

Jack Pollard, *The Formative Years of Australian Cricket, 1803-93*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1987. Biblios., illus., index, pp.320. \$40.

This latest edition from the seemingly endless Pollard production line fills a wide gap in our sporting history and provides a worthy companion to his encyclopedic *Australian Cricket: the Game and the Players* (1982). The two books are in a way similar in that they may not represent extensive original research (though I am willing to be corrected on this) but rather they bring together much information about the game which, although in some cases well known, has until now been scattered in a myriad of diverse sources. The *Formative Years* brings little to light for readers of Bowen's *Cricket: A History of its Growth and Development Throughout the World*, and those familiar with the long list of 19th century annuals, reminiscences and histories. The book is valuable nevertheless, because it brings the story of 19th century Australian cricket to those who have neither the time nor the inclination to spend months scratching around the libraries and the private collections of a few lucky individuals. Furthermore, he tells the story in a highly readable way - presentation and layout are open and pleasant enough, the manuscript appears free from typos (a rare thing these days), and there are enough pictures to keep even the keenest of photofiles happy (some probably being published for the first time).

Some academics will perhaps turn their noses up at the book, and certainly Pollard raises more queries than he answers about

early Australian cricket. However, he has drawn the broad contours and it is now up to the scholars to trot off and do the detailed spade work that the subject demands.

Pollard's descriptions of the early tours are especially good and he settles, as well as anyone can, the question of who put up the money for a number of the early ventures. Similarly his treatment of cricket in the colonies before 1850 (especially Tasmania, which after such a bright start took such a time to graduate to Sheffield Shield status) is thorough and revealing. However, to me, the real strength of the book lies in the vignettes of the important (and some not so important) characters behind the early years of Australian cricket. For example, who could help but feel a little sympathy toward one Peter Snodgrass, an early member of the Melbourne Cricket Club and ardent, if inaccurate, duellist. In his first duel, Snodgrass shot himself in the foot and in a second, against a young barrister Redmond Barry (who as a Supreme Court judge would pass sentence on Ned Kelly) shot and missed before the signal was given.

All in all I thoroughly enjoyed *The Formative Years*, except for one aspect - Pollard's annoying habit of referring to the nineteenth century colonies as states - an oversight which nearly saw the book disappear out the window on a dozen occasions.

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