

Stremski, Richard, *Kill for Collingwood*. Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1987. Pp. 340. Notes, bibliography, index, photographs.

Although he is not a “true-blue Aussie,” having migrated from the U.S.A. in 1972, Richard Stremski soon became addicted to “Aussie Rules” and has written a most informative, penetrative history of one of Australia’s greatest football clubs. His academic affiliation is with La Trobe University in Melbourne as a social historian, while his recreational affiliation is with the Collingwood Football Club. In reality, he is a self-confessed football fanatic. The club’s honorary historian since 1983, he is also responsible for assembling the photographic records which hang throughout the Social Club, and he recently wrote the script for the film “The Spirit of Collingwood: 90 Years in the Making.”

For the uninitiated, there are five variations of football in Australia: the 13-side game of Rugby League, thought of generally as the rugby professional game, played almost exclusively in N.S.W., Queensland and the Northern Territory; the 15-side game of Rugby Union, the amateur rugby game, played by the more sensible members of Australian society, and it is played mainly in N.S.W. and Queensland, though there are bastions in the other states as well; soccer, or Association football, which is played throughout Australia, but has never achieved the status or the following of the other codes; American football,

which has only recently attracted a limited following from expatriates from North America, i.e., a lunatic fringe. Then there is what is generally known as Australian Rules football, an indigenous 18-side game which is avidly followed in the southern states. In the past five years attempts have been made to make it a viable national game with professional teams in all of the major cities. It is too early to attempt to estimate the success of the latter enterprise, as earlier attempts have failed.

The general fanaticism of followers of this game has resulted in a number of histories of the sport, more so than any of the other football codes in Australia. There is the *Argus' History of the Premiers*, Graeme Atkinson's *Everything you ever wanted to know about Australian Rules Football but couldn't be bothered asking*, Marc Fiddian's *The Pioneers*, Jim Main's *Australian Rules Football*, Mike Maplestone's *Flying High, The History of the Essendon Football Club*, Stephen Rodger's *Toohey's Guide to Every Game Ever Played*, Leonie Sandercock and Ian Turner's *Up Where Cazaly?*, Michael Sunderland, Rod Nicholson and Stewart Murrh'y's *The First One Hundred Seasons Fitzroy Football Club 1883-1983*, and Percy Taylor's *History of the Collingwood Football Club 1892-1948*.

The advantage of such histories is that they do provide an author with relevant background information, social, political, economic and sporting, as well as different approaches to the writing of history. Stremski has elected to approach his subject chronologically, with an Introduction and 19 chapters: Kill for Collingwood; Good Old Collingwood; from Association to league; The system and the spirit; Ground development and management 1892-1914; War and warriors; Trials and tribulations 1919-26; The machine 1927-30; War against cricket: the battle for Victoria Park; Depression football; An aggressive and progressive Club; Collingwood at war; The changing of the guard 1945-50; The last hurrah 1951-58; More than a game: ground development since 1956; The great election of 1963: the factionalisation of Collingwood; Tradition and trauma: the Sherrin era 1963-74; Damn the tradition: the Clarke years 1974-76; For a few dollars more: the Hickey administration 1976-82; Advent of the New Magpies: an epilogue.

Richard Stremski's book is about an Australian Rules club, Collingwood, which represents a Melbourne suburb. For eighty years it was the Victorian Football League's (V.F.L.) most successful club. Collingwood won six V.F.L. premierships in the 10 years from 1927 to 1936, but in the 50 years since then only two premierships have come its way. The team, however, continues to gain entry into the finals almost every year and has been runner-up to the eventual premiers some 15 times. Their collapse under the pressure of finals in recent years has earned them the sobriquet "Colliwobbles."

Researching the history of this disadvantaged industrial Melbourne suburb assisted in the understanding of the motivations, attitudes and values espoused so forcibly by those living in, and representing, Collingwood. Stremski argues conclusively that Collingwood's drive for football superiority was motivated by a strong sense of social inferiority, it being a working class suburb. Success

enabled the suburb to transcend its humble origins, mainly through an emerging tradition based on the values of unity, discipline and loyalty. During its most successful years, just before and after the Depression, the Magpie supporters became completely “one-eyed fans,” and would gladly have “killed for Collingwood.” The author has made an outstanding contribution to Australia’s sporting literature through his volume, as he traces in careful and at times brilliant fashion the players, the administrators, the coaches, the games and the incidents that fashioned the club’s history.

The sport historian will glean the book with enthusiasm as Stremski analyzes other issues as well: creeping professionalism, the effects of war and depression, religion, larrikinism, the role of women, class, the role of the pubs and the schools. There is an immense amount of scholarship in the book that has relevance for other researchers in other subject areas.

The only faults in the book are the author’s own commitment to Collingwood which is occasionally professed too strongly, or too enthusiastically—“the most loved, and hated, team in Australia” (p. x)—a tendency to be repetitious, particularly when expostulating on the reasons for Collingwood’s success, and perhaps an overemphasis on brutality, which is exemplified in the title and is expounded upon throughout. These are minor quibbles, however. It is an outstanding book which analyzes Australian Rules and particularly Collingwood Football Club in a changing social scene and painstakingly endeavours to relate the significant events and people.

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