

Ron McLean, *Country Cracks: The Story of N.S.W. Country Tennis*. The Namoi Valley Independent, Gunnedah, Australia, 1983, Illus., Appendices, pp.144. \$12.50. Available from the author, 22 Russell Court, Gunnedah, 2380.

Country Cracks provides an informative, readable nostalgic account of many of the players, families and personalities involved in NSW country tennis over the past 75 years.

The author, Ron McLean, a journalist who has been involved in NSW country tennis for many years, both as an administrator and player, has paid particular attention to tracing the development of the Country Week Tennis Carnival and its players from 1909, (when the event was established) until the present day. This emphasis has been particularly effective in providing an insight into a large and representative cross-section of NSW country players, on terms of their tennis careers, styles, results and family backgrounds. The Carnival, held at White City in Sydney every year, has always been considered by country players to be the focal point and venue for representative district teams competition. It has always attracted the majority of leading country players including J.O. Anderson, J. Crawford, A. Roche, M. Edmondson, Margaret Court (Smith) and Evonne Cawley (Goolagong).

Country Cracks successfully combines a readable and flowing journalist text with a large number of rare and interesting photographs, which show an assortment of styles, fashions and country players from newspapers and private collections throughout the twentieth century. This diverse range of photographs is a particularly refreshing development since there has been a tendency for books on Australian tennis to re-use some well-worn pictures.

Given the preponderance of photographs, the large and glossy pages and the 'modern' language, this book will appeal more to those

who have played or been involved in country tennis. However, it has a more general interest since it deals with a major component of Australian tennis, and tennis has certainly been considered one of the foremost sporting activities of country people. *Country Cracks* also offers some pertinent comments on the differences between country and metropolitan tennis.

Of course, the book has its limitations: one of the continuing problems confronted by any writer in dealing with the history of Australian tennis is that so little of the fundamental research, analysis, or indeed, basic correlation of factual material has even been attempted. While *Country Cracks* has certainly pioneered the way in one particular aspect of the history of Australian tennis, it has not been able to deal with all the features of the country game. For example, it is mainly the big names that are treated while the majority of country tournaments and players are ignored. Moreover, little analysis has been attempted of the phenomenon of country tennis as a part of the social history of the local environment. And finally the important role of the social player and visiting city competitor to country tennis has largely been neglected.

This book is also deficient in some aspects of style and organisation. While the popular journalistic mode of expression has advantages in terms of its unlaboured accessibility for general readers, it has its limitations for the more serious sport's historian. Although there are various headings throughout the book, there is no table of contents, no subheadings, nor index. Furthermore, while contemporary newspapers have been quoted extensively, no footnotes have been included, and the text provides few clues to their exact source. A map of the relevant NSW country towns and areas would have also been particularly useful in clarifying the book's context and clearly indicating the geographical distribution and position of the more successful country tennis areas, tournaments and players.

Despite such qualification, *Country Cracks* has certainly 'been able to contribute something to the folklore of country tennis' (153), with its successful combination of memorabilia and photographs of NSW Country players over the past 75 years. Nevertheless, however, grateful for whatever 'folklore' we can get, it remains

for tennis historians to move beyond that level of collection to relate the sport intimately to the society of which it was a part. In that task *Country Cracks* will be a useful and welcome future source.

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