

Noverr, Douglas A. and Ziewacz, Lawrence E. *The Games They Played: Sports in American History, 1865-1980*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, Inc. 1983. Pp. vii. 422. Index, bibliographic essay, illustrations. \$34.95 (cloth).

The Games They Played is a compendium predicated upon and exalting the love affair which Americans have had with sport. Douglas A. Noverr and Lawrence E. Ziewacz, two associate professors in Michigan State University's Department of American Thought and Language, detail the events and the exploits of the phenomenal, the good, and the "brats" of seven sports that have involved the "largest numbers of participants and spectators" (p. vii) in the United States. After their introductory chapter synthesizing thirty-five years of "experience," the authors launch into a decade-by-decade description of and values ascribed to professional baseball and boxing, college and professional football and basketball, tennis, golf, and track and field, as well as the Olympics. Not only do these sports catch the spirit of Americans, but

they usually contribute to and maintain morale, values, and the American way in the twentieth century.

The sports fan may find this volume to be an alternative to traditional encyclopedias. As long as the reader concurs with what the authors have chosen to highlight, he or she may appreciate the opportunity to compare who were the achievers and what happened in the various sports at the same time and across time. The book is readable, and the sports are contexted in other American happenings. The flaws, while not insignificant, are not overwhelming. There are a few errors in facts (e.g., Baseball's Major League Players' Association was not "established" in 1966, as the authors state, p. 280) as well as in sentence structure. One cannot help but wonder how the Philadelphia Athletics could have "won the 1931 pennant for a third straight season" (p. 102). Disconcerting, also, are the omissions (e.g., Babe Didrikson) and the disputable and vague statements often used as topic sentences. The author's claim, for example, that "tennis began to boom in the United States in the late 1960s" (p. 282) and that "violence became a part of the game even in the so-called noncontact sports" in the 1970s (p. 308).

Statements such as these may cause more problems for the critical student of sport and society, be he or she fan or scholar. The dust jacket and the preface claim that *The Games They Played* is a "cultural history as well as a sports history" (as if the two were mutually exclusive). I for one, however, would not assign it space on a shelf with insightful histories—for reasons in addition to the existence of vague, problematic contentions. The authors suggest the influence of John R. Betts on their study of sport (pp. 9-10), and his typology is theirs. In its day *America's Sporting Heritage* was a groundbreaker, a classic; more than a decade later, however, *The Games They Played* is a copy frozen in time. Noverr and Ziewacz have not moved beyond Bett's first order description or the "sport mirrors society" paradigm. Each chapter begins with a recitation of what was happening and what the mood of the people was in the United States. Then the litany of sport begins.

Two additional factors deter either effective or novel analysis and synthesis. First, Noverr and Ziewacz do not view sport as an independent variable, although some of their material suggests that it is. Second, they do not provide a lot of evidence that they are aware of current research in sport history or in any other field of social/cultural history. Stereotypes and one-dimensional discussions of society abound. Late nineteenth century industrialists remain "robber barons," sports which became popular filter down from on high, and the 1950s are "flashy," the decade of the "gray flannel suit." Even the social analysis/commentary is disturbing. Discussing the 1960s, the authors explain the revolt of "young people . . . against the 'uptight,' 'plastic,' technocratic world" as "a result" of the fact that "society had foolishly trusted in its own capabilities to solve the complex problems of modern industrial societies." Then the reader can almost anticipate the conclusions for sport: "Sports could not long remain unaffected by the throes of a society in compulsive upheaval" (p. 244).

The Games They Played will probably not supplant existing sport history texts. Perhaps the authors do not intend that it should. Its value lies in its rendering of events and personages, however arbitrarily they were chosen. I just wish I could have read it as a fan, albeit an uncritical one, right before the World Series.

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