

Keith Macklin, *The Story of Rugby League*. Stanley Paul, London, 1984. Appendix, index. pp.215. \$17.95 paper.

This 'patriotic' history and like most examples of the genre it is more than a little antiquarian. Avid fans of Rugby League probably do regard it as being 'the greatest game in the world', but it will be difficult to convince non-believers of the importance of some of the 'facts' assembled in this volume. There is no real thesis; facts are piled one on another as if they were building blocks, each being given equal weight. Macklin's methodology is 'scissors-and-paste', the accepted journalistic approach to sporting history. Mason and others have shown what historians can accomplish in their histories of association football; Rugby

League still awaits its historian.

Macklin's Chapter 2, 'How It All Began', could have been extremely valuable. There is a mass of material available on the origins of the game in England, some of which has been analysed by sociologists such as Eric Dunning and Kenneth Sheard, but Macklin is content to list a few points. The break away of the Northern Union in 1897 has to be seen in terms of the increasing competitiveness, communal rivalry and professionalisation of sport in late nineteenth century England. Class conflict was also involved. Rugby's administration was dominated by a southern establishment which had little knowledge of the industrial north and which was also hostile to working-class political organisation. Criticism of professionalism was associated with the 1890s attack on labour; gentlemen were not professionals and, at least, some of them had class objections to the Northern Union. The ridiculing of the BBC League commentator, Eddie Waring, in the 1970s and early 1980s came from trendy middle-class England. In the north such humour was seen as another example of southern arrogance. It is interesting to compare the warmth with which Australian visitors are received at the northern league grounds of England - try, especially, Hull and Castleford - with the attitude to the occasional visiting southerner.

Historians and followers of Rugby League will learn some useful facts from Macklin's book but, in general, it is disappointing. Indeed, it is a revised and updated version of a book first published in 1962, and then reissued with additions in 1974. Rugby League really deserves better than this. Indeed, the origins of the game, both in England and Australia, illustrate key issues in social history. Political and local historians can learn much about their subjects from studying the relationship between clubs and political parties; crowd composition and behaviour provides fascinating insights for historians and sociologists; and there is also valuable information for economic historians, those who are interested in class analysis, and the students of professionalisation. This is a long-winded way of saying that the history of Rugby League should be history, not antiquarianism and anachronism.

A final point. The cover of Macklin's book shows Australian forward Rod Reddy tackling England's Peter Smith, who, it is

claimed, is attempting to 'surge through' the tackle. This is indicative of Macklin's interpretative abilities and also of his accuracy. The only place Smith is 'surging to' is the ground.

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