

Carter, John Marshall. *Sports and Pastimes of the Middle Ages*. Columbus, Georgia: Brentwood Communications Group, 1984. 80 pp. \$7.50.

Literature on the history of sports in the middle ages is not very plentiful. John Marshall Carter would like to see this situation change and so he has written *Sports and Pastimes of the Middle Ages* as an encouragement and preliminary guide to further research. As a trained medievalist and the author of *Ludi Medi Aevi: Studies in the History of Medieval Sport* (Manhattan, Kansas, 1981), Professor Carter is well qualified for the task he has set out to accomplish.

This small volume consists of seven essays most of which have already appeared in the *Canadian Journal of Sports History*. The first four essays are historiographical and bibliographical and as such provide a good introduction to research. Especially interesting are the chapters discussing materials such as the rolls of the justice of eyre, the coroners' rolls, and the Bayeaux Tapestry as primary sources for sports history. The remaining three chapters are analytical investigations of clerical attitudes toward sports, sports in twelfth century London, and the pastimes of peasants as depicted by the Bayeaux Tapestry.

As a brief introduction to sports in the middle ages, Professor Carter's book succeeds in introducing much of the pertinent scholarship in its footnotes and bibliography. Even more important, Carter shows that he is a good historian by his concern to reveal all of the potential primary sources for research in sports history, particularly legal documents, works of medieval fiction, and art like the

Bayeux Tapestry. Considering the paucity of relevant source materials, his concern is well-founded and shows real historical creativity.

Unfortunately, Professor Carter's creative use of primary sources is not matched by equal analytical skill. His first chapter entitled "Medieval Sport: A Definitional Effort" seems to come to no other conclusion than to cite Johan Huizinga's idea that play is the antithesis of work with the qualification that the definition is complicated by the medieval class structure. The problem with this definition, as Carter points out, is that pastimes of the nobility such as jousting, horsemanship, and archery are also basically the same things they did when they were fulfilling their social function of being the warriors of society. Carter's basic acceptance of sport being part of the antithesis of work is never able to explain this occurrence.

Carter's definitional problem leads him into an anachronistic way of looking at sports in the middle ages which is exemplified by the titles of his chapters five and six which refer to noble warriors as "God's Athletes" and William Fitzstephen as "A Medieval Sports Reporter." Instead of viewing sports and play from the view point of the twentieth century's technological and urbanized setting, it seems more reasonable to view sport and play from an evolutionary and functional approach. How did many of the medieval sports come into existence? Carter discusses hunting and fishing but never mentions their origins as activities which obviously began as part of a quest for subsistence. As society's capacity to feed itself through agriculture increased they evolved into activities based on personal enjoyment not necessity. Jousting, horsemanship, and archery began as drill and practice for the real fighting to come. After all, one of the strengths of the English armies during the Hundred Years War was their ready supply of deadly longbowmen which stemmed from the English yeomanry's penchant for archery competition as a leisure time activity. Here the function of sport and the function of war were closely linked. As military technology became more sophisticated by the late middle ages, the sporting aspects of activities such as jousting became more important than the military aspects. Henry VIII of England was almost killed in a joust while Henry II of France did die as a result of injuries received in a tournament. In spite of the obvious danger, jousting was clearly a sporting activity. No sixteenth century monarch would have seriously attempted to apply his antiquated skills with a lance by leading his knights in a charge against artillery, crossbowmen, and pikemen. The function of enjoyable recreation and competition remained in formerly warlike drills long after the military function lost its practical application. Viewed in an evolutionary and functional framework, the similarity between the work and play of the nobility presents no paradox as they do when placed in a dialectical relationship as Carter does by not going beyond Huizinga.