

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*. University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994. Appendices, chronology, index, notes, lists pp. 540.

The two most recent books of any substance on Australia and the Olympic Games are Gary Lester's *Austratians at the Olympics: A Definitive History* (1984) and Max and Reet Howell's *Aussie Gold* (1988). While both these books make valuable contributions, there was a clear need for a more comprehensive 'story' of Australia and the Olympics. Harry Gordon's book has provided that 'story'. Gordon's has the credentials to write this book. He has a track record as a sports journalist and biographer: he published *Young Men in a Hurry* (1961) and *Dawn Fraser* (1965). He has attended most Summer Olympics since 1952.

The book was commissioned by the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) to mark the centenary of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which was formed following the International Athletic Congress at the Sorbonne University, Paris, in 1894. The AOC gave Gordon unlimited access to private papers, letters, minutes and documents. He was funded to search in the archives and library of the IOC at Lausanne and to travel and interview key administrators and athletes in various locations. Gordon states in the Introduction that 'I have been given assistance and total goodwill, but the shaping of the history, the path of the narrative, the interpretation and shreds of emphasis have been mine alone'.

The organisation of the book is excellent. Forewords by John Coates, Herb Elliot and Dawn Fraser are informative as is Gordon's Introduction. The content of the twenty-seven chapters is chronological, commencing with 'The Lion of Athens', focusing on Edwin's Flack's success at the inaugural Olympic Games in 1896 and finishing with 'And the Winner Is', highlighting the Sydney 2000 bid. The book is encyclopaedic, with forty-seven pages devoted to lists of the performance of every Australian at the summer and winter Olympic Games. The Index (13 pp.) is also comprehensive. The collection of photographs,

many of them previously unpublished, complement the text admirably. However, it is disappointing and somewhat surprising that no acknowledgment of the sources of the illustrations is provided. Referencing is sparse or confusing in some chapters.

The three years of intensive research combined with Gordon's journalistic background have been fruitful - the book is a fascinating and pleasurable read. In addition, Gordon's emphasis has been on the 'athletes' - and rightly so. Gordon has gone beyond Lester and the Howell's, who focused primarily on the gold medallists, to provide interesting and informative background on all Olympic medallists. He provides, as well, some indication of the infrastructure of respective sports, their governing bodies, the Australian Olympic Federation/Committee and to a lesser extent, the State Olympic Councils. Coverage of governing bodies is important because there have been some significant squabbles and sordid moments behind the scenes in the Australian Olympic movement

The history of events leading to Australia's involvement in the Olympic movement is an original contribution which has not appeared in book form before. The inclusion in Appendix I of a three-page letter of April 1894 from Basil Parkinson, Honorary Secretary of the Victorian Amateur Athletic Club, to our 'representative' on the British AAA (C Herbert), is an added bonus. Gordon's material on the formation of the IOC is interesting. However, I believe that there remain opportunities for other authors to provide informative accounts of the organisation of the International Athletic Congress in the Sorbonne, Paris, and the involvement (and non-involvement in some instances) of Australian officials and athletes. The activities and roles of the first IOC members in Australasia, Leonard Cuff and Richard Coombes, will also shed light on the extent of organisation and the bureaucracy of sport in Australia and New Zealand around the turn of the century.

Gordon has done more than merely focus on the athletes. The Olympic movement encompasses far more than the athletes, and is also

greater than the AOC (formerly the Australian Olympic Federation [AOF]). Gordon, without question, has provided the most informative and detailed history of this organisation ever published. However, even a well-researched book has dilemmas which the author must confront. Gordon could have delved further, and written more, on the development, role and machinations of the AOF/AOC but had he done so the book might not have been as suitable to his target audience who were more interested in the primary focus of Australia at the Summer Olympics rather than manoeuvring behind the scenes. The author has achieved an appropriate balance. He has also introduced many significant issues relating to Australian social and sports history.

Some of the excellent sections relating to the Olympic movement and the AOF/AOC deal with IOC members in Australia. Gordon has made excellent use of the oral history tapes of David McKenzie, IOC member in Australia from 1974-81, who is profiled very effectively. While there are some interesting insights into other IOC members, there could have been greater exploration of their impact on the Olympic movement and the AOF/AOC. More research could be undertaken on the role and significance of the AOF/AOC - a possible undertaking for the centenary of the AOF.

Harry Gordon has provided a comprehensive and authoritative history of Australia at the Olympics. This excellent historical account is now the definitive work on the subject and will encourage others to undertake further research on Australian Olympic history.

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