

Book Reviews

Steve Errington, *City Matting to Suburban Turf: A History of the Western Australian Suburban Turf Cricket Association 1896-1996*. **Western Australian Suburban Turf Association, Perth, 1996, pp. 229.**

It was recently contended that modern Australian writing on cricket is unsurpassed in excellence. This observation was from the perspective of the quality of the authors. Another dimension of this excellence is the breadth of the subject matter that is currently being investigated. Apart from the traditional biographies and coverage of Test series, works have emerged on topics such as captaincy, grounds and even umpiring. The important political and sociological dimensions of cricket have been addressed in the histories of the various state cricket associations. Another challenge has been to research some of the junior or minor associations that have an important place in the cricket culture of each state and territory. Invariably the records for 'junior' or 'minor' bodies are poorer and the commercial markets for such works are more limited. However, Steve Errington's history of the Western Australian Suburban Turf Cricket Association is a very professional attempt to fill the vacuum of research concerning the breadth of cricket in Western Australia outside the more well known and higher profile Western Australian Cricket Association (WACA).

Junior or minor associations may not appear to be apt terms although the organisation which is the focus of this book, when first formed in 1896, was called the Western Australian Junior [Cricket] Association. Junior implied being outside the senior competition and was not a reference to the age of the players. Moreover, the Western Australian Minor Cricket Association was also once the name of the organisation. This was considered to be an outcome of the tabulation of cricket results in the newspapers where the WACA and other cricket results were differentiated for readers. It should also be understood that what is now known as the Western Australian Suburban Turf Cricket Association has never been able to conduct most of its fixtures on turf wickets. At one stage the Association was called 'Metropolitan Senior Matting'. To play on turf has been an objective of the Association with only a minority of the clubs being able to negotiate terms with their local government councils or schools to have turf surfaces. Indeed the book provides an interesting resume of cricket surfaces other than turf, including clay and cement,

various malthoid covers, plexipiave (an acrylic surface coating), types of matting and synthetic turf.

The beginnings of 'suburban turf', closely linked to 'gold fever' of the 1890s, can be traced to the rapid growth of the Perth and Fremantle metropolitan population. Suburban competitions, with rivalry between Perth and Fremantle being especially keen, sprang up in sports such as Australian Rules football, baseball, rugby union, lawn bowls, cycling, cricket and tennis. The latter, was mainly played as a winter sport for cricketers with some of the early tournaments being controlled by the WACA, which also had tennis courts at its ground in the Perth city area. In December 1889 Western Australian cricket had taken a major leap forward when the WACA was successful in persuading Governor Broome to grant the WACA a 999 year lease (later converted to freehold) on fourteen acres of land in East Perth. The Western Australian Junior Association (come Suburban Turf), and for that matter tennis, did not share in the great advantage of having such a facility located so close to the central business district.

The tasks of recording the rule experiments made by the Association, the composition of the teams, annual coverage of the winning sides, and outstanding performances for a century of cricket were formidable. Indeed, this exercise has been undertaken with fastidious care by author Steve Errington. The detail provided in the appendices was also excellent. Some of the differences in the rules were fascinating such as a hit over the boundary line once being called a 'fiver'. Better known is how the number of balls in an over changed at various times from four, to five, to six and eight. A question not answered was whether Suburban Turf ever experimented with the contentious lbw rule. Well covered, however, were the various incentive points formulas for runs and wickets, in addition to the premiership points for draws, ties, winning on the first innings or outright (including by an innings).

One of the major contributions of the Suburban Turf history is the recognition it provides for fine cricketers and performances in the state's cricket history outside the WACA competition. Darryl Gillies, for instance, played with outstanding success as a batsman, bowler and fieldsman for 25 seasons, playing in all eleven of Swanbourne's first grade premierships. An outstanding innings played by an opening batsman, Brad Hopes, in October 1993, scoring 347 not out, including 27 sixes and 34 fours, deserves to be remembered. Ten-wicket hauls for bowlers were also

noted but it has apparently only been achieved on a few occasions.

The history provided recognition to an army of voluntary administrators. Characters such as Jos Barrett, Norm Buchan, Stan Power, Les Felstad and Ross Arlow, to name a few, appeared repeatedly throughout the text. Association histories can recognise the dedication of voluntary officials which are vital to the health of a sport. Actually the author himself, Steve Errington, was himself a club president, and was also listed as a life member of the Association. Despite the importance of voluntary labour the delicate problem of levying fees to meet the costs faced by the Association was well illustrated. The first forays into sponsorship by Suburban Turf were unsuccessful but after modernising its corporate image some monies flowed to the Association. Some players began to receive payments for their services.

One of the hurdles faced in such an exercise is the absence of big names and events with which to link the history to make it more readily comprehensible for even the cricket reading fan. It was learnt that Test cricketers Tony Lock, Bob Massie, Martin Bicknell, Roshan Jurangpathy and Alan Mullally played Suburban turf at some stage of their careers. Just prior to World War II, when the Association played interstate matches in South Australia, Glyn Kessey, the wicket keeper for the party would later gain distinction as the keeper for Western Australia's inaugural Sheffield Shield winning team in 1947-48. More recently Terry Prue graduated as a player to international umpire status. Perhaps an opportunity was missed during the Packer upheaval to entice such famous players as Dennis Lillee and Rod Marsh to Suburban Turf (given that they were unable to play for Western Australia), but the Suburban Turf Board in 1977, after much discussion, voted to uphold the ban on such cricketers laid down by the WACA. Generally, though, the plethora of names and changing teams is difficult to absorb. Of course, sporting historians have to uncover the ground and this type of exercise it is not always brimmed with interest. However, the author did give coverage to many of the local football heroes who played Suburban turf to keep themselves competitively sharp during the summer months.

Predictably the book gave full coverage of the relationship between the WACA and Suburban Turf. As late as 1995 there was a larger than usual number of WACA players who transferred to Suburban Turf. This was largely in response to a decision by the WACA that its first and second grade teams commence at 11.00 am on Saturdays, rather than

Suburban Turf's 1.00 pm start and no Sunday play. The general theme of the book is one of a productive relationship between the WACA and Suburban Turf particularly in terms of the provision of administrative offices. Perhaps the question needs to be asked whether cricket in Western Australia would be stronger, particularly for marketing and junior development, if all the cricket bodies were under one umbrella. However, *City Matting to Suburban Turf*, leaves the impression that the Association has a distinctive cricket culture in Western Australia which can now be better comprehended as an outcome of Steve Errington's scholarship.

Harry Phillips
Edith Cowan University