

ways of thinking about the connection between sport and society: that sport is a reflection of institutions in a particular society; that sport is a symbolic expression of core values; or that sport is an agent of social change. Yet, the entries do not necessarily reflect this theoretical organization. In fact, a number devote inordinate space to “Rules and Play,” and few entries make reference to institutions, values or change. Those that do so manage with aplomb, such as Duncan Humphries’ entry on snowboarding and William Baker and S.W. Pope’s very thorough review of basketball. Had these ideas been the driving force behind all of the individual entries, the work might have had more coherence as a whole. However, one might also argue—correctly, I believe—that theoretical consistency would have limited, rather than enhanced, the collection of such a diverse range of subjects and such a vast collection of authors. I suggest that the editors erred, albeit mildly, in staking such categorical claims when, in fact, the diversity of connections between sport and society, well beyond the three they enunciate, typifies and constitutes one of the strengths of this reference work.

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McComb, David G. *Sports: An Illustrated History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. 139. Illustrated. Bibliographies, chronology, further reading, index. \$25.00 cb.

In his book *Sports: An Illustrated History*, David McComb explores the multifaceted field of sports history beginning with a global survey of sports in early civilization and continuing through modern sports in North America. McComb designed the book as an overview appropriate for adolescent to adult readers, balancing a concise 129 pages of text with illustrations and eleven sidebars to provide a “starting place for anyone interested in the global development of sports” (7). In addition to this expansive scope, McComb also incorporates a broad range of information. The main narration identifies the origin of each sport, the evolution of key rules, the rise of professional sports organizations, and key individual and team performances. Also woven into the text are brief passages on many of the overarching issues discussed by sports academics: cultural, political, and religious beliefs promoting or demoting sports; geographic influences; how sport is used as a metaphor; racial and gender inequalities in participation; the rise of media coverage; and equipment innovations. Although overshadowed by the main narrative, these passages contain important aspects of sports interpretation and scholarship.

The content of *Sports: An Illustrated History* is not new to sports enthusiasts or historians, but the well-illustrated format and narrative style is appealing for novice readers. McComb bases the content and organization on the labor of many well-researched and -documented sources. In the preface McComb credits the works of David Levinson and Karen Christensen’s *Encyclopedia of World Sports* (see above—*ed.*), Graeme Wright’s *Rand McNally Illustrated Dictionary of Sports*, and the Diagram Group’s *Rules of the Game*, and provides a listing of additional key sources in the appendix. However, the broad scope and organization of McComb’s work requires brevity and generalizations at the cost of some clarity and presentation.

McComb begins the text stipulating the scope of his work, organization and definitions of sports. He then launches into early records of sport, focusing on Mesoamerican civilization, Asia (particularly China and Japan), India, Middle East, Rome, Islamic cultures, and Africa. This is followed by a summary of the development of sports and Olympic competition of the Greek civilization (800–200 BC) and the Roman Empire (500 BC–400 AD). McComb presents this information geographically, by country and then by sport. Within these chapters, he blends historical evidence with mythology, cultural, and religious information of the period justifying the adoption and promotion of particular sports. The narrative jumps quickly from one story to the next describing some sports up to the present while many stop abruptly and segue to another sport or country. McComb also includes images and information of athletes from the 1950s to 1970s such as Roger Bannister breaking the 4-minute mile barrier in 1954. This hopscotch through time may confuse novice readers trying to grasp the popularity of each sport before the modern era. A tighter focus and further research for appropriate illustrations and biography sidebars would create a stronger presentation.

McComb continues this approach in the next two chapters, turning to the spread of sports in Europe and its colonies from the Middle Ages (500-1500) and Renaissance (1400–1700) through the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. Not until the last three of the seven chapters, which limit their scope to North American (and specifically US) sports, does McComb seem at ease with the narration. Here the stories have a more appropriate depth and flow than the previous chapters.

Enlivening the text are passages addressing participation, rising popularity of watching sports, the explosion of media coverage, and the overt use of national identity in sports for international politics such as Nixon's "Ping-Pong Diplomacy" and the 1980 Olympic boycott. Most of these sports are presented on a professional level but the base of their popularity is the spread of amateur competition and the organizations that fostered them. McComb mentions the YMCA and the AAU, but should have further stressed their importance.

Overall, McComb's narration is successful in introducing his reader to the many interesting facets of sports and culture. McComb assumes the challenging task of providing an encyclopedic presentation of the dates, names, and facts about each sport in a novice reader format. Although not prominently highlighted, he also connects these facts to a social and cultural interpretation. Unfortunately, by not limiting the scope of his work, McComb is forced to limit the depth of his narrative and interpretation, resulting in somewhat scattered prose. Using more sidebars, highlighting key terms or passages, and creating subheadings within chapters would make it easier to navigate through so much information.

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