
WAKEFIELD, WANDA ELLEN. *Playing to Win: Sports and the American Military, 1898-1945*. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997. Pp. ix-216. Notes, bibliography, index. \$19.95 pb.

During the mid to late nineteenth century, the American armed forces tolerated sports as useful diversions from the rigors of military life. Soldiers competed sporadically in baseball, boxing, wrestling, horse racing, shooting matches, and foot races, but without a service-wide policy, few post commanders promoted athletic programs in a systematic fashion. This all changed dramatically with the challenges posed by the Spanish-American War experience as an emergent generation of officers turned to sports to combat desertion, alcohol abuse, and the lure of prostitution. Their collective efforts transformed the goals, ideology, and organization of the American military establishment itself as officers equated success on the battlefields with prowess derived from the playing fields. By the early years of the twentieth century, sport was seen increasingly as an efficient means to not only enhance physical preparedness, but also to cultivate martial spirit, obedience, and citizenship. Between 1917 and 1919, the armed services made sports and athletic training a central component of military life, leading one journalist to note that "Uncle Sam has created not only an army of soldiers, but an army of athletes."

Wakefield's study is less a history of military sport during the period between the Spanish-American War and World War II than a selective exploration of how power, gender, and racial hierarchical relationships were expressed and reinforced through military athletic competitions. She suggests that the military brass used sports metaphors to socialize diverse enlisted forces into the dominant discourse of a masculinist sporting culture. Unfortunately, the 1898-1917 history is surveyed in a mere eight pages. Although Wakefield notes the absence of a coherent pre-World

War I military athletic program, she overlooks the vigorous debate over national physical preparedness in both military and civilian society (a debate that divided women's civic groups between those that championed peace and those that advocated patriotism). This lack of a broader historical context mars Wakefield's discussion of the post-World War I period. Relying heavily on the military newspaper *Stars & Stripes*, Wakefield discusses the military's efforts in promoting "American" sports in Europe (e.g., the Inter-Allied Games), but neglects to analyze how such efforts exuded stridently nationalistic sentiments. She is certainly correct in arguing, however, that the military's successful sports program during World War I convinced many soldiers and young officers alike that success in sports led to success in the military, and that masculinity required an interest in sport.

The armed forces expanded steadily through the 1930s and escalated sharply prior to the Pearl Harbor attack. As Wakefield writes, "The creation of athletics programs at the growing bases helped reassure Americans that military life would not materially alter the attitudes and values of the young men who answered their nation's call to serve and limited conflicts between civilians and those in the armed services" (p. 78). In the opening paragraph of Chapter 6 ("Strong Men, Strong Bodies, Off to War, 1941-1945"), Wakefield raises an interesting question regarding what difference this program of sports and athletics meant to the individual soldier. But again, given only 15 pages devoted to the 1941-1945 period (with little nonsports historical analysis of the military, home front, or war itself), Wakefield isn't able to grapple with it. The final chapter argues that systemic racial prejudice, homophobia, and gender bias counteracted the military's goal of developing a strong army and navy. As Wakefield documents, women's athleticism was encouraged only to the extent that it didn't pose a threat to the "prevailing assumptions that women should be weaker and more passive than men" (p. 117). Thus, women either battled butch/lesbian stereotypes or were forced to accommodate the hypermasculine military culture by emphasizing their feminine physicality. Wakefield's seminal contribution is to demonstrate that, for many, enlisted sports were "profoundly uninteresting and they had to be bribed or ordered to play"; for others, sports were so completely alien that they were unable to appreciate the sporting metaphors. Soldiers uninterested in sports and athletics were marginalized by a resilient hierarchy defined by physicality.

This book was written for a narrow segment of sport studies scholars. Although Wakefield's 140-page analysis of the macho, sexist, racist, jingoistic military establishment fills gaps in the existing literature, most scholars and nonspecialist readers will likely be left wanting more. The prose itself is heroically bland (a fixable problem with attentive editorial work) and photos or illustrations would have enhanced the book's overall presentation. The history of American military sport awaits a more thorough, engaging treatment.

1. Editorial, "How Uncle Sam Has Created an Army of Athletes," *Scientific American*, 126 (1919), 114.

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