



📷 CUP PAUSE: Little else matters.

Opinion

Talking Point: Aussie traits are frontrunners in Cup sweep

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What are some of the essential characteristics of Melbourne Cup Day and how many of them are uniquely Australian?

Melbourne Cup Day for many is a day of optimism and hope. Punters and sweep participants may spend their morning picturing their horse crossing the line first.

But with work sweeps there is a definite Australian attitude. That if “I” don’t win the sweep, let’s hope someone does who could do with the money. Certainly not the boss. Besides, any boss who does win the sweep should put his ill-gotten gains to a morning tea the next day for all the staff. Any boss who doesn’t, might be seen, in the words of Bob Hawke on another famous sporting day, “to be a bum”.

Melbourne Cup Day can be a very inclusive day. It can be a day when everyone feels part of the show. As many go off to Melbourne Cup breakfasts, lunches, afternoon teas or simply a break from work to watch the Cup, camaraderie is built simply due to the focus on the race. Sweeps at work or in social settings abound where, for a small amount of money, anyone can feel part of the action.

For some also it is a chance to dress up. It's not just those in some elite marquee at Flemington who do so, but many at suburban or country functions throughout Australia no matter their socio-economic circumstance. They know their photo won't appear in the social pages of their local newspaper, but it doesn't matter. Some have dressed to impress while others have dressed to express. Besides as Oscar Wilde said, "Fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear."

After the Cup, there is that very Australian characteristic that comes to the fore. The need for people to tell their story. "I nearly backed the winner but ..." "The jockey rode my horse badly." "I should have put \$20 on instead of \$5." And so it goes on. Tote staff and bartenders need the patience of Job to listen to all the hard-luck stories.

The Cup also highlights another Australian trait. Most sweeps in Australia give a prize for last place. What a great Australian characteristic. Australians pride themselves on supporting the underdog so to give everyone that other great Australian trait of "a fair go", the person whose horse runs last gets a payout.

Another attribute was highlighted after the 2015 Melbourne Cup and that is Australians' propensity to say it as they see it. Winning Melbourne Cup jockey Michelle Payne, in her speech, told those who thought women weren't good enough to ride a Melbourne Cup winner to "get stuffed". A great Australian reaction.

The Melbourne Cup also highlights Australia getting its priorities sorted. Not only does it stop the nation for the three minutes and 20 seconds it takes to run, it monopolises newspaper headlines the next day. However, elsewhere in the world, earth shattering events may be taking place. Every four years in the US, on the first Tuesday in November which is our Cup Day, the world's most powerful person is being elected.

Differentiating it from the Cup date, the election date must be preceded by a November Monday. So last year the US election was on November 8, while the Cup was on November 1.

So we can only speculate about the year 2020 when the dates coincide. It matters not whether Donald Trump has got the blessing of US voters or their ire, because here in Australia he may have to compete for front page space with the result of an event that is uniquely Australian. The Melbourne Cup.

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