

**Robert Pascoe, *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*. Text, Melbourne, 1995. \$22.95.**

Any historical monograph which presents itself as 'the' history of some location or event, or whatever, is immediately open to criticism. But when Robert Pascoe adds the term 'complete' to the subtitle of his work on Australian football, he presents as something of a sitting duck. *The Winter Game: The Complete History of Australian Football*. is a useful reference book on Australian football, which offers snippets of insight without ever analysing issues in sufficient depth. As a record on information concerning football in the elite leagues of Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, it is thorough. (If you do not wish to wade through the pages of description of seasons you can just go to the appendices). But as the complete history of Australian football, it is inadequate.

The first oversight occurs in the introduction. In establishing the 'Barassi Line' which divides rugby territory from Australian football territory, Pascoe dismissed Australian football in Queensland and New South Wales. Pascoe may be surprised to find that from the mid-1860s until the late 1880s football played by the 'Victorian rules' was the principal code in Brisbane and Ipswich and in most of Queensland. Despite the rise of rugby, football has maintained a presence there, and the Brisbane Bears arrived in the city with a weight of history and tradition behind them. (This was one of the reasons why Carrara was such a failure).

Pascoe also has difficulty deciding on his audience. At times, the work is explanatory, as if produced as a missionary tract for overseas pagans; at other times, it assumes an intelligent readership who enjoy an understanding of the subtle nuances of the game, its culture and its place in the broader society.

For the latter the book is very frustrating. Just as Pascoe embarks on a provocative analysis of many important issues he is drawn back to the temptation of games, results, premierships and goal-kickers. This is the case at various stages with regard to religion, ethnicity, class and aboriginality. A good example exists where he introduces the importance of comedy in football referring to the outer without giving supporting examples although when he returns to this idea in a later chapter he does illustrate his point. His references to print journalism at various stages in his book could have been developed and coordinated to produce an

excellent expose on this topic. (He rightfully acknowledges the role of The Greatest Game in the analysis of football in culture).

Herein lies an organisational problem. Although the chapter titles hint at themes, the book is actually structured as a chronological account. At times, there is only token consideration of the theme suggested by the chapter title. Occasionally, material is included which runs contrary to the theme of a particular chapter.

The book is not without good qualities which makes it a worthwhile volume for the shelves of football analysts and lovers alike. (Indeed, Pascoe has difficulty hiding his own passion for the game. The text often presents the voice of Pascoe the fan, rather than Pascoe the social historian, which may have been an asset, had the historical analysis been stronger. Perhaps this says more about the quality of the game than the quality of the book). The work on football and the community is of particular note. Pascoe is also able to bring to life some of the individuals who have been part of the game and its culture. The discussion of film and video records at various points in the book is valuable and invites further study.

Many of the snippets of analysis are themselves illuminating but they are certainly not 'complete'. Generally, the book is frustrating for the academic historian and sociologist as it tends to mention issues in passing rather than offer comprehensive and systematic analysis. However, it is a useful reference text to whet the appetite.

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