major race he had to contend with the fact that an ex-member of the stable, Bill Dickinson, by then an established bookmaker, had knowledge of Harris' potential.

Monaghan and Harris devised an elaborate ploy to deceive Dickinson who, having broken with Monaghan after a rift in the stable, could have destroyed their meticulous plans and long, careful preparations.

Harris walked into the betting ring dressed in some old, daggy clothes, to conceal the fact that he was in top condition. He carried a half-eaten pie to give others the impression that he was eating it, something a serious contender for a race would not do. Harris went up to Dickinson's board, said his hellos and then asked the bookmaker who he thought was going to win the Gift. Dickinson said the name of a runner who appeared to be in with a chance and Harris laid a modest bet on him. As Harris walked away from Dickinson's board the bookmaker lengthened the odds that he was offering against Harris from 50/1 to 100/1.

(notes from an interview with Harris)

Monaghan's account of this deception confirms that of Harris, though he also took delight in recalling Dickinson's astonished reaction on realising that he had been duped.

Guile and deception are the ways of the sport. Bookmakers are alert to the signs of a runner going off and they will rapidly shorten their odds. But to draw in enough money to make the pay-out on the winner, bookmakers offer enticing odds on runners they think are not going off. Monaghan and Harris thoroughly hoodwinked Dickinson. Had he seen through the deception, he would have considerably shortened his odds on Harris, the other bookmakers probably following his lead. This story also illustrates shifting alliances. One year Dickinson had been a part of the team and would have had a slice of the proceeds from Harris' win, the next he was out of it and seen as a potential danger to Harris' aspirations. Such is the dog-eat-dog world of professional running and, for that matter, of acquisitive capitalism.

Archie Fairbrother avoided leaks by rarely revealing his plans, sometimes even keeping runners that he had set for a major race in the dark until the last minute. Archie appreciated that leaks can occur when the stable's intentions become too widely known. Runners' parents and partners are particularly suspect. Parents are believed to be only too ready to tell friends that their progenies are going off in big races and are thought to pose significant threats to runners' betting markets. Stories are told of how parents knew nothing of their offspring being set for a big race until the whole thing was over or, at least, until the stable had laid its bets. Dick Gilmour, a confirmed bachelor, simply would not trust women. He was said to state that, 'They talk too bloody much, women'.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Rob Monaghan, also a confirmed bachelor,

took Chris Harris' mother, whose trustworthiness was summarised in his description of her as being as 'tight as an oyster',<sup>19</sup> completely into his confidence. But Harris' father, whose loose mouth was considered a big risk to the stable, was excluded to the extent that he was told that his son had left Monaghan's stable.

Roger Best, trained by Rob Monaghan, lost the market the first year that he went for a big race and, like Fred Jones many years earlier, he decided to pull up rather than run just for the prize money. He went on to win the race the following year. Monaghan was certain in that first year about the source of the leak, that had made Best the favourite for the race before they had bet a cent.

Monaghan blamed the lost market on Best's wife, who was very annoyed with Best when he told her that he was going to pull up. She is reputed to have said, 'What do I tell all of my friends? Because she had told them all to back him. That was in [year]. In [the following year], the year that Best won, a female neighbour gave him \$10 before he went to Stawell and asked him to back himself on her behalf. Best refused, returning the cash, suggesting to her that it would be a waste of money to put it on him. Best did not want to lose the market a second time. Monaghan held the view that Best's wife had been talking again, despite what had occurred the year before.

(notes from interview with Monaghan)

Another persistent threat for any stable is the runner in the know who inadvertently reveals a secret. Ben Schwartz, a runner who went on to become an official in the sport, tells of how, when involved in a long distance charity run, he roomed with Roy Paglia, a well-known footballer who was also associated with professional running.

*Schwartz:* ... when Ken Richards won [the Stawell Gift] it was a very funny incident. ... we had Roy Paglia with us on the [long distance charity] run, and the first night at Bendigo I shared the room with Roy Paglia which is a story in itself. Roy of course was in the running game and we got pretty full later in the night and Roy started to open up a little bit. Roy said to me, he said, 'Ben, we've got a Stawell Gift winner amongst us, in our stable. He's never run in his life but he will win Stawell'. That's all he said. ... He was in Harry Smith's stable.

So the very next morning we've woken up and Roy has woken up and he said to me, 'Ben, did I mention anything about running last night?'

I said, 'Yes Roy You did'.

He said, 'Did I mention anything about the Stawell Gift'.

I said, 'Yes, you did Roy'.

He said, 'Did I mention anything about a winner?'.

I said, 'Yes, you did'.

He said, 'Did I mention anything else?'

I said, 'No you didn't'.

Then he said, 'Well, forget you heard the conversation'.

That was all and of course I put that at the back of my mind. Richards won it in [year] and that [the charity run] was in January [the previous year]. I went to Stawell in April and I looked through the stables and I thought now he's got somebody there, but nobody came up from the Harry Smith stable that year and I completely forgot about it. The very next year, and Ken Richards hadn't run all that time and he came in the next year and he'd had one run, he came in in [year] eighteen months later almost [than the charity run] and he won Stawell. It was only afterwards when they were interviewing on the TV that they said to him, 'Did you and your stable win much money?' He said, 'Oh yeah. We did, but we could have won a lot more only Roy Paglia opened his mouth'. Then I clicked that that was the conversation eighteen months before, and they'd put him away all that time.

(Taped interview)

## Conclusion

Deception is so commonplace in professional running that it is expected that its practitioners will deceive and the onus is on others to work out the illusion. The stories presented in this paper show how professional runners attempt to sustain their deceptions against threats from snoopers, the public gaze and leaks. Through stories, novices are introduced to the ways of the sport, learning the importance of things such as secrecy and what they need to do if they are to secure a big win. For the adept, the stories confirm that these are the ways in which the sport is constructed and that their actions and plans are in keeping with these ways. The stories also provide the means for dealing with the threats to getting a big win. Snoopers can be chased away Potential leaks can be spotted and plugged. Forms of concealment can be devised to deceive the public gaze. For these runners, the sport's past, as related through stories about individuals, provides models of how to win and strategies to combat threats to winning. So

the stories relate how the sport is constituted and, in so doing, they are also constitutive of professional running.<sup>20</sup>

The learning/re-affirming, through stories, of the doing of the sport, occurs in what their telling suggests to be the time-honoured ways of professional running. But, equally, these stories are told and interpreted in a contemporary context; the way in which the past influences the present is framed by the present. Past events retain their relevance because the objectives of the sport have retained some temporal continuity into the here-and-now, which also allows the past-as-stories to model how the sport should be played out. This continuity occurs because professional running was and remains a sport primarily associated with battlers. By identifying the pre-dominant socio-economic location of the runners, the cultural forms reflected in the stories are understood in terms of wide-ranging structural constraints on social action.<sup>21</sup> The narratives represent patterned social actions that together constitute a response of battlers to the perceived realities of life in an acquisitive capitalist society. The type of stories told by professional runners reflects their habitus.

The oral narratives pertinent to professional running are selected by the ways of doing the sport *now*. Stories that are not relevant to the present are not told; they are not even remembered. Moreover, the stories told are from 'living-memory'. Tales from earlier periods of the sport have disappeared from the oral record. Although professional runners have a sense of continuity with what has gone before them, this is not a strict historical continuity in the sense of a sequence of events and happenings. But a sense of the past as a timeless, undifferentiated set of occurrences is important, because this enables those in the sport to legitimate the ways that they construct it in the present.

The stories relate fragments of the sport's past as it is relevant to the here-and-now and, in turn, this sense of the past provides a guide about 'what-to-do', about how to constitute the sport. Thus, the tales (re)create a history of the *doing* of the sport that is central to its agenic (re)construction. This remembering is shifting, situational (and perhaps fictional) because it is so inextricably built into and constructed from within the present. The veracity of 'fact' is irrelevant; it is the doing of the sport in the here-and-now that selects the relevant narratives. So while its past plays a constitutive role in the construction of the sport, the narratives that make the history are informed and selected by present doings. Within a popular context, therefore, a sense of the past is a reading of the present.

## Notes

- 1 The research on the Stawell Easter Gift included here was done jointly with John Perry. This research was supported by grants from the Australian Research Council and from Deakin University. An earlier version of this paper was

- presented to Sporting Traditions XII Conference, Queenstown, New Zealand, February 1999. I thank all those who have commented on this paper.
- 2 Professional running is also found in Scotland's Highland Games and the Borders Games circuit straddling southern Scotland and northern England. But this sport has experienced serious decline in these areas.
  - 3 R. Samuel, *Theatres of Memory. Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, Verso, London, 1994, p. 6.
  - 4 M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by L.A. Coser, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.
  - 5 J. Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces: Descartes to Connectionism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p. 2.
  - 6 Sutton, *Philosophy and Memory Traces*, p. 6 footnote. Emphasis from source.
  - 7 Historically, there has been the occasional female pedestrian and, over the past decade, meetings on the VAL circuit have staged women's events. The number of female participants remains relatively small, as does their prize money, and their involvement is still considered marginal. My research has been with male runners.
  - 8 P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Routledge, London, 1986, and L. Wacquant, 'The social logic of boxing in Black Chicago: toward a sociology of pugilism', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 9, 1992, pp. 221-54, have demonstrated that class influences the sports people play, the manner in which they play them and the meanings that they bring to them.
  - 9 Bourdieu, *Distinction*; P. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. by R. Nice, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990. J. Thompson, 'Editor's introduction', in P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.
  - 10 B. Rigauer, *Sport and Work*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1981.
  - 11 See A. Metcalfe, 'Leisure, sport and working-class culture: some insights from Montreal and the northeast coalfields of England', in H. Cantelon and R. Hollands, (eds.), *Leisure, Sport and Working Class Cultures*, Garamond Press, Toronto, 1988.
  - 12 A case study of the making of a winner in professional running can be found in P. Mewett with J. Perry, 'A sporting chance? The 'dark horse strategy' and winning in professional running', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, vol. 14, 1997, pp. 121-42.
  - 13 The issue of amateurs entering professional running requires a separate treatment. But perhaps the professionals' perspective on amateurs was a little naive: an amateur athletics official told me that amateur runners had started to run dead so that their times would not prejudice their chances on the professional circuit.
  - 14 A group of runners, sometimes as few as two or three or as many as twelve or fifteen, who train together under one (occasionally more) trainer(s) is referred to as a 'stable'. A stable often acts as a unit for betting purposes. Secrets and forms of deception are based in stables.
  - 15 Betting is discussed in terms of the length of the odds. The smaller the bet required to win a specified amount, the 'longer' the odds. So a bet laid at 20 to 1 (bet \$1 to win \$20) provides longer odds than one laid at 5 to 1 (bet \$1 to win \$5). 'Taking the market' means betting at the longest available odds. Conversely, 'losing the market' means that someone else bet on the runner first, securing the longest odds.
  - 16 All personal names are pseudonyms, including those used in interview transcripts and fieldnotes.

- 17 Getting a 'lift' from the handicapper means being given a more lenient mark. Conversely, a 'pull' refers to being put on a less favourable handicap.
- 18 Taped interview with Tom Walsh.
- 19 Interview with Rob Monaghan.
- 20 See R. Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1986.
- 21 See B. Berger, 'Structure and choice in the sociology of culture', *Theory and Society*, vol. 20, 1991, pp. 1-19.