

The Imperial Game: Cricket, Culture and Society. Edited by Brian Stoddart and Keith A. Sandiford. Manchester University Press, Manchester and New York, 1998. 178 pp. UK price: £40.00. ISBN 0-7190-4978-4.

FOLLOWERS of the England–Sri Lanka cricket match played at the Adelaide Oval in late January 1999, part of Australia's one-day World [sic] Series, need little reminding that cricket in the late twentieth century is still the imperial game. The on-field dispute in which Sri Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga interrupted play to lead his team to the edge of the ground objecting to the provocative and highly controversial no-ball call against bowler Mutiah Muralitharan, was only the latest and most public episode in the decolonization of the game, a process which has lagged behind political decolonization by as much as 50 years. Only in 1993 did the international governing body of the game, the International (formerly Imperial) Cricket Council, cease to be administered from the inner sanctum of that flagrantly reactionary body, the MCC. The struggle which spilled over onto the playing arena in Adelaide replicates in many respects the old contours of empire in which non-white, 'developing' nations occupied a subordinate position to the entrenched authority of the white imperial establishment.

Such a view runs against that other common notion that sport — and cricket most particularly in the British Empire — ran ahead of and subverted, at a popular level at least, the conventional relations of empire when colonial teams on tour or at home managed to inflict defeats on English teams. While Keith Sandiford's introduction to *The Imperial Game* suggests it is essentially a story 'about the colonial quest for identity in the face of the colonisers' search for authority' (p.1), the chapters reveal histories and societies where two playing sides, and empire and race, were only two axes of a multi-dimensional cultural theatre where many meanings were played out in the course of a match. *The Imperial Game* suggests that no simple formula can be applied in understanding the complex cultural exchanges of empire.

Stoddart and Sandiford's collection only marginally addresses the contemporary struggles exposed in a very 'uncricketing' manner in Adelaide, though they form a central part of a concluding reflective chapter on the game in the postcolonial context. The central theme of the book, the latest in Manchester University Press's impressive *Studies in Imperialism* series under general editor John M. MacKenzie, is wider. How is it that cricket, that quintessential product of mid-nineteenth-century Victorian England, which flourished, found its modern form and became the dominant metaphor for all that was idealized in the era of high imperialism, social darwinism and muscular (or manly) Christianity, has endured through decolonization, the dismemberment of empire and the complete repudiation of their ideological underpinnings? Cricket has not only survived in widely disparate societies around the globe, but has come to represent the strongest oppositional and nationalist positions in several places, as well as to be socially defining in others (for example Australian barracking). There can be nothing more English, and nothing more Indian, Stoddart observes, than the game of cricket as played on the subcontinent.

The contributors to this volume, all of whom are the authors of major socio-cultural histories of the game, explore the ways in which 'the imperial game' throws into relief key themes of continuity and disjunction in the history of empire. In South Africa cricket served as a symbol of division between the two major white populations before World War II and was there, as in most other places, as strong a signifier of class as race. In India it was only after independence in 1947 that cricket emerged to become the national game with a fervent popular following, largely a result of government-supported radio broadcasting with commentaries provided in all the major languages. In the West Indies, where cricket's organization adheres to the old imperial region rather than modern political or social boundaries, the game saturated life but also served to distinguish most finely the myriad geographical, race, class and gender

filaments of the Caribbean. In New Zealand the game's history reveals much about the enduring bonds of imperial deference rather than any tide of independence. Greg Ryan's elucidatory chapter provides a discomfiting corrective to the recent tendency to emphasize New Zealand's growing sense of independence and cultural maturity in the post-war or at least post-1960s years. It was 1978 before New Zealand beat England; Australia did so in 1910-1911 and South Africa in 1905-1906. There are times when New Zealanders, even historians, have reason to feel grateful to rugby union.

As in any collection the contributions are uneven, not so much in quality as in chronological focus and questions asked of the relations between cricket and empire. There is much to say and all have had to condense. *The Imperial Game* provides an engaging and useful distillation of a large and important literature in the knotty culture of imperialism. In the modern organization of the game the language of corporate managerialism prevails: spectators have become the sport's 'customers' or 'clients'. We are offered here, as readers of the history of the game, what would no doubt be described as a one-stop comparative shop.

And for all its unsavoury imperial and distasteful commercial associations, one senses that the contributors are all too aware of the irony of their own nostalgic attraction to a game played over intervals of drinks, lunch and tea by linen-clothed players belting leather and standing at 'fine leg'. Such an attraction, of course, stands in the face of the threat posed by the new empire of media moguls whose missionaries convey the 'word' via cable television and proffer the trade goods of franchised sportswear.

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The Loving Stitch: A History of Knitting and Spinning in New Zealand. By Heather Nicholson. Auckland University Press, Auckland, 1998. 308 pp. NZ price: \$49.95. ISBN 1-86940-188-3.

HEATHER NICHOLSON is a fervent advocate of the art of winding wool. Extensively researched, intelligently organized and generously illustrated, her book traces the history of knitting and spinning from their European origins through to their present-day craft revivals. After a series of chronologically structured chapters detailing the transformation from routine domestic manufacture to creative hobby, she supplements the narrative with topical chapters on the making and selling of yarn, pattern books, knitting education, men's knitting, competitive knitting and protest knitting.

There is a wealth of fascinating detail in *The Loving Stitch*. Time was when being able to turn the heel of a handknitted sock was an essential skill. Now even the most dedicated knitter seldom needs to accomplish that difficult task, reserving the specialist knowledge for babies' booties. The shift in the use of knitted fabrics from underclothing and garments for the lower limbs, like stockings and socks, to the more familiar upper body outerwear of jerseys, jumpers and cardigans was a major watershed in history of modern dress. Depression mend-and-make-do receives due attention. The chapters on the role of knitting in the two World Wars are sensitive and finely drawn. Nicholson notes, for instance, how packing parcels for servicemen overseas became a ceremonial event for women separated from their loved ones. Knitting comforts for soldiers was at once recreation, war work and an expression of tenderness towards absent friends. Obtaining wool for wartime baby layettes was very difficult, but determined women found ingenious ways to express maternal and grandmaternal pride in the form of little woolly garments. Throughout, Nicholson is alert to the emotional significance of