

Richard Cashman, *'Ave a Go, Yer Mug! Australian Cricket Crowds from Larrikin to Ocker.* Collins, Sydney, 1984. Illus., pp.192. \$14.95.

Richard Cashman has attempted a very difficult task-writing a scholarly book for a general audience - and has succeeded remarkably well. He has produced a serious study of an important subject in a cheerful style, without too many footnotes and other distractions like graphs and tables. He has also presented a number of interesting cartoons and colourful photographs with brief and apt captions. Unfortunately, however, he failed to provide an index or a select bibliography which would have been most helpful to the general reader as well as the student of Australian social history.

This is a fine study of cricket crowds which throws much useful light on Australian sociology. Cashman examines such key themes as crowd size, composition, and conduct, and occasionally compares them with parallel English developments. His findings indicate that spectator interest in Australian cricket has been curiously cyclical, with alternating slumps and booms that sometimes defy adequate explanation. Large crowds were in attendance during the 1860s and 1870s but not in the following decade. A resurgence occurred early in the present century and reached a climax in the 1920s. Lean years were experienced in the 1950s and again during the late 1960s before the current boom began.

Cashman tries hard and intelligently to account for these shifts. Conflicts of authority and a surfeit of international cricket during the 1880s caused a marked decline in the number of

Australians who watched the intercolonial matches before the advent of the Sheffield Shield competition rekindled a popular interest in the game. Improvements in facilities at the leading cricket grounds and the success of Australian players against their English rivals led to a steady increase in cricket crowds at the turn of the century when all classes of Australians were relatively better off and had more spare time than before. A universal sense of relief and a general search for recreational outlets after World War I gave cricket a tremendous boost for more than a decade. And then the unabashed deification of Donald Bradman during the 1930s produced extraordinary crowds wherever that remarkable prodigy performed. Cashman has calculated that the 'Bradman Factor' accounted for almost 7,000 additional spectators on each day that that genius batted.

This work is concerned as much with behaviour as with numbers. Cashman frequently discusses crowd conduct and observes that here there were peaks and valleys also. The unusual rowdyism of the 1870s reappeared one century later. He is less convincing in his efforts to explain these periodic changes. He stresses drink, gambling, chauvinism, and sometimes dull play or faulty umpiring as perhaps the main cause of crowd violence in the nineteenth century. Similar factors have again operated to produce unpleasant incidents in recent years. But there is no satisfactory explanation for the good behaviour of Australian cricket crowds during the 1950s and 1960s. It is not enough to say that they were smaller and therefore easier to control. The bumper crowds of the inter-war years, after all, had also behaved well. Even so, Cashman does make the very valid point that crowds must always reflect the foibles and standards of the wider society. The rowdyism of any era is but a mirror of contemporary manners and morals. Violence is sometimes encouraged by inadequate facilities at cricket grounds, improper behaviour of the cricketers themselves, and a fiercely chauvinistic attitude on the part of some local patrons. Almost invariably, however, regrettable excesses are caused by only a small minority.

Cashman makes a sharp distinction between barracking and disorder. He traces the history of Australian barracking in considerable detail and describes some of the most famous barrackers.

Several colourful paragraphs appear here on the celebrated Yabba, who once patrolled the Hill at Sydney. Cashman leaves the impression that a good deal of Australian barracking was nothing more than friendly banter which too many Englishmen misunderstood and too severely criticised. The general behaviour of Australian cricket crowds, in fact, was not much different from that of football crowds in England. But Cashman does acknowledge that sometimes the barrackers behaved too ill, and he devotes much space to the question of crowd control. He notes, for instance, that (after the most unsavoury incidents of the early 1980s) many cricket grounds made more deliberate efforts to prevent disorder by improving facilities, erecting fences, and deploying a larger and more conspicuous police force.

This is not merely a book about cricket spectators. There is a good deal here about cricket administrators, players, and pavilions, as well as the impact of modern technology on Australian sport. Occasional remarks on general salaries and wages help to place the whole subject of admission fees and payments to professional cricketers in a broader Australian economic context. There is also a very sound analysis of the Packer Revolution, following Henry Blofeld, Cashman emerges with a commendably balanced view of the bitter conflict for cricket control during 1977-79, avoiding the kind of vitriolic comment in which so many critics indulged at the peak of that controversial affair.

On the whole, this book deserves to be readily bought and widely read. It should be of interest to both the ordinary cricket enthusiast and the serious student of social history. Cashman has performed a vital service by illuminating an important area of Australian social life that has hitherto attracted all too little attention from journalists and sociologists alike.

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