
Book Review Essays

BRAWLEY, SEAN. *Vigilant and Victorious: A Community History of the Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club 1911-1995*. Collaroy Beach, Sydney: Collaroy Surf Life Saving Club, 1995. Pp. xii, 410. Notes, photographs, appendices, indexes. A\$50.00.

BRAWLEY, SEAN. *Beach Beyond History of the Palm Beach Surf Club 1921-1996*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1996. Pp. ix, 300. Notes, photographs, appendices. A\$49.00.

Unlike America, where paid professional lifeguards ensure surfbathers' safety, Australians traditionally put their lives in the hands of volunteer lifesavers. Since early in this century, local lifesaving clubs have patrolled beaches on weekends and public holidays during the summer season. "Official" histories of the surf lifesaving movement portray lifesavers as vigilant, disciplined, and athletic young men who willingly sacrifice their free time to serve the community. But as Sean Brawley demonstrates, at least with respect to the Collaroy and Palm Beach clubs on Sydney's affluent northern peninsula, much of the aura surrounding lifesaving is romantic myth.

Historians looking for evidence of humanitarian ideals among lifesavers will find little to celebrate in either *Vigilant and Victorious* or *Beach Beyond*. Sport was, and is, the main attraction at Collaroy. Early lifesavers organized unique sports such as surf swimming, beach sprinting, and surfcraft racing, which they said honed their rescue skills. But sport became the *raison d'être* for many lifesavers. Sporting competition lured many keen athletes to Collaroy, and successive administrations used sport "to recruit new members." For example, they entered teams in suburban rugby league and basketball competitions to foster prospective members' interest in surf lifesaving (*Vigilant*, p. 205). Collaroy has a proud sporting record that includes producing several dozen Australian champions, hosting two Sydney metropolitan championships, one New South Wales state championship, two Australian national championships, and an international test.

Like Collaroy, few, if any, people joined Palm Beach for humanitarian reasons. But unlike Collaroy, sport has played only a minor role in Palm Beach's history. Most members joined Palm Beach to take advantage of its residential facilities and recreational and social activities (*Beach*, p. 103). Even athletes who represented Australia in other codes shied from lifesaving competitions. Palm Beach was a "seaside leisure resort" (*Beach*, p. 199) and "an escape" from sporting rigor and discipline (*Beach*, p. 101).

How do two clubs within the same association spawn such radically different approaches toward lifesaving? This question is beyond the reach of Brawley's narrative, but it is clear that social class is a major factor. Local businessmen and skilled tradesmen dominated the administration at Collaroy, with ordinary members comprising mostly working-class youths from Sydney's dormitory suburbs to the southwest. By contrast Palm Beach, an affluent holiday community, drew its leaders "exclusively from outside the district" (*Beach*, p. 39) and from among "the captains of industry, the city's leading lights in legal and medical circles [and] State . . . politicians" (*Beach*, p. 49). Thus, the two classes established clubs that reflected their specific cultural and economic interests. At Collaroy this meant disciplined sport; at Palm Beach it meant casual pleasure.

Collaroy's membership was particularly vulnerable to economic downturns, as the club found it difficult to recruit outside the working classes. Recruitment drives at middle-class private schools inevitably failed. Social animosity between the classes led even to "verbal and physical encounters," and most middle-class members would depart the club after just one season (*Vigilant*, p. 172). Hence, Collaroy tended to concentrate its recruitment efforts on working-class rugby league clubs.

Palm Beach was no more successful at integrating the social classes. Local fishermen and tradesmen were among the club's foundation members, but tensions with middle-class "weekenders," as well as very high annual subscription fees, forced the working classes to leave.

Social class also explains the different relationships that developed between the lifesaving clubs and their local communities. Local businessmen initially mobilized working-class youths to form the Collaroy club. But economic opportunism drove their efforts: they wanted to develop the area as a holiday destination, and this depended, in part, on reassuring visitors about their safety on the beach. By the mid-1930s, however, Collaroy and its lifesaving club were well established, and local businessmen withdrew their support and charity. Many local parents, too, were skeptical about the club's social contribution, "warning their sons away from the surf club because it was allegedly full of 'scallywags'" (*Vigilant*, p. 107). Palm Beach lifesavers generally maintained good relations with the local community, as the beach served as "the place where the smart set met and socialized" (*Beach*, p. 50).

At both clubs, however, excessive alcohol consumption damaged relations with their local communities. At Collaroy intoxication outside patrol hours was "mandatory" (*Vigilant*, p. 187). This led to numerous incidents, including one in 1952 in which the police charged six lifesavers with malicious damage to property. At Palm Beach, not surprisingly, given the class and educational background of its membership, a boarding school and university college ethos prevailed, by mid-century drunken sprees were as common as crude pranks.

The Collaroy and Palm Beach clubs perpetuated the lifesaving movement's infamous male chauvinism. The Surf Life Saving Association decreed lifesaving a male activity and prohibited women from performing rescues or entering competitions. Collaroy and Palm Beach relied on female "supporters" to raise funds, but neither club admitted women members as active lifesavers.

Yet important attitudinal and political differences existed among men and women at the two clubs. At Collaroy lifesaving was a man's world, and women "had no desire to mimic the men or appear mannish" (*Vigilant*, p. 167). At Palm Beach the rules prohibited women from entering the clubhouse except by invitation of the committee. However, women supporters at Palm Beach refused to accept their status, and in the 1930s they challenged male hegemony. The women decided to form a new social venue for women and men. Fearing mass defections and loss of income, the men approved a separate social club (the Pacific Club). But they insisted that lifesaving "gentlemen" govern the new club (*Beach*, p. 48), and they continued to bar women from the annual general meeting of the lifesaving club.

By 1980 Palm Beach was the only Sydney club that still refused to admit active women lifesavers. Intense pressure finally forced the club to officially accept women in 1985, much to the chagrin of dissenters who pledged to "make life hell for any female who dared to try and join" (*Beach*, p. 208). By contrast, when the first women lifesavers joined Collaroy, they "encountered little antagonism from male members" (*Vigilant*, p. 311), and today women lifesavers outnumber men.

Yet it would be unfair to dismiss lifesavers as self-interested male chauvinists. Members of both clubs have performed some daring rescues and shown extreme bravery. In 1924 Palm Beach's Austin Dellit dived on top of a two-and-a-half-meter-long shark that was about to attack four children; the startled shark retreated. In 1946 a Collaroy boat crew performed a "super-human" rescue when it towed to safety a stricken eighteen-foot half-cabin cruiser, with six crew members all suffering from hypothermia.

Club members have also shown deep compassion for their own. Lionel Sheldon returned to Collaroy from the Great War totally, and permanently, incapacitated. The government granted him a forty-acre farm, and surf club members helped Lionel's family clear and prepare the land. Palm Beach purchased a private residence (Ortona) and refurbished it as clubrooms for members who saw active service in the Second World War. Ortona was a "brilliant success," reintegrating may war service veterans back into both the club and society by helping to remove emotional and psychological scars (*Beach*, p. 92).

Vigilant and Victorious and *Beach Beyond* are meticulous pieces of historical research. However, both contain too much detail at the expense of social and cultural contextualization. Moreover, the chronological format and narrative style force readers to supply the structure and analysis necessary to give the books coherence. A brief discussion about the social nature of clubs, combined with thematically organized chapters, would have greatly enhanced both books and enabled Brawley to better explain the respective conditions under which the two clubs flourished and waned. Is it simply coincidence that Collaroy and Palm Beach reached their nadirs in the early 1970s during the counterculture movement? Is it coincidence that the revival of both clubs corresponded with the Federal Labor government's doctrine of economic fundamentalism and corporate managerialism? Collaroy and Palm Beach restructured in the late 1980s. Today they subscribe to management theory and have in place business plans, long-

term development and recruitment plans, and strategies to disseminate information and improve public relations. However, many older members of Collaroy are struggling to come to terms with the recruitment of administrators who have no background in lifesaving and who are oblivious to its traditions (*Vigilant*, p. 325).

Despite these criticisms, *Vigilant and Victorious* and *Beach Beyond* are essential texts for historians of beach culture. They challenge and debunk orthodox lifesaving history; they expose the Surf Life Saving Association's great myth that the lifesaving movement rests on humanitarian ideals. In short, Brawley explains that lifesavers face redundancy as local councils—uncertain of their legal liability toward surfbathers—employ greater numbers of professional lifeguards to work beside lifesavers on weekends and public holidays. But if the lifesaving movement folds, Australia will lose a sporting institution rather than a humanitarian organization.

—DOUGLAS BOOTH
University of Otago

POPE, S.W. (ed.) *The New American Sport History; Recent Approaches and Perspectives*. Sport and Society Series. Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1997. Pp. xv, 423. Notes, index. \$19.95 pb., \$42.50 cb.

RIESS, STEVEN A. (ed.) *Major Problems in American Sport History: Documents and Essays*. Major Problems in American History Series. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. Pp. xix, 437. Notes, illustrations. \$21.56 pb.

American sport history, as the editors of these two works proclaim, has taken on a new form over the past two decades. It has, through the work of a corps of capable and inquisitive sport historians, transformed itself from traditionally descriptive accounts of events and deeds of individuals or groups to meaningful analyses of broad social and cultural issues that affect or afflict humanity in a variety of ways. No longer are Babe Didrikson's, Joe Louis's, or Joe DiMaggio's heroic feats just awesome achievements in the athletic world; they have far greater importance for examining how America has dealt with its more thorny issues of gender, race, and ethnicity. In a similar vein, monolithic explanations that depict static relationships between sport and social class, urbanization, technology, or commercialism overlook the dynamic interactions between sport and these entities, which have had considerable impact on social, political, and economic developments in this country. Increasingly, recent sport history has become more attuned to the larger role sport has played in American society and how it has helped to shape ideas, values, behaviors, and mores of the American people.

Historically, sport, for both editors, not only shaped and instilled middle-class values, particularly in American youth, but it also reinforced those values as they moved into adulthood. To them, sport became a progenitor of self-discipline,