

# BOOK REVIEW

**Andre Odendaal, Krish Reddy, and Christopher Merrett. *Divided Country: The History of South African Cricket Retold: Volume 2, 1914–1950s*.** Cape Town: BestRed (an imprint of HSRC Press), 2018. xiv + 442 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$39.95. Paper. ISBN: 978-1-928246-16-16-9.

In May 2022 as I was finishing the review of this book, cricket was making the headlines, as allegations of racism against former senior White players post-unification were reaching an [anti] climax. The national body, Cricket South Africa (CSA), was embarrassingly forced to withdraw charges of racism against its national men's team coach Mark Boucher after the material witnesses declined to give evidence. In April 2022, former Director of Cricket Graeme Smith was cleared of charges of racial bias by independent arbitrators, with CSA ordered to pay Smith's legal costs.

These allegations and recriminations brought home the title of the book *Divided Country: The History of South African Cricket Retold*, by Andre Odendaal, Krish Reddy, and Christopher Merrett. The book relates the story of cricket in the first half of the twentieth century. But here we are, some three decades into a unified cricket structure, still grappling with issues of race.

In a world where understanding social forces eschews history, the pages of this book are sobering. Cricket and racism have had long innings in South Africa, as the authors point out. But they have a further intent that their work “will contribute to making the sport genuinely inclusive and actively intolerant of the inherited brand of class snobbishness, racism, sexism and social discrimination that has for so long been integral to cricket's culture” (14).

The post-apartheid period has witnessed the publication of a number of regional studies that have sought to “recover” the histories of Black cricket. Based mainly on already completed research, this four-volume history has a national rather than regional focus, and it covers the seven bodies that organized cricket in the country during the period under review. This, the second volume, covers the years from 1914 to the 1950s. It follows *Cricket and Conquest. The History of South African Cricket Retold: Volume 1, 1795 to 1914*, and will be followed by a further study that takes the

story of cricket into the post-apartheid period, with a final volume consisting of statistics. This unitary history is welcomed, especially as the two volumes already published situate the story of cricket within its wider social, cultural, and political context.

The authors are well suited for this project, as they have a long involvement in cricket as players and administrators and a solid academic grounding. André Odendaal is a former cricketer, cricket administrator, and an academic historian who has published on cricket and politics for over four decades; former schoolteacher, cricketer, and cricket archivist Krish Reddy also served on the executive committee of KwaZulu Natal; and Christopher Merrett, former cricketer and umpire, retired librarian at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and editor of the *Natal Witness* newspaper, has published a work on the politics of South African cricket and a critical study on the University of KwaZulu Natal.

As the title makes clear, *Divided Country* refers to the division of the sport during the period from 1914 to 1950, when there were seven boards governing cricket in South Africa. The game was divided by race, religion, and gender. A whites-only SA / Rhodesia Women's Cricket Association was started in 1952, with around 400 women who participated in a national tournament. This section alone makes the book a valuable acquisition. While the women faced great opposition from men, this was nevertheless a bold move, given that the International Women's Council only became part of the International Cricket Council in 2005, half a century later. The whites-only South African Cricket Association (1890–1977) selected the teams that represented South Africa.

The book is divided into five parts. Part One examines the First World War and (white) South Africa's involvement in test cricket to 1939, as well as the establishment of the South African Coloured Cricket Board (SACCB). Part Two focuses on segregation in general and in cricket in particular in the 1920s to the 1950s. Part Three discusses the competitions run by the different cricket boards in the post-World War Two period. Part Four examines aspects of women's cricket and the gradual move from racial to non-racial cricket, mainly among Indians, Coloureds, and Africans. The final part, consisting of over a hundred pages, provides comprehensive team and individual statistics for the over sixty tournaments played during this period.

This is an invaluable addition to the growing literature on cricket in South Africa. There are lovely stories of players and matches, anecdotes, and comprehensive notes and references. While some of the material has been published in different places, the authors expertly bring it together into a readable narrative. This magisterial study will be of interest to those interested in cricket history and those concerned with race relations during the periods of segregation and the onset of apartheid in South Africa, viewed through the lens of cricket. The book will certainly help change attitudes about who cricket belongs to in South Africa and perhaps help forge a

common purpose. It shows how far the country has traveled since the 1950s and even the 1990s, but as recent events show, the road ahead remains fraught with difficulty.

Goolam Vahed  
University of KwaZulu-Natal,  
Durban, South Africa  
[vahedg@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:vahedg@ukzn.ac.za)

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### **Suggested reading:**

- Schler, Lynn, and Itamar Dubinsky. 2020. "Green Eagle Nation: The Politicization of Sports Journalism in the Post-Independence Nigerian Press." *African Studies Review* 63 (4): 883–905.
- Tidrick, Kathryn. 2014. "The Masai and Their Masters: A Psychological Study of District Administration." *African Studies Review* 23 (1): 15–32.