

## Book Reviews

Müller, Norbert, and Rühl, Joachim K., eds. *Olympic Scientific Congress 1984 Official Report: Sport History*. Niedernhausen (West Germany): Schors-Verlag, 1985. Pp. 10-486.

Is the international scholarly conference, to which one flies five thousand miles in order to speak for ten minutes, for which one (or one's institution) spends a thousand dollars or more in travel costs, a boon or a boondoggle? This is, fortunately, a question I need not answer. From such conferences, however, come published collections of papers delivered. When the conference is well planned, when the editors of the collection are allowed to be selective, the result is a valuable contribution to scholarship. Whether or not the Olympic Scientific Congress of 1984, at Eugene, Oregon, was well planned, I cannot say, but the published papers on sport history, the first of thirteen such volumes, are the occasion for dour meditation. Instructed presumably to include everyone who presented a paper in Eugene, Müller and Rühl do just that—with abstracts for those who failed to submit the actual paper. To say that the papers vary wildly in quality is to understate the case. The fifty contributions range from the magisterial to the pitiable.

Before I comment on some of the individual contributions, I must praise the editors for the English they have scrupulously monitored. There are occasional grammatical blunders and idiomatic discords, but none of the papers is rendered unintelligible by its author's unaided efforts to express himself in his second or third language. I say this not as one who arrogantly believes that all scholars the world over are obliged to master English; I ask only that those whose native language is not English seek help before publishing gibberish. There is no gibberish in this collection.

There is a great deal of nonsense. We are told, for instance, by one scholar that research into the relations among sport, literature, and art have been "scarce and infrequent" (118). Another asserts that the daggers and swords carved upon medieval tombstones can be taken as evidence of sports participation. Still another scholar offers us the biographical facts on one of the founders of hydrotherapy. It is doubtless good to learn that ribs broken in a carriage accident were mended by the judicious application of cold water, but should this information be classified as sport history? A fourth author provides us with vignettes of thirteen Olympic victors and concludes that "poor and rich family backgrounds alike have produced stellar-performing athletes" (110) a bit of news that sport sociologists will surely welcome. Still another scholar provides a five-page text of a slide show on Greek and Roman sports arenas—with a photograph of Olympia. I quote the entire commentary on Roman facilities:

In Roman hands the Greek Games degenerated. This was a nation of circuses, amphitheatres and hippodromes where the public was to be entertained by professionals. Best known of the circuses is the Coliseum. A very large statue of Nero, the Roman emperor who had violated games sites at both Delphi and Olympia, stood beside this building. From this Colossus of Nero the Coliseum took its name. Modern Rome has lined the pavement by the Coliseum where the Colossus of Nero stood.

Near the Coliseum is the Circus Maximus where chariot races were held. Rome contributed its "Baths" to our Sports History. Greatest of these in Rome were the Baths of Diocletian. One wall of the baths stands as a part of a chapel in use today. (261-262)

Quite apart from the obvious, the irrelevant, and the erroneous, there is a good deal to criticize. Predictably, anglophobe historians neglect European sources. This matters little when the topic is British or American, but Brian Stoddart has written an article on "Sport, Cultural Politics and International Relations" which purports to examine the German soccer tour of 1935 from both a British and a German perspective. He is excellent on the British reactions, but he has used only those sources available in English, which does tend to reduce the value of his comments on the Germans. Am I the only sport historian to think this a defect? In contrast to Stoddart, Hajo Bernett limits the focus of his essay on the 1932 Olympics to the games "as Seen by the Nationalistic and Racial Ideology" and nonetheless draws upon some of the sources in English. Bernett displays the mastery which has characterized his extensive contributions to sport history.

Norbert Müller's very interesting reflections on fair play serve, in my *partis* judgment, to raise rather than to resolve the issue. The problem is that he defines fair play so broadly that it includes "a plurality of Christian virtues" (483). I prefer a more sport-specific conceptualization that defines fair play in terms of respect for the opponent whose best efforts are welcomed because they force us to our maximum achievement. It is not necessary that fair play include gallantry, modesty, self-discipline, and a host of other virtues socially desirable but inessential in the realm of sport.

There are, happily, enough papers to justify publication of the collection. I shall mention only those which I personally found especially informative. I learned a good deal from Reet Howell on Australia's first female Olympians and from Joan S. Hult on the female opposition to female participation in the Olympics of 1928, 1932, and 1936. Since there is almost nothing on Japanese sports available (except in Japanese), I am grateful for the 9-page history of Japanese women's sports by Hiroko Seiwa, Katsuma Takahashi, and Yuji Hirano. Heiner Gillmeister's "The Flemish Ancestry of Early English Ball Games" continues his philological investigations into the medieval origins of modern sports. Joachim Rühl's synopsis of his classic book on Robert Dover's so-called "Olympick" games (a 17th-century revival of traditional English sports) may tantalize some into reading the original. Norbert Müller's study of the American treatment of Pierre de Coubertin's life and work illuminates some American cultural biases. I especially appreciate his remarks on John Mac-

Aloon's brilliant but flawed study. Although their essays might be classed as "local history," Roland Renson and Roberta J. Park maintain their usual high standards in essays on the Antwerp Olympics of 1920 and the sports events associated with the San Francisco World's Fair of 1915.

A stickler for classification might object to the inclusion of six essays on sports in literature and in film, but I am grateful for Sharon Stoll's somewhat polemical defense of the Sumerians: "Of the five sporting events discussed by Homer, four of them were first practiced by the ancient Sumerians" (178). This may or may not be the case, but the argument is interestingly revisionist. If I am less enthusiastic about the other literary essays, it is perhaps because the authors were unable to do very much in the small space allotted them.

And the question of space brings me back to my earlier point. Is it really necessary to be unselective? Are fifty ten-page essays better than ten fifty-page essays? No respectable scholarly journal would volunteer to publish whatever its readers submitted. Are we in such bad shape professionally that conference organizers have to promise publication and thus commit the helpless editors to every paper?

Amherst College

Allen Guttman