

**Richard Cashman, Warwick Franks, Jim Maxwell, Brian Stoddart, Amanda Weaver, Ray Webster, with assistance from Erica Sainsbury, eds, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket* Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996. Appendices, bibliog., illus., stats. pp. 640. \$59.95.**

Following the highly successful two editions of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Sport* (1992, 1994) — and a third forthcoming in 1997 — this Australian cricket ‘encyclopedia’ is a welcome addition to the growing body of integrated historical source material on Australian sport. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket* (OCAC) involves 102 authors from Australia and overseas and comprises some 1250 entries. Historians are increasingly looking for ways to collaborate rather than working in isolation, so this project is testimony to their cooperation on a massive scale. Perhaps we will see companions to Australian Rules football, the rugby codes etc. in the future. A companion to the Olympics is projected for release in 1999 in time for the Sydney Olympics.

OCAC includes around 1000 personal profiles representing all the men and women who have played Test cricket for Australia, plus notable Sheffield Shield cricketers and leading overseas players who have helped shape the game of cricket in Australia. Other biographical entries are

devoted to leading umpires, scorers and administrators, as well as cricket commentators and journalists. Procuring information on all these individuals must have tested the patience and tenacity of the authors and posed numerous headaches for the editors. Nonetheless, for cricketing aficionados and sports historians the biographical entries and accompanying statistics will be a valuable source. Perhaps an abridged edition for the 'average' reader might be considered as details on those who played only a Test or two may not be of wide general interest.

*OCAC* is, however, much more than a compendium of past players, officials, etc. It also contains entries on major cricket grounds around Australia and essays on other cricket-playing countries. These entries help place the game in a broader context. Most importantly of all, the volume includes 50 thematic articles covering a vast range of subjects such as cricketing legends, crowd behaviour, the influence of the media and commercial interests. These pieces provide the book with academic rigour. There are also 23 feature articles on special aspects of cricket such as the art of spin bowling and major 'incidents' such as the Lillee-Miandad confrontation of 1981. These essays are generally entertaining: Geoff Lawson's piece on 'fast bowling' is particularly amusing, which suggests he may yet live up to his namesake 'Henry'. The essays are also insightful. Lex Marinis, a social commentator and comedian, notes that there have been a relatively small number of 'ethnic' Australians in cricket but that around the world the game is now played 'by more non-Anglos than those of Anglo-Celtic background: the West Indies, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and South Africa, as well as the emerging African countries' (p. 174). And as Colin Tatz argues with consternation (pp. 2-5), we only have to look at the virtual absence of Aborigines at Test level to realise that discrimination has been rife throughout the history of Australian cricket.

A good portion of the book is devoted to women's cricket, which provides female players with needed profile and recognition. As thematic essays on women's cricket confirm (pp. 594-600) the game has been considered widely to be a male domain, this hampering women players' efforts to be taken seriously as athletes of calibre. Some 'traditional' readers of cricket literature may find the presence of women in this volume to be an unwelcome intrusion; but it is a necessary and timely addition. Indeed, what is plainly missing from the volume is a thematic essay on cricket and masculinity!

Two further serious omissions spring to mind. Essays on amateurism and professionalism would seem to have been mandatory in a collection such as this including a discussion of shamateurism (W G Grace's conditions for touring Australia for example). There are also a few minor errors: of all things the words Australian and cricket are misspelt on page xv; Bradman's tally of first-class runs reads as 2806 instead of 28 067 (p. 636); Warwick Franks writes peculiarly that 'the performance encapsulates the performance quality of [Keith] Miller' (p. 366); while Wray Vamplew must be wondering why he is not listed in the Key to Authors. I was also a little disappointed in the selection of photographs in the book. Images, for example, of Merv Hughes (p. 257) and Dean Jones (p. 280) playing before a handful of spectators is not particularly inspiring, while twin brothers Mark and Steve Waugh (pp. 568,570) are obscured by helmets — which makes it difficult to 'personalise' them. In such cases 'close-up' shots might have been preferable.

Overall, *OCAC* is a thoroughly absorbing collection that will be enjoyed by lovers of both men's and women's cricket. Like baseball in the United States, cricket is often claimed to be the nearest thing to a national sport in Australia. Whether or not we agree with such a view, this volume goes some way towards making it appear so — though we can hardly compare the level of public support for cricket in Australia to that of the popularity of baseball in the USA. Nonetheless, whatever way cricket develops in the next century, one thing is certain; *The Oxford Companion to Australian Cricket* provides an outstanding guide to our cricketing past.

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[An abridged version of *this Companion*, *The A-Z of Australian Cricketers*, will appear in late 1997. Ed.]