

Ric Sissons, *George Lohmann: The Beau Ideal*. (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1991), pp. 65. \$9.95 paper.

This slender biography of George Lohmann, a spinoff from the research undertaken by Ric Sissons for his award-winning *The Players*, enhances the author's reputation as a cricket historian.

Lohmann was an outstanding bowler. His initial first-class wicket, that of W G Grace, was a portent of what was to come in a brilliant career. Ultimately he achieved a test bowling average of 10.75, an all-time best for England, a feat no doubt assisted by a wicket every thirty-four balls, a strike rate unparalleled in test history.

Yet Lohmann is of interest for more than his bowling endeavours. He was an atypical professional cricketer coming as he did from a middle-class background. He was also fierce in his defence of the rights of the player in a game constrained by amateur ideals. This led to him becoming the first professional cricketer to obtain a contract which guaranteed him an income irrespective of how well he played, or indeed whether he played at all. It also induced him to join the famous strike for a greater fee prior to the Oval test against Australia in 1896.

Although the book focusses on Lohmann, insights are gained on cricket in general in the late nineteenth century. The reader learns that test teams were selected by the ground authority; that sides were not allowed to declare their innings closed; that any player wishing to change counties was subject to a two year residential clause; and that a black (though of West Indian not Aboriginal parents) represented Australia in test cricket.

As a cricketing biography I have one small criticism. George was dropped after his first-class debut against Derbyshire, but no details of his performance in that match are given. As a biography I wish we had been told more about George's life off the field. Only by implication - a mention of a possible fiancée paying for a memorial stone - do we learn that he was unmarried. One wonders what happened to the young lady whom he reputedly met in Australia and intended to take back with him to England

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