

Brian Crowley, *A History of Australian Batting 1850-1986* and *A History of Australian Bowling and Wicket-Keeping 1850-1986*. Macmillan Australia, South Melbourne, 1986. Bibliog., illus., index, stats. pp.xii + 211, and xii + 212. \$24.95 each.

The dust-jacket informs the reader that Brian Crowley is a South African who migrated to Australia in 1984. It was with a great deal of interest, therefore, that I read his two volumes on Australian cricketers, published as they were only two years after his arrival in this country. I was particularly keen to see how well Crowley captured the essence of Australian cricket, the predominantly amateur approach of its cricketers and how much information he was able to provide on the backgrounds of the players which I regard as an integral part of any history of Australian cricketers. To his credit, Crowley has read widely: he has provided a most comprehensive bibliography, and throughout the books, he has quoted freely from a wide range of contemporary and authoritative sources. In this way, he has cleverly overcome any disadvantages suffered by not growing up in the environment that he seeks to describe. Crowley has also resisted the temptation to confine his remarks to the very top-flight of Australian players: the book is enhanced by his attention to the lesser ranks, those just on the fringe of Test selection, and even those solid, long-serving Sheffield Shield players who were never regarded as genuine Test prospects. In terms of coverage, then, the books are quite comprehensive.

By covering so many players, however, the depth of treatment necessarily suffers. In the case of the lesser-known players, comment is often restricted to one or two lines, being merely a reiteration of some statistical feature of the players career. To give an example, the treatment of Neil Dansie, who in my childhood seemed to be an eternal fixture in the South Australian team, is typical: 'Nuggety all-round sportsman, H.N. "Nodder" Dansie played 124 times for South Australia as a prolific hard-hitting right-hander without winning a Test opportunity'. Even for the more prominent players, comment is largely restricted to on-field performances, with very little light being shed upon the backgrounds of the men concerned. Crowley's pleasant narrative style prevents the books from becoming trite, but at times it lacks the interest that someone like Ray Robinson engendered through pertinent details of life outside cricket.

The text is punctuated with a good selection of full-page photographs reproduced in non-glossy form on the same paper on which the text appears. The statistics, potentially, are one of the most valuable features of the book, the career records being arranged in a series of eight predetermined eras between 1850-51 and 1984-1985. Unfortunately, practice falls short of the ideal, because the statistics of players whose careers bridge two or more eras are not split to illustrate their respective contributions to each era. To give one extreme example: Bobby Simpson's 21,029 career runs appear at the top of the table in both the 1958-59 - 1970-71 and 1971-72 - 1977-78 spans, even though he played in just one seas

Crowley, in total, has produced a pleasant ramble through the paths of Australian cricket, eminently readable books even if they do not really add to the store of knowledge on the subject. The two volumes are hardcover and well-bound, but even so, not much short of \$50 for the set is rather a lot to ask.

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