

Brown, Gene, ed. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Sports*. New York: Arno Press, 1979. 14 vols. Index, pictures. \$239.

Newspaper coverage of events has long been a major source of information for historians because it provides first-hand information from a contemporary perspective rather than an historical one. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Sports* is a unique reference tool for it provides histories of numerous sports through the reproduction of articles previously published in *The New York Times* a newspaper with some of the most comprehensive reporting of sports events in the country. This set of 14 volumes, edited by Gene Brown with introductions by Frank Litsky, attempts to cover all of the major sports and most of the minor ones. There are individual volumes on basketball, football, baseball, track and field, golf, tennis, and boxing. Other volumes cover several sports at a time, such as soccer and professional hockey; horse and auto racing; winter sports (figure skating, skiing, amateur hockey, etc.); outdoor sports (archery, bicycle racing, hunting and fishing, etc.), indoor sports (badminton, gymnastics, etc.), and water sports (swimming, rowing, etc.). The fourteenth volume is an index for the entire set.

The format of each volume consists of a brief introduction on the history of the sport or sports; chronological coverage of the sport; an appendix giving descriptions of the sport, usually with a glossary of terms and lists of champions; and a key-word index. The articles are reproduced as they appeared in the newspaper, with the publication date listed at the end. There are numerous black and white photographs of personalities and events, with some diagrams sprinkled through the various volumes.

The educational, research, or recreational value of any volume or set of encyclopedias is predicated on several factors: readability, indexing, potential usage, audience, level of content, purpose, format, and form. Several other encyclopedias of sport exist, but these are single volume works which limit themselves to only brief overviews of sports history. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Sports*, on the other hand, is a fascinating look into the history of sport, providing both a sense of immediacy and a feeling for the evolution of various sports over time. The volume on football is an example of this. Through the use of play diagrams, articles on rules changes, and reports of important intercollegiate contests, the reader can see how the game of college football has changed over the years. At the same time it is apparent how the major universities dominate coverage of the game. The professional section covers the regional founding of the game in Pennsylvania and Ohio in the 1920's and its competition with the college game in the 1930's and 1940's. The 1950's reveal a new image for professional football, highlighted by expansion, while the 1960's and 1970's became the Golden Age for professional sports franchises. A third section, entitled "Football and Society," focuses on abuses in the sport such as college recruiting violations in 1929 and drug use in professional football. (These articles 'would probably have had more historical impact if placed in chronological sequence in the other sections.)

In any encyclopedia the editors must try to be both comprehensive and selective. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Sports* attempts to identify significant events, contests, or turning points in the development of individual sports. The volume on baseball provides articles on most of the key events in baseball history, from reports of games where records were set to news stories such as Lou Gehrig's farewell at Yankee Stadium or the Dodgers' move to Los Angeles. By including tidbits such as the 1921 news item that fans in Pittsburgh can now keep balls hit into the stands, or the 1944 announcement that Negro fans in the two St. Louis parks are no longer restricted to bleacher seats, this volume becomes more than a series of statistics—it is also a look at the social history of the game. In page after page the reader finds a fascinating chronicle of our “national pastime.”

Yet some volumes are more successful than others. Baseball is primarily an American sport with a limited number of professional teams. Track and field, on the other hand, is an international sport, with a long history of competition in many countries. In an apparent effort to keep the volume at a manageable length and yet remain international in scope, the emphasis in the track and field volume is primarily on Olympic events. As a result, many American record holders who were not Olympians have been excluded from mention in the volume; there is not even a listing of non-Olympic champions in various events.

There are other weak points in the set. The fact that the articles come only from *The New York Times* means some sports, such as those with a West Coast orientation, are slighted. Only six pages are devoted to water skiing and surfing, the most recent article having been written in 1975. Within this section, three articles deal with surfing—a 1965 feature article on California surfing, a 1966 article on Long Island surfing championships (complete with a glossary of surfing terms), and a short news article on the winners of the 1966 world surfing championships in San Diego. These articles may give the reader a taste of the sport, but three articles from a 15-month period over a decade ago gives the reader no sense of the history of the sport or the changes it has seen.

Hasty editing has allowed a number of errors to slip in. In the water sports volume, for example, a photo caption of swimmer Dawn Fraser refers to her as Dawn Frazier. The same volume lists the first chapter as “Swimming” on the table of contents and on the first page; however, the chapter heading on each of the succeeding pages says “In the Water.”

A more severe problem from the point of view of the researcher is the encyclopedia's incomplete indexing and minimal cross-indexing. Photographs do not appear to be indexed at all. In the baseball volume the Black Sox scandal

is listed only as “scandal, baseball 1919,” and it does not appear at all under this category in the index volume. The track and field volume has no reference in its index to the members of the 1976 gold-medal-winning 400-meter relay team (described on page 197), yet this same index includes a reference to swimmer Donna de Varona because her event appeared in an article also describing an Olympic track event. While the de Varona reference would have been appropriate for the index volume, it is irrelevant in the track index. Better and more complete indexing could have made this encyclopedia a more valuable reference tool for persons interested in looking up specific facts or events.

Nevertheless, *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Sports* is an imaginative approach to presenting historical information on sports. While it will not replace the use of the actual *New York Times* for serious historians, this encyclopedia could be used as a starting point in gathering historical data or in gaining a better knowledge of specific events or personalities. Its limitations may hamper its usefulness for sports historians and its price may put it out of the range of many sports enthusiasts, but it would be a valuable and appropriate addition to public libraries, secondary school learning resource centers, and undergraduate college library collections.

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