

1. Ponting leads cricketer-dominated popularity poll as Thorpe slips

2. AFL grand final increases lead as ‘most important’ event

(Statement by Martin Hirons, Director, Sweeney Sports)

World Cup-winning and Test cricket captain Ricky Ponting has become Australia’s sports star with the greatest sponsorship appeal.

Ponting, frequently ranked as the world’s best batsman, has ended the six-year reign of recently-retired swimming super-star Ian Thorpe as the sporting identity Australians consider the most suitable to be paid to endorse brands and organisations.

Ponting posted a ‘SweeneyScore’* of 76, one point more than Thorpe who first topped the poll in the summer of 1998-99 and who has led the rankings since 2000-01.

The results are shown in the 21st summer edition of the Sweeney Sports Report, recognised as Australia’s most comprehensive and authoritative sports survey (*survey details at end*).

Thorpe’s score was his lowest, a result of his absence from competition last year as he battled injury, illness and decreasing motivation. (Note: The survey was being conducted when Thorpe last November announced his retirement but polling ended before recent publicity about an alleged hormone irregularity).

Ponting’s ascendancy to top spot follows five-point gains during each of the past two summers. His current score is double that achieved in the summer of 2000-01 before he became in 2002 Australia’s One-day International captain.

Cricketers again dominate the rankings with Ponting, Glen McGrath, Adam Gilchrist, Brett Lee and retired Test captain Steve Waugh being in the top eight.

Surprisingly, the biggest increase was scored by Socceroo and Liverpool star Harry Kewell. Despite not playing for most of the 2006-07 English season because of injury, his feats with the Socceroots in last year’s World Cup saw his ranking climb 25 points to place him fourth.

Golfer Karrie Webb’s return to form last season saw her post the second-biggest gain of the year –13 points - to 49 points and 26th place.

*‘SweeneyScore’ is a sponsorship appropriateness ratio: $\frac{R}{PA} \times 100$, where

R = % of people who rate the sportsperson at least 8 out of 10 as someone worthy of being sponsored

PA = % of people who have heard of the sportsperson

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Table 1: SweeneyScore
(Sponsorship appropriateness ratio)

Source: Sweeney Sports Report 2006-07

Leaders – more than 45 points				Main increases/decreases		
		Points	Change 05-06 to 06-07		Change 05-06 to 06-07	Total points
1	Ricky Ponting	76	+5	Increases		
2	Ian Thorpe	75	-6	Harry Kewell	25	73
3	Grant Hackett	74	+6	Karrie Webb	13	49
4	Harry Kewell	73	+25	Layne Beachley	11	64
5	Glen McGrath	71	+8	Lisbeth Lenton	11	47
6	Adam Gilchrist	70	+5	Craig Lowndes	10	58
7	Brett Lee	69	+6	Steve Larkham	10	36
8	Steve Waugh	65	+4	Lauren Jackson	9	56
9	Layne Beachley	64	+11	Troy Bayliss	9	30
10	Greg Norman	62	+1	Glen McGrath	8	71
11	Pat Rafter	61	+3	Shane Warne	8	55
12	Cathy Freeman	60	+4	Shane Crawford	8	45
13	Craig Lowndes	58	+10	Andrew Bogut	8	42
14	Andrew Gaze	56	0			
	Lauren Jackson	56	+9	<i>Decreases</i>		
16	Shane Warne	55	+8	Braith Anasta	13	14
17	Kostya Tszyu	54	-1	Lleyton Hewitt	7	52
18	Leisel Jones	53	+7	Mark Philippoussis	7	24
	Mark Skaife	53	0	Ian Thorpe	6	75
	James Hird	53	+1	Lote Tequiri	6	36
	Tim Cahill	53	na	Jana Pittman	6	20
22	Lleyton Hewitt	52	-7			
	George Gregan	52	-1			
24	Andrew Johns	51	+1			
25	Chris Judd	50	na			
26	Karrie Webb	49	+13			
27	Mark Viduka	48	+6			
	Andrew Symonds	48	na			
29	Lisbeth Lenton	47	+11			
30	Stuart Appleby	46	+2			
	Liz Ellis	46	na			

AFL grand final increases ‘most important’ lead

The AFL grand final has increased its lead as the nation’s most important sporting event.

Now rated as the top event by more than a quarter of respondents (27%) it leads the Melbourne Cup by 10 points, three more than in the summer of 2005-06.

The Cup, which led the poll in 2002-03 when 22% of people voted it top event, slipped to 17% this past summer.

The Australian Open tennis retained third place but its rating slipped four percentage points to 8%, only two points ahead of Test cricket which, boosted by the summer series against England increased its rating from 5% to 6%. The events rated next most important are:

- 5% - State of Origin Rugby League
- 4% - NRL Rugby League grand final, Bathurst 1000km motor race
- 3% - Australian Formula 1 grand prix.

Table 2**Most important event – trends**

% of population

Source: Sweeney Sports Report 2006-07

	91-92	92-93	93-94	94-95	95-96	96-97	97-98	98-99	99-00	00-01	01-02	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07
AFL Grand Final	20	22	25	21	25	30	26	26	22	23	22	20	20	24	25	27
Melbourne Cup	12	13	12	12	11	12	16	12	17	18	18	22	21	18	18	17

About the survey

The Report is the 21st summer edition of the nationally conducted Sweeney Sports Report, produced by Sweeney Sports, the sports and sponsorship arm of market research company Sweeney Research.

The Report is recognised as Australia's definitive sports industry study.

The survey involves 50 major sports played or covered by the media.

Since 2003, interviewing for the Report has been conducted continuously throughout the year with about 170 interviews conducted each month.

For this summer report, data were collected between October 2006 and March 2007.

One thousand interviews were conducted, using computer-assisted telephone interviewing, in the six state capital cities and Canberra.

All respondents were aged 16 to 65 years with one third being aged 16 to 29 years, one third 30 to 44 years and one third 45 to 65 years. About half were men and half were women.

During analysis, the results were weighted by age and sex within each city to make the overall findings fully representative of the major cities' populations.

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