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HARTE, CHRIS. *A Sportswriter's Year*. London: London Sports Reporting Agency, 1997. Pp. 310. £8.95.

British sportswriters often publish books about sport, but rarely say much about sportswriting itself. They prefer to tell stories of the many great sportsmen and fewer sportswomen they have seen at close range, about the great matches, fights, and races that they viewed from the usual longer and safer distances. They tell us more about the locker room than the composing room and perhaps they are giving the sporting public what it wants. This book could have been different.

It offers an account of the 1996-97 English sporting year in the form of the day-to-day working routine, not of one of the celebrated reporters of a leading national newspaper, but from the pen of an agency scribe whose job it is to provide brief reports mainly of nonleague, semiprofessional soccer matches for local and regional newspapers and magazines who want to carry brief match reports, but either cannot afford to allocate their own reporters or do not consider the events important enough to do so.

There is some interest in the accounts of the floodlit drudgery of the Chertsey, Croydon, Dartford, Molesley, Purfleet, Tooting, southeastern England soccer circuit, an often far from compelling way to spend the long winter evenings in the company of small crowds of soccer anoraks. This is, after all, an important sector of the English soccer obsession. But as a study of the business of football reporting, the book lacks insight and detail. We are never told how the London Sports Reporting Agency was set up in the first place, by whom, nor how it operates. Nor are we given examples of the author's work or told where it appeared. This reviewer tried to telephone the London Sports Reporting Agency to ask about some of these things, but Directory Enquiries could find no record of it. There is an irritating secretiveness about some of the writing too, as the author hints that he is in possession of information that would produce a sensation if only he could release it. The tone, the name dropping, the labored sense of humor, and the failure to reflect seriously about the role of the soccer reporter all add to the disappointment of a book whose 236 soccer matches and 31 rugby matches began to seem like one damn sporting thing after another long before the end.

—TONY MASON

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