

Walvin, James, *The Peoples Game — The Social History of British Football*, (Allen Lane, London, 1975). 201 pp.

This is a fascinating, tantalizing and irritating book. First let me dispose of the irritation. The history is carefully researched and at the outset the author has mentioned the massive plagiarism which has been perpetrated by historians of football. By the liberal use of inverted commas he perhaps avoids the charge against himself, but where did he obtain all those extracts from medieval and later documents quoted in the chapter on pre-industrial football? Not presumably from primary sources. Most regrettably the quotations in the text are not related either numerically or otherwise to the bibliographies at the end of the book so that anyone wishing to take the social history

of football a step further is faced with the infuriating task of repeating much of Walvin's work. Scholarship has been sacrificed to readability.

The book is certainly most readable. Some of the chapters are a good deal more than this. That which recounts the rise of working class football gives the clearest account to date of the growth in popularity of the game and some of the agencies which fostered it and which football in its turn fostered. The role of the press and of transport firms is touched on and the outline of economics of leisure in the nineteenth century is highly relevant.

Some of the conclusions suggested are perhaps somewhat facile. Can the change from the dribbling to the passing game really be closely linked with the growth of working class influence? If not what was the explanation? This is not the only puzzle which emerges from this book. Why for instance did so many Scots emigrate to England to play football? Perhaps they did not. Perhaps they emigrated to England for reasons similar to those which sent them to Nova Scotia, British Columbia or Dunedin. The interesting question is why they were such an influence in English football and made so little impact on the game in Canada or New Zealand. Walvin points out that when the English exported football at the end of the nineteenth century it took root and flourished in countries where Britain had trading and financial links — European and South American, and had no growth in the British Dominions, or India, countries where Britain had direct political control or influence. Moscow Dynamo club originated from a team organized by two Lancashire textile workers. Benfica, Real Madrid and many other now famous clubs originated similarly. Yet in India, Australasia, and North America no comparable development occurred.

On the home front the history of the game reveals time and again social and class feeling in Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth century. It also reveals the hypocrisy of pretending that sport was not political. While the Home Secretary was stating in the House of Commons that a football match with Nazi Germany was nonpolitical his own foreign office was instructing the Football Association on what countries they should play against and that they should give the Nazi salute in Germany.

Later chapters in the book concentrate more and more on the international scene, the professional clubs and the spectators. Little attention is paid to the social significance of football at grass roots. Plate 25 shows 111 pitches on one field all provided at public expense and all being played on with hardly a spectator in sight. Why was association football along with swimming subsidized thus from public funds while rugby football

and many other sports for the most part paid their own way?

In his concluding chapter Mr. Walvin says he is going to ignore sociological theory and analysis because he is not qualified to deal with them, and then attempts to demolish the sociological analysis of Ian Taylor without defining or even understanding terms such as 'working class' and 'elites' and the relationship between them. 'Embourgeoisement' is not mentioned until the final paragraph. Alas, we shall not have a satisfactory social history of such a complex subject as football until historians and sociologists can cooperate more closely than James Walvin seems able or willing to do.

Despite or perhaps because of the limitations and unanswered questions in this book it is stimulating, enjoyable and a valuable contribution to the social history of sport.

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