

Book Reviews

John A. Daly, *The Splendid Journey: A Centenary History of Amateur Swimming in South Australia*. **South Australian Amateur Swimming Association, Adelaide, 1998. Illus. pp. 192.**

Swimming in creeks, dams, harbour pools, rivers, sea pools, filtered pools and in leisure centres has been a central feature of Australian culture, yet there has been very little written on the topic if you compare with other sports like Australian football, cricket, horse racing, golf, rugby league, rugby union and tennis. This is one reason why Daly's *The Splendid Journey* is a welcome addition to recent swimming historiography which has comprised only a handful of sources including Douglas Booth's, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf-Lifesaving' (1994), Alan Clarkson's *Lanes of Gold: 100 Years of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association* (1990), John McDonald's *The First 100: A Century of Swimming in Victoria* (1993) and Veronica Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912* (1992)¹

Another reason why *The Splendid Journey* is valuable is that the sport of swimming, and the development of the South Australian Amateur Swimming Association (SAASA), is examined in the context of wider social issues. Daly introduces his book by drawing on Philip Drew's argument, contradicting Russell Ward's view, that it was the coast, not the bush that has predominantly shaped Australian culture. The beginnings of swimming in South Australia are described against a backdrop of developments in the colony and the role of the sport in early colonial life. A key defining feature of swimming was the role of the early professional entrepreneurs – in particular Charles Bastard – and the struggles with amateur swimming officials that prompted the formation of the SAASA. For any scholar interested in the amateur / professional dichotomy, the first four chapters are very informative as they describe, in one institutional setting, the process by which amateurism became hegemonic. During these early chapters, Daly established that the Association was instituted in 1898. This historical nugget demolished the myth that the SAASA was formed in 1907 which led to a phantom jubilee celebration in 1957.

A prominent issue in this history is the role of women in swimming clubs and the Association. The social and cultural context that limited female participation in the early years, that enabled the first female representative of the state in 1930, that resulted in the formation of a

separate organisation for women in 1938 and its subsequent merge back into the SAASA post World War Two, and that has resulted in women gaining access to executive positions including President, enriches this history. Another worthwhile endeavour of this book is the efforts to pursue the relationship between geography and swimming. Daly shows the fundamental importance of waterways to the development of both competitive and recreational swimming as it was the Torrens River and the Port Canal that were the sites of many clubs and their pools. A wonderful series of photographs help tell the stories of the river clubs. Daly also traces the development of swimming pools as cultural sites from the Adelaide City Baths opened in 1861 to the establishment of the Adelaide Swimming Centre in 1969 and its subsequent upgrading to the Adelaide Aquatic Centre two decades later.

Daly is also prepared to address the relationships between local coaches, coaches and swimmers, and coaches and administrators in South Australia. The most prominent coach in the State was Harry Gallagher who came to Adelaide in the mid-1950s and brought with him one of Australia's most famous swimmers, Dawn Fraser. The relocation of Gallagher was a mixed blessing: 'The Sydney coach introduced scientific methods, twice a day training, attention to detail. He raised the status of coaches in SA not only in swimming but also in other sports. However he was not liked by his peer group because he actively recruited their best athletes and was often dismissive of their expertise' (p. 105). As this citation highlights, Daly is prepared to recognise tension within the sport. In fact, analysis of conflict is a central tenet of the book and is typified by his narrative of the relationship between city and country swimming. Country swimming was blessed with keen administrators, plagued by inadequate facilities, and there was discord over the years with the SAASA because of the perception that it was a city-centred Association. These tensions and attempts to ameliorate the situation are detailed in a complete chapter devoted to country swimming.

In the final three chapters of *The Splendid Journey*, changes in the SAASA are explained as Australian sport was injected with financial resources from State and National governments, as sporting associations were transformed from organisations run by volunteer administrators to professionals, as coaches have become increasingly important and coaching programs have been developed, and as athletes have been given financial assistance to develop their skills for competitive

performances. South Australian swimmers were supported by government funding following the establishment of the Australian Institute of Sport (1981) and the South Australian Institute of Sport (1982), a full time executive director of swimming was appointed in 1982, and an out-of-state coach was controversially appointed in 1988. Daly skillfully crafts the South Australian experience on a backdrop of the altering landscape of Australian sport.

In summary, Daly has produced a very readable, well researched and engaging history of swimming in South Australia that ensures local personalities and the defining features of the sport are integrated into a wider understanding of Australian sport. The SAASA have every right to be extremely happy with their centenary history.

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- 1 Douglas Booth, 'Swimming, Surfing and Surf-Lifesaving', in Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart, eds, *Sport in Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 231-254; Alan Clarkson, *Lanes of Gold: 100 Years of the NSW Amateur Swimming Association*. Lester-Townsend Publishers, Sydney, 1990; John McDonald, *The First 100: A Century of Swimming in Victoria*. Swimming Victoria, Melbourne, 1993; and Veronica Raszeja, *A Decent and Proper Exertion: The Rise of Women's Competitive Swimming in Sydney to 1912*, Australian Society for Sport History: Studies in Sport History No. 9, Campbelltown, Sydney, 1992.