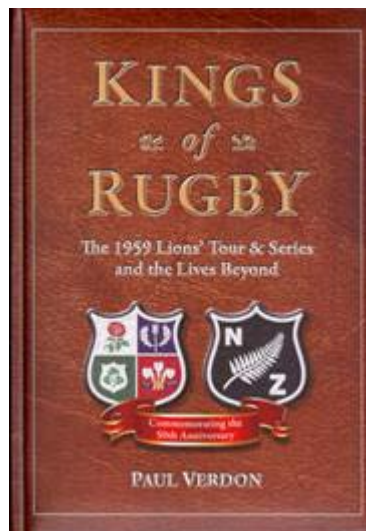


'Kings of Rugby'

The 1959 Lions' Tour & Series and the Lives Beyond



Book Review
by

www.rugbyfootballhistory.com

3/31/2009

Authored by: Nigel C Trueman

'Kings of Rugby'

The 1959 Lions' Tour & Series and the Lives Beyond

Book Details

Title:	Kings of Rugby - The 1959 Lions' Tour & Series and the Lives Beyond.
Copyright:	2008
ISBN:	0-9582387-6-6
Publisher:	Hill-Verdon Publishing Ltd.
Author:	Paul Verdon
Genre:	Sporting History, Rugby Union, International Tours
Description:	Limited edition book commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1959 Lions tour & series.
Characteristics:	Signed by ALL 43 surviving All Blacks & Lions players and the author. 1.5 kg, 255 pages A4 Padded Vinyl Cover Contained within presentation box Numerous colour and black-and-white photos
Price:	185GBP plus 20GBP P&P.

Review

The Author's intent was to create a commemorative tribute to the 1959 Lions' tour & series, fifty years on. The title is adopted in honour from Terry McLean's book of the same name.

Verdon was a school boy aged 12 at the time the tour took place but has strong memories of the Lions' free running and passing style of play and the friendly, almost evangelistic way the visitors engaged with their hosts throughout the tour whether in victory or in defeat.

It is obvious to this reviewer that immense care and thought has been exercised with the content and production of this book. When you consider the meticulous research, the extensive interviewing of the surviving players, the inclusion of their signatures, their profiles, the multitude of photographs, the detailed game by game match reports and the fine presentation of the material this is surely a labour of love with a value well beyond its price tag.

The author's style is relaxed and engaging throughout, making this book appealing to both the serious Rugby Historian and the casual reader interested in the feats of International rugby players past.

The book contains Forewords from Fred Allen, former All Black coach, and Cliff Morgan, Welsh and Lions International, after which the reader is introduced to some of the recurring themes and key issues from the tour by means of a Prelude and Introduction. The author then reminds the reader of previous tours which all helps to paint a clear picture of the anticipation which preceded the tour and the background on which events were to unfold.

The Author includes a chapter on his own recollections from his school days in Somerfield, Christchurch and the events leading up to the tour. There is also a chapter describing life in Christchurch during that period and a useful list of historic events happening back in Great Britain which will no doubt help the reader become acclimatized to a simpler yet special time.

Verdon then provides a profile of the Lions and New Zealand players. At this point my attention was drawn to the fact that this book is principally about the Lions in New Zealand and therefore the Australian players are not profiled, nor are the Canadians playing in the Vancouver and Toronto games (actually two were not even Canadian), however, these games are included in some of the statistics tables at the back of the book and in the game reports.

The bulk of the contents of the book is given up to a chronological report of the tour in both Australia and New Zealand with a full report provided for each game. The reports also provide team lists, venue, attendance etc. and make fascinating reading. There is plenty of background information surrounding events before and after the games and this I found particularly interesting and it added greatly to my enjoyment of the book. A separate section also provides details of the Canadian leg of the tour and the journey home. One can almost feel the players' relief at finally stepping onto home soil once more.

Typically a book such as this would have ended with a simple conclusion of sorts but Verdon's stamina and appetite for the facts ensures an anything but straightforward end to the book and he launches into an analysis of 'what could have been', largely from the observers and surviving

players point of view. This covers refereeing decisions, styles of play and tactics which goes further to illustrate how close this tour went towards having a very different result.

The Author then provides a potted history for each Lions and New Zealand player after returning home which allows the reader to learn how their careers, nay, lives progressed after that epic tour. This is followed by his conclusions and epilogue.

A complete bibliography is included towards the back of the book, however, from an academic point of view I found the lack of footnotes and referencing within the main text a little discomforting, as in the past I have sometimes found the need to track odd facts back to their original sources. However, I can imagine that most would consider this a small sacrifice to make in return for a superbly readable and enjoyable book.

The book is also equipped with a comprehensive index which made hunting for particular facts very straight forward.

Summary

It is easy to look purely at the test match results and dismiss a tour side because they may have failed to win the big games. This book proved to me that you really need to look deeper, much deeper. The 1959 Lions ended up the highest scoring Lions of all time (842) and it is unlikely that record will ever be bested due to the much reduced duration of today's tours. This fact is made all the more incredible when you consider that the 1924 All Black touring team scored 838. Davies and Hewitt had a personal tally of over a 100 points which only Wallace and Hunter of the 1905 All Blacks have ever achieved.

Verdon covers a lot of ground in this detailed and engaging work. Before reading it I can say that it was all too easy to draw quick conclusions that the 1959 Lions were simply outplayed in the test series or that they lost it due to the kicking of All Black full-back Don Clarke and/or the vagaries of the country's referees but there is far more to it than that and this book helps the reader sift through all the information and encourages the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Regarding the construction of the book and its general presentation, it is high quality throughout. I remain unconvinced by the vinyl covering, probably because it is my first experience of this type of cover but it does seem quite practical and durable.

I would strongly recommend this work to any serious rugby reader and/or collector since I am confident that it would exceed their expectations.

Ordering Details

Hill-Verdon Publishing Ltd.

39 Harbour View Road, Point Chevalier, Auckland 1022, New Zealand.

Email: headams@xtra.co.nz

Website: www.verdoncollectables.com

Telephone: 0064 -09 – 8464991

Price: 185GBP plus 20GBP P&P.