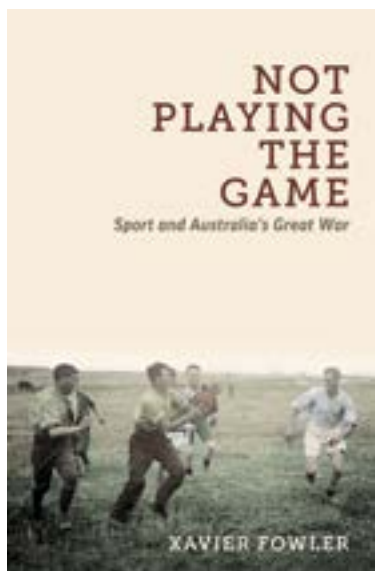


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Not Playing the Game: Sport and Australia's Great War'

By **Xavier Fowler**

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*Reviewed by Cat Jones,
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I'm sitting down to write this review in the week before the Anzac Day round of AFL football. It is inevitable that, as it gets closer to the first bounce of the first game, newspapers will start reporting the lead up—the teams, the stories and the links to war, the start times and predicted winners. Each year, tens of thousands will flock to the MCG to watch two games that are shrouded in ceremony, reverence and described with words that echo wartime language. It is the same with other sports around the country, and it seems that every year these links do not falter.

In Australia, sport and war have been inextricably linked. It's not just Australian Rules football either. Clubrooms around the country have plaques and honour boards adorning the walls that pay tribute to club members who lost their lives on the battlefield. In *Not Playing The Game: Sport and Australia's Great War*, Xavier Fowler focuses on these links.

Fowler reminds readers that the connections between sport and war in Australia were not, and are not, harmonious. The fact that sport was used at the time of the Great War as a mechanism to recruit young men was often met with admonishment and anger, with some spectators turning on recruiters. While sport provided a respite for some from the tragedy of war, there were those who believed that it should not continue in the face

of such adversity. Fowler's research explores both viewpoints with depth and clarity, and strikes the balance of historical empathy well.

This book shows to the reader that the discussions around sport and war were not confined to one class, religion or sport. It permeated every corner of Australian society, sometimes ending in tragedy such as the story of boxer Les Darcy. It affected amateurs and professionals alike, although it was the amateur teams that suffered the most as war continued, with many competitions struggling to stay active.

Fowler's chapters also deal with the reactions of many to sport continuing through wartime, such as the Victorian Football League. The admonishment received by competitions that decided to continue as wartime progressed is spelled out with quotes and stories that interweave well. Fowler discusses this topic sensitively while also providing details that allow for intrigue.

Overall, *Not Playing The Game* will provide any reader with substance on a time in Australia's history when lines were drawn on the sporting field. Students in senior History classes could draw on this text as examples of continuity and change, of societal norms and divisions. It will also appeal to sports history aficionados. I know I will be returning for another read.