

BOOK REVIEWS

Dobbs, Brian: *EDWARDIANS AT PLAY: SPORT 1890-1914*. (London: Pelham Books, 1973).

Mr. Dobbs has been a sports journalist and he has used this technique to indicate that what previously has been considered to be a golden age in British sport, has been, to a certain extent, a misconception. He has concentrated upon Association Football, Rugby Football, Cricket and the Olympic Games, devoting a chapter on each for, as he says:

“It would be impossible for one man to read, let alone evaluate, all the source material available on the whole spectrum of Edwardian sport. . .” (p. 36).

His main concern is to indicate that the principal problem of the Edwardian sportsmen and administrators was with the relationship between the amateur and the player, i.e. the professional. He provides ample evidence to support his thesis that the many ills which currently trouble sport in the United Kingdom have their roots in the Edwardian period.

The chapter on Association Football is devoted to the growth of professionalism. He draws attention to the working class origins of the professional footballer and the chapter is full of detail as to who played and how many people watched. The rivalry between the Football Association and the Football League is also discussed in the context of the growth of professionalism. The early link between the Public Schools and the growth of organized football is also briefly considered.

His chapter on Rugby Football is concerned with the development of international competition and the regularization of the rules. Here again there are numerous accounts of who played and how many were in each team.

When he deals with Cricket Mr. Dobbs is again concerned with the personalities of the game. The position of the professional cricketer vis a vis the gentleman amateur is emphasised with anecdotes regarding the treatment of the professionals by the 'gentleman'. The development of County Cricket as an alternative to the earlier country house game is also discussed.

Although the three chapters mentioned above are full of detailed information regarding the growth of cricket and football, there is an absence of analytical depth and the treatment remains rather superficial in the journalistic style of which the following is an example:

"Entries and crowds for the Cup continued to swell. 210 clubs entered for 1896 and 48,836 people saw Spiksley, Sheffield Wednesday's outside left, score both goals in a 2-1 win over Wolves, who had changed the black and gold quarters worn to victory in 1893 for natty stripes, an omen that their captain Harry Wood who had played three years previously must have regretted." (p. 49).

However, in his consideration of the growth of the modern Olympic Games from 1896, Mr. Dobbs gives an interesting indication that the relationship between sport and politics, which has been noted in more recent Olympiads, was by no means unknown in the very first games of the 'modern' period. In the chapter on the Edwardian Olympics there is a more analytical approach and a real attempt to evaluate the aims of Baron de Coubertin in reviving the Olympic Games.

A serious omission is acknowledged by Dobbs:

"The position of women in Edwardian sport, to be fully documented, would make this book half as long again. . ." (p. 176).

He does take a brief look at the development of female participation in sport during the Edwardian era and had the book been 'half as long again' it would probably have been better value, for at £4.00 it seems to be over-priced.

"Edwardians at Play" is an interesting book but disappoints by the lack of a deeper consideration of why sport developed in the way that it did during this particular period. The book is illustrated by fifty photographs and prints; there is reference in the text to some of the sources used, but there is no bibliography.

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