

## Book Reviews

**Geoff Armstrong and Mark Gately, *The People's Game: Australia in International One-Day Cricket*. Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1994. Bibliog., Illus., stats. pp. 295. \$24.95.**

A history of Australia in Limited Overs internationals poses a number of fundamental questions. Is the history of this postmodern game which emphasises 'instant gratification' (as Ian Harriss noted) of any consequence? Are the fans, who flock to this game, interested in its history? Do the statistics of the abbreviated game have any accepted meaning? How should they be read? In what sense is 'one-day' cricket the 'people's game'?

Limited Overs internationals have now been a regular part of the Australian summer for almost two decades but this is the first attempt that I know of - other than for books on the World Series Cricket crisis - to write a history of the game. Many traditionalists have contended the abbreviated game is played in an ahistorical void, with each game following a reasonably-predictable script, important on the day but forgettable by the time of the next match. While the details of far less predictable Test matches lodge in popular memory, few can recall particular Limited Overs games. I have watched - and enjoyed I must confess - many Limited Overs matches but can only remember two in any detail: the see-sawing 1975 World Cup Final (which kept me up to 6 am in the morning) and which featured some spectacular run-outs by Viv Richards; and the 1987 World Cup Final, which marked the beginning of a period of Australian ascendancy in this game and was remarkable for a much-criticised unsuccessful reverse sweep by the English captain Gattling. By contrast, I can remember vividly the events and even precise details of many Tests.

What then constitutes the history of the abbreviated game? When matches are taken out of the context of a particular Series or Cup do they stand up to retrospective scrutiny? Do the scores have any larger significance beyond a moment in time?

The authors struggle, at times, with some of these issues including the meaning of Limited Overs statistics. They seem a trifle bemused by the occasion when Garry Cosier took 5/18 and Greg Chappell 5/20 against England in 1977 - the only occasion when two bowlers each took five wickets in one innings of a Limited Overs international. The authors admit that this double 'five fer' was far from memorable: that it was achieved by 'Chappell ... and Cosier, a portly right-hander who bowled slow, usually harmless cutters from a brief, waddling approach, remains amazing' (p. 54).

There is also the problem of reading the statistics of the game, which are included in an impressive and welcome twenty-eight page statistical appendix. Should the reader focus on the player's average, the aggregate or runs per over (or per 100 balls)? How should one compare the figures of an opener, who has time to settle in, with that of a number six batsman, who has to thrash from the start Is the average of Geoff Marsh (39.97) comparable with the average of a number seven, Simon O'Donnell (25.34)? What is a good average (and run rate) for an opener as compared with a middle-order bat?

The inclusion of many glossy pictures throughout the book suggests that the authors have attempted to tap into the popular market however whether this book will be read by many of the fans of the abbreviated game is problematical. Those who have promoted the game have not exhibited much interest in its history or the game's traditions. It may well take time for Limited Overs cricket to invent its own traditions, and ways of measuring performances from one era to another. It is likely as well that those cricket followers who are enjoy reading cricket history - the quality end of the market - are more likely to read books about Test and first-class cricket, which has long established traditions and history. It is ironic that when it comes to the issue of historical readership the roles between Test and abbreviated cricket may be reversed. The older game has an established audience whereas the more modem game appears to attract a much more limited market.

Limited Overs cricket, of course, has a history, and even a fascinating history, which will be read by social historians, if not by a mass readership. While the details of a succession of matches may not be all that illuminating - I had long forgotten a controversial tie which had occurred in season 1983/84 whereas details of the two Test ties are etched in my memory - there are many other intriguing issues and changes in the abbreviated game.

This book has an interesting discussion of the first Limited Overs international, which occurred by accident in Melbourne in 1971 attracting 46 006 spectators. Armstrong and Gately explore the attitude of players to this match and to Limited Overs games in the 1970s, when many regarded one-day games as light-hearted practice or exhibition games. Although a few, such as Bradman and Benaud, recognised the potential of Limited Overs, Australian administrators were hardly at the forefront of the promotion of the one-day game. Only three of the first eighteen internationals were played in Australia. Australian players were disadvantaged for a long time because they played so little limited overs cricket, far less than English cricketers in particular.

One valuable feature of this book is that it includes short features on individual players since the 1970s. The authors explore their attitudes to the new game: what they thought of it, how they adapted to it, whether they preferred it or Test cricket. Initially the players simply treated one-day cricket as a normal game before they began to realise its special demands and tactics. The changing perceptions and tactics employed in the Limited Overs game is worthy of a book in its own right. In an article prepared for *the Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket* (1996) Chas Keays has explored the changing tactics over the past decades: such as whether to bat first; the deployment of bowlers and the role of spinners and changing rates of scoring.

While this book may be misguidedly directed to a possibly non-existent popular market, it has much useful material for social historians. Whether we like it or not, Limited Overs cricket is now part of cricket

history and to ignore it is to write partial history. Limited Overs cricket continues to have a dramatic influence on the game since 1977 and the history of first-class cricket is intertwined with the abbreviated game.

The authors have chosen a title which is catchy, though hardly an original, one in that it was used by James Walvin in his history of soccer published in the 1970s. This begs the question whether one-day cricket can be compared with soccer and even rugby league in this respect. The working classes became prominent in the organisation of both games in the late nineteenth century and played a creative role in their development. I doubt whether it is valid to compare soccer with this modern version of cricket which is a packaged form of mass culture promoted for many years by PBL Marketing. However, Armstrong and Gately argue that Kerry Packer quickly became aware that there was a popular groundswell for one-day night cricket. A case can be made for a more restricted use of the term, the 'people's game'. 'Packer cricket' had its populist elements making cricket more accessible and Australian than before.<sup>1</sup>

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**NOTE:**

- 1 I have argued this way in 'Packer Cricket', D Headon, J Hooton, and D Home, eds, *The Abundant Culture: Meaning and Significance in Everyday Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995, pp. 80-5.