

GEMS, GERALD R. *Windy City Wars: Labor, Leisure, and Sport in the Making of Chicago*. American Sports History Series. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Scarecrow Press, 1997. Pp. 242. Notes, illustrations, index. \$39.95 cb.

Among the best works written on sport in America have been those that focus on particular cities. Dale Somers' book on New Orleans is a pioneering urban study, while Mel Adelman's work on New York and Stephen Hardy's on Boston are two of the best books we have on the history of American sport. These are three very different works; their theories and methods vary widely. Yet by focusing on particular urban spaces, they succeed. Adelman was right; cities really are crucial sites for understanding how sports develop.

Gerald R. Gems' *Windy City Wars: Labor, Leisure, and Sport in the Making of Chicago* must be added to the list. By the time baseball clubs formed in New York, Gotham had been the premier American commercial center for decades. When John L. Sullivan became the first great national sport celebrity with his spectacular fights around New Orleans in the 1880s, the Crescent City had long been the largest in the South. But Chicago was different. When those same baseball teams started playing in New York, Chicago was a small but growing town well in the shadow of Cincinnati and St. Louis. By the time John L. Sullivan won the heavyweight championship about thirty years later, the Windy City was the second largest in the country. Chicago was America's first stock city. Railroad connections made it the central clearinghouse for goods shipped between the East Coast and the hinterlands. During the second half of the twentieth century, its population doubled each decade. The 1871 fire barely slowed this growth, by 1890 Chicago held one million people. In other words, sports were not grafted onto the city of Chicago, but grew up with it, and perhaps that provides one explanation of why they have been so important.

Windy City Wars does an excellent job of placing sporting developments in historical context. Gems has read widely and deeply into American social history from the Gilded Age through the Great Depression, and the result is a sophisticated analysis of how changes in society and economy effect sport. Gems argues that late nineteenth-century Chicago, with its remarkable class and ethnic diversity, did not have a singular sporting tradition. Radical labor groups sponsored athletic contests. Germans, Poles, and Bohemians continued their own games, and the middle class urged the adoption of "clean" sports that taught such values as teamwork, equality, and good sportsmanship. Young urban toughs might play baseball, but loyalty to peers and defense of neighborhood honor were higher values than fair play; employers and employees battled over how workers used their leisure time; progressives built playgrounds to help socialize children, but authorities often found themselves policing them for ethnic conflict and violence; public parks became gang turf, which youth defended with blood if necessary.

By the era of the 1920s and 1930s, something more like a dominant sporting culture had emerged, with labor radicalism waning and ethnic distinctions declining. But Gems is very clear that Chicago did not simply become

homogenized. On the contrary, baseball, basketball, and football now predominated in schools and on playgrounds, but many of the old distinctions of class, neighborhood, and ethnicity remained. In ever increasing numbers, corporations sponsored industrial leagues, and bowling gained immense popularity. But again, teams often reflected ongoing social divisions.

Windy City Wars also has some problems. Occasionally Gems' language is a bit wooden, even sloppy. Native Americans is a phrase usually reserved for Indians, not whites who were born within the United States. Calling early Chicago a "frontier town" practicing "self-sufficiency" contradicts the fact that trade and commerce were always central to its existence. Moreover, although Gems discusses women and athletics, he does not do enough with the latter category of gender, including how sport helps forge notions of masculinity that transcend categories of ethnicity, race, and class. Finally, sometimes Gems gets a little far away from sports themselves. It is difficult keeping subject, context, and interpretation in balance. He does a far better job with the latter two than many works of sport history, but he does so at the cost of making sports themselves vivid. We could use more moments here where games come alive for us the way they did for players and spectators.

These criticisms aside, *Windy City Wars* is a fine book, and it deserves a wide readership. Chicago was an important cradle of American sporting practices, and Gems is a worthy chronicler of that history.

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