
HIGGS, ROBERT J. *God in the Stadium: Sports and Religion in America*. Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky, 1995. Pp. 333. Notes, bibliography, index. \$15.95 pb.

The day after the Atlanta Olympics bombing, in which one person died and more were injured, an athlete is reported to have said, "Right now gold medals seem unimportant." This, in essence, is Higgs' point. He believes that sports and religion will mostly be thinking of Christianity are in many ways incompatible (p. 1). To confuse or to link the two, as Americans now do, is detrimental to both, damaging athletes and fans, institutions, and even the body politic.

Unlike many who write about religion, Higgs knows his God; as a West Point student-athlete and mature sport scholar, he also knows his sports. And while this book is outspoken and heartfelt, it is firmly grounded in the relevant literature; it must be reckoned with by anyone who wants to understand the place of sport in American culture. Higgs sets sports and religion in a wide context. In tracing the evolution in the United States of the general acceptance of sports as an appropriate partner to religion, to the history of their connection, and to the personalities and attitudes that led us to the present connection (p. 1), Higgs contrasts two archetypes, that of the shepherd and that of the knight. He thinks that Western history in large measure can be viewed as the transformation of the ideal of the Good Shepherd into the Christian Knight, of a social and nature gospel emphasizing play and festival into a gospel of wealth and worldly success emphasizing competition and conquest (p. 3). Towards the end of the book, Higgs juxtapose(s) the pervasive symbols of...the shepherd's staff and the sword of the knight in a three-page list ranging from the shepherd's "Christ the Shepherd, Citizen soldier, Wonder, Ethics, Teacher, Mysticism, Frank Merriwell, Joan Baez, Memories" to the knight's equivalents, "Christ the Knight, Standing Army, Magic, Rules, Coach, Evangelism, Frederic Remington, Madonna, Statistics" (pp. 313-315). The content of this book is not meager. Chapter I, entitled "From Sabbath Bars to Super Sunday," sets the stage. Higgs states, "...our history has traced a steady movement away from the virtues and values that I

would associate with shepherds towards the structures of a knightly worldview (p. 5). In subsequent chapters, Higgs documents that movement during which Christian manliness has been a symbol in five distinct but overlapping phases, beginning with the transfer of Protestant knighthood to the New World. Higgs believes we are now in a bread and circuses phase, in which sports simultaneously serve the purposes of entertainment, religious proselytism, pacification of the masses, and political propaganda (pp. 5-6). Higgs casts his net wide, because he is certain that sport was transformed not simply by industrialization, but by the ethos and activities of colleges and their athletic directors and coaches, by the YMCA, by American presidents and generals, and by preachers; these institutions and persons were primarily interested not in the shepherd's concern for being but in the knight's concern for doing. Trenchant, often witty, replete with quotations from an amazing variety of sources ranging through time and disciplines, *God in the Stadium* makes a powerful case. It is, however, a case that is ultimately idiosyncratic. Indeed, this book is in some sense autobiographical—Higgs discovered the links between Christianity, sports, education, and the military (p. xiv) because he lived them. Higgs makes no secret of his allegiances; he loathes the philosophies of such men as Carnegie, Teddy Roosevelt, Yost, and Billy Graham, while wishing that the ideals of Thoreau, Twain, Muir, and like-minded writers had prevailed instead. He will have no truck with the squalid hypocrisy of college athletics, and he believes television has done sport no good.

While acknowledging that the knights have had some virtues and the shepherds some flaws, virtually all good things belong to the shepherd, all bad things to the knight. Whether, however, we agree with Higgs's argument is not the point, for he has done us a service, sometimes in unexpected ways. It is no wonder, for instance, that college athletics, under attack for more than a hundred years, survive every salvo against them. Higgs has shown, as no other author to my knowledge has done, just how deep and widespread are their roots. Above all, Higgs forces us to think about the tragedy and misery that result from foolish or willful conflation of entirely different universes of discourse. His thoughtfully constructed explanation of how such confusion could ever have occurred is something with which every sport historian will have to come to terms.

—JOAN M. CHANDLER
 University of Texas at Dallas