

Book Reviews

History is only a confused heap of facts.
Lord Chesterfield

Dizikes, John. *Sportsmen and Gamesmen*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1981. Pp. 350. Notes, index, pictures. \$15.00.

During the nineteenth-century, profound economic, technological, demographic and religious changes, along with a host of other cultural and social influences, dramatically altered the social life of Americans. Sport and games were not immune to the pressures created by the onset of modern America. John Dizikes' *Sportsmen and Gamesmen* is an attempt to explore the changing nature and meaning of American sports and games. The work is well-written, but not well organized (no clear time-period is provided), highly provocative and suggestive, but in the end the analysis is unconvincing.

Dizikes states that the "gradual transformation of the aristocratic sporting tradition into a popular one is the theme of this book" (p. 4). While the author pays some attention to the democratization of sports and games, the work fundamentally revolves around two critical sub-themes. The first examines the shift of the American sporting type from a sportsman to a gamesman. For Dizikes, sportsmen and gamesmen are not polar sporting types. In fact, he concedes that there is no simple or clear distinction between the two. What differences do exist, he suggests, are a matter of emphasis and temperament. Their divergent attitudes towards the rules of the contest are at the core of their varying sporting personalities. The sportsman accepts "both the explicit rules of the game and the unwritten code of conduct that went with them," while the gamesman acknowledges the rules, but refuses "to recognize the existence of any code of conduct" (p. 38). For the gamesman, the rules exist not to be violated, but to be circumvented in his pursuit of his overriding objective, winning. The gamesman also differs from the sportsman in his "scientific" calculating approach to the contest. For him, competition is a display of technical and manipulative skills, not an arena for the achievement of honor. As a result, the gamesman "emphasizes psychological means and states of mind, not physical strength or force" (p. 39).

The repeated efforts of Americans to create a new and distinctive sporting culture is the second sub-theme of this work. While Dizikes insists that the

gamesman could be found in other cultures, he sees him as the quintessential American. The characteristics of the gamesman were consistent with America's democratic traditions, its open society and bourgeoisie mentality. As a result, the gamesman "came to be the dominant sporting and cultural type as the nineteenth century wore on" (p. 40). While Americans continued to pay lip service to the English tradition of the sportsman, the gamesman possessed the qualities to achieve victory, and thereby win the respect of his countrymen.

Dizikes uses a collection of biographical vignettes on various individuals, such as John Cox Stevens, Richard Ten Broeck and Hiram Woodruff, to explore his themes. Sport historians will be familiar with most of the people examined, but Dizikes makes us more aware of their contributions to nineteenth-century sport than can currently be gleaned from our historical studies. His treatment of William Ransom Johnson is insightful and his examination of chess champion, Paul Morphy, is informative, although too psychoanalytical for my own tastes. Dizikes' finest chapter is his discussion of Henry William Herbert, where he explores the tensions between the English and American sporting traditions.

Dizikes' approach facilitates his analysis of the mentality of the gamesman, but his selections are open to the "second guess" since he neglects to inform the reader why these people were chosen and who they represent. The selections result in a middle to upper class orientation. Boxer John C. Heenan is the sole representative of the influential sporting fraternity. Furthermore, all the people examined were involved in individual sports. Dizikes' work would have, therefore, profitted from an examination of other types of individuals, such as cricketer-baseball player Harry Wright or billiard-player and manufacturer Michael Phelan. The book would have also been better off if some of the selections had been excluded. P. T. Barnum clearly played a pivotal role in the development of urban amusements, but he had little to do with the history of sport and games. Similarly, theatrical star, Adah Menken, the sole female discussed, provides little insight into the nature and meaning of American sport.

Dizikes' analyses presents even more severe problems. His contention that sport became more democratic is predicated on the assumption that many forms of sport in the pre-Jacksonian period had been "the monopoly of the few" (p. 4). The reverse, however, was the case, with horse racing and fox-hunting the notable exceptions. In fact, sport was more class divided in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century than it was a hundred years earlier. More significantly, Dizikes concedes that by the Revolutionary period "there really was no sporting aristocracy, in the English sense" (p. 17). Yet, the author never explains what constituted the American sporting aristocracy. The issue becomes more cloudy by his unconvincing effort to link Andrew Jackson with the older sporting types.

Dizikes' work is severely hampered by the absence of any serious analysis of the profound impact the new social conditions had on the development of sport and games. For example, he never explains the connection between the changing nature of the city and the changing nature of sport. His contention that the openness of America's social structure made it impossible to transplant aristocratic sporting traditions is hardly novel and his work does not adequately respond to the recent criticism of the de Tocquevillian model of American society.

The little attention Dizikes pays to societal forces is not surprising since he views the mental attitude at the core of the gamesman. Although the gamesman could be found in earlier cultures, Dizikes sees their characteristics as an expression of bourgeoisie culture, a culture which places a premium on innovation, rationality and work. Dizikes' examination of the influence the bourgeoisie mentality had in creating the American sporting personality yields important insights into this generally unexplored area of sport history. The research indicates that significant sporting changes, such as commercialization and professionalization, were not solely the by-products of demographic and economic alterations. Rather they were the logical result of America's dominant sporting personality type. Dizikes' work further suggests that sporting trends long identified with the massification of sport had their rudimentary beginnings among individuals who were considered "gentleman" sportsmen.

Dizikes' examination of the American sporting mind falls short in certain areas. The vital changes in American attitudes towards sport during this period are never seriously discussed. Nor does he adequately explain why Americans felt compelled to give lip service to the code of the gentlemen. Moreover, he fails to analyze the ongoing appeal of the sportman's code as evidenced by the creation of amateur codes in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century.

Dizikes' efforts to link the gamesman to the creation of a distinct American sporting culture is both perplexing and unconvincing. For sometime now, most scholars have moved away from the idea of the "new man," preferring instead to understand the American experience within a global context. It is therefore surprising that Dizikes seeks to emphasize the unique. Numerous antebellum Americans did call for the creation of an indigenous culture and members of the sporting world were no exception, as evident by the desire to establish baseball as the "national pastime." Conveniently, Dizikes virtually ignored this sport. Even if he had examined baseball, he would have found little support for his thesis that "Games became or were American by being scientific" (p. 298). For all the claims that baseball was an expression of our national character, none of the rhetoric dealt with the scientific qualities of the sport. As late as the 1870s moreover, baseball supporters were defensive about the claim that their sport was not as "scientific" as its English counterpart, cricket.

Dizikes' work fails to come to terms with, even acknowledge, the recent sporting literature, particularly the research of Guttmann and Dunning and Sheard. These works have effectively illustrated that the rationale-scientific orientation towards sport is strongly tied to modernization, a process hardly unique to America. Clearly, many of the trends Dizikes believes as distinctive of our sporting culture were already underway, or occurring simultaneously, in England. It is significant to note that even the usage of the term "science" in a sporting sense was one Americans borrowed from the English.

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