

Bernard Whimpress, *Passport to Nowhere. Aborigines in Australian Cricket 1850-1939*. Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 1999, pp. 298, \$29.95.

Why have there been so few Aboriginal cricketers when Aboriginal footballers and boxers abound in the last few generations? This question stimulated Bernard Whimpress to undertake this investigation of Aboriginal cricketers. He produced an important book for a wide range of people from cricket enthusiasts through scholars in Aboriginal history to members of Aboriginal communities across eastern and southern Australia. It examines the origins, progress and demise of the involvement of Aboriginal men in cricket over three generations to the Second World War.

As the title suggests, the book argues that the long-term theme of Aborigines in cricket was discontinuity. Promising starts and fine performances in the end bore little fruit for Aborigines or Australian cricket. In taking this view, Whimpress disagrees with some earlier writers, notably Genevieve Blades and Colin Tatz, who he claims have exaggerated the extent of cricket played by Aboriginal groups, and also the status of some Aboriginal cricketers. He also disputes Blades' emphasis on the top down introduction of cricket by missionaries in the nineteenth century to civilise Aborigines through cricket. Whimpress uses a diffusionist model to guide his analysis, arguing for the multiple origins of Aboriginal cricket, including Aboriginal directed lateral and bottom-up origins. Aboriginal people moving from mission to mission or pastoral station to mission introduced cricket to their kinsmen.

This book of his recent PhD thesis displays a wealth of exhaustive research and careful analysis. Whimpress explores five major missions in detail and the careers of the six most prominent Aboriginal cricketers to 1939, including Johnny Mullagh, Jack Marsh and Eddie Gilbert. Where work already exists on these cricketers, Whimpress always discovers a new angle. For instance, he researched in detail Johnny Mullagh's country cricket career in the Western District of Victoria for the first time. His analysis of Jack Marsh's career is also a fine example of subtle research. Whimpress argues that Marsh suffered from more than simple racial discrimination as he battled the intrigues of test selection. Indeed, he experienced no such discrimination at the club or popular level. Whimpress' treatment of speedster, Eddie Gilbert, is given a freshness by his discussion of throwing and also the predilection for spin bowling in the 1930s, both of which did not favour Gilbert for test selection.

Whimpress aims to steer a course between the two recent schools of Aboriginal historiography, the 'oppositionists' who emphasise racial discrimination and the structures of colonial dominance and the 'revisionists' who stress Aboriginal agency in resisting or accommodating colonial power. He argues that Blades and Tatz have exaggerated racial discrimination in their explanation of why Aboriginal cricketers did not reach the eminence some of their skills and performances deserved. He puts forward complex, not single strand discrimination arguments, as to why some Aboriginal cricketers missed test selection. However, Whimpress still gives racial discrimination its due. He points out, that while only twenty-six first class cricketers of the thousands who have played to date have been accused of throwing and their careers halted, three out of five Aboriginal first class fast bowlers before 1939 suffered the same fate and missed Test and further state selection.

Despite his aim to balance 'oppositional' and 'revisionist' approaches, Whimpress does not provide a sustained analysis of Aboriginal agency in cricket. There is no penetrating exploration of the meanings of cricket for individuals who succeeded at the game or the communities that sustained these men. They were also symbols of regional and state patriotism when they played representative cricket. What sense of self did these successful Aboriginal cricketers develop at a time when Aboriginal men were not admired in any other field by a racist society? A closer interrogation of photographs, press reports and crowd responses might have yielded results. They were also the heroes of their own people. Although Jack Marsh seemed to have severed kin linkages, Albert Henry and Eddie Gilbert had a strong following on Queensland reserves. Whimpress could have tackled these questions through communal and family memories. He would have found that for some Aboriginal men, cricket was a passport to somewhere, the admiration of km and one's own self esteem.

There is also a fascinating denouement to the Johnny Mullagh story in the Western District that Whimpress can only partially tell. The white Australians of Harrow appropriated Mullagh after his death in 1891. His cricket prowess boosted the esteem of the Western District and Harrow in particular and the passing of this respectable black who played the colonial game, one of the last of his group, closed the local Aboriginal story and thus the immediate threat in the District. The citizens of Harrow are currently embarking on a new round of appropriation of Mullagh to boost the ailing fortunes of their town.

Thus the 'oppositionists' line holds true overall. Aboriginal cricketers were more controlled than in control. In the wider world of colonial Australia, test selection was, by custom not law, open only to white Australians in the years before 1939. It is this situation that is admirably and carefully explained by Bernard Whimpress in a book that will reward and delight interested readers.

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Janet Cahill, *Running Towards Sydney 2000: Olympic Flame & Torch*. Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 1999. Illus, pp. 97, \$19.95.

With the countdown to the Sydney 2000 Olympics now being measured in months rather than years, books on the Sydney Olympics are beginning to flood the market. Most of the books appearing in Australian bookshops are devoting themselves to the endless glorification of past Australian sporting achievements whilst others will be jumping on the high-expectation bandwagon that is surrounding many of our current Olympic athletes. Too few books are likely to be concerned with a critical examination of the Olympics in terms of its broader social, cultural, political and economic implications. If the latter type of book is considered to be the front-runner and the former a backmarker, then *'Running Towards Sydney 2000: Olympic Flame & Torch'* by Janet Cahill is a book that sits comfortably midfield.

Cahill's work is modest in scope. With a focus on the Olympic flame and torch as symbols of the Olympic Games, Cahill seeks to provide the reader with insight into the Ancient Olympic origins of the torch and flame as well as its revival in the Modern Olympics in 1928. Cahill, who is currently the Olympic Project Manager at the University of Technology Sydney, has successfully argued that the torch and its associated ceremonies are the most enduring traditions that remain from the ancient Olympics.

The primary shortcoming of the book is its uncritical nature. The best opportunity to adopt such a stance was in her discussion of sponsorship of the torch relay. Unfortunately, there was an apparent reluctance to probe for greater insight within a commercialisation or commodification framework. Reasons for this are not especially difficult to identify given