
CORBETT, BERNARD M. *The Beanpot: Fifty Years of Thrills, Spills, and Chills*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002. Pp. 227. \$35.00 cb.

February 6, 1978. As early as the morning commute, the weather reports warned of a major "northeaster" headed toward Boston. This collision of southern moisture and arctic air would create the worst winter storm of the century, still a record in many coastal areas. As the Hockey Supervisor for the Eastern College Athletic Conference, I was scheduled to drive eighty miles to the Boston Garden for the opening round of the Beanpot Tournament, an annual battle between Harvard, Boston University, Boston College, and Northeastern, for Beantown's bragging rights. By early afternoon, I decided that no one in his or her right mind would show up. But then again, it was the Beanpot. Over 11,000 people took their chances, jamming the lobbies between periods to check the weather reports. Most of them did not get home that night. Several hundred die-hards remained in the Garden for the three days that Boston officially closed down. They drank beer and ate hot-dogs, slept where they could, showered in the locker rooms, and when their clothes felt grimy, changed into fresh concession-vendor uniforms. As Ted Sarandis recalls, "All things considered, it was the best place to get stranded" (p. 89). A true Beanpotter.

This oversized book is written for a popular audience; it is no scholarly monograph, there is no "thesis" to analyze. Many NASSH readers will gloss over with the play-by-play accounts, year after year. Author Bernie Corbett—a well-known local writer and broadcaster—slogged through reels of microfilm and tracked down dozens of interviews to gather rich source material for his narrative and sidebars, which are supplemented by plenty of photographs and statistics. But Corbett's efforts produce much more than a fan's paradise. Altogether, they offer clear insights into one of Boston's most cherished institutions—one that ranks up there with a ride in the swan boats, a Brigham's frappe, or a dugout seat at Fenway Park. In fact, even the Red Sox cannot claim such a privileged place on Boston's calendar. Opening day varies from year to year, and who dares count on play-off dates. But mark down the first two Mondays of every February. They belong to the Beanpot. Only the Marathon—held on Patriot's Day each April—has such a lock.

The Beanpot—begun as a 1952 Holiday affair in the Boston Arena—moved to the Boston Garden in year two. It took a decade to reach sell-out status, but there was no let up after 1961. It developed all the intensity of a Stanley Cup final in Montreal or Toronto (only imaginary these days, but routine in the sixties). As long-time Boston College coach

"Snooks" Kelley put it, "You have to know the Pope to get a ticket" (p. 115). It became a major recruiting tool for the four schools, which competed fiercely for talent against the likes of Cornell, New Hampshire, or Michigan as college hockey slowly grew into a money-machine (now #3 on the NCAA's currency list, after men's and women's basketball).

There is, to be sure, a list of questions that Corbett does not ask or answer about the Beanpot. Walter Brown, Garden/Arena President and Celtics owner, was a long-time promoter of amateur hockey. Corbett indicates (p. 4) that Brown saw the 1952 tournament as a chance to bring local college hockey back to the spectacle status it enjoyed in the 1920s and 1930s. Then Brown might bid to host the infant NCAA tournament. But this is Corbett's last stab at managerial analysis. We can only ask: How did the Beanpot survive the early years of lean attendance, when the Garden's 13,909 seats would be half or two-thirds empty? Was the Beanpot simply a weapon in a scheduling duel with the Bruins, owned by Weston Adams? The rivalry between the Brown and Adams families went back at least four decades. And why hockey over basketball? Interest in college basketball was on the rise in the Boston market. Long a stepchild to hockey, college basketball was poised to step ahead. Boston *Globe* writer Ernie Roberts even predicted that the Arena's 1952 invitational basketball tourney, to be held days after the first Beanpot, "will outdraw the hockey gang." It did not happen, and college basketball has never since challenged hockey for supremacy in Boston, one of the few places in America where this is true. The Beanpot has had something to do with this anomaly.

But such analysis was not Corbett's concern. He sticks to his mission—to capture the spectacle, and what it has meant to players, coaches, and fans. He shoots, he scores! Readers who have become jaundiced about the commercialism and deceit in college athletics might enjoy the ethos of pure competition that surrounds this event. Long ago, the tournament's directors could have cashed in from any number of corporate sponsors drooling over title rights. Their response is best conveyed by Bill Cleary, Boston hockey legend, Harvard and the U.S. Olympic team hero who served his alma mater as hockey coach and athletic director for three decades. As he has said to me and many others, "This will never be the Tostitos Beanpot." We can only hope that he is right.

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