

Harte, Chris. *The Fight for the Ashes, 1982-83*. Adelaide, South Australia. Glenalvon Press, 1983. Pp. iv, 253. Index, pictures. \$A. 4.95.

During the winter (the Australian summer) of 1982-83, an all-star English cricket team toured Australia and New Zealand for a series of international contests. When the British sportsmen returned home they had little to show for their long excursion. Australia had defeated them in the major Test challenge, and the English side also lost a three nation "World Series Cup" round robin, which included New Zealand. A final brief visit to New Zealand brought more humiliation, as the home country won all three games against their English guests. Chris Harte, an "English born; Australian domiciled" writer, chronicled this sporting expedition. In his introduction he claims to give the reader a "neutral viewpoint" by reporting "the facts with neither fear nor favour." (p. iv). When an Australian company abandoned its plans to publish this narrative, the author and some compatriots decided to produce the book themselves. The result is a labor of love. Harte states that his "chapters are all fact, with as little opinion as possible." (p. iv). This is only partly true, for while *The Fight for the Ashes* presents a wealth of detailed match descriptions and voluminous statistics, it also includes many interpretive comments. While it is obviously written for the cricket enthusiast, this piece of sports journalism is useful as both a primary and secondary source for the scholar of international cricket and Australian sport. As an Australian cricket authority correctly notes in his foreword: "The book is well spiced with anecdotes, gossip, newspaper comments and useful background material for the future historian." (p.i).

The Fight for the Ashes suggests that contemporary cricket combines many traditional pre-modern features with numerous modern characteristics, and suffers from many of the problems common to commercial athletics today. Traditionalists appreciate Test matches that take up to five days for completion, and that require the players to wear white clothing and to break for tea. They also enjoy the ritual of burning the game ball after the Test Series is concluded, with the defeated side handing over "the ashes" to the winners. But aficionados are less thrilled with much of the commercialism, professionalism, bureaucratization, rule changes, and lack of sportsmanship among players and spectators.

The volume presents much evidence that international cricket today is hard pressed to retain what is left of the nineteenth century game. The leading players receive prize money, endorse products, and sometimes violate the time-hon-

ored code of behavior on the field. Their conduct troubled the English captain, who stated that “he was aiming to win, but playing the game was just as important.” He stressed that all cricketers “had an extra responsibility to the image of the game in this day and age.” (p. 16). A English sportswriter complained about the Australians’ behavior: “Perhaps it was inevitable that something had to give when the most English of games was played in an increasingly Americanized society. Something had given and it looked to be the ethic of sportsmanship.” (p. 232). The spectators’ behavior was not always exemplary either. At the first Test match at Perth a few of the English fans attacked an Australian player, which prompted tighter security in subsequent encounters. Excessive commercialism through marketing and promotional campaigns generated public interest and sold products, but sometimes upset the purists. Among the items sold “the prize for poor taste went to pairs of unisex knickers which had “C’mon Aussie, C’mon” emblems strategically positioned on the rear, and a space for the autograph of your favorite player on the front.” (p. 18). Television allowed millions to enjoy the excitement, but it also graphically displayed crowd disorders and players arguing with umpires. At Melbourne a new \$4 million electronic scoreboard was used for the first time for cricket. For those in the press box who were accustomed “to the old, stilted, but highly efficient names and figures in black and white,” it was “a culture shock to see cricket’s necessary statistics appear in all colours of the rainbow.” Six operators displaying commercials and action replays produced an “amazing range of visual material.” Ironically, the new board’s programmer was a “Japanese gentleman who had never seen a game of cricket in his life!” (p. 101). Political tensions also surface in these international contests, with their intense national rivalries and the pride at stake when former colonies meet the mother country on the playing field. There are also a few passing references to rumors of several Australians joining a “rebel tour” of South Africa, which one official feared would threaten the stability of cricket relations between the seven Test match countries.” (p. 80).

Perhaps the most intriguing topic covered in this book concerns the evolution of the rules of cricket—especially the experiments with one day contests, the wearing of colored clothing, and the use of a white ball. These were not permitted for the Test matches, but were successfully applied during the “World Series Cup” round robin and the final matches between England and New Zealand. The influence of television and the desire to increase gate receipts explain these innovations, which are clearly designed to generate more interest in cricket among the masses. Old-timers lament these changes. John Woodcock, a writer for the *London Times* and editor of the cricket journal *Wisden* remarked: “One-day cricket, compellingly and endlessly promoted on television, is fast becoming a cult in Australia . . . this seems bound to be to the detriment of the first-class game. It has spawned a kind of fanaticism . . . There is a real danger that the wearing of coloured clothes and the use of a white ball will drive such a wedge between one-day cricket and the traditional game that the two will eventually become as different as Rugby League and Rugby Union,

run by separate organizations.” (p. 244). Another journalist reported that the exciting five day Test match at Melbourne “shows up one-day cricket for what it is; an instant pop version of the game, which intrinsically is worth very little.” (p. 149). Chris Harte’s *The Fight for the Ashes* recreates all of the action of these international challenges, but also shows how this ancient sport is struggling to adjust to the cultural impact of the last quarter of the twentieth century.

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