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The role of sporting medals in a sports museum

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Medals are a vital part of the material culture of sport. Whether awarded as prizes, bestowed in recognition of service or created as souvenirs for fans and collectors alike, sporting medals are an important symbol of the way society recognises key achievements and moments in sport. For a sports museum whose mission is to reflect on the importance of sport in society, medals play a crucial role in the representation, interpretation and communication of these attitudes and values.

To gain an understanding of how sporting medals can be deployed by a sports museum in their collection and exhibition programs, this paper takes as a case study the National Sports Museum (NSM) in Melbourne, Australia. The NSM approaches sporting medals as objects of material culture, rather than as numismatic items, and the museum's methodologies in interpretation, display, storage and cataloguing methods all reflect this integrated approach.[1] Looking first to exhibitions, this paper introduces a typology that divides sporting medals into three thematic categories – competition, honour and commemoration. A semiotic model is then used to analyse and understand the role of sporting medals within the institution's exhibitions policy, representing social values and communicating ideas such as nationhood, victory and prowess. This paper then looks to sporting medals in the context of the NSM collection, revealing a different emphasis on symbolic value. Within the institution's existing collecting policy and practice, sporting medals are valued for their ability to signify a broader range of sporting and non-sporting themes. The museum's attitude toward sporting medals is further demonstrated by its non-numismatic approach to the way such objects are stored, catalogued and managed.[2] In the areas of exhibitions and collections, the NSM prioritises the semantic power of sporting medals, and their role in communicating the value, impact and meaning of sport in Australian society.

This paper specifically addresses the context of the NSM, a public museum located at the Melbourne Cricket Ground in Melbourne, Australia.[3] It is a multi-sport museum, with a significant portion of its exhibition space devoted to permanent displays relating to those sports with the highest participation and

spectatorship rates in the country. Large areas are devoted to Australian football, cricket and the Olympic Games, with smaller areas addressing thoroughbred racing and the MCG itself, while individual showcases are themed to sports such as rugby league, netball, tennis, football (soccer) and boxing. A large gallery and a number of showcases throughout the museum are reserved for a changing program of temporary exhibitions, allowing the museum to address contemporary issues, minor sports and other themes. In addition, the museum houses five sporting Halls of Fame (cricket, boxing, thoroughbred racing and Australian football as well as the Sport Australia Hall of Fame).[4] The NSM has a small heritage collection of its own with a broad remit to represent the social importance of sport in Australian history, but also has access to the large heritage collections of the Melbourne Cricket Club Museum, Library and Archives and the Australian Gallery of Sport and Olympic Museum. Medals are just one element of a varied inventory that includes sporting equipment and apparel, trophies, programs, posters, printed ephemera, trade cards, artworks, photographs, personal effects, audio-visual material and much more.

The NSM takes a broad view in the definition of sporting medals. First, the term 'medal' is used to cover many forms of metal tokens, including medallions, medalets and fobs regardless of the method of manufacture, but excluding coins and badges.[5] Secondly, a medal is considered a sporting medal if it bears a relationship to a sporting event, venue or sports person. This grouping covers a very wide variety of objects, and it is therefore useful to apply a three-part typology for sporting medals that reflects their creation and purpose in the sporting world. This typology comprises, in sequence from most exclusive to most inclusive, competition medals, honour medals and commemorative medals.

Competition medals are awarded to an individual or a team following achievement of a certain standard in a sporting event. The gold, silver and bronze medals awarded at the Olympic Games for first, second and third place-getters are competition medals. Although the gold/silver/bronze paradigm is upheld at many contemporary sporting events there are also many other kinds of competition medals, with wide variation through history in the material used as well as in the number of medals presented (for first place only, to lower place-getters, or to all participants regardless of performance). A medal does not need to be received at the time of victory or participation to be a competition medal, but might be created at a later date in order to acknowledge a competition achievement (for example, a football club awarding medals to its premiership players since a championship trophy cannot be shared). An important quality of these medals is that they are earned

directly through participation in sporting competition, and therefore are exclusive to those athletes who have competed in a particular event.

Honour medals are semi-exclusive medals that are bestowed or issued in recognition of a contribution made to sport more generally. At the most exclusive end of the spectrum, this category includes medals awarded for sporting prowess, such as most valuable player, best on ground, or highest goal scorer. Such honours are often awarded by clubs or leagues, but can also be presented by non-sporting organisations, such as sponsors, newspapers and radio stations. This category also includes medals awarded by government bodies (such as an Order of Australia medal for service to sport), as well as medals recognising admission into sporting Halls of Fame and other excellence awards. At its least exclusive level, this category also includes medals or fobs issued to recognise membership of a sporting organisation.

Commemorative medals form the least exclusive, or most inclusive, category of sporting medals. These are created and distributed to mark certain sporting anniversaries or events. Being broadly available to the public, these medals serve various purposes: to commemorate and remember, to publicise and to advertise. Often generated specifically as souvenirs, these medals provide a way for non-athletes to feel inclusion in, and ownership of, particular sporting moments.[6]

By thus dividing sporting medals into competition, honour and commemorative medals this typology favours thematic characteristics over more conventional numismatic properties such as material, age or origin. By using exclusivity and inclusivity as its guiding principles, the typology reflects the dominant social attitude to sport that confers highest esteem to sporting success at the elite level, less esteem to participation and lowest esteem to non-participatory activities such as spectatorship.[7] The categories reflect the varying roles of sporting medals in wider society, and by extrapolation reveal how these same ideas are represented within the museum.

Museums draw on material culture – objects – to understand history.[8] In a museum, objects act as evidence, evoking the past by virtue of their continuing physical presence. This evocation is not objective however, but is influenced by the choices and actions of the museum.[9] The act of selecting an object for a museum's collection or display is always subjective, and reflects a set of judgments about an object's social, cultural or heritage value. In a museum, then, items of material culture such as sporting medals can be usefully understood as signs, able to communicate a range of messages depending on context.

In the terminology of semiotics, a sign is composed of two elements – the signifier (the physical object) and the

signified (the idea, or the message, that the object carries).[10] While the signifier is inert, its signified message is wholly socially generated. An object can act as many signs; meaning that it can signify many things simultaneously.[11] Being socially constructed, these meanings will shift and change depending on the viewer, the context, the culture and the era in which they are viewed. For a museum, collecting and exhibiting objects means creating signs – a powerful act that can perpetuate as much as interrogate ideologies, assumptions and norms. Whereas exhibitions are developed for communication with the visitor through providing an education and entertainment experience, collecting is undertaken for the purposes of preservation, research and posterity. The sporting medal's behaviour as a sign – as with any museum object – changes according to its consideration in either an exhibition or a collection context.

The NSM takes the phrase 'moments that made us' as the museum's overarching exhibition theme, presenting the narratives of key moments in Australia's sporting history that have had influence on Australian culture and identity. Such 'moments' are widely varied, and include national sporting victories such as the America's Cup in 1983; major events such as the staging of the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne; examples of Australian sporting innovation such as Jack Brabham's BT19 Formula 1 race car; and structural changes to the sporting industry such as the staging of World Series Cricket from 1977 to 1979. Sporting medals are therefore more

Section of Museum	Competition	Honour	Commemorative	Total
Faster Higher Stronger (Olympic Games)	99	6	6	**111**
Australia's Game (Australian football)	40	67	0	**107**
Sport Australia Hall of Fame	2	1	0	**3**
Backyard to Baggy Green (cricket)	2	2	0	**4**
The People's Ground (MCG)	0	1	0	**1**
Champions (thoroughbred racing)	0	2	0	**2**
Other sports	13	4	1	**18**
Total	**156**	**83**	**7**	**246**

Table 1. Distribution of medals on display in the NSM on 1 February 2012, by type.

Figure 1. 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' gallery in the National Sports Museum. Photograph by John Gollings, reproduced with permission of the National Sports Museum.

relevant to some themes than others, and in some areas do not appear at all.

As Table 1 demonstrates, 89% of all medals displayed in the NSM are in the sections dedicated to the Olympic Games and Australian football. In contrast, the area dedicated to thoroughbred racing has just two medals included in its display, those showcases instead being replete with sashes and cups. The large cricket gallery has just four medals and is instead populated by trophies, inscribed cricket bats and ornately embellished cricket balls signifying individual and team honours. Similarly, there are no medals in showcases focusing on boxing (though title belts are featured), nor cycling (where coloured jerseys signify achievement). This distribution demonstrates two superimposed value systems: first, the inconsistent importance placed on medals in the sporting world (where medals do not always feature as a sport's highest prize) and secondly, the museum's own curatorial choices, which will be discussed in more detail below.

If the role of the medal in the NSM's exhibitions is to communicate with the audience through its function as a sign, then we shall see that, in semiotic terms, some medals are more useful than others. The distribution defined in Table 1

shows that across the NSM just 3% of all displayed medals are commemorative, despite their widespread manufacture and prevalence in the primary and secondary marketplaces.[12] As signifiers, commemorative medals tend to evoke messages of an event or a larger story (such as the staging of a major sporting event) and are therefore less useful in communicating those key sporting ideas of mastery, achievement and glory.

Competition medals are semiotically powerful objects, and can be considered as a specific format of sporting trophy.[13] They exist to mark a sporting victory or significant achievement, and are designed, manufactured and bestowed with this specific task in mind. Other functions of the victory medal are resolutely secondary, whether being a ceremonial and photographic prop, a method of compensation and occasionally remuneration for competitors, or even as an advertising billboard. Competition medals are fundamentally associated with formal medal ceremonies and the associated choreographed performance that recognises and privileges victory, therefore signifying not just victory but also the social prestige and glory that victory brings.

Although different sports place varying levels of importance on competition medals, they have great symbolic potency for the Olympic Games. In the NSM, 'Faster, Higher, Stronger' is a large gallery that includes along one wall a linear series of showcases, presenting objects from each modern Olympiad from 1896 to 2008 (Fig. 1).[14] An analysis of the medals in these Olympiad showcases reveals that medals appear in all of the showcases save one, with 88% being competition medals.[15] Of those medals, the majority (36 of 49) are placing medals (gold, silver or bronze), all of which were awarded to Australians, with the remaining 13 being participation medals.

Medals are so fundamental to the idea of the Olympic Games that any Olympic exhibit would be incomplete without them. 'Olympic gold' figures large in national sporting mythologies, and for many athletes it is the ultimate ambition, and no other medal, trophy or award would be its equal. A gold medallist takes on a hero status, while lower medals and placings are more likely to be forgotten by history. Seen together in 'Faster, Higher, Stronger', the medals signify Australia's sporting strength on the international stage since the very first Games of the modern Olympic era. Olympic medals play a political role in reinforcing, propping up or propagating myths of nationhood in countries all around the world, whether through the deliberate choice of medal design by the host nation, or through the competing nations' position in the medal tally.[16] Indeed, Australia's poor result in the medal tally at the 1976 Montreal Olympics was the main catalyst for the establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport, promoting a more professional

Figure 2. Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race line honours medal awarded to Adrienne Cahalan, 2010. NSM (N2011.66.16). (50 x 7mm). Kindly on loan to the NSM from Adrienne Cahalan. Reproduced with permission of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia.

approach to sporting excellence and driving the nation toward sporting success.[17] Many countries provide financial reward to those athletes who win Olympic medals,[18] with Australia, China and Canada setting up aggressive sporting development programs in the lead-up to their home Olympics (Sydney 2000, Beijing 2008, Vancouver 2010) with the principal intention of improving their standing in the Olympic medal tally.[19]

As signs in the museum context, Olympic competition medals are heavily loaded – politically, emotionally and socially – and therefore operate differently from other competition medals. In semiotic terms, the signifier is also the signified. This intense cycle of self-reference is part of what makes them so alluring to viewers: while winner's medals from other elite-level international competitions may signify mastery, glory and athletic excellence, an Olympic gold medal signifies foremost 'Olympic gold'.[20]

A recent temporary exhibition in the NSM on the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race included a winner's medal presented to Adrienne Cahalan in 2010 as navigator aboard Wild Oats XI, the first yacht across the finish line (Fig. 2). The presence of the medal added semiotic weight to the other items in the display belonging to Cahalan. Her wet-weather gear came to signify more than simply an example of the type of equipment required to withstand the race's ferocious weather conditions: it was the wet-weather gear that could furnish a win. Likewise, her navigation notes signified a proven methodology for victory. Although the information that Cahalan was part of a winning crew was also provided on an exhibit label, the presence of a medal provides an immediate visual association between the surrounding objects and the idea

Figure 3. Chas. Brownlow Trophy awarded to Dick Reynolds, 1934 (N2011.53.1). (42 x 28 x 1mm). Kindly on loan to the NSM from the Reynolds Family. Reproduced with permission of the Australian Football League.

of success. Allowing objects to form hybridised signs through their proximity to each other is a way for the museum to recruit the semantic agency of the medal in communicating with the visitor.

Certain honour medals hold a similarly vaunted position within their sport as Olympic gold, though on a more localised scale. These medals, too, act as self-referential signs, signifying not only the achievement they were originally created to honour but also serving rhetorically to represent themselves.

One of the few such examples in Australian sport is Australian football's Chas. Brownlow Trophy (Fig. 3). Known colloquially as the Brownlow medal, it is awarded to the Australian Football League's (AFL) 'fairest and best player' and is determined by the tally of votes cast by the umpires throughout the season.[21] The medal itself is an unimposing fob embellished with blue enamel, and is presented annually in Melbourne to enormous (though extremely localised) fanfare generated by the AFL, commercial television and daily newspapers. In this media-saturated age, the semiotic significance of the Brownlow medal extends well beyond its stated purpose as the league's highest individual honour and has become fundamentally linked to the ceremony surrounding its presentation.

The Brownlow medal is presented at a gala ceremony televised in those Australian states where Australian Football is the dominant football code. The black-tie event accords the medal an aura of glamour – a quality not usually linked to a contact sport. The medal's status is further reinforced by the dramatic delivery of the votes by armed guards, then the prolonged process of counting the votes, interspersed with footage of game highlights, commentary, live interviews and pre-

recorded tributes. This performance, orchestrated by the AFL and broadcast media, constructs a mythology of great worth and importance for the Brownlow medal, which is out of step with the esteem felt for the medal by the recipients. Past winners, while gracious, often claim that they'd gladly trade their Brownlow for a premiership medal won with their team-mates on Grand Final day.[22]

The NSM displays a number of Brownlow medals. In the Australian football section of the NSM one showcase is dedicated solely to the Brownlow medal (Fig. 4), displaying the medal awarded to Wilfred 'Chicken' Smallhorn in 1933 (the tenth to be awarded) and a facsimile of the illuminated citation given to recipients.[23] Mounted above the showcase is a list of all past recipients. This medal fulfils a crucial role in the museum exhibition by signifying the concept of 'Brownlow medal' – standing not just for itself and for the recipient, but for all Brownlow medals. For those visitors who are aware of the Brownlow medal's associated mythology, the object also acts as a sign to evoke those ideas of ceremony and prestige. It can be argued that the display reinforces this mythology by devoting an entire showcase to this single, tiny object. This significance, however, is only visible to those visitors who are already aware of the mythology – to others the medal continues to signify those qualities 'fairest and best' for which the medal is awarded. By displaying only the medal, and electing not to display objects that specifically signify the ceremony (such as items of formal clothing, images of the ceremony, or news clippings lauding the event), the NSM presents a display that draws on the viewer's own knowledge to create meaning.

Figure 4. Brownlow showcase in the National Sports Museum. Photograph by Helen Walpole.

The Brownlow medals exhibited in other parts of the museum fulfil different roles. The three Brownlow medals won by Dick Reynolds are displayed in the 'Australian Football Hall of Fame Legends Gallery' (Fig. 5). Just four individuals have won the medal three times to date and each have Legend status in the Hall of Fame, hence the presence of all three medals together is a

Figure 5. Australian Football Hall of Fame Legends Gallery at the NSM. Photograph by John Gollings, reproduced with permission of the National Sports Museum.

significant historical grouping in which the signified message is greater than the sum of the three component parts. As well as signifying the enhanced quality of 'fairest and best' associated with Reynolds as a triple-Brownlow medallist, the three medals as a group subsequently confer this quality of excellence to their location, the Legends Gallery, and by referral, to everyone else represented within it.[24]

By contrast, Brownlow medals present in the 'Club Room Gallery' take their place among other medals to evoke club loyalty and identity. The 'Club Room Gallery' contains a series of showcases each representing one of the clubs in the AFL, with all but three containing medals. Contrasting starkly with the jumpers, boots and ephemera presented in the showcases, the medals together build up an atmosphere of pride in the history of each club, and underscore the rivalry between them. The Brownlow medals invoke the names of past champions, while other medals represent specific victories and premierships. The St Kilda Football Club showcase, for example, contains four honour medals from a breadth of eras: a Brownlow medal awarded to Tony Lockett in 1987, a life membership fob awarded to Barney Carr 'for valuable services rendered' in 1930, an honour medal for 'League Best Centre' voted by the readers of The

Sporting Globe in 1922 also awarded to Carr, and a 'Best on Ground' medal awarded to Nick Riewoldt in 2006. Here, and throughout the NSM, the label accompanying the objects provides information that extends the story of the medal – the recipient, the reason for the award and the date – rather than any details on dimensions, mass, mint, designer or media. The medals play much the same role as other items of material culture in the NSM, signifying moments, champions, events and victories rather than their own specific physicality.

Medals are used in the NSM's exhibitions to perform a range of semiotic functions. Through their distribution and context, these medals communicate a variety of messages to museum visitors about societal values placed on such concepts as victory, participation, ceremony, honour and prestige. Their inclusion in exhibitions also speaks to the values imbued in the medals themselves by different sports, institutions and the museum. These roles are played out in the pedagogical space of the museum's public exhibitions area, and are therefore subtly different from the role of sporting medals in the museum's collections.

The collection policy for the NSM is substantially different from the institution's exhibition policy. While exhibitions reflect the theme 'moments that made us', the collection includes objects that refer to the spectrum of sport in Australia, from champions to grass-roots to spectators, seeking objects that demonstrate the underpinning social importance of sport to Australians of all ages across all eras. Sporting medals are therefore as much a part of the collecting priorities as uniforms, fan mail and Olympic torches.

The NSM collection policy reflects a model of collecting that museologist Susan Pearce defines as 'systematic'.[25] Systematic collecting is an endeavour to gather objects according to a particular empirical rationale, seeking completeness and eschewing duplication. This methodology lends itself most readily to items that have an established classification system, such as botanical specimens or postage stamps, or a set of objects with clearly defined parameters, such as military medals issued by a certain country, or beer bottles from a certain brewery. The NSM, however, approaches the collecting of the material culture of sport without the benefit of a classification structure or a universal reference text. Instead, the collection policy identifies certain themes such as key sports and or events that the museum prioritises when assessing objects for acquisition.

Sporting medals demonstrate such variance in quality, issue, distribution, design, manufacture and other characteristics that a rigidly ordered approach to their collecting is futile. A 'one of everything' approach would yield anything from limited edition commemorative medals, to mass-produced pewter medals awarded for

Figure 6. Medal issued to commemorate the athletes murdered at the Munich Olympic Games, 1972. NSM Collection (N2009.145). (81 x 3mm).

participation in a city fun-run, through to membership fobs for suburban golf clubs. It is possible to enact a comprehensive systematic collection by narrowing the focus and instituting sub-categories, such as Olympic medals, or Melbourne Cricket Club membership fobs.

However, across the breadth of the NSM collection, medals play an integrated role: they are not secluded in a separate numismatic collection, but are instead considered in equal measure with all other collection objects. The implication of this is that medals are acquired, catalogued and managed in much the same way as other collection objects. This reflects the museum's approach to these objects as being just as much a part of the sporting landscape as trophies, programs, technical equipment and other items of material culture. Cataloguing methodologies demonstrate this approach, with the NSM eschewing numismatic categories in favour of information about the associated sport, event, person and date of awarding rather than about the weight, bullion value, type of metal, date of manufacture, mint or designer. The management of sporting medals in the NSM collection reflects their role in exhibitions: as items of sporting heritage, valued for their ability to signify the broader history of sport in Australia.

Unlike the exhibition policy, however, the collection policy is not limited to key sporting moments. Indeed, the museum acquires medals across the three categories of competition, honour and commemorative medals in order to reflect a range of events, individuals and locations. Having commenced collecting only recently – in 2008 – the NSM collection is too

Figure 7. Gold medal awarded to Verdi Barberis for Weightlifting at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games 1954. NSM Collection (N2009.144.8). (53 x 4mm). Reproduced courtesy of the National Sports Museum.

small for a quantitative analysis of the prevalence of competition, honour and commemorative medals to provide any useful information. It is already clear, however, that the collection is less weighted toward elite competition medals and includes in its number participation medals, non-elite medals and commemorative medals.

An example is a medal issued to commemorate the lives of those Israeli athletes killed by terrorists at the 1972 Munich Olympics (Fig. 6). The medal has a similar appearance to an Olympic competition medal, with an image of Nike, goddess of victory, on the obverse and a depiction of the Munich Olympic stadium on the reverse. Like many commemorative medals, this object is a step removed from the event to which it refers. Unlike Olympic competition medals, which are the direct object of desire and were physically present at the victory ceremony, this commemorative medal was issued after the fact. It bears a symbolic rather than direct relationship to the event, and therefore has a quality of contemplation, rather than evidence or witness. In the collection, however, the medal is not limited by its ability to signify a single moment: it is collected for its role in a wide range of themes and issues including demonstrating how the International Olympic Council draws on its own symbolic structure of medals to present its own history.

On occasion, the museum will acquire a number of medals that represent the career of a single athlete. This is part of the systematic approach to representing a breadth of individuals, sports and levels. For example, the NSM received a donation of medals from the family of Verdi 'Vern' Barberis,

an Australian weightlifter, who had retained the medals he had won at national and international competitions in this event. Barberis won Australia's first weightlifting medal in international competition, placing second at the British Empire Games in Auckland in 1950. He subsequently won bronze at the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki, and at the 1954 Empire Games won Australia's first international gold medal for weightlifting (Fig. 7). The acquisition of this collection of sporting medals allows the museum to represent not just Barberis' contribution to Australian weightlifting, but also the sport of weightlifting itself. These ideas could be – and are – represented through other items of material culture donated by Barberis' family, such as his Australian Olympic team blazer worn at both the 1952 and 1956 Olympics. Crucially, however, the medals themselves are significant to Australian weightlifting history, being the first to be won by an Australian in international competition. While the medals represent the athlete and the events, they also mark their own place as milestones in the development of Australian sport.

In the collections then, as in the exhibitions, sporting medals are valued as part of the broader material culture of sport. By bringing these medals together in the care of an institution whose principal interest is the social importance of sport in Australia, the NSM is building a collection that can shed light on the role of sporting medals in society in a general manner. Beyond questions of provenance, design and recipient, these medals also provoke us to consider the more philosophical questions relating to their cultural and political function.[26] Such questions fall into a gap between numismatics and sports history and, although addressing these issues in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, they are important in analysing more fully the role of sporting medals in a sports museum.

This paper has addressed the multifaceted role of a sporting medal at the National Sports Museum. The values invested in sporting medals by sports, institutions, individuals and the museum itself are reflected in the semiotic power of the objects, and operate differently in an exhibition context as in a collection. By providing a three-part typology of sporting medals, this paper has identified certain characteristics of competition, honour and commemorative medals, and has discussed how the roles of sporting medals in these categories differ when deployed according to the museum's exhibitions and collections policies. The NSM collects and displays sporting medals for their ability to communicate some of the essential qualities of sport while acknowledging their bias towards narratives of victory, mastery and prestige. The museum therefore approaches the collection and display of sporting medals in balance with other forms of material culture, incorporating them into exhibitions according to

context and applying similar storage and cataloguing principles as other objects in the heritage collections. Sporting medals have an important role in the NSM as powerful signs, intrinsic to an understanding of the place of sport in Australian culture.

Notes

1. The International Committee of Money and Banking Museums (ICOMON) is the peak organisation concerned with numismatic museology. The proceedings of past meetings of ICOMON are useful in understanding the approach of numismatic museums, although these papers are mostly concerned with coins rather than medals. See particularly Reiner, C. (ed.,) (2001), *Money and Identity: Lectures about History, Design, and Museology of Money (ICOMON Annual meeting, 11th, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2004)*, Hanover, ICOMON; Gitler, H. 'Numismatics and Museology – A New Outlook' (1996), *Proceedings of the ICOMON Meetings held in Stavanger, Norway 1995 and Vienna, Austria 1996*, Madrid, Museo Casa de la Moneda: 124-127 on display techniques; and Doty, R. (2006), 'Numismatics for a New Millennium: ICOMON's Possibilities', *JNAA* 17: 4-15 on the role of ICOMON in building a numismatic groundswell in the museum industry.
2. Other major public collections in Australia have dedicated numismatic display galleries (such as the 'Medals and Money' Gallery at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery) or dedicated numismatic collection storage areas (such as Museum Victoria).
3. The definition of the NSM as a public museum with a multi-sport focus is an important distinction. The differentiation between public and private sports museums is crucial to understanding the commercial and educational imperatives. The author of this paper is the curator at the National Sports Museum, and brings that experience to this research. For an analysis of the different categories of sporting museums (including the NSM), and their varying levels of commercialism and partiality, see Phillips, M. (2011), *Representing the sporting past in museums and Halls of Fame*, New York, Routledge. Other papers dealing with this issue are Snyder, E. (1991), 'Sociology of Nostalgia: Sport Halls of Fame and Museums in America' *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8: 228-238, and Kidd, B. (1996), 'The Making of A Hockey Artifact: A Review of the Hockey Hall of Fame' *Journal of Sport History* 23/3: 328-334; and Vamplew, W. (1998), 'Facts and Artefacts: Sports Historians and Sports Museums' *Journal of Sport History* 25/2: 268-282.
4. The Melbourne Cricket Club Museum can also be accessed from the NSM, but is excluded from this paper as it is a privately-owned museum governed by a different set of collection and exhibition policies (see note 3).
5. The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (2006) provides a useful definition of 'medal' as 'a metal disc with an inscription or design, awarded to acknowledge distinctive achievement or made to commemorate an event.'
6. For a discussion of the psychology of collecting souvenirs, see Pearce, E. (1992), *Museums, Objects and Collections: a cultural study*, Leicester; and for an Australian context, see Griffiths, T. (1996), *Hunters and Collectors: the antiquarian imagination in Australia*, Cambridge, Melbourne, Cambridge UP.
7. For a discussion of the sociology of sport in Australia and how sporting prowess is valued, see Cashman, R. (2010), *Paradise of Sport: a history of Australian sport*, Sydney: Walla Walla; Cashman, R. and Hess, R. (2011), *Sport, History and Australian Culture*, Sydney, Walla Walla;

and Vamplew, W. and Stoddart, B. (eds) (1994), *Sport in Australia: a social history*, Cambridge, Melbourne, Cambridge UP. A typology focusing on other attributes (such as designer, geographic distribution or bullion value) would provide insights that emphasise alternative value systems.

8. Moore, K. (1997), *Museums and Popular Culture*, London, Washington, Cassell: 131; Pearce, M. (1992), *Museums, Objects and Collections: a cultural study*, Leicester, University of Leicester: 24.
9. The idea of museums – and curators – having an active role in the construction of an object's meaning has been a core tenet of museology through the past two decades. See the seminal text, Vergo, P. (ed.) (1989), *The New Museology*, London, Reaktion.
10. Pearce, S. (1997), *Collecting in Contemporary Practice*, London, Sage. For a more complete discussion of the theory of semiotics, see Leeds-Hurwitz, W. (1993), *Semiotics and Communication: signs, codes, cultures*, Hillsdale, NJ, Laurence Erlbaum.
11. A sporting medal could be a sign of victory, or could signify a particular person, moment or place. A competition medal might signify different things throughout its lifetime: before being awarded (craftsmanship, event logistics, security), during the award ceremony (national pride, victory, achievement) and after (the athlete him or herself, his or her career, the sport in which the medal was won); and then something else entirely if displayed in a museum, sold at an auction or found in a rubbish bin.
12. By their nature, commemorative medals are regularly produced as souvenirs and are therefore widely available for purchase through primary markets (mints, for example) or secondary markets such as auction houses and online auction websites.
13. A comprehensive analysis of the role of sporting trophies in a sports museum, specifically the William Webb Ellis trophy at the National Museum of Rugby in Twickenham, is found in Stedman, L. (2006) 'Engaging with and rediscovering the value of the object in sports museums: a study of the rugby world cup trophy', unpublished thesis, U of Leicester. For a comparable analysis of sporting stamps in a museum context, see Osmond, G. & Phillips, M. (2011) 'Enveloping the Past: Sport Stamps, Visuality and Museums', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 28/8-9: 1138-1155.
14. The NSM's London 2012 showcase will be unveiled around the time of the London Olympics.
15. The NSM has no medals representing the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, and is actively seeking items for display. There are also no medals on display representing the 1900 Olympics, though this Olympiad shares a showcase with 1896 and 1904, for which medals are displayed.
16. There is extensive literature on the links between Olympic Games and national identity, see particularly Tomlinson, A. and Young, C. (2006), *National identity and global sports events: culture, politics, and spectacle in the Olympics and the football World Cup*, Albany, NY, State U of NY.
17. This strongly demonstrates the importance of medals over other benchmarks of success, such as the number of top-ten finishes, number of finalists or even number of athletes who achieved personal bests, cf. Australian Sports Commission (2002), *Excellence: the Australian Institute of Sport*, Canberra, Australian Sports Commission; Mungazi, F. 'Sporting Chances: Part 2' (Radio documentary) BBC World Service (January 2012).
18. Many countries have programs that provide cash rewards to Olympic medallists. For example, at both the 2008 and 2012 Olympic Games, Russia gave 4 million roubles to its gold medallists, 2.5 million to its silver medallists and 1.7 million to its bronze medallists - 'Russia offers cash

incentives for Olympians', *Latest News*, 9 Wide World of Sports (8 February 2012), http://wwos.ninemsn.com.au/article.aspx?id=8415656 (12 February 2012).

19. Canada, having failed to win any gold medals at either of the two Olympics they had previously hosted in 1976 (Montreal) and 1988 (Calgary), set up a program called 'Own the Podium' in 2005 specifically designed to assist athletes to win gold medals at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics - 'Own the podium works: medalists', CBC News (23 February 2010), http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/story/2010/02/23/bc-moir-virtue-own-the-podium.html (6 February 2012). Australia's 'Olympic Athlete Program', in place from 1994-2010, tied government funding to specific medal targets in Olympic sports - Hughes, A. (1998) 'Australian Sport and the Olympics: Historical and Contemporary Issues', in Barney, R. et al (eds), *Global and Cultural Critique: Problematising the Olympic Games, Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium for Olympic Research*, London, Canada, University of Western Ontario: 75-86; and Cashman, R. & Hughes A. (1997) 'Sydney 2000: Cargo Cult of Australian Sport?' in Rowe, D. & Lawrence, G. (eds), *Tourism, Leisure, Sport: Critical Perspectives*, Sydney, Hodder Education: 216-226. For a discussion of China's Olympic program, see French, H., 'China Presses Injures Athletes in Quest for Gold', *New York Times* (20 June 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/20/world/asia/20olympics.html?pagewanted=all (30 January 2012).
20. It is interesting to note that in spite of their symbolic power, Olympic gold medals of recent years contain only 6 grams of gold (24 carat), and are mostly composed of sterling silver. Silver medals were awarded to winners in the first two modern Olympics in 1896 and 1900. Gold medals were awarded for first place from 1904, and were pure gold until 1912 when composite metals were introduced - 'The fine art of victory: the design of the Sydney 2000 Olympic victory medal', online resource Sydney, Powerhouse Museum, (no date), http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/sydney2000games/modules.php (2 November 2011).
21. Blair, P. (1997), *History of the Brownlow Medal: fairest and best*, Hawthorn, Vic, Sabey.
22. This sentiment expressed by Brownlow medallist Gary Ablett Jnr, in Cullen, M., 'Ablett sets his sights on flag', *AFL.com.au* (22 September 2009), http://www.afl.com.au/news/newsarticle/tabid/208/newsid/85132/default.aspx (30 Jan 2011); and Skilton, R. in McFarlane, G., 'Brownlow Medal history beckons for Chris Judd or Adam Goodes', *Sunday Herald Sun* (24 September 2011).
23. This showcase previously displayed the first Brownlow medal, which was awarded to Edward 'Carji' Greeves, until the item was recalled by the lender in 2011.
24. The equivalent award in Australian Cricket, the Alan Border medal, has taken a similar 'night of nights' approach to its awards' ceremony. This is represented in the museum not by an actual medal, but by a commemorative cricket bat, which demonstrates cricket's valuing of equipment (stumps used in key matches, inscribed bats) over medals in recognising individual achievement.
25. Pearce, S. (1992), sets out this definition in *Museums, Objects and Collections: a cultural study*, Leicester, U of Leicester: 43.
26. Some topics identified for further research include: the conceptual origins of the medal as a token for sporting victory; relationships between sporting medals and agricultural and horticultural show medals; the symbolism of medal ceremonies; an iconographic study of the imagery depicted on sporting medals; an analysis of the chicken-and-egg relationship between

sporting medals and the cultural importance placed on outright victory instead of personal achievement; the role of medals in the psychology of athletes and in the sports media complex; or how sporting medals influence the ideologies of clubs, teams and even nations.

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