

Australian Society for Sports History and the Australian Sports Commission. Wray Vamplew. Richard Cashman, Ian Jobling. Katharine Moore and John O'Hara, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*. Melbourne. Australia: Oxford University Press. 1992. Pp. ix. 430. Photographs, bibliography, key to authors. \$A49.95.

It was the first morning of the Australian Society for Sports History's (AASH) conference in Sydney in July 1989. Wray Vamplew, knowing of my experience in publishing sporting books, took me to one side and asked if I would join him in a meeting with a representative of Oxford University Press (OUP) a few minutes later. It was there I first heard of the OUP idea: another in their Companion series, this time on Australian Sport. What was being suggested was vast, far too much for me to contemplate. Vamplew took it in stride.

Back in 1912, Gordon Inglis had published *Sport and Pastime in Australia*, but in the intervening years no one had come near to producing a quality work on Australian sport. There had been a number of "pot-boilers" in the post-war years which had attractive covers and little else, and all in their own way perpetuated much of the mythology that dogs the history of Australian sport.

Therefore, OUP had to look for a group of people who not only knew their individual subjects but who could put it down in a coherent way. ASSH was their only choice.

Associate Professor Wray Vamplew then set to work. Four co-editors joined him: Richard Cashman, Ian Jobling, Katharine Moore, and John O'Hara, and by the time they had finished their task three years later, so had 223 other contributors. The list is a veritable Who's Who of noted Australian

sports historians and authors. There was also considerable help from the Australian Sports Commission.

OCAS, as it has already come to be known, is an authoritative and encyclopaedic reference on sport in Australia and provides a cohesive overview of the temper and development of the innumerable codes which constitute the country's sporting character. There are over one thousand entries covering all sports, major as well as minor, in some detail. These are not only on individuals but also on significant institutions, competitions, and venues.

OCAS offers important thematic essays on crucial aspects of the history, proliferation, and increasing professionalism of sport on the continent. The growth areas of sports medicine and sports management are taken into consideration as is the cultural influence of sport as represented in art and literature.

Vamplew's main research topic of violence in sport is detailed at length, with the essay on crowd disorder being particularly moot. There is also a section on obsessiveness, although one cannot help feeling that the Australians' obsession is more narrow in content than, say, in Britain.

With so many contributors, some differentials are obviously going to occur. Within the early pages (pp. 1-4: opposite p. 24) are statements which are currently "Politically Correct." That they are incorrect in fact is probably immaterial as virtually only that contributor, and a couple of other historians who had researched the subject in depth, would know truth from fiction. Unfortunately, very soon afterward comes an entry for the Adelaide Oval (p. 5), the factual errors of which run into double figures let alone incorrect typographical presentation.

Errors do occur, particularly by one author whose work may not have been thoroughly checked. The problem revolves around mythology (see cricket broadcaster Alan McGilvray's entry, p. 235) of which sport plays a large part in Australia's culture. I always find that when researchers tend to dig below the surface they invariably strike gold. This occurs in entries on cricket (pp. 100-103), crowd disorder (pp. 109-110), literature (pp. 219-228) and nationalism (pp. 252-254).

Common errors have also been overcome in individuals' entries, not least that on cricketer Victor Trumper (p. 361). Others include Lawrence Adamson (p. 5) who became a sportsmaster *par excellence* at Melbourne's Wesley College and Colden Harrison (p. 174) who is prominently remembered for developing the guidelines for Australian Rules Football. However, there could, and in some cases should, have been more lengthy essays on, for example, Percy Beames (p. 55) who enjoyed the rare distinction of captaining his state, Victoria, in both football and cricket and James Giltinan (p. 156), the first president of the New South Wales Rugby League.

For all its relatively minor faults (FA Cup instead of League Cup, p. 184) and occasional opinionated comment (South Africa, p. 209), the choice of subjects have been chosen well and reported upon with clarity. Six authors stand out from the pack: Braham Dabscheck, Richard Cashman,

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Chris Cunneen, Rob Lynch, J. Neville Turner, and Wray Vamplew. As could be expected, the bibliography (p. 391-421) is extensive as well as being a researcher's dream. However, looking at some of the titles could turn into a nightmare, if some of the text between those covers is ever used as fact, a problem that sport engenders and that most contributors have, thankfully, seen through.

British Society of Sports History

Chris Harte