

## Book Reviews

Dunning, Eric G.; Maguire, Joseph A.; and Pearton, Robert E.; Eds. *The Sports Process: A Comparative and Developmental Approach*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1993. Pp. xiii, 321. Notes, bibliographies, index. \$45.

This collection of essays is an avowed attempt to nurture what the editors call “a relatively new area of academic endeavor, a field that can be variously described as the ‘historical,’ ‘comparative-developmental,’ or ‘process-sociological’ (‘figurational’) study of sport” (p. xi). Beneath the exotic titles, the editors envision more than a casual bond between sociologists and historians; rather a “blending or fusion of the two subjects into one,” whose “central objective is the tracing and explaining of long-term structured processes of social development . . .” (p. 6).

This is hardly a novel goal for either history or sociology. Indeed, the book is better understood to represent a wing of sport sociology that employs broad historical and comparative frameworks rather than narrow, “today-centered” surveys or ethnographies (p. 7). There are some excellent exemplars of this fusion of sociology, history, and theory; they offer ready primers to historians. For instance, Rick Gruneau continues his critique of modernization, but turns from Gramsci to Foucault and Bourdieu. Alan Ingham and Rob Beamish combine Weber and Marx to outline the “embourgeoisment” of American sport. Eric Dunning offers a succinct introduction to the figurational grammar of Norbert Elias, and applies it to British rugby, foxhunting, and hooliganism. His coeditor, Joe Maguire, employs Elias to explain the early success of American football in Britain. Grant Jarvie uses Gramsci’s notions of the organic and the conjunctural to explore the complex relations in South African sport and politics.

If some essays are explicitly theoretical, others employ more traditional historical or comparative frameworks. Peter McIntosh rehearses some old debates on power and politics in ancient contests and spectacles. Jennifer Hargreaves analyzes the Victorian cult of the family and the early years of female sport in Britain. Allen Guttmann surveys the diffusion and cultural imperialism of ancient and modern games. And Joe Arbena offers a good, old-fashioned historiography on the international aspects of sport in Latin America. His short, tightly-packed essay is especially rich with ideas and sources for any comparative analysis.

So what can historians make of this “new” field? Although they should benefit from the concise theoretical primers and from the comparative perspectives, they will be frustrated with the editors’ introduction. It generally

revisits a longstanding debate between and among historians and sociologists about theory versus data, structure versus agency, framework versus narrative, the general versus the specific. Veteran *JSH* readers will hear echoes of Alan Ingham and Rick Gruneau. Indeed, much of this book dates to the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Gruneau and Ingham were calling on historians to become more theoretical. Too many of the essays have no references after the early or mid-1980s. Even the editors admit the lack of feminist theory.

There are other frustrations. Although the editors criticize empiricism in either sociology or history, their caricatures of sport historiography cannot be taken seriously. For instance, they suggest that “whatever the historians themselves may believe, . . . history cannot be an atheoretical subject”; and that historians employ implicit theories “liable to take the form of myths, prejudices, fantasies, and biases of various kinds” (p. 5). Who are they talking about here? While there are atheoretical sport historians who let “the facts speak for themselves,” few published works stand on myths or fantasies; more and more employ rather explicit frameworks drawn from the same theorists seen in this book. The editors’ use of a straw “historian” is especially ironic given Dunning’s claims that the critics of Eliasian theory (*Dunning’s* favorite) “have simply failed to grasp the range, complexity, and subtlety of the theory he proposes” (p. 42). Sport historians deserve the same close reading.

It is unfortunate that the editors are so strident in their attacks on history. We need more collaboration, not more border skirmishes. Both history and sociology benefit from a diversity of approaches. A good example is the work of Gruneau, Ingham, and Beamish. In his essay, Gruneau deftly blends notions of the body, hegemony, the Olympics, commercialism, and amateurism, to portray a complex web of compromise between moral and material entrepreneurs eager to advance a vision of life that was at once wholesome and profitable (pp. 90-92). Likewise, Ingham and Beamish clearly outline the importance of bourgeois interests in the growth of parks, playgrounds, church leagues, and school sports.

These grand frameworks are extremely valuable; at the same time, they are limited. Historians will find Gruneau’s references to “negotiation and compromise” to be rather vague. There is too much emphasis on “forces” and not enough on the vagaries of history—the individual decisions that have great consequences, the contradictions in the lives of reformers like Joseph Lee or Luther Gulick—which can only be uncovered by a “deep mucking” in source material.

Likewise, Ingham and Beamish may be far too generous in awarding control of the amateur movement to old elites and parvenus. They overlook the role of skilled workers, petty shopkeepers, saloon owners, gamblers, and politicians, who developed the vast foundation of commercial spectacle that supported amateur ideology. In fact, only as historians look more closely at the interests of petty capitalists and budding sports bureaucrats like James E.

Sullivan, many of whom were *from* the working and old immigrant classes, will we see how truly “middling” the amateur movement was.

Similarly, despite Jarvie’s thoughtful use of Gramsci, his agents are distant organizations, whose names are typically abbreviated. For some historians, these will become sterile characterizations. To understand agency one must move to the level of the individual actors who face constant decisions they generally don’t understand. This may be the perspective that separates the “process” sociologists from the historians. (This is especially obvious in the arid essays by Klaus Heinemann and Bero Rigauer.)

Maguire offers a final example. His is simply a superb and succinct account of the marketing strategy by which the NFL swept into the British market in the mid-1980s. Drawing largely from a 1987 paper given by the NFL’s International Marketing director, Maguire clearly traces the intersection of interests among 1) an NFL in search of European markets, 2) Channel 4 and the *Daily Telegraph*, seeking young Thatcherites, and 3) hungry corporations (both Anheuser Busch and British companies) ready to use the NFL as a badge of status and credibility. This intersection between the NFL, the media outlets, and the corporate partners, comprises what Dunning and Maguire would call a “figuration.” (American marketers refer to it as the magic triangle.) Either way, Maguire’s analysis works because it combines a strong theoretical framework with rich detail—from the sales levels of year-books, to the program packaging of Channel 4’s football, to the use of NFL branding on Marathon chocolate bars, Wagon Wheel biscuits, and Leaf bubble gum.

As strong as Maguire is, however, historians will note some serious limitations, particularly in his overreliance on a single conference presentation by an NFL executive. Although it helps to capture the “figurational” interdependencies, it does not convey the confrontational and competing interests that one expects from negotiations between leagues, the media, and their corporate partners. Further, Maguire only presents one half of the production/consumption equation. He insists that critics of “Americanisation” too often undervalue consumer abilities to enjoy American promoted products without becoming Americanized. Unfortunately, Maguire offers no evidence about the meanings of NFL football to British consumers.

The point is not that Gruneau, Ingham, Beamish, Jarvie, and Maguire are wrong or deficient on some absolute scale of scholarship. On the contrary, they offer much to historians. They ask important broad questions that should prompt valuable research. Like the essays in a similar, recent book edited by Ingham and John Loy, *Sport in Social Development* (1993), these works should be read closely. They reveal the promise of more collaboration between historians and sociologists—in theory and in methods. But they don’t exhaust the work to be done; and they won’t render historians redundant.