

Garry Lester, *Australians at the Olympics. A Definitive History*. Lester Townsend Publishing, Sydney, 1984. Illus., appendices, tables, pp.284. \$

Although I am unsure as to what is meant by the term, 'a definitive history', this book is certainly the most comprehensive

overview of Australian athletes at the Olympic Games yet published. This book is a well-balanced collection of highlights of each Games, biographical sketches of significant Australian gold medalists, comprehensive tables and excellent photographs. Given the great public interest in the Olympics, this offering by sports journalist Lester will satisfy a popular demand.

Australians at the Olympics is based on a wide range of sources: newspapers, interviews, diaries, letters and reports consulted over a number of years. As a result there are many interesting and original insights. There are also meticulously-compiled lists of the members of Australian teams and their respective performances which are summarised in tables. The usual lists of Olympic medal winners, readily available elsewhere, are also included. These could have been deleted in the interest of more information about Australian performances.

This criticism can be extended to other sections of the book. Although the author has done more than any other writer to tell the story about Australians at the Olympics, there are numerous descriptions of athletic performances and photographs which have no Australian component. The title, then, is somewhat misleading. It was also disappointing that the section heading for the 1912 Stockholm Olympics was 'Jim Thorpe Heads Great Moments' (52) which seems to diminish the performance of Australia's first two female Olympians, Fanny Durack and Mina Wylie, who won gold and silver medals respectively. Similarly, approximately 80 of the 240 photographs are not related to Australian performances.

Had Lester concentrated less on non-Australian performers he might have delved further into Australians at the Games. As expected, he has focussed on 'the winners' - the outstanding performances and events - and has presented them well. However, he could have written more about Australians at the Games who did not become champions. There is also a need to evaluate the contributions of administrators and officials such as Richard Coombes, E.S. Marks, Les Duff, Edgar Tanner, Judy Patching, Syd Grange and others.

Some disconcerting aspects of this book are the lack of acknowledgement of sources, references and a bibliography. It is clear that this book is the work of a journalist rather than a historian. It would have been better, too, to have omitted altogether an

inadequate two-page summary of one thousand years of a highly complex socio-cultural Pan-Hellenic athletic festival. Two photographs of the Zeus Temple ruins are mistakenly captioned 'where the Ancient Olympics were once conducted' (10-11).

Despite such errors and the omission of any reference of Australian reactions to the revival of the Olympic Games (which would provide a fascinating insight into Australian sports in the 1890s), this is still a very worthwhile book.

Australians at the Olympics is deficient in socio-historical perspective in that it fails to explore the role and significance of the Games in Australian society. However, it is, according to current member of the International Olympic Committee, Phil Coles, 'a valuable guide... for it will bring many hours of enjoyment, and it fills a large gap in Australian sporting literature' (Foreword).

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