

Christmas Books

Saturday December 8 2007 ■ timesonline.co.uk/books

Mark Hodgkinson is a skilled knitter, too. His memoir of growing up in 1970s Rochdale and supporting the town's hapless football team, **Believe in the Sign** (Pomona, £9.99/£9.49), is a collection of mostly unremarkable anecdotes, yet in his tender hands the whole is greater than the parts. This is sport not as a welcome adjunct to depressing reality but a symptom of it: the football is as disappointing and aimless as life in the town.

If ambition was in short supply in Rochdale, it is not lacking in Tim Harris's household. He has produced a gigantic, sprawling history: **Sport: Al-**