

RADFORD, PETER. *The Celebrated Captain Barclay: Sporty, Gambling and Adventure in Regency Times*. London: Headline Book Publishing, 2001. Pp. x+342. Illustrations, notes and references, select bibliography, index. £7.99 pb., £15.99 cb.

Peter Radford, who is Professor of Sport Sciences at Brunel University in London and a leading authority on eighteenth-century sport, brings a unique background to his study. An Olympic sprinting bronze medalist in 1960, he knows a great deal, from personal experience, about sports competition, intense training, the thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat. He thus presents the life story of Captain Robert Barclay, an amazing pedestrian and pioneering sport celebrity, with the understanding and perceptiveness of an athletic insider.

Robert Barclay was born into the Scottish landed gentry in 1779. He grew up to be a pedestrian, pugilist, trainer, soldier, farmer, and local worthy, and to be extravagant, reckless, unconventional, and very famous. Already an accomplished athlete, in the summer of 1809 on Newmarket Heath, backed by his own money and organisation, he undertook the greatest sporting challenge to date—to walk 1000 miles in 1000 hours, at the rate of one mile every hour, for a prize of 1000 guineas. The astonishing achievement took him nine hours less than six weeks, requiring extreme sleep deprivation and endurance. It occasioned extensive press coverage, attracting huge wagers and drawing large and diverse crowds that included the Prince of Wales. Barclay's extraordinary triumph made him rich and the most famous sportsman of his time. Remarkably, eight days after finishing, he was fit enough to embark for the Continent with his regiment to fight Napoleon.

The world that shaped Robert Barclay was one that was changing rapidly, under the influence of intellectual, industrial, agricultural, political, and social revolutions. It was a world "in which trials of strength and stamina, and stories about them, were woven into daily life" and which on all levels "was mad on sport and . . . entranced by the excitement of gambling" (pp. 30-31). It was also the world of an influential Scottish landed family with a history of achievement and exceptional physical prowess.

The hero's father, a Westminster MP and a much-respected laird who possessed estates near Stonehaven south of Aberdeen, was known locally as the "Great Master." He loved hard physical labor and was renowned for walking the 510 miles from his home to London and, on one occasion, covering 210 miles in three days. The Great Master taught his son that long-distance walking was natural and admirable, regaling him with stories about his personal experiences with the most famous athletes of the day and about the physical prowess of his ancestors. These stories captured the young boy's imagination. Robert was only seventeen years old and still at school when he won 100 guineas wagering that he could walk six miles "heel to toe" on the Brixton to Croydon road inside of an hour. In a sense, he never looked back. Sporting competition—participating, gambling, training, and promoting—became the *raison d'être* for much of the rest of his life. Considerable money could be made from it and lost, he learned quickly, but sporting challenge and achievement became the most important to him.

Peter Radford's mostly descriptive book opens with "The Greatest Ever Sporting Event," an account of Barclay's 1000-mile walk. Radford then proceeds chronologically through Barclay's remarkable life, providing captivating descriptions of the extraordinary gambling mania to which all classes were addicted in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century. Readers encounter a plethora of unusual sporting events, athletes, and promoters, people such as the Daft Laird, Fletcher Reid, Jackey Smith, Lord Camelford, and pugilists Daniel Mendoza, Gentleman Jackson, Jem Belcher, Tom Molineux, Tom Cribb, and Thomas Lawrence who became a famous painter. Radford also introduces readers to "The Fancy," an unusual, informal, and complex group of self-centred, hard-drinking, and hard-living men, based in but not confined to London, who for more than a generation financed all sorts of sports, in particular pugilism, wagered on them, and attended events as spectators, attracted by excitement and uncertainty, by money and the thrill of risk-taking (pp. 59-60). Barclay eventually came to enjoy a place at the head of The Fancy's affairs.

Unfortunately, Radford's text contains a number of irritating stylistic, spelling, usage, and factual errors that should not have survived into the published work. Stylistic examples include the periodic use of sentence fragments rather than full sentences and some odd paragraphing and punctuation. Spelling mistakes include Philippedes instead of Pheidippedes (p. 3), Duke of Argyle instead of Argyll (p. 5), Earl Besborough instead of Earl of Bessborough (p. 5), and Spencer Percival instead of Perceval (p. 192). Awkward usage is exemplified by the references to Prince Clemens Metternich rather than von Metternich, to Prince Hardenburg rather than Prince Karl von Hardenberg, and to artist Joseph Turner rather than the conventional J.M.W. Turner (p. 223). Glaring factual errors include references to the coronation of George IV occurring in Westminster Hall rather than Westminster Abbey (p. 244) and to George III rather than George IV as the former Prince Regent (p. 261).

Such flaws notwithstanding, Peter Radford's biography of a larger-than-life figure is based on extensive research in primary and secondary sources, some of the former likely being culled for the first time. While the work lacks significant in-depth and original analyses, it provides a truly delightful read. The author's discussion of Captain Barclay's unique and complex life—his numerous sporting challenges and achievements, his associates and relationships, his attitudes and aptitudes, and his problems and failings—is fascinating, informative, and great fun. Readers learn something of the revolutionary changes that were transforming late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century Britain, the education and social life of a young gentleman, the casualness that could be connected to a military career, and the laws of inheritance, landholding, and entitlement. More importantly, they also learn a good deal that has hitherto been little known about the sporting sub-culture of the period; in particular, its colorful participants and pedestrian, pugilist, and horse racing aspects, about the physical training involved, and about the gambling obsession and issues of manliness, male bonding, hero-worship, publicity, class, race, and gender by which it was complicated.

In sum, the work can be recommended to academic and lay readers as enjoyable reading that makes a useful contribution by resurrecting the heroic if flawed figure of Captain Barclay and by situating his amazing athletic achievements within the context of

late eighteenth-/early nineteenth-century life, thereby shedding light on the evolution of modern sport.

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