

Baker, William J., *Sports in the Western World*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982. Pp. viii. 360. Bibliography, illustrations, index. \$19.95 (cloth), \$9.50 (paper).

Professor Baker has done teachers of sport history a valuable service by writing a clear narrative of sports in western society. His purpose, he writes, is: "This book is about the history of competitive sports in the western world—from ancient religious ritual and simple tribal contests to highly organized modern spectacles." On the whole, Professor Baker has achieved his purpose. His twenty chapters, organized into five logical, chronological parts, trace the development of sports from ancient times to the present. As the author admits, parts four and five deal more fully with American sports than any other sports topic. This is certainly understandable considering the sports explosion in modern American life intensified by the extensive media hype.

The author's style is pleasantly journalistic and succinct. The book is quite entertaining and the choice of illustrations is tasteful. This is no picture book.

Though the book is most heavily-weighted in modern sport, the author makes a serious attempt at balance. The chapter entitled "Organized Greek Games" is particularly well done as are most of the chapters. The chapter entitled "Medieval People at Play" suffers not from the author's shortcomings but from the state of the art of medieval sport history. The writer of a survey of western sport cannot be held responsible for synthesizing what is

not there. Yet, the emphasis on ball games, which covers seven of the twelve and a half pages in the chapter on medieval sport, suggests too firm a reliance on Robert Henderson's *Ball, But, and Bishop*, a work that has formed the basis of too many opinions on sport in medieval society. A striking omission from the bibliography on medieval sport is the reviewer's "*Ludi Medi Aevi*": *Studies in the History of Medieval Sport* (Manhattan, Kansas, 1981).

The section in "Medieval People at Play" entitled "Master Versus Masses" points to a rather divided medieval society regarding sport. Bishop Adalberon of Laon, who wrote in the early eleventh century, and numerous other medieval writers, did not see this separation: ". . . the city of God which is believed to be one is divided into three: some pray, others fight, and the others work. These three groups live together and could not endure separation." The evidence from chroniclers and other writers seems to paint a less divided picture of medieval social classes.

In chapter five, "The Day of the Scholar Athlete," there are also nagging minor problems. The later medieval church is not known for its ascetic preoccupations. And, the ideal "Renaissance man" sounds very much like the ideal knight of the twelfth century. This section continues the older view of the so-called "Italian Renaissance" as a "rebirth" of civilization. After the reader passes these very few minor riffs, he is then treated to the rest of a splendid book.

The author is to be commended for his generous quotes from the primary sources. Chapter six, "Frowning Puritans," is also exceedingly well researched and written. Chapter seven is one of the best. Frankly, chapter nine is the best! That chapter is devoted to football and the author is particularly skillful in tracing the development of European soccer and rugby and American football.

As Professor Baker points out in his Introduction, chapters nine through twenty are more elaborate and, subsequently, better. His vignettes of sporting pioneers like Dr. James Naismith, his themes of individualism and nationalism, and the scope and diversity of the sources make these chapters a fine achievement.

Chapter nineteen, "Sports Biz," was an excellent distillation of the media hype of modern sport. The last chapter, "Sports in Perspective," introduces the reader to an outstanding and varied number of important books on sport.

*Sports in Western Society* is a book that can serve numerous purposes. It should be used by all who seek an understanding of the ebb and flow of sport in western society. Pedagogically, it is an excellent introduction for a course in sport history. Finally, it would also serve as a valuable supplement for those teachers of western civilization who desire a novel heuristic for their courses and who believe that sports are a vital part of western society. The book is certainly required reading for anyone interested in the history of sports.