

S.F. Wise and Douglas Fisher, *Canada's Sporting Heroes*, (Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Company Limited, 1974). Illustrated 338 pp.

In recent years many sport historians around Canada, who were aware of the project through correspondence and/or discussion with the authors and their collaborators, have waited patiently for the arrival of this book. Its publication just prior to last Christmas may have solved some of their present-giving problems and demonstrated that patience is still a virtue which is rewarded on occasions. *Canada's Sporting Heroes* may

be regarded, in fact, as a significant landmark in the history of Canadian publishing.

A crucial reason is that for the first time a major Canadian historian has dared to write a book on the history of sport in his country, and vigorously assert its significance and validity. Syd Wise is Chairman of the History Department at Carleton University, and also taught history at the Royal Military College and Queen's University, besides being the chief historian of the Department of National Defence in Ottawa. He was President of the Canadian Historical Association in 1973-74, and is currently President of the Social Science Research Council of Canada, and has written several books on Canadian history. Rarely can such credentials have been brought to bear to support a focus on the history of sport anywhere. His co-author, Douglas Fisher, has the attributes for a sound contributing role, also. Fisher was an adviser with Professor Wise to the Canadian Federal Government's 1969 Task Force on Sports; as well as being a founding Director and Chairman of Hockey Canada. He has been writing a syndicated newspaper column for over 10 years, and was an M.P. from 1957 to 1965. To this impressive couple of co-authors should be added the names of other special contributors: Harold Rea, Chairman of the Board of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, who initiated and nourished the project; historians Dana Johnson, Tom West, and Diane Mew, who shared the research work; and "Lefty" Reid, the Curator of the Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, who "was most cooperative in providing material and good advice". This combination of talents has produced a most worthwhile contribution to the sporting literature of Canada.

The book apparently began as a straightforward project to research the members of Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, in order to put between covers the most accurate sport biographies of each member that could be assembled. However, the authors subsequently persuaded the directors that each division of sport—Team Sports; Water Sports: Science and Strength; Horses; Shooting; Winter Sports; Track and Field; Golf, Tennis, Bowling, and other Sports: the Builders—should be preceded by an introductory essay on the general history of sport in Canada. Also, later chapters were added on the role of Montreal as a Canadian sports incubator, on sporting journalism in Canada, and even on the future of sport in Canada. Then, after some considerable re-writing and restructuring regarding format and style with the future market in mind, the book was issued in its present form. The sport historian can feel mostly grateful, but also a little disappointed, as a result.

The sporting biographies are obviously extremely valuable, based on excellent source material, and represent a real contribution to current knowledge regarding the majority of Canada's most famous athletes. As a work of biographical reference alone, therefore, the book has exceptional merit. The many illustrations are well-chosen and distributed to advantage throughout the text of this large [338 pp.] and colourful book. But the introductory essays already referred to, plus the specialized chapters which are not biographical in nature, will probably appeal most to sport historians. The authors' analysis of the social scene

which puts each sport, or sports-group, in historical perspective, represents a precise expertise and insight which is most welcome. Few will read these essays and chapters without being impressed in various ways.

Indeed, the selected bibliography included at the back of the book hardly does justice to its contents in this respect. One suspects that a more lengthy and critical bibliography was condensed during the editing process to its present form. It seems to this reviewer, for example, that some of Alan Metcalfe's ideas in various articles over the past five years, have been incorporated in the text without his name appearing in the bibliography; and this comment might well apply to some other material used. This is not to say that the bibliography is without merit, merely that it is not as comprehensive as might be expected.

A similar comment seems valid regarding the lack of reference footnotes, which will probably disappoint many serious readers, especially if they have been stimulated or intrigued by a particularly pertinent quotation for which they would like to have the exact source. (However, readers of Roxborough's previous commendable works in Canadian sport history, which often lack even a bibliography or index as well, will be well-experienced in the necessary search for such information!) It is a pity that Canada's Sporting Heroes could not have provided a more detailed reference system; such as is found, for example, in its nearest counterpart, i.e., Howell and Howell's *Sports and Games in Canadian Life: 1700 to the Present* (MacMillan of Canada, 1969).

Potential readers should also be aware that this homage to Canadian sporting life gives only passing reference to some of Canada's most famous hockey and football stars such as Gordie Howe, Russ Jackson and "Rocket" Richard. In fact, the "Golden Jet" himself, Bobby Hull, obtains mention in only one sentence in a biography devoted to Howie Morenz. This is because the manuscript is based on material from Canada's Sports Hall of Fame, rather than from the Hockey Hall of Fame or the Canadian Football Hall of Fame. Thus some genuine Canadian athletic heroes have received scanty recognition in the text in comparison with other less valid ones who have received more comprehensive treatment, like Norval Baptie (who lived only the first year of his life in Canada), Sam Langford (who left Canada permanently when he was 12 years old), Earl Thomson, and others.

It is possible that the title may offend members of the Women's Liberation movement, as at least 29 of the biographies refer to females, and the addition of the term "heroines" might therefore have been deemed appropriate. (This figure includes the speedboat Miss Supertest *I, II* and *III*, winner of the Harmsworth Trophy from 1959-61. Readers of this review are respectfully invited to decide the sex of the famous *Bluenose* racing schooner for themselves.) Really, there is little else to complain about. Authors Wise and Fisher, in their Introduction, candidly admit that "this book. . . probably contains a number of mistakes in fact" and ask that readers send corrective information for "future editions". Many will have noticed, for example, that the picture purporting to be of Ned Hanlan (page 104) is in fact one of "Jake" Gaudaur, whilst the

picture of Lou Scholes (page 114) looks suspiciously like the real Ned Hanlan; and that the gentleman portrayed and labelled as “Joseph E. Seagram . . . The Patriarch of Canada’s foremost racing family at the turn of the century” is wearing remarkably modern attire considering . . . (Professor Wise has informed me that it is actually a picture of Seagram’s son).

One hopes that readers will respond to the authors’ honest call, for this is a book to celebrate rather than to carp about or nit-pick over. If the flaws which are present can be eradicated, so much the better: in the meantime it is easy to agree with the recent judgement by Michael Bliss in *Maclean’s* that “All in all it’s fair to say that Wise and Fisher have given us the most important book yet written about sports in Canadian life” Canada’s Sporting Heroes is indeed, as claimed on the jacket of the book, “an encyclopedia, a history, and a vivid journalistic account of this country’s vibrant sports scene”.

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