

Redmond, Gerald. *The Sporting Scots of Nineteenth-Century Canada*. Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982. Pp. 347. Index, appendices, bibliography, notes, photographs. \$40.00

In 1961, the last census year in which the category was recorded, more than 1.8 million Canadians identified themselves as of Scottish origin, thereby

making them the third largest ethnic group in Canada, larger than all but the English and French. Although mythologized memories of the Highland clearances have given the impression that most Scottish immigrants were penniless crofters who came in a single wave at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in fact Scots of all classes and districts have emigrated to Canada in a relatively steady stream since the Conquest in 1763. They were never an oppressed minority. Well trained by the superior Scottish education system, imbued with that sense of moral purpose and public spiritness which emerged from the Scottish Reformation, but lacking opportunities at home, they were often recruited to be officers and administrators for Britain's colonies or traders for her banking and merchant firms. Not surprisingly, they became extremely influential. The leaders of both major political parties at the time of Confederation were Scots-born, as were the first two prime ministers. They dominated the fur trade, the timber trade, banking and railways. They established schools and universities. And as Gerald Redmond argues, they made a lasting contribution to the development of Canadian sport. They introduced curling and golf and popularized them by forming clubs, building specialized facilities (such as covered rinks for curling) and publicizing competitions and achievements. Their Highland or Caledonian Games Societies—which by mid-century staged annual festivals of athletics, dancing and music, attracting hundreds of entrants and thousands of paying spectators—contributed to the subsequent development of track and field. Scotsmen were prominent organizers and competitors in other sports, while Scots governors-general and politicians added royal and state patronage.

Redmond's account of these developments is rich in detail and anecdote, weak in analysis. The nineteenth-century sportsworld in which the Scots played was quite different from our own: events we would regard as children's novelties (like the sack race) were contested with the same seriousness and for the same prizes as events now on the Olympic program; age-class competitions were considered unusual; and most events were conducted with a respect for social niceties that the spirit of instrumental rationality has all but eradicated today. By liberal use of contemporary reports, Redmond has given us a participant's perspective. The result is an affectionate portrait of activities we might otherwise dismiss as stuffy or quaint.

But the term, "influence," covers a wide range of agency: a garlic can influence a stew as well as the cook. Redmond's thesis is weakened by his failure to inject any analytical rigor into either the relationships or the activities he describes. To what extent were Scottish-Canadian sportsmen representative of a distinct sporting culture? Or were they merely giving a Scottish flavour to an approach to game-playing that was essentially English, albeit modified by contact with other cultures in the British Isles? He never makes this clear. He cites seventeenth-century English sources for golf and tells us a Highland Games Society appropriated the word, "Royal," as early as 1832. Although he tells us there is a difference between Scottish, British and English cultures, he is never precise about these differences nor the relationship

between Scottish culture and English imperialism. Given that Scottish-Canadians came from and lived in several distinct regions, and a number intermarried with *Canadians* and Metis, the very term, "Scottish," may require clarification as well. Yet he makes no attempt to distinguish between sportsmen's backgrounds and in some cases is content to cite Scottish surnames as the sole evidence of Scottish influence.

Redmond is equally vague about the particular character the Scots-Canadians contributed to Canadian sport. We now know that "sport" is a particular form of physical activity fashioned from a variety of more traditional forms during a century of energetic innovation and heated debate and it would be nice to know whether ethnicity structured this process in any significant way. Yet Redmond cannot address this question for his concept of sport is idealized and ahistorical. Although he asserts that curling was more "democratic" than other sports, he makes no attempt to employ this or any other category as a framework for analysis. Alan Metcalfe and Rick Gruneau have shown that the Montreal and Toronto business and professional men who created the first pan-Canadian sports organizations imparted a particular class stamp to their activity. Redmond tells us that many of these men were Scots, but he is silent about the exact nature of their contribution. In the light of the last decade of scholarship and debate about "social control" and the "invention" of sport, such imprecision is no longer acceptable, even if the thesis from which this manuscript was prepared was defended in 1972.

Maxwell Howell, the founder of the Alberta school of sports history of which Redmond is representative, once argued for the importance of "first order" studies of the development of organized physical activity in Canada—studies which would unearth the essential facts about the Canadian experience, but leave the necessary analysis to a subsequent generation. Although Howell's project was once accepted uncritically, Redmond's *Sporting Scots of Nineteenth-Century Canada* illustrates why the "first order" study is no longer sufficient. While he provides a competent summary of the secondary literature, his failure to inform investigation and explanation with any sort of conceptual precision, let alone a theoretical framework, still leaves us wondering about the *specificity* of the Scottish-Canadian contribution. He has demonstrated beyond a doubt that the Scots were present at the beginnings of Canadian sport, but beyond a few generalizations, he cannot tell us precisely what they did. The answer to that question awaits a more penetrating approach.

University of Toronto

Bruce Kidd