

"THE MORE THINGS CHANGE . . ."

The 1930s in Australia were years of despondency and despair. A sense of desolation pervaded the community in the face of bushfires, like those that raged in Victoria on Black Friday, and in the anguish of dealing with the physical ravages of the poliomyelitis epidemic. Above all, few families remained untouched by the misery of unemployment.

But there was another problem.

As the war clouds gathered in Europe, the fitness of young Australians became a concern. While Australians in their thousands were flocking to watch the wizardry of the Don, Harvey Sutton, Professor of Preventive Medicine at Sydney University, in his address *Physical education and national fitness*, noted: "The majority of [young Australians] form a lost legion which goes to the great army of onlookers and barrackers, and whose only physical efforts are accordingly confined to deep breathing at intervals . . . As a nation we need sportsmen, not barrackers: players, not spectators." He estimated that most of the then two and a half million young Australians were unfit.

The solution? Physical activity through physical education.

Now, fast forward to the new millennium. We still have horrific bushfires (witness Canberra in 2003), we still flock in our thousands to barrack for our sporting icons, and we remain physically inactive. With abundant high energy food, obesity has now become *the* national problem.

And the solution? The federal government is now attempting to re-educate young Australians, encouraging them to exercise more and improve their eating habits. The Prime Minister, in launching this program, duly noted the inherent paradox of a ". . . sports-loving nation becoming increasingly less mobile and increasingly more obese."

Physical activity, fitness and now fatness.

"The more things change, the more they stay the same . . ."*



Martin B Van Der Weyden

*Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose
Alphonse Karr 1849.

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The Doctor Ross Ingram Memorial Essay Prize

Are you an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander with something to say about Indigenous health?

Tell us your story

The Doctor Ross Ingram Memorial Essay competition is open to any Indigenous person who is working, researching or training in a health-related field. Essays should be no more than 2000 words long, and must be submitted by Monday, 10 January 2005.

For more details on the competition and the prize, see MJA 2004; 180 (10): 492
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