

Book Reviews

*A book is like a mirror: if a fool looks into it, don't expect
an apostle to be looking out.*

G. C. Lichtenberg

Lucas, John A. and Smith, Ronald A. *Saga of American Sport*. Philadelphia: Lea & Febiger, 1978. Pp. 439. References, index, illus. \$16.50.

Saga of American Sport is the best and most complete history of American sport yet written. Comprehensive in nature, it touches nearly every facet of American sport from the Jamestown settlement to contemporary America. It is an accurate, up-to-date account of American sport analyzed within the context of American social history. More extensive and analytical than either Foster Rhea Dulles', *History of Recreation: America Learns to Play*, or John R. Betts's, *America's Sporting Heritage*, *Saga of American Sport* has surpassed both of these texts as the standard work on American sport history.

The authors, Professors John A. Lucas and Ronald A. Smith of Pennsylvania State University, are two of America's most respected sport historians. Lucas, the renown scholar of the Modern Olympics, has researched a variety of eighteenth and nineteenth century American sport history topics. Smith's primary interest is American intercollegiate athletics which he has investigated intensively.

In covering the expanse of American sport history, Lucas and Smith have organized their work in three parts, logically dividing it at the Civil War and World War I. Beginning with Puritan ideology, the authors emphasize the pervasive influence of the Puritan ethic during the colonial and revolutionary periods and its legacy well into the nineteenth century. They then tackle the difficult task of interpreting sport during America's industrial era. "Sport in Transition" is a close look at organized sport and its relationship to industrialization, urbanization, immigration, social class, minorities—women and blacks, and education. The section on the modern era examines sport during the 1920s, professional and amateur sport, the plight of women and blacks in sport, and the dissemination of sport to the masses.

Saga of American Sport, for the most part, is an interpretive history of sport in

American society. Rather than following a central thesis, admittedly a difficult if not impossible task, the authors examine sport as a reflection of the dominant ideological and social themes emerging throughout the course of American history. In analyzing American sport, they considered the influences of Anglo-European ideologies along with the religious tendencies, social mores, educational trends, and the sporting preferences of the American people. They portrayed nearly every facet of sport in American life. Illuminating their portrait of American sport are 105 illustrations interspersed strategically throughout the book. Many were rare photographs uncovered by the author's diligent search through the vast photographic holdings at the Library of Congress.

The strongest section of the text is Part II. It contains superb chapters on nineteenth-century collegiate athletics, women and blacks in sport, and America's new social leaders—the *nouveau riche*. The authors' analysis of the newly rich's impact upon the growth of American sport is clear and logical, making "Sport and the Social Set" their best chapter. Their lucidity is evident in statements such as the following about the newly rich. "This upper class created the prestige needed to give organized sport an important place in the social life of the nation" (p. 148). Equally explicit is their interpretation of the development of intercollegiate athletics and its importance to the colleges and to the American public. These chapters have resulted from perhaps the best and most intensive research yet undertaken on American intercollegiate athletics.

The authors excel in Part I with their explanation of the relationship between sport and religion. Their description of the little-known ring tournaments ranks among the best, and their frequent use of excellent sources has enabled them to extract substantive information for analyzing sport in early America. Their interpretation, however, is misleading in one area. They overstate the impact of the Puritan ethic on American life. Similar to many reputable historians, namely Edmund S. Morgan and C. Vann Woodward, Lucas and Smith have depicted Puritanism as an all-encompassing and nearly universal ideology that swept America during its first 250 years of existence. It was not Puritanism that spread the dogma of piety, productivity, and frugality in America, but rather a narrow social ethic adopted by large numbers of Britons as well as other Europeans. A close look at Puritanism reveals that it is 90 percent English and only 10 percent Puritan.

While *Saga of American Sport* has many merits, it has several shortcomings. The weakest section is the third part dealing with twentieth-century American sport, except for the chapters on women and blacks which rank among the best in the text. Two possible explanations for the lower quality of Part III are that the history of modern sport has been only partially researched and that neither co-author has studied modern sport in depth. Although this section is

markedly weaker than the others, the authors deserve praise for probing unfamiliar territory and presenting as good an analysis of modern sport as there is. Obviously, certain segments of this section lack interpretation. The chapter on professional sport is largely descriptive because the authors did not have a David Voigt or Harold Seymour to help them analyze football, basketball, and hockey. But the real tragedy of this section is the chapter on "Amateurism and the Olympic Games." Professor Lucas knows more history about the Modern Olympics than any living American. Surely, his knowledge of the modern games warranted more than one paragraph for each of the games of each Olympiad (save the Montreal games) crammed into twelve pages.

Other notable topics needing more interpretation are the effect of the *America's* yachting victory upon American nationalism, the significance of "Muscular Christianity" in America and the relationship between basketball and the growth of intercollegiate athletics for women. Considering the problem of limited space, the authors could have expanded these partially developed areas by avoiding unnecessary repetition. For example, much of the horse racing information on pp. 152-53 also appears on pp. 43, 45, and 66-67. There is no need to use the same baseball quote of the same Princeton student twice (pp. 171 and 193). Similar arguments can be evinced for the replication of Tom Molyneux's boxing exploits (pp. 64 and 268), Charles Paddock's running abilities (pp. 306 and 308), and Gertrude Ederle's swimming victories (pp. 307 and 344).

Two other minor flaws, though not lowering the overall quality of the book, bear mentioning. The authors penchant for overusing certain words and their preference for the exotic rather than the familiar word are somewhat distracting. They selected "chiliastic" (p.44) over millennial, "hyperbolic" (p. 79) for exaggerated, and "consummately" (p. 340) above highly. A sampling of their favorite overused words are "remarkable" "inexorable," "ephemeral," and "desultory."

The merits of *Saga of American Sport*, however, greatly outweigh its defects. Overall, Lucas and Smith have organized, synthesized, and interpreted American sport history. Their work, better than any other text on this topic, has placed sport within the perspective of American history. Perhaps its foremost contribution is the much-needed substance it brings to the sport history body of knowledge. It not only provides those interested in sport history with a solid and well-developed history of sport in America, but it is also a fountain of ideas for sport historians to probe deeper in their quest to understand the enigma of American sport. To borrow one of the authors' overused terms, *Saga of American Sport* is "remarkable." Professors Lucas' and Smith's tireless efforts have earned them a permanent place in the annals of American sport and a warm spot in the hearts of sport historians.