

Adrian McGregor, *King Wally*. University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1987. Illus., index, pp.vii + 247. \$9.95, paper.

King Wally is a biography of Wally Lewis, Australia's Rugby League captain in recent years. Lewis' career is still on the ascendance, as exemplified by his performance in the July, 1987 State of Origin series, which occurred after McGregor's book was published. Writing on any current hero suffers somewhat, as the final chapters remain to be written. The story can only therefore be partially told, but at least it leaves the writer with the possibility of a future edition when the hero retires, and another when he departs this globe.

Despite these short-comings the biography has considerable merit. Adrian McGregor is an outstanding feature writer, currently employed by the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane. His previous experience was with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a two-year stint in Fleet Street, and periods with

the *Australian* and the *National Times*. He has a B.A. from the University of Queensland and has won several journalism awards, including one from the National Press Club for sport journalism. His major previous work was a biography of Greg Chappell, also published by the University of Queensland Press.

Adrian McGregor epitomises the professional journalist. He takes pride in his work, and is meticulous in his preparation. He took six months leave to research and write *King Wally*, and applied himself with the dedication that is his forte. He put together over 100 hours of interview with Lewis, and travelled inter-state for his research, endeavouring to come to terms with the variable opinions rampant in the two states about Lewis' ability.

There are no references in the book, but it is a minor short-coming in the work as the quality of his sporting journalism soon becomes evident. *King Wally* is not a production-line book by a hack writer intent on quick money. It is a work by a consummate professional with obvious skill in his craft. What separates this work from the majority of other efforts by his fellow sports writers is McGregor's ability with words and expression. He deliberates over his emerging product, and gives it a quality and a sensitivity that are rare. The signing of Wally to stay in Brisbane is but one example of how McGregor understands his craft.

McAuliffe coughed for attention. Wally stared at the maroon Q.R.L. initials embossed in the thick pile carpet. A reporter selected a free Winfield cigarette from a fine timber box. McAuliffe gave way to his doubt by explaining it was wrong to presume that, because the conference was being held at Lang Park, Wally was staying. Wally took over. "After considering all the factors and weighing up carefully all the possibilities", he paused..."I have decided to move to Sydney". McAuliffe's jaw dropped, his clasped hands fell apart, and he turned with rounded eyes to discover Wally in the grip of silent, slightly ashamed, laughter. "Oh mate, only joking", said Wally and patted McAuliffe's arm. "Don't ever do that to me again", he said. "I'm getting too old for that sort of shock". Then he laughed and swore heartily. (pp.171-72)

There are 11 chapters in the book tracing the life of Wally Lewis from boyhood until his crowning as 'Emperor of Lang Park' or 'King Wally'. McGregor does not however fall into the usual trap of proclaiming the immortality of his subject. This, he realizes, would have him, as an astute writer, "fall into the same trap as the

image makers". Rather than argue for the place of Lewis in history, he rightly concludes that it is simply 'better to enjoy him while he is still here'. It is good advice for any sensible biographer for a current sporting hero.

Maxwell L. Howell
Human Movement
University of Queensland

Reet Howell
Brisbane C.A.E.