

**Three contributors react:**

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The first test for a booklover is, of course, the erotic quality of a volume - and our new Companion passes with flying colours. It has an elegant dust-jacket, a cloth with appreciable but gentle texture, binding that feels as if it will last, good paper, interesting plates, and a gracious

use of language. When I compare it with those much-thumbed other Companions on my shelf, like Scholes on Music and Drabble on English Literature, it has the great advantage of ready mobility; unlike its fellows, it doesn't demand a solid desk as prerequisite for comfortable reading.

Then, to its various functions: it is perhaps firstly a reference book, and it serves that well - but I would have liked a wonderful synopsis like that in Scholes:

A READER'S SYNOPSIS  
OF THE  
OXFORD COMPANION TO MUSIC

Showing how, in addition to  
the use of the volume as a book of reference,  
the dispersed articles upon various branches  
of the subject may, if desired,  
be read as a series of

CONCISE COMPREHENSIVE SURVEYS  
OF THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS  
OF THE ART.

One of the glories of both Scholes and Drabble is that I very rarely use either as a reference book without being diverted by some other fascinating snippet of information, which then leads me off to another article, and so on. *Australian Sport* has led me off on just such a hunt. Having caught sight of the photograph from Williamson's *The Club*, I turned to the paper on Drama, and from that to Art, Film, Literature and Media (but alas, nothing on cartooning, nor even a biography of the great WEP). Exactly the sort of journey which Scholes' synopsis aids and abets.

Another thing which extends the Companions beyond the reference function is their capacity to stimulate one to new ideas. Again, *Australian Sport* has it. Just to take one example, Bob Paddick's essay on Amateurism has literally dozens of starting points for further exploration of ideas. And lastly, although reflecting the inherent seriousness of sport, its writers have often brought a touch of humour to their task, and the editors were wise enough to include an article on that great bit of Dunstan irreverence, the Anti-football League.

So, it does fulfil admirably the challenge of the Companions to be more than merely a reference book.

But I shouldn't omit my disappointments. As a social scientist, I was disappointed not to find articles on masculinity, spectatorism, social class, semiotics and a horde of other things. Then some of the minor cultural traditions seem to be overlooked, like the Sunday keg, the pie-night, and that old-fashioned indoor entertainment of recitation which helped to generate some of our greatest sporting poetry and traditions. Perhaps it should have been titled *Australian Sport History*, then none of us would have unrealistic expectations.

That everyone will doubtless notice, the absence of some articles: for me, I feel Gustave Techow deserves much more than passing reference under gymnastics; that great inspiration to Australian climbing, Dot Butler, was overlooked - and so on. But worst of all, one use of a reference book is to initiate the uninitiated - so it is indeed regrettable that such an important question as the origin of the term 'The Ashes' is left unanswered.

But these are all minor quibbles compared with the real accomplishments; I am glad that the Companion exists, and proud to tell my friends that I had a small part in such an impressive undertaking.