

## In Pursuit of Bill: A Comprehensive History of the Rugby World Cup

By Lance Peatey  
(Boxstar Media, £17.95)

For once a book's title is not a load of hyperbole. Comprehensive just about covers this excellent work, which leaves the other offerings on the market looking pretty sick. In fact the publishers could almost have used "Pre-history" in the sub-heading, since the author, Lance Peatey, opens his minor masterpiece in 146 BC, with a look at harpastum – the Roman form of the Greek game episkyros.

Peatey's academic approach has produced a cultured read, which incorporates a very good statistical and records section in the appendices.

The reader is reminded that the Rugby World Cup got off to a shaky start. It was 1987, Nelson Mandela was still incarcerated in prison on Robben Island, and South Africa did not have a prayer of partaking since the Republic was still enmeshed in its barbaric anti-apartheid philosophy and host nations Australia and New Zealand, quite rightly, refused to allow the Springboks to enter the tournament.

There was a military coup in Fiji a week before the start which also cast a cloud. But it had taken a lot of talking long before then even to get within a week of the scheduled start.

It needed the persuasive

powers and imagination of two men, Sir Nicholas Shehadie (the then president of the Australian Rugby Union) and former All Blacks manager, Dick Littlejohn, to convince the blazered world of rugby that this was a goer.

What became known as "The Nick and Dick Show" travelled the globe and after much jaw-jaw and not a little haw-haw and guffaw from the sceptics they eventually sold the concept.

New Zealand emerged as the inaugural holders of the trophy, yet they very nearly did not have a thing to cling to after beating France in the final. Just before the start of the tournament the RFU's John Kendall-Carpenter, chairman of the International Board's Rugby World Cup sub-committee, rang Shehadie to say, "We haven't got a trophy".

Kendall-Carpenter paid the Royal jewellers Garrards £6,000 for a silver gilt trophy – named The Webb Ellis Cup after the Rugby School pupil, William, of that name – hence the "Bill" in this book's title. Rugby fans and sports followers in general are urged to go in pursuit of this book.

David Llewellyn

