**THE BALL**

AUTHOR • John Fox

PUBLISHER • Harper Perennial, \$19.99

“Why do we play ball anyway?” It’s a question asked by author John Fox’s son when they were tossing a baseball to each other one day. “I could tell immediately that this sudden inquiry wasn’t one of those random toss-off questions Aidan, like other kids his age, tended to ask on a regular basis,” the author writes in the prologue to this book. “No, it struck me that this was downright existential.” This fascinating book attempts to give the definitive answer. It takes us from the Mexican jungles to the small-town gridirons of Ohio, from medieval villages and royal courts to modern soccer pitches and baseball parks. John Fox explores the little-known origins of our favourite ball sports across the centuries. Part history and part travelogue, his book delves into the basic reasons we play ball. Nowadays, games involving balls mean big money, reputations and scandals. As it’s an American book, I went straight to the

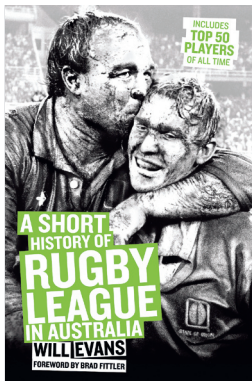
index to check, and there are numerous entries for cricket. Fox may love baseball, but he covers all ball sports here. The subject is so obvious and yet we knew so little about something that consumes much of our lives – until now.

A SHORT HISTORY OF RUGBY LEAGUE IN AUSTRALIA

AUTHOR • Will Evans

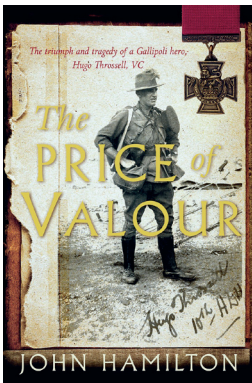
PUBLISHER • Slattery Media Group, \$39.95

Will Evans was born on the Gold Coast to Kiwi parents, and spent his childhood in New Zealand where his pedigree suggested he should follow rugby union. But he became a rugby league convert as a kid after watching classic games on television. He confesses he “traded in the All Blacks and the Highlanders for the Broncos and the Maroons”. His passion for rugby league led him to become a sportswriter for *Rugby League Review* and *BackPageLead* and, eventually, to become an author with this, his first book. It’s obviously a labour of love, and a big job at that. It may be a relatively short history, but this is an incredibly comprehensive book that every rugby league fan should have at home. Dip into it and read the history, the statistics, and the stories of the clubs, awards, players and the representative scene. There’s even a chapter entitled *Rugby League Around the World* because although it may not be as widespread as soccer or rugby union, league is played elsewhere and not just in England and New Zealand. The French play it, the Papua New Guineans play it ... it’s even a minnow sport in the US. Will Evans now lives, wisely, in Brisbane, rugby league central.

**THE PRICE OF VALOUR**

AUTHOR • John Hamilton

PUBLISHER • Macmillan, \$34.99



The Victoria Cross still holds an important place in our national story. VC winners – and we have had our fair share – have a special place in our military history and public interest never seems to flag. This is the story of one of those VC winners, but it doesn’t glorify war. It’s a cautionary tale. Despite the fact that Hugo Throssell of the 10th Light Horse Regiment was a hero of Gallipoli, where he won his VC, his later life and tragic death prove that war is terrible indeed. Throssell was badly wounded and sent to England to recover. There he met his future wife, the journalist and author Katharine Susannah Prichard. He returned to fight in Palestine, but after the war he publicly denounced it, which alienated him from the establishment. Back home in Western Australia, unable to hold down a job and subject to depression, he had a troubled life and in 1933 he killed himself. Throssell was a shining example of

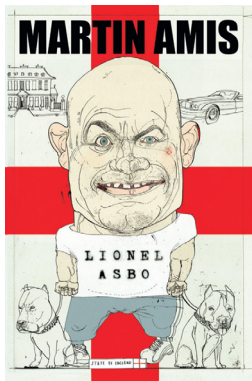
heroism, but also of the damage war can cause to everyone involved. His story adds a note of realism in an age when we tend to over-idealise the memories of The Great War. This is something of a reality check.

LIONEL ASBO

AUTHOR • Martin Amis

PUBLISHER • Jonathan Cape, \$32.95

The critics have been hard on the English novelist Martin Amis. Each new book is measured against his early works, when he had wunderkind status. *The Rachel Papers*, *Money*, *London Fields* ... these books were part of the Zeitgeist. Then critical disappointment set in, but this new novel has revived interest. Perhaps that’s because he’s returned to a subject he does well: London’s underclass. Lionel Asbo is, to quote one critic, “the latest in a long line of yobs”. Asbo (a jokey name that references the UK’s controversial Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) is doing a stretch in prison when he wins the National Lottery, which doesn’t make him a better person. But it does make him a celebrity. His nephew, the orphaned Des Pepperdine, fears his uncle, who looks down on the boy as a class traitor because he is trying to improve himself. But Des is no angel and at the start of story he admits he’s having an affair with an older woman: his grandmother. That’s the sort of unsavouriness that sets the tone for this book, which skewers English society. Amis has lived in New York for some years, but still takes aim at the folk back home whenever he can.



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