

Book Reviews

Wray Vamplex, Katharine Moore, John O'Hara, Richard Cashman, Ian F Jobling, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992. Bibliog., illus., pp. 430. \$49.95.

SIX PERSPECTIVES**Two reviewers comment:**

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A landmark of sport history has been reached with the publication of *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* written by members of the Australian Society for Sports History and edited by five of its leading members. The editors and the Society as a whole are to be commended for publishing such a comprehensive guide to sport in Australia.

This collection incorporates a number of entries which are not normally included in compilations on sport, or indeed in other similar historical collections. *OCAS* includes an extensive number of biographical entries, entries on specific sports and sporting organisations. In addition, the book contains a number of references on other areas related to understanding the interaction of sport and society such as, amateurism, nationalism, violence, crowd disorder and government policy, to name a few. I was also impressed with the

inclusion of overseas sporting personalities who have had a significant impact on Australian sporting history, such as the entries for the American cyclist 'Major' Taylor and the Tommy Burns-Jack Johnson boxing match of 1908 held in Sydney. As a result, both the casual reader and the academic will gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of sport in Australia of the past and present.

In addition to all of the merits of the volume, I noticed a few omissions which should be corrected in any future printings. There have been a number of very successful Australians over the years in international golf - most of whom are included in the volume - but I was surprised to see no entry for Ian Baker-Finch or Wayne Grady, recent winners of major championships and both with considerable success in international golf. As a scholar now based in New Zealand, I was amazed (as a 'shocked' Kiwi colleague immediately noticed) that there was no entry for the Bledisloe Cup or Wallaby - All Black rugby matches. I am sure now that Australia holds the Cup, the editors will want to include an entry if there is an opportunity in future. A smaller criticism is that there are other overseas sports figures who have achieved success in Australia who also could be mentioned. In particular, I am referring to those who have played Sheffield Shield cricket, and rugby league. Perhaps Dennis Conner should also be included in a separate entry. My final major criticism is that the biographical entries vary widely in content. Some are quite sketchy compared with others and all do not provide the same basic information. However, this is to be expected from a project with so many contributors. These criticisms are minor and should not detract from the overall quality of the volume.

I was impressed with the editors' inclusion of 'minor' sports, with the way in which women and women's sports were addressed and with the inclusion of many Aborigines who have been successful in sport. One is struck by the number of women and Aborigines who have succeeded in Australian sport despite the prevalence of sexist and racist attitudes in Australia. I still think that more attention could be paid to women's sports which have not received the same media coverage,

sponsorship or fan support as male sports. Projects such as this one are good opportunities to redress some of these imbalances by increasing the exposure of women's sporting achievements of the past and present. Media coverage, attendance figures and sponsorship should not be the only determinants of what is valued in sport. Even more women involved in Australian sport, past and present, could be included such as Rose Scott, to name one example. Nevertheless, I think ASSH should be commended for making substantial headway in the coverage of women in Australian sport.

One great strength of the *OCAS* is the special topic entries. Lois Bryson's contribution 'gender' (pp. 152-5) deserves special mention as an excellent overview of perhaps the most significant category of analysis - affecting both women and men in studies of how sport interacts with society at large. Braham Dabscheck's discussion of 'unionism', (pp. 362-4) is also impressive in looking at athlete's rights and worker associations in sports. Many other special topic issues are also discussed well, such as Aborigines in sport, betting on sport, law, literature, media and sport science, to name but a few.

Despite a few criticisms, I believe that *OCAS* is a volume of which ASSH can be justly proud. The volume will be of great use to academics, students and fans of Australian sport. It is hoped that groups or societies involved in the study of sport in other countries will undertake similar projects. ASSH and the specific editors should be praised for generating a superb model for others to follow.