
From: Phil Johns [mailto:hanoiswans@gmail.com]
Sent: Sunday, June 10, 2007 1:31 PM
To
Cc:
Subject: RE: Footy Record in Australia

Hi Andrew

Thanks for your email and I would agree with you that the content of the Footy Record does "seem quite limited".

While these types of responses from Australia are very standard, they continue to leave me perplexed.

In Australia, everyone is dismissive of footy overseas because "no one plays it". When I am in Australia and tell people about playing footy in Vietnam, they are amazed and they want to know more. When backpackers and business people come to Vietnam and stumble across us, they are stunned. Jack from Melbourne, as the ball was bounced for his first match outside of Australia, yelled out as he ran in to contest the ruck, "Aussie Rules in Vietnam!" Five weeks ago, the tiny Swans launched a blog site (www.hanoiswans.wordpress.com) and have so far had 1,000 hits.

Grand Final Day from Manila to Jakarta, Hong Kong to Hanoi, Kuala Lumpur to Tokyo is a great Australian Day with proper organized events happening in each of the major cities across the region. Many fly in AFL celebrities from Australia for their events. Again, many of the visitors (speaking for Hanoi at least) cannot believe that the Grand Final is televised live, that there is a formal organized event and that there is a local footy club which even plays other countries.

Back home, the more educated who already know of the existence of footy outside of Australia, dismiss us because we are "old, fat, slow expats" (there are plenty of exceptions to this, I hasten to add) – that we're not professional footballers. They're right. We're not professional footballers because none of us came here to play footy. Most of us came here to work as professionals. What that means is that across the region, you have a network of Australians working in influential positions in business and government - who have a passion for footy. We are all volunteers, promoting footy.

Perhaps we have "failed" because we haven't been able to turn the sea of soccer (but have a look at the great work that the Bali Geckos and Jakarta Bintangs, for example, have done with setting up a now very well established local league). However, regardless of what we do or don't do, when Australians step outside of Australia, they immediately start learning about soccer because it is so pervasive. It's everywhere. With our presence, we help keep the interest of footy strong and get a few locals to start asking questions about our strange game. In business language, if I was in Australia, I would be thinking of the Socceroos as being a bit like an import. As imports come in you have to fight harder to maintain market share and/or start exporting. Aussie Rules is already across the region and if you look at www.worldfootynews.com it's well and truly across the world.

This offers amazing untapped potential. With an unofficial network across the world and being a football code that is unique, the clubs that play Australia's Signature Sport are effectively Australia's unofficial sporting/cultural embassies.

In marketing, we are taught about the importance of differentiation. So, rather than mocking Aussie Rules because "no one plays it", it could be used as a marketing vehicle to promote Australian products. Last month in Vietnam, Austrade hosted the Australian Schools Open Days in Hanoi and Saigon. The Vietnam Swans put up a stall in both cities to demonstrate some

Aussie Rules, get them handballing and trying to bounce the ball. The Vietnamese laugh and giggle and have a great time. Because of that, the Australian school product is more likely to be differentiated from the school product being offered by other countries. As is usually the case, the Australians who came out were amazed to see us with our footies in both cities.

Last year in Hanoi, we started expanding Grand Final Day in to Grand Final Week which, with a marketing spin, can also double as Australia Week. We wanted to know whether any organizations with links to Australia had any “important” visitors coming through Hanoi in Grand Final Week that we could make a connection with the Grand Final. Most didn’t think so. The Red Apron Wine Shop had an Australian wine maker coming out two weeks earlier. That could have almost been perfect: to celebrate the Australian Grand Final, we’re bringing out an Australian winemaker who has just released his blah blah... The shop could have balloons with team colours and some footy sporting memorabilia that they borrow from us. Then, the Frenchman for example who likes wine, comes into the shop to see the wine maker – and sees all the footy stuff and asks, “What’s that? What’s this footy thing?” 20 seconds later, he’s focused on the wine again – but it has been a different experience and so is more likely to remember the Australian wine maker which is good for the shop. It’s good for footy because through the shop we have accessed someone we would never have met.

On Grand Final Day, the Australian Ambassador who is our No 1 Ticket Holder and a strong supporter of the Vietnam Swans, apologized that he would not be able to attend our Grand Final Event. The reason was that the Honourable Fran Bailey needed to be taken to the airport at that time and protocol stipulates that the Ambassador must take her there.

Three weeks later, I read in the The Age on line that the Honourable Fran Bailey, Australia’s Tourism Minister was upset that Japan Airlines had cut services to Australia. I was staggered. Why was the Tourism Minister in Vietnam in the lead up to the Grand Final (Australia grants very few tourist visas to Vietnamese)? Why was she on an aeroplane during the actual Grand Final? Why wasn’t she in Tokyo riding the wave of natural Australian momentum being lead by the Tokyo Goannas – who all happen to be volunteers?

Clearly, she doesn’t see the potential value of footy as a marketing vehicle for Australia. Maybe she prefers rugby? I argue it’s not about footy or rugby. It’s about what generates the attention for Australia. And that is footy.

So should all that be driven by the Australian Government, Austrade, the Australian Tourism Commission? I would have thought that the AFL would have an interest in getting to Canberra to speak to the senior politicians and bureaucrats about the potential opportunities.

However, with the AFL’s humble old Footy Record unable to even give a mention the 8th Annual Asian Champs which will attract 500 passionate, influential people (footy volunteers) representing 10 countries from across the region who are the only ones fighting for footy over here, it doesn’t seem likely.

Sitting outside of Australia, it’s not the opportunities that “seem quite limited”. But many thanks for trying anyway.

(The views expressed above are my personal views. While I have cc’d representatives of the other footy clubs in Asia who are attending the Champs, they may or may not agree with the above. I should also point out that I have never been to an Asian Champs – this year will be my first year at a Champs. For the previous 3 years, I have just been involved with footy in Vietnam.)

Regards

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President

Vietnam Swans

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