

Christgau, John. *The Origins of the Jump Shot: Eight Men Who Shook the World of Basketball*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999. Pp. ii + 220. Illustrations. Bibliographic essay. \$15.00 pb.

The history of basketball in the United States is filled with individuals, both women and men, whose actions transformed the game. John Christgau provides us with a glimpse into that history by asking, “[w]ho were the pioneer players who had the courage to depart from the rigid conventions of the game and leap into the air to shoot?” (i). Christgau examines the lives and playing careers of eight individuals whose creative experimentation with an “unusual jumping toss” (145) during the 1930s and 1940s rebuffed conventional wisdom of the period which espoused the philosophy that, except for rebounding, there was no jumping in basketball. Those players included Myer Skoog, John Gonzalez, Bud Palmer, Dave Minor, Joe Fulks, Johnny Adams, Belus Van Smawley, and Kenny Sailors.

In detailing the personal and athletic exploits of each of the eight men who developed the jump shot, Christgau exposes some of the richness found in basketball history throughout the early to mid twentieth century. In some instances, by the early 1930s, enthusiasm for the game of basketball outpaced the availability of facilities and equipment, resulting in inventive responses to potential obstacles. Christgau explains that in the early 1930s future NBA star Joe Fulks and his boyhood friends replaced their “sock basketball” with a “bladderless ball...stuffed with sawdust” that bounced only if “you pounded it hard enough” (111).

The on-the-court innovation and creativeness that Christgau speaks to is matched by his own engaging narrative style. In describing the athletic talents of Kenny Sailors of the University of Wyoming in the 1940s Christgau writes that during a contest Sailors stole “a pass and then raced down the left side of the floor with low, quick dribbles that blurred his hand like the beat of bird wings.” Sailors’ jump shot gave “courtside spectators in folding chairs” the illusion that he was “ris[ing] up into the scoreboard” (205). Such vivid description is captivating and reflects the potential wide popular appeal of this book.

Such potential appeal, however, is both a strength and a weakness of *The Origins of the Jump Shot*. An overemphasis on descriptive detail and a lack of academic rigor preclude *The Origins of the Jump Shot* from serious attention by sport scholars. Because the text is not footnoted, there is little evidence provided to document claims made by Christgau throughout the book. For example, Christgau notes that John Burton was considered “one of the finest players” in the San Francisco Bay area during the 1940s (51). We are left wondering about the source of such a statement, given the omission of endnotes from the text. Moreover, little explanation is given concerning methodology. Christgau briefly notes that his efforts to find those who were the first to develop the jump shot led him to several states, resulting in a number of interviews with players, coaches, and spectators. However, it is unclear whether or not the eight players chosen for inclusion in this book represent an exhaustive examination of athletes whose skills changed the look of the game of basketball. One might also ask about the omission of athletes, both women and men, who played for African American colleges and community teams throughout the early twentieth century.

Given the widespread popularity of basketball in black communities by the late 1920s and early 1930s, this exclusion by Christgau is significant.

Although Christgau acknowledges that any discussion of activities on the basketball floor is rendered meaningless “as long as it is divorced from lives and history” (xii), he does not explore the impact of events such as the Depression or World War II on the history and direction of basketball and the people who were involved in the game. The storytelling style of the book and corresponding preoccupation with play-by-play detail gives the impression that basketball existed in a cultural vacuum. While that perspective can make for a readable and engaging narrative, it ultimately lacks the critical lens demanded by sport history scholars.

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Riess, Steven A. *Touching Base: Professional Baseball and American Culture in the Progressive Era* (rev. ed.). Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999. Pp. vii + 308. Illustrated. Notes, appendix, index. \$49.95 cb, \$18.95 pb.

In his introduction to the revised edition of *Touching Base*, Steven Riess reviews the status of sport history within the general field of history in the U.S. He notes that until the late 1960s, sport history was practically invisible. Many academics sneered at the idea of such a discipline. University of Kentucky historian Carl Cone suppressed his writings in sport history at the beginning of his career (c. 1940s) because “they might have counted against me as indicative of a young assistant professor who was not seriously engaged with the discipline of history” (2). Riess discusses some notable advances in sport history since Cone made the above statement in 1979, but also points out that to date no history department in the U.S. has advertised a position in the area of sport history.

Published in 1980, the original edition of *Touching Base* was one of the pioneering works in integrating sport history into the mainstream of American history. It was one of the first monographs to successfully examine sport (baseball) in the larger context of social and cultural history (the Progressive Era). Riess studied the game by focusing on its central elements, spectators, owners, and players, in the cities of Atlanta, Chicago, and New York. Since Riess completed his research for the original edition, the number of quality books and articles in sport history (with baseball in the forefront) has exploded.

The first chapter of the revised edition, “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” is a comprehensive narrative and historiography on baseball from the Civil War period through the early 1920s, with particular emphasis on the themes Riess analyzes in the remaining four chapters. It brings together for the reader the important research and interpretations concerning baseball over the last twenty years. As is the case throughout the book, Riess successfully blends together theory, historiography, and narrative on specific teams and individuals to hold the reader’s attention. The introductory chapter is a gem in that it concisely lays out for the reader the early history of the game and its relationship with