

Lapchick, Richard E., ed. *Fractured Focus; Sport as a Reflection of Society*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1986. Pp. 388. Notes, bibliography.

Social scientists often use models or prototypes to explain events or analyze cause-effect relationships. In his anthology, *Fractured Focus; Sport as a Rejection of Society*, editor Richard Lapchick, a sports activist with a political science background, does precisely that. He embraces the overwrought “mirror model” to show the negative impact of sport on society. Clearly stated, his purpose is “to counterbalance all the writings about the joys of sport with a critical look at its less glamorous side.” He accentuates the negative with essays on such “problem areas of sport” as the exploitation of athletes, youth sports, racism, sexism, drug abuse, violence, gambling, and international politics. However, he changes directions in his conclusion, trying to convince the public that his book was “meant not to dampen the readers’ love for the game but simply to make them think about what is happening off the field” with the hope that their subsequent actions will lead to better sport in a better world. Such ambivalence not only depicts the complex nature of modern sport, but it also reveals the mixed feelings of an individual who has devoted most of his life toward making it better for everyone.

As director of the Center for the Study of Sport in Society, an institution he founded at Northeastern University in 1984, Lapchick has a deep commitment toward sport. The Center is helping professional and former professional athletes to return to college to complete their baccalaureate degree requirements. At the same time, through its outreach program, it is encouraging junior and senior high school students to make education their highest priority. Over the years, Lapchick has written widely about sports. He has authored numerous articles and several books, most notably *The Politics of Race and International Sport: The Case of South Africa* (1976) and *Broken Promises: Racism in American Sport* (1984). The latter, largely autobiographical, discusses his role in the movement to boycott South African sports and the life-threatening assault he suffered because he played a prominent role in that movement.

Lapchick leaned heavily upon *Arena Review* and *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, in assembling this collection of essays. Twenty of the twenty-six essays in this anthology are from these two journals which, incidentally, are published by Lapchick’s Center at Northeastern. He selected the writings of such celebrities, scholars, and journalists as Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Harry Edwards, Robert Lipsyte, George Sage, and Murray Chass. Without question, most of the essays are provocative and informative.

Fractured Focus, though it enhances our understanding of sport and its role in our contemporary world, is problematic on two fronts. In the first place, Lapchick's adoption of the mirror model, albeit a broken one in this case, gives sport a much broader and more important role in society than it actually has or deserves. The book's sub-title, *Sport as a Reflection of Society*, gives one the impression that sport is an all-encompassing entity reflecting society in its entirety. In his introduction, Lapchick recognizes the limitations of sport when he identified the several "problem areas" noted previously. But in order to avoid ambiguity, he should have chosen a title indicative of the limitations spelled out in the introduction. On the second score, editor Lapchick falls a bit short and a bit late in attempting to produce a text to "counterbalance all the writings about the joys of sport." A preponderance of books casting sport in a negative light have been published during the past two decades. Who can forget Harry Edwards' *Revolt of the Black Athlete* (1969), Jack Scott's *Athletic Revolution* (1971), Dave Meggyesy's *Out of Their League* (1971), or Gary Shaw's *Meat on the Hoof* (1972)? *Fractured Focus* can only add to this genre; it cannot counteract the so-called "joys of sport" because the scales have already been tilted toward the negative end for some time now. If anything, the positive side of sport needs equal treatment.

The irony of *Fractured Focus* is that the text is not nearly as negative as its title suggests. Even though its major aim is to focus attention on negative criticism of sport and that is apparent in several of the pieces (e.g., *Washington Post* columnist Mark Asher's "Abuses of College Athletics" and Robert Lipsyte's "Sportsworld Revisited"), many of the essays are informational rather than critical. Essays of particular interest in the section on intercollegiate athletics are Harry Edwards' "Collegiate Athletics Arms Race" in which he criticizes the low academic standards of NCAA Rule 48 and the piece by three professors at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas which examines the university course work of athletes at their institution. Two of the more insightful essays in the text are Donald Carlston's analysis of environmental race differences among basketball players and Mary Bell's "Role Conflict of Women Athletes in the United States." Bruns and Tutko's "Dealing with the Emotions of Childhood Sports" is useful for parents and youth league officials, and "Drug Abuse in Baseball" by *New York Times* sportswriters Chass and Goodwin reveals the widespread use of cocaine among baseball players. A number of other essays on media and ethics, gambling, violence, and youth sports contain valuable information for physical educators and sociologists.

The book, however, is not without shortcomings. Recurrent themes appear in pieces dealing with intercollegiate athletics, racism, sexism, and gambling, but that perhaps cannot be helped due to the overlapping themes in those areas. The logic of placing the excerpt of Abdul-Jabbar's autobiography in the section on youth sports is more difficult to comprehend. The segment appearing in the text covers portions of his final two years in high school and his judicious decision to attend UCLA. This material is clearly beyond the realm of youth sports which generally involves pre-teen and early adolescent athletics. Lapchick's own

piece, "A Political History of the Modern Olympic Games" reveals the weakness of social scientists attempting to write history. As a political scientist concerned with political developments, he does a creditable job with the 1936 Berlin Games and the protest of American black athletes at Mexico City in 1968. But he missed a major issue in the "two Chinas" controversy of 1976. Political pressure from the Communist bloc, no doubt, had some impact on Canada's decision to recognize Red China and prohibit Taiwan from competing at Montreal (a stance Canada later softened due to U . S . pressure), but the underlying cause of Canada's action was largely economic. The point Lapchick overlooked was Canada's \$320 million trade surplus with Red China and its \$144 million deficit with Taiwan. Later in the article, he quotes George Orwell as making a statement in 1959 when the latter had already been dead for nearly a decade.

Lapchick is a sports activist who is gravely concerned about the current status of sport. Throughout most of his adult life, he has directed his energies to bringing about change and reform. Optimistic in outlook, he believes the public has sufficient power to cleanse sport of its many abuses. Through *Fractured Focus*, he provides a venue for beginning that process. Tragically however, the American public does not see its society reflected in the mirror of sport. Consequently, it has no interest in repairing an unused, fractured looking glass.