

Bale, John. *The Brawn Drain: Foreign Student-Athletes in American Universities*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991. Pp. xvii, 226. Notes, illustrations. \$29.95.

John Bale's third contribution to the newly established field of sports geography settles the matter. Except for John Rooney, whose help he generously acknowledges, Bale has no rivals. His first monograph, *Sport and Place* (1982), was concerned entirely with British sports. *Sports Geography* (1989) deals with European and North American sports as well. My reaction to these books was one of delighted astonishment. By examining the interaction of sports with their natural and human environments, Bale offers the historian a radically different perspective on topics as diverse as the construction of a golf course and the "production" of professional athletes. It may be that Bale's maps, charts, and figures are the geographers workaday tools. It may also be that Bale's quantified techniques are commonplace within the specialty. They are, nonetheless, likely to be new ground for sports historians whose work, mostly narrative, seldom includes indices of professionalism, adoption curves, maps of differential productivity, or catchment diagrams. Not the least of Bale's achievements is to introduce these and other relatively unfamiliar techniques in such a way that they are immediately understandable.

*The Brawn Drain*, an Englishman's view of foreign athletes competing for American colleges and universities, is a much more conventional book. Although there is a historical chapter, based largely on Benjamin Rader's *American Sports* and John Rooney's *The Recruiting Game*, most of the book is sociological. After commenting on modern sports as a global phenomenon, Bale describes "the dimensions of global recruiting." Most readers will have had the impression that athletes from Europe and Africa have been recruited by the University of Texas at El Paso, by UCLA, and by a number of other American colleges, but few have realized the extent of the phenomenon. There are not exact data on the number of foreign athletes at American schools, but Bale estimates that there are approximately 3,000 of them at NCAA Division I schools. The total for all schools he conjectures to be roughly 6,000, 75% of whom are men.

Some sports, like American football, have very few foreigners while others, like soccer, have many. In 1987, only 3.5% of Division I basketball players were foreigners, but 40% of the players in the quarter-final round of the 1983 ice hockey tournament came from Canada. Some schools are notorious for the percentage of foreigners on their teams. In 1981, foreign students, most of whom were considerably older than the Americans they competed against, enabled the University of Texas at El Paso to win the NCAA's track-and-field championship. Without the foreigners, UTEP would not have finished among the top six. At the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, in 1987, ten of the eleven swimmers on the men's team were recruited from abroad.

Bale is quite responsible in his use of the available evidence. There is only one point where he seems seriously in error. "Compared with the game in Western Europe, where it is rather poorly developed and to some extent ridiculed, women's soccer in America is well organized with a good standard of performance" (p. 56). In fact, the *Deutscher Fussballverband* began in 1970 to sponsor national soccer championships for its women's teams; by 1985, the organization had 441,932 female members. While not all of these members play on soccer teams (because some soccer clubs field teams in other sports), large numbers of women have joined the soccer teams sponsored by other branches of the *Deutscher Sportbund*.

From the coach's point of view, the advantages of a pipeline running from Sweden or Tanzania to the United States are manifold. Foreign athletes are usually easy to recruit. A single airmail letter can bring a future NCAA champion to the campus. Foreign athletes ask less than hot-shot prospects from Canton, Ohio, or Odessa, Texas. (Few Kenyans expect to drive a Subaru their freshman year.) Foreign athletes are also likely to be more self-disciplined than their American counterparts, in the classroom as well as on the practice field.

Although some critics of American sports have been quick to condemn the "exploitation" of foreign athletes, Bale demonstrates that most of them tend to be grateful for the superior athletic facilities at American universities, for the chance to earn a college degree, and for the opportunity to have lived in the United States. Their mostly positive assessments, which appear in brief quotations and then in an entire chapter devoted to interviews, can be discounted but Bale is quite properly reluctant to brush aside the athletes' testimony by labelling it "false consciousness." There are clearly cases of exploitation. A number of athletes arriving at the University of Texas at El Paso complained that their scholarships were considerably less generous than they had been led to believe. Dishonesty of this sort was, however, the exception and not the rule. "Any generalization claiming that foreign recruiting per se exploits student-athletes is . . . an oversimplification" (p. 202).

"Given the global character of sports and the increasing permeability of national boundaries," concludes Bale, "international sports recruiting of all kinds is likely to intensify" (p. 203). Is this a good thing or a bad thing? The NCAA has waffled on the issue. Concerned about the exclusion of American collegians from American intercollegiate sports but hesitant to deny foreign students the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the college, the NCAA has experimented with limitations of eligibility based on the ages of the athletes involved and the number of years spent in precollegiate competition. Bale does not attempt to untie the knotty ethical conundrum. Like the sophisticated anthropologist, the ethically alert geographer describes the lay of the land—the natural and human environments—and leaves it to the natives to solve their own problems.