

**Omar Henry with Keith Graham, *Omar Henry: The Man in the Middle*. Queen Anne Press, London, 1994. Index, pp. 240. £16.99.**

Omar Henry was born on the wrong side of the tracks in the Coloured community of Stellenbosch and learned his cricket on matting wickets in predictably poor conditions. When he was a teenager his family was moved to Idas Valley under the Group Areas Act. A latter-day Basil d'Oliveira, he went to play for Western Province, Boland and Orange Free State in the Currie Cup; for white South Africa versus the Australian mercenaries of 1986/87; for South Africa versus India in 1992: and, most remarkably, for Scotland (as captain). One of the photographs amusingly shows Henry attired in cricket pads and a kilt.

Unfortunately, Henry has not been well served by this heavily ghost-written account. Apart from the dead weight of those laboured and frequent phrases 'as I've already said' and 'Don't get me wrong, but ...', Eddie Barlow makes the preposterous claim in the foreword that 'he, and he alone, was the one person who, because of his colour, became a symbol in South African cricket'. What Barlow means is that he was the sole black cricketer used by the establishment for propaganda purposes. Henry joins in this fantasy by arguing that cricket made more progress towards the elimination of racial divides 'than any other sector of life' (p. 173). And again we are exposed to the tired old cliché that in the 1960s and 1970s it was against the law to play multi-racial cricket in South Africa (pp. 39-40). It was not against the law; it was against white custom and the policy of an illegitimate government, an entirely different proposition. Henry argues that 'the nature of things had seen the game develop as predominantly a white sport' (p. 153), a curious interpretation by a victim of the effects of colonialism and segregation, apartheid and racism.

The most interesting part of the book is Henry's account of his expulsion from the non-racial South African Cricket Board for infringing the double standards resolution. The resolution demanded a total boycott of all establishment sport by players affiliated to non-racial bodies. It was a challenging requirement but a worthwhile commitment made by thousands in the face of an authoritarian government becoming increasingly vicious as the end of apartheid loomed. Henry briefly watched cricket at Kingsmead and then refused to apologise for his transgression. In a chapter headed 'Kangaroo Court' he describes what sounds like a successor to the Spanish Inquisition. Allowing for the fact that things are always different in the Cape, it is important to record that elsewhere in the country such hearings were a model of legal decorum and probity. In a situation of extreme socio-political dislocation, adherence to matters of principle was taken very seriously.

Henry admits that he was treated shabbily by officials of some of the teams he played for; and that some white players were racially prejudiced against him. He chose to live with this and other insults provided by apartheid law, but deludes himself in believing that the 'moment of glory' represented by his selection for South Africa against the Australian mercenaries was for the 'non-white community' (p. 141). He is also in error in claiming that he was the first from the 'Coloured'

community to play for South Africa. He is out by ninety years: Charles Bennett Llewellyn, a 'Coloured' man from Pietermaritzburg, won fifteen caps for South Africa between 1896 and 1912 in the twilight years before segregation become entrenched.

Most black cricketers took a far more robust attitude to apartheid sport and the commercial enterprises that fed off it. The problem is that the literature on South African cricket is increasingly consigning them to the margins of history.

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