

Harte, Chris. *A History of Australian Cricket*. London: André Deutsch, 1993. Pp. xix, 799. Photographs, appendices, select bibliography, index, £25.

This is definitely not your ordinary history of Australian cricket by a journalist determined to write only nice things about cricketers, spectators and administrators. It is a rigorous examination of the development of the game in Australia since 1800. Harte tries hard to demonstrate that Australian cricket is inextricably linked with the gradual rise of Australian nationalism from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. His book therefore contains a substantial portion of historical sociology and succeeds admirably in placing the game quite squarely within its constantly evolving socio-

cultural context. Although he is aware that Australians have never been willing to accept the validity of stories which tend to demolish the myths and illusions about their cricketing heroes, Harte takes great pains to bring these stars to earth and to depict them in mortal rather than saintly garb.

*A History of Australian Cricket* is as comprehensive a study as one can reasonably expect. It is solidly based on a wide range of primary and secondary materials as well as on private correspondence and personal interviews. The result is a large body of new information, some of which will raise more than a few Australian eyebrows. The author comments freely on his findings and some of his candid judgments of individuals who are still alive (or have only just recently died) are much less timid than one might have expected. Most of the Australian administrators and many of the leading players over the years have been very sharply criticized here. Sir Donald Bradman and Richie Benaud are among the very few who have escaped with their reputations intact.

Harte, then, is not afraid to speak plainly about mistakes and misconduct. He is thus the first historian to refer to the touring team to England in 1878 (p. 101) as "a rough side, rough in behaviour and rough in attitudes." He also is the first to write openly about the attempts on the part of John Selby and George Ulyett to throw the England game against Victoria during the 1881-82 tour and to divulge that they beat up a colleague, Billy Midwinter, after he had reported them to Alfred Shaw, the captain. It is also news to many cricket historians that Lord Sheffield, who is generally credited with having been one of the great benefactors of Australian cricket, took "some time" (p. 173) before eventually coming forward with the £150 he had promised for making the trophy for the interstate championship in 1892. The team which toured England in 1912, we are told, was one of the "worst-behaved ever assembled," with its players setting "records for alcoholic consumption and disorderly conduct" (p. 255).

Harte methodically traces the origins of Australian cricket back to the early nineteenth century, basing his outline on a careful study of several early Australian newspapers. He is thus able to report that the first interstate match occurred in February 1851 when the Victorian XI travelled to Tasmania and that over 150 first-class cricket matches were played in Australia prior to the inception of the Sheffield Shield competition. He also emphasizes the role of William Caffyn, Jesse Hide, Charles Lawrence and Tom Wills as the individuals most responsible for the rapid growth of cricket in Australia during the second half of the nineteenth century.

There is a great deal in this book about crowd composition and conduct over the years and the study tells us much about the economics of Australian cricket at various stages along the way. We learn, for instance, that the first English tour to Australia in 1861-62 netted its two promoters over £14,000, while the visit of 1878-79 left the Melbourne Cricket Club with a net loss of £6,000, and the tour of 1891-92 cost Lord Sheffield some £2,700 of his own

money. Almost miraculously, the five Tests played in Australia in 1911-12 attracted 342,275 spectators and yielded gate receipts in excess of £16,000. Just as incredibly, thanks to the "Bradman Factor," millions of spectators watched Test series both in England and Australia during the difficult 1930s. Also revealed for the first time here are the details of the 1979 settlement between the Australian Cricket Board and PBL Sports which brought an end to the famous feud between the Australian cricket administrators and Kerry Packer, a local television magnate.

Harte writes with unusual candor about the quarrels and disagreements between the players and the administrators which have bedeviled Australian cricket from the very beginning. He invariably sides with the cricketers, arguing repeatedly that the game has traditionally been administered by pompous and self-serving individuals who know too little about cricket and care less about the welfare of the players. This perennial and unnecessary feud was destined to reach its climax with the players' rebellion in the late 1970s during the so-called "Packer Revolution."

Harte has profited much, as he has freely admitted, from the advice of such Australian scholars as Richard Cashman and Wray Vamplew and has emerged with as fine a history as most academic historians would have been proud to write. It is a truly fascinating work which deserves to be widely read. Despite the absence of footnotes, it contains all the elements of reliable scholarship—including an excellent bibliography. Considering its bulk and the attractive manner in which it has been produced, this book is more than worth its price.

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