

Raelene Boyle and Garry Linnell, *Raelene: Sometimes Beaten, Never Conquered*, HarperCollins, 2003, pp. x + 325. RRP \$39.95.

If you asked most Australian sports followers for their memories of Raelene Boyle, they may remember her role in the opening ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games where she entered the stadium with the legendary Betty Cuthbert; or her wonderfully succinct remark 'What a relief when Cathy Freeman won the 400m athletics gold medal at those same Olympics. Older followers will never forget her 400m swansong at the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games where, at thirty-one, she ran and won her final individual event in her international career in front of an adoring public and with an extraordinary media interest. However, this book co-authored with Walkley Award winning journalist Garry Linnell, tells us much more about this legendary Australian athlete.

The book is broken up into three sections, an approach that in this instance works well. Part One deals with Boyle's approach to death when friends and family are taken from her and her thoughts in dealing with her own diagnosis of breast cancer in 1996. Part Two deals with her athletics career from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s, the highs and lows, her memories of Olympics and Commonwealth Games in which she competed, as well as the reasons behind her absence from the boycott-ridden 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. This section also provides a significant snapshot of what it was like to be involved as a competitor at the highest level of Australian athletics during this changing period for her sport. The third section of this book deals with her life off the track, her relationships, her diagnosis of

ovarian cancer (after she had already contracted breast cancer) and how she fought these illnesses. We hear of her enlightening views on the Sydney Games, and her life since, which also deals with her general health.

Australia produced very few world class athletes during the 1970s, but Boyle was the premier Australian athlete (male or female) during this period. This book therefore is important on two levels.

For the sports historian, it is one of the few published accounts that discusses the difficulties facing an elite Australian athlete at the highest level. Boyle's insights into women's athletics are incisive and an important contribution to athletic history. Her remarks on the drug culture that pervaded the Eastern Bloc and East Germany, in particular, make very pertinent reading. This is especially important given the drug taking by various international athletes that have come to light recently. Sadly, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

The book also provides a moving account of Boyle's battle with ill health since her retirement, particularly the breast and ovarian cancers from which she has suffered. Women of all ages will gain much from reading the chapters that deal with these struggles.

This book is a significant addition to the small library of athletics literature in this country. It is well presented with many excellent photos and a valuable index. It is a no-holds barred account of an extraordinary life, led at times in trying circumstances, and Boyle has not spared herself. Her honesty and forthrightness are refreshing. I can think of no finer tribute to her but to end the review with the following quote that ends the book:

'My name is Raelene Boyle.

I've been beaten. But I've never been conquered' (p. 310).

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