
GRUNDLINGH, ALBERT, ANDRE ODENDAAL AND BURRIDGE SPIES. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1995. Pp. ii, 135. Illustrations, notes.

Ian van Zyl played on my high school rugby team in Natal. He was a thinking rugby player with a real eye for the gap. The school team was very good; some of

the players were provincial representatives, and they made up almost all of the Zululand high school team. When they played home games, it seemed like the entire town turned out to watch.

The centrality of rugby in South African social life has often been the subject of comment, and it is usually stressed that rugby has a particular place in the Afrikaner world. However, aside from its inclusion in a number of general commentaries on South African sport, little attention seems to have been given to rugby as a sociocultural institution. *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society* is a significant step toward correcting that gap—a gap so big that a player with only a modicum of Ian van Zyl’s ability could have gotten through easily.

Beyond the Tryline gives extensive coverage of South Africa’s rugby scene. In confronting such issues as black rugby meeting English rugby and Afrikaner nationalism greeting the build-up to the 1995 World Cup, rugby is seen through a Clifford Geertz “deep play” lens. It is analyzed in a social context as either being informed by or informing nationalism, schooling, class, and gender. In doing so, the collection is certainly ambitious, confronting a huge topic in a svelte form.

Grundlingh’s opening essay looks at rugby in the so-called “New” South Africa. He works his way through the tangled politics of rugby’s reconciliation with itself as the (white) South African Rugby Board (SARB) sought a new relationship with the (nonracial) South African Rugby Union to form the South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU). Problematically, he highlights white public opposition to the deals struck between the ANC and the SARFU to build a new rugby, yet derides the (antiapartheid and nonracial) South African Council on Sport for being more interested in doctrinal purity and the reconstruction of South Africa than in international sport. This is the weakest of Grundlingh’s three essays, and it oddly grants South African rugby considerable autonomy.

Grundlingh’s second essay steps back to look at South African rugby’s response to isolation. In doing so, however, Grundlingh extends the acceptable period of isolation. He continues the notion that tours such as that by the 1986 Cavaliers from New Zealand—with nearly a full-strength All Black side—were “rebel” tours. This essay is a useful attempt to show institutional rugby’s response to isolation while maintaining the image that a strong antiapartheid feeling persisted inside the SARB. However, a discussion of the changing attitudes toward the sports boycott and racialized sport would have helped. He needed to address the contradiction between accepted mixed-race national teams and their rejection at all other levels. This argument suggests that 1970s multinationalism had become naturalized, yet this implication is not developed.

Grundlingh’s final contribution looks at the connections between rugby, Afrikaner nationalism, and masculinity. This discussion places far more emphasis on nationalism than on gender, largely because imperial gender roles are assumed to have been adopted. There was, however, a conscious attempt by the SARB to publicly incorporate women as supporters, which appears to be at odds with this imperial ideological role of rugby. Grundlingh is quite right to argue that the attempt to “Afrikanerize” rugby is anti-imperial, but his failure to consider the

gender implications of this shift from rugby as an imperial bond to its role in nationalist assertion significantly weakens his analysis. The essay would have been strengthened had he considered the role of women in Afrikaner nationalism, as well as looked at the tensions between this and the place of women in Afrikaner rugby. The essay does include a useful discussion of the spread of rugby within Afrikanerdom, but greater attention to the social status of ministers and schoolteachers in facilitating the dispersion of rugby to Afrikaner communities would help explain why an English sport took hold so rapidly. His explanation seems to hold well for the Cape, but what about the spread to rural areas?

Spies and Odendaal each contribute one essay to the collection. Spies deals with rugby within white English-speaking South Africa. This is a disappointing essay, lacking a clear thesis except that schools are important in the spread and development of English-speaking rugby. It is too patchy and insufficiently analytical. Spies has missed a chance to consider English and Afrikaner social relations around rugby: How do the imperial heritage and tension over apartheid formations impact or play through relations between white communities and attitudes toward rugby? That said, it does provide a useful narrative of the growth of English rugby.

Odendaal's contribution is perhaps the most useful and significant in the collection. It is an important narrative of the development of black rugby that would have been strengthened by the inclusion of more about social relations in nonwhite rugby. He also points to tension between SARU and SACOS over the priorities given to international contact and social transformation. A clearer statement of how these tensions were manifested and the extent to which they were resolved would have made the piece much more useful. Despite this, the essay provides the most comprehensive statement on black rugby in South Africa to date.

Beyond the Tryline provides a good basis for further scholarly analysis of South African rugby and some useful ideas for those working with sports in former colonies of settlement. It is often the case that the primary treatment of any subject has a kind of sacrificial role to play in ongoing debate. Grundlingh, Odendaal, and Spies have a place on the altar of sport's social analysis with this seminal work

—Malcolm MacLean
University of Queensland