

Jose, Cohn and Rannie, William F. *The Story of Soccer in Canada*. Lincoln, Ontario: W. F. Rannie, 1982, 200 pp. Index, appendices, pictures. \$6.95 (paper).

The art of doing single sport history has been championed by a small number of writers among whom are Voigt, in *American Baseball* (3 volumes) and Mason, in *Association Football and English Society, 1863-1915*. At this time, there is no significant piece of work on the topic of a single sport in Canadian sport history. Jose's and Colin's book is characterized best as a record of soccer in Canada rather than as either a history or "the story."

Both authors have an admirable commitment to chronicling and/or publishing books on a wide variety of topics ranging from whaling to ornithology to whiskey. In writing “the story of soccer in Canada,” the authors consulted numerous people closely connected to the sport itself as well as two professional sport historians for information. While the market segmentation for the book is difficult to discern, it is definitely not scholarly. The serious historian will find little of value in the book; it is written in a complete vacuum bell-jarred from both the context and the times of Canadian society and sport. Appropriately, then, the cover design displays a giant Canadian flag stuck into the northern hemisphere of a global, presumably, soccer ball.

Any book should not be judged by its cover. Intended readership should be the main criterion of review. The authors of *The Story of Soccer in Canada* are strangely silent as to their explicit purpose for the book. The only hint of intent for the reader given in the Introduction is the single line, “Now for the story of soccer in Canada.” It seems more fitting for a lavish MGM movie production than for a book. In the promotional brochure, the target audience is identified:

A book for every soccer fan
and player.
How the game began and
developed in this country.
Authoritative. Illustrated.

Optimistically, it is difficult to imagine any soccer fan or player reading this book and enjoying it. A chronicle-like overview of the game, from 1586 (!) to 1980, as it was played in Canada is given in 34 pages of the first chapter. Succeeding chapters center on isolated events or themes such as an 1888 Canadian soccer team tour of Britain, Canada’s 1904 St. Louis Olympic gold medal performance, a variety of international tours and contests, youth soccer, and a “who’s who then and now” chapter. But not one of the chapters is story-like. Instead, the chapters melt together with game score after game score, venue after venue after venue. In short, as stated, it is more a compendium or a record of soccer games, scores, teams and players’ names. Biographical sketches, except for the acknowledged “father” of soccer in Canada, David Forsyth, seldom run longer than one paragraph. Some good early pictures were reproduced but in a book whose outer dimension are 8 by 5 inches, they lose their impact.

Finally, the authors’ biases are obvious—the more soccer the better and an attendant corollary, whatever Canadians did with respect to soccer was simply admirable and worthy, therefore, of record. There are glimmers of insight although faint and undeveloped. The authors, for example, note the working class origins of the sport, its indebtedness for growth to immigrants (often, the authors claim, recruited with job promises in return for playing soccer), its subservient status and lack of media attention compared to Canadian football, its widespread, growing appeal to females, and the general lack of North American attentiveness to the basic motor skill of kicking. Only passing attention is given to these aspects of the game’s history.

Single sport history is not easy to write. Game by game accounts such as *The Story of Soccer In Canada* add little to academic history, to popular history or to sport heritage, as commendable as the addage might seem to be that some history is better than no history.

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