

Tagg fails to court win

By GREG THOM

BOOKS

FICTIONAL barrister Felicio Tagg in Victor Kline's *Rough Justice* is to the legal system what the Sydney Swans are to the AFL.

But while the Swans at least managed to win one game last season, Tagg has maintained an abysmal run of courtroom defeats second to none throughout his less-than-illustrious legal career.

When he represented himself in his own divorce case and lost, he consoled himself that at least his ex-wife won a generous settlement.

Such is his capacity for losing even the most basic of cases, he has become a legend in Sydney's legal fraternity.

So much so that judges and magistrates, not wanting to be the ones to break the drought, make sure Tagg's run of outs continues.

Despite his stubborn determination to succeed in his chosen profession, the hapless

lawyer gets no support from his family either.

His mother does nothing for his depressed state of mind by constantly reminding him he should have become a carpenter — part of the reason he went to law school instead.

Part of Tagg's problem is he can't see the point in the adversarial system of justice, where in his eyes two protagonists take extreme positions against each other in court and argue causes they rarely believe in.

To Tagg, the eternal idealist, it was not the most efficient path to justice, not the quickest route to the truth.

It was hardly the killer instinct needed to forge a successful career as a barrister.

But Tagg stubbornly refuses to give in.

Which is probably a bad thing, because as well as possibly being

Australia's most incompetent barrister, Tagg must go close to clinching the unluckiest title as well.

Or so it would seem when, down on his luck, the potential flood of legal work little more than a trickle, he receives what on the surface is a fairly straight forward case.

But things are never that simple for Felicio Tagg.

Throw in an obnoxious, egomaniacal grazier as a client, a love affair with the client's wife and a bumbling attempt to recover the grazier's kidnapped stud bull in order to free him from jail and Tagg quickly loses what little control he had of the situation.

Victor Kline has written a very witty, entertaining and funny book, with a hero who despite, or perhaps because of, his failings, is impossible to dislike.

If only he had listened to his mum and become a carpenter.

ROUGH JUSTICE, by Victor Kline (Allen & Unwin, rrp: \$14.95).