

BOOK REVIEWS

Richie Benaud, *Benaud On Reflection*. William Collins, Sydney,
1984. pp.263. \$16.95.

Richie Benaud, former noted Australian all-rounder and Test captain, is perhaps Australia's best and most widely appreciated cricket commentator. His unflappable television manner combined with a crisp, laconic delivery has guided hundreds of thousands of young and old Australians to a greater knowledge and enjoyment of cricket. Occasionally, like the sergeant-major on parade, you may see him smile, as he does from the dust jacket of his nicely produced, entertaining and valuable book.

There is no doubt that Benaud is well qualified to look back over 36 years of cricket as a player, captain, commentator and publicist. He began his first-class career in 1948, made his Test debut in 1952 and captained Australia from 1958-64, losing only four Tests out of 27 played. An excellent leg-spin bowler (248 Test wickets at 27 apiece), hard-hitting batsman and fine gully fieldsman, he became the first player to achieve the Test double of 2000 runs and 200 wickets. In his long and highly successful career as cricketer and commentator he witnessed many controversies surrounding the game and changes to so-called traditional cricket. Benaud, however, is both philosophic and realistic and not one to detest or regret innovations in 'the most controversial game of all'. Indeed he is proud to have been part of what he calls the two revolutions in cricket. World Series Cricket and the presentation of one-day limited over cricket on television. To those who would deprecate one-day (and night) cricket he gives the irrefutable answer that cricket has always been a developing game and originated as a one-day game.

Benaud reflects on a wide range of issues in an honest, straightforward, no-nonsense manner. His comments on the art of captaincy ('ninety per cent luck and ten per cent skill') in chapters 2 and 3 and throughout the book are excellent and deserve to be widely read by both senior and junior cricketers. Linked with his thoughts on captaincy is the place of the all-rounder in a team

(Benaud would have three) and leadership of the game as a whole which are the subjects of other chapters. One-day cricket has fortunately led to the reappearance and importance of the all-rounder in the game, and Benaud examines the performances of these complete and attractive cricketers giving generous praise to Miller, Sobers, Botham, Imran Khan, Kapil Dev and Hadlee. A novel and very interesting feature of the book is, Chapter 11 where the author records a conversation on various aspects of cricket with his cricketer father, Lou, and brother John who played three Tests for Australia.

As in most cricket books of a reflective and historical nature some old tales are retold. Could it be otherwise in the game that naturally produces so much passion, recorded comment and literature! But while perhaps we all like to be reminded of some of our favourite cricket stories, Benaud also provides many new ones and offers fresh insights into the game. In addition to the topics already mentioned his comments on the media ('cricket's greatest ally'), umpiring, South Africa, sponsorship and cricket administrators will be read by many with interest and profit. In particular, his verdict on South Africa which he says 'will have bigger and better rebel sports tours in years to come', will excite argument and promote further controversy.

There are few first-class cricket books by Australian cricketers and other writers: most cricket historians would agree that the list of such books is exceedingly small. *Benaud on Reflection*, however, would certainly be included.

Gerald Walsh
University of N.S.W.
at Duntroon