

Garrie Hutchinson, *From the Outer: Watching Football in the 80s*. McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books, Melbourne, 1984. pp.231. \$7.95.

For those of us who have never participated in top-line professional sport (or have, but no longer do), this is the book we have probably all contemplated writing at some stage. It is, as its title describes, a book which is concerned with the game of Australian football. Yet it is written from a unique perspective: that of the football watcher, the fan who physically attends matches and inhabits the Stands or (more frequently) the Outer, and engages in the pursuit of cheering his team to victory whilst denigrating

the efforts of the opposition.

This book is a collection of thoughts ('mosaic', is Hutchinson's term) on the game as it is played today, by a 'watcher' who has devoted most of his life to the Saturday afternoons of the month between March and September.

It is a personal account, but it is also universal. Many of the issues to which Hutchinson refers are considered by all football fans at least occasionally. The pre-season build-up, different venues, the character of today's game, heroes, thugs, umpires and umpiring, 'the good old days', the finals, the ecstasy of victory and the agony of defeat; all of these are reflected upon and discussed. We all have our own thoughts on such matters; Hutchinson has put his down on paper. Therein lies the uniqueness of this book,

As a compilation of his 'Watcher' columns in *The Age*, readers will sometimes feel frustrated by occasional textual repetitions. Fortunately, Hutchinson has included the dates of each piece; readers are able to place the chapter they are reading in its contemporary setting. Because the articles were written between 1980 and 1983, devoted football fans will often be able to remember the actual game Hutchinson refers to in each of his chapters. Contemporaneity is one of the book's strong points.

Australian football is, we are often told by *aficionados* of other codes, a highly subjective game which relies on the looseness of its rules (and their interpretation) for its attraction. I think Hutchinson would see more than mere subjectivity in the game. Were he able, he would consider football as something of a microcosm of Australian society, into which the values, mores, conventions, persecutions (racial, class, religious), despair, joy and incredulity of day-to-day existence is telescoped. He may not openly say this, but lurking closely beneath everything he says about enjoying the experience of 'going to the footy' is a hidden suspicion that football in Victoria is an experience not unlike life: it can be hated, enjoyed, taken for granted or made the most of, but never ignored.

Negative aspects of Hutchinson's book are few. The major criticism which supporters of ten other Victorian Football League clubs would probably voice concern the apparent over-emphasis on

Carlton (Hutchinson's current team) and Essendon (his boyhood one). I fear, though, that this is an occupational hazard for all football writers who claim impartiality and do not state from the outset that they are unbiased.

The only editorial criticism I have concerns presentation. Tighter proofreading would have eliminated the errors which, though minor, nonetheless appear from time to time.

Victorians (or any others raised on a hard diet of VFL) will appreciate this book; if it performs well interstate, I shall be surprised. In saying this, I do not mean to detract from its quality. It is a useful contribution to an area which is, in the 1980s, at last beginning to grow.

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