

Book Reviews

Honest criticism and sensitive appreciation are directed not upon the author but upon his work.

T.S. Eliot

Gilbert, Doug. *The Miracle Machine*. New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980. Pp. 314. Index, illustrations. \$10.95

The Miracle Machine is an excellent personal account of the sport organization in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It is written by the late Doug Gilbert, a journalist who worked for many years with the Montreal Gazette. Awarded the National Newspaper Award and named Canada's Sportswriter of the Year in 1978, Doug Gilbert was killed in a car accident a year later in Puerto Rico while reporting on the Pan American Games. Since 1970 when he was assigned to cover the Rome Olympic Games, Doug Gilbert developed a special interest in sport-political issues and, in particular, in sport in the Soviet bloc nations. He travelled with the Concordia University tours of the U.S.S.R. and the G.D.R. and for several years concentrated his efforts on researching the phenomenal growth of the G.D.R. as a sporting power. Friendships made over the years with East German officials rewarded him with a series of privileged visits to the G.D.R. With few apparent limitations, Gilbert was allowed to move freely through the G.D.R., touring sport facilities, questioning administrators, officials, scientists, doctors, coaches, and athletes from many disciplines. The results of Gilbert's earlier visits to the G.D.R. appeared in a series of excellent articles written for the Montreal Gazette. *The Miracle Machine* includes much of this information and is the sum of Gilbert's interviews and personal observations made over several tours through the G.D.R. Balanced against Gilbert's wide understanding of western sport, *The Miracle Machine* is an excellent comparative study and it reflects throughout Gilbert's tremendous energy and enthusiasm. Sadly, he was not to see *The Miracle Machine* in print. His wife, Gail, as a tribute to her husband made sure that *The Miracle Machine* finally appeared in book form.

The Miracle Machine discusses at length the growth of East German sport, its philosophy, and its present organizational structure. The interviews with Manfred Ewald, head of the (East) German Gymnastic and Sport Union, illustrate dramatically why the East German sport organization is able to work so efficiently, and equally (with Gilbert commenting) why the equivalent in Canada and the U.S.A. does not.

Gilbert is also able to use his interviews and research to illustrate many unusual aspects of the East German program. There is an excellent discussion of the confrontation between East and West Germany and how each country has stimulated the other to greater efforts. The development in incentives for East German athletes is also well documented—from the early days when butter, meat, or volumes of Goethe were given to the winners—to the present day with its wealth of special privileges and material rewards.

An irritation in reading *The Miracle Machine* is the feeling that Gilbert is often excessive in his praise of all things East German. This reviewer became progressively annoyed by the heroic dimensions given to many East German athletes. They are persistently charming and modest—as opposed to many from the West—and they win repeatedly in spite of sickness and other adversity. In opposition to this, the negative aspects of the East German system are seldom mentioned and no effort is made to interview the athletes who preferred to leave the G.D.R. and settle in West Germany. Some comments from these people would have added greatly to the value of *The Miracle Machine*. It also appears that Gilbert was confined by his constant dependency on an interpreter. This may have restricted his ability to search beyond the “party-approved level” and likewise limited the scope with which he could move freely among the East German people.

Allowing for these limitations, *The Miracle Machine* is recommended as highly informative and well worth reading. It would be an excellent text for undergraduate courses in Sport History or Comparative Studies.

University of Victoria

Gerald A. Carr