

Essay Review

Guttman, Allen. *A Whole New Ballgame: An Interpretation of American Sports* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Pp. x, 233, notes, bibliographic essay, index. \$24.95.

This book is the third of Allen Guttman's broad interpretations of the role of sport in culture and society. *From Ritual to Record* (1978) outlined his ideal-type of modern sport. A long chapter in that book described the components that distinguish "modern" sport from its predecessors: secularism, equality, bureaucratization, specialization, rationalization, quantification, and obsession with records. More recently, *Sport Spectators* (1986) examined the changing types and roles of spectators through time. Both books not only considered the European experience, but were heavily influenced by European (especially German) scholarship in sport studies.

A Whole New Ball Game focuses on the American experience, and it is less explicitly based on the latest German scholarship. Still it shares much with its companions. Guttman is interested in examining what is "modern" about modern sport. He also wants to consider the consequences, both positive and negative, of modernity. His methods of inquiry continue to be interdisciplinary, although his last books are more historical than the first. Most important, *Ball Game* continues Guttman's earnest commitment to produce works that are both scholarly (and useful to specialists) and attractive to intelligent "common readers" (p. x).

This is certainly not a novel objective for a scholar. But such books are not abundant in sport studies, and for one basic reason. Journalists and celebrities have for long been storming the marketplace with their own histories, exposes, and "issues" books on *sport*. They press their arguments and their bylines daily in the newspaper, on radio, and on television to consumers who eagerly sop up the information with their donuts and coffee. This tradition, coupled with the lack of "professional" status or public recognition for sport studies, makes things difficult for the scholar who seeks a wider audience. Indeed one must note that Guttman published the above works with scholarly university presses.

Be that as it may, Guttman has produced a book that is scholarly yet written with grace, clarity, and wit. Moreover, one senses that he is crafting his own genre of sport studies: historically and theoretically informed, yet oriented to contemporary issues; based on wide reading, yet packaged clearly and concisely for the "common reader." Such readers will have a different and more thorough understanding of current sports issues. The bulk of the book in fact considers the usual array of problems-labor disputes, gambling, collegiate

commercialism, drugs, youth burnout, race and gender discrimination—in a way that lies distinctly between *Sports Illustrated* and *Sportwissenschaft*. This is a laudable goal. We scholars must do something to reduce the shelflife of John Madden, of Peter Golenbach, and of the shallow works that some presses are now pawning off as *real* history. It remains to be seen, though, whether the average sports boobie will leap from Frank Deford toward Michel Foucault.

While his book is geared to general readers, Guttman continues to raise important issues for specialists. For instance, *Ball Game* includes chapters on “Puritans at Play” and “The Southerner as Sportsman.” In both chapters Guttman considers to what extent either group contributed to the development of “modern” sport. In both cases he finds little contribution, largely because neither group embraced ludic activities for their own sake. In Guttman’s words:

Just as the study of clerical motivations demonstrates the difference between the Puritan acceptance of physical recreations and the modern affirmation of sports as autotelic activity, an examination of motives clarifies the subtle difference between southern and modern sports. The southerner approached horse races as he approached cockfights: as a gambler.

I interpret Guttman to mean that the contributors to modern sport were those who developed or supported such activity *for its own sake*, and not for the sake of moral or financial salvation.

Many scholars (including this reviewer) will disagree with Guttman’s position. It seems far clearer that the central architects of today’s sports explicitly tied the game itself to some non-ludic utility such as health, profit, status, or morality. John Downname, Increase Mather, and William Byrd endowed to Walter Camp, Senda Berenson, and Luther Gulick a sense of instrumental rationality that tied the *means* of sport to the *ends* of social living. I suspect that throughout history the most active promoters of sport—from Solon to Spalding—have always espoused this type of instrumental rationality. Only the structure of social life has changed. Where Solon promoted the polis through athletics, Albert Spalding championed capitalism through baseball. Thus while Guttman includes rationality in his ideal-type of modern sport, his means-end chain is incorrectly circumscribed by the game. Historically, the ends have always gone beyond winning. Ironically, in his chapter on basketball, the “prototypical modern sport” (p. 70), he accepts the broader instrumentalism of Naismith’s “high-minded Christian intentions” (p. 81). Why deny the same to Cotton Mather?

Guttman takes other positions that specialists (and even “common readers”) will challenge. For instance, his liberal sense of equality leads him to chide the “Canute-like” effort of women physical educators who erected an alternative model of sports. Some radical feminists will surely reject his general inference that separate cannot be equal.

Even when disagreeing, however, one must credit Guttman for the importance of his questions and for the clarity of his positions, both of which are necessary for meaningful debate in any field. It is worth noting that Guttman

and Melvin Adelman, both advocates of the modernization paradigm, seem to be in the thick of most serious debates in sport history. Indeed, for its engagement of both history and social theory, Guttman's dialogue with Richard Gruneau, Alan Ingham, and Rob Beamish (some of which has appeared in this journal) is probably at the top of a small English-language heap. We need more if the field is to mature. Let me conclude then by raising another objection, in hopes of generating more debate.

Readers must be aware that Guttman is an idealist, which is to say that, for him, ideas and ideology (in its broadest sense) become compelling agents of historical change. In this book, it is something called "the logic of modern sport," a spirit or mentality that encapsulates and animates the theoretical components of his ideal-type (equality, rationalization, etc.). But here the problems begin. It is never clear who constructs this "logic." Puritans and Southerners are categorically denied founder status. Cartwright, Naismith, Beecher, Applebee, et al. briefly appear to make their contributions, so one must assume that the "logic" is at some point a product of historical conditions. In the end, though, one realizes that the "logic" is a reproduction of the ideal-type. In other words, Guttman has taken Weber's ideal-type and turned it into something like Hegel's Geist.

For instance, in his version of baseball's integration, Guttman argues that "the logic of modern sports (and some very vocal black journalists) called clearly for the recruitment of black players who promised to perform better than their white counterparts (p. 128)." The compelling logic in this case is equality of opportunity, a component in Guttman's ideal-type of modern sport (Wendell Smith is but a parenthetical agent).

Now the Weberian in Guttman has correctly argued that an ideal-type need not mirror historical reality. The ideal-type is rather used as a basis for comparison and explanation. In this case one might compare the historical lack of equal opportunity in baseball with the ideal-type, and then ask "what historical factors have separated the historical from the ideal?" That would be Weberian analysis. Somewhere, however, the ideal-type has become the Sportgeist, which can then "call" history. This is highly questionable, especially since the historical (as opposed to the ideal-typical) logic of sport has reeked of social discrimination. Many would argue that it still does.

Even if he confuses his ideal-type with Sportgeist, Guttman raises a larger question of importance. Let us assume agreement that ideas can influence the course of history. Is there a Sportgeist, a spirit or logic of sport, a special firmament of ideas and attitudes, that has somehow influenced the development of baseball, basketball, and the like? Materialists would say "yes," but they would insist that the logic of sport is nothing more than the logic found in the dominant mode of production. A materialist would listen to Guttman's description of bureaucracy, specialization, rationalization, and quantification, and hear nothing more than the chimes of capitalism.

Guttman clearly sees something else at work, something that grows out of social relations but does not simply reproduce them. Unfortunately, the logic of

his ideal-type does seem too closely tied to the historical structures of mercantile and industrial capitalism. Could there be some other logic or spirit of sport, a residual, more timeless Sportgeist that, like a ludic DNA, inheres in the fibers of every sport that has occurred in history, from Pythian Games to Palio, from folk football to the Super Bowl? If so, then one must ask when and how did this Sportgeist develop historically, and how have its agents confronted alternative visions of sport and society?

The quest to answer such questions will not threaten Frank Deford's position as a sport's "expert." But it may further explain the contradictions so vividly described in America's *Whole New Ball Game*. As usual, Allen Guttman is leading the charge.

University of New Hampshire

Stephen Hardy