

**John Ross, ed, *100 Years of Australian Football, 1897-1996*. Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1996. Bibliog., illus., index. pp. 383. \$49.95**

There is no doubt that this extremely handsome volume is a football 'blockbuster' in every sense of the word. Featuring an impressive, eye-catching cover, a text of nearly four hundred words, a plethora of black-and-white and colour photographs, and a vast array of illustrations, advertisements and cartoons, the official centenary publication of the Australian Football League (AFL) is certainly the best 'coffee table' book detailing the history of any football code yet published in this country. The book also represents excellent value for money, and because all Victorian Football League/AFL seasons receive relatively equal treatment in the chronology, supporters of every Victorian club will find something

of interest as the fortunes of their respective teams wax and wane over the years. Unfortunately, the early years of the Victorian Football Association are not covered in any great detail, but players, coaches, umpires, spectators, administrators, and even detractors of the game, are all given due consideration at various stages in the book, which is set out in six chronologically-arranged chapters. Highlights of each season are also featured in boxed sections, and relevant statistics, including ladders, finals' results, and leading goal kickers, appear in unobtrusive panels at regular intervals throughout the text.

Most of the material is presented in an 'as you were there' format, with accounts of games paraphrased from newspaper reports, a style similar to that adopted in other Penguin 'chronicles'. This season by season approach is sensibly broken up by a number of short thematic essays written by historians, journalists and a team of 'staff writers'. Many of the best essays are composed by well-known historians such as Geoffrey Blainey, Robert Pascoe and Stuart Macintyre, while other excellent contributions, often evoking a strong sense of football culture in Melbourne, are written by leading newspaper journalists, including Martin Flanagan, Keith Dunstan and Russell Holmesby. Although such a structure and diverse authorship work well and contribute strongly to the attractiveness and accessibility of the book, the technical details involved in the presentation of the material does create a number of serious problems in terms of the historical accuracy of the material. For instance, when accounts of the games are paraphrased, quotation marks are rarely used, and so it is impossible to determine whether the words used in the text are those of journalists from the period, an amalgam of different sources, or the interpretation of unacknowledged Penguin staff writers. Such a murky form of plagiarism, where the original source is not only altered but is not identified, deters and misleads those historians who would want to explore the events and issues in further detail.

From an academic viewpoint, lack of attention to photographic sources is also a major deficiency in the book. While the illustrated material is impressive in its variety, with action shots, crowd scenes, cartoons, artefacts and memorabilia items interspersed throughout the text, only the ownership, and not the date or the source, for these photographs is acknowledged. Again, while the overall appearance of the book may have been enhanced by omitting such 'unnecessary' detail, it seems a pity that the opportunity to provide a comprehensive photographic register was ignored. Of greater concern, however, is that

on some occasions the practice of omitting such detail deliberately misleads the reader and calls into question the methodology employed by the editors and the veracity of the material presented in the book. One particular example, among others, demonstrates the nature of this problem. An illustration depicting two women dressed in playing uniforms appears on page 43 as part of the 1899 season highlights. The caption, without quotation marks, implies that these women were spectators at Australian football games and that football was starting to have an influence on winter fashions in Victoria. No source is supplied other than an acknowledgement to the State Library of Victoria. It comes as something of a disappointment, then, to realise that this illustration first appeared in a British newspaper with the intent of poking fun at female rugby players. The illustration was only later reproduced in *Melbourne Punch*, along with the original caption from *London Fun*. None of this detail appears in the book. The point is that because there is no proper citation of the source, neither date nor newspaper nor author, it is impossible to trace whether an intentional error or a fabrication has been made on the part of the editors.

Other criticisms of the book are not so severe, although it should be mentioned that the index is poorly arranged and inconsistent at best, the bibliography is limited in scope, ignoring the growing number of postgraduate theses and journal articles that have appeared in the area, and the attempt to use symbols and arrows as a cross-referencing system within the text is poorly explained and capriciously executed.

Despite these negative comments, however, the book is a 'must buy for every sports historian and fan of the code. In a year when the AFL spent \$3.5 million ostensibly 'celebrating the history of football, there were precious few successes or positive returns for the embattled League administration, particularly given the circumstances surrounding the 'death' of the Fitzroy Football Club and the hostile emotions unleashed by the merger debates. With this volume, however, drawing as it does on the historical roots and culture of the game, the AFL can at least genuinely claim to have achieved something that is 'good for football'. We can only dream and hope for a definitive narrative of the game which takes account of the history and traditions of football in other states of Australia.

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