

Department of Sport, Recreation and Tourism and the Australian Sports Commission, *Australian Sport: A Profile*. Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1985. Appendices, bibliog., illus. pp.ix+202.

One should welcome, rather than grumble about this new venture of the Department and the Australian Sports Commission to 'fill a gap in the literature on sport in Australia'; the promise to 'regularly update' the 'Profile' and the wide range of contributors assembled: professional sports administrators, top civil servants, historians and other academics, coaches, journalists and others.

However, in view of the significance of this endeavour, I am sure that the Committee, which produced the book, would welcome some constructive criticism. First, some minor gripes. Maybe I am old fashioned but I would prefer a more regular-shaped book, which can sit more easily in a bookcase rather than this glossy squat, twice as wide as high, creation. The bibliography is inadequate with many notable omissions including the book and articles of Bob Stewart, who is a contributor; a minor article of Bill Mandle is cited but none of his more substantial articles and book; similarly, an ANZAAS paper of Kent Pearson is mentioned but not his book. Then there are some errors including one notable one that 'during

1978-79 the percentage of total transmission time devoted solely to sport on Australian television was 18 per cent for metropolitan commercial stations and over 21 per cent for the ABC' (p.90). I read somewhere recently that sport on Australian television had only reached 8.4 per cent of total time on Australian television by the mid-1980s and that it amounted to some 15 per cent of time on American television.

There are two more substantial criticisms. The book, which the authors hope will 'present an entertaining, accessible and accurate profile of Australian sport is a veritable sporting smorgasboard presumably based on the principle that everyone will find something useful at some point. The book as a result ranges widely and wildly from objective and critical accounts of the 'financial support' of modern sport, an article which would hold its own in any academic journal, to accounts of Australian sports, which are so basic, that they could be handed out to American tourists, or visitors from Mars for that matter, who know absolutely nothing about Australian sport. It is tedious too to read in article after article about some of the 'high points' in Australian sport. A few authors are guilty of perpetuating some of the well-worn myths of Australian sport and others seem intent on creating some new ones. Consider, for instance, the following glittering generalisation: 'Initially, the sports which captured the Australian imagination were exclusively masculine, and one of the reasons for this was our strong, sometimes ingenuous, warrior tradition' (p-23).

On the other hand, there are some very fine pieces in this collection. Bob Stewart has published another informative piece about the changing financial structure of Australian sport. I hope he continues to explore this rich theme much further. There are also worthwhile offerings from Bill Mandle, John Daly, Libby Darlison and a number of others.

One of the real strengths of the book is its focus on sport and public policy and the changing administrative structure of sport. Many articles throw light on the changing structures and the significant role played by government in the last decade. There is an interesting chapter, for instance, written by John Cheffers on the Australian Institute of Sport and Graham Dempster, First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Sport, Recreation

and Tourism, raises some significant questions about sport sponsorship. 'Are we prepared', he asks, 'to accept the idea of full-time athletes who can concentrate solely on their sports careers while they last? Are we prepared to make special allowances to ensure our athletes are able to be gainfully employed when their sports careers cease?'

The book also contains some useful appendices including a list and brief history of National Sporting Associations, which while not a definitive list includes no less than 57 associations ranging from the prominent to the less well-known: such as the Australian Ballooning Federation (1964); Australian Bowhunters Association (1979) and the Australian Underwater Federation (1953).

I think there is also some scope for several whimsical articles which look into the crystal ball. In Garry Daly's Annual Report of Sport Australia for the year ending June 2000 we find that Sir Gregory Chappell is Head of the Australian Sports Aid Foundation and that the Olympic Games of 2000 are scheduled for Beijing. But I doubt whether historians south of the Murray will agree with Mungo McCallum's pessimistic prediction about the future of Australian Rules Football: 'A sport in which the national team has no one to oppose is not going to survive indefinitely' (p.164).

This is an important addition to the literature on sport but may I, with respect, suggest that the Editorial Committee need to decide whether this book is a public relations exercise, designed to present Australian sport in its most favourable light, whether its purpose is to outline changes in the political and administrative infrastructure of sport; or whether the objective is to provide a critical and objective analysis of Australian sport. This first issue does not succeed as much as it might because the focus of the book is too wide and ill-defined.

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