

Baker, William J. and Carroll, John M., eds. *Sports in Modern America*. Saint Louis, Missouri: River City Publishers, 1981. Pp. xii, 172. Notes, photographs, tables. \$8.95.

“I don’t like to see sports used politically because—to repeat—I don’t believe they have that much significance, despite Communism’s national over-emphasis on games for international standing. Nor did I feel comfortable even

when an American President, Richard M. Nixon, the one-time reserve end at Whittier College, diagrammed football plays for . . . the Washington Redskins.” (p. v).

The preceding lament, extracted from Bob Broeg’s informal and engaging introduction to *Sports in Modern America*, is vitiated by the other materials in the volume. Despite Broeg’s fillip, sports have a significant and symbiotic relationship with American social and intellectual life. Indeed, the primary assumption of the editors concerns the legitimacy of analyzing sport with the same rigor reserved for other important phenomena. Thus, Broeg, a talented and iconoclastic journalist, reflects neither the major theme nor the dominant methodology utilized in this collection of essays.

With the exception of Broeg, all of the contributors to this book, besides possessing an expertise in sports studies, are specialists in established disciplines. *Sports in Modern America* reflects the insights of history, American studies, English, physical education and kinesiology. Breadth of knowledge, demonstrated by previous scholarship, qualifies John M. Carroll, a political and diplomatic historian at Lamar University, and his co-editor, William J. Baker, a social-intellectual historian of Modern Britain at the University of Maine-Orono, for the task of selecting materials that illuminate correlations between sports and the macrocosm. Although they eschew footnotes and avoid specialized terminology, contributing scholars demonstrate a sophistication and depth rarely exhibited by popular sports writers. Carroll and Baker identify undergraduate students in various history, sociology, and physical education courses as their intended audience.

Covering the years from Reconstruction to the present, *Sports in Modern America* is divided into three parts. The essays in the first unit (1865-1920) consider the emergence of organized sports, the influence of social elites on sport, and efforts to reform boxing, college football, and organized baseball. Part two (1920-1950) contains four essays, as does the previous component, and examines the symbolic appeal of baseball, contradictions generated by the dual educational and economic functions of college football, images of sport presented in the media, and the position of blacks in American sport. And the third section (1950-1981), comprised of five essays, focuses on the economics of sports, the female athlete, violence in sports, the dissemination of American sport to other nations, and a consideration of the Olympics within the context of international affairs. Each part begins with a concise prologue that discusses salient characteristics of the era under consideration, summarizes the essays that follow, and notes the background of authors. Although some of the thirteen essays represent revisions of other works, none appeared previously in its present form.

Appropriately, baseball, long the nation’s most popular game, figures promi-

nently in several articles. In "Sports at the Crossroads," an essay by one of the co-editors, William Baker ponders organized baseball's reaction to two crises, the challenge posed by Ban Johnson's upstart American League and the stigma left by the Black Sox scandal. According to Baker, the National Agreement of 1903, which acknowledged the American League as a major league, granted owners near absolute power over player trades, and recognized territorial rights, paralleled "the regulating, standardizing, modernizing tendencies of American government in the Progressive Era." (p. 39). He depicts the creation of the office of commissioner, first filled by Kenesaw Mountain Landis, to this same stress on efficiency as well as to the aura of respectability a stem federal judge could bring to baseball after the gambling publicity generated by the 1919 Chicago White Sox and others. Perhaps Baker might have profitably contrasted the symbolism manipulated by President Calvin Coolidge, another icon of the 1920s following the Harding Scandals, to that evoked by Landis. More to the point, Baker's otherwise insightful commentary overemphasizes the centrality of "simple rural backgrounds" (p. 46) and low player salaries to the ambience that spawned baseball's gambling problems. Quantitative evidence from Steven Riess' recent monograph, *Touching Base*, suggests that middle-class origins, college education, and comfortable remuneration were more common among professional baseball players than with the general population during the Progressive Era.

James Harper's aptly titled "Baseball: America's First National Pastime" attributes much of the game's perennial appeal in the generation following 1920 to its ability to evoke rural nostalgia while exploiting the trolley, radio, electric light, automobile, and other products of urban technology. Given the eccentricities of Ted Williams, Yogi Berra, and Casey Stengel, however, Harper's claim that post-World War II diamond heroes projected a corporate appearance, unlike the Jazz Age individualism of Babe Ruth, needs qualification. In "The Black Athlete In American Sports" William MacDonald notes that although Jackie Robinson reopened the major league to blacks, before 1900 a number of blacks played organized baseball. MacDonald skillfully relates the banishment of blacks from organized baseball, horse racing, and other sports they once participated in to the movement toward *de jure* segregation in the larger society. Besides its participation in racial inequality, the 'national pastime,' recounts Harry Jebesen, Jr., in "The Big Business of sports," engaged in monopolistic practices with impunity. Due to its exemption from antitrust laws, the result of a 1922 Supreme Court ruling, baseball owners, writes Jebesen, have long exercised prerogatives denied to entrepreneurs in other sports. "Violence in American Sports" by Douglass Noverr and Lawrence Ziewacz intelligently explores rising levels of violence in sport since World War II but fails to adequately consider whether the institutionalized harassment of umpires acts more as a safety valve or as an incitement to spectator rowdiness. Although William Miller's "The American Sports Empire" ably depicts the influence of United States culture on other nations, it

fails to offer in-depth analysis of the process by which certain peoples have molded American forms to conform to indigenous mores. During her Meiji Era, for example, the Japanese invested baseball with the values of their national character, rather than with those of the game's inventors.

Although the editors merit commendation for assembling an excellent selection of articles, the addition of a few more essays to *Sports in Modern America*, which has only 172 pages of text, would have strengthened certain neglected areas. The recent jogging boom, the growth of soccer, and the athletic standard bearers of white ethnic groups, for example, receive muted attention. And a topical organization might have more effectively conceptualized themes than the organization of units around chronological periods. Even on its own terms, the organization raises question. Do the years 1865-1920, for instance, an interval encompassing Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, and the Progressive Era really form a distinct entity in sports history or in any other aspect of American studies? An index would add to the book's utility, and the circumscribed bibliographic materials following each essay merit amplification. In addition, the essays are rarely seminal. Nevertheless, most articles cogently synthesize previous scholarship within an interpretative context purposely designed to stimulate debate. Moreover, readers will enjoy a series of evocative photographs, including one of Ronald Reagan portraying Grover Cleveland Alexander. *Sports in Modern America* is lucid, interesting, and informative.

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