

THE TRANSFORMATION OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL: THE IMPACT OF BUSINESS ON THE SPORT FIELD

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ABSTRACT: This article interprets the Australian Football League's (AFL) transformation from a game to an entertainment business through the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu. The transformation of sport, as illustrated in Australia, highlights how communities are being undermined by the agenda of global neoliberalism to transform all relations into commercial relations. Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital and habitus enable us to understand how the sport field has merged with the economic and media fields and how the dominant, neoliberal, business characteristics of the sport field influence the way those participating in the field act, make decisions and prioritise. Likewise, we can interpret how the actions of the field's participants reinforce the dominant characteristics of the field. In practical terms, using the AFL as a case study, the analysis highlights how neoliberal, business ideals characterise the sport field and how the relationships and actions of the field's participants reflect this. Importantly, this article draws on insights from the fans who provide their thoughts on the changing face of the AFL, and in particular, the increased role of the media and economic fields in the sport field.

KEYWORDS: Neoliberalism; Sport; Bourdieu

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Football League (AFL) has changed dramatically over the last 150 years. What were once local, community-held, grassroots endeavours has become a multibillion-dollar entertainment industry with a national reach. According to Andrew Demetrious, former chief executive officer of the Australian Football League, 'The AFL is a brand, a business and a form of entertainment that has to compete for the hearts and

minds of Australians, just as all other forms of entertainment do.¹ Each of the eighteen clubs within the AFL competes with the others in selling its products, team play and its club brand, to its supporters (consumers). The aim of each club is to generate enough revenue and profit to survive in the AFL and to gain competitive advantages against the other seventeen clubs. In the process, the game has changed significantly since it was first played, with many of the changes appearing in the last thirty years.²

This paper seeks to understand the impact of this change through a conceptual lens. In particular, this paper seeks to use the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to interpret the transformation of the AFL into a multi-billion dollar entertainment industry, dominated by neoliberal ideals. By using Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital this study will explore and understand the impact of the economic field and the media field on the sport field, using the AFL a case study.

The transformation of popular sport in Australia into a multi-billion dollar industry is a significant topic for analysis. Sport is one of Australia's most popular pastimes. Indeed, Australian Football is Australia's indigenous game. Furthermore, many Australian cultural theorists and historians have outlined that the game's characteristics at its origin in the 1850's represented the expression and values of the Australian people at the time.³ The game was very much a reflection of the democratic principles Australia was founded upon. Australian Football, much like Australian democracy, was free, facilitated active participation within communities, and encouraged participants to reach their full potential, while also working together towards shared and common goals. The fact that Australian sports such as the AFL have been transformed into a business has significant implications for the game's community. In particular, it appears football communities are being replaced by markets of consumers.

By expounding the concepts of Bourdieu, this paper will develop a conceptual lens that we can use to understand and interpret the transformation of the AFL into a business and the subsequent transformation of communities to markets. Furthermore, to enrich the conceptual framework and further illuminate this transformation, football fans will share their views about how the game has changed and the impact this has had on the

¹ Demetrious, A., 'An Ongoing Challenge', 2006, in McLachlan, G., 2013 *Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure Report*, online, <http://www.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Annual%20Report/2013%20AFL%20Annual%20Report.pdf>, retrieved, March 6, 2014

² While the origins of Australian Football, particularly before 1858, are the subject of much debate, it is generally accepted that Australian Football became more organised and more prevalent in Victoria, and, in particular in Melbourne, from 1858. For more about the origins of the game see Blainey, G., *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Information Australia, Melbourne, 1990

³ Blainey, G., *A Game of Our Own: The Origins of Australian Football*, Information Australia, Melbourne, 1990

game's communities. On a personal level, the fans will discuss their own relationship with the game and the club they support.

However, to fully understand the game's transformation and its impact on the fans it is first necessary to understand the political backdrop of western society over the last forty years, and, in particular, the rise and dominance of neoliberalism, which came to dominate the west, its prevailing political ideology and its many fields of society, including sport.

NEOLIBERALISM

The dominance of neoliberal policy in Australia over the last four decades has stretched well beyond the boundaries of economics, politics and business and is now one of the most prominent and defining features of Australian culture. Australia exemplifies the triumph of neoliberalism globally, and this transformation of sport illustrates the significance of its penetration of all dimensions of society and culture. The political philosophy, which says that 'money and markets can always do everything better than governments, bureaucracies and the law' has profoundly affected the way we consume and interact with our culture and, indeed, each other. The transformation in the Australian political and economic setting over the last four decades is seen more broadly as the triumph of 'economic rationalism' – the doctrine which states that to more rationally organize society all social forms and all social relations should be based on market principles and be subject to market imperatives.⁴ As such, new means and methods of making money have spawned in almost all forms and facets and Australian life – sport included.

The ideological shift to the right that domestic politics leapt towards in the late 1970's is by no means unique to Australia – indeed it was mirrored in various measures across the western world, led by the United States and the United Kingdom.⁵ Likewise, the subsequent commodification of the AFL merely mirrors the commercialization of culture across the western world, and serves to highlight the domination of the market in shaping and defining our relationship with sport.

At the core of the neoliberal agenda is the unwavering belief that, when able to act freely and without government interference, the market will be self-regulating and produce the most efficient, productive and effective economic outcomes, therefore

⁴ M Pusey, *Integrity Under Stress: Economic Rationalism in Canberra – A Nation Building State Changes its Mind*, C.U.P., Cambridge, 1991, p. 208

⁵ Steger, M., Roy, R., 'First-wave neoliberalism in the 1980s: Reaganomics and Thatcherism, in *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction*, OUP Oxford, Oxford, 2010, p. 21

creating higher quality products and services at a more efficient cost.⁶ The dominant features across most neoliberal economies from the 1980's were increased privatisation, the deregulation of previously government regulated sectors and the reduced role and spending of government in the market, along with globalisation, free markets and entrepreneurship.

Importantly, the enthusiastic embracing of neoliberal dominance within western society also served to engrain the neoliberal framework as 'common sense' – not just in an economic sense, but across several different functions of society. Nothing was off limits or out of bounds – everything that could be utilised to generate profit, was. Those industries which had always generated some level of money within its operation became fully embedded in the neoliberal mantra of 'producing profit'. Even industries that were not fully privately owned or did not function to profit, still implemented neoliberal styles of management, which ensured the principles of efficiency, productivity and profit appeared as the norm in all facets of life. Indeed, the global market and its neoliberal policies were considered inevitable and irresistible.

THE EFFECTS OF NEOLIBERALISM ON SPORT

The dominance of neoliberalism in society means that even industries that are not fully privatised are still managed to operate as private businesses. The AFL is an example of this. Culture, such as sport, was once considered an expression of its creators – the people. In most instances, culture is still an expression of its creators; however, it is now created by the culture industry. Culture, such as sport, has largely been taken off the people and the community and sold back to them in the form of 'popular' culture.

This is an extension of the neoliberal 'way of life' – every object and action can be commodified and every commodity can be packaged, advertised, marketed and sold. The process in between is analysed through measurements of efficiency, productivity and profit. The domination of neoliberalism eliminates any other form of community that does not define relations in market terms, making it almost impossible to appreciate that there could be any alternative. This idea is illuminated in Nancy MacLean's recent book, *Democracy in Chains* (2017) where she examines James Buchanan, one of the major architects and agents for the Radical Right. MacLean argued that people always act out of self-interest, and that government activity should be minimized, allowing only markets to determine income distribution and the direction of society. Buchanan called for

⁶ Pusey, M., *Integrity Under Stress*, 1991, p. 209

privatized public assets, and sought to significantly marginalize all public institutions.⁷ The organization of sport in any other way than based on self-interest, would naturally be a target for this way of thinking, as it implies upholding the value of the common good of the community, such as team spirit, in opposition to individualist egoism. Philip Mirowski and Dieter Plehwe's work on the Mont Pelerin Society further supports this notion. In their anthology, *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (2009), Mirowski and Plehwe outline that the Mont Pelerin Society, founded in 1947, set out to frame all political and economic debates on a global scale, replacing Keynesian economics and its social democratic agenda by imposing a globalized market advancing business activity, self-interest and relationships defined through the market to the extent that they are considered the natural way of life in almost all dimensions of society.⁸ Before the advent of neoliberalism in the culture industry, culture did not just represent and express the people who created it; it also provided a platform for citizens to engage in something meaningful with others and to build something from the grassroots. Through this evolution, communities were created and sustained.

However, it seems that with the advent of neoliberalism, this has changed. In 2017 the AFL is utilised by powerful, commercial, deregulated, privatised industries as a tool to generate profit. Furthermore, it would appear that the AFL is largely managed with the same principles and objectives as a private organisation. Although the AFL and its 18 clubs are not privately owned organisations, they operate as businesses, with money now the most dominating characteristic of the competition's existence.

Finally, the neoliberal, private sector style of management adopted by the AFL and its clubs has also influenced the act of playing. Indeed today, the once carefree, spontaneous, creative nature of play has been compromised by neoliberal characteristics of efficiency, structure, team rules and set plays. Each individual and team performance is reviewed, analysed and judged as a business would be – by measure of efficiency and effectiveness through a range of modern day statistics such as 'contested possession', 'hardball gets', 'loose ball gets', 'inside 50's', 'clearances' and other key performance indicators.

As will be illuminated later in this paper when we hear from several AFL fans, the dominance and impact of neoliberalism in the AFL has been both observed and felt by the community. However, before we discuss the views of the fans, it is first necessary to outline the transformation of Australian Football from sport to business.

⁷ MacLean, Nancy, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, Random House, New York, 2017

⁸ Mirowski, Philip and Dieter Plehwe, eds. *The Road from Mont Pèlerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009

FROM SPORT TO BUSINESS: THE TRANSFORMATION OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

The changes that have occurred in the AFL since the inception of Australian football in and around the 1850's are numerous but tend to fall into these areas: (a) the rise of professionalism or the professionalisation of the sport, (b) the transformation of the game from sport to entertainment, and the relationship between the fans, supporters, and members to both the league and its member clubs.

Professionalism. The most significant change may be the professionalisation of the game, which impacts all aspects of the game and club cultures. Since the 1990s, Australian footballers have faced increasing demands in terms of performance. Their commitment to meeting these expectations has resulted in significant changes in training regimens. In the former Victorian Football League (VFL), players followed a twice-a-week training schedule. In the AFL today, footballers train nearly every day, putting in not only thirty to forty hours a week with their teams but also fifteen to twenty hours a week individually.⁹ In addition to training, the media and community work commitments players must meet have moved AFL football from the semi-professional, leisure-time pursuit it was in the VFL to a full-time, seven-days-a-week profession. According to Austin Jones, former St. Kilda defender and midfielder, this shift has fundamentally changed the game. Instead of engendering fun and joy, the game is 'just a business and that's the sole aim'.¹⁰ As a result, players feel less passionate about the game.

Professionalisation has also led to players feeling less affinity for their clubs as they must focus more and more on their individual performance statistics, a result of the increasing use of microanalysis by clubs to determine individual players' effectiveness, efficiency, and costs. Historically, players in the VFL followed the unwritten rule that love for the game and for the clubs they represented was more important than individual opportunities for fame and fortune. Such notions, however, have all but disappeared with the new emphasis on professionalism and individual abilities. Increasingly, the AFL utilises its players as commodities to strengthen revenue streams by selling its products to consumers. In turn, players have become adept at branding themselves to capitalise on this change, leading to increasing numbers of players leaving one club for another to earn more money, recognition, and the perks that come with such fame. The first such defection occurred in 1964 when Ron Barassi, champion of the Melbourne Football Club, revealed his individual ambition and desire for greater financial prosperity by

⁹ Jones, A., cited in Trevor Grant, 'The Reluctant Star', *Herald Sun Weekend*, 22 April 2006, 10–11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

leaving his club to play and coach for the rival Carlton Football Club. According to John Devaney, 'It was an appointment that sent shockwaves reverberating through the entire world of Australian football'.¹¹ Such departures of high-profile players have become increasingly common, even accepted, as the game and its players become more and more professionalised. In more recent years, Chris Judd, Gary Ablett Junior, Israel Folau, Karmichael Hunt, Callan Ward, Tom Scully, and Lance 'Buddy' Franklin (among others) have left their clubs, even their original sports, to take positions with other clubs for greater financial gain and opportunities to be part of championship teams.

Exacerbating the shift from loyalty has been the implementation of free agency. Since 2013, AFL clubs can offer players on other teams significantly more money to play for them rather than continue with their home teams. The only condition is that the rival clubs may make such offers only to players who have been part of their home teams for more than eight seasons. Home clubs may offer to match or exceed rival contracts, but they may do so only for their ten highest paid players. Thus, although players have the right to accept or reject such offers, financial gain increasingly is the determining factor in who plays for what team and is the motivation for players working to increase their individual statistics to attract such offers.

The influence of professionalism within the AFL is not restricted to players, however. Play is still the essence of AFL brands, and teams must be successful on the field to ensure their survival and ability to attract increased capital. To that end, clubs spend significant portions of their revenue on developing football departments and attracting top coaching staffs to increase player and team performance. Anecdotal evidence shows that members of each team's football department, especially the coaches, are now shaping play on the field, which has become a function of the business of the AFL. Coaches serve as key managers in these AFL businesses. Winning is the key performance indicator, affecting not only those who play and coach but the business as a whole in terms of generating revenue. Once responsible primarily for motivating players, coaches must now be meticulous planners and strategists, utilising sport science and microanalyses of player and team performance to take players and teams to successful game outcomes. Where once players on the field were the primary determinants of game tactics, now they are relegated to carrying out the marching orders of their coaches, who structure the overarching tactics for each game and assign each player specific roles during the game to implement those tactics.

Entertainment. Hand in hand with the professionalism within the AFL has been

¹¹ John Devaney, Carlton, in 'Australian Football: Celebrating the History of the Great Australian Game', *AustralianFootball.com*, accessed 28 March 2012, <http://australianfootball.com/clubs/bio/Carlton/3>.

the emergence of the sport as entertainment. Ensuring the entertainment value of their product (game play) is critical to the ability of the AFL and each of its eighteen member clubs to generate increasing revenues. One of the most extensive areas the AFL has targeted to increase entertainment value concerns the rules and regulations governing the game. Changes such as deliberate out of bounds, time limits for lining up for goals, and kicking out immediately after the opposition's scoring a behind have been introduced to make the game faster and, thus, more aesthetically pleasing and entertaining for fans and the public at large.¹²

Inherent in the quest to keep the game entertaining for the general population, the AFL has implemented an equalisation policy to ensure that games are as close and as unpredictable as possible, heightening their entertainment value. The AFL designed this policy, first implemented in 1985, to ensure all clubs have the chance to be successful within the league and, thus, more entertaining for consumers.¹³ Under this policy, the league distributes revenues garnered from all sources equally among all the clubs. In addition, during the draft, the policy affords the lowest ranking team at the conclusion of the season the first selection in the first round and the first-ranked team the last selection. Each club is also limited to the same amount of money for total player payments so that wealthier clubs cannot simply offer players more money than the less well-financed teams can afford.¹⁴ In this way, the equalisation policy is supposed to 'promote, but does not guarantee, . . . competitiveness and evenness on the field, allowing for uncertainty of outcomes and the opportunity for surprise results'.¹⁵ Indeed, the policy appears to work in that, since 1985, all but one of the eighteen clubs have made it the finals and teams near the bottom of the rankings do, on occasion, defeat those ranked significantly higher.¹⁶ In effect, the policy helps to keep fans and supporters believing their teams can win, to ensure audiences for the various media outlets covering the sport, and to generate increased revenues for the league and its clubs.

Changing the game in these ways, however, is only one aspect of entertainment. Off-field extensions of the game have also been designed by the AFL and the media to engage and entertain consumers. These include increasing sports coverage in all types of media, which have found Australian football to be a drawing card for readers/viewers and

¹² 'AFL Rules—Laws of the Game 2015', *AFL.com*, accessed 5 May 2013, <http://www.afl.com.au/afl-hq/laws-of-the-game>

¹³ 'The AFL's Equalisation Policy Explained', *AFL.com*, accessed 6 March 2014, <http://www.afl.com.au/news/2014-06-04/equalisation-changes-explained>.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

advertisers. Over the years, coverage about the game both on and off field has expanded from seasonal to year round. Both television and radio broadcast games, with stations working cooperatively to ensure the broadcast of every game played during the season.¹⁷ Radio stations also offer magazine-style sports programs, often during drive time, to fuel the fans' desire for more coverage. Often hosted by former players, these shows feature segments on individual games, teams, players, and issues related to the sport both on and off the field. Television has embraced similar types of programs, and competition for the rights to broadcast championship games has continued to escalate. In 2015, Seven Network and Foxtel bid a record \$2.508 billion to broadcast all the AFL games, including preseason, home and away, and finals games.¹⁸ Online, games such as *Dream Team* (AFL) and *Super Coach* (*Herald Sun*) attract consumers who wish to engage in creating their own fantasy teams, utilising the microanalyses proffered by teams and sports analysts to choose players, field teams, and play virtual games. In 2011, over 600,000 consumers visited the *Herald Sun* and/or AFL Web sites each week.¹⁹

Supporters/consumers. Intertwined within the shifts related to professionalism and entertainment is the shift in how the AFL and its member clubs view their fans and supporters. More important than the creation of community within the club is the ability of the club to generate revenue to remain successful within the league and entertainment communities. Supporters who were once a vital part of each club, contributing to the vibrancy of the community whether they contributed financially or not, are now relegated to the role of consumers, sources of revenue for the organisation. To be part of their clubs, individuals are required to purchase memberships, which comprise a significant portion of club revenues.

As financial demands increase, however, so do the efforts of clubs to expand their membership. This has resulted in both the league and individual clubs recruiting beyond their support bases. Teams have changed their names to be more attractive to a wider audience of potential supporters (e.g., the Western Bulldogs and the Kangaroos²⁰). Others have moved their traditional home grounds, training facilities, and headquarters out of their home areas to state-of-the-art facilities to broaden their supporter bases (e.g.,

¹⁷ Lethlean, 'Broadcasting, Scheduling and Infrastructure', 39.

¹⁸ McLachlan, 'AFL CEO Gillon McLachlan's Statement on New Broadcast Deal'.

¹⁹ 'NAB Fantasy', *AFL.com*, accessed 11 June 2012, <http://fantasy.afl.com.au/pulse/index.html#/pulse>; 'Nissan Super Coach', *Herald Sun*, accessed 11 June 2012, <http://supercoach.heraldsun.com.au>

²⁰ John Devaney, Western Bulldogs, in 'Australian Football: Celebrating the History of the Great Australian Game', *AustralianFootball.com*, accessed 27 April 2012, <http://australianfootball.com/clubs/bio/Western%20Bulldogs/14>.

St Kilda, Collingwood, Essendon, Hawthorn²¹). Others have sold the location of home games to interstate and government venues outside the boundaries of their traditional supporter bases, thus limiting the ability of their supporters to attend home games (e.g., Hawthorn, North Melbourne, Western Bulldogs, Melbourne, Port Adelaide²²).

In addition, the AFL has created two additional teams, the Gold Coast Suns and the Greater Western Sydney Giants Football Clubs, to create new markets and attract new supporters to the game. Yet it has continued to deny applications from Tasmania to form a club, perhaps because the Tasmanian market is significantly smaller than the others and the people in Tasmania are already avid AFL fans and consumers of the AFL brand and products.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFORMATION: BOURDIEU'S THEORY IN PRACTICE

To understand the underlying reasons for the transformation of the AFL requires an understanding of Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital. A French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu pioneered investigative frameworks and terminologies to help understand the dynamics of power relations in social life. In building his theoretical framework, Bourdieu developed his key terms of *capital*, *habitus* and *field* as a means of understanding the interactions of citizens within a given setting to gain power or recognition.²³

From the school of genetic structuralism and critical sociology, Bourdieu was heavily influenced by traditional sociology theory, which he utilised to build upon through the development of his own theory. Max Weber's theories, which centred upon the importance of domination and symbolic systems in social life, as well as the idea of social orders, were substantially drawn upon by Bourdieu to develop the notion of *field*. From Karl Marx, Bourdieu understood that 'society' was the product of a range of social relationships. As will be noted later in this analysis, Bourdieu built upon this to argue that these social relations constrained citizens to recognise each other and compete with

²¹ For more information about the history of each club, see 'Australian Football: Celebrating the History of the Great Australian Game', *AustralianFootball.com*, accessed March 28, 2013, <http://australianfootball.com/clubs>.

²² See Hawthorn Football Club, *Annual Financial Report: Year Ending 31 October 2007*, accessed 15 October 2012, http://www.hawthornfc.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/Hawthorn/PDFs/HFC_2007_Annual_Financial_Report.pdf; Heath O'Loughlin, 'History: North in Hobart', *NMFC.com*, accessed 16 October 2012, <http://www.nmfc.com.au/news/2011-09-27/history-north-in-hobart>.

²³ Bourdieu, P., 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, J.G., *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, Greenwood Press, 1986, pp. 241-258

each other for socially recognised forms of power.²⁴

Bourdieu also inherited a certain structuralist interpretation from the theories of Emile Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Claude Levi-Strauss. Integral to his theories of *field*, *capital* and *habitus* was Bourdieu's claim that social structures tend to reproduce themselves. Yet, Bourdieu was also influenced by theories of phenomenology, particularly through the theories of Maurice Merleau-Ponty who played an essential part in the formulation of Bourdieu's focus on the body, action and practical disposition. These ideas manifested in Bourdieu's theory of *habitus*.²⁵

Bourdieu's theories of *capital* and *habitus* (and later, the concept of *field*) attempt to reconcile the contrasting objective-subjective antinomy of the social sciences. He wanted to unite social phenomenology and structuralism through his theories of habitus. An analysis of Bourdieu's work and, in particular, a practical investigation of his theories of *capital*, *habitus* and *field*, is necessary to understand this more clearly.

BOURDIEU'S THEORIES OF FIELD, CAPITAL AND HABITUS

Bourdieu's concept of field concerns the reasons people behave as they do in a certain time and space. Through his notions of capital and habitus, Bourdieu attempted to understand how citizens within the same field seek to gain power from each other from the limitations of the field in which they are a part. He concluded that the behaviour of citizens and the relationships they share with each other reflect their environment and serve to legitimise and reinforce the existing structure of their surroundings.²⁶

Bourdieu argued that what appear to be autonomous individuals acting according to their own interests are actually products of an emergent historical system of social relations that constrain these individuals to recognise each other and compete with each other for socially recognised forms of power, which he describes as capital. Thus, capital is any form of power that allows actors to participate in a given field of society to gain further capital, thereby augmenting their positions in the field. He differentiated capital into four types: social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, and economic capital.²⁷ Social capital consists of resources based on group membership, relationships, networks or influence, and support. It is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships

²⁴ Bourdieu discusses Weber, Marx, Durkheim, Mauss and Levi-Strauss in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002

²⁵ Bourdieu, P., *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 2002, p. 60

²⁶ Bourdieu, P., 'The Forms of Capital', in Richardson, J.G., *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*, Greenwood Press, 1986, p. 241

²⁷ Bourdieu, P., 'The Forms of Capital', p. 241

of mutual acquaintance and recognition'.²⁸ Cultural capital consists of nonfinancial social assets that promote social mobility beyond economic means: forms of knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has that give them higher status in society. Parents provide their children with cultural capital by transmitting the attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the current educational system. Symbolic capital refers to the resources available to an individual on the basis of honour, prestige, or recognition. Economic capital refers to one's command over economic resources such as cash and financial assets.

According to Bourdieu, through these four types of capital, citizens augment and establish their positions in society. In addition, capital is fundamentally linked to fields and habitus.

Bourdieu saw the modern social world as being composed of various fields or structures of social relations. Among the main fields in modern society, he cited the arts, education, law, politics, and the economy. Within each field, citizens compete for capital, struggling against each other to establish their positions within that space. In general, the different actors within each field tend to strive for capital specific to that field and independent of capital within any other field. Although each field of society is autonomous and independent of the influences and characteristics of other fields, Bourdieu also believed that the economic field is the most dominant, powerful, and increasingly influential field. Thus, maintaining the autonomy of the other fields is essential to limiting the power of those with economic capital. Bourdieu also believed that the limited characteristics of the field in which they are a part constrain the struggle between citizens for power. This struggle for capital also serves to augment and reproduce the existing dominant structure of the field.²⁹ However, if a field loses its autonomy to another more dominant field (e.g., the economic field), the struggle for capital will change to reflect the limitations of the dominant field. Thus, citizens will increasingly battle for the most dominant forms of capital, which in turn will further augment and change the structure and characteristics of the field. According to Bourdieu, if the economic field merges with almost any of the other fields, each field will begin to mirror the next as will the struggle for capital within each field.³⁰

²⁸ Bourdieu outlines his definition of cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital and economic capital in 'The Forms of Capital', p. 245

²⁹ Further to 'The Forms of Capital', to read more about Bourdieu's theories of fields, capital, habitus and cultural production, refer to: Bourdieu, P., Passeron, J., 'Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction', in Brown, R., *Knowledge, Education and Cultural Change*, Tavistock Publications, London, 1973; Bourdieu, P., *The Field of Cultural Production: essay in art and literature*, Columbia University Press, 1993; Bourdieu, P., *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1996

³⁰ Bourdieu, P., 'The Forms of Capital', p. 246

The notion of habitus further clarifies this process. According to Bourdieu, actors gain capital and power within a field as a result of their habitus, a system of dispositions developed in response to the objective conditions of the field. That is, an individual's 'feel for the game' and struggle for capital is constrained by the dominant characteristics of their surroundings. He also argued that the habitus of an individual augments and reproduces the characteristics of the field. Thus, having absorbed objective social structures into a personal set of dispositions, the subjective nature of an individual's actions reinforces the characteristics of the field and the relationships within it.³¹

This point is fundamentally important in understanding the transformation of the AFL from sport to business. In an autonomous sport field, sports clubs evolve from play, which characterizes their culture and spirit. However, this process is disrupted when the sport field loses its autonomy to other fields (i.e., the economic and media fields). As a result, the pursuit of economic capital begins to dominate the actions of those participating within the field; and the pursuit of economic capital characterizes the culture and spirit of the field and the relationships formed within it. Rather than play being foundational to the culture and spirit of football clubs, neoliberal business characteristics become dominant and are the determinants of play.

The influence of the economic field. Bourdieu claimed that the economic field has undermined the autonomy of most other fields in society, limiting the habitus of the actors within each field to the structure and characteristics of the economic field and increasing each individual's desire to accumulate economic capital. Thus, the struggle for economic capital begins to define the relationships citizens share with each other and reaffirms the dominating influence of economic ideals across most fields of society. Indeed, the influence of the economic field is so prevalent that all fields have begun to reflect the economic field and, as such, all look the same.³² Today, each field—whether public or private—appears to be characterized, if not defined, by the economic and political philosophy of neoliberalism. Likewise, the disposition of each individual is increasingly determined through the constraints of the market and the struggle for economic capital, which, according to Bourdieu's theory, simply serves to reinforce and legitimise the dominating features of the economic field. Because the economic field and its dominant philosophies have merged with most of the other fields of society, each field now reflects the other. Furthermore, the habitus (the struggle for capital and relationships between the actors of the field) also mirror those of other fields, making neoliberalism the dominating norm for society. According to Bourdieu, if individuals relate to each

³¹ Bourdieu, P., 'Structures, habitus, practices', in *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1990, p. 52

³² Bourdieu, P., 'The Forms of Capital', p. 251

other through their habitus, the limitations of their surroundings, and the struggle for capital, then in a field dominated by neoliberal ideals, the relationships formed and shared by citizens must be defined through the market.

The influence of the media field. The role and influence of the media field, already influenced by the economic field, has also merged with the sport field, utilizing play as a product to market and sell to a mass consumer audience to generate profit. In doing so, the media field has influenced the transformation of the sport field into a form of entertainment that fans consume. Thus, as the sport field begins to mirror the economic field, individuals within the sport field begin to develop relationships through the dominant principles of neoliberalism, turning play into a product utilized by key stakeholders within the field as a tool to accumulate economic capital. This, in turn, reinforces the dominant economic characteristics of the field.

Sport as entertainment. In *Sociology in Question*, Bourdieu devoted one chapter to analyzing how one can be a sportsman. In doing so, he positioned himself as somewhat of a sporting novice: 'I speak neither as a historian nor as a historian of sport, and so I appear as an amateur among professionals and can only ask you, as the phrase goes, to be a good sport.'³³ He began his analysis by recognising the sport field as an arm of the entertainment industry with an economic function and market-based characteristics. Throughout the chapter, he analysed the different roles sport plays in the lives of citizens based upon their social class.

Bourdieu claimed that sport has become a commodified spectacle, part of a broader entertainment industry and a branch of show business: 'Sport as a spectacle would appear more clearly as a mass commodity, and the organisation of sporting entertainments as one branch among others of show business.'³⁴ He even referred to the relationship between sport (entertainment) and spectators (consumers of sport) as one of 'demand' and 'supply',³⁵ with new 'supply' of sport changing the way spectators consume (demand) sport. Bourdieu recognised that because sport has become an item of entertainment, it is packaged, sold, consumed, and indeed played far differently from how it was played in the age of amateurism and before the advent of media and economic dominance. He claimed that the organisation of sport, which coincided with the rise of the sports star, began in public schools when headmasters and teachers organised sports games and competitions to monitor their students and control what they were doing in their free time. In this sense, sport was the vehicle used to promote the virtues of future leaders and to train individuals in courage and manliness, forming character and

³³ Bourdieu, P., 'How can one be a sportsman?' In *Sociology in Question*, Sage Publications, 1993, p. 117

³⁴ Bourdieu, P., 'How can one be a sportsman?', p. 124

³⁵ Bourdieu, P., 'How can one be a sportsman?', pp. 117

developing a will to win within the rules. Thus, organised sport became an extremely economical means of mobilising, occupying, and controlling adolescents and creating competitive, organised activities that could be viewed by interested spectators who, while watching the contest, could also be controlled and monitored.

As the spectacle element of sport (demand) grew, the relationship between the players, the game, and the spectators (consumers) also changed. Prior to the domination of the media and economic fields, the sport field emphasized noble outcomes such as fitness, teamwork, and community that motivated both players and supporters. With the rising influence of economics and media in organised sport, the players became tools used by sporting organisations to attract crowds, members, and money. At competitive, organized, and professional levels, most individuals within the field developed a 'win at all costs' mentality. Players became valuable commodities, assets of their sporting organisations in helping their teams to win and in selling their team's brand in the market. Sporting clubs indicated the value of players' abilities, now seen as a commodity as well, through financial agreements or contracts. Thus, sport and the sports participant became part of the entertainment market whereby the relationships they shared with others within the sport field was, in many ways, defined through market imperatives of demand and supply.³⁶

In terms of the AFL, the merger of the sport field with the economic and media fields has ensured that AFL football now mirrors the bureaucratic business model of Western society, with players, coaches, club and league management, and board members all making decisions based primarily on their personal economic objectives and the economic objectives of their organisations. The professionalisation of the sport has ensured that players receive increasing exposure through all forms of media, giving them recognition and power. In turn, they serve as ideal tools the league, its individual clubs, and companies outside the league use to increase their financial capital. Thus, players routinely serve as spokespersons to sell a variety of products and services, not only enhancing the financial capital of these organisations but also garnering additional financial capital for themselves.

THE FANS' PERSPECTIVES

In interviews conducted with fourteen AFL and/or club members, a range of changes in the game were discussed. Importantly, the semi-structured interviews were guided by Bourdieu's conceptual framework and the notion of the sport field losing its autonomy to the economic and media fields. In particular, the topics discussed focused on the

³⁶ Bourdieu, P., 'How can one be a sportsman?', pp. 118-119

increased role of the economic and media fields in the AFL and the impacts this has had on the game's characteristics and the various participants in the game – from the clubs, players, coaches and administrators to the fans, themselves. Fundamentally, the interviews were designed to illuminate how members of the AFL community viewed, and felt about, the game today. For example, have they observed the loss of autonomy of the sports field? Do they believe the economic and media fields have driven a transformation of sport into business? Do they see the domination of economic capital in the power struggles of the AFL participants? How do they view their relationship with the game today? The observations of the fans ultimately enrich concepts of Bourdieu as a means of understanding the game's transformation.

AFL fans and supporters are keenly aware of many of the changes that have occurred in the league over the last thirty years. Participants clearly noted the changes resulting from the increased influence of the economic and media fields on the sport field.³⁷

Zak Kardachi suggested that the AFL has changed the game to such an extent that 'if you show someone who had never seen AFL, the game ten, fifteen years ago and the game now, without being too hyperbolic, it's almost unrecognisable as a game'. Michael Westland described it as 'clinical. AFL is a clinical sport, a clinical game'. However, not all fans believe the game should revert to what it once was—and continues to be to some extent—at the grassroots level, as Stuart Osbourne illustrated:

It's a very polished product the AFL these days, so I think the game's great. I don't buy into the whole 'the game was better in my day' thing. If I go back now and watch any of the games from the '90's or even the '80's, it is so far different in terms of the skill level [compared to today]...the skill level and the intensity and the physicality of today's game is better than it's probably ever been.

The Influence of the Economic field: The AFL as a Business: Interviewees supported the idea that the AFL is now a business, with many seeing the transformation as something fundamentally important and necessary to the survival of the game. Tom Gallimore referred to his home club as 'a business' in which management keeps 'their eye on . . . generating revenue and money to be a successful club'. He noted that organisations or companies that do not do that 'won't be around'. Furthermore, when

³⁷ Ten interviews were conducted in 2013 as part of a research project (see Sam Duncan, 'How the Play Element Has Changed in Australian Football and the Consequences of This Change on Community', (unpublished doctoral thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn, Victoria, 2015) and Author., *Footy Grounds to Grandstands: Play, Community and the Australian Football League*, Ginnenderra Press, Port Adelaide, 2016. These individuals were selected through a convenience sampling technique, resulting in all participants being male. To balance the information from interviewees for this work, I interviewed four female AFL fans in 2015. (See Author., 2016, 'Appendix,' in *Footy Grounds to Grandstands* (p. 186) for list of all fourteen individuals and the dates of the interviews). The Appendix contains a list of all fourteen individuals and the dates of their interviews.

describing their football clubs, many interview participants indicated the organisation of their clubs mirrored the departmentalization evident in most businesses of the size of the AFL: management (presidents, CEOs, etc.) run the day-to-day operations, make the financial decisions, and develop and market the brand; coaches manage the players and team, with full-time football departments, coaches for each area of specialization within the sport; and players committed to being full-time employees of the club. They also understood the link between financial capital and success on the field, as Westland observed: 'The teams with more [money], with better facilities . . . are generally at the top for longer.'

The Corruption of Play: Sport Managed and Analysed as a Function of Business: The interviewees were also keenly aware of the differences brought about through the professionalisation of the sport, from changes in coaching and players' abilities to express freely their enthusiasm, skill, and flair on the field to the effects of salary caps, free agency, microanalyses of player performance, and marketing on player loyalty and team performance. Supporters have noticed the increasing importance of coaches and the decreasing role of players in managing the play element. Cheree Brown acknowledged that 'the approach' coaches now use 'is much more methodical'. Jeremiah Ryan noted the increased number of coaches teams now have on their staffs, 'development coaches and tactical analysts and guys that don't even see their own club play. All they do is . . . research on the opposition. . . . you can't for a minute think that footy hasn't changed with regards to tactics and the development and innovation of how they process information'. Effie Caloutas stated that although 'players are responsible for meeting the coaches' needs and executing the game plan required . . . coaches have an even bigger influence because they have to create a suitable game plan'. Yet players are not without their influence, as Ryan suggested, 'because they're the ones who kick the scores.' He felt that even though the league has been trying to get coaches to produce the type of play the league wants, 'the coaches don't care about how the footy looks, the coaches care about winning games.'

The transformation of the AFL has also affected players' abilities to play as they wish. Expected by their coaches to execute tactics and play within the confines of their coaches' game plans, players are no longer able to play with the flair, freedom, spontaneity, creativity, and enjoyment they could exhibit prior to the merger of the economic and media fields with the sport field, as Hawthorn supporter, Josh Forte, indicated:

There's far less spontaneity of players and creativity and there's far less independence of players now. From when we grew up in the late 80s and 90s, you'd find players with so much flair, so much personality on the field . . . so much creativity for their team and maybe not the most athletically gifted, which is brilliant football to watch. Whereas now you find more brilliant teams than brilliant

players.

According to Ryan, ‘a well drilled team . . . plays the way the coach wants them to play. They [the players] have almost no creative control’. Phil Wild indicated that ‘everyone [is] playing a similar style of game, with a few modifications, based on maybe a few star players’. However, Gallimore felt that playing with flair or not was a bit more complicated than just following the coaches’ instructions:

It depends on who you are as a player, how much trust the coach has in you as a player . . . you need to be able to manage and temper your flair and your creativity. But I think good players can do that. The good players can step up when they need to and show individual brilliance and flair, but they can equally know when to offload to a player that’s 20 metres out in front of them, that guarantees you get a goal.

Supporters have also seen how policies implemented by the AFL to ensure competition to garner more financial capital have inadvertently affected player loyalty. The total salary cap on each club’s expenditures for player salaries and the equalisation policy were designed to ensure clubs with less financial capital could compete with wealthier clubs by making it more difficult for wealthier clubs to lure away top players from clubs with less revenue. However, the AFL’s decision to expand into northern markets by creating two additional teams and its desire to attract new consumers have mitigated the effects of those policies. Few high-profile players left their home teams prior to the expansion. With the expansion, however, the AFL exempted the two new teams from the salary cap provisions and compromised the equalisation policy by giving the new teams more money than the other sixteen clubs to build their playing lists.³⁸ This led to some of the biggest names in Australian football leaving their home clubs and communities to earn significantly more money. Gary Ablett Junior, arguably the game’s best player, defected from his original club, the Geelong Cats, to the Gold Coast Suns for a reported estimated figure of \$9 million over five years.³⁹

Interviewees varied in their opinions about what some perceived as defections. Osbourne stated that he didn’t ‘begrudge’ Ablett’s decision to take an offer that essentially ‘sets him up for life’. Gallimore concurred, noting that ‘there’s only a certain

³⁸ Adrian Anderson, ‘Football Operations’, in AFL, *Annual Report 2012*, 50–63, accessed 19 October 2015, http://s.afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/AFL%20Annual%20Report%202012_web.pdf

³⁹ For an example of these reports, see:

Elsworth, S., ‘Gary Ablett Jnr signs deal with Gold Coast Suns’, *Courier Mail*, September 29 2010, p. 94
Wilson, C., and Brodie, W., ‘Footy’s favourite son rises to Gold Coast Challenge’, September 29, 2010, p. 91

amount of time you're going to be able to make money'. Westland held the opposite view: 'I consider myself a loyal person—quite a fierce loyal person [and] to give up [a] big part of you for money when you probably don't need it when living on 500 grand or a million and half [a year] . . . I think I wouldn't have made the same decision'. As far as players in general, Brown viewed leaving for better money as being 'similar to a promotion'; but for Caloutas, players who leave their teams for more money are being disrespectful of the clubs that 'had an impact on their career[s]'.

The defections of Israel Folau and Karmichael Hunt from the National Rugby League and the game they loved to play for Australian football, a game neither had ever played at elite levels of competition, solely for monetary gain elicited quite different reactions than the Ablett move. Jason Lee noted that their recruitment by the AFL was 'a branding exercise' designed to promote play in the AFL above all other forms of entertainment that competed with it for Australian consumers. Lee felt the AFL 'wanted to hit the target audience of the young kids following the NRL'. Ryan noted 'the AFL didn't go out and pay for players. They went out and bought profiles . . . players that were already popular with sport viewers in these areas where the AFL was trying to expand'. Scott Hutchins concurred, indicating Hunt and Folau were 'marketing tools' the AFL 'was using . . . to establish fans in rugby states'. Although Forte also agreed that the moves were driven by marketing, the decision to acquire those two players was 'terrific' in that it 'made them [consumers] think about the game and it would've flooded the media in those northern states'. Westland agreed: 'If you were trying to make a foothold in a new market . . . you've got to find some way of relating to the people in the market. But more than that, you have to make waves . . . So I think the AFL made absolutely the right decision.'

The influence of the media field: the commercialization of the game: Interviewees were also quite aware of the impact of media on the sport and the importance of the sport to various media. In discussing the expansion teams, Kardachi stated that money from the media was the driving factor behind the AFL's decision to expand into Sydney's West and Queensland's South East: 'If those teams are successful, you then get more people watching the game on TV, you get higher broadcast deals, larger broadcast deals, you get more people buying merchandise, more people going to the games [meaning] revenue overall grows'. He also believed that the league places money ahead of supporter passion, noting its reluctance to expand into Tasmania: 'If the AFL really wanted to love the game...and [have it be] viewed by the people who really want to see it...they'd probably have a team in Tasmania, where there is support—perhaps not commercially as viable support as Greater Western Sydney or the Gold Coast but definitely a support that is growing for that'.

The media's use of the game as a tool for generating revenue was also clear to the

interviewees. Wild noted that the AFL was so dominant in media reporting and scheduling because ‘eyeballs mean dollars . . . it means ratings . . . it’s a pretty simple business equation’. He also noted that one would have to be ‘a bit naïve not to think that’ media have the biggest impact in decisions affecting the AFL, noting that ‘without that money the AFL wouldn’t be able to do things like expand into Greater Western Sydney, to prop up clubs that might need it’. Stuart Osborne believed that the needs of the media had superseded the needs of AFL fans, particularly in the scheduling of games: ‘There are too many bloody timeslots . . . so that every game can be shown live, but it’s friggling impossible to plan your weekend when you go to the footy now. . . . it’s all driven by broadcasters because they want every game live’.

However, most of the interviewees admitted to enjoying and participating in the tremendously increased media coverage of the game, which has transformed it from strictly sport to entertainment. Not only do they cover as many games as possible on weekends, but media have also extended coverage beyond the actual matches to entertain readers, viewers, and listeners seven days a week.

Community Members, or Consumers of an Entertainment Product?

Understanding the transformation of the AFL’s view of fans and supporters as consumers rather than as the number one stakeholders in their clubs, the owners and custodians of the game, was not quite as clear to the interviewees. Most of the interviewees grew up in households that embraced one club over the others, although occasionally families exhibited divided loyalties. Others chose the teams they supported because of the interests of their friends or the loyalties of the communities in which they lived. Thus, family, friends, and proximity were more influential in their choice of team than any of the marketing efforts of the AFL to attract new fans—and family was the most important influence, as Lee illustrated: ‘My father barracked for Essendon and my entire family barracks for Essendon, and it’s something that I’ve just always done’. So, while football clubs increasingly mirror businesses and increasingly market and package themselves to attract new supporters and consumers of their brands, club loyalty is often still a matter of family tradition and the old-fashioned notion of barracking for the team that represents one’s community.

Being a member of a club is also not what it once was, especially given the number of members clubs now have and the clubs’ ever present marketing to secure more members. Communication between the league and its clubs and their members is primarily one-way and is dominated by the use of electronic and social media channels. The primary purpose is to inform members of club and league news and to provide insights into club issues and events. As Neil Duncan noted, ‘I have felt more included lately but it is more through just keeping you advised of each year to renew your membership, what functions are on’. According to Lee, ‘If you’re a member, getting

emails, you're getting updates, you're getting alerts on what's happening in the club...you're looking at the website all the time, you're seeing press releases and updates from the chairman and from the coach to the members, you know, and I think the club has got better in engaging its supporters.' However, few clubs appear to encourage their members to communicate back to them or to engage them in ongoing conversation.

Yet most of the interviewees continued to believe that the fans were the number one priority of their clubs. According to Hutchins, 'fans are the number one stakeholder, because without the fans there's no game. Without the interest of the fans, there's no TV money, there's no betting money. It all dries up'. Duncan concurred: 'Without the fans, I don't think you've got a product really. So, no, I think the game is still for the fans'.

Interviewees were also able to provide examples of club members and supporters collectively driving key decisions their clubs had made. One such instance was the firing of Matthew Knights as coach of the Essendon Football Club. According to Westland, 'the people voted with their feet'. Lee believed Essendon's decision then to appoint James Hird as senior coach was largely driven by the members: 'There was a feeling in the community, or the Essendon community, that Hird was the man to lead the side, and it probably wasn't the feeling in a lot of football circles, but I think the club listened to the people on that one and employed him'. Similarly, Wild believed the appointment of Paul Roos as Sydney's coach in 2002 was a direct result of club administrators listening to the wishes of the Sydney supporter base.

Despite these examples of club members/supporters rallying together to generate desired outcomes, numerous other occasions show that AFL club executives generally make decisions based on business outcomes or goals, not the wishes of their fan bases. Osbourne reflected this view, stating that he believed fans are now treated more as brand advocates than as number one stakeholders: 'I don't deny that clubs recognise the importance of members. I think their importance is more from an advocacy point of view because I think we're all sort of like brand advocates of the brand that is [the] Essendon Football Club. I wear their gear and I go out and I talk about the company'. According to Osbourne, 'If we were the number one stakeholder, then I think we would have input into the decisions of the club'. He cited Essendon's decision to relocate from the Melbourne Cricket Ground to Etihad Stadium to play the majority of its home games as an example of decisions based more on commercial and financial objectives than the opinion of the Essendon members: 'It was a quasi-consultation of the members —they sort of went to the members and said what do you think? So I don't think we are the number one stakeholder. I think there are other stakeholders that make the decisions'.

Many of the interviewees stated they purchase their club membership to contribute to their clubs and to help them work towards a shared and common outcome or goal,

which, according to Westland, is on-field success: 'I think the club and all its members all have a common goal, and the common goal is success.' Some fans, like Duncan, join their clubs specifically to help them out of financial distress: 'I joined when Geelong got into financial difficulty in the late 1980s and '90s and thought, "Well, I don't want to see them go into extinction, so I better do my little bit and join up as a member"'. For Ryan, membership is ownership and loyalty combined: 'A supporter is the sort of person who's not following the club when they're having . . . [a] bad run. A member, they've paid their money and they're always there'.

For some members, however, purchasing a membership is largely about ensuring they can attend games, as Kardachi admitted: 'I'm a member so I can go to games . . . if you want good seats, if you want to be at every game, then you buy a membership'. To get the best deal, Westland did not join his club but instead purchased memberships to the Melbourne Cricket Club and the AFL: 'The MCC has the best rights...and [being an AFL member] is basically to get Grand Final tickets. We've been to nearly every Grand Final ever since that I can remember'.

INTERPRETING THE VIEWS OF THE FANS THROUGH BOURDIEU'S CONCEPTS

The interview responses highlight that the sport field has lost its autonomy to the economic and media fields and the impact this has had on the prevailing characteristics of the sport field, or in this instance, the AFL.

What the fans described was the transformation of the AFL into a business, dominated by neoliberalism and its core feature, economic capital. In describing the dominant neoliberal characteristics of the AFL, the fans noted an increased emphasis on revenue and profit, both fundamental objectives of business. They have seen the league, its clubs and players become more professional and more concerned with making money, sometimes at the expense of loyalty. They have observed players now concerned with implementing game plans, tactics and coaches' instructions, ensuring the very act of 'playing' is even analysed in business terms. Furthermore, they noted that the idea of generating more economic capital often trumps any other consideration when making key decisions about the game and its future.

Importantly, they have observed that the economic and media fields have been behind many of the game's most significant changes, including their own relationship with the game. The fans now consume the game through the media more than ever before and highlighted examples of the media industry stimulating monetary growth in the sport field.

Furthermore, some, such as Essendon member, Stuart Osbourne, believe the merger

of the sport, media and economic fields means that fans are now consumers and brand advocates more than key community members and influencers of the game. Their participation is now largely based on consumerism, rather than active participation in working towards shared and common goals, and their power has been largely reduced to a matter of how much economic capital they have. While some fans, such as Hutchins and Duncan did say they believed the fans were still the primary concern of the AFL, to make their point they did so using typical neoliberal language, referring to the game as a 'product' and noting the role the fans play in generating economic capital for the game and the media. They claimed that 'without the interest of the fans, there's no TV money, there's no betting money...it all dries up,' and 'without the fans, I don't think you've got a product really.'

These observations support the notion that the sport field has lost its autonomy to the economic and media fields and the neoliberal principles of money, markets and consumerism have come to characterize the AFL.

CONCLUSION

The influence of the economic and media fields on the AFL is both clear and continuing. Each year, coverage of the sport increases; changes are made to the rules of play to make the game more exciting and, thus, more entertaining; and money, recognition, and the power that comes with both are the bases for the decisions players, coaches, and other team personnel make concerning which teams they choose to represent. Increasing revenues and profits are the goals behind decisions affecting player lists, game venues, league expansion, and microanalyses of players and teams. The fans, including AFL and club members, seemingly have accepted such changes as inevitable and warranted, even embracing some of them such as the heightened excitement generated in games compared to earlier play in the league. Their responses in terms of buying memberships, branded products, and game tickets and engaging in numerous forms of media/entertainment outlets concerning Australian football show this acceptance.

Importantly, this paper has highlighted the transformation of sport into as a business as an illustration of the global domination of neoliberalism. Bourdieu's concepts provide a means of interpreting how the economic model has come to dominate the structure and characteristics of many fields of society, including sport. However, Bourdieu's conceptual framework also enables us to understand the possibility of how society's fields could be different, just as he did in his book, *Fighting Back: Against the Tyranny of the Market*.

Furthermore, the views of the fans, as participants within the sport field, enrich the concepts discussed and developed in this paper. Indeed their views and observations support the notion that the sport field has lost its autonomy to the economic and media

fields. This further supports the idea that Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital can be used to provide an accurate lens through which we can view, interpret and understand the AFL's transformation from a game into a business.

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