ROSENTRAUB, MARK S. *Major League Losers: The Real Cost of Sports and Who's Paying for it.* New York Basic Books, 1997. Pp. 538. Notes, tables, references, index. $27.50 cb.

The business of sports is one of the most financially lucrative enterprises in America. Much like the robberbarons of a century ago, today's sports franchise owners have built their wealth, in part, through government largess and monopolistic control of the industry. Yet at a time when public pressure exists for decreased government spending and welfare reform, why do Americans seem so willing to subsidize the billion-dollar sports industry through corporate welfare? This is the central question Mark S. Rosentraub addresses in his book *Major League Losers.* In answering this question, Rosentraub provides an eye-opening account of how local and state governments have been "dazzled by promises of economic growth from sports, mesmerized by visions of enhanced images for their communities, and captivated by a mythology of the importance of professional sports" (p. 3). The goal of Rosentraub's book is to unravel this sports mystique in order to derail the system of public subsidy and allow Americans to see more clearly the benefits that professional sports can and cannot offer.

Rosentraub focuses his study on the economic arrangements that structure professional sports and have led to franchise relocation, competition among cities, and public financing of sports stadia. Prior to the 1980s, team revenue was generated largely through ticket sales, concessions, souvenir sales, and television broadcasts. Different sports had different structures for dividing these revenues. Before 1995, Major League Baseball (MLB), the National Hockey League (NHL), and the National Basketball Association (NBA) did not have local media revenue-sharing programs. This meant that teams in large cities with lucrative media contracts could generate much more money for the franchise than could a team in a smaller market. For example, in 1994 the Boston Bruins NHL team earned $11.4 million in local media revenues, while the Winnipeg Jets earned just $3.2 million (p. 102).

Rosentraub highlights the variety of reasons why cities believe having a professional team is important enough to justify public subsidies. The most important is local economic redevelopment. Teams argue that having a franchise in a city helps boost the area's economy and increase its tax base. Yet Rosentraub's analysis illustrates quite effectively how little a sports franchise contributes to a region's ecomony. He found that professional sports, on average, account for no more than 1 percent of private-sector jobs or payroll. Even when factoring in franchise-related spending and growth from new restaurants, hotels, and bars in the area, he found very little growth (less than 3 percent). In other words, sports franchises cannot transform a region's economy since they are "small potatoes" in the economy of any city (p. 140).

Another argument made in favor of public financing of sports franchises is that they enhance the image of the city and foster community identity and local pride. Professional sports teams, the argument goes, provide a focal point upon which disparate groups can rally and overcome racial, class, and ethnic differences in celebrating a team's success. This solidarity certainly was exhibited in Miami following the Florida Marlins World Series victory in 1997. Parades wound through Little Havana, and fans lined the streets simultaneously waving Marlins flags and flags from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela that captured the connections between Marlins' players and fans. Yet, when Marlins' management began selling off star players just weeks after the victory, fans saw how fleeting and tenuous this connection was with their community. As Rosentraub explains, "Sports...are not an economic engine or social elixir for either the tangible or intangible necessities of life" (p. 454).

In this discussion of the relationship between the tangible and intangible benefits of sports, Rosentraub is most powerful. He demystifies professional sports by breaking down the celebratory rhetoric to illustrate the economic impact of sports on communities. He lucidly presents complex economic arguments to explain the potential costs and benefits to cities involved in the sports franchise game. Rosentraub also nicely illustrates how the economic connections between sports teams and the media have helped create this romantic ideal that structures many Americans' experience and understanding of sports. By exposing these links, he effectively lifts the veil of sports mythology and allows readers to determine the value of sports on more firm economic grounds.

In addition, Rosentraub offers useful suggestions for how cities and politicians might confront franchise owners in the future to end this system of corporate welfare. He recommends, for example, that national associations of mayors and governors establish a compact stating that they will not use tax dollars to finance sports franchises and their stadia. This agreement would mean that teams could not play one city off against another in bargaining for more lucrative stadium deals. Public funds, then, would no longer be transferred from civic projects that benefit many to subsidies to private industry that benefit the few.

The book is less effective in illustrating the historical context in which this system of public subsidies to sport franchises started. It remains unclear from the book what factors led sport franchise owners to seek and expect funding from local government coffers. Rosentraub points to the rise of free agency as a crucial moment in which teams recognized the need to generate more revenue. Yet this factor does not explain why cities obliged the request for public funds. A more thorough discussion of the historical process by which teams argued for public funds and convinced cities to support them would highlight the changing role of urban regional politics in America, as well as the expanding role of advertising and the media in shaping public perceptions of need and desire.

The book also would benefit from greater attention to an analysis of regional patterns in the economics of sports franchises. While Rosentraub presents numerous case studies to illustrate his points, he does not elucidate how sports might matter more in the economies of some regions than others. Most of his examples are drawn from rust-belt cities that have looked to sports franchises as an elixir for urban redevelopment. Yet sunbelt cities such as Miami and Phoenix might have a different experience with the economics of sports given that their economies are tied directly to image, recreation, and leisure. How much do sports teams contribute to economies of cities that depend on tourism and leisure spending for their tax base?

Despite these gaps, the economic analyses presented in this and other recent books on sports franchise financing have helped readers understand the myriad ways in which teams and cities can make money through sports. One hopes that these clear-headed economic studies will enter into public discourse and structure future debates on "the real cost of sports and who's paying for it."

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