



## **Book Club Book of the Month September 2021**

### ***Second Innings: On Men, Mental Health and Cricket* by Barry Nicholls (Fremantle Press)**

#### **Summary**

*Second Innings: On Men, Mental Health and Cricket* (2021) is Barry Nicholls' reflection on his life to date. Nicholls explores his past and heritage, carefully plotting the small and grand experiences that have been keenly felt within his mental health. With the expected sharp voice of a veteran broadcaster and journalist, Nicholls shares and attempts to make sense of his own struggles and the road to recovery, using his love of cricket to make sense of it all.

Set partly in the present, *Second Innings* includes flashbacks through five decades of life and focuses on the lives of the men across the generations of Barry Nicholls' own family. It tells the story of Barry's journey from teacher to print journalist to broadcaster, reflecting on the consequences of denying his mental health with a blend of candidness and warmth.

#### **About the author**

A former A-grade district cricketer and schoolteacher, Barry Nicholls has written about cricket for decades and is a broadcaster with the ABC, where he has worked since 2003. The author of several books on cricket history across Australia, *Second Innings: On Men, Mental Health and Cricket*, is his latest, weaving memoir with the history of cricket in Australia.

After 25 years of playing cricket, he now enjoys spending his weekends watching his children embrace the challenges and pleasures of participating in sport. Barry lives in Perth with his partner, Ann, and their four children and has learned a bit about second chances in life.

## Questions for discussion

1. The book opens with a thorough run-through of Nicholls' generational ancestry, in particular his father and grandfather, each plagued by their own experiences of mental health. Do you think there is something to note about generational trauma and mental health for the men in Nicholls' family? Why?
2. In telling us about his grandfather, Nicholls says, "*Cecil is dying inside. But he can't or doesn't want to tell anyone*" (p. 31). What does this tell us about generational differences in how the men in Nicholls' family think about seeking mental health support?
3. In what ways do you think learning about his past and the mental health struggles of his male relatives helps or hinders Nicholls' own mental health journey?
4. After his brother, Steve, has an incident in the family home, Nicholls' dad asks him, "*You didn't tell anyone what happened, did you?*" (p. 77) What impression do you think phrases like this had on young Nicholls, just beginning to grapple his own experiences of anxiety?
5. Even as a young teen, Nicholls displays anxious behaviours. How does turning to cricket help him better understand his anxiety throughout his formative years and later in life?
6. Do you think cricket becomes a crutch to hide behind for his mental health or a vital lifeline that sees him through some difficult years?
7. Nicholls reflects, "*It's hard to distinguish between his depression and his laziness*" (p. 125). Do you think Steve's mental health challenges prevent Nicholls from fully realising and seeking help for his own?
8. "*I wonder if I'll ever come back like I used to after a bad run of outs when batting*" (pp. 181). Nicholls leaves us with the hopeful notion of second chances. What are some of the other vital messages *Second Innings* imbues on the reader?
9. How much of Nicholls' experiences with mental health do you think are common for men of his generation and younger men in general?
10. In what ways do you think this book will help to aid more conversations around men and mental health?

## If you liked this book, you may also like ...

*You Only Get One Innings: Family, Mates and the Wisdom of Cricket* by Barry Nicholls (HarperCollins), 2013.

*Golden Daze* by Sean Doherty (Hachette Australia), 2020.

*For Cap and Country*, eds. Jesse Hogan, Simon Auteri & Andrew Faulkner (HarperCollins Australia), 2019.

*Leather Soul: A Half-back Flanker's Rhythm and Blues* by Bob Murphy (Black Inc), 2019.

*Never Say Die*, eds. Fiona Crawford & Lee McGowan (NewSouth Publishing), 2019.