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Feeling a little bemused by a request to review *OCAS* as a contributor, I nonetheless settled down and attempted to apply my energies to the task. Short of reading the entire book (which I didn't - I don't think this is what the editors had in mind anyway), how was one to tackle this? Random readings resulted, and this review therefore takes the form of some random thoughts.

My first musings concerned the weightings accorded the various sports. How can one gauge a sport's importance? In the build-up towards publication a number of preconceptions were revealed which shaped the ultimate form of the book. 'Important' sports got more space, including more biographies of famous players. How was this 'importance' measured? - I was never told. Perhaps 'importance' was judged by thoughts of potential purchasers. And perhaps this was the right way to proceed. Three passionate cricket devotees of my acquaintance picked up the book immediately (happy to be met with three pages and 76 cross-references). A fan of aerobics (1/6th page, no cross-references), on the other hand, was interested solely in her sister's entry - on lawn bowls!

A similar concern echoes my ambivalent feelings about the selection criteria used in a NSW museum of sportspeople, where 'fairness and equity' have resulted in 13 per cent of the collection representing women. No, I did not count the women's entries in *OCAS*, but I did submit a (longish) list of names for my sport which was (understandably) pared down. In the main, however, those included in the book were people with contemporary appeal. I accept that the individuals who used to illustrate my sport may be seen as important by future readers. But I can't help but feel that this doesn't apply in all

cases. One biography concerns a young person, Duncan Armstrong, who achieved a world record and Olympic gold medal in 1988. Clearly, the criterion for Armstrong's inclusion was not an editorial decision to include all medal-winners and record-breakers. This particular sportsperson may have gone on to bigger and better things. But it was a bit dangerous to assume this particularly in an Olympic year. In fact, Armstrong was far from the limelight in Barcelona - while other medal-winners and record-breakers rapidly emerged. Sadly, they were too late for *OCAS*.

OCAS does attempt to cross the abyss between 'traditional' sports-writing and critique. As the Bibliography amply demonstrates, the majority of sports-writing is undertaken by fans (whether professional writers or not) in celebration of their heroes or their sport (see for example those under the heading 'Sport Life Saving'). Of course this is not necessarily a bad thing - indeed it is precisely what many people want to read. Nonetheless the inclusions in *OCAS* of theoretical and general articles such as 'Gender', 'The Australian Way of Sport', 'Media', and 'War' provides a breath of fresh air in their efforts to explain the role of sport in Australian society and its effects on Australia's development.

On the issue of women in sport, *OCAS*'s coverage seems to be the broadest I have come across in general reference works. Although I was disappointed to see the old 'Women' entry in the Bibliography, it (thankfully) doesn't appear as a discrete topic in the text proper. By avoiding this trap for the unwary the editors have indicated a more than token interest in the important role of women in sport.

On a visual level, the book leaves a good feeling too. The cover is tastefully done, and my random readings unearthed few typos (apart from a personal gripe about the oft-misspelt given-name on page 410 - my own! (Lovella rather than Louella). The text itself is well laid out, and the information is in an accessible form. The choice of illustrations - using the guiding principle of rarely or not previously published illustration- was good, with an even-handed approach and some nice

lateral thinking at the point of selection. However, if the book was designed for reference purposes and dipping-into, it's disappointing that there is no list of illustrations. Similarly, although images are thought to speak directly to their viewer, I'm of the opinion that good captioning can make or break an image's impact - a bit more thought (and more complete information) for *OCAS* captions wouldn't go astray.

On a final positive note, *OCAS*'s breadth of information is certainly unavailable anywhere else to my knowledge: only one of my own subjects for bibliography had entries in currently existing biographical registers. Sportswomen, in particular, have been hard done by in past registers, so full marks need to be awarded on this score. Furthermore, on the definitive test for usefulness for a reference work, *OCAS* was successful. During a telephone call, my father was adamant that a certain sculler had won a particular event. Unbeknown to him, I consulted the *OCAS*: he would be pleased to know that he had got it right - if I had the courage to tell him that I had questioned his accuracy!