

Bose, Mihir. *Keith Miller: A Cricketing Biography*. Winchester, Massachusetts: Allen & Unwin, Inc., 1980. Pp. 175. Index, bibliography, statistical appendix, pictures. \$12.50.

Keith Miller burst into the forefront of cricket in 1945, playing as a member of the Australian forces team in England and performing spectacularly as a fast bowler and hard hitting batsman. Subsequently, he was a star in a team of stars, the Australian touring team in England of 1948—the only Australian team to be undefeated in England. He was a cavalier of cricketers, high spirited, handsome, entertaining and good natured. Off the field, he was an inveterate gambler on horses and no mean socialite. There was always something in him of a citizen of the world and he married an American girl from Boston. To think of him growing elderly in the 1980's is to make one feel one's own youth is passing away or to quote from Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*:

“Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers come to dust.”

Mihir Bose writes of Miller from the point of view of a younger generation. Bose was too young to have seen Miller at his most devastating in 1945 and 1948. Inevitably, then, the book lacks something: the author cannot recapture or fully communicate the sense of joy of the Victory Test Series of 1945. All this and heaven too! Cricket again *and* the end of World War! Nor can his writing capture the aura of brilliance and ruthlessness of the 1948 Australian Touring Team when Lindwall and Miller performed as one of the greatest fast bowling combinations of all time, on a par with Gregory and McDonald, Larwood, and Voce or Statham and Tyson. Ah, those sinister green caps!

Yet to compensate for this lack of personal memory, Bose offers us perspective. He reminds us that Miller's career continued with distinction until 1956, though by this time the Australians had lost their sense of purposeful menace, and have never quite recaptured it. Bose also brings out well the perennial tension within the fine all-rounder that Miller was. An all-rounder may want to be more of a batsman when his captain may want him to be more of a bowler. Miller's value as a fast bowler may have led to some neglect of his batting. But in whatever capacity he served in the field, he was always noticed—there was more than a touch of glamor there. He also had his fair share of disagreement with another Australian star, his captain and later test selector, Don Bradman—two very contrasting temperaments at interplay.

However, Miller's cricketing differences with authority now seem, in retrospect, fairly small beer compared with more recent cricketing controversies.

As a star, Miller was in an in between world as far as the economics of international cricket were concerned. At the turn of this century amateurs such as W.G. Grace and C.B. Fry were not averse to making income out of writing about the game or receiving testimonial money, but between the Wars and immediately after the Second World War there was the cult of the pure amateur player. This was an era that denied the captaincy of Yorkshire (though not of England) to Len Hutton because he was a professional and, a few years before, Hammond had to turn amateur to become Captain of England. Australian cricketers on tour in England were dignified in the records as amateurs though they were remunerated for expenses. In that era both amateurs and professionals put more of value into cricket than they received in financial remuneration. Bose makes the telling point that Australian players were each paid only 40 pounds a Test Match in Australia at a time when one day's gate receipts out of a six day game might amount to 40,000 pounds.

Players of Miller's generation were stars in the public mind but not paid as stars. Since then, with commercial sponsorship and the intervention of Kerry Packer, the Australian cricket impresario, the leading cricketers, if not the rest, have made a conspicuous income, though cricket generally remains an underpaid profession. Cricket, at least, is spared the curse of sham amateurism now that all cricketers are regarded as players in the top class game, there now being no distinction between amateurs and professionals. Miller supplemented his income by writing for the British *Daily Express*, and Bose describes the relatively few pains and pleasurable rewards of this pursuit, which enabled Miller to prolong his international travelling days into the jet age. Though he thus benefitted from several sources of income, one is left to wonder how individuals so famous in the English speaking world (outside the USA that is) should have reaped so little financially from the game. But the economic mismanagement of cricket is a great unwritten story.

Mihir Bose's style is superior to that of the run of the mill cricket biography writer and his writing reminds us (and readers of Ved Mehta in *The New Yorker* need no reminder) that some of the best English prose of our time emanates from those whose family origins are in the Indian sub-continent. Bose also reminds us that cricket, above all games, has stimulated the largest quantity of fine writing, from the era of Nyren to that of Cardus and Bernard Darwin. The subtleties, diversities and sheer consumption of time of cricket make out of any cricket match an experience worth recording in writing.

There are a few flaws in Bose's *Keith Miller*, for example the Australian city of Fremantle occasionally gathers a gratuitous extra 'e' in the text. Anybody

familiar with the city or the British naval family of Fremantle would wince at the solecism. But the substance of the book is as it should be. This study may be short on passion, but it is strong on detail and measured judgment and worthy of notice by the discerning reader.

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