

A. Mancini and G.M. Hibbins, *Running with the Ball. Football's Foster Father*. Lynedoch Publications, Melbourne, 1987. Illus., index, notes. pp.viii+200. \$29.95.

Quite some time ago two ladies came somewhat tentatively into the MCC Library to advise that they had nearly finished a manuscript but to complete the formalities, they thought it wise to check out what the library might have to offer. Their story related to H.C.A. Harrison, the reputed 'father' of Australian rules football, outstanding athlete, public official, and a long serving Vice President of the M.C.C. The centre piece of their work involved reproducing his autobiography published in the 1920s as *The Story of an Athlete*. The original publication has been scarcer than proverbial hen's teeth and often the researcher at major libraries has been told that their copy cannot be located.

The pair went to work delving around and discussing their project with members of the 'Monday Group'. Gillian became so involved and entrenched that visitors would approach her for permission to look around, and answered some of their queries. Gradually their book was expanded, its facts more thoroughly substantiated, modifications were made, until about a year later the book was ready for publication. It then covered not only Harrison, but Thomas Wentworth Wills and his colleagues who devised the first rules. As a result *Running with the Ball* is, among other things, the most authoritative book on the origins of Australian Rules, and joins Richard Stremski's *Kill for Collingwood* and Turner and Sandercock's *Up Where Cazaly* as a class of their own in the literature on the subject.

Not satisfied with that, Gillian created history by persuading the VFL to publish their book.

Running with the Ball is essential reading for all serious students of our national game. It depicts the background developments leading up to Wills' famous letter of 10 July 1858 when he proposed a committee should devise a game of football suited to local conditions, then traces carefully the way the game was moulded and changed over the years. In the process it demolishes such myths as - Harrison being one of the founders; that Aussie Rules was based on a game played by the Aborigines with a possum skin 'ball'; or that it originated with the Irish on the goldfields.

In commending the book I must also sound an accolade for the VFL for the sponsorship of a serious study on the game it administers. Perhaps it heralds the start of a closer relationship with the work of the Sporting Traditions conferences. However, such a working relationship will not be possible without considerable effort on the part of the Society. There is a need for A.S.S.H. to strive to identify and develop *applied* rather than *theoretic* studies which are meaningful to important sports administrators such as the VFL. Turner's legal-papers could be adapted and expanded to throw light on solving some problems faced by tribunals; the economists could develop studies about the use of resources to provide, maintain, and develop sporting stadiums, pricing policies and the effects of inflation on admittance charges to sporting functions, and the like. A.S.S.H. as a whole could form an expert group to provide forecasts of short, medium, and long term developments in sport.

The A.S.S.H. group which was formed last year to guide SBS TV in researching Australian sporting heritage has certainly pointed the way in which the society needs to develop to become an established authority in the field of sporting research and development.

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