

Cashman, Richard, and Weaver, Amanda. *Wicket Women: Cricket and Women in Australia*. Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1991. Pp. viii, 246. \$24.95.

In their quest for equality, Australian women may have had a rougher road than American or British women. "The number of books written on Australian sport," write Cashman and Weaver, "is immense but almost all of them are about men, with books about animals in sport . . . as the next largest category" (vii). *Wicket Women*, the happy result of a collaboration between a distinguished sports historian and a television commentator-cricket player, begins to redress the balance.

The first two chapters take the story from the earliest unconfirmed report of women's cricket in 1815 to 1931, when the Australian Women's Cricket Council was formed. The first real breakthrough came in 1886-87, when Lily and Nellie Gregory, members of a truly cricket-mad family, captained the "Fernleas" and the "Sciroccos" in a number of games played at what later became the Sydney Cricket Ground. Spectators were attracted by the novelty of the games, and the proceeds went to charity-which made the events more or less respectable. Outside of urban areas, female cricketers had to be especially adaptable. When the "Forget-Me-Nots" of Warrnambool played against a male team, their opponents had to be "either fifty years [of age] or over fifteen stone-and many qualified both ways" (22). In 1905, the Victorian Women's Cricket Association was founded, presided over by one of Australia's most active feminists (which is further evidence against those who insist that women's sports are a form of social control). For some reason, women were unable to build upon this promising start. By 1914, the VWCA, which began with twenty-one clubs, was down to five.

Chapters 4 through 8 continue the narrative. Women's cricket revived in the Twenties and reached an apogee in the Thirties, when Tests were played against a visiting English team (1934) and against the English at home (1937). After a brief postwar recovery, the game entered a period of stagnation, from which it recovered in the Seventies and Eighties, when the global wave of feminism washed over Australia as it had over Europe and the United States. State and federal government provided subsidies and anti-discriminatory legislation. Major corporations, like Shell Australia, sponsored the women's game. A conversation between millionaire Jack Hayward and the famed English player, Rachael Heyhoe Flint, led to the establishment of a World Cup tournament in 1973. In the Eighties, Australian women dominated the game and won the second and third of these events.

Since Australian television has shown little interest in women's cricket, occasionally showing it in the intervals of a men's Test, most fans have had to

read about these successes rather than following them “live.” The tone of what they have read has varied greatly. While there were supportive newspaper articles, even in the nineteenth century, there has also been condescension and a refusal to take the women’s game seriously. Early critics complained that the game developed a woman’s muscles, damaged her reproductive organs, and doomed her to permanent spinsterhood. As the costumes evolved from long skirts to shorter skirts to even shorter box-pleated divided “culottes,” there was opportunity for moralists to grumble and for immoralists to gawk at “dolly birds” (some of whom seem to have worn no shorts at all). More recent denigrators of the game have pointed out that the women cannot throw as hard or bat as far as the men. Much of the criticism has taken the form of satirical cartoons, many of which are reprinted (along with a splendid selection of photographs).

On the whole, Cashman and Weaver are quite positive not only about the game but also about the role of the Australian Women’s Cricket Council, which suggested the book and provided archival materials. I am unable to judge whether or not AWCC sponsorship has biased the book, but I suspect that Cashman is as reliable and objective here as he has been in his other books. He is certainly no less lively.

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