

SECOND INNINGS

BARRY NICHOLLS

ABOUT THE BOOK

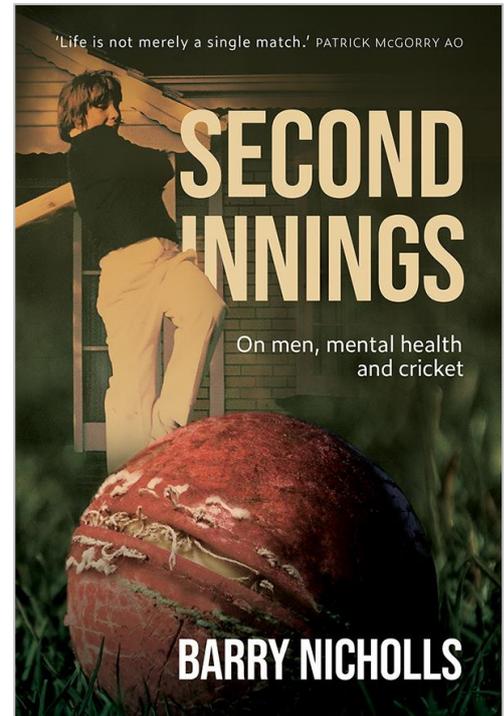
Second Innings is a memoir about the author's struggle with mental health and the road to recovery, using his love of the game of cricket to make sense of it all. Shifting between past and present, *Second Innings* includes flashbacks through five decades of life in suburban and regional Australia and focuses particularly on the lives of the men across the generations of Nicholls' family. It tells the story of the journey from teacher to print journalist to broadcaster, from Adelaide to the Red Centre to Western Australia. *Second Innings* shows what can happen when long-term unresolved anxiety takes hold, and it demonstrates the value of finding compassionate and understanding medical professionals who provide a path toward the light when all is lost. As Greg Chappell helps teach this writer: in life there is always a second innings.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Barry Nicholls is a journalist and broadcaster who has written nine books including *For Those Who Wait: The Barry Jarman Story* and *You Only Get One Innings: Family, Mates and the Wisdom of Cricket*. Barry has broadcast on the ABC for close to two decades, including presenting a sports books podcast for ABC Grandstand for five years.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the importance of cricket in Barry Nicholls' life?
2. How does cricket help him create a framework in which to discuss mental health?
3. Why do you think that mental health is so difficult to talk about for the sufferers and those around them?
4. How would you describe a 'man's man' (p.10) in an Australian context and what models of masculinity do we see in this book?
5. How does the interweaving of past and present in this memoir aid the author in the telling of his story?
6. What do you think the reader gains from this structure?
7. What kinds of external factors impact on the mental health of the men in Barry's family – historical, social, and cultural?
8. Do you think we are becoming better at talking about mental health?
9. Can you think of a time when these conversations began to change and what may have prompted that?
10. Do you believe there is still a stigma attached to those suffering from mental health conditions?
11. What elements of mental health struggles are exacerbated by an inability to articulate or share them?
12. Why do you think that we do not respond to others' mental health struggles the same as physical ones?
13. What forms of stigma are evident in *Second Innings*?
14. What does Barry's story highlight about the value of a good GP?
15. What do you learn about genetic predisposition to mental health concerns?



INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

Do you think that sport is a useful way in to helping men talk about mental health?

Yes, definitely. Talking about and playing sport helps spark conversations that form the basis of friendship and trust. When there is trust you can talk about more important things like mental health. Anyone who has played competitive sport knows it also teaches you about life. Injustices and difficult times are inevitable, and persisting is one of the keys to surviving and prospering. Using sporting language to describe how you are feeling can sometimes be a way of broaching a sensitive topic without having to use some of the heavily stigmatised words that surround mental health. It avoids labels and normalises an experience that many of us will go through at some stage of our lives.

How has your love of cricket and your participation in the game aided you along the way?

Cricket has been the through line of my life: the one constant. Cricket taught me that life is all about facing the next delivery or challenge that life throws at you. It's also been the basis of so many happy memories and friendships. Whatever happened in my life, cricket was always there. The game and its history represented a safe place when I sought an escape from growing up in a disruptive household. My mum and dad were good people, but they often clashed. Immersing myself in the game later helped when my parents divorced, and my brother Steve became severely mentally ill. Playing cricket and studying its history provided some order and normality to my life. I'd look at old black-and-white cricket photos and get lost in the history. Batting used to provide the same feeling.

Did writing this book lead to any unexpected revelations for you?

I wrote most of this book after I had moved to a much less demanding radio role at the ABC. This finally provided me with the mind space to reflect on some of the more difficult periods of my life. I was able to think and write with a clarity I hadn't experienced before. The months after the basic story was written, my father died and I was able to access some of the family records he had closely guarded for many years. Some of Dad's family history verified what I had written. During this time my mother also went into care. In her twilight years she was more even-handed about her relationship with my father and continued to reveal elements of her own family history.

What advice would you give to someone who is concerned about somebody else's mental health?

Depends on your relationship with them and how severe the mental health concern is. Generally speaking, I would start by simply asking them how they are going. If they begin to open up, then listen carefully to what they say. Maybe even offer to help even if it's little things like having them over for a meal or meeting them for a coffee. If possible, find out if they have a GP who they are comfortable talking to about their mental health. If not, help find one who can. Be aware they may take some time to try and resolve whatever they are going through. Just let them know you are there for them if needed. Speak candidly. Let them know that they are not alone, and you are not judging them. If they won't talk to you, maybe ask a mutual friend or colleague to have a try. If that fails, try to reach out to a family member of the person you are worried about.

Why does stigma still exist when it comes to mental health?

Because society views poor mental health as a weakness. This is despite those who have experienced mental health trauma often having extraordinary resilience and great capabilities. There is a limited understanding of mental health in the community partly because it's only recently become an acceptable topic of conversation. Mental illness can be also be more difficult to treat than a physical condition and you can't see the injury caused. Its treatments can be more hit-and-miss. There are some great medicos out there but you have to find one that suits you. My brother Steve once told me that 'mental health is the bargain basement of discrimination'. He was right. Workplaces are among the worst for dealing with people who have experienced mental health issues. In my experience, sporting clubs can be more willing to accept and embrace people with different life experiences. People recovering need compassion, understanding, patience and love. Everyone needs to realise that one day it might just be them who is struggling with their mental health. Until this is realised, stigma surrounding mental health will persist.



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