

Korr, Charles. *West Ham United: The Making of a Football Club*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986. Pp. 257. Illustrations, notes, glossary, chronology, and index.

While rock star Rod Stewart was singing about “passion” in London schoolyards during the 1980s, Charles Korr was writing about another form of British “passion”—the football club of West Ham United and its identity in London’s East Side. Korr, a scholar who has published previously on topics of British history, immersed himself in the history of West Ham United for several years and produced an intriguing and valuable book. In so doing, Korr the American outsider became a British insider and the readers of his book are the beneficiaries of this transformation. While not distracting from his fairness and evenness as a historian, Korr’s familiarity with club officers, players, and fans has made his research and writing more personal and in turn, the book is more enjoyable.

In a sense, *West Ham United* is a company history. It is the story of a business organization which began in 1895 as the Thames Ironworks Football Club and evolved into the West Ham United Football Club Ltd. in 1900. In his analysis Korr writes about public image, marketing, earnings, salaries, boards of directors, managers, and competition—terms and concerns not unlike those discussed in the board rooms of most major corporations. Arnold F. Hills, the Harrow and Oxford educated president of the Thames Ironworks, started the football club for his workers as an agent to build character, morals, and morale. Initially, the club was funded by club member subscriptions and the Ironworks. They practiced and played their games on the Hills’ owned Memorial Ground. Yet, in a few short years, the power of competition altered the make-up and function of the club. As “winning matches against first-class competition” (p. 6) became their prime objective, board members and players no longer came from the ranks of Thames Ironworks employees. Consequently, in 1900, Hills severed formal ties with the club and they became West Ham United. Although Hills retained many shares of stock, his direct connection with the club ended in 1904 and the team stopped playing at his Memorial Ground and moved to the Boleyn Ground on Green Street in East Ham.

A new age of prosperity began with the philosophical and physical shift of West Ham United. The geographic move was a visible break with the Ironworks and the new location also proved to be better for spectator attendance. In addition, the new board of directors was composed of local men of the community. Between 1905 and 1914, they realized a profit and attracted support by fielding a winning team, paying higher wages to quality players, and making the grounds a comfortable place for the fans. The spectators responded positively. Even though the shareholders were the legal owners of the club, Korr acknowledges that “the real owners were a much more nebulous group—the tens of thousands of people who talked about the club, gave vocal and emotional support and paid their money at the gate.” (p. 27) This sense of community

loyalty and pride courses through the book and is one of the factors that makes West Ham United so interesting.

Another aspect of the identity of West Ham United is that the club has been kept in the control of a small and protected "family" of chairmen, managers, and secretaries. Korr views these positions as "a lifetime appointment" (p. 31) and it is easy to see why he would come to this conclusion. There have only been five managers and five secretaries in the history of the club and in the chairman's position, only four individuals held office from 1909 to the present with two of these men being father and son. Here again, with this kind of stability, it becomes obvious why Korr describes West Ham's leadership as "a self-perpetuating oligarchy." (p. 28) Adding to the "family" theme is the fact that most of the trainers, coaches, and scouts have been former West Ham players.

Korr progresses through the ups and downs of the "Hammers" with discussions of finances, managers, club operations, great players, and the club's relationship with the various communities and subcultures that make-up London's East End. With skillful use of the club's annual reports and board minutes, interviews with club officials, players, and fans, and excerpts from local newspapers, Korr familiarizes the reader with famous secretaries like Eddie Chapman, popular stars like Syd Puddefoot, and long enduring managers like "Reg" Pratt. Overall, the contents of the book explain in precise detail what Charles Korr chose as his concluding statement: "West Ham has been more than a game, more than a club-it has been a way of life." (p. 228)

*West Ham United* serves as a good model for what could be done by others in analyzing the history of a specific sporting team. Historians and sociologists as well as those with interests in sports management will benefit from reading the book. Both sides of the business venture are provided-the inner workings of a sport club as well as the outward public reactions to managerial decisions.

The book is also a joy to read. Korr writes a moving story and like a good novel, the reader is "hooked" after the first few pages.

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