

Roland Fishman, *Calypso Cricket: the Inside Story of the 1991 Windies Tour*. **Margaret Gee**, Sydney, 1991. pp. 297. \$16.96.

Viv Richards, *Hitting Across The Line: an Autobiography*. **Pan Macmillan**, Sydney, 1991. pp. 288. \$32.95 h.b.

Of all the by now well posited connections between sport and society, few are better developed by analysts than those connecting cricket and Caribbean modern cultural formation. Indeed, the writings of James, Patterson and others are now seen to have a wide theoretical

application in coming to a deeper understanding of sports' civic applications around the globe. Link that with a fabulous playing and appreciation tradition, and it is clear why a rare Australian tour in the region should generate a spate of books, including these two.

For anyone with an interest in cricket, a Caribbean odyssey - the word is not chosen lightly - should be mandatory. Many, though, will have to rely on the power of prose (and carefully selected television images), which is why it is sad to report that these books are disappointing in the extreme if, in each case, for quite different reasons.

Fishman's book began as a great idea and, to be fair to him, the title was not his choice. The book was envisaged as a sort of non-participatory George Plompton work, an attempt to unravel the inner workings of an undoubted social phenomenon, the cricket tour. Given that tour books, once wonderful, are now universally execrable, his ambition was laudable.

Unfortunately, a great gap develops between objective and achievement. The book is more about Fishman than the Australian team, and very rarely captures the essence of Caribbean life or cricket despite learned reference to Nietzsche, running guru George Sheehan, Tim Gallwey and other 'thinkers'. The overwhelming sense is that Fishman, a non-cricket officianado despite an earlier biography of Greg Matthews, spent most of his time trying to work out a relationship with the tourists which would enable him to fathom what was going on. Moreover, his lack of knowledge of and enthusiasm for cricket would scarcely have enamoured him to the locals whose devotion to the game is rarely explained in anything deeper than the colourful banal.

Immediately upon its publication the book caused a minor stir among players and journalists, largely because of its so-called revelations about some players' alleged sexual exploits. The debate swung largely about the 'unwritten rules' of such sports reportage, for which read the largely dependent journalists' reliance upon contacts for stories. That debate had potential, but is not raised in the book itself at all.

There are one or two nice touches, notably the sections on how players attain nicknames, the itinerant lives of the modern players, hints at the political intrigues, and some passages on the media. But it could all have happened anywhere, because there is nothing particularly Caribbean here - the social references are mainly to tourist traps and their bogus reggae.

Cricket believers would approach the book cautiously, anyway, given the front cover illustration - it shows Bruce Reid bowling left arm over in a curious contortion which suggests his target to be somewhere in the region of deep mid-wicket. It is not mandatory to be an expert to produce good sports analysis, but it doesn't hurt.

Which is why Viv Richards' book is inexplicably disappointing. One of the greatest of modern players, Richards has also been an outspoken advocate of players' rights, Afro-Caribbean rights to respect (a powerful regional commodity) and racism in cricket, among other issues. These issues are mentioned here, but never plumbed deeply.

Some of his own controversial incidents are brushed aside, including the 'Bobby Simpson isn't our cup of tea' saga, the Christopher Martyn-Jenkins 'allegations' and the 'James Lawton in the Press Box' bolover. Curiously, Richards' own sad exit from Somerset is scarcely detailed at all (Joel Garner's autobiography is infinitely better on that episode). Consequently, the book reads like its author has held back a great deal, which is a great shame because he clearly feels many things very deeply.

All in all, these books add little to our knowledge of Caribbean cricket culture, or even our knowledge of Caribbean cricket, more's the pity.

Brian Stoddart
University of Canberra
