

lenged, and the book offers no new information concerning golf's origins. The authors defend this date and at the same time ignore other works such as Robert Browning's *A History of Golf* (which even appears in the bibliography of this work).

Carson Codd's chapter on the USGA and Mike Bryan's chapter devoted to the professional game attempt to explain the cultural forces leading to the change from amateur golf to professional golf as the premier game, but both of these efforts lack depth of analysis. These chapters reflect a lack of concern for the shift in the dynamics of golf participants. Analysis of the economic forces that contributed to not only these changes, but also the growth in golf's popularity among the masses is also deficient. Bryan does give a good explanation for the trend toward lower scores in competitive tournaments. Advances in technology not only improved golf equipment, but also improved course management and design as well. Tom Doak does a nice job explaining how course design has changed, and how the rationale for building a course has changed from having land suitable for golf, to projects developed solely for the purpose of profit. However, he might have considered more carefully his assumption that profit was not a part of golf's roots in America from the beginning.

Although a beautiful and well-done work on the game, this book is really a popular history of golf meant for avid golf enthusiasts. It adds nothing new to golf scholarship and lacks critical insight. Little is made of the fact that persons of color were excluded from the PGA tour until 1961, and that many courses still had "Caucasian only" clauses a decade or more later. Certainly the book is marketed to those on whom golf has a passionate hold, but at the same time the book itself has overlooked the depth of the connection between golf and its participants.

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GEORGE, NELSON. *Elevating the Game: Black Men and Basketball* Lincoln, NE: Bison Books, 1999. Pp. xix + 261. Illustrated. Bibliography, index. \$15.00 pb.

It may be overstating the obvious to assert that African American men play basketball. Even a cursory glance at college or professional leagues will make clear that such is the case. Indeed, a number of good works exist that describe and interpret the role of blacks in sport (Arthur Ashe, *A Hard Road to Glory: The History of the African American Athlete, 1619-1918*; Pete Axthelm, *The City Game*; and Phillip Hoose, *Necessities: Racial Barriers in American Sports*, to name just a few). George's contribution is to join African American sport performance to a *black aesthetic*, a term he describes succinctly, if belatedly, on page 240: "Black aesthetic—our [African American] music put into physical motion," George, a former columnist for *Billboard* and *The Village Voice*, displays a great deal of knowledge regarding musical forms and an impressive understanding of basketball. *Elevating the Game*, George confesses, is not a balanced book. He does not include an analysis of African American women or European American players, except as counterpoints or as examples of practitioners of a different form. Instead, George focuses on the African American players that have helped transform American basketball, and by extension, the style of the

game. The players whom George discusses are older now, their skills diminished by age, but the image of great play remains in our memory, much like the jazz masters he so frequently mentions.

George delineates the existence of a black aesthetic by linking representative players to the popular music of the day: Marques Haynes and bebop; Elgin Baylor and "cool"; Darryl Dawkins and rap. Essentially, the same questions run throughout: Can one's culture manifest itself in sport and be represented as a particular "way" of playing that sport? Does style transcend geographical region, especially in the days before television and mass marketing? Did similar social pressures bring a similar response? If one answers "yes" to any of these questions, then how does one explain the varying styles of African American political response or the variety in the very art form, music, that George championed? John Hoberman's question posed in his work *Darwin's Athletes* lingers: Did African Americans devote more time to athletic perfection than to scholastic development because athletics, despite the overwhelming odds, seemed a better opportunity for professional and material advancement? And while such nurture/environment questions place us on treacherous ground, it is safer territory than if we traverse an argument based on nature or genetics.

George does travel perilously close to the line when he writes that "The jumping ability and quickness African-Americans brought to the game demanded systems that capitalized on these gifts." Hence, the success of the UCLA Bruins and the Boston Celtics: John Wooden and Red Auerbach utilized black talent more intelligently than did their peers (140-41). Foot speed and jumping ability are neither capabilities spawned by community nor aesthetics inspired by music. They are physical qualities that, occasionally, translate to basketball excellence. Wooden and Auerbach deserve credit for utilizing the best players available and creating a system that best exploited their skills while many of their colleagues saw color and ignored talent.

Despite the above, I do agree that there is a black aesthetic at work in basketball. The same could be true for a Jewish aesthetic or Polish aesthetic—at least up to a point. When urban communities were so segregated as to allow a style of play representative of a culture, one could argue for the aesthetic's existence. George could so ably identify style as much due to the segregated neighborhoods from which the players emanated as due to physical qualities that distinguished the players themselves. And it is the community that ultimately creates the aesthetic: it is they who cheer for splendid play and jeer at those who violate the community's ethics. In a book written about men, it is appropriate to mention that the community also helps to shape gender roles that will eventually be displayed on the court. But there are limits to the exposition of a race- or cultural-based style. Clearly, Oscar Robertson played in a different way than did his contemporaries Elgin Baylor and Connie Hawkins. In the end, it was the marshalling of their physical attributes that allowed them to exhibit athletic greatness, not their adherence to some cultural style.

One of George's most valuable contributions is to disprove the notion that African Americans valued sport above all else. George splendidly examines the role historically black colleges and universities played in using sport to educate kids who would have had little financial opportunity to attend college. It is clear that athletics served the student and the university for the coaches and administrators at those universities, and not vice versa. Holcomb Rucker, the founder of the famed basketball tournament in New York that bears

his name, believed that sport could help a kid get to college and learn valuable life skills. In other words, sport was a means to a more positive and glorious end, not a glorious end in itself. Perhaps the Rucker and the school administrators are relics from another era, but, as George contends, larger forces simply overwhelmed them.

Sport is part of popular culture, and as such is susceptible to cultural trends. If a black aesthetic continues to dominate basketball, it is partly because our communities are still segregated, the lives of blacks and whites measurably different. Current white players, such as Jason Williams, have adapted their play to the black aesthetic, proving that the aesthetic is not so much based on race as it is on athletic performance. In every sport, from track and field to figure skating, athletes mimic each other in an honest attempt to play the game more successfully. The black aesthetic in basketball, perhaps the ruling aesthetic, testifies to both African Americans' dominance of the sport and the continued structure of our society.

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ENTINE, JON. *Taboo: Why Black Athletes Dominate Sports and Why We Are Afraid to Talk About It*. New York: Public Affairs Press, 2000. Pp. ix + 387. Notes, index. \$25.00 cb.

Who has watched the Summer Olympics, a track meet, or a professional basketball game and not wondered, "Why are so many of the best athletes black?" Could it be that they are genetically better suited to athletics than whites or Asians? Jon Entine dares to ask such questions, and has traveled much of the world in search of answers. He is a clever reporter and a vivid writer. The tales he tells—whether firsthand reports of conversations with distance runners training in the Kenyan highlands or stories about Jack Johnson gleaned from history books—make the reader feel that he or she has been there. Alas, though the stories are good ones, in the end *Taboo* is a muddle-headed book. Entine offers a pile of sport stories, interspersed with oddly arranged fragments from the scholarly world. The whole does not amount to a sustained or convincing argument.

Entine's central contention is that the weight of scientific evidence suggests that blacks have superior genetic material for athletic activity. Entine pursues this idea by focusing on track and field. He contends that track requires less equipment than other sports, hence it provides the best field in which to test athletes' native abilities unencumbered by cultural predispositions or social barriers. He notes that lots of top-level track and field athletes are Africans or descendants of Africans. He contends, more or less, that such dominance results from those athletes sharing a common genetic pool that athletes from other places don't share. Maybe that's true—but one cannot determine it from Entine's account. I kept waiting for him to get to the scientific evidence, but he never does. He never establishes that his African-derived athletes possess a common gene pool, much less that that gene pool is what causes athletic performance.

Entine makes a bundle of mistakes along the way. He errs in relying on pseudoscientists to make scientific judgments. The key "scientific" authorities whom he quotes (albeit in scattered fashion) are mainly individuals like J. Philippe Rushton, who is widely regarded