

Jones, Stephen G., *Sport, Politics and the Working Class*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989. Pp. xi, 228. Index, bibliography, notes, \$48.00.

Only the naively idealistic believe that sport and politics are separate entities. In this first volume of the *International Studies in the History of Sport* the late

Stephen Jones makes it quite clear that working-class sport in interwar Britain was subject to political influence, both from above and, more germane to his text, also from below. Indeed the main focus of the book is the role of the British labour movement in the development of sport between 1918 and 1940, in particular the socialist inspired but Marxist usurped British Workers' Sports Federation and its rival, the social democratic National Workers' Sports Association.

His research enables several revisions and correctives to be made of the conventional wisdom on the subject. John Hargreaves, among others, has argued that "sport in the 1920s and 1930s remained remarkably free from state intervention" but Jones, on the contrary, postulates that "this period saw the state's sphere of influence widening" (p. 132) through the greater provision of facilities and the regulation of selected sporting activities, most notably those associated with gambling. He also lays great stress on those aspects of the standard of living not measurable through increases in average real income and aggregate consumption. These, as Jones points out, "say little about inequality, the life chances of women, access to housing and health schemes, political rights, social alienation, attitudes, way of life, and perhaps most of all the character of manual labour in the workplace and the home" (p. 43). Jones also believes that other writers have too readily dismissed the influence of the working-class movement on interwar sport by ignoring the fact that "not only did labour organisations spawn recreational offspring, but they also helped to modify the nature and character of the British sporting tradition" (p. 11). Nevertheless, even Jones' well-documented case cannot show that the impact was significant relative to commercialised sport which was "the most important interwar trend" (p. 52). Jones, however, believes that the nature of this changed because of working-class involvement and pressure. Here perhaps the importance of continuity rather than change should be emphasised. Maybe the traditional rough working-class masculine admiration for violence, alcohol and gambling had a stronger influence than any political movements.

The strength of the book lies outside the sporting arena. Jones knew his political theory and history and set this study of interwar sport firmly in the broader political economy of the period. Yet unfortunately this also produces the major weakness of the work. Whereas, with his expertise, Jones was quite comfortable with the jargon of the political theorist, this will be less true of his readership. Even a useful synopsis of several theoretical approaches to sport provided in the introductory chapter requires resort to the intellectual's dictionary of concepts and terminology. This is a portent of what is to come, for, despite one chapter wittingly headed 'Up The Reds,' the general narrative is pedestrian, occasionally convoluted, and certainly not helped by the overuse of quotations from the theoretical authorities.

Commercialised sport was far more significant in the lives of British workmen than any socialist organised version. Yet, although this book essentially is about one of the 'also rans' in the history of sport, it is still worth a place on the sports history shelves. It is important to look at failures as well as successes:

indeed it is in the nature of sport itself that losers will out-number winners. Nevertheless it could still be argued that the workers' sports movement was a relative success for surely it has to be judged in terms of its own agenda which, propaganda aside, never realistically saw it overthrowing capitalist sport.

Flinders University of South Australia

Wray Vamplew