
WIGGINS, DAVID K., ed. *Sport in America: From Wicked Amusement to National Obsession*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1995. Pp. viii, 351. Suggested readings, index. \$24.95 pb.

This collection of essays by some of the nation's finest sport historians seeks to cover the great bulk of the national experience. The range spans from Puritan New England to ongoing gender-related controversies involving intercollegiate sports. Culled from academic journals and books, the 19 articles are grouped into

five categories: "The Pattern of Sport in Early America"; "Health, Exercise, and Sport in a Rapidly Changing Society, 1820-1870"; "Sport in the Era of Industrialization and Reform, 1870-1915"; "Sport, Consumer Culture, and Two World Wars, 1915-1945"; and "Transformation of Sport in the Age of Television, Discord, and Personal Fulfillment, 1945-Present." The chronological division of the various sections is logical, but not all of the essays are of equal merit. Indeed, the inclusion of certain articles is questionable altogether, unless one defines sport in the broadest, virtually all-inclusive manner which this volume evidently does. Nevertheless, the book, with some notable exceptions, holds up remarkably well in affording readers a taste of the panoply of American sports and sporting experiences.

Allen Guttman opens *Sport in America* by examining the role of play for American Puritans. He pointedly denies the argument of revisionist Schneider and Geldbach that Puritanism encouraged the growth of sports. As he lucidly puts it, "I am not aware of a single document in which a Puritan minister or magistrate demonstrates any enthusiasm for sports per se" (p. 11). While Puritan theologians did not appear "sullenly" antagonistic to play, they were both opposed to amusements taking place on the Sabbath and sharply disdainful of "heathenish recreation," including dancing around the maypole. On the other hand, the Puritan clergy did categorize sports a lawful recreation, which served an instrumental purpose, providing necessary rest and recreation.

Concentrating on the late colonial and early nationhood period, Nancy L. Struna delves into the issue of "Gender and Sporting Practice in Early America." Struna makes it clear that by 1810, recreation in the United States was far more systematic and expansive than had previously been the case. She seeks to refute the notion that sporting practice remained largely a male preserve. Struna declares that "the code of the sportsman and the cult of domesticity" appeared as polar opposites in the realm of "separate spheres" prescribed by middle- and upper-rank Americans. Nevertheless, she argues that upper-class women in particular had acquired the time and resources required to partake of sporting activities.

A gripping essay by Elliott J. Gom begins the section dealing with health, exercise, and sport in the era of Jacksonian democracy and beyond. Focusing on the southern backcountry, Gom examines the social significance of the gouging, biting, scratching, and clawing characteristic of fighting in the region. Such "sporting" endeavors, Gom suggests, matched the violence and poverty that afflicted so many. In the highly competitive near-frontier society where their competitors existed, "reputation was everything, and scars were badges of honor" (p. 50). With the passage of the backwoods, such practices became increasingly unacceptable, however, replaced by still more deadly encounters involving mass-produced revolvers.

Even in the midst of the slave plantation and a patriarchal society, as authors David K. Wiggins and Roberta J. Park indicate in separate essays, space was carved out that enabled both those held in bondage and women to participate in recreational activities. Wiggins contends that such pursuits afforded slaves a measure of autonomy and self-respect. Equally important, "sport and popular

pastimes” carried out on Saturday nights helped produce a sense of group solidarity. In contrast to the southern white backcountry, slaves “generally preferred less combative pursuits” (p. 68). Wiggins insists that “cooperation and community spirit” prevailed within the slave quarters, not “cruel rivalry, physical violence, and ruthless domination” (p. 68). During the near-century from the outbreak of the Revolution to the close of the Civil War, Park writes, there emerged an ideological atmosphere conducive to the rise of both “curricular physical education and extracurricular sports programs for females” (p. 93). Educators like Catherine Beecher and writers such as Lydia Sigourney promoted “healthful exercise and active recreations” (p. 74) for the female sex.

With American society undergoing tremendous flux in the early decades of the 19th century, Melvin L. Adelman notes, the first modern sport in this nation’s history appeared. Sport experienced growth and changes, and harness racing in New York City underwent a process of modernization. Adelman articulates the characteristics of modern sport: formal organization, standardized and written rules, national and international competition, the arrival of professionals, broadened reportage of sport events, and the maintenance of statistics and records.

In the decades immediately following the Civil War, baseball itself became far more elaborately organized. But in an innovative essay, Ronald Story underscores “The Meaning of Baseball in Early American Culture” for “The Country of the Young.” In the 1880s, he declares, baseball became “a mass cultural movement” (p. 121) whose passionate nature and intensity rivaled that of revivalism and temperance. The mass appeal of baseball, Story writes, derived from its great popularity among thousands of boys and young men who played the game in spite of parental disdain and disinterest. Baseball provided the salvation and love required by young American men. As a consequence, baseball became America’s game. Baseball and other leading sports of turn-of-the-century America received a great impetus from the “mass culture of leisure” (p. 150) that abounded. Stephen Hardy points to the historical impact of sporting goods during this era, which further helped to institutionalize the sport of play.

Even certain failed efforts to bring order to the chaos of American sport eventually resulted in greater control. One such example, Ronald A. Smith notes, involved the unsuccessful attempt by university faculty to reign in intercollegiate athletic competition. Like the other essayists covering the 1870 to 1920 period, Steven A. Riess considers the modernization of sport to coincide with urbanization. His particular focus is the relationship between urban spectator sports—baseball, boxing, and horse racing—and political bosses. He examines developments in New York City, where Tammany Hall politicians encouraged the unfolding of “mass participatory sport” (p. 164), particularly among Irish-Americans.

Four essays in *Sport in America* examine the impact of the consumer culture on the world wars. Timothy P. O’Hanlon looks at “School Sports as Social Training” in World War I. By contrast, Mark Dyreson contends that the 1920s produced “a fundamental reshaping of the ideology of sport in American civilization” (p. 207). More than ever, social critics came to view sport as entertainment.

The athletic experiences of particular ethnic groups during the interwar period and World War II is highlighted in essays by Gary Ross Mormino and Samuel O. Regalado. Mormino looks at Italian immigrants and their children in St. Louis who resided in an area derisively referred to as Dago Hill, where the likes of Yogi Berra and Joe Garagiola first played baseball. In the end, sports appeared to facilitate the acculturation into the American mainstream. At the same time, it fostered ethnic and religious identities through competitive games. Similarly, Regalado turns to California's Japanese American Yamoto Colony in the San Joaquin Valley to explore how sport "nurtured cultural camaraderie, competitiveness, and pride" (p. 239). Sport was intimately connected to such cherished samurai ideals as courage and honor. Regalado questions, however, whether sport enabled the Nisei to achieve social acceptance.

The final five essays in the collection focus on sport in the television age when domestic and international strife was so clearly evidenced, and when the quest for personal fulfillment became so pronounced. For Donald J. Mrozek, "The Cult and Ritual of Toughness" abounded in Cold War America, dramatically affecting both organized athletics and physical education as a consequence. Emboldened by the successful waging of World War II, key public officials, sportsmen, and public educators argued that sport and physical training should become part of the waging of the Cold War. Later in the decade of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Randy Roberts and James Olson note, American sport was even more dramatically influenced by the television industry that had helped spawn the cult of toughness. The authors indicate that ABC producer Roone Arledge transformed sports television through the launching of "Wide World of Sports," "The Superstars," and above all else, "Monday Night Football." More than any individual, Roone Arledge helped to change "the economic and aesthetic foundations of sports" (p. 283).

One of the gravest problems afflicting the sports world in the contemporary age, drug usage, is discussed by Terry Todd in "Anabolic Steroids: The Gremlins of Sport." Since ancient times, Todd points out, athletes have relied on substances of all kinds in order "to get a competitive 'edge'" (p. 285).

Joan S. Hult discusses a different kind of controversy in "The Philosophical Conflicts in Men's and Women's Collegiate Athletics." She points to the disparities regarding the governing bodies for college sports, the National Collegiate Athletic Association, and the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women. Hult indicates that the passage of the Educational Amendment Act of 1972 (Title IX) demanding equality of opportunity for all students has resulted in "changes and redefinitions of the role of sport in society" (p. 317).

In an essay every bit as interesting as its title, Gerald Early discusses "Hot Spicks Versus Cool Spades: Three Notes Toward a Cultural Definition of Prize-Fighting." In the past, Early argues, boxing's most symbolic clashes pitted white against black, or black against black. With the first title match between Floyd Patterson and Sony Liston, intraracial, rather than interracial fights became the most heavily publicized. Now, "a punk" and "a bad nigger" were going toe-to-toe, while the initial bout involving Liston and Muhammed Ali sent the "crazy nigger"

against the “bad nigger” (p. 322). From that point forth, Ali’s black opponents generally were viewed as representing the white establishment, while he “had become a sort of Calvinist redeemer of the race” (p. 322). With Ali’s retirement from the ring, black versus Latin encounters became most fraught with symbolic importance, as exemplified by the fights between Sugar Ray Leonard and Roberto Duran.

Although the editor indicates that space constraints compelled the deletion of footnotes, the omission is glaring in a scholarly work like this one. Repeatedly, this reviewer at least wanted to be able to check out reference citations, which were nowhere to be found. Another major weakness is the dated or at least incomplete nature of certain of the essays, particularly any number relating to post-World War II America. While the Early essay was intriguing, the reader is left wondering how racial considerations have impacted boxing in the past decade or so. Similarly, the Todd article could have used a postscript of its own to highlight the Ben Johnson scandal and other recent controversies involving drug enhancement of sports activity. Why, for example, was there no discussion of the drug difficulties major league baseball faced from at least the late 1970s onward, or the policies of other professional leagues, such as the National Basketball Association and the National Football League.

Television’s impact on American sport remains enormous, but the post-Roone Arledge-era was in no way discussed in the otherwise fine Roberts and Olson piece. The saturation of sports through the airwaves was touched upon in their essay, but a more recent perspective of contemporary developments would have been appreciated.

Perhaps even more strikingly, *Sport in America* contains no essay dissecting the labor strife, which now abounds in many professional sports. The big three—major league baseball, the NBA, and the NFL—have continually been rocked by labor-management conflicts over the course of the past three decades. Yet another major change that American and international sport has witnessed in the-past quarter-century or so is the blurring of the line between the amateur and the professional. From Open tennis to the Olympic Games to the departure from school for the pro ranks by undergraduates and even high schoolers, the enormous riches to be garnered continually set the tone for the sporting world. Nevertheless, declining or even stagnant attendance figures that have cropped up in the major leagues, for instance, arguably do not bode well for the once-great national pastime.

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