

George Piggins and Ian Heads, *Never Say Die: The Fight to Save the Rabbits*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2002, pp XXII + 312 illus (paperback) \$30.00

Mum took me to see South Sydney play in their last grand final win on Saturday, September 18, 1971 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the historic sporting arena in Sydney. I was nine years old. On Friday July 6, 2001 the Full Bench of the Federal Court upheld South Sydney's appeal after a long legal battle and setback after setback. Within a week Souths was readmitted to the national Rugby League's 2002 competition. I was thirty-nine years old and had supported South Sydney all my life and I cried. The link between these two events was George Piggins, chairman of the South Sydney District Rugby League Football Club.

This is his story as told to veteran Rugby League journalist Ian Heads and told in an easily accessible manner. This will not only appeal to South Sydney fans everywhere but also to those of us who follow any sporting team with any passion at all. A flavour of the book can be illustrated as follows:

For some, the club was a mother and father, the biggest thing in their lives. They were crying with happiness. And outside the court building there was dancing in the streets, car horns blowing and red and green flags waving And I was thinking – God strike me dead – all I did was stand up for a principle (pp. 3-4).

The book is split into two sections. The first section outlines Piggins' early life in Mascot (an outer suburb of Sydney in the 1950s), his rugby league career, his working life: "Work has always underpinned my life. I have virtually never been unemployed since I was 15 years of age" (p. 49) and his business interests

in areas as diverse as the trucking and nursery industries. He was able to sell his business in 1984 and retire early. It also deals with his post rugby league playing career involved in coaching and administration at South Sydney and takes the story up to the year prior to the Super League fiasco. This is significant in that this gives the reader an insight into the world that Piggins lived and the environment that helped shape the figure he has become.

The second section of the book deals with Piggins' interpretations of events since Super League: how it has affected himself and his family, his club and also his view of the opposing NRL/News Limited camp. He also delves into the internal conflicts within South Sydney and his involvement in them. Piggins deals with the court cases that Souths were involved with during this period too. Throughout, Piggins pulls no punches and his language can best be described as colourful. This is illustrated by the following passage where he savages Denis Fitzgerald, the Parramatta CEO:

I didn't (and don't) think much of Fitzgerald, and certainly don't need his lectures. I ended this way: 'I remember a bloke once saying to me about the treachery surrounding the whole rugby league battle: "George, the more I understand humans, the better I love my dog." Denis, let me simply end this by saying that every time I see your name in print, I have this terrible urge to walk my dogs (p. 247)

It has to be said that undoubtedly there will be people both outside and inside the South Sydney camp that will disagree with Piggins' interpretation and recalling of events during this period specifically since Souths was excluded in October 1999 from the NRL. However at the end of the day, this is his story and he has certainly earned the right to tell it in the colourful, emotive and evocative fashion that he does.

To sum up, this tale was never going to be an objective one covering the events of the recent past. It couldn't possibly be. That telling still awaits and the challenge remains out there for somebody to take this task on. However, to the many, many thousands of people who love this great club, so what! This publication gives us an insight into one man's unbelievable stubbornness and courage when fighting for values such as tradition, loyalty and fairness encapsulated by the South Sydney Football Club and its loyal followers. Given today's society that we live in, that cannot be a bad thing, can it?

P.S. At the time of writing, South Sydney was badly beaten in their first game. However, as one fan said to me 'It's better than the last two years and there is always next week!'

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