

MEDIA RELEASE

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Soccer continues to scale leadership ladder

Statement by: Sweeney Sports Director, Martin Hiron

Soccer has become one of the three most popular sports in Australia, the winter 2006 Sweeney Sports report shows.

Soccer has in winter 2006 drawn almost level with Australian Rules and is equal with swimming as the sport in which most people are interested – eclipsing cricket and tennis and moving well ahead of the two rugby codes.

Boosted by this year's World Cup at which the Socceroos reached the knock-out stage of the finals in Germany, soccer has recorded its highest ever interest level.

Almost six of every ten adults (56 per cent) say they are interested in the sport, compared with 57 per cent who say they are interested in Australian Rules.

The result is in the eighth winter edition of the Report which has also been conducted in summer for the past 20 years.

The Report, recognised as Australia's most authoritative sports and sponsorship survey, calculates 'interest' by combining data about the proportions of adult Australians in capital cities who participate in, attend, watch television programs, listen to radio broadcasts, read print media reports and use the internet for information about each sport.

Soccer's previous highest level of interest in a winter survey was 50 per cent after the 2002 World Cup (when the Socceroos did not reach the finals).

It gradually declined to 41 per cent interest in winter 2005 before its steep increase (attributed at the time to the hiatus in the national league for more than 18 months and a lack of high profile international matches).

The results for soccer, as for most major sports, are historically driven by changes in television viewing but slippages similar to those which occurred between 2002 and 2005 are not expected during the next few years because of:

- The higher profile that the sport and its key players have following the World Cup
- Increased enthusiasm for the national A League, as shown by strong early season match attendances
- The added bonus of the Socceroos playing higher profile games
- A stronger organisational structure, providing more dynamic leadership.

In contrast to other football codes which have strongholds in specific cities, Soccer's interest levels are more consistent across the capitals.

Table 1: INTEREST TRENDS FOR MAJOR SPORTS - % OF PEOPLE

Source: Sweeney Sports Report Winter 2006

	Winter '99	Winter '00	Winter '01	Winter '02	Winter '03	Winter '04	Winter '05	Winter '06
Australian Rules	54	54	49	54	54	53	59	57
Soccer	35	42	35	50	49	46	41	56
Swimming	55	66	52	62	62	56	56	56
Tennis	67	67	56	55	57	51	56	52
Cricket	55	53	48	50	51	50	53	52
Rugby Union	27	30	29	39	38	42	40	41
Rugby League	39	39	35	43	42	42	42	40
Motor car racing	36	35	32	39	36	33	37	32

Table 2: TELEVISION VIEWING TRENDS FOR MAJOR SPORTS - % OF PEOPLE

Source: Sweeney Sports Report Winter 2006

	Winter '99	Winter '00	Winter '01	Winter '02	Winter '03	Winter '04	Winter '05	Winter '06
Australian Rules	49	50	44	49	48	49	55	55
Soccer	30	38	30	44	39	38	35	49
Cricket	52	50	45	44	44	43	47	47
Tennis	62	60	53	47	45	41	47	44
Rugby Union	25	28	27	36	34	39	37	39
Rugby League	36	36	32	40	38	39	40	38
Swimming	43	57	43	44	41	36	38	35
Motor car racing	34	33	30	37	32	30	35	30

Table 3: INTEREST IN FOOTBALL CODES BY CITY - % OF PEOPLE

Source: Sweeney Sports Report Winter 2006

	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Adelaide	Perth	Canberra	Hobart
Australian Rules	40	71	49	80	72	39	71
Soccer	61	53	48	55	54	60	51
Rugby Union	51	28	52	26	39	58	26
Rugby League	53	23	59	24	34	48	28

AFL Grand Final still top attraction

The AFL grand final is considered the nation's most important sporting event, comfortably ahead of the Melbourne Cup and the Australian Open Tennis Championships.

About a quarter (24 per cent) of capital city adults believe the 'last Saturday in September' game is the most important, compared with 17 per cent who rank the Melbourne Cup in first place.

The Australian Open Tennis Championship is considered most important by about one of every eight people (13 per cent), about double the proportion who believe that State of Origin Rugby League is most important (seven per cent).

MOST IMPORTANT EVENT - % OF PEOPLE

Source: Sweeney Sports Report Winter 2006

Event	%	Change for year
AFL grand final	24	-1
Melbourne Cup	17	+3
Australian Open tennis	13	+2
State of Origin Rugby League	7	-3
NRL grand final	5	0
Cricket – test series in Australia	4	+1
Bathurst 1000km motor race	4	+1
Bledisloe Cup – Rugby Union	3	-2
Australian grand prix (Formula 1)	3	0
Sydney to Hobart yacht race	2	0
<i>Note: all other events 1% or less</i>		

About the Survey

The Report is the eighth winter edition of The Sweeney Sports Report which has been conducted for 20 years 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 winter survey covered 21 of the major sports played or covered by the media from April to September. Interviewing was completed just before the AFL and NRL grand finals.

Computer assisted telephone interviews were conducted with 1000 Australians in the six State capital cities and Canberra.

Half the respondents were male and half were female with one third in each of the 16-29 years, 30-44 years and 45-65 years groups.

During analysis, the results were weighted by age and sex within each city so that the overall findings are fully representative of the populations.

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