Chapter Two

When Evonne Goolagong won the Wimbledon ladies’ singles competition in 1971, newspapers around Australia announced the result with sensationalist headlines and hyperbole. Aged nineteen and a newcomer on the world stage of tennis, Goolagong defeated the reigning champion, fellow Australian Margaret Court. What was it that made Goolagong’s win such a media sensation? Was it her youth, rural Australian background and unexpected bursting into international success? Was it her beauty, in a sport where a woman’s media profile was and is heavily influenced by her appearance and sexuality? Or was it that she was of Aboriginal descent, the heroine of a classic rags-to-riches tale of triumph? In this chapter, I explore representations of Aboriginal and Māori women who became famous for their sporting achievements during the second half of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on Goolagong. I consider the common portrayal of sport as a road to overcome discrimination and social disadvantage, the recurring representation of Indigenous sportspeople as natural athletes and the often ambivalent depictions of sporting women, making a particular comparison with representations of Court, to date Australia’s only other winner of the Wimbledon ladies’ singles tournament. Throughout the chapter, I also discuss the ways in which Indigenous sportswomen themselves reflected on and attempted to shape their own public biographies. Finally, I consider the ways in which the complicated intersections between dominant discourses of femininity, Indigeneity and national imaginings were both echoed and forgotten in representations of a new generation of Indigenous sportswomen by the last decade of the twentieth century.

Indigenous Women in Sport

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Indigenous men in Australia and New Zealand sometimes achieved great success and even fame in sport, despite the barriers of racism, exclusion and poverty which existed in both countries (particularly Australia). Indigenous women’s participation in sport, however, was considerably more limited. Women have historically been restricted and marginalised in sport, confined to sports perceived as female-appropriate and ignored or stereotyped in the media. Approaching the twenty-first century, it remained the case that more attention in academic scholarship, popular writing and the media was focused upon men’s experiences of sport than upon those of women. Such gender discrimination intersected with racial discrimination to further marginalise Indigenous women in sport on both sides of the Tasman. Scholars of Australian sports history have observed that Aboriginal women
historically experienced greater marginalisation in sport than either Aboriginal men or non-Aboriginal women.\textsuperscript{1} As Colin Tatz wrote in 1995, ‘if white women are having difficulty getting to first or second base in sport, then by comparison their black sisters are not coming within cooee of the ballpark’.\textsuperscript{2} While Māori women in New Zealand were perhaps more able to participate in organised sport than were Aboriginal women in Australia, owing to the legal restrictions and relatively greater level of social prejudice faced by Aboriginal women, few reached the upper levels of their chosen sports, and even fewer became well-known for their sporting achievements.

Nonetheless, a small number of Aboriginal and Māori women did succeed in reaching state or national representative level in the first half of the twentieth century. In Australia, cricketers Edna Crouch (later Newfong) and Mabel Campbell (later Crouch) played for Queensland against England during its 1934-1935 tour.\textsuperscript{3} Faith Coulthard (later Thomas) was also a successful cricketer. Remembered as the first Indigenous woman to represent Australia internationally in cricket, Coulthard played against England in 1958.\textsuperscript{4} She later remembered that reporters sought to interview her as the ‘native nurse’ on the team. Because the captain, vice captain and managers ‘wanted to be in the news’, the interview did not eventuate, which Coulthard considered ‘was good anyway, because I didn’t know what to bloody well say’.\textsuperscript{5} In New Zealand, Meg Matangi captained the national netball team which toured Australia in 1938.\textsuperscript{6} Another who competed outside New Zealand during these years was endurance swimmer Katerina Nehua. She broke the world record in a contest in Sydney in 1931, and again later that year in Brisbane.\textsuperscript{7} Yet her achievements were sometimes imagined in terms of feminine domesticity, as when she was reported to have entered an event in Manly during the Depression because she needed the money to give her unemployed husband and four young children a better life.\textsuperscript{8} Following these and other forerunners, increasing numbers of Māori and Aboriginal women achieved fame and success in sport during the second half of the twentieth century. One woman stands out, however, as having reached heights of international success

\textsuperscript{2} Tatz, p. 270.
and fame not matched by another Indigenous sportswoman in Australia or New Zealand until the 1990s. Evonne Goolagong (later Cawley) was twice winner of the Wimbledon ladies’ singles competition, as well as winning the ladies’ singles competition four times in the Australian Open and once in the French Open.

Figure 3: ‘Evonne Goolagong Relaxes at Kooyong Between Tournament Matches’, 1 February 1971, Eric Wadsworth.


Sport and the Rags-to-Riches Myth

To many observers, it seemed a long way from Goolagong’s early life in the small town of Barellan in New South Wales (NSW) to her position in the top ranks of women’s tennis in the 1970s and 1980s. Her background, variously imagined as being in the outback, the bush or the rural heartland of NSW, was frequently referenced in representations of her as a fairytale success. Wrote one journalist in 1965: ‘I saw yesterday a sight that will stay in my mind forever – a slim brown aboriginal girl from the bush, playing tennis on a posh North Shore court, her face alive with delight’.  

‘the little girl from the back streets of Barellan made the big time’.\textsuperscript{10} Following Goolagong’s first victory in the Wimbledon ladies’ singles in 1971, her youth and rural origins were emphasised along with her Aboriginality in the media sensationalism of her achievement. As the Hobart \textit{Mercury} announced, ‘Miss Goolagong, the part aboriginal from the New South Wales outback, beat the defending champion and three times winner’, Margaret Court, to take the title.\textsuperscript{11} The \textit{Age} similarly declared that ‘the part-Aboriginal girl from a little outback NSW town today dethroned the reigning champion’.\textsuperscript{12} In portraying Goolagong as the girl from the outback, such statements greatly exaggerated Barellan’s remoteness, and at the same time failed to acknowledge Court’s upbringing in the rural city of Albury in NSW. Moreover, despite the persistence of such narratives about Goolagong’s early life, much of her adolescence was spent in Sydney, where she went to develop her tennis after her coach, Victor Edwards, invited her to live there with his family.

Where media narratives of Goolagong’s life made reference to her extended stay with the Edwards family, Victor Edwards was usually imagined as a mentor or guardian to whom her parents had entrusted her so that she might have a chance to reach tennis success. Analogously to the experience of the land, white people discovered Goolagong’s talent, and interceded to develop it. In one recurring narrative, it was this discovery that was central to her success. She was ‘just another underprivileged outback child, the daughter of a shearer – until a tennis coach noticed her ability to pound a tennis ball’.\textsuperscript{13} Edwards’ agency in her rise to the top was also stressed in the \textit{Daily Telegraph} after her first Wimbledon win: ‘The little part-Aboriginal girl, discovered by coach Vic Edwards on a tennis court at Berellan [sic] … ten years later is queen of the tennis world’.\textsuperscript{14} Goolagong herself was once quoted explaining her belief that ‘some people think that Mr. Edwards plucked me out of Barellan and, presto, I became a Wimbledon champion’, an idea that gave her ‘no credit as a person’.\textsuperscript{15} In an autobiography co-authored with Phil Jarratt in 1993, she observed another distorting facet of this framing of her life. ‘I have been painted many times in the media as an Eliza Doolittle,’ she wrote, ‘an Aboriginal urchin who was saved from the savages and taught civilised ways by the Edwards family’\textsuperscript{16}.

Sometimes such narratives of success were manufactured deliberately. An Australian Broadcasting Commission programme produced after Goolagong’s

\begin{enumerate}
\item ‘Evonne Storms Way to Title – Great Win’, \textit{Mercury}, 3 July 1971, p. 42.
\item P. Stone, ‘Evonne is Wimbledon’s Darling!’, \textit{Age}, 3 July 1971, p. 28.
\end{enumerate}
1971 Wimbledon win upset not only Goolagong, who observed the film crew’s attempt to ‘illustrate beyond any shadow of doubt the rags-to-riches element of my story’, but also other residents of Barellan, who considered that the depiction of the Goolagong family as poor and ostracised was demeaning. While narratives of non-Aboriginal sportspeople sometimes shared a similar rags-to-riches framing, there were thus important differences of tone and emphasis in narratives of Goolagong’s life, centring on her Aboriginality. Goolagong’s ‘extraordinary appeal’ with Australian spectators was explained in the NSW Aborigines Welfare Board publication *Dawn* in 1968 as due to her being seen ‘not only as a rising champion, but also as an Aborigine who has made good’. Likewise, stories about world champion boxer Lionel Rose that appeared in the press after his sporting career sometimes made reference to his having risen to fame and success from a poor background living in a dirt-floored shack, although also often considering that he had later lost the fairytale. Embedded in narratives of a rags-to-riches transformation was this subtext of salvation, which could assuage white guilt about past injustices when referencing Aboriginal individuals.

Sport has often been considered a field of opportunity in which racial prejudice might be overcome. In an article in the *Sun News-Pictorial* in 1971, Alan Trengove wrote that sport was ‘the one arena in which the aboriginal has had almost an equal opportunity to display those qualities that the white man admires’. Sport was, he wrote, ‘a great leveller’, and encouraged ‘social integration’ and closeness between people. Mark Ella, a successful Aboriginal rugby player, made a similar point in 1989, although he also noted the difficulties that Aboriginal people faced in seeking to ‘make it’. Historians have sometimes agreed that sport might be a path to social equality. Richard Broome has argued that Indigenous men ‘experienced moments of dominance’ in boxing and running performances that ‘endured in the minds of all Australians’, thus ‘modifying the power of white racial dominance’. Likewise in New Zealand, it was sometimes suggested that rugby union was inclusive, an arena in which Māori (men) could easily participate and

17 Ibid., pp. 208-209.
20 Trengove, p. 21, emphasis in original.
21 Ibid., p. 21.
which was thus a spur to integration or to harmonious race relations.\textsuperscript{24} As Geoff Watson noted, the involvement of Māori in sports lent weight to the longstanding view that race relations in New Zealand were better than elsewhere, particularly when Māori players represented New Zealand.\textsuperscript{25} However, several scholars have contested these beliefs, often pointing to the barriers faced by Indigenous sportspeople as constituting partial or total refutation of the idea that sport could be a route to social and economic equality.\textsuperscript{26} While sport has sometimes provided a means of escaping poverty and a measure of social acceptance, it has also been subject to restrictions on Indigenous participation that have limited this possibility. Indigenous sportspeople who have reached the top of their respective sports have been few. Moreover, the celebration of those who did become sports stars often involved the repetition of racialised and gendered narratives that could reinforce stereotypical understandings of Indigenous peoples and cultures.

\textbf{The Natural Athlete: Indigeneity and Physicality}

Behind the idea that sport was one of few routes to success and recognition for Indigenous peoples seems to lie a continuing belief in their possession of greater natural talent for sport than that possessed by white people. In 1971, the year Goolagong first won Wimbledon, Trengove stated in the Melbourne \textit{Sun News-Pictorial} that Aboriginal people were usually good at sport, and that many ‘seem naturally endowed with speed-of-foot and quick reflexes’.\textsuperscript{27} Scholars of race and sport have observed this myth of innate athletic ability in framings of Indigenous sportspeople on both sides of the Tasman, particularly in relation to men playing Australian Rules football (AFL) in Australia and rugby union in New Zealand.\textsuperscript{28} As Darren Godwell has suggested, failing to question the myth of the natural athlete could result in Aboriginal people becoming ‘typecast in


\textsuperscript{25} G. Watson, ‘Sport and Ethnicity in New Zealand’, \textit{History Compass} 5, no. 3 (2007), p. 783.


\textsuperscript{27} Trengove, p. 21.

life as sportspeople’, as well as reinforcing existing ‘racial inequities in power relations’.

Further, the emphasis on natural athleticism and physicality often implicitly downplayed Indigenous sportspeople’s hard work and suggested that they were closer to nature than were white athletes. Victory for black sportspeople was thus sometimes interpreted as stemming from a ‘natural advantage’ that was ‘often linked to “animal” ability and cunning’, while in the case of a white athlete it could be considered a triumph of ‘intellect and strategy over brutish instinct’.

The discourse of natural athletic talent was thus linked to discourses which constructed Indigenous people as primitive, closer to the animal world than white people; their natural talent in sport was ‘socially acceptable savagery’.

Such representations of innate athletic ability were not confined to Indigenous sportsmen. Writing in 1994, Jennifer Hargreaves identified similar depictions of black sportswomen as natural athletes, although she did not discuss the experiences of Aboriginal women in Australia or Māori women in New Zealand.

A narrative of natural talent was evident in some representations of Goolagong. In the *Australian*’s coverage of her two victories in the ladies’ singles competition at Wimbledon, particularly that by Murray Hedgcock, the myth appeared implicitly several times. After defeating Billie Jean King in the 1971 semi-final, she was said to have an ‘extraordinary athletic ability’ which ‘made her the most intriguing tennis player in the world’ at the time. Her play in the 1971 final was described as ‘one of the finest displays of natural tennis ability ever seen at Wimbledon’, and she was described after her victory in the 1980 semi-final as ‘the world’s most naturally gifted tennis player’.

She was described in the *National Times* in 1982 as having been ‘universally accepted as one of the most naturally gifted athletes tennis has known’. Descriptions of her playing style as fluid and natural similarly implied an innate skill rather than one which had been developed through hard work. ‘Evonne is the most natural of players,’ stated George McGann in the *Bulletin* in 1978.

It was this natural talent which enabled the fairytale of her success, according to many framings of her story, although


29 Godwell, pp. 16, 19.


31 Hokowhitu, pp. 268-270; Wall, p. 42.


only through the agency of benevolent non-Indigenous figures, particularly Edwards. Hedgcock framed the ‘Goolagong story’ in this way when he wrote of ‘the part-Aboriginal girl from Barellan showing amazing flair for tennis [who] was brought to Sydney to become part of the family of coach Vic Edwards’.

Recurring portrayals of Edwards as the mentor who shaped raw talent into a champion suggest the apparently masterly media skills of Edwards himself. Goolagong observed in her 1993 autobiography that Edwards was ‘a master at using the media to further his own ends’, and several times referred to him as having shaped her story into a legend through his feeding of the media. She quoted him referring to her in a monthly newsletter for his coaching school as ‘the person I raised from obscurity to world fame’. Emphasising Goolagong’s innate ability and the role of Edwards in shaping that ability denied the centrality of her own determination and hard work in her success. In telling her own story in 1993, Goolagong sought to disrupt these earlier glowing narratives of Edwards’ role in her life and career, giving a much more critical account of her relationship with him.

The myth of natural talent also appeared in representations of other Indigenous sportswomen in Australia and New Zealand. Ruia Morrison, a Māori tennis player who competed at Wimbledon four times from 1957 and reached the quarterfinals once, was considered naturally talented by some observers. Profiling her in 1956 for the Māori Affairs Department publication *Te Ao Hou: The New World*, Michael Lindsay termed her ‘a “natural”’, whose ‘graceful, effective style can be traced directly to her Maori lineage’. She had, he wrote, ‘an inborn sense of rhythm and a fluid swing controlled by the supple muscles so typical of the Maori’. A much later retrospective article, in 1995, described her as having had ‘a natural rhythm and keen eye’. Morrison herself was once quoted commenting, however, that what was termed being a ‘natural’ stemmed from having learnt much of tennis from her childhood habit of ‘swishing’ at things with a stick. She was quoted observing that ‘I didn’t move fast on the court but I had this ability called anticipation’. Such a quality, although arguably ‘natural’, suggested that contrary to the stereotype, she was indeed a ‘thinking’ player. Similarly, in *Mana* in 1995, Vanessa Bidois wrote that Morrison was successful as a tennis player despite being small and lacking ‘power’ in part because of her ability to ‘read play exceptionally well’ and to ‘anticipate’. Morrison was also once quoted, however, saying that there had ‘always been good Maori players since I’ve been

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38 Cawley and Jarratt, pp. 99-100, 107, 114.
39 Ibid., p. 284.
around because of their natural co-ordination skills’.  

Indigenous sportspeople’s own articulations of their success in terms of the myth of natural talent add a complicating layer to understanding representations of race and gender in the media.

More than merely downplaying Indigenous athletes’ hard work, representations of them as naturally talented could be linked to narratives of them as disinclined to work and train hard. Brendan Hokowhitu noted that Māori men playing rugby were subject to representation as naturally talented but ‘lazy’, having the talent but not the discipline.  

In an edited interview, world champion squash player Leilani Joyce (earlier Marsh, later Rorani) remembered: ‘I grew up with the stereotype that Maori people have got the talent but they don’t have the guts’.

In the case of Aboriginal sportspeople, a variation of this theme was the oft-repeated suggestion that they would go ‘walkabout’ when competing. ‘Going walkabout’ was perceived as a ‘natural’ Aboriginal trait. The phrase was used in relation to Aboriginal workers on cattle stations going away for a period, giving time for seeing kin, holding ceremonies and educating children in traditional ways. In this sense, it could be considered positive. Yet the term also conjured up images of directionless wandering, and employers disapproved of a perceived tendency for Aboriginal workers on pastoral stations to leave and go back to their own people and way of life for a while. Aboriginal boxers in the mid-twentieth century were sometimes described in the press as ‘inconsistent performers who went “walkabout”’.  

Rod Humphries’ suggestion in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1971 that Lionel Rose had the ‘ambition’ to be a champion again but ‘none of the dedication’ that he had had the first time likewise implied natural talent that was not harnessed to the necessary determination and diligence.

Similarly, Aboriginal footballers were routinely cast as lacking reliability and diligence as well as having natural flair and ability, and were often excluded from positions on the field demanding they be leaders or quick thinkers. Aboriginal netballer Marcia Ella was also reportedly the subject of ‘racist slurs’ in the 1980s for her ‘inconsistent form’.

This image can first be seen in relation to Goolagong in the reported comments of Faith Martin, one of the instructors who noticed her tennis ability at a coaching clinic in Barellan and informed Edwards of her potential. In a 1975 publication claiming to be Goolagong’s autobiography, Martin was quoted

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44 Romanos, p. 47.
45 Hokowhitu, pp. 271-272.
47 Broome, p. 178.
49 Coram, pp. 61-69, 81, 89; Hallinan, Bruce and Bennie, pp. 5-6.
50 Stell, p. 239.
saying that a child might not ‘maintain the interest year to year’. ‘And with the Goolagongs being Aboriginals’, she added, ‘you wouldn’t count on their not moving somewhere else’.\(^{51}\) Importantly, there is doubt over the genesis of this publication, as Goolagong hints in her 1993 collaborative autobiography that the earlier book was actually not an autobiography, but was the creation of Edwards and an American journalist, Bud Collins.\(^{52}\) The author(s) of the book discussed the use of the ‘walkabout’ image in relation to Goolagong’s moments of lost concentration while playing. Supposedly in Goolagong’s voice, they explained:

> When this happens, … most spectators nod knowingly, “Evonne’s gone walkabout”.

> … I’ve accepted the expression “walkabout” for my spells, but the word didn’t come from me. It came from Mr Edwards. Though I know he wasn’t being condescending, it is an expression that irritates many Aborigines …\(^{53}\)

The description of her times of lost concentration as ‘spells’ implied that there was something wrong with her.

The phrase was used more in newspapers during her 1980 Wimbledon campaign, by which time many writers considered that she had not dominated world tennis to the extent that commentators in 1971 had expected. There were eighteen references to this tendency in forty-eight articles from Australian newspapers in 1980, as opposed to seven references in thirty-seven articles in 1971, almost a doubling of their frequency. Lenore Nicklin noted in one match report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that Goolagong ‘appeared to go on her habitual “walkabout”’ part way through the match, and commented in another that she ‘went walkabout in the second set’, playing terrible shots.\(^{54}\) A play on the idea was made in the headline of one report of her 1980 victory: ‘Evonne goes winabout’.\(^{55}\) More disturbing is the anecdote sometimes told of an unnamed Australian Premier remarking in 1980 of his hope that she ‘wouldn’t go walkabout like some old boong’ in the final.\(^{56}\) Writing on Australian Wimbledon champions in 1995, Allan Kendall noted that although Goolagong was seen as ‘a bit of a perhapser’ because she might at any time lose concentration, her record of reaching the final in the Grand Slam events that she played was very steady.\(^{57}\) It was often taken for granted that her times of lost concentration meant that she did not win

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52 Cawley and Jarratt, pp. 84, 134, 213.
53 Goolagong and Collins, pp. 32-33.
56 Tatz, p. 276.
as often as she could have. In a book on Australian sportspeople, Terry Smith commented that ‘of course, she would have won many more major events but for her famous “walkabouts”’. This stereotypical image of Aboriginal people was thus redeployed in relation to lapses in concentration that all sportspeople are presumably susceptible to, diluting Goolagong’s supposedly unbeatable natural ability to explain why she did not win more consistently. Goolagong herself observed in her 1993 autobiography that ‘saying that I went “walkabout” was just another way of implying that Aborigines were underachievers who lacked the will to win’.

Goolagong’s Aboriginality was also called on to explain her perceived carefree, innocent nature, particularly in relation to her approach to tennis. During her first Wimbledon competition in 1970, Jim Webster wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald that ‘sophisticated Wimbledon, with all its pompous trappings, was softened yesterday by the endearing simplicity of Evonne Goolagong’. In both 1971 and 1980, a significant number of Australian newspaper articles discussed Goolagong’s grace, charm or cheerful nature. On court she was often described as being calm and happy, rather than aggressive, particularly in reports during the 1971 Wimbledon tournament. Described as ‘the smiling Evonne’ in the Melbourne Herald in 1970, she was termed ‘the happy little Australian’ in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1971, and in the Australian the same year was described as exhibiting ‘girlish enthusiasm’. These depictions demonstrate the intersection of gender and race in representations, as they are both gendered and raced, suggesting a purportedly feminine frivolity as well as a supposedly Aboriginal childlike naturalness. Morrison, although not described as lacking the killer instinct, was similarly described as having a ‘sparkling personality’ and as being known for her ‘good natured impishness’. While these traits were often admired, ascribing them to a basic racial nature infantilised a champion and evoked European images from the time of early contact of Indigenous peoples as childlike. As well as race and gender, however, Goolagong’s perceived cheerful and innocent nature and relaxed approach were sometimes ascribed to her country beginnings. In a 1975 children’s book, Linda Jacobs wrote that Goolagong’s experiences during her career meant ‘the quiet country life will never again be for her’, but that it could still be seen in her innocence, ‘joy of playing’ and ‘level-headed view of life’. Representations such as these suggest the importance of multiple stereotypes in media representations and caution against racial over-determination.

59 Cawley and Jarratt, p. 141.
60 J. Webster, ‘Evonne is a Success’, Sydney Morning Herald, 25 June 1970, p. 11.
62 ‘Morrison’s Moment’, p. 28; Romanos, p. 46.
The Exotic Other in the White World of Tennis

The image of Wimbledon as a world apart from Goolagong’s was often evident in narratives of her life, related to the rags-to-riches myth and a narrative of her as a sort of Cinderella to whom Edwards played the fairy godmother. Hedgcock wrote in the *Sunday Australian* that her ‘early background was about as far in distance and style from a gala Wimbledon finals day as it would be possible to imagine’.\(^{64}\) Developed from indoor tennis, lawn tennis had roots in that ‘game of kings’, as it was in sixteenth-century France and England. Yet unlike in Europe, public tennis courts were available to the majority of the Australian population, and tennis in the 1950s was not constrained by class distinctions to the extent that it was, for instance, in the United States, so that it was possible for champions to emerge from rural backgrounds as well as urban. Graeme Kinross-Smith considers that it was in the 1950s and 1960s, about the time that Goolagong was a young player, that tennis became ‘open … to a wider spectrum of the Australian population’; moreover, ‘traditions of country competition’ existed in a number of states, including NSW, which contributed to the rise of strong players despite their ‘being distanced in their formative years from coaching and regular top-level competition’.\(^{65}\) Goolagong was not the first Australian tennis champion to emerge from a less than wealthy rural background.

Tennis was also a predominantly white game for much of its existence. Colin Tatz, writing in 1987, included tennis among sports in Australia that did not have a history of Aboriginal participation, Aboriginal role models, or support networks.\(^{66}\) Bud Collins wrote in the prologue to the 1975 purported autobiography that it was ‘a very white game, with a few exceptions’, and Goolagong herself noted that ‘tennis in Australia in 1961 was truly the whitest of worlds’.\(^{67}\) Similarly in New Zealand, the president of the Aotearoa Māori Tennis Association, Dick Garratt, was reported in 1998 to have cited lack of resources and social restrictions on Māori as reasons why fewer successful Māori players emerged in earlier years. Ruia Morrison, he said, reached the level of success she did ‘more as a fluke because she was so clever’.\(^{68}\) Even the clothing that competitors were to wear was white. Before Goolagong appeared on the famous showground of Wimbledon’s Centre Court in 1970, her clothing was checked to ascertain that it ‘complied with the “predominantly white” regulation’.\(^{69}\) In a sense, Goolagong was performing whiteness through her dress. She herself made reference to this in 1996, when she was quoted in the press defending

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64 M. Hedgcock, ‘Will Success Spoil Her?’, *Sunday Australian*, 4 July 1971, p. 42.
67 Cawley and Jarratt, p. 79; Goolagong and Collins, p. 10.
69 Cawley and Jarratt, p. 158.
Cathy Freeman’s decision not to carry the Aboriginal flag at the Atlanta Olympic Games. Some controversy had been caused when Freeman carried it along with the Australian flag at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria in Canada (as I discuss further below), and she was aware that to do so in the Olympic Games might lead to disqualification. Goolagong was quoted in the *Australian* saying that ‘it’s like I can’t wear a black dress at Wimbledon, so that’s the rule’.  

Wimbledon was the most elite and tradition-bound tournament of all; to play at Wimbledon was to be in the centre of the elite white world of tennis. Goolagong made her first appearance on Wimbledon’s prestigious Centre Court in 1970, and lost the match. After the game she spoke to reporters, describing the interview in her 1993 collaborative autobiography. ‘I had been thrashed in a second round match by a player who wouldn’t be going much further in the tournament either,’ she said, but the press conference was ‘jam-packed’. The reporters ‘didn’t want to know about my tennis, they wanted me to speak in Wiradjuri or throw a boomerang or something’. Among the questions she remembered were several telling ones:

Did I feel proud to be the first Aborigine to play Wimbledon? What did I think of apartheid? Was there racial discrimination at home?  

Goolagong’s Aboriginality, particularly in the first years of her career before she won major international titles, was a key factor in making her newsworthy. Indeed, Australian newspapers gave considerably more coverage to the 1971 ladies’ singles final at Wimbledon than had been the case when Court had won, as expected, the previous year. While Goolagong’s youth, supposed outback background and beauty all contributed to the newsworthiness of her win, the sensationalist announcements of her victory in 1971 assuredly owed much to her status as the first Aboriginal tennis star.

As Lee-Anne Hall has argued, Aboriginality can act as ‘a reason to be noticed, a journalistic angle [and] a sponsor’s delight’. Writing with Jarratt in 1993, Goolagong herself observed that ‘my race made me different and therefore newsworthy’. A similar observation was made in the autobiography of world champion boxer Lionel Rose, written collaboratively with Rod Humphries. A tentative suggestion was made that the excessive publicity he experienced might have had ‘something to do with being the first Aboriginal to become a world champion at anything and with my assimilation into the white community’.

71 Cawley and Jarratt, p. 158.
72 Hall, p. 438, emphasis removed.
73 Cawley and Jarratt, p. 13.
Certainly, several press reports of his world championship victory in 1968 noted that he was the first Aboriginal person to win a world title.\textsuperscript{75} Much earlier, Katerina Nehua’s being Māori was a point of interest in the media when she competed in Australia in the early 1930s. Caroline Daley argued that as ‘a non-indigenous indigenous person’ Nehua had ‘offered the Australian journalists an exotic allure that the white contestants lacked’.\textsuperscript{76} On rare occasions, journalists themselves made astute observations as to the reasons for Goolagong’s media appeal. Before her 1971 Wimbledon win, Denis O’Brien asked in the \textit{Bulletin} whether she was ‘tennis box-office’ because she was ‘a genuine whizz’, or whether it was also partly because she was ‘part-Aboriginal’.\textsuperscript{77}

As with other Indigenous sportspeople, Goolagong’s Aboriginality was frequently referenced in the media. Such references ranged from descriptions of her as an Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal tennis player, rather than as an Australian tennis player or simply a tennis player, through allusions to a mystical cultural heritage, to descriptions of her physical appearance. Mike Gibson described her in the \textit{Daily Telegraph} in 1971 as a ‘frizzy-haired little piccaninny’, although knowing Goolagong would not like it, because he thought ‘that is what she looked like’. In the same article, he also described her as having ‘blood from the Dream Time running through her veins’.\textsuperscript{78} Goolagong once commented in an edited interview that when she first went to Sydney ‘news clippings used to annoy me a bit, because it would be “Aboriginal Evonne Goolagong”, and that’s all they’d put’.\textsuperscript{79} In the early twentieth century, Katerina Nehua was similarly identified in the press by her ethnicity. Caroline Daley observed that ‘the fact that she was Māori was a frequent refrain’, and that she ‘was rarely referred to as a New Zealander, even in the New Zealand press’.\textsuperscript{80} Jennifer Hargreaves noted in 2000 that ‘racialised accounts of Aboriginal superstars’ that treat them ‘as the “Other”’ appeared ‘commonplace’ in the Australian and Canadian medias.\textsuperscript{81} The same might be said of the New Zealand media. Stella Coram similarly observed that in newspaper pieces about Aboriginal AFL players, one ‘defining feature’ was that ‘indigenous athletes are known by their Aboriginality’, which ‘explains everything from their successes to their challenges’. Newspaper articles about Aboriginal athletes, she argued, ‘reify race logics’ and are ‘essentialist’ in that ‘they determine that indigenous athletes are different in cultural and racial

\textsuperscript{76} Daley, p. 44.
\textsuperscript{80} Daley, p. 44.
terms’. Such a focus on race in framing narratives of Indigenous athletes set them apart from non-Indigenous athletes and irrevocably marked them as different.

Yet while her Aboriginality was often exoticised, Goolagong was sometimes also written of in ways that repressed her Aboriginality. Once she had become internationally successful, she began to be described slightly less often as Aboriginal than had been the case in the early years of her career. She herself was quoted in Deadly Vibe magazine in 2001 observing that although she did not follow what was written about her when she was playing, ‘I did notice that the more successful I became, the whiter I seemed to become’.83 New Zealand hockey and tennis player Margaret Raureti Hiha made a similar point in an edited interview given after her retirement from competitive sport. ‘You’re a Maori until you succeed,’ she said, and after that ‘you’re a New Zealander or perhaps a New Zealand Maori’. As well as opera singers Kiri Te Kanawa and Inia Te Wiata, she argued that such a pattern was obvious in descriptions of tennis player Kelly Evernden, who ‘was a Maori when he was young, and … became a New Zealander when he became world class in tennis’.84 Closely tied to such representations were imaginings of the nation, and of the sometimes ambivalent place of Indigenous people within it. By 1980, Goolagong had become thoroughly Australian, celebrated as one of Australia’s sporting heroes, and her Aboriginality was often elided. Like Freeman later, she was sometimes referred to as belonging to an imagined Australian nation: ‘our Evonne’.85 In one article in the Melbourne Herald in 1980, she was described as ‘our Evonne, with her Aussie smile and nonchalance’.86 Particularly when a competitor in international tournaments, Goolagong both actually and metaphorically represented the Australian nation.

There was potentially more to such descriptions than a simple embrace of her tennis achievements. Kell argued that Goolagong’s ‘media success’ and ‘acceptance [by] mainstream Australian society’ was built partly on repressing Aboriginal identity and not being seen as ‘radical’.87 Goolagong was featured in the Australian Women’s Weekly after her 1971 Wimbledon win. In a recent study of that publication between 1945 and 1971, Susan Sheridan, Barbara Baird, Kate Borrett and Lyndall Ryan argued that Aboriginal people were ‘named as individuals’ in the magazine only when being included as ‘success stories’, that

82 Coram, pp. 155-156.
87 Kell, p. 44.
is, as ‘successes of assimilation’. Goolagong does not appear to have been explicitly described in such terms in the Women’s Weekly, but the celebration of her as successfully assimilated was sometimes implicit in media treatment of her. Perhaps the most obvious example was an advertisement which appeared in the official publication New Dawn in 1974. Readers could write in for a copy of a booklet produced by the Department of Labour in which young Aboriginal people were shown doing a variety of jobs, along with information on how to obtain a similar job. Goolagong’s words from the introduction of the booklet were quoted at the top of the advertisement, and a picture of her was used to illustrate it.

Goolagong herself considered that when Aboriginal people were successful in any field, ‘there is a tendency, perhaps unconscious, for Australians to say, “See, we’re not holding them back, we give them every opportunity”’. She suggested that the fact that she was given ‘a ticker-tape parade through the streets of Sydney and a Lord Mayoral reception’ while multiple Wimbledon winners Court and John Newcombe had not received such an honour reflected the tension in ‘racial politics’ in Australia in 1971 and ‘a kind of racial relief’ at her win, ‘a feeling that somehow my achievements proved that Australia was a land of equal opportunity’. The enthusiastic embrace of ‘our Evonne’ perhaps carried echoes of this relief. A concept of ‘enlightened racism’ is useful in understanding such framings. Representing an Indigenous figure in ways which emphasised him or her as successful in the terms of the dominant white culture allowed non-Indigenous admiration for the person’s achievements, while also implying that such success was open to all who had the will to achieve it, denying the existence of systemic barriers. Framings of Indigenous athletes that repressed their Indigenous identity might thus be as problematic as those which exoticised it.

Around the time that Goolagong rose to international prominence, a strong Aboriginal protest movement was visible in Australia (as discussed in Chapter One). Within this context, Goolagong was sometimes criticised by Aboriginal people for remaining unpoliticised, or for turning herself white and failing to make sufficient efforts to assist her people. That is, she was reproached for not actively representing Aboriginal people in a political sense. She was publicly criticised by Charles Perkins, who said that he ‘couldn’t care less’ about her sporting successes because she ‘didn’t care about [her] race’, and in an angry

90 Cawley and Jarratt, pp. 204-205.
Chapter Two

poem by poet Kevin Gilbert.\textsuperscript{92} The poem, published after her win in 1980, was a bitter attack on her for not using her prominence to call attention to the hardships suffered by Aboriginal people.\textsuperscript{93} In her collaborative autobiography, Goolagong’s response was, partly, that she did more for Aboriginal people by playing at the top of her sport than she might have ‘with a hundred soapbox speeches’. While people in Australia protested about apartheid and the prospect of racial disturbances was raised, she wrote, ‘a black Australian curtseyed before royalty, then went on to prove that Aborigines could make it to the top’.\textsuperscript{94}

Goolagong received much criticism when she agreed to play in South Africa in 1971, including from prominent Aboriginal people who felt that she should not go and that she was letting down her people. In her 1993 autobiography, her comments about this incident included that she did not know very much about South Africa or apartheid, but that once criticism began, she was glad of the chance to ‘show white South Africans just what a black athlete could do’.\textsuperscript{95} Goolagong thus appears to have considered herself a role model and example rather than a political spokesperson. Playing tennis, she could represent Aboriginal people at the same time as she represented Australia, and she could fulfil such a representative role without being overtly political. Moving back to Australia later in life, Goolagong became involved in tennis development for young people and in Indigenous sports programmes, such as the Goolagong National Development Camp for Aboriginal children. Her autobiography was also produced after her return to Australia, co-authored with Jarratt. Throughout her career, she emphasised, she was always ‘a proud Aboriginal woman, a Wiradjuri Koori’ who had ‘stayed close’ to her ‘Aboriginal roots’. Becoming a champion required ‘sacrifices’, she stressed, and if she had ‘shut out certain things that others thought were obvious’, tennis ‘was only a part’ of her life. ‘If I hadn’t become a champion’, she asked, ‘who would listen to me now?’\textsuperscript{96} Answering her critics, and demonstrating that she had not lost touch with her Aboriginal heritage, appear to have been crucial imperatives in Goolagong’s decision to write her own story.

**Beauty, the Body, Feminism and Sport**

Women’s position in sports during the twentieth century was contested and shifting. In this context, Indigenous sportswomen were represented in the media not only in terms of narratives about race, but also about gender, and the two

\textsuperscript{92} Cawley and Jarratt, pp. 337-339; ‘Perkins Fires Evonne a Volley’, *Daily Telegraph*, 9 July 1980, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{94} Cawley and Jarratt, pp. 205, 339.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., pp. 174-177.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp. 12, 16.
intersected in crucial ways. On her return to Australia after winning Wimbledon in 1971, Goolagong was received as a celebrity. As well as the parade and reception in Sydney, she attended dinners and functions, appeared on a television show and was present at a parade and ‘Wimbledon Ball’ held in Barellan. A photo spread appeared in the *Australian Women’s Weekly*. Three pictures showed her in action on the court, while a larger picture took up the full second page, showing her at the Wimbledon Ball, with a caption telling the reader that ‘happy Evonne’ wore a ‘slim-fitting gown’ in ‘gold-and-silver lame’. A later article, in September 1971, reported that she had purchased many clothes while overseas, including the outfit she was wearing that day. Mention was made of her beauty and glamour, and that she ‘looked very attractive and outstanding among the crowd that swirled around her’. In these articles, and in the images which accompanied them, Goolagong was placed within discourses of femininity that were common to women’s magazines at the time. Images of Goolagong published in women’s magazines were also more likely to show her as part of a family unit than were images published in newspapers, which most frequently pictured her within a tennis context. Such textual and visual depictions of her were in many ways not different from the ‘consistent portrayal of white women as active, glamorous and sexually desirable’ which was evident in the *Australian Women’s Weekly* at the time. Aboriginal women appeared in the magazine between 1945 and 1971 ‘only if they conformed to such ideals of white femininity’. Clearly, Goolagong could be depicted in just such ways.

Likewise, Māori women who featured in the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* were often depicted in ways that focused on domestic details, fashion and beauty. In 1990, an article appeared about the marriage of New Zealand netball captain Waimarama Taumaunu, and another article described lawn bowls player Millie Khan as a ‘modest mother of seven’. Outside of sport, similar portrayals of Māori women were also evident. Opera singer Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, for instance, was often quoted discussing the centrality in her life of home and family, or her approach to motherhood and marriage. Indeed, articles about Te Kanawa in the *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly* throughout her career often elided racial difference in a focus on shared gender experiences.

While women’s magazines such as these were vitally implicated in delineating ideals of femininity, Indigenous sportswomen were also represented in similar ways in other print media texts. Goolagong was often described as a ‘girl’ in

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99 Sheridan, Baird, Borrett and Ryan, p. 114.
reports of Wimbledon in 1971.\textsuperscript{102} Though she was young at the time, such descriptions also echoed common representations of sporting women as ‘girls’ or as behaving in ‘girlish’ ways.\textsuperscript{103} In other familiar representations of dominant ideals of femininity, she was described in 1971 as ‘vivacious’ and as a ‘pretty, petite 19-year-old’, and despite its being irrelevant to her tennis ability, her choice in fashion was detailed.\textsuperscript{104} She was ‘Wimbledon’s sweetheart’, ‘Australia’s darling of the courts’ and ‘Wimbledon’s darling’.\textsuperscript{105} Playing after the birth of her first child, she was described in reports of the Wimbledon tournament in 1980 as ‘the world’s favourite tennis mum’ by former Australian Wimbledon champion John Newcombe, writing with John Thirsk in the \textit{Daily Telegraph}, as ‘Supermum’ by Trengove in the \textit{Sun-Herald} and as ‘happy Evonne Cawley, contented wife and mother’ by Hedgcock in the \textit{Australian}.\textsuperscript{106} Similarly gendered representations sometimes appeared in print media stories about Māori sportswomen, as indeed was the case in stories about non-Indigenous sportswomen on both sides of the Tasman and more widely. In 1995, reporter Chris Fogarty asked in the \textit{Sunday Star-Times} whether or not a male rugby player would be asked ‘similar questions about the demands of family, work and sporting career’ as were asked of New Zealand netballer Noeline Taurua-Barnett.\textsuperscript{107} Awareness of this issue did not, however, stop Fogarty from including mention of Taurua-Barnett’s partner and daughter in the article.

A focus on domestic details, clothes and beauty emphasised attributes perceived as feminine, and this focus has been common in media representations of sportswomen during the twentieth century. As Marion Stell argued, ‘reassurance that a champion athlete is still a normal woman is a continuing need in our society’.\textsuperscript{108} Jim McKay has observed that scholars approaching the study of sport from a ‘feminist/cultural studies perspective’ have demonstrated that the media ‘naturalise hegemonic definitions of “real men” and “real women” in sport’.\textsuperscript{109} Several scholars have observed the continuing frequency of reporting on sportswomen’s domestic lives, particularly in relation to marriage and

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\bibitem{108} Stell, p. 180.
\end{thebibliography}
motherhood, and of narrative framings that trivialise their achievements or emphasise their (hetero)sexuality. In being framed in such ways in the print media, Goolagong and other Indigenous sportswomen shared in representations common to all sportswomen and to which sportsmen, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, were not subject.

Narratives of white Australian champion Margaret Court's life were similar to those told of Goolagong. Court also came from a ‘little country town’, and was once described as the 'girl from Albury who became a tennis legend’. She was said to have had ‘a poor and tough upbringing in the backblocks’ of Albury, making her story almost as much a rags-to-riches tale as Goolagong’s. An oft-repeated story about both Court and Goolagong is of their having used pieces of wood as their first rackets when children. Also like Goolagong, Court was discovered as a talent while still young, moving to Melbourne aged fifteen under the patronage of a former champion, Frank Sedgman, who was once said to have ‘plucked’ her from her hard life in Albury. Court was considered to be ‘athletic’ by several commentators, and was described as ‘a natural athlete before she went near a gym’ by Allan Kendall. Importantly, she was also known for being subject to nerves affecting her game, particularly on the Centre Court at Wimbledon. Indeed, in one book of famous Australian sportswomen, it was stated that she would ‘undoubtedly have had an even more impressive record but for her “big match” nerves’. The difference, of course, was that in Court’s case this weakness in her game was not blamed on race or discussed in racially loaded terms.

It is this very invisibility of whiteness, that allows it to be imposed as a norm, that has contributed to the continuation of historical inequalities in power relations. While white feminists have begun to write about and analyse whiteness, Aileen Moreton-Robinson has argued that, rather than ‘white race privilege’ being...
'interrogated as a form of difference', it ‘is an invisible omnipresent norm’.\(^{118}\) As she observes, the ‘white cultural system … exists as omnipresent and natural, yet invisible’, and race exists as ‘a categorical object … deemed to belong to the other’.\(^{119}\) For Court, while print media representations of her sometimes made visible her position as a woman in the male-dominated realm of sport, no reference was made to her as white. She was often described in terms related to gender or age, as a ‘woman player’, a ‘girl’, a ‘30-year-old Perth mother’ or as ‘Mrs Court’.\(^{120}\) Yet she was only ever described as an ‘Australian’ tennis player, while Goolagong was also sometimes tagged as Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal, though less often by 1980. Goolagong was represented as different, Other, the only Aboriginal woman playing international tennis. Court was part of the ‘invisible omnipresent norm’ in her whiteness, if still marginalised by her gender.

It is important also to consider the context of sport in general and tennis in particular at the time. As David Rowe and Jim McKay argue, ‘the relationship between sport and hegemonic masculinity is both deep and enduring’. They suggest that ‘one reason that sport is such a resonant symbol of hegemonic masculinity is that it literally embodies the seemingly natural superiority of men over women’.\(^{121}\) Some debate exists among scholars as to the extent and timing of the impact of the second wave feminist movement upon women’s participation in sport, but it is clear that the movement did have at least some impact by the 1980s.\(^{122}\) Tennis has been, as Deborah Stevenson has argued, ‘a site where debates on women and sport have flourished’.\(^{123}\) In the early 1970s, considerable protest took place against women’s tennis receiving less attention and less prize money than men’s tennis. A split developed between the United States Lawn Tennis Association (USLTA) and a new Women’s Pro ‘Tour, the Virginia Slims circuit, after the latter was set up in 1970 with larger monetary prizes by Gladys Heldman from World Tennis magazine. In 1973, when the USLTA held a women’s pro tour competing with the Virginia Slims tour, two groups of female players had formed, with Goolagong in the USLTA faction.\(^{124}\) Tennis, in particular, has also been a sport in which players were represented in terms of gender stereotypes and their

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\(^{122}\) On this issue see: Booth and Tatz, p. 11; Heaven and Rowe, p. 59; Stell, pp. 233, 251-252.

\(^{123}\) Stevenson, p. 212.

physical appearance and dress scrutinised. As Stevenson argues, ‘in contrast to other high-profile sports such as track and field and swimming, where such an image has never been hegemonic, the image of the fit, yet feminine, tennis player persists’ even in the early twenty-first century. Tennis, she states, ‘is a sport where assumptions about hegemonic femininity have been challenged, an arena where the media mediate the negotiation of sexuality, image, and the sporting woman’.

Media depictions of Goolagong during her career in tennis can only be thoroughly understood within this context. By the time of her second win in 1980, Goolagong was sometimes represented as a feminine player who was different from the manly women supposedly then appearing on the circuit. Writing in the *Sun-Herald*, Sandra Jobson felt that what ‘really won the applause from the British’ was Goolagong’s ‘calm femininity’, at a time when female tennis players were supposedly ‘neurotic’, had ‘“prune faces”’ or were allegedly lesbians. She and fellow-finalist Chris Evert-Lloyd, Jobson noted, were ‘two of the most popular and attractive girl players’, as well as being ‘happily married’.

Another reporter, Michael Gawenda, described Goolagong in the *Melbourne Herald* in 1980 as having ‘grace and charm’ and ‘sheer femininity’. The familiar representation of Goolagong as cheerful, innocent and lacking a killer instinct was also a feminised image, in that she was not seen to be implicating her gender by playing tennis. Similarly, Court was described in the *Australian* in 1970 as a powerful athlete, stronger than some men, but ‘recognisably – thank God – a woman’. This focus on femininity is particularly important in the context of a widespread belief in tennis that the best female players played ‘like men’. In an echo of the dichotomy that female athletes have continually struggled with over the years, Goolagong’s defeat of Court in 1971 was ‘thought to be the triumph of grace over power’. Moreover, Angela Burroughs and John Nauright have observed the growth of a ‘new focus on the “heterosexiness” of female players’ arising ‘through changes in media representation’ approximately over the period of Goolagong’s tennis career. They argue that a ‘heterosexie hegemony’ arose in Australia and New Zealand that ‘has worked to position female athletes in opposition to male athletes and to valorise femininity in women’s sport’. Writing of the period between 1970 and 1990, Marion Stell has observed that as ‘competition got tougher and sportswomen needed to train harder, longer and with more emphasis on strength, so too did

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125 Stevenson, pp. 209, 212.
126 Jobson, p. 2.
129 Stevenson, p. 218.
130 Stell, p. 262.
131 Burroughs and Nauright, p. 189.
the pressure to conform to society’s image of a real woman’. Indigenous sportswomen were not immune to such pressures, and representations of them in the print media often combined these gendered tropes with the racialised ones discussed earlier.

**Freeman and Reconciliation: Race, Gender, Nation and Sport in the 1990s**

Many Indigenous women have made their mark in a variety of sports on both sides of the Tasman since Goolagong’s retirement from the tennis circuit in the early 1980s. Women such as Nova Peris and Cathy Freeman in Australia, and Leilani Joyce in New Zealand reached great sporting success and became well-known nationally and internationally. Yet like all women in sport, Māori and Aboriginal sportswomen continued to be represented in gendered ways in the print media, at least at times, and often continued to struggle for recognition in comparison with sportsmen. Neither did media representations entirely cease to frame Indigenous sportswomen as racial Others. Toni Bruce and Christopher Hallinan suggest that representations of Freeman in the print media in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were little different from those evident in media narratives about Goolagong. Among other framings, Freeman was represented as a ‘natural runner’ and as ‘unmotivated’, as well as being represented in ways which emphasised perceived ideals of femininity.

One article which referred to her ‘natural talent’, printed in the *Sun-Herald* in 1994, was titled simply ‘The Natural’. Another, in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1996, commented that her ‘spirtely charm’ at the Atlanta Olympic Games would ‘long be remembered’. At the same time, one sign of new departures in media representations of sportswomen was the frequency with which Freeman was represented as similar to machines in her ability. Some representations of Freeman made explicit comparisons with Goolagong. Writing in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1995, Jeff Wells described Freeman and Goolagong as both having ‘a fine Aboriginal grace in their movement and their mien’. After Freeman’s silver medal win in Atlanta in 1996, Richard Yallop wrote that Goolagong’s ‘charm’ was that ‘she carried her extraordinary talent so naturally and with such unaffected spontaneity’, and that

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132 Stell, p. 258.
'it was exactly the same when Cathy Freeman, Evonne’s natural successor, wrote her name into Olympic history at Atlanta stadium.'  Like Goolagong, Freeman was herself aware of her position as embodying Aboriginal prowess in the face of racism and exclusion. She recalled that when she won gold in the 400m at the Commonwealth Games in 1994 and carried the Aboriginal flag along with the Australian flag on her victory lap, she ‘wanted to shout, “Look at me, look at my skin. I’m black and I’m the best”’.

Figure 4: ‘Cathy Freeman, Commonwealth Games, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, 1994’, Melanie Collins.

Similar to representations of Goolagong, an imperative towards narrating sporting achievements in terms of salvation was sometimes evident in later framings of Freeman and of hockey player and runner Nova Peris (earlier Peris-Kneebone). After Peris won gold as a member of the successful Australian hockey team at the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, the win was described in the Age as particularly great ‘for someone who has overcome the disadvantages of isolation and lack of opportunity’, as well as having had a child at a young age. In this rags-to-riches narrative, racism appears to feature rarely as a barrier to success. Greg Gardiner noted this tendency in relation to an article about Peris in the

Australian in 1998, in which she was represented as having overcome much hardship, type unspecified. Where racism was mentioned, he observed, it was conceived of as merely ‘an “obstacle” to overcome’. After her silver medal victory in Atlanta, Freeman’s ‘road to the top’ was similarly described in the Age as having ‘been rockier than most’, and although it was acknowledged that ‘behind every athlete’s Olympic medal is struggle and hardship’, it was suggested that ‘perhaps Cathy Freeman’s story – and that of her mother, Cecilia, – are among the most poignant’.

Peris and Freeman themselves both sometimes gave weight to such interpretations of their successes. Each suggested in their respective collaborative autobiographies that they desired their stories to encourage people, especially young Aboriginal people, and that dreams could be achieved. Although such representations of Peris and Freeman emphasised their own hard work and determination to a greater extent than was the case in representations of Goolagong, they remained problematic. Stressing hard work and tenacity as a way in which systemic problems of poverty, exclusion or racism might be overcome potentially implied that failure to overcome those barriers was the fault of the individual concerned themselves.

Representations of Indigenous sportswomen also, however, encapsulate threads of discourse other than those of race and gender. Throughout this discussion, the intricate relationships that exist between discourses of race and gender and those of nation have been apparent. Indeed, ideas of nation have been central to discourses about sport. Sporting events, particularly international events, are ‘a key arena in which particular versions of nation are expressed’. Rod Brookes is right to argue that it ‘is difficult to envisage sportswomen being held up by the media as being representative of the nation in the way that, for example, male soccer or rugby teams are’. Yet as Bruce and Hallinan argue, ‘highly mediated images of Aboriginality and sport have become integral to an understanding of what it means to be Australian’. Echoes of similar intersections between race and nation were sometimes evident in New Zealand as well. The comment was made in the New Zealand Herald in 1991, for example, that ‘no truer-bluer Kiwi than Wai [Taumaunu] … could be chosen’ to captain the New Zealand netball side. Caroline Daley has noted a tendency in New Zealand sports history for Māori sportspeople ‘to be whitewashed to become Brown Britons’ or

144 Bruce and Hallinan, p. 260.
146 Bruce and Hallinan, p. 260.
for ‘their presence in team sports [to be] noted as evidence of harmonious race relations’. As is clear in the transformation of Indigenous sportspeople in the press from Aboriginal and Māori athletes to Australian and New Zealand athletes, Indigenous sportspeople have been represented in ways which bear sharply on imaginings about the nation in Australia and New Zealand. Media portrayals of Indigenous sportswomen are thus tightly implicated in representing particular versions of the nation. Representing Australia on an international sporting stage, Goolagong could be depicted as an exotic novelty, an assimilation success or a symbol that all was well in Australian race relations.

Most obviously, race and nation were deeply embedded in media narratives about Cathy Freeman, possibly the most famous Aboriginal sportswoman yet. Scholars have begun to closely analyse media representations of Freeman, particularly in relation to two highly symbolic events in her career: her decision to carry the Aboriginal flag as well as the Australian flag in her victory laps at the 1994 Commonwealth Games, and her victory in the 400m at the Sydney Olympics in 2000. Freeman was a hugely popular athlete, and her victory in 2000 was celebrated across Australia. Larissa Behrendt argued that this public embrace of Freeman was ‘not of [her] Aboriginality per se’, so much as it was of ‘the type of Aborigine’ that she appeared to exemplify, which was one who was ‘non-confronting, amiable, modest and successful in the dominant culture’. Yet Freeman was also a more confronting figure sometimes, as when she carried the Aboriginal flag on her victory laps, and at such times she became a less acceptable figure.

Freeman has also been framed in the media as a ‘symbol of national reconciliation’. Indeed, Bruce and Hallinan have suggested that, in her position as a successful Aboriginal person who represented Australia internationally in a sporting sense, Freeman appeared to be an embodiment of the possibility of reconciliation. ‘Embracing Freeman,’ they argued, could therefore be ‘an easy way out for Australians who, without having to take any action, can believe: We are not racist: We love Cathy’. Perhaps because of the perceived necessity of representing her as ‘an “Australian”’, common gendered ways of representing sportswomen were less evident in stories about Freeman. In depictions which sought to articulate particular versions of an Australian nation, race was perhaps more central than was gender, suggesting a continuing uninterest in viewing women as being able to represent the nation. At the same time, it was the

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148 Daley, p. 44.
151 Bruce and Hallinan, pp. 261, 267, original emphasis.
152 Wensing and Bruce, pp. 393-394.
particular conjunction of political and social factors, as well as the specificities of Freeman’s own story and person, which made such representations both frequently articulated and compelling.

**Conclusion**

Representations of racial difference were deeply embedded in many media stories about Goolagong, and she was reflective about those representations. Her profile as an Aboriginal sportsperson was the most evident depiction, both in her playing days and more recently. Her Aboriginality was often framed as a key defining characteristic in narratives of her life and career. Naming her as Aboriginal or part-Aboriginal, referring to her as possessing natural talent or liable to go walkabout, or describing her physical features all framed her as different, as racially Other. Yet she was also subject to media representation in relation to her youth, rural background, beauty and positioning as a feminine woman who was also a strong and fit sportsperson. Sometimes the key factor in framing representations was gender, as when her perceived femininity was celebrated by commentators in the context of feminist pressures for change in women’s tennis and the application of negative stereotypes to many female players. Discourses of gender thus intersected with discourses about race in shaping narratives about Goolagong, as in narratives about other Aboriginal sportswomen in Australia and Māori sportswomen in New Zealand. Gendered depictions, however, might be elided in framings which focused on representing particular versions of an Australian or New Zealand nation, and representations of race often fell into accepted parameters as exotic Others, authentic Kiwis and Aussies, or symbols of harmonious race relations or reconciliation. Demonstrating the multiple and complex nature of representation, women such as Goolagong and Freeman could be framed as representing ideas about race, gender and the nation at the same time as they represented Australia in a more practical sense in international sporting competitions. No longer whitewashed as assimilated by the end of the twentieth century, Indigenous sportswomen were nonetheless often represented in the print media in ways which marked them as different in both racial and gendered terms, and depictions which placed them as representing the nation on an international stage frequently remained deeply ambivalent.