
DYRESON, MARK. *Making the American Team: Sport, Culture, and the Olympic Experience*. Sport and Society Series. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998. Pp. 269. Notes, bibliographic essay, index. \$18.95 pb, \$44.95 cb.

While the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries loom large in American sport historiography, American participation in the early Olympic Games typically has not been treated as especially significant. Donald Mrozek's *Sport and American Mentality, 1880-1910*, for example, which covers much of the same ground as Mark Dyreson's, *Making the American Team*, makes only brief mention of the Olympic Games of 1904. Dyreson, however, elevates the Games to a position of central importance, arguing that the Olympic Games staged from 1896 to 1912, "provided the most important symbols for making sport the nation's common civic language" (p. 5).

American sport, writes Dyreson, was an "invention designed to meet certain political goals" (p. 2) of a group of intellectuals, writers, and civic leaders such as William James, Jane Addams, and Theodore Roosevelt, most of whom identified themselves as progressives. This "powerful group of American thinkers defined the United States as a sporting republic" (p. 7). Dyreson uses the term "sporting republic" to symbolize "both the popular fascination with sport and the basic intersection of sport and political ideas" (p. 8).

As the United States struggled with the wrenching process of rapid modernization and its impact on the American republic, sporting republicans advocated the use of sport as a social technology that could provide a sense of common values and national identity. They initiated a "conversation about sport in which American ideas about sport and republics became inextricably linked" (p. 2). "The most important American discourse about sport and politics," Dyreson claims, "focused on the Olympic Games" (p. 4).

The book's opening chapter examines the origins of the sporting republic, deftly tracing the historical development of Western republican thought and demonstrating how the nature of organized sport made it attractive to progressive ideologues of the era. The middle chapters are devoted to the Olympic Games. These chapters are superb. Dyreson provides a detailed narrative of the first five Olympic Games and the 1906 Intercalated Games while simultaneously introducing evidence that American participation in the Olympics, particularly the Games of 1908 and 1912, helped "forge a national culture for the modern United States" (p. 10).

Dyreson also includes a chapter that examines the limits of the sporting republic, focusing on exclusionary policies based on class, sex, race, and ethnicity. The final chapter analyzes the demise of the sporting republic.

Making the American Team is noteworthy on a number of counts: a.) the boldness of Dyreson's thesis that an influential group of opinion makers placed sport at the heart of its efforts to shape the American republic; b.) the importance he ascribes to the early Olympic Games as a forum in which America defined itself and its place in the world; and c.) his emphasis on the concept of sport as an invented social technology.

Viewing sport as an invented technology is a useful but not entirely satisfying paradigm, at least as presented in *Making the American Team*. It is not clear precisely what Dyreson believes was invented. Twice in the introduction he refers unequivocally to sport as an invention. Later, in chapter 1, he discusses at length the invention of the sporting republic. Sport and the sporting republic are not the same thing. It is difficult to know whether Dyreson means for us to take literally the claim that sport was invented. It is one thing to argue that progressive theorists and writers utilized the existing institution of sport for their political purposes, thereby shaping both the reality and perception of sport. It is quite another thing to flatly credit the invention of modern American sport to a small group of nineteenth-century intellectuals with a political agenda.

In his discussion of the invention of the sporting republic, Dyreson states, "Sport itself is a technology. Technologies are ways of organizing the world to solve problems. Sport is a social technology designed to solve important political and social problems" (p. 18). This sweeping assertion raises a number of questions. Is Dyreson suggesting that sport, by definition, develops only as a consciously engineered response to specific socio-political concerns? Or, does he mean simply that sport always has the potential to be employed as a social technology? And, if he really means the former, must we then discount the critical role of commercial

innovation and entrepreneurial ambition in the development of sport during the period in question?

Although the characterization of sport as an invented technology is not entirely convincing, this is an excellent book. Dyreson has skillfully mined the periodical literature of the period, clearly bringing into focus the relationship between progressivism and the development of sport. His thesis that American participation in the early Olympic Games was a significant factor in the evolution of a national culture is original and persuasively argued. Clearly written and well researched, *Making the American Team* is a valuable addition to the literature of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American sport history.

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