



PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
LAUNCHING OF 'CRICKET WALKABOUT'
BY JOHN MULVANEY AND REX HARCOURT
KIRRIBILLI HOUSE - 12 JANUARY 1988**

With the Aboriginal Cricket Team making final preparations for its 1988 tour of England, and on the eve of what should be a thoroughly enjoyable match at Manly tomorrow, it is my very great pleasure to launch 'Cricket Walkabout' by Professor John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt, which tells the story of the Aboriginal cricket tour of 1868.

Macmillan are to be congratulated on this timely publication, which I am very pleased to see has been brought out in association with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

'Cricket Walkabout' makes an invaluable contribution to Australia's social history and its sporting history. With great scholarship, John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt have brought to life Australian colonial society and the Western Victorian milieu from which the players came.

They do not disguise the brutality which marked the race relations of that era and which was particularly bad in the Western Districts in the decades leading up to 1868.

Aboriginal social conditions, including health, were deplorable. Three members of a team who toured Sydney in 1867 died, directly or indirectly, as a result of the tour. One member of the 1868 team died in England.

'Cricket Walkabout' describes how cricket grew up as a popular game among the Aborigines of Western Victoria. The conditions in which they played cricket were most rudimentary. For example, Johnny Cuzens, one of the stars of the tour, learned to bat with a hurdle bar.

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All of this makes the achievements of the men of 1868 the more remarkable. Their tour began with an eight-day journey by waggon from Edenhope to Warrnambool and a secretive departure off Port Phillip Heads for Sydney, in order to circumvent well-meaning attempts to keep them at home.

While in Sydney, the team stayed on the beach at Manly, at the Pier Hotel owned by one of the tour organisers, Charles Lawrence, who also captained the side. George Smith of Manly, later a prominent figure in local politics in Sydney, was another backer, who accompanied the team on its tour of England. An Aboriginal team had in fact played at Manly in March the previous year and Smith had played in the Manly side.

After a few games in Sydney, the team sailed for England on the wool clipper, 'Parramatta', on 8 February and arrived three months later. So began the first tour of England by an Australian cricket team.

As Mulvaney and Harcourt point out, one record established by the Aboriginal tourists is certain to remain unsurpassed. Although reduced to a mere 11 fit players during the tour, between their first match at the Oval on 25 May and their last engagement on the same ground on 15 to 17 October, the players were in the field 99 days out of a possible 126, and they ranged almost as widely over the countries as is the practice of modern cricket tourists. Their 47 matches were played in 40 centres, across 15 countries.

Let me quote what 'Cricket Walkabout' has to say about the general circumstances of the tour:

"Playing conditions more rigorous than those faced by modern touring sides also imposed difficulties and added strain. While matches normally lasted only two days, there were more of them, which added to the time spent travelling, often in uncomfortable vehicles and delays were prolonged while waiting for transport connections. The hours of play were longer also than at present. Play began at 11 am or noon and usually continued until 7 pm or later. The addition of sporting exhibitions to the Aborigines' programme must have involved even longer hours. There were no tea breaks and the only interval was for lunch, a 35-minute period at some time between 2 and 3 pm. Most grounds did not provide special catering facilities for the players who had to take their chance with the crowd which thronged refreshment tents. If he was lucky, a player emerged with beer and sandwiches."

The pressures placed on the team's stronger players were remarkable. Johnny Mullagh and Johnny Cuzens played in 45 and 46 matches respectively. With Charles Lawrence, the team's English captain, they bowled 4234 of the team's 4983 four-ball overs. These three bagged 609 out of 714 wickets taken. They also did the bulk of the wicket-keeping between them, something even Gary Sobers, with his all-round talents, did only rarely.

In the batting, Mullagh and Cuzens, with Lawrence, also provided the strength. All three scored over 1000 runs on tour with Mullagh achieving nearly 1700 runs at the best team average of 23/65. Cuzens scored more than 50 on nine occasions and Mullagh on eight.

Mulvaney and Harcourt examine in detail the question of just how good the 1868 team was. They put the tour in the overall context of the evolution of cricket in the middle of the last century. The Aboriginal team arrived in England just when the rules and practice of the game were in a state of flux. Grounds and pitches were frequently in appalling condition. My team will be batting 12 tomorrow but in those days it was common for any number of players to be included in teams which were often also unequal in size.

The capacities of the tourists obviously fluctuated widely but, from the authors' analysis, it is quite clear that Mullagh and Cuzens were class cricketers by any standards. The redoubtable W.G. Grace praised them for their "very good all-round form" and their "conspicuous skill at the game" and although he did not play against them, he included a photograph of the team in his memoirs.

An idea of Mullagh's ability can be seen from an innings he played more than a decade and a half after the English tour. Mulvaney and Harcourt record that he opened the batting for a Western Districts side in Adelaide against Norwood, for whom George Giffen, the great Test Bowler, bowled unchanged, taking 6 wickets. Johnny Mullagh carried his bat for 43 not out in a total of 116.

John Mulvaney and Rex Harcourt have done Australian history and Australian cricket a magnificent service in writing this book. When the first edition came out 20 years ago to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the tour, the book and its subjects may not have received the recognition they deserved.

Now, in 1988, with some corrections and additional material - and I am delighted to learn of Bill O'Reilly's role in providing valuable archival documentation - this revised edition, coming out in conjunction with the forthcoming tour will, I am sure, make a big impact and do something to give Mullagh, Cuzens, Bullocky, Dick-a-Dick, Redcap and their fellows the place in our history which is rightly theirs. Aboriginal people - indeed all Australians - should feel pride in the success and character of the first Australian cricketers to tour England.

May I take this opportunity to congratulate Mark Ella, Ian King and John McGuire and the players, organisers and sponsors of the 1988 Aboriginal tour on the splendid venture they have undertaken. You will be great Ambassadors for Australia and I am very pleased to note that Colin Moynihan, the British Minister for Sport, has expressed his support for the tour.

I would also like to thank the distinguished Australian cricketers, past and present, who have agreed to offer their services in tomorrow's match for the Trinity Bay Cup, to which I am looking forward with great enthusiasm. I am sure that the game will provide an unforgettable opportunity for the Aboriginal cricketers to play with them and the public at Manly to see them.

And finally, may I also express my appreciation to Mayor Joan Cooke, Greg Smith and other representatives of the Manly community, who have shown such goodwill and imagination in putting on the match.
