

Harkness, Don. Editor, *Sports in American Culture: 1980 Conference Proceedings*, Tampa: American Studies Press, 1980. Pp. 61. \$3.25 (paper).

No matter how large a travel budget might be, it would not accommodate all the potentially useful trips to conferences and conventions. In the area of sport history that situation is even more difficult. Most of us can get funds to go to the annual NASSH meetings, but beyond that it is virtually impossible. In the last four years there have been at least ten major conferences in the area of sport history which were special, organized with a theme. and so very inviting to the possible traveller. One supposes that if one were as prolific as are sports writers, this would not be a problem as there would be enough useful papers to give to warrant some sort of subsidy.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work that way. For that reason we can welcome the publication of the proceedings of such conferences, especially when they are produced in an inexpensive format as is the one under discussion. For, to

be frank, in the real world, not all conference papers are good, and some of them can be improved in the editorial conferences leading up to publication. And, some of the papers inevitably have primarily local appeal, and they can get the attention they deserve when the proceedings appear. Don Harkness, editor of this work, has had all these matters in his thoughts as he prepared this work for reviewers and other professional readers, I am sure.

This conference was held in May 1980. The convenors attempted to provide a forum for those interested in sport and its place in American life. A short paper attempting to put sport into the American dream and another which discussed sport as a factor in the arsenal of the social scientist provided the kickoff session, quickly followed by sport and politics. Considerable attention was given to the place of women's sport today, in the wake of Title IX funding, and a paper was heard on Soviet-American sport, but the best paper was that on sport and ethnicity, subtitled, "war minus the armies." This was the year of the Olympic boycott, and the organizers felt that a debate on the action would be useful. From the summary in this work, it was not a debate. Dwight Stones spoke for two hours supporting the boycott from chauvinist, political non-sport reasons, and his opponent, a non-athlete, was left to offer some significant comments on sport and competition which was non-racist and non-chauvinist in form. One suspects that the words, however, well selected and received, came as a light and deadened end to a barrage of political platitudes.

One session was given over to sports at the University of South Florida, no doubt useful to those who attended that institution, but of small significance to a wider audience, unless it be how Title IX had had an impact on that University. However, the comments did not differ much from an earlier talk by the same speaker.

The last session was, in most ways, the most provocative, and the one which offered the most to readers, and one supposes, to the original auditors. Papers were heard on the economic aspects of professional sports, with good materials on tennis players, the role of agents, and a session on professional baseball. Hank Webb, a marginal pitcher with the Milwaukee Braves, gave a moving commentary on the impact of these big monies on athletes, and especially on the marginal player, who for a very few years does quite well indeed, but because he is marginal, finds himself in the classic labor dilemma. If he overprices his services at all, another marginal player underbids him, and the joyride is over. Only those who can sell something unique or very unusual make the really big money, can plan for the future, and have a sense of security. *This does not have to be athletic ability.* Only in the margin is that crucial. Reggie Jackson, Dave Kingman, and a number of others often fill ball parks. Managers wanting and needing to win to maintain their positions must grind their teeth with passion as the economics of the sport determine who plays, when they play, and much of this without regard to winning or losing, only to coming close. Hank Webb provided another glimpse at this world, and in so doing, opened it wide for view at least for a moment.

So another conference proceeding crossed my desk. I did not attend the conference; no money, other plans, whatever. I have had the opportunity to read the results, however. I would like to meet Hank Webb. Perhaps SABR, or more likely NASSH, could put a major session together of persons like Hank Webb, Pumpsie Green. Allen Webb. the 150th ranked tennis professional, the non-starters on the New York Cosmos, or the last man on the Winnipeg Blue Bombers, and see what professional sports and economics. and also sociology has to offer to these persons caught in the margin.

For that session I am glad to read the book. For the others, I must confess that I am just as happy that I stayed in Maine. I am profoundly glad that I didn't hear Dwight Stones, and I don't really care much about sport at USF. The sport and American dream is and was a good idea, but it apparently didn't come off, and even if sport makes a little cottage industry for social scientists. most people probably are not effected. The book is nicely illustrated by Joe Joeb, who provides a series of line drawings for many of the headings of articles. At the cost this is a useful book. I would like to read an analysis of the conference from those who began the discussions, however. Was it a success or failure? Did it meet the objectives of the organizers? The editor, and other editors in future, would do us all a favor by indicating answers to these and other questions.

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