

Graeme Kinross Smith, *The Sweet Spot: One Hundred Years of Life and Tennis in Geelong*. Hyland House, Melbourne, 1982. pp.191. \$21.95.

The Sweet Spot celebrates the centenary of the Geelong Lawn Tennis Club. Graeme Kinross Smith traces the fortunes of the club which are tied in with developments in business, the world wars, the depression, industrial expansion and changing modes of transportation and communication; he also explores changes in fashion and entertainment. The history of this particular club is also linked with wider developments in the tennis world. This book, then, is more than a narrow club history; while club administrators are identified, the focus is rather more on how an individual club reflects and fits in with its wider social context.

The book is enhanced by a wide range of suitably captioned illustrations which help to establish the place of tennis in the social fabric of Geelong society. A caption dated 1883, one year after the foundation of the club, advertised the annual Easter Tennis Ball. There was also a note that entry to the Ladies and Gentleman's Handicap doubles was 10s 6d per pair. At that time handicaps were a popular event. Such advertisements clearly demonstrate that tennis was a game restricted to those 'with means'; and the founders and members were drawn from the 'establishment'. Ball boys were hired to 'serve' and as gentlemen completed their play each day, the caretaker was on hand to pass them a towel in the shower room.

At the 1925 Annual General Meeting, a male preserve, it was mooted that facilities for ladies be improved. Nothing eventuated

as women, for decades, were not formally recognised in the committee structure. The top women players found competition difficult to arrange and very few men were prepared to play a game of mixed doubles. Smith is not able to discern an erosion of male chauvinism at Geelong (and elsewhere) until the 1970s.

Smith, in this book, was more keen to observe the culture and context of the club rather than the strokes, scores and court behaviour of the club champions. There are some references, however, to some memorable encounters, the traditional Eastern tournament, and local champions such as Gus Kearney, the Hawke's, the Hassett's, Gladys Toyne and Geelong's own Margaret Smith (Rollins).

It is Smith's contention that 'sporting history of the 1926 pennant team with rackets crossed type can be very boring'. Despite his own involvement in competitive tennis for 30 years, he has commendably avoided the temptation to employ the 'pennant scores model'. Matters of special interest to the keen tennis player such as court surface, ball quality and attire are discussed. Indeed, during the 1920s tennis boom, when some eager member transgressed the club rules by playing on Sunday, the Committee immediately resolved to deplore this action. Occasionally, too, the Saturday pennant matches were rescheduled at an earlier hour to enable players to watch Geelong play important Victorian league football clashes. The intense community interest in league football surfaces although more may have been written about the impact of cricket, particularly during the Bradman era, on the tennis fraternity and club membership statistics.

Although this is a history of a particular club, it includes material about intercolonial and international tennis; of stars such as Brookes, Patterson, Tilden, Lenglen and Sedgmen; details of exhibition matches by visiting players and how the Easter Tournament helped the Geelong Lawn (once asphalt) Tennis Club to grow. There is also reference as to how Hopman insisted on hours of practice and peak physical condition for competition.

The 'amateur' days of the club have now long gone together with long dresses and long trousers. The coloured attire is new as are the raquet frames and strings. What may also be new is the influx of a different strata of society into tennis. The Geelong Club is possibly more 'open' than it was upon foundation. Perhaps

this point could have been explored further by examining a few case studies of how 'working class' youths attempted to make the tennis scene at Geelong.

However, in open competition, this book is a winner with very few 'soft spots'. It is well indexed, appropriately documented, and well illustrated. Some tennis fans may prefer a more journalistic style. The sociologist, also, might have liked more statistical detail comparing the tennis community with Geelong's social structure. But for the sports' historian it is essential reading.

Harry C.J. Phillips
Western Australian C.A.E.