

# Book Reviews

**Paul Dobson, *Doc: The Life of Danie Craven*. Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1994. Illus., index. pp. 297.**

In my review of Ted Partridge's biography of Danie Craven, *A Life in Rugby* (see *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 11, no. 1, Nov. 1994), I made the comment that Partridge should have drawn on two previous biographies of Craven, written in Afrikaans, to provide a definitive and detailed biography for the international market. I also expressed the hope that Paul Dobson would rise to the challenge. Dobson's book has now been published and is an excellent work.

Dobson was educated by the Dominican Sisters and the Marist Brothers, first in Rondebosch (Cape), then Australia and later in Natal. He began teaching at the Diocesan College (Bishops) in Cape Town in 1958 making a name for himself as a national rugby referee and author of books such as *Rugby in South Africa: A History 1861-1988* (1989). He is currently Chairman of the Western Province Referees' Society and serves on both the Executive of the SA Referees' Society and the Laws Committee of the SA Rugby Football Union. He knew Craven for many, many years and during that time made careful notes of all Craven's idiosyncrasies and sayings. The book, which is based on 120 sources and written in an accessible and humorous style, is a winner.

The book covers Craven's early days in Orange Free State; his student life at Stellenbosch; his relationship with 'Oubaas Markötter' (his mentor); Craven as rugby player, teacher, coach and selector; his relationship with the *Broederbond*; Craven as President of the SA Rugby Board; tours; colours; Craven as author—'he wrote more books on rugby football than anybody else in the history of the game'—the Craven Week for schools; his rugby clinics; Craven and the press; his awards; his financial abilities and disabilities; his religion; Craven as a person; and lastly his death. The only aspect of Craven's life neglected by Dobson are his experiences in England and Europe, just before World War II, when Craven was studying physical education. The inclusion of a chronology (1860-1993), a list of sources and index, makes the book even more valuable. This is, by the way, the only Craven biography with an index.

There are very few errors in this biography though Dobson does suggest that the University of the Cape of Good Hope is a Stellenbosch

Institution (p. 13) which it is not. There is some occasional repetition though it does not annoy the reader as it is blended with new information. Dobson is effective in his synthesis of facts from different eras.

Craven decided that his staff members must specialise academically and Dobson lists the subjects on p. 32, omitting to mention the natural sciences like applied physiology, biomechanics, anatomy and so forth. On p. 36 he makes a distinction between 'little-known' and 'ancient' games, listing *ourania* as a 'little-known' rather than an 'ancient' game. Another contradiction is the statement that Craven was not personally ambitious: 'I never had the ambition to become a Springbok (p. 58)'. Yet, elsewhere in the book Dobson related Craven's disappointment when he was not elected Captain of the touring side to New Zealand. He may have meant the honour of leading his country rather than the fame of being its captain. There is also a reference to a person, De Vos, who taught rugby to the students of the Victoria College at Stellenbosch (p. 74). Surely this must be Stellenbosch College as the name was changed to Victoria College in 1887 and Stellenbosch students played rugby long before 1887. The first rugby played at Stellenbosch even predated the founding of the Stellenbosch College in 1881. On p. 118 reference is made to a biotechnician instead of a biokinetician. There is a quotation from Wilkins and Strydom that the *Broederbond* was the 'most powerful underground organisation in the Western world (p. 131)'. This is debatable—were they more powerful than the Mafia? Dobson also claims that the naming of the South Stand at Newlands after Craven was a total surprise to him (p. 183). Then, why did Craven have a fez ready to put on his head to salute the 'Malays'—as it was traditionally 'their stand'—during the opening ceremony?

Craven always used negative comments to spur people on. From Dobson's book it appears that this habit originated with his father and 'Oubaas Mark'. As a child he once accidentally overheard his parents saying that he did not have the brains of his two older brothers. 'For much of the rest of his life he would strive to prove his parents wrong!' Was this maybe why Craven did three doctoral dissertations? If one reads Craven's book on Markötter, one could see that Craven moulded himself on the younger Markötter. The latter used to 'kick players up, not down'. Like Markötter, he never praised a player. Craven believed that if he praised a person, there was nothing more he could do for him.

Praise would make him complacent as well, forsaking his quest for truth. 'For many merely being noticed by Craven was praise enough!'

The book makes fascinating reading. For instance, the Australian reader would find it interesting to read that Craven scored his first ever Test try against the Wallabies and that it was the Springboks who taught the All Blacks to scrum! Shorter tours and France's entry into the IRB were all due to Craven. He did not know about the New Zealand Cavalier tour until they landed in South Africa in 1986.

This book is well researched and written. It pays tribute to Craven's life-long effort to serve the game in general and Springbok rugby in particular.

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