

WANN, DANIEL L., MERRILL J. MELNICK, GORDON W. RUSSELL, AND DALE G. PEASE. *Sport Fans: The Psychology and Social Impact of Spectators*. New York: Routledge, 2001. Pp. ix + 246. References, subject and author indexes, \$75.00 cb, \$22.95 pb.

The authors of *Sport Fans* synthesize a wealth of psychological and sociological research to examine the importance and impact of sport for fans and the importance and impact of fans for society. The nine chapters are roughly divided into three thematic categories: the relationship between fan and sport, spectator aggression, and the advantages and disadvantages of sport fandom.

This book probably has a little something for anyone interested in the social, psychological, cultural, political and historical significance of sport. While in the end much of the research the authors examine offers more questions than answers, it provides some interesting theories and data to work with for those studying the relationship between fan (or fans) and sport (athletes and teams).

One such question the authors try to answer is why do people become sport fans? As one might guess, the answer to this question is complicated. While acknowledging that there are dozens of motives behind sport fandom, the authors look at the state of sociological research and theories to focus on a mere eight. These eight are so broad (the desire for group affiliation, aesthetic appreciation, momentary escape, and the like) that one could imagine any number of subcategories under each of these. At the end of a chapter like this, the reader can get the feeling that the answer to many of the questions raised in this book is invariably "it depends."

While much of what is asserted in this book strikes me as common sense, the authors are careful to provide research to support their assertions. This is not an unimportant exercise. As social and behavioral scientists like to point out, common sense is sometimes wrong (or at least not supported by the data). The book's penultimate chapter, "The Psychological Consequences of Sport Fandom," provides a good example of this. The authors set forth some general assumptions about sport fans (they are lazy, aggressive, display maladaptive behaviors, and have poor interpersonal relationships) before looking at relevant psychological studies to determine if they are right. While I am not sure they are completely fair in categorizing these as general assumptions and might be guilty of building a straw man, most have at least heard these assumptions expressed (usually by nonfans). So some might be surprised to find out that sport fans actually perform better in college than nonfans (p. 157). Others might be surprised to read that no correlation has been found between sexual aggression and sport consumption (p. 159). Still others might be surprised to know that the research does not support the belief that sport fans adopt the maladaptive behaviors of athletes or have unusually poor interpersonal relationships (pp. 160-164).

This chapter exemplifies the overall tone of this book. In short, the authors have a relatively positive take on the psychological and sociological impact of sport fandom. The final chapter, "The Societal Consequences of Sport Fandom," is very optimistic about the role of sport in society. While acknowledging some less flattering critiques of the pervasiveness and centrality of sport in contemporary society (such as Marxist and feminist critiques), the authors suggest "that a tertiary social network provided by something like sport fandom satisfies an important social imperative in postmodern society by serving as

a unique urban structure whereby strangers assemble not only to be entertained but to 'engage the other' in meaningful dialogue" (p. 188).

After all of this analysis the authors end almost apologetically by suggesting much of this research could amount to "socio-babble," and the major societal function of sport fandom is possibly "to provide spectators and fans alike with a time-out institution" (p. 208). So the major psychological and sociological function of sport fandom is escape; sport offers people momentary freedom from the pressures and tedium of everyday life. (I told you much of this smacks of common sense.) But I find this a strange note to end on; it short-changes much of what the authors did in the previous 207 pages of this book. Of course sport offers escape, but this begs the question on which this inquiry began: at what psychological and sociological (not to mention political and economic) cost or benefit? This is an important question the authors ask, and they do a nice job presenting some of the research that might help us answer it. But as the authors concede, much work is still to be done.

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WATTERSON, JOHN SAYLE. *College Football: History, Spectacle, Controversy*. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. Pp. xiv + 456. Notes, illustrations, bibliographical essay, index. \$34.95 cb.

This detailed study focuses on the persistence of corruption and scandal in college football throughout nearly its entire history, despite frequent calls for reform. Contemporary abuses strikingly resemble those of the early twentieth century. Even in the 1890s football critics charged that the sport, which had no connection to the school's academic mission, distracted students from their work and undermined the building of character as gentlemen defined it. Obsessed with winning, football spectators, much like those at a prizefight, clamored for their team to injure opposing players. By the 1920s many universities were erecting enormous stadiums whose seating capacity exceeded that of major league baseball parks, requiring a substantial shift of financial resources from academics. College coaches often recruited men who had never graduated from high school and who were not expected to attend class.

Professional coaches, employed solely to win games and often paid higher salaries than distinguished professors, quickly replaced the gentleman amateur. During the 1920s, the national celebrity of Notre Dame's Knute Rockne enabled him to earn huge sums endorsing products and as a business consultant, underlining the intrusion of commercial values into college football. His annual retainer from Studebaker Motors was more than the company president's salary.

In the book's first section, Watterson effectively describes the evolution of the early game, focusing on the brutality crisis resolved by rule changes introduced between 1906 and 1912 that resulted in a faster, more open game. He might have devoted more attention here to comparing football violence with that of late nineteenth-century student rituals like cane rush, which involved a larger proportion of the student body and were considered even more dangerous.