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CRONIN, MIKE. *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer and Irish Identity since 1884*. Pp. 214. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999.

Historian Mike Cronin sees national identity as a shifting, contested terrain. Rather than a single nationalism, there are several, fluid ones constantly transformed (and transforming) to meet changing historical circumstances and generational needs. As a result of the recent peace process, contemporary Irish nationalism is no longer dominated exclusively by Church or State, nor "a belligerent and hostile nationalism that is locked into a history of grievance and terrorism," but rather, one that is "both civic and banal, a nationalism that is little different from most other nationalisms in the western world" (p. 45).

True to his intellectual roots in traditional political history, Cronin commences his study of sport and Irish identity with a savvy overview of nationalism as a modern ideological phenomenon and then onto a more focused discussion of Irish nationalism. Using "Ireland" as a convenient geographical concept to identify the thirty-two counties as a single land-mass (as well as to incorporate the Irish Free State, the Irish Republic, and contemporary Northern Ireland), he argues that nationalism should be understood as a "multifaceted expression of identity" which functions as "both a mobile and historically contested ideology" that can be "formalized, imagined or challenged by forces, groups, and individuals both within and outside the projected vision or reality of the nation" (p. 30). Thereafter, he situates sport within the contours of mainstream Irish (political) history to show how historians, while focusing on the elite, "high cultural" aspects of Irish nationalism, have failed to "bridge the gap between ideology and popular sentiment" (p. 17). Unlike most sport studies scholars who analyze sport from the inside-out, Cronin establishes the broader political, historical, and intellectual forest prior to examining the narrower grove of trees. One of the great strengths of *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland* is Cronin's breadth of secondary sources (the bibliography lists nearly 100 sources on nationalism and national identity—*excluding* those pertaining to the history of Irish sport). His exploration unfolds within an economical, logical structure: an effective, cogent introduction followed by five chapters: Nationalism, Sport, Gaelic Games, Soccer, and finally, Northern Ireland and the Troubles.

Cronin poses several guiding questions that inform and focus the book: How closely has sport been linked to the many different ideas and traditions of Irish nationalism since the late nineteenth century? How do we measure sporting nationalism? Who or what is representative (of Irish nationalism)? Is sport a symbolic representation of the idea of nation? He interrogates a broad range of research sources with a keen sense of originality and confidence and structures the narrative around an ambitious survey of sport, and thereafter, a more focused discussion of late nineteenth-century efforts by the nationalistic Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), and a discerning investigation of the fundamentally different agendas and strategies which define contemporary Irish sporting nationalism.

Cronin's analysis of the fiercely nationalistic GAA that defined itself (beginning in the 1880s) against the "gentlemanly" Irish Amateur Athletic Association (and its attendant

Protestant, Unionist, and Sabbatarian leanings) is both a strength and weakness. Irish games despite their alleged historicity, were actually (re)invented in the late nineteenth century to promote ethnic solidarity and revive a "lost" or mythologized Ireland—a legacy which, according to Cronin, currently struggles to come to terms with an outmoded, idealized notion of what it means to be "Irish" and what the nation should be. Although scrupulously thorough, Cronin's account of the GAA is, nevertheless, static—stuck almost exclusively stuck within its heyday of the 1880s. One might have expected a more extended analysis of the first half of the twentieth century, as well as more explicit ruminations of what exactly the Gaelic games signify within Irish society (and the fluid (re)articulation of Irish nationalism and national identity) in more recent times.

Cronin is sensitive to the ways in which notions of sporting nationalism change over time. "While Gaelic games could be representative of a national culture and of a national sport," he writes, "they could never regularly field a team of players under the name Ireland" in the latter twentieth century (p. 125). Since the mid-1980s (especially with the 1990 and 1994 World Cup Finals), soccer exudes fundamental shifts within Irish sporting identity. Whereas a century ago, the insular Gaelic Games provided the quintessential occasion for defining Irish sporting prowess, international sporting competitions (e.g., World Cup) have become the terrain upon which contemporary sporting identities are sustained in recent years. Soccer, while not a product of traditional "Irish" national culture, has provided Ireland with a [new] physical nation, "a nationality that could be measured against other nations, which could be cheered and applauded"(p. 125). Cronin characterizes such experiences in galvanizing a nation of spectators and participants as an "evanescent" (even "banal") form of nationalism (pp. 130-131)—a way for an "imagined community" to momentarily lose itself in sport (similar to what Grant Jarvie termed "90 minute Patriots" in a book on Scottish sport).

Mike Cronin has written both the best case study as well as the most sophisticated conceptual analysis of sporting nationalism yet published—that, along with Bairner's recent *Sport, Nationalism, and Globalization*, points the field toward a fuller understanding of the nuanced relationships among sport, nationalism, and the deceptively problematical nature of national identities. Sport studies scholars have been content to apply the same general conceptions of nationalism to sport in diverse historical and geographical settings for much too long. This book will give future researchers pause in perpetuating this methodological tendency. Cronin demonstrates that the traditionally rigid adherence to facile definitions of nationalism has irreparably stifled a broader questioning of the place of sport. He departs from orthodoxy by arguing that sporting nationalism has become increasingly less central to contemporary nationalism, and has, in fact, become increasingly banal in the early twenty-first century. Cronin's book re-defines the parameters of debate of this complex historical phenomenon. As such, it is mandatory reading for all scholars of sport, nationalism, and contemporary political history.

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