

Richard Cashman, *Australian Cricket Crowds: The Attendance Cycle. Daily Figures, 1877-1984*. History Project Inc., Kensington, 1984. Illus. pp.324. \$20 (incl. postage). Available from Dr. J. McQuilton, History, University of NW.

Richard Cashman will forgive me for stating at the outset that his latest offering is hardly likely to become a best-seller; a book that is nearly 90 per cent raw crowd figures will have little appeal on the popular market. For all that, the end product is a fascinating compilation of statistics and analysis that has opened up a whole new dimension of research in Australian cricket history.

One of the early chapter headings of the book is 'Problems and Methods in Counting Cricket Crowds', an ordering which sums up nicely the dilemma the author faced in collecting and collating the data. Overcoming the problems associated with the collection of an accurate set of figures obviously preoccupied him for some considerable time before he addressed himself to the task of devising a method of presenting them. He records in detail the varying degrees of success he had in his search for comprehensive crowd statistics around the country, reserving for my own state the deserved opprobrium of having the worst set in the Commonwealth.

The chapter entitled 'The Attendance Cycle' contains detailed interpretation of the mass of statistics that appears later in the book. The composite season totals are studied, and fluctuations explained in terms of Australian economic and cultural history, ground development and media interest. Individual attention is then paid to Test cricket, other International cricket, Sheffield Shield cricket, one-day cricket, and even the World Series game from 1977-79. The development of Sunday play is noted, as is the climatic disadvantage under which Queensland has to labour in its quest for its first Sheffield Shield title. Cashman's work on the 'Bradman factor' as a crowd-puller, which has appeared elsewhere, is fully documented here, too. All his conclusions are supported at the end of the book by many pertinent tables and graphs whose headings range from 'Composite Season Totals' to 'Picture Show Admissions', proof of the comprehensive analysis undertaken.

The bulk of the book, though, is taken up with the actual crowd figures and gate receipts of most of the first-class cricket played in Australia since 1877. There would have been more than one way of arranging this: Cashman has chosen to do it under the categories of Test cricket, other International cricket, Shield cricket, one-day cricket and World Series cricket, so that anyone, for example, wishing to look up Sydney's crowd figures for the 1924-25 season will need to consult three different sections. This is not offered as a major criticism, but merely to show that whatever system is used, it will be possible to point to flaws in the arrangement.

The starting point that has been used in the Interstate matches and the International matches against the individual colonies does invite some comment, however. Having gone back to 1877 for the first Test match, it would have been much more logical to start the Intercolonial and International match figures from that year, too; instead, we find that all New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia matches start at the institution of the Sheffield Shield in 1892, while the other States do not join in until their respective admissions to the Shield this century. Apart from giving the impression that serious Intercolonial cricket did not commence until 1892, the author's choice of starting dates means the omission of those International matches against the colonies in the 1880s, which were regarded with almost as much importance as the Tests that were played then. A full set of figures for that famous old series, New South Wales versus Victoria (first played in 1856) would have been valuable, too. For very little extra research (given that an enormous amount has been undertaken as it is), it might have been worthwhile to extend the range of the statistics to incorporate the above.

The book appears in attractive, glossy card-covers, but is unfortunately poorly-bound (several pages of my copy have almost worked themselves loose). The lack of a chapter-heading on each page is something of a drawback, too, for someone who tends not to use the table of contents; at a random opening of the book, it is not readily apparent whether one is looking at crowd figures for a Test series or for a season of International matches against the states. Nevertheless, Cashman has achieved a stupendous feat, and

or the serious student of the game, the book is a must; it is such an important work that it is difficult to do it justice in a review of this length. Despite its fairly ordinary production, I have no hesitation in conferring a 'highly recommended' rating.

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