

Jack McHarg, *Stan McCabe: The Man and His Cricket*. William Collins, Sydney, 1987. Illus., pp.xii+187, \$14.95.

Stan McCabe was the last of a long line of three gifted strokeplayers from New South Wales who graced Australian cricket from the 1890s to World War II. Legend has it that Trumper inspired Kippax and Kippax provided an ideal for McCabe. Chosen for the 1930 Australian team to England without having scored a Sheffield Shield century -- a remarkable selection -- McCabe was never dropped from the Australian XI during his career. He was, in fact, the only Australian player to play in all Tests against all countries during the 1930s. His three greatest innings are amongst the most memorable in the history of the game: 187 at Sydney in 1932 when he put Larwood to the sword; 189 at Johannesburg in 1935 when Wade, the South African Captain, appealed against the light to protect his fieldsmen against the ferocity of McCabe's strokes; and 232 at Nottingham in 1938 when he scored 72 of the last wicket partnership of 77 in 28 minutes!

Those who saw him play will never forget him. Amongst his contemporaries he was the best loved Australian player of his era, admired for his modesty, his amiable nature and, that rare attribute, complete fearlessness against fast bowling.

Yet, until Jack McHarg's work, there was no book written on McCabe and, indeed, he does not even appear in the index to Padwick's *Bibliography of Cricket*. This book is a labour of love. McHarg was a Sydney grade cricket contemporary of McCabe and his

work shows the result of years of steady research into the life of a man he much admired.

Apart from a detailed description of his subject's cricket career he has recorded other interesting details. At St Joseph's College, a great Sydney rugby school, the stocky, well-knit McCabe was a fine rugby fullback. He secured a very creditable pass of five A's and two B's in the old Intermediate examination and, obviously, could have undertaken university studies. But, in the hard 1920s, formal education ended for a Grenfell barber's son at fifteen.

McCabe was the only Australian player to make social visits to the English dressing room during the 'Bodyline' series and Freddie Brown, an English captain, referred to him in correspondence as 'dear Stan McCabe'. He was honourable and generous in his business career. His health was undermined by heavy smoking but McHarg refrains from mentioning his 'conviviality' which further debilitated him. He does refute, firmly, the canard that McCabe's death, at 58, was suicide.

A most revealing chapter in the book is entitled 'The Perfect Cricketer?' Here McHarg replies convincingly to the suggestion made, albeit reluctantly, by Bradman, Moyes and Fingleton, that McCabe lacked consistency and should have achieved an even more outstanding record. He notes a Test average against England of 48.27 and a career average of 49.38. He produces the extraordinary statistic that McCabe scored at the rate of 47 runs per hour in Tests compared with Bradman's rate of 37. He also states that McCabe averaged fourteen boundaries per one hundred runs compared with Bradman's ten. Surprisingly his 41 catches in 39 Tests had, at the time of his retirement, been exceeded only by Hugh Trumble, a great slip fielder, with 43 catches in 32 Tests.

This work gives heart to the enthusiast as it confirms the old adage that every keen student of the game 'has a book in him or her'. McHarg has perpetuated in the best way the memory of a great Australian sportsman. Well researched and written and retailed at a modest \$14.95, this book should be held in every cricket lover's library.

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[This book was awarded the Jack Pollard Trophy, the Literary Award of the Australian Cricket Society, for the best cricket book published in Australia for season 1987-88 -- Ed.]