

Sands, Robert R., editor. *Anthropology, Sport, and Culture*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1999. Pp. xv + 218. References on sources, index. \$59.95.

The first thing that jumped out at me about this book was the price: \$60—for a collection of, in large part, previously published articles and chapters that total just a little more than 200 pages. But because the title sounded both important and relevant to my world of sports and cultural studies, I read on with great anticipation. After all, anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, Kendall Blanchard, and Alyce Cheska, among others, have significantly influenced scholars concerned with sport and culture. So I was curious to discover the state of the discipline at the end of the millennium.

In the preface, Robert Sands, anthropologist and editor of this volume, makes the case that anthropologists should set the course for examining the significance of sports in modern life. While accepting the validity of interdisciplinary research in the study of sport and culture, he is “of the mind that anthropology should be the leader” in this research. But in the very next sentence Sands informs the reader that what follows is not the work of anthropologists alone, but an “eclectic array” of research from various disciplinary perspectives with the common denominator of looking at sports as a form of cultural expression. This left me surprised and dubious. Because I originally believed the books intent was to introduce readers to anthropological approaches to the study of sport and culture, I was a bit surprised. Because Sands had declared his single-minded belief that anthropologists were best equipped to study the significance of sport on culture, I was dubious about his commitment to a truly interdisciplinary look at the subject. Sands quickly and intuitively reassured me by pronouncing this collection of research both “coherent” and “cohesive” (xiv). While the writing throughout is essentially coherent, the only thing cohesive about this book is its binding.

Don't get me wrong: I believe in the value of interdisciplinary research and scholarship. In fact, I owe my career to it. But interdisciplinary research does not mean separate articles by anthropologists, historians, sociologists, kinesiologists and journalists slapped together in one book. Rather, it is employing the assumptions, methods and theories of different disciplines in a reasoned manner to arrive at a more complex and meaningful understanding of a given topic. Sands mistakenly believes that grouping thirteen chapters in five sections (theory and method in anthropology of sport; sport, culture, race, and running; sport and culture change; sport and cultural identity; culture, sport, and ritual) gives his book cohesion. Sands explains that each section focuses “around a central theme in contemporary and traditional anthropology that relates to the relationship between culture and sport” (xiv). But he does little else to pull these chapters together. He claims each chapter falls under the rubric of anthropology, but by his definition, I wonder what doesn't? Maybe this is his point, but that by itself is not enough to justify this book's existence (at any cost). In fact, anthropologists only write four of the thirteen chapters in this volume (two of which are by Sands); to be fair a couple of other chapters rely quite heavily on the theories and methods of anthropology. This leaves more than half of the book beyond the scope of anthropology's disciplinary assumptions, beliefs, questions, and

rigor. The other chapters seem to be included only because they dealt with some topic related to sports and culture. This is a pretty broad and unfocused premise for a book.

In the end the reader is left wondering what this book is trying to accomplish. Which brings me back to my original point: Why should one pay so much money for it? Over half of the chapters are previously published articles or excerpts from books. It is up to the editor to justify the existence of this collection, and in this regard he falls considerably short. If not about interdisciplinary or anthropological research, maybe this book is meant as an anthology of recent writings on sports and culture. But that is not how this book is characterized or introduced by Sands in the preface and opening chapter. And if that is what it is, Sands is open to harsher criticism for his selections and omissions.

This is not to say that individually some of the chapters are not interesting and worthy of your attention. In the first chapter Sands does a nice job reviewing the literature of anthropological research as it relates to sports. In the second chapter, "Experiential Ethnography," Sands also demonstrates that he is at his best when working within the theoretical and methodological framework of his field, anthropology. Sally Ness concludes a strong opening section on "theory and method in anthropology and sport" with her chapter, "Understanding Cultural Performance: Trobri and Cricket." However, the good work of these first three chapters only leads to greater disappointment in what follows. The second section, "sport, culture, race, and running," takes the reader through a rather strange detour into theories on why runners of African descent now dominate track and field in world competition. Amby Burfoot's "African Speed, African Endurance" and John Hoberman's "The Fastest White Man in the World" are both good examples of why serious historians should at least sit at the table with anthropologists (or, in this case, journalists and professors of Germanic languages) when they look at sports and culture.

From this sojourn into questionable scholarship, Sands takes us in the third section, "Sport and Cultural Change," to an uneven, but sometimes interesting, look at how sports and their icons can have different cultural meanings depending on a consumer's political and national/tribal position. Steven Jackson and David Andrews' look at the meaning of Michael Jordan's popularity in post colonial New Zealand is the best entry here. Unfortunately this section serves as a microcosm for the book's major failing: the section could have been more effective if more cohesive. While Sands is right that all three chapters in this section deal with the impact of sports on cultural transformation, they are too variant in approach and subject matter to be considered a unit. While one deals with the transfer of commodity signs (*i.e.*, Michael Jordan, Nike, and the National Basketball Association) from one nation to another, the other two deals primarily with the impact of sports and athletes on their own country. While all three could rightfully be included in the same book, they should not comprise a sub-topic within a larger collection.

The two chapters in the fourth section, "Sport and Cultural Identity," probably are the best fit in the book. Cheryl L. Cole and Samantha King's "Documenting America: Ethnographics of Inner-City Basketball and Logics of Capitalism" shows how the book *Soul of the Game: Images and Voices of Street Basketball* and the film *Hoop Dreams* use visual codes and a neoconservative narrative of will, self-sufficiency, and independence to help "mainstream audiences reconcile the conflict between inner-city poverty and the sense of themselves as compassionate, virtuous, and morally superior" (168–69). Stephen Jackson

and Klaus Meier then examine in "Hijacking the Hyphenated Signifier: Donovan Bailey and the Politics of Racial and National Identity in Canada" how athletes, in this case Canadian sprinters Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey, can be both "anchors of meaning and symbolic markers of difference" in a nation's search for cultural distinctiveness (178).

The book comes to an entertaining, if not completely serious, conclusion in the last section, "Culture, Sport, and Ritual," where Alan Dundes gives us a Freudian look at American football. Here he suggests that football is analogous to male verbal dueling where the objective is to put one's opponent "down." Of course, the best way to accomplish this is to figuratively turn your opponent into a "passive receptacle for a male aggressor's phallic thrust" (204). I am not sure if Dundes wrote this with a wink in his eye or not. If not, it occasionally spirals into silliness; if so, it is pretty smart. Let me give you one example of what I mean. Dundes explains that the discourse surrounding football implies sexual aggression. Commonly used descriptors and signifiers like "penetration," "end zone," and "pops" all suggest the implied or subconscious aim of the game to figuratively deflower the opponent. While the Freudian significance of penetration and end zone seem obvious, Dundes really stretches the etymology of "pop" to make his point. According to Dundes, to say "a player popped an opponent" is derivative of the idiom "to pop the cherry" of a virgin during sexual intercourse. Just as in Mexican-American folk speech in which "pop" can refer to sexual penetration, this word used in the context of a football play means turning your opponent into a female victim of male sexual aggression (207). This would come as a big surprise to most of those people who have used this word to describe a hit in football or any other contact sport. Without denying the importance of the subconscious in deconstructing language, maybe, just maybe, intent is still important in interpreting uses of speech.

Many of the chapters of this collection are intelligent, engaging, thought provoking and worthy of your attention. I merely suggest you save your money and check it out via your local library or library loan.

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Cronin, Mike and David Mayall, eds. *Sporting Nationalisms: Identity, Ethnicity, Immigration and Assimilation*. Cass Series. Sport in the Global Society. Frank Cass, 1998. Pp. xiii + 226. \$46.50 cb, \$22.50 pb.

Cronin, a Senior Research Fellow at De Montfort University (UK) and Mayall, a Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University (UK), have gathered a collection of nine articles that focus on the "creation of identity through sport" (6). They begin their introduction by quoting Tiger Woods, who claims that his "ethnic background should not make a difference" in the way he is viewed (1). The editors vociferously disagree, hoping to use this volume to "challenge Tiger Woods' assertion that identity is not important" (6).

The essays that seek to prove Mr. Woods wrong are an eclectic lot indeed, with a clearly interdisciplinary bent. This diversity is one of the strengths of the collection. The authors range widely in experience from Roy Hay, a well-published Senior Lecturer in