

Michael Roberts and Alfred James, *Crosscurrents: Sri Lanka and Australia at Cricket*. Walla Walla Press, Petersham, 1998. Illus., scorecards. pp. 168. \$50 hardback, \$19.95 paperback.

Ian Woodward, *Aussies versus Windies: A History of Australia-West Indies Cricket*. Walla Walla Press, Petersham, 1998. Appendices, illus., scorecards, stats. pp. vii + 260. \$29.95.

These two books represent a welcome widening in the perspectives on Australian cricket writing. While the enthusiastic crowd response to the 1998-99 Ashes series underlined the special position of these matches in the ethos of Australian cricket, it is also obvious that there are many ways in which English cricket is increasingly marginal in the development of the world game. Yet such has been the concentration of Australian cricket writing on the Anglo-Australian game that Mike Coward's *Cricket Beyond the Bazaar* (1990) has been one of the only books to go beyond the Lord's-MCG axis.

In terms of results, the West Indies have been Australia's most formidable opponents. So far, these contests have fallen into three distinct periods, the first of which ran from 1930-31 to 1975-76, during which Australia won 24 and West Indies seven of the 41 Tests played. Conversely, in the 36 Tests played from 1978 to 1992-93, the West Indies won nineteen

and Australia six during the long period of Caribbean domination of world cricket. Currently, it seems possible that a third stage may be dominated by Australia, although the 1999 series in the West Indies underlined the danger of making facile predictions.

Each of the first two periods produced a dominant image of West Indies cricket which stood in stark contrast to one another. From the earlier period, the joyous 1960-61 tour by Frank Worrell's team made an indelible impression on Australian cricket followers. Following the funereal 1958-59 Ashes series, the tied Test in Brisbane, the Adelaide draw and the general spirit of chivalrous flamboyance helped to shape a sense of the Caribbean cricketers as the laughing cavaliers who would entertain us but not beat us too often. In contrast, after 1978, there came the transformation of the West Indies into a machine of awesome effectiveness, based on a combination of menacingly lethal fast bowlers who hunted in quartets, batting which was dismissively confident and immaculate fielding, cemented and directed by the captaincy of Clive Lloyd. The cavaliers may have ceased laughing but they were now accorded a sometimes cowed and often awed respect.

Ian Woodward's history of these Tests is reliable, restrained and balanced, providing a chronological account of the cricket in each series in prose that is unaffected and accessible. For this reader, however, the book is too unambitious and too restricted to a match by match account which limits its impact. It would seem to be vital to offer the reader the opportunity to understand the place of cricket in the West Indies, particularly the ways in which the game has been both an expression of a kind of Caribbean consciousness and at the same time a victim of inter-island sporting tensions.

Furthermore, the West Indies have been the most significant non-European presence in Australia's cricket experience. As such, it would have been valuable for Woodward to examine how these teams have been reported on and received in this country as a way of sketching the extent to which cricket mirrored or shaped perceptions of race in Australia. The 1930-31 West Indian team was the first sporting team containing a significant number of black players to visit these shores and it would have been useful to examine in some detail the terms in which they were reported but Woodward contents himself with a brief reference to the issue. For example, was Learie Constantine's athleticism presented as an expression of a racially-determined physical prowess?

This kind of issue had a pointed political dimension at the time of the 1960-61 West Indies tour of Australia. The popularity of the team and the cricket they played were such that uncomfortable questions began to be asked by some Australians, wondering at the morality of feting men who would not be permitted to settle here because of the White Australia Policy. The Dean of Melbourne, Dr Barton Babbage, preached on this issue just as the tour ended and soon after the Immigration Reform Group was formed. An exploration of this kind of issue would have given the book a vitally important context into which the on-field details could be placed.

In contrast, Sri Lanka has only made a recent impact on the Australian cricket consciousness, despite a connection stretching back to 1884. This connection remained long frozen in an image of the old Ceylon as a pith-helmeted outpost of Empire which was a stopping-off point for Australian teams travelling to England. The last four years, however, have permanently altered the picture. Umpire Darrell Hair's no-balling of Murali Muralitharan for throwing at the MCG on Boxing Day 1995, Sri Lanka's winning of the World Cup in 1996 after Australia refused to play qualifying matches in Colombo and the emergence of Arjuna Ranatunga as a red rag to the bull of many of the Australian players and most of the Australian press have meant that there is a puzzling new dimension to Australia's international cricket.

Sri Lankan born Adelaide anthropologist Michael Roberts is the dominating presence in the fascinatingly frustrating account of Australian-Sri Lankan cricket relations, *Crosscurrents*. It is a curious mixture: part history, part anthropological observation and part passionate polemic. The essays by S S Perera, Richard Cashman and Roberts himself offer the reader a useful, albeit brief, introduction to the history of Sri Lankan cricket, particularly its contacts with Australia. This material is vital to an understanding of the context and nature of cricket on the island, particularly the dominance of school cricket and the relative sketchiness until recently of a first-class structure. Australian cricket followers need to be aware of the distinctive culture of Sri Lankan cricket and one looks forward to a systematic and detailed account of it.

Roberts' anthropological interlude, 'An Ethnic Encounter at a Cricket Match', sits awkwardly in this collection as it needs more supporting commentary and explanation for Australian readers to appreciate the full ramifications of the subtleties of the ethnic interplay described.

It is the series of essays on the recent controversies in which Roberts is both most stimulating and most febrile. He argues that the strained cricketing relationships between Australia and Sri Lanka since 1995 bespeak an approach by the former which is arrogantly inept in its dealings with the new world champions. In these sections of the book, Roberts argues his case passionately and persuasively, even if at times his leaning towards conspiracy theories can become overwrought.

Roberts is on strong ground in arguing that Australian authorities mishandled the original Muralitharan episodes in 1995-96, a position which is reinforced by the repetition of these actions during the 1998-99 one-day series. He coins the term 'cricketing fundamentalism' to describe the notions which have circulated in the Australian media of there being a pure and universal assessment of the fairness of a bowler's action. The sense of outraged purity has been bolstered by the assertions of a number of journalists that it is only Australian umpires who possess the courage and integrity to call Muralitharan's action. That the whole apparatus of Australian cricket allowed the spectacle to be repeated at Adelaide last summer only serves to reinforce Roberts' argument.

Similarly, the refusal to visit Sri Lanka during the World Cup was characterised by a similar lack of finesse and diplomacy which was compounded by what Roberts demonstrates was a lukewarm response to Sri Lanka's winning of the championship.

The value of this book is that it offers to us another perspective on these recent controversial events, a perspective which needs sober consideration in the light of the mindless chauvinism which has been sometimes been offered as analysis in sections of the Australian media. It is the kind of approach which inveighs against Arjuna Ranatunga as habitually skating close to the outer limits of the laws and spirit of the game while presenting the Australian team as more sinned against than sinning. Peter Roebuck has raised the possibility that Australian cricket prefers the Sri Lankans to remain 'smiling and submissive' as the exotic other who ultimately should know their place. We will be the poorer if we fail to understand the kind of dimensions to Sri Lankan cricket which Roberts explores in this book. On the other hand, the production in Colombo or Kandy of two or three bruisingly intimidating versions of Holding, Walsh or Ambrose could rapidly accelerate this process,

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