

Mike Procter with Patrick Murphy, *South Africa: The Years of Isolation and the Return to International Cricket*. Queen Anne Press, London, 1994. Index. pp. 240. £19.99.

At first sight this is another ghost-assisted biography by a prominent sportsperson complete with thumbnail sketches of players past, present and future, fantasy test selections and plenty of statistics. But underneath this standard fare are some interesting insights into the attitudes of one of the 'lost generation' of South African Test cricketers.

Mike Procter now has the grace and honesty to admit that the boycott was justified: 'It took isolation to make us understand what had

to be done' (p. 154). The players of the 1960s, he maintains, 'suffered from the shortcomings of our politicians' (p. 10). They were hardly shortcomings but blatantly racist policies, closely shared by those who administered white cricket. Procter takes the easy way out throughout this book by blaming politicians and making the odd reference to social conditions while failing to reflect on their connection with sport.

Procter was of course one of the players who took part in the famous walk off at Newlands during the Test trial of 1971. At the time this was criticised by Hassan Howa and the non-racial South African Cricket Board of Control as a public relations exercise. The inversion of some of what Procter has to say about South African cricket in the wilderness years helps to explain why non-racial cricket thrived.

It is quite obvious that the introduction of a few black faces to first-class competition in the early 1970s was window dressing. The South African African Cricket Board was not a moderate organisation but one prepared to accept the paternalism which had been South African government policy since 1956. The rest of the world did not have an 'out-of-date opinion of South African society' in the late 1970s but an increasingly clear understanding of what reformed apartheid was all about. The mercenary tours were not brave and supportive but about money (lots of it) and the creation of a facade of normality (as admitted on p. 87). In view of these and many other truths it is hard to sustain the Procter thesis that South Africa was the victim of a hypocritical world, devious politicians, movable goalposts and other unsporting tactics.

Procter makes a convincing and supportive case for Ali Bacher's township development scheme for young black cricketers marred only by the spelling of the names of several of the venues. It is a pity that this could not have been placed in a more rigorous historical context than one which blithely abolishes all discriminatory laws affecting sport in 1982, buries apartheid at various dates and portrays cricketers as leading the way to a non-racial society.

Christopher Merrett
University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg