

John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt, *Cricket Walkabout: The Australian Aborigines in England*. Macmillan, Melbourne, 1988. Illus., index, pp.204. \$19.95.

One hundred and twenty years ago the first party of cricketers left Australia for England. For almost a century that 1868 tour was ignored, undoubtedly because the players were Aborigines. The cricket world and its historians preferred to imagine that the first Australian tourists arrived ten years later; of course they were white.

In 1967 John Mulvaney's *Cricket Walkabout: The Australian Aboriginal Cricketers on Tour 1867-8* was published; an expanded and revised edition of this seminal work has just been released.

The organisation and realisation of the tour was an astonishing achievement. International cricket tours were still a rare occurrence; over the previous decade parties of English professionals had visited Canada and the United States (1859) and Australia (1861-2 and 1863-4).

An attempt had been made in 1867 to arrange an Aboriginal tour but this proved to be the work of a white confidence trickster. Tragically two members of this side died before they could return home from Sydney, another two died shortly afterwards and a further three fell seriously ill.

Of the fourteen players who did undertake the arduous England tour (the party was away for twelve months with five months spent playing forty-seven matches in forty towns and cities) one died of tuberculosis in England while two others were sent home early due to illness,

The Aborigines were well-received in England although occasionally they suffered racial discrimination. Initially the Marylebone Cricket Club declined to organise a fixture at Lord's but later relented, while *The Times* remained a stern critic claiming their play was 'a travestie of cricket'. However such adverse press comments were not widesbread.

Mulvaney and Harcourt are correct in stating that the Aboriginal tour needs to be assessed in the context of the state of English cricket during the 1860s but it is very unfortunate that they repeat ill-judged comments about the nature of the dominant English professionals of the period. The novelist Anthony Trollope may have remarked that professionalism was 'the monster cricket nuisance of the day' but he is hardly an authority on the history of the game. Later in the book the authors dismiss Trollope as a 'racist' for his description of 'the dignified Aborigine' as a 'sapient monkey'.

The professional touring sides (such as the All-England XI) in mid-Victorian England were the true pioneers in the national and international development of cricket. They cannot be dismissed as 'money-grabbing', drinkers and practical jokers. However that approach allows Mulvaney and Harcourt to lower the standard of cricket in England and therefore raise the on-field status of the tourists. At no point did the Aborigines encounter the professional strength of English cricket.

Mulvaney and Harcourt divide the opposition the tourists faced into three categories. The first and most important includes seven teams against whom the Aborigines played ten matches. These

sides the authors remark ' correspond with familiar county teams today, although not in standard'. The crucial point that Mulvaney and Harcourt omit to mention is that these elevens were in every case 'The Gentlemen of' the county and not the representative county side. In other words the county's professionals were excluded. For examples the Aborigines met the 'Gentlemen of Surrey' on three occasions but absent from the local side were notable players such as Thomas Humphrey, Henry Jupp (Mulvaney and Harcourt wrongly attribute his career record to the amateur G.H. Jupp who did play against the Aborigines), George Griffith, Edward Pooley and H.H. Stephenson. Similarly when the tourists travelled to Yorkshire the 'county' side did not include professionals; among the absentees were Ned Stephenson, George Freeman, Roger Iddison and Tom Emmett.

The description of the best opposition the Aboriginal tourists faced as 'county' is misleading and overstates the case. Further in the ten matches against these gentlemen-county combinations the Aborigines managed only four draws and suffered six defeats by wide margins.

It is no disgrace to accept the assessment made by W.G. Grace that the Aboriginal tourists were 'equal to third-class English teams'. After all, the team was drawn from one region in western Victoria.

The on-field performances of the tourists were dominated by three players - Charles Lawrence, the white captain, co-sponsor and former Anglo-Irish professional; Johnny Mullagh (1698 runs and 257 wickets) and Cuzens (1358 runs and 114 wickets). Mullagh, who scored twenty-two per cent of the team's runs and delivered more than thirty-seven per cent of the overs, was an outstanding player who represented Victoria in 1879 against Lord Harris's England eleven.

Mulvaney and Harcourt conclude that, 'The rise of the Aboriginal team to stardom in 1866-68 and its subsequent neglect offers a sad model.' Racist legislation and enforced segregation made further Aboriginal tours impossible, while subsequently the White Australia policy dominated the thinking of the cricket establishment. In 1908 Billy McElhone, a leading figure on cricket's federal Board of Control asserted, 'no blacks should be allowed to play cricket in Australia'. In 1951 a monument to commemorate the 1868

tour was unveiled at Edenhope, while thirty-three years later a similar bronze plaque was added to the southern stand of the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Black sportspeople have often been forgotten. The publication of *Cricket Walkabout* ensures that the 1868 Aboriginal tourists can never be written out of history again. It is unfortunate that while establishing the rightful place of the 1868 Aboriginal tourists in the annals of the game John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt have sullied the reputation of England's Victorian professionals.

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