

Maxwell L. Howell and James McKay (eds.), *Proceedings of the VII Commonwealth and International Conference on Sport, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (Conference '82)*, vol. 9, *Socio-Historical Perspectives*, Dept. of Human Movement, University of Queensland, 1984. pp.191. \$10. Available from Human Movement, University of Queensland.

This collection of 22 papers from Conference '82 covers a wide range of topics from the 'idealisation of play' to 'sport and Puritanism' and from 'sport, Aborigines and racism' to 'German physicians as innovators in sport and physical education'. The writers come from a variety of disciplines and countries (Europe, North America and Australasia) and range from well credentialled writers to emerging post graduates.

The editors have attempted to structure the 22 papers by dividing them into four sections: 'meanings and definitions'; 'domination, hegemony and social inequality'; 'issues and conflicts in Australian and New Zealand sport'; and 'historical case studies'. While the four papers on 'domination' fit well together, other sections, notably the case studies, are a miscellaneous and loosely-integrated assortment.

While the papers are something of a mixed bag, as one would expect in such a large anthology, there are a number of very original offerings including Sutton-Smith's essay on the 'idealisation of play'; DavidWhitson's 'sport and cultural hegemony', based on concepts developed by Raymond Williams; Brian Stoddart's 'sport and cultural imperialism' and Richard Fotheringham's 'sport and

nationalism on Australian stage and screen', which opens up a new area of sports history in this country. Other papers, while not so wide ranging, add materially to the corpus on Australian sport such as Ian Jobling's discussion of first Olympian, W.H. Flack; Ray Crawford's work on the development of physical education for women in Melbourne and the continuing work of Genevieve Blades on sport and Aborigines. Others are worthy of comment (bouquets and brickbats) but, given the number of authors, space does not permit.

The most interesting part of the collection, however, is that it does not hide some of the continuing debates which surface quite regularly in the area of sports history. The brief editorial statement by James McKay is a frank and thoughtful comment on the recent interest in sport by 'mainstreamers', as he calls them, historians, sociologists and the like. While McKay welcomes the wider attention and greater respectability paid to the history of sport, he also points out that it has led to a 'fundamental split', which was evident at the conference, between those who adhere to a 'descriptive and chronological interpretation of historical events' versus those who stressed 'the need to place sport in a much broader socio-historical context'. There was also a difference of opinion between those who called for a 'critical' approach to sport versus those who regarded such a position as too 'political', 'ideological', and/or 'Marxist'.

To McKay the future does not look 'particularly promising for a pandisciplinary analysis of sport' given the current 'paradigm struggles' between various disciplines. McKay is also concerned about the growing tendency to locate studies of sport in the wider context of popular culture, cultural studies and social history. It could lead to the 'ironic situation' that after years of complaining about the 'marginal academic status of our area because 'mainstreamers' ignored sport, we could find ourselves in a peripheral position once again' with sport being submerged in broader social history.

In his conclusion McKay ends on a more positive note that 'specialist, mainstream and interdisciplinary analyses of sport are complementary, not competing approaches'.

It will be worthwhile for all of us, involved in some way or another in sports studies, to reflect on these forthright and

balanced comments on the problems of academic 'splits' and 'faction' and the implications of resulting struggles. However, I would like McKay to write further on this subject and establish the necessity of a 'pandisciplinary analysis of sport'. Is it essential for the advancement of the 'field'? Is it possible or even desirable? What, to me, seems important is that the various 'factions' within sport history/studies continue to operate under the one umbrella (conferences, journals and associations) so that there will be some degree of cross disciplinary stimulation and debate. Looked at, from another perspective, 'paradigm struggles' might lead to much creative debate in the sport history/studies field providing it does not lead to separatism.

Included in the book is an all too brief abstract of another significant debate between Brian Sutton-Smith and Diana Kelly-Byrne who argued the case for 'sport is the apotheosis of play', versus the opposition, Richard Gruneau and Alan Ingham, who contended 'sport is the atrophy of play'.

This volume does more than mirror some of the current research on sport in Australia, and some overseas research, it contains some important historiographical statements about the state of academic play in 1984.

Richard Cashman
University of New South Wales