

Essays on Sport History and Sport Mythology, ed. by Donald G. Kyle and Gary D. Starks. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1990. 154 pages. Notes, introduction. \$24.50.

The five contributors to this collection could constitute a Dream Team of sport historians teaching at American colleges and universities. Each author has already left his distinctive mark on sport history and each has already presented one of the distinguished lectures at the annual NASSH convention. Given this auspicious group, it is not surprising that *Essays on Sport History and Sport Mythology* provides an informative and interesting examination of a variety of quite diverse topics. However, as Jack Berryman points out in the Introduction, there is an underlying theme in this book as each article confronts in its unique way “the problem of general preconceptions and misconceptions in the study of sport history” (p. 4).

Don Kyle did double duty on this book: he coedited it and authored the insightful article, “E. Norman Gardiner and the Decline of Greek Sport.” Kyle is a champion of the revisionist scholarship in ancient sport history, a literature which challenges the idealistic vision Gardiner presented and represented. Here he is less concerned with refuting Gardiner and more interested in understanding the man, the milieu in which he worked, his approach to sport history and the sources he relied upon. While Kyle remains impressed with Gardiner’s scholarly productivity, he is cognizant of the problems with the interpretations of this classicist, that he could be dogmatic and arrogant, and that he was a social elitist and at times a racist. Although not excusing these flaws, Kyle offers a more sympathetic treatment of the English scholar than the Machiavellian image David Young constructed in *The Olympic Myth of Greek Amateur Athletics* (Chicago: Ares Press, 1984). What emerges in this article is a Gardiner whose vision of the rise and fall of Greek sport is virtually trapped by his own commitment to athletics and even more so by the temper and scholarship of his time. Kyle provides an illuminating examination of how Gardiner’s view of Greek sport was embedded in three mutually reinforcing ideologies: athleticism, amateurism, and Victorian humanistic Hellenism. He is also informative in showing that although Gardiner continually espoused that the Greeks had a relevant message for modern society, he imposed his portrait of the present on his image of the past. Similarly, Kyle shrewdly analyzes Gardiner’s sources and their influence on his vision of decline. Again he is aware of Gardiner’s limitations: his selective and prescriptive use of the evidence to bolster his myths and his misreading of sources to uncover an ideal age of amateurism. Nevertheless, Kyle makes clear that Gardiner did not err in comprehending “the ancient perception of history as in decline” (p. 29). He insightfully explores how this motif ran through the ancient writers upon whom Gardiner relied, especially Aristophanes, and how it helped him construct his rise and fall schema. Kyle is most interesting when he applies what Patrick Brantlinger calls “the paradox of progress as decadence” to explicate Gardiner’s scholarly inconsistencies and

elitist sporting vision. While Gardiner recognizes that in both the Greek era and his own “performance and crowds may progress quantitatively,” he felt that the overall pattern is a process of qualitative decline from spirit, harmony, natural excellence, and a noble ideal” (p. 31). While historians of ancient sport increasingly find Gardiner’s work curious, as Kyle aptly claims, the notion of a better past than present still permeates our popular writing and vision of sport. To understand this phenomenon, sport scholars may for different reasons return to Gardiner, and Kyle’s insightful piece will provide them with an excellent starting point to understand the man and his writings.

Allen Guttman offers in “Eros and Sport” his usual thought-provoking ideas. In this essay, he attempts to demythologize the highly taboo association between sport and the erotic. To this end, Guttman provides a short but lively look at how the two have been paired from antiquity to the present. He reveals an acceptance of athletic eroticism in ancient Greece and Rome, the triumph of a more reticent response with the onset of modern society, and evidence that recently erotic impulses in sport have become visible once again. Guttman rejects the neo-Marxist explanation (hardly shocking to those familiar with his writings) for the shift from ancient awareness to modern denial. He claims that it emanated not from capitalism’s “need to repress, sublimate, and exploit the instinctual self,” but more from “the differences between paganism and Christianity” (p. 151). Guttman’s position may be the more accurate of the two, but it is stated not substantiated. As a Weberian, he should have also been more sensitive to the interconnectness between Christianity and capitalism, emphasizing their interplay rather than offering an either-or proposition. Given the theme of this book—new ways to envision sport history—I feel it is appropriate to recommend that the time has come for Guttman to stop raising the specter of a now-questioned neo-Marxist vision to serve as a foil for his differing view. In the emerging and important discourse on the body, of which athletic eroticism is a part, sport scholars, including those who agree with Guttman’s vision (and I generally place myself in this category), must understand and come to terms with the conceptually more sophisticated analyses emerging from different angles on the left even if in the end we disagree with their interpretations.

As has been Guttman’s trademark, he marshals evidence from a variety of disciplines to explore the linkages between sport and the erotic, but as usual he is at his best when he draws upon film and fiction to sustain his thesis. He also examines the psychological literature on sport and sexuality and finds it, correctly in my mind, generally wanting. I also agree with the two main points of Guttman’s essay: that for participants and spectators eros plays a part in the joy of sport; and, that scholars need to give greater attention to the erotic influence in athletics rather than prudishly denying its existence.

While we should heed Guttman’s recommendations, we must avoid the problems that exist in his article. He too easily treats eros as a biological/psychological entity rather than a culturally/socially constructed one.

Guttman concedes difficulty in defining eros, but proceeds to claim that it seems to “describe the power of sexual attraction” (p. 140). However, several of his examples do not fit this definition, while others do so only marginally. I believe that at this early stage of research into this theme it would be beneficial to focus on the broader notion of sexuality and examine how sport was enmeshed within this socially constructed concept during different eras. Within this more expansive vision we would not present “baseball annies” as “erotically dazzled young women” (p. 145), but rather comprehend their actions in terms of power relations that are sexually and gender constructed. We must also avoid quick rushes to judgment. Guttman’s assertion that the unchallenged masculinity of male athletes enables them to embrace when athletically celebrating, while “rumors of lesbianism often rob female teammates of a like opportunity to express affection” (p. 149), appears logical because it conforms to our conventional view of how male and female athletes are perceived. However, there is no reason to accept this unsubstantiated statement. My observations of female team players is that their behavior in this area is no different from their male counterparts except that they pat each other less frequently on the backside.

While Allen Guttman’s controversial ideas have continually challenged sport historians, Steven Riess has always been the field’s quintessential researcher. In fact, if there were a John Madden team for sport historians who are not afraid to get down and dirty, who will spend hours in the library to uncover one more reference, Riess would certainly be its captain. He brings this work ethic to his essay on professional sport as a vehicle for social mobility. Riess’ thesis—that sport is overrated as a source of upward mobility—is hardly novel, as for nearly two decades scholars have demythologized the popular notion that athletics offered the underprivileged a way out of the ghetto. However, what makes this article so special is that it provides the most extensive examination of socio-demographic characteristics of pro boxers, baseball, football, and basketball players and how they changed during different time periods. Sport historians will be familiar with some of this data, but even where this is the case Riess offers a useful synthesis. The essay breaks new ground when Riess looks at pro football and basketball, sports which historians continue to neglect as research topics. He shows that the pioneers of pro basketball emerged out of the ethnic enclaves of the large metropolitan cities, especially New York, and, despite their immigrant backgrounds, they generally attended college and did exceedingly well after their careers ended. The same trend was true for NBA players active during the 1950s, although they were more of WASP and middle-class background when compared to their predecessors. Riess does not delve into why these hoopsters conform to the popular notion about sport and social mobility, but he leaves the distinct impression that their athletic fame and high rate of graduation were the major influences.

Riess’ investigation into the backgrounds and career patterns of pro-

football players is even more interesting and suggestive. Pro-football also originated in working-class communities, but by the Depression years the majority of the players were of middle-class background. This pattern remained until after World War II when the sons of blue-collar workers re-emerged as the dominant group on the gridiron. Riess notes that despite some differences in the social origins of pre- and post-World War II players, both groups had relatively high rates of graduation, married well, and held white-collar occupations after their careers ended. Once again Riess' own data questions his conclusions about sport and social mobility.

Overall, his study reveals an eclectic pattern, varying among sports and over time. In fact, Riess' work, more than he recognizes, allows us to rectify the discrepancy between the popular image and the scholarly research. The former position appears to have some merit, although as articulated it was often exaggerated and romantic. The scholarly literature served as a valuable corrective for this overstated vision, but in its desire to demythologize the popular view and its conservative overtones, it, too, may have rushed too quickly to judgement.

Despite the impressive array of data, and to some extent because of it, Riess' article can be frustrating. The author is often more concerned with presenting the material than fleshing out its significance. For example, Riess recognizes that while recent pro-football players earned more lucrative salaries than their predecessors they are less likely to have successful post-career occupations. He connects this shift to changes in the college athletic system—greater demands on the time of players, the willingness to recruit academically ill-equipped athletes and a declining graduation rate—but a detailed explanation is absent. Riess also misses a golden opportunity to examine the influence of systemic racism, even though he is aware that the shift occurred simultaneously with the dramatic expansion in the numbers of African-American athletes. While the brevity of the article contributed to the shotgun analysis, Riess' reliance on a now-dated scholarship on social mobility and class aggravated the problem. As a result, he continues to present class as functional and static rather than incorporating some of the recent literature which see it as relational and dynamic. Given the various shortcomings, Riess' article will certainly not be the final word on the interconnectness among sport, class, and social mobility, but because of the vast amount of information contained within it, the work will always be an important starting point for any discussion on this theme.

Richard Mandell's article examines the critical socio-historical analysis of modern sport. He insists that despite the worldwide popularity of sport, this kind of literature is severely limited, mainly of recent origin, and almost exclusively of German extraction. Mandell offers a brief but suggestive look at why the Germans have been at the forefront of this scholarship. He finds its roots in the ongoing linkages that existed there between the political and physical education/sport since the eighteenth century, but he insists that it

was not until the 1960s that a mixture of social and intellectual trends, in conjunction with the preoccupations within German cultural circles with the upcoming Olympic Games in Munich, gave vent to a critical examination of the connection between sport and society.

Mandell's claim that there is a German sport scholarship and everything else is less is one familiar to readers of his work, but the assertion has become tiresome and, even worse, problematic. He maintains that the German sport literature is more critical (a concept he never clarifies) because it is grounded in social theory. By contrast, he asserts that even the best of the American works are "merely angry" and "merely the product of the analysts' raw energy, intelligence and cynicism" (p. 129). This vision has several drawbacks. One is its failure to recognize that from the outset American sport history was embedded within a theoretical framework (urban-industrial, Progressive-social control, functionalism), although it was always more implicit than explicit. Ironically, there are scholars who insist that this approach does not radically differ from the modern model that Mandell so strongly advocates. Another limitation is that he does not acknowledge that what much of the theoretically embedded social analysis offered was a plugged-in, reductionist, mirror image of the connection between sport and society. Finally, Mandell is painfully unaware of the insightful sport history being written in the United States and other English-speaking countries. The writings of Elliot Gorn, Wray Vamplew, Patricia Vertinsky, and Richard Holt are just some examples of how American, Australian, Canadian, and English historians are integrating social theory and historical research to produce richly textured, nuanced, critical analyses of sport.

Steven Hardy is another historian creating an innovative approach to critically examine the connections between sport and society. In his fascinating article in this collection, he constructs the notion of the Sportgeist as a way to reconcile the issue of continuity—change in sport and the varying visions of David Sansone and Allen Guttman. Hardy insists that the Sportgeist, or the spirit of sport, is simply a "set of four polar tensions or contradictions," that "exist along dimensions of physicality, competition, creativity, and achievement" (p. 48). He turns to the ancient Greeks to reveal the ongoing tensions in sport between victory-fair play; aggression and excess-moderation and self-control; freedom-regimen; and individual-community. While Hardy envisions the Sportgeist as a force for continuity in sport, an expression of what Fernand Braudel described as the "longue duree," he perceives sporting change emerging from the interplay between the Sportgeist and societal and sport structures. To illustrate the linkages Hardy draws from his expertise in business history to explore how four prominent sport individuals—Henry Chadwick, Albert Spalding, James Sullivan and Sendra Berenson—sought between 1860 and 1915 to impose their personal vision of the Sportgeist on sport structures and the difficulties their efforts confronted.

Hardy's notion of a Sportgeist to link past and present, premodern and

modern sport is certainly intriguing, but its importance to sport studies derives even more from how it offers a distinctive dimension to the field. If there is a Sportgeist, sport can no longer be understood as either a mirror or by-product of society OF as just another manifestation of a cultural form. Rather if the Sportgeist serves as one of the contexts in which sport exists, as Hardy insists. then it must influence how historical actors (individually and collectively) structure the activity and what meanings they bring to it and extrapolate from it. This vision is attractive to historians, I among them. who believe that something the equivalent of the nature and character of sport needs to be factored into the analysis of sport history. Despite the appeal of this approach, caution is still required as greater clarity is still necessary. especially with respect to terminology. Hardy describes the Sportgeist on one occasion as the "spirit of sport," but on another as "a structure of choices that comprise a core spirit" (p. 48, 52). Are these views one and the same: if not. how do they differ? What precisely is the spirit of sport and does not such an image suggest that sport has an essence? Hardy's terse treatment of the Braudelian view of structure serves more to confuse than enlighten and it may be more advantageous to speak of a culture and/or practice of sport. Certainly other questions can be posed, but what Hardy's innovative framework facilitates and to some extent mandates is an escape from the vision of sport history as another variation of social history.

Essays on Sport History and Sport Mythology offers a collection of suggestive original articles. Written by some of the best practitioners in sport history, which in itself should make the work must reading for graduate students, the essays at times break new ground, raise thought-provoking questions, and challenge the conventional wisdom. While the book illustrates some of the finest scholarship in the field, what is absent from the collection is also both revealing and disappointing. None of the articles address the issues of race and gender. None of the essays explore sport outside of a western context and none is grounded in the insights of any of the recent social theories now popular within the historical scholarship. These limitations severely detract from an otherwise well-put-together work, but they do not minimize the valued contribution or the insights of the particular essays.

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