

Jack Pollard, *Australian Rugby Union. The Game and the Players*, Angus & Robertson in association with Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1984. Illus., bibliog., pp.945. \$49.95.

Whilst the Australian Broadcasting Commission may have had its troubles in the broadcasting arena of late, surely its association with the production of Jack Pollard's latest publication is a noteworthy achievement and deserves congratulations.

The book was launched on the eve of the 8th Wallabies successful "grand slam" tour of Britain and Ireland in late 1984, wherein the Australian team defeated England, Ireland, Wales, Scotland and a Barbarians XV. Pollard was fortunate to capture this ready market.

The successful aura surrounding the book has led many to assume that this is the definitive work on the Australian Rugby Union. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The book is basically a compendium of statistics, photographs and summaries on every

player who has played for Australia at rugby combined with a description of the various affiliated rugby unions, competitions, schools and clubs throughout Australia whom Pollard has deemed worthy of mention.

The book is marred by a number of errors (I found 23 during a cursory browse). The most likely reason for this situation is that Pollard seems to have accepted the 'facts' of previous publications on the subject.

Pollard's 2¼ page summary of the Sydney Suburban Rugby Union illustrates many of the factual limitations of the book. Whilst Pollard has broadly encapsulated the philosophy of the 'Sydney Subbies' clubs, he is somewhat astray in the details. He wrote that 'the Fire Brigade enters numerous teams...Cranbrook Old Boys play as the Old Cranbrookians, Sydney Grammar as the Old Sydneians' (p.523). The NSW Fire Brigades last entered a team in the Sydney Suburban Competition in 1938; there has never been a Club known as Old Cranbrookians in the 'Subbies' and Old Sydneians, founded in 1981, did not play during the 1983 season, and as such, may not be the best example of an Old Boys Suburban Rugby Club. A Club such as St. Patricks Old Boys (Strathfield) which entered 'Subbies' in 1969 and today is one of the Suburban Union's leading Clubs would have proved a better Club to cite.

This minor criticism over the details of his 'Subbies' reference leads to a rather more substantial flaw of Pollard's book. The importance which Pollard attributes to the Greater Public Schools Athletic Associations (GPS) of both Brisbane and Sydney has distorted his presentation of Australian Rugby Union. While there is no disputing the influence of the schools from the GPS competitions in the development of rugby in Queensland and New South Wales respectively up until the turn of the century, it is also true that after that time Rugby spread to many other private non-GPS colleges as well as the State High Schools. Surely, the Combined Associated Schools, Combined Catholic Colleges and Combined High Schools and the non-aligned schools more thorough treatment.

This somewhat 'blinkered' view of the development of rugby extends to Pollard's treatment of so many other topics. His discussion of the composition of the Sydney Rugby Union District Competition centres around 13 of the 29 District clubs. To Pollard,

schoolboy rugby in Sydney is the GPS Competition and District Football really means the 'traditional' District Clubs. This leads Pollard to toally ignore the Mosman and Hawkesbury Agricultural College Clubs, for instance, because while they were formed prior to 1900 they did not become part of the District Scheme until the mid-1960s and were not 1st Division District Clubs.

This book would have been more comprehensive and valued had Pollard been able, even as appendices, to list the various clubs and schools throughout Australia who play rugby as well as details of the various competitions. The book however, is a quick reference book concerning mainly the game at the national level, with trimmings to market the book with as a wide an appeal as possible. The 945 pages (particularly those concerning every Australian Test Player) is a remarkable achievement in itself. It depends upon how useful the publication will be to the reader. Whether a reader will find Pollard's work a valuable reference book or alternatively get lost in its pages remains to be seen. An index would have assisted in guiding one through the maze. But who knows - fishing expeditions have proved very profitable to Pollard in the past.

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