

Markovits, Andrei S. and Steven L. Hellerman. *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism*. Princeton Studies in Cultural Sociology. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001. Pp. xiv + 367. Notes, index, bibliography, appendices. \$17.95 pb., \$59.50 cb.

Authors Markovits and Hellerman examine the absence of a significant soccer culture in the United States in contrast to the game's dominant place in much of the remainder of the world. They conclude that "soccer in America (until the 1980s) lacked both necessary pre-requisites—grassroots activity from below and appropriate institution building from above—to warrant consideration as a viable candidate in a country in which it could never become part of the sports culture" (p. 267).

More significantly they argue that, in the crucial decades between 1870 and 1930 when sports became institutionalized in the culture of the country, the game was singularly unable to counter its perceived "foreign-ness," while its promoters were too entangled in their rivalries to combine their efforts in the greater cause of proselytizing soccer to the American public.

The authors provide a background history of soccer's failure to gain mass support and do so against the more successful efforts of entrepreneurs in baseball, gridiron football, basketball, and ice hockey, which they call the Big Three and One-Half in deference to hockey's partial recognition as a sport with major following in the United States.

They conclude with detailed accounts of the United States' recent soccer record and in particular its hosting of the men's 1994 World Cup, and the international leadership position, on the field and off, of its women soccer players. They provide telling description of the ways in which European commentators mock their own female players.

The book is particularly interested in the issue of American exceptionalism and the ways a hegemonic sports culture occupies a country's sports space and squeezes out pretenders. Soccer's failure today is partially the result of a historic determinism in which its perceived second class status has become a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy which continues to doom its prospects.

This is perhaps the book's most problematic conclusion for it leaves little possibility of change and fails to consider that, just maybe, the game's proponents might have had the purposeful intention of keeping their game out of the nation's withering glance for fear of what might be done to it.

Americans, after all, did adopt British rugby and then almost immediately transformed it into something that met their particular needs but in so doing left the original game in the United States in an even more precarious state than soccer.

In conspiring against soccer's mainstream success, the rationale of its proponents might not be that different from the comments of leading hip-hop artists who, at a New York colloquium in June 2001, feared the migration of their culture and music to the white suburbs of America.

If so then the soccer folks have proved more successful than the musicians in corraling their game. For that, they might be ironically applauded.

The authors see promise in the events of the last decade, but here again it appears that reality will conspire against soccer. Twenty-five years ago rival leagues were formed to compete with those of the “Big Three and One-Half.” Today that seems impossible. Big league sports particularly in the last decade have entered an economic realm which makes start-up costs prohibitive.

Their public role as well has changed. “Football in the contemporary United States more resembles the cultural icons of entertainment than of sports,” the authors argue (p. 145).

The above applies to world soccer as well as America’s games, suggesting that only a successful national league on the level of the English Premier or Italian Series A could elevate the game in the United States to a level comparable in status to that of the NBA, NFL, or Major League Baseball?

The prospects for this are highly improbable, unless one can ever imagine American sports fans paying up to \$100 for a single regular season game, or television interests handing out multi-billion dollar contracts. Without such commitment, however, the American game will forever be locked out of the superior level of competition.

Nevertheless, soccer’s play by millions of American youth, its success among American women, and the ability of the United States to compete internationally at least on the level of a middle level soccer power, is not to be dismissed.

Sports is going through a transition every bit as significant as that experienced in the early years of the 20th century. As the Big Three and One-Half become the cultural preserve of a narrower elite much in the manner of classical theatre and opera, the general public’s appetite for sports may provide openings for new enthusiasms, such as minor league variations of the majors, women’s sports, and new games. It will be interesting to see if soccer enters this emerging niche, and if so what the implications will be for its future success in the United States.

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Daniels, Stephanie, and Anita Tedder. *‘A Proper Spectacle’: Women Olympians 1900-1936*. Australia: Walla Walla Press in conjunction with ZeNaNa Press and the Centre for Olympic Studies, 2000. Pp. 170. Contents, foreword, appendix, references, bibliography, index, photographs. Aus\$34.95 pb.

This book is an outgrowth of Daniel’s Master’s thesis “Women and the Olympics” written in 1997. Realizing that the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 was the 100th anniversary of women competing in the Olympic Games she decided to expand her project. She asked her colleague at the Bedford College of Physical Education in England, Anita Tedder, to collaborate with her, resulting in *‘A Proper Spectacle.’*

Even though the authors’ subtitle is *Women Olympians 1900-1936*, the front cover has at the bottom “Celebrating 100 Years of Women in the Olympics.” They emphasize that they concentrated on the women who were Olympians in the 1928, 1932, and 1936