

Dunning, Eric and Sheard, Kenneth. *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players: A Sociological Study of Rugby Football*. New York: New York University Press, 1979. Pp. xiii, 321. Index, notes, tables. \$18.50.

In the past decade, when historians have turned their attention to sport and its importance as a form of social history they have been faced with an often unpalatable fact of scholarly life: much of the pioneering work on the subject had been done by sociologists. Eric Dunning has been at the cutting edge of the work in the sociology of sports and a number of his articles on association football (soccer) and rugby football have stimulated the work of many historians and sociologists. In *Barbarians, Gentlemen and Players* Dunning in conjunction with Kenneth Sheard fulfills the promise of exacting and exciting work that he has held out to us for years.

The introduction clearly sets out the goals of the book: to test the theories of Huizinga, Rigauer, and G. P. Stone, to test the hypotheses of Norbert Elias concerning violence-control, to interpret the structural sources of Britain's emergence as the "first sporting nation," and to look at the development of the British class structure and related institutions such as the public schools. The authors are true to their promise; they will deal with all four and to combine them into a coherent narrative. Although the latter two might be of greater interest to most historians, the discussion of sociological models and their importance should not be slighted.

In the second half of the nineteenth century Englishmen spread the gospel of sports and Muscular Christianity throughout the Empire and much of the rest of the world. The breeding ground for this ideal was the Victorian public school, an institution with which too few social historians in this country have dealt adequately. The authors have described briefly the important role of the public schools in educating generations of gentlemen and the way in which rugby became almost a paradigm for education, life, and leadership. The acceptance of the new form of football, one in which the ball was carried and thrown, demonstrated the influence of the public schools, those created to meet the needs of the bourgeoisie. When the sport finally gained acceptance at the Universities, Oxford and Cambridge, the new public schools could point to a tangible sign that they had "arrived."

For years, sports analysts in England have asserted that "rugby is a ruffians' sport played by gentlemen and soccer is a gentlemen's sport played by ruffians." Like many cliches, there is much truth in the comment and this book shows why and how that situation developed. Shortly after Rugby and soccer split off from one another, there was a division within Rugby, the result of which was to create two separate rugby organizations, one for gentlemen and one for ruffians.

The most efficient way to deal with this tightly written book is to look at its conclusions with the understanding that they are developed fully in the preceding text. The authors are at their best when they explore the relationship

between Rugby and class divisions. Class identification was an omnipresent feature of Victorian society and has remained a central feature of British life to the present day. “The development in British sport of an amateur dominated structure can be regarded as symptomatic of the structure and development of British society as a whole in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” (p. 271) Using Rugby as their example, the authors meticulously demonstrate the class related causes for amateur domination and the effects that policy had on the further development of the game. In a like manner, they show how the amateur ethic has pervaded the world of business and politics. Clearly, the lessons of the Rugby field were brought to bear on the nation as a whole.

I would take exception to some theories advanced by Dunning and Sheard. Their discussion of the role that sports such as football play in the social integration of urban communities includes the idea that in cities having more than one team (i.e. Manchester United and Manchester City) that supporters of the one will unite in support of the other so long as they are playing a team from another city or region. If the lessons of London are any indication, just the opposite is true. No one seems more dedicated to the defeat of all other London clubs than a supporter of one of them.

The heart of the book is the lengthy discussion of the way in which the gentlemen amateurs (the phrase might be a study in redundancy) tried to make sure that Rugby was not tainted by the same curse of professionalism (by definition, an affliction caused by the working class) that had driven them to leave soccer and establish their own game. Once Rugby was on its own, a further division took place between those clubs which were dependent on gate money and therefore wanted to increase the spectator appeal and the clubs which cared only to provide sport for their members.

The divisions within Rugby reflected more serious divisions within English society—between North and South, between old money and new, between the products of varying levels of public schools, and between working and middle class. A critical feature was that the new game that developed for the working class in the North was very much the product of middle class officials who wanted to make the game more entertaining. The sport, a useful way to exercise social control over the working class, would be of little value if it did not challenge the popularity of soccer. This was not a consideration in the South.

In their “reflections” Dunning and Sheard go beyond a historical analysis and present non-equivocal comments on the future of Rugby. Their summation bears close attention: “the class prejudice of Rugby Union seems to us to be merely symptomatic of the deeply rooted class prejudice in British society as a whole. Such prejudice is the major obstacle to reform in Britain, whether in

the wider society or the more limited sphere of sport.” (p. 282) Whether or not the reader agrees with these conclusions there can be no argument that the authors have advanced a hypothesis that is ably supported and must be taken seriously. They have shown that the study of sport has an important role to play in looking at questions concerning the traditional and accepted norms of a society. The way in which they have integrated questions about amateurism, the rules of the game, the governance of the sport, and the moral impact of Rugby into a cohesive unit is a major contribution to the study of the social significance of sports in Britain and Western society.

University of Missouri-St. Louis

Charles P. Korr