

- 1. Cricket captures ‘most interest’ cap**
- 2. Swimming slips to second place**
- 3. Tennis rebounds**
- 4. AFL continues to fend soccer**

**(Statement by Martin Hirons, Director, Sweeney Sports)**

Cricket has for the first time become the outright leader in the Sweeney Sports Report’s table of sports in which Australians are most interested.

It has eclipsed swimming which has been the most popular or equal most popular sport since the summer of 1991-92.

The exploits of the Australian Test team during the past year has boosted the sports popularity by five percentage points: almost six of every ten adult Australians (59%) are now interested in it, a figure that is expected to increase because surveying for the Report ended in March, before the start of the cricket World Cup in which Australia’s triumphed on April 28.

The Report – this year’s is the 21<sup>st</sup> summer edition – is recognised as Australia’s most authoritative sports and sponsorship survey. It calculates ‘interest’ by combining data about participation, attendance, television viewing, radio listening, print media readership and internet use (*survey details at end*).

It shows that cricket gained ground mainly because of an increase in people who watch it on television. Participation increased marginally to almost one of every eight people (13%), the equal highest ever recorded for the sport.

### **Swimming**

Swimming’s slump could partly be the result of super star Ian Thorpe’s absence for most of the year from competitive swimming and his retirement last November.

Overall interest in swimming dropped four percentage points to 57% with the major factor being an eight percentage point drop in the proportion of people participating.

Swimming has always been the leading participatory sport and it still is - but the current proportion of about one third of people (34%) who take a dip is the lowest recorded since the Report was launched.

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## **Tennis**

Tennis staged a comeback during the year, interest increasing four percentage points to 56%, making it equal third most popular sport with Australian Rules football. It was mainly boosted by a four percentage point increase in television viewing – it is the second most watched sport on TV with almost half the population (48%) being viewers during the year.

## **Australian Rules**

Australian Rules, its supremacy among the football codes having been under threat for the past few years from soccer, is proving a determined leader with interest in it increasing to a record 56% of the adult population.

The ‘indigenous game’ increased its lead marginally against the ‘world game’ helped by television viewing reaching a new peak (53%).

## **Soccer**

Soccer’s popularity increased marginally with, for the first time, more than half of Australians (51%) now being interested in the sport.

The modesty of the increase was surprising given the success of the second year of the A-league and the continued flow-on from the World Cup success.

However, levels of participation (11%), attendance (15%) and television viewing (46%) are at record or equal record levels.

## **Interest trends**

Of the 50 sports surveyed, 18 suffered significant (three percentage points or more) decreases in interest during the year.

Apart from swimming, however, the losses occurred among non mainstream sports, principally: ten pin bowling (an eight percentage point loss); bushwalking/hiking and gymnastics (seven percentage points each); board diving, snooker/billiards/pool, softball and touch football (five percentage points each); and athletics, canoeing/kayaking and equestrian (four percentage points each).

## **Participation trends**

Only one sport – triathlon – increased its participation level by a significant percentage (three points) during the year.

Most of the sports to lose ground in overall interest, like swimming, suffered significant losses in participation, mainly: ten pin bowling (-8 points); bushwalking/hiking (-6); and sailing/yachting, snooker/billiards/pool and touch football (-4); and softball (-3).

## **Television trends**

Cricket, soccer and tennis all increased their television viewership significantly but, again, non-mainstream sports tended to lose viewers, principally: gymnastics (8 points), athletics and board diving (5 each); and hockey and snow boarding (4 each).

**Table 1: Interest 2006-07** (% of capital city adult population)  
Source: Sweeney Sports Report 2006-07

	Inter- est	+/- % since summer 05-06	Partici- pation	Atten- dance	Tele- vision	Radio	Print media	Internet
Cricket – outdoor	59	+5	13	22	54	16	18	9
Swimming	57	-4	34	7	39	2	7	2
Australian Rules football	56	+2	6	27	53	14	18	9
Tennis	56	+4	22	10	48	4	11	4
Soccer	51	+1	11	15	46	5	10	6
Rugby league	42	0	2	15	39	7	9	4
Rugby union	40	0	3	11	37	4	8	4
Motor car racing	35	-1	2	11	33	3	6	3
Cycling	34	-1	23	4	18	1	3	1
Gym workout	33	-3	33	0	1	0	0	0
Running sports	32	-1	23	3	13	0	2	1
Golf	31	+1	19	3	23	2	6	3
Bushwalking/hiking	29	-7	29	0	1	0	1	0
Fishing	29	-2	26	1	12	1	2	1
Athletics	28	-4	5	8	21	3	7	2
Surfing	27	+1	14	6	18	1	3	1
Snooker/pool/billiards	26	-5	22	2	11	0	1	0
Basketball	26	0	8	9	20	1	5	4
Gymnastics	26	-7	1	4	22	0	2	0
Snow skiing – downhill	24	-2	13	2	16	0	1	1
Motor cycle racing	24	+1	2	5	22	1	4	1
Horse racing	23	-2	1	10	18	4	5	2
Netball	23	-2	8	7	17	1	3	1
Surf lifesaving/iron man	22	-1	2	5	19	0	2	1
Boxing	22	0	4	4	18	1	4	1

**Table 2: Interest trends for selected sports 1988-89 to 2006-07**  
(- % of capital city adult population)

Source: Sweeney Sports Reports

Red = highest. Blue = lowest.

	88- 89	89- 90	90- 91	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
Australian Rules	45	45	46	47	45	46	45	51	55	50	48	51	50	52	52	54	55	54	56
Soccer	28	32	33	32	32	37	38	37	37	41	37	38	39	44	47	47	45	50	51
Rugby League	34	38	40	44	44	44	47	43	41	38	35	38	36	43	39	46	41	42	42
Rugby Union	15	23	24	31	33	30	32	31	31	30	28	33	31	38	37	43	44	40	40
Cricket	57	58	63	58	58	54	54	56	57	54	52	55	55	57	57	56	55	54	59
Swimming	50	56	56	60	59	55	64	56	61	59	56	55	58	64	59	62	59	61	57
Tennis	59	59	64	58	56	53	51	56	54	50	48	49	51	58	55	60	55	52	56
Golf	43	42	49	46	41	40	41	41	42	37	35	37	36	36	36	36	36	30	31
Basketball	36	44	43	43	42	40	41	39	43	35	33	36	35	33	33	33	33	26	26

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## 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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