



It's Only A Game: A Life in Sport

John O'Neill

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A behind-the-scenes look at the business and fun of sport from the man who has run the Football Federation of Australia and currently heads the Australian Rugby Union

John Eales holding the Webb Ellis Cup aloft after Australia's triumph at the 1999 Rugby World Cup. John Aloisi tearing off his jersey after driving home the penalty kick against Uruguay to lead the Socceroos to the 2006 World Cup for the first time in 30 years. Two iconic sporting images of our times, one man at the helm through those and many others.

John O'Neill, one of the world's leading sports administrators and strategic thinkers, believes in 'pipedreams' - those radical ideas that, when articulated, show us what is possible. Having gained business acumen during a successful career with State Bank, John always held rugby union close to his heart, both as a player and a coach. Taking over as CEO of the Australian Rugby Union in 1995, John would lead the revolution of the sport out of the dark ages of amateurism and into its most successful and financially prosperous period ever. He would go on to bring the tournament to Australian soil in 2003 in what many consider to be the 'best ever' World Cup.

In a recruitment coup by business tycoon Frank Lowy, he left the ARU in 2004 to head up Football Federation Australia. John O'Neill was soon backing another 'pipedream', going on record that he was determined to wake the sleeping giant of Australian sport and place it on a par with the other football codes. His Midas touch was again evident in the Socceroos dramatic 2006 FIFA World Cup campaign that lifted an entire nation and in the establishment of the Hyundai A-League. It can now be said that 'the World Game' has arrived in full.

John O'Neill takes us past the gilded images of Aussie gold and recounts the power struggles with the establishment and players, and the lighter moments on and off the field - all against the backdrop of a sports-mad country where the top of the pedestal is the perennial expectation. In the business of sport where passion and reason hang in an uncertain balance, O'Neill takes us through every step of his mission: leaving sport in a better place than when he found it.

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