

Jack Hibbert and Carrie Hutchinson, *The Barracker's Bible. A Dictionary of Sporting Slang*. McPhee Gribble Publishers, Melbourne, 1983, Illus., pp.237. \$7.95.

Playwright Hibbert in league with Hutchinson has produced a highly entertaining pink-paged dictionary of the slang of spectators, participants and commentators which includes colourful, earthy and sexist language ('handbag brigade', 'cream puff' and 'quiche-eater') along with some original and indigenous phrases (a 'Grandma Williams' for a player outpaced continually by an opponent

and a 'battered sav'). The book is enhanced by cartoons by Counihan and Dickins including an Aussie Rules player in 'bum freezer shorts'.

It doesn't take long to discover that this is a very partial and limited dictionary with a heavy bias towards the language of Melbourne and Australian Rules football. Apart from the 55 general entries in the 'A' section there are 23 terms derived from Australian Rules, 11 from cricket and just three to cover the other 14 sports dealt with, Rugby League, for instance, is poorly served with approximately 40 terms in the whole book and most of the entries are technical terms rather than slang: included are 'hooker', 'scrum half', 'touch', 'touch in goal', 'touchline' and so forth.

While the editors make no apologies for their 'partisan interest and home [Melbourne]', they make some extraordinary and very dubious claims about the comparative status of barracking in the sports covered. They argue that Australian Rules has contributed more to the language of slang because it is the oldest football code and is [presumably more] Australian, Rugby and cricket supposedly have less slang because there is 'less theatricality'; and cricket in Australia is watched 'in a state of reverence', (Have the authors been on the Sydney Hill or Bay 13?) The authors further declare that they met a 'wall of silence' when attempting to research the argot of Rugby League.

While it's true that Rugby League fans don't read books and that there is precious little slang in the slim library of League, anyone who listens to the Sunday broadcasts of the code knows that language-mangling and cliches are alive and well in Sydney, After all Rex Mossop has won more tautology contests than anyone else; veteran Frank Hyde is always good for a startling phrase or two; 10's Ray Warren has plumbed new depths of piousness and banality (everything is magic: tries, moments and even players [Mr. Magic]) and laconic supercoach Jack Gibson is now threatening to rewrite the grammar and language of League.

The comparisons between barracking in Australian Rules and cricket are also contentious. While an Australian football match is usually far noisier than a cricket game, cricket is played over

such a long time and has so many lulls in the action that it encourages barracking more than most games. Players, too, sitting around in dressing rooms have ample time to work out nicknames and further the language of cricket as do commentators who have to cover many periods of inaction.

This is a welcome pioneering study but its usefulness is considerably limited by its narrow and parochial focus. The definitive work on Australian sporting slang has yet to be written.

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