

Bailey, Trevor. *A History of Cricket*. Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1978. Pp. 192. Index, records, pictures. \$14.95.

This is a glossy coffee table book which is more in the league of Time-Life books than the Audubon Society but it is a well-informed publication, for Trevor Bailey has been one of the foremost thinkers on cricket in the post Second World War era and has had an interesting and at times controversial career as all-rounder, from schoolboy prodigy to England and Essex opening bowler, evolving into one of the most difficult batsmen to dislodge in test (international) cricket history, as any Australian might bear witness. Since retiring from playing first class cricket, Bailey has followed a familiar path into writing about the game and assisting in its administration.

In *A History of Cricket* Bailey attempts a comprehensive survey of the game—a well nigh impossible task in only 168 pages of text, of which he devotes a disproportionate two thirds to cricket since 1945. In the latter part of the book he touches on many unfinished stories such as the financial plight of first class cricket in England, and to a lesser extent Australia, the results of innovatory one day cricket of the limited over variety, and the so-called Kerry Packer revolution. This ‘revolution’ might in the light of continuing events prove to be no revolution at all, just a mere raiding party, for although Packer, the Australian, challenged the world cricket authorities with a rival and well funded organization, he has shown a keen wish to come to financially advantageous terms with the cricket establishment. Bailey in writing on these themes has a magisterial air, but his personal predilections occasionally creep in, when for example he comments that Alec Bedser the English test selector is not very imaginative.

One of the virtues of the book is the excellent choice and reproduction of the photographs. Another is the clear presentation of statistics. One is reminded of the old adage that every picture tells a story in the glimpse of the tired

satisfaction of Jim Laker as he leaves the field after his world record harvest of 19 wickets against the Australians at Old Trafford in 1956.

But despite these virtues one is never sure as to which kind of reader this book is meant to address. The story of the growth of cricket has an all too familiar ring to the experienced cricket reader who has a library of Wisden Cricketers' Almanacks to hand, and yet it does not really tell enough to the neophyte who might seek basic information. The work has three fundamental errors of perspective. It pays too much attention to what will probably turn out to be the ephemeral detail of the past two decades. It concentrates exclusively in modern times since 1880 on Test and county cricket to the exclusion of other forms of the game such as league, club and school. Lastly, it virtually ignores the playing of cricket in countries such as the USA and Argentina which have not attained the rank of leading cricket powers. Moreover, Bailey only mentions en passant, the missionary role of cricket enthusiasts through the centuries, but it would have been worthwhile for him to cast a glance at the current state of the game to see in what area the fortunes of cricket are waxing or waning. In all, the failings of *A History of Cricket* are a reminder that the best cricket histories in the last twenty years have been monographs such as John Marder writing on the USA versus Canada Series, John Kay writing on English league cricket or Jim Laker on one day cricket. These works assemble indispensable details on particular aspects of the game. Bailey merely follows a well worn general track, albeit in a shrewd and lucid way.

The broad sweep of the book raises many interesting implied questions, though Bailey does not attempt to answer them. Why for example has first class cricket been so badly organized in its finance, compared say to American baseball or even British rugby? All cannot be blamed on the vagaries of the British weather! This financial failure is in contrast to the very progressive attitudes in other cricketing aspects, such as racial (with the conspicuous exception of South Africa) or in the termination of sham amateurism, making all players of the same status whether paid or not. And why has cricket flourished so much in Australia and yet withered on the vine in the USA where until the 1860's, at any rate, it had a good chance of becoming the favorite American summer game? Bailey does mention that the first cricket tour by an English team of professionals was in the USA and Canada in 1859 and was very successful, but then he says nothing more on the subject. Perhaps a disservice was done to cricket in the USA by its often mistaken identification in that country with gentility and fair play. It became too country club a game in the USA when it needed to develop a strong base in the industrial areas. Cricket, as it developed into a mass sport in northern England, was in fact a very hard and combative game in which the earning of money was a great incentive to outstanding performance. One wonders, finally, whether there is any way of making cricket of top class, financially self sustaining and of reducing the amount of test cricket, the coinage of which has become so debased that the plethora of recent test series tend to blur in the memory.

Cricket's reflection of social change is an interesting theme. The rise in popularity of cricket in the English industrial north and midlands no doubt reflected rising wealth and leisure time from 1850 onwards. The popularity of traditional cricket in the period 1945-50 reflected how little English leisure habits had been changed by the Second World War. Then the intrusion of the affluent society of the 1950s and 1960s changed all that, and the great cricket grounds of England were not to be filled again until the Gillete and other one day competitions in the latter part of the 60s and the 1970s. Unfortunately, Bailey gives us only tantalizingly brief references to these themes. Cricket is one of the most societal and sociable of games and Sir Neville Cardus, its greatest lyrical and imaginative chronicler, was quick to see the link between northern style English cricket and northern industrial society. The rarity of this kind of perception gives this book a pedestrian flavor.

Cricket has produced the finest body of writing of any sport in the world and probably the greatest in quantity, too, for example, *Wisden* noted well over 70 new works on the game published in 1977 alone. In comparison with what has gone before it *A History of Cricket* seems relatively small beer, containing too little history and having a title which is too grand for its contents.

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