

**Kerry Murphy, *Kerry Murphy's Memoirs: Diaries of an Irish immigrant*. Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 1998. Appendices, illus, index. pp. 383. \$34.95 plus postage from Walla Walla Press, PO Box 717, Petersham NSW 2049.**

It has been established that sport is one of the most important cultural vehicles through which immigrants ease into life in their new country while maintaining linkages with their homeland. The historiography of this phenomenon is large in the United States but until recently has been scantily treated in Australia. Some scholars, such as Phil Mosely, in *Ethnic Involvement in Australian Soccer: A History 1950-1990*,<sup>1</sup> have begun to analyse the meanings of sport in immigrant communities. Mosely focuses on the relationship between many migrant communities and the sport which is seen by many Australians as *the* 'migrant' game — 'wogball' as it has been called. John Hughson<sup>2</sup> completed a doctoral thesis on the 'Bad Blue Boys' which support the Sydney United Football Team (formerly Sydney Croatia). In fact much of the historiography of sport and immigration in Australia has focused on soccer. A sea change in this area of scholarship was achieved with the publication of *Sporting Immigrants: Sport and Ethnicity in Australia*. The sporting activities of eight immigrant communities in Australia was analysed and individual chapters were devoted to ten different sports reflecting the divergence of sporting interests of immigrants in Australia that the 'Wogs and Soccer' paradigm ignores. *Sporting Immigrants* was an agenda-setting study. Hopefully sports historians in Australia and New Zealand will respond to the challenges set by this book.

For the sports historian and scholar of immigration *Kerry Murphy's Memoirs* offers a timely insider view of sport in an immigrant community

in Australia. A man with limited formal education, Kerry Murphy sets out to tell 'a simple story of life the way I saw it and lived it and loved it and also of our games and pastimes' (p. 3). It is the work of a common man who was intimately involved in all facets of the culture of his ethnic community — music, dance, language, sport, religion, charity and politics — from the day he arrived in Australia on 21 February 1950.

The book is divided into *two* parts; *Kerry Murphy's Memoirs and Essays in Gaelic Culture in Australia*. Part One focuses on Murphy's early years growing up around Knocknagoshal in Co. Kerry in south-west Ireland. This section will have limited appeal to sports historians. It is a familiar recitation of nostalgic nationalism which lays the blame for all of Ireland's ills over seven hundred years squarely in the lap of the English. While there is no doubt that the Irish have suffered from the English jackboot it is plainly unhelpful not to recognise Irish complicity in this history.

There is a problem with the early part of the memoir in that Murphy confuses 'memory' and history with 'learned traditions'. He was born in 1918 yet he represents images and memories of the Black and Tans, the Irish Civil War and the War of Independence as his own. By the time these events had come to their only partially successful conclusion (from an Irish Republican point of view) Murphy was only four years old. Yet he speaks of the 'burnings, rapes, looting' and the rest, perpetrated by the 'Tans' (p. 12) — a hated unit that operated in Ireland in the early 1920s (which occurred the author was only three) — as part of his remembered past. It is more likely that his memory represents a mixture of the rich local folklore with the version of history every Catholic Irishman was taught at school.

Like many Irishmen Murphy is a keen student of his country's history and it has obviously played an important role in the shaping of his identity and motivating him in his lifelong community involvements. Those scholars looking for sharp analyses of the forces that controlled life in his time in Ireland won't find it here. But beneath the surface of tired republican rhetoric they will find some rich insights into life in a small rural town in Ireland at the time it began its journey towards a modern nation state.

His emphasis on the importance of Gaelic games, music, song, poetry and story telling provides some insight into what kept the people going through war, oppression, and difficult economic times. These early

chapters are full of amusing anecdotes and descriptions of rural life. His practical explanations of some of the tall tales told to children is a highlight of chapter three; the use of superstition by adults as a means of social control.

However, the book suffers because of a 'Good Old Days' view of history when 'men were men and women were proud of it' (p. 2). He speaks of his own birth at the family home when 'most were born at home and very little ever went wrong', (p. 11). This ignores the reality that the child mortality rate then was nineteen per thousand. When Murphy relates cheerfully of the prevalence of large families — one of his neighbours had 26 children — he appears oblivious to the suffering of the mother of those children.

An important feature of Part One is the insight given to the feelings of the about-to-depart migrant. In the days of sea travel it was usually good-bye for ever and so akin to death. In the Irish case the immigrant 'did the rounds' receiving send offs and well wishes from all in the surrounding area. Murphy promised his parents he would see them in five years but he never saw them again.

An annoying feature in this representation of history is the presentation of 'facts' without citation and in many cases of dubious validity. Murphy claims 'in my father's time' an Irish triple jumper, Thomas Lar Wren, jumped over 48 feet (p. 32). Such a leap would have won gold in the first six modern Olympic Games,<sup>3</sup> and Ireland's champion triple jumper, Eamonn Fitzgerald, jumped 49 feet 3 inches to finish fourth in the 1932 Games.<sup>4</sup> While this book is not written for an academic audience, exaggeration and inaccuracies diminish the enjoyment of the read. A curiosity is a table presented as a 'List of All Ireland Champions County Colours' (p. 34). It contains all 32 counties — all of which have not been All Ireland champions. The list excludes London, which has and is an important part of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) story. This part, which also contains many 'layman's' views on world events which are linked to Ireland in one way or another, show a charming naivety yet lack of awareness of geopolitical reality.

Part Two of the book will be of great interest to those interested in sport in immigrant communities. Historians of Irish Australia will welcome this part of the Murphy story. He was intimately involved in the development of the New South Wales and Australasian GAA. His knowledge of the internal politics of the organisation is immense as it is of

the teams and personalities involved in the association for almost half a century. There is an exhaustive list of names; teams; championship winners. There are contributions from interstate members of the GAA which help to fill out the national story. Murphy successfully demonstrates the importance of Gaelic sports to the Irish community and the proactive role they play. The relationship between Irish business and sport is another interesting facet. The GAA often serves as a de facto employment agency; real estate agent; introduction agency and counselling service. (Murphy himself personally met newly-arriving Irish immigrants at the wharves). As in other ethnic communities the sporting club is a safe haven within an alien host culture and often an entrance to the social networks that enable the immigrant to find work, accommodation, and places to socialise.

Many readers may be surprised at the scope of activities of the GAA. An annual national championship for hurling and football is held as are interstate representative games. International games have been played against touring All Ireland champions and the Irish community of the USA, demonstrating the importance of the GAA in the Irish diaspora. Teams have also been sent overseas although not on a regular basis.

While most Australian immigrant sporting organisations tended to cater only for men, Murphy demonstrates the GAA has always been mindful of the sporting needs of female immigrants. In the 1950s basketball clubs were provided for women. Since the 1980s, women's football has become very popular. Many women have become involved in administration.

Overall this book provides us with one man's personal view of the world. The immigrant experience can be painful, exhilarating and rewarding all at the same time. The passion this man has for his native country and its traditional games is the most striking feature of the book. He has made it a mission of life to promote and advance these native games in the Australian Irish community. The book is thus a powerful multicultural statement. Although Murphy has lived almost five decades in Australia, Gaelic sports and Irish Australian networks are still the focal point of his life.

For the sports historian the book provides the base for a fuller analyses of the Gaelic Games and their impact in Australia. It's a great pity from that point of view that footnotes and a bibliography were not provided.

The book is a well presented hardback with a handsome dust jacket

and there are many fine photographs which enhance the text. Walla Walla Press, a fledgling in the publishing industry, can be proud of this their second offering.

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#### NOTES:

- 1 Philip Mosely, *Ethnic Involvement in Australian Soccer: A History 1950-1990*, NARC, Canberra 1995.
- 2 John Hughson, 'A Feel for the Game: An Ethnographic Study of Soccer Support and Ethnic Identity', unpub. PhD thesis, UNSW, 1996.
- 3 D Wallechinsky, *The Complete Book of the Olympics*, Penguin Books, New York 1988, pp. 95-7.
- 4 D Wallechinsky, *Complete Book*, p. 97. Also see Lindie Naughton and Johnny Watterson, *Irish Olympians*, Blackwater Press, Dublin, 1992.