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TATZ, COLIN, *Obstacle Race—Aborigines in Sport*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995. Pp. 408. Index, photographs, appendices, glossary. \$40.00.

“If one wants to begin the very difficult journey of overcoming racism,” writes Colin Tatz in *Obstacle Race* (p. 158), “one has to start with facing history, looking down the tunnels of its ugliness, not dismissing it, orchestrating amnesia or sanitising history.” *Obstacle Race* takes an important first step toward achieving this vision with an enlightening view of Aboriginal sport in its historical, political, legal, and philosophical contexts.

Why did Tatz choose to look at sport in order to understand the situation of Aborigines in Australia? Because Aborigines are over-represented in sport. In the Northern Territory, where only 22 percent of the population are Aboriginal, they form 70 percent of the players in the A and B divisions of Australia's national sport, Australian Rules Football. One could seek, as have many, to find a genetic explanation for a racially linked performance advantage. As Tatz points out, that serves no purpose, except perhaps to denigrate the very performances that are under scrutiny. Such a biological determinist model neglects the motives that push Aborigine youths to discover self-determination, autonomy, ritual, power, self-expression, and survival in a racist and oppressive world. What is important to see, and what Tatz highlights, is how sport reflects and exemplifies the Aboriginal condition in Australia, yet concurrently contains the potential to elevate and consolidate this people in the face of persistent and institutionalized racism.

The history of Aboriginal sports is one of exceptional talent, focus and determination, punctuated by an underside of rejection, belittling abuse and racial vilification. While sport was, and remains, an avenue for social and economic advancement for Aboriginal people, many have been neglected and indeed rejected by the country to which their performances brought glory. Jack Marsh, seen as one of the best bowlers in cricket in the early twentieth century, was kicked to death—his assailants were set free—only ten years after his heyday. And, eighty years down the road, as we approach the twenty-first century, Aborigine Nicky Winmar, a stellar Australian Rules player, was subjected to the vociferous and vituperative jeers of 50,000 Collingwood fans who vilified his skin color and racial background.

Sport serves, however, an important function in Aboriginal communities. Tatz describes the need for cement—a sustaining faith or philosophy—to enhance cohesion, to bring Aborigines together. And sport, he believes, has the potential to create this bond. The modern history of the Aboriginal people has been one of loss of sovereignty, which has left a listless people without a *raison d'être*. Sport, on the other hand, provides clear goals, social regulations, control mechanisms, elaborate rituals, support groups, and the promise of rewards—the very things that have been damaged by the colonizing forces. The Yuendumu games, organized by the Warlpiri people, are an example of how Aboriginal pride can be renewed through sport, organized and run by Aborigines for Aborigines. Culture, ritual and sport are celebrated according to Aboriginal values and identity, and this practice has been successfully transplanted to other communities.

Although *Obstacle Race* takes on the noble role of telling us about the plight of the Aborigines in Australia through the story of sport, it is not through this education that rampant racism will find its resolution. "Education programs cannot, and will not, eradicate a racism and xenophobia that is endemic in the total culture of a society," writes Tatz (p. 353). Never have educational programs fostered a sustained change in racist behavior, and Tatz proposes that we should take steps to criminalize racial vilification instead of sanctioning those behaviors that are unacceptable in contemporary society. He challenges sports associations to act independently and not to wait for State legislation against racism.

Sport is not only the cement of the Aboriginal people, it is the means by which their identity, their mere existence, is brought forward in the consciousness of white Australia. As such, this tome, which also regales the sport aficionado and the statistician, brings about a clear perception of a people—their strife, their contributions, and their strengths.

—ANNEMARIE JUTEL  
*University of Otago*