

Book Reviews

Story, Ronald, editor . *Soprts in Massachusetts: Historical Essays*. Westfield, MA: Institute for Massachusetts Studies. 1991 Pp. xii. 164. Notes. illustrations. index. \$ 10.00.

Ronald Story has compiled an interesting group of historical essays on the development of sporting experiences in Massachusetts. This slim volume includes such disparate topics as women's colleges' participation in baseball and hunting and fishing in the Bay State.

The essay format allows Story to include articles that might not appear in an historical anthology. Mileru's essay on the demise of minor league baseball and Miller's on the old ball parks are examples of engaging and informative essays that are not written in a stringent research style. Miller's essay in particular provides the reader with a "feel" for the time period and more than a little nostalgia for the old neighborhood parks. The current success of Oriole Park at Camden Yard in Baltimore attests to many baseball fans' longing for the old parks with their character and charm. Miller is very successful in conveying to the reader the "sights, smells, and sounds" of the neighborhood parks.

Often, when an editor provides a lead-in to each essay, it becomes a distraction. but Ron Story is very adept in setting the rhythm and tone for each essay in his introductions. He sets the stage without ever giving away the plot or being obtrusive in his directions. His introductions allow the volume to have a measure of continuity from one section to the next. They also provide Professor Story a forum in which to suggest other readings on the topic, ask pertinent questions, or make comparisons to other works in the same area. His suggestions for additional readings are insightful and invite the reader to investigate other materials.

Six of the 10 essays deal with baseball, which reflects the continued obsession with the "National Pastime." But to the editor's credit, the essays included deal with aspects of the game that have received less attention. Robert Weir's article on the impact of the working class and organized labor on baseball's development in Massachusetts provides new insight into a familiar topic, while Gai Berlage's description of baseball at Eastern women's colleges is representative of another less investigated area.

The majority of the essays are extensively documented and use primary source materials. The level of scholarship is high throughout the book with intelligent, reflective writing the norm. Patrick Miller's handling of a little-known incident involving an African-American Harvard lacrosse player named Lucien Alexis and the United States Naval Academy is an example of

the high-caliber writing included in this volume. He analyzes the role that college sport played in raising questions about segregated sport in the South. He effectively chronicles the hypocrisy that existed at Northern colleges when playing Southern schools in the South, while tracing the impact of student demonstrations on decisions made by athletic directors and college presidents. Weight is added to the episode when the reader considers the colleges involved and the year (1941) of the incident.

As with all collections, the reader has to adjust from one essay to the next with changes in writing styles and format, a process made less painful by Story's introductions. I would have liked to have seen more diversity in the sports included, although skiing, hunting and fishing each warranted an essay, I was somewhat surprised that basketball did not get more coverage, considering its birthplace is Massachusetts.

I found one inconsistency in the text of the book. Michael Trotman cites 1895 as the date by which women were playing the game of basketball at Smith, while Berlage gives it as 1892. The date of 1895 is the one found in the Naismith papers, but newspaper accounts place the first game as occurring in March of 1892 at Smith. This is three years before the date found in Naismith's papers. Either Naismith wasn't aware of the early games at Smith or he just had the wrong date in his notes. Trotman drew his essay largely from the archives at Springfield, so it is easy to understand the confusion.

The major limitation to this volume is the length of the essays. Often I found myself wanting more information or analysis on the topics, but the essays are uniformly short and finite in their focus. Authors such as Trotman, Weir, Berlage, and Patrick Miller do attempt to place their essays in a broader historical context, with varying amounts of success. George Kirsch continues his discussion on cricket and the development of baseball in his essay, but this is familiar territory for those who have read his earlier book.

This book was a guilty pleasure for me. Like reading a collection of short stories, if you don't find the first one of interest, the next will probably be better. Undergraduates would enjoy many of the essays and the volume could be useful as a resource for an undergraduate class.

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