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Sam Newman is an anthropologist. Were I to say this to his face, one suspects Sam might adopt a quizzical expression and ask what it means. Of all the names given Sam Newman, *anthropologist* would seem to be on the least likely list.

Yet, when Joe Gutnick resigned from the Melbourne presidency, it was Sam who spoke for the rest of Melbourne.

"There must be something else going on," Sam said. It was instinctive and correct. Sam, there is something more going on in the fracas over the Melbourne presidency. It has to do with the way football in our city provides a socially acceptable, and generally positive, way for violence to be expressed and dealt with.

The rituals surrounding the following of football enable us to join in mob violence. Violence is infectious. We know this instinctively. Everyone knows, without the need for scientists to prove it to them, how easy it is to get caught up in the crowd. The crowd boos the umpire, and we all join in. Liberatore scraggs Knights and the Richmond crowd hurl abuse with one voice. Lloyd fumbles the ball in the goal square, and the whole opposing team crowd send down derision (not that Lloyd fumbles much these days).

This kind of group violence, mostly verbal and posturing, is socially acceptable.

Another thing we know instinctively is that the violence could get out of hand. A line must be drawn between Carlton hating Collingwood, and the two crowds marching in open warfare. How do we stop the violence getting out of hand?

The answer lies in scapegoating. Scapegoating is deeply rooted in human society. It is the most common method for converting mob violence into mob community and peace. The crowd seeks out a scapegoat to blame for their violence. The scapegoat is accused and then destroyed (in the worst cases, like in Indonesia lately and the Balkans, they are actually murdered).

How does this work in football?

The mildest and most common form of scapegoating is the kind our poor old umpires have been getting. When the common cry goes up against the umpire, the crowd purges its violence on the man in white. And peace returns for a moment. If you are not sure about this, notice how often people in the crowd laugh immediately after umpire abuse. It's the self-conscious giggle of people instinctively aware that an innocent man has just been murdered for the sins of the many.

Less regular, but similar in function, is the sacking of bottom-team coaches. The coach is routinely made the scapegoat for poor team performance. We don't even question it. But notice something really interesting about how Drum and Knights get the message. From the gossip mill. Why? Because the gossip mill carries the whole weight of the crowd with it. When a coach is fired by the board, he can always claim the board is to blame. He can try to scapegoat the board. But when someone is

assassinated by gossip, they are being murdered by the mob. It is a clear case of all against one. Scapegoating at its most refined and effective.

Sometimes, of course, it's the President that gets the chop (or chops himself). The same mechanism is at work. In the case of Joe Gutnick it is easier for the Melbourne mob to choose him as the scapegoat because he is an outsider. Caroline Wilson keenly records that the central issue might be whether in our multi-cultural society an orthodox Jew can be President of Melbourne Football Club. Time, and elections, will tell whether the Melbourne board has accurately read the member's desire for a scapegoat.

Are you still with me, Sam? To summarise so far: Football gives us a chance to join in crowd violence (in a nice way, of course). And, it gives us a chance to create a sense of community by scapegoating that violence onto someone else. But, as Sam is evidently aware, there is something else going on.

That "something else" is myth. You see, the scapegoating mechanism only works so long as we don't notice it. Myths help us to identify the victim and to confuse the facts so as to excuse the group violence. Only the rare and truly insightful anthropological observer, like Dermott Brereton, for example, will admit that it's all about punch-ups and thuggery. For the rest of us, we need better reasons for joining the football crowd. Myth provides those reasons.

The most obvious and important myth is that winning a premiership cup actually matters in the scheme of things. Likewise that position on the ladder is important to the State of the World. These ideas were not given to Moses on Sinaia. Nor are they found in the declarations of human rights by the United Nations. There is not a mention of football in our Australian constitution and not even in John Howard's once-proposed preamble.

A less pleasant aspect of myth are those that attempt to justify the choice of scapegoat. We can go along with the idea that 40 losses out of 53 games isn't good enough. So Damian Drum deserves it. Right?

But what has Joe Gutnick done? He's a Jew, not part of the top end of Collins Street, sits with the cheer squad, won't go to the footy on the Sabbath. No-one is game enough, or sufficiently self-aware, to say these things have anything to do with him being scapegoated. Although, Caroline Wilson does a good job of hinting. Instead, and more ludicrously, former good friends question the man's sanity.

Here I'm with Sam Newman. It doesn't make sense. Something more is going on. And even if the participants cannot always see through the myth-making, something inside them ekes out the truth. "Hey, that's football" says Damian Drum over the way he gets sacked.

Yeah, that's football. And that's why we need it. Because violence, and scapegoating, and myths are nice. Indeed, they are important for our sanity. For me, it's patently too long since Hawthorn won a Grand Final and that keeps me going to the footy, and lets me have my weekly fix of mob violence and scapegoating. Then I can go home in peace.