

Bailey, Trevor. *A History of Cricket*. Winchester, MA: Allen & Unwin, 1979. 192 pp. Photos, index, records. \$14.95 (cloth).

The essential difference between Trevor Bailey and other cricket writers is that he himself played the game excellently at all levels while they did not. He has established an enviable reputation as a player, cricket administrator, and journalist. His most recent book is therefore likely to be a best-seller. But the serious student of the social sciences, who is looking for profound sociological insights, is not going to discover many of them here. He will not even find footnotes or historiographical suggestions. He will find a brief laudatory foreword by Sir Donald Bradman, the great Australian cricketer; fifteen lively chapters, mainly on English cricket; a brief statistical appendix, compiled by Bill Frindall, the well-known cricket statistician; and an unusual array of pictures and photographs. These illustrations are perhaps the strongest feature of the work as they vividly demonstrate how equipment, costumes, and cricket styles have evolved since the eighteenth century. Unfortunately, they are accompanied by lengthy captions which repeat, almost verbatim, several passages from the text.

Bailey dismisses the early history of cricket in two short chapters, adding nothing to what has long been commonly known. He acknowledges that the legalising of under-arm and later over-arm bowling by the M.C.C. did most to modernize the game during the nineteenth century, but he tells us too little about those Georgian and Victorian pioneers.

Like most cricket historians who are critical of their own contemporaries, Bailey goes back to the past in search of cricket's "Golden Era." He locates it in the Edwardian age, which he describes in rather idyllic terms in the third chapter. This was actually the period when there was considerable agitation by feminists, labour leaders, and Irish nationalists; when emotional debates over successive budgets led to the emasculation of the House of Lords; when the British press was becoming almost hysterical over the construction of the German navy; when soccer and horse-racing had superseded cricket as the leading spectator sports in Britain; when cricket professionals were extremely unhappy with their treatment at the hands of arrogant and autocratic amateurs; and when almost every cricket club in the land was in dire financial straits. Yet, with incredible naivete, Bailey writes (p. 25) that "The existing social structure was accepted by the vast majority of the population and the cricketers were able to concentrate on the game they loved without having to worry about anything else. . . . The game was very popular and did not have to compete with other sports, providing a reasonable standard of living for the professionals and enjoyment for the many amateurs who then had the money to play for fun."

Bailey does a good deal of reminiscing in the middle chapters which seem almost autobiographical. Thus he reflects a totally Anglo-centric bias when he speaks of a "Renaissance" in the 1950s as opposed to the "Sad Sixties." England reached a peak during 1951-8 when she defeated her major cricket rivals easily and often. Bailey's personal contribution to that renaissance was quite substantial. After his retirement, England's test team gradually disintegrated and the 1960s were necessarily years of patient reconstruction. Had he been writing from a West Indian or South African perspective, he might well have regarded that decade as another golden age. His Anglo-centricity is almost evident in the organization of his book, which completely neglects American, Asian, African, and European cricket. A single chapter is devoted to each of the main cricket countries, while no fewer than nine focus squarely on England.

Ironically, Bailey's best chapters are those dealing with limited overs cricket and non-English cricketers. He offers sound explanations for the dramatic decline in interest and attendance during the 1960s stressing the persistent economic slump, the stodgy play of most first-class cricketers, the emergence of rival recreations, the tendency to watch important games on T.V. rather than in the stands, and the prohibitive costs inherent in staging a game like cricket which last so long. Eventually the game was rescued by generous sponsors like Benson and Hedges, Cornhill Insurance Company, Gillette, John Player, the Prudential Insurance Company, and Schweppes. These firms sponsored the numerous one-day competitions which have become extremely popular in recent years.

Bailey also comments intelligently on Australian crowd behaviour, and produces interesting comparisons between Australian stars like Lindwall and Lillee. He also contrasts the various Australian cricket centres in a very

shrewd manner, leaving us wondering why he did not do the same for places like Lord's and Leeds, Old Trafford and Trent Bridge. His brief descriptions of the leading cricketers are most perceptive, and he shows some awareness of the basic social, cultural, and geographical problems which have traditionally affected Indian, New Zealand, and West Indian cricket.

Unlike most writers, Bailey deals without emotion with the South African question. Commenting sadly on the tendency of modern cricket to be dominated by politics, he regrets that South Africa has been banned from the test cricket arena. But he passes no moral judgment on the blatant racism of that country. He does, however, become quite emotional in his analysis of the "Packer Revolution." He denounces those professionals who dared to challenge the old-fashioned and authoritarian attitudes of the Imperial Cricket Council, and fears that the Packer rebellion is likely to harm the game irrevocably. In fact, his gloomy forecast has proved incorrect. The Kerry Packer "Circus" did more good to the cause of the professional cricketer than it brought harm to the game as a whole. This splenetic chapter is unworthy of Bailey's skills and it must be regretted that he chose to ignore the example set by Henry Blofeld who treated the whole subject much more objectively in his excellent *The Pucker Affair* (Collins, 1978).

On the whole, this book does what it set out to do. It describes the history of cricket in simple terms to make it palatable to a non-academic audience. It was not meant to be a scholarly work and should not therefore be judged as such. Bailey's style is far more pleasing than the stolid manner in which he often batted, and his grasp of the technicalities of the game is very sound. He naturally writes more confidently about the period after World War II, and he paints some delightful capsule sketches of the players with and against whom he himself once played.

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