

SOME ADVICE ON WRITING SPORTS CLUB HISTORIES

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The transition from chronicle and celebration to social history, from great players or people, great buildings and great achievement to the complexities of social experience, is possible in the many institutional histories which regularly appear. The same basic principles apply to the histories of sports clubs, schools, churches, voluntary associations and other local institutions. Much of the raw material for an improved social analysis can be assembled by simple tabulations and thoughtful interviews. Since the bulk of social research in the community is done by amateur, voluntary writers professional researchers should encourage improved work. Beyond the local benefits this will also increase the available partly refined material for 'serious' students of society.

I want briefly to offer a checklist for developing the institutional study of a sports club under three headings, Place, People and Change. Slight modifications would enable its use regarding other local institutions.

Place

- * Where are the formal boundaries (if now a district club)?
- * Where are the actual catchment areas (especially in earlier times)? (Check players' addresses)
- * How did the players get to training and matches - by foot, bicycle, car, bus?
- * Was the club affected by economic developments - ups and downs in urban or rural industries?
- * Has there been a loss of players to other areas? To cities? To more professional sport?

People

- * Patrons, financial supporters, committee members: what are their occupations, business interests, ethnic-religious backgrounds?
- * Committee members, patrons, players: are there any families with a long-term involvement? As players or as committee members? If the latter, did they tend to run things almost as a right?
- * Players: what are the occupations, ages? Any patterns? Any marked changes?
- * Social, ethnic and religious influences: are there any links between, for example, a grade cricket club and a churches league, between a club and a particular school?
- * Pubs, social activities: are there any particular venues, types of activities, times, changes? Did older players go on to run hotels?
- * Role of women (or men if the subject is a women's club)?
- * Finance: what are the fund-raising methods, costs?
- * The club and other clubs: who are traditional rivals or friends?
- * What are the club's reputation and self-image?
- * Media coverage: what is the quantity? (Nil? Results only? More?) What is the quality - just descriptions or analyses and backgrounds?

Change (and continuity)

- * What have been the changes (or continuities) in any of the above?
- * In administration (committee organisation or membership, leadership): for example have there been reform groups, committee candidates from a different social background, an influential president?
- * In success on the field: has change been related to any of the other factors? Have there been conflicts and tensions involving factions on committees? Coaches or star players and committees? 'Old guard's election committees? Or regarding behaviour, manners on the field, dress? New grounds or competitions? Amateurism, payments?

Nearly all this information can be gleaned from club records or from oral folklore (talking to former members and players as well as present ones). The historian of the local club is usually a part-time worker and the records may be less well organised than the researcher would like. Encouraging a broader approach to club histories, and the integration of analysis of social data into the narrative, could be more difficult than we at first assume. It should be done, however, and this short check list offers one starting point.

If you are interested in writing any form of local or institutional history you should read and use G. M. Hibbins, J.C. Fahey and M. Askew, Local History: A Handbook for Enthusiasts, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985.