

Richard Lipsky, *How We Play the Game. Why Sports Dominate American Life.* Beacon Press, Boston, 1981. Bibliog., pp.188. \$12.60.

Lipsky, a Professor of Political Science at New York University, has written a book which neatly translates to the Australian situation, and which succinctly explains why sports are such an important part of many people's lives.

Lipsky's book is both a celebration of sport and a critical analysis of its social and political functions. He introduces the reader to the 'sportsworld' by describing his own experiences as both a teenage player and adult supporter. In both cases he highlights the drama, symbolism and emotional intensity of sporting contests.

In Chapter 1, he provides a concise comparison of views of the defenders of sport (joyful, aesthetic, creative and co-operative) and those of the critics (joyless, elitist, racist, dehumanising and authoritarian). However, Lipsky goes further than Novak, who

in his *Joy of Sport* viewed sport mainly in terms of its celebratory and quasi-religious functions. As a starting point Lipsky discusses sports as a mirror of society and as an escape or opiate. Like Edwards in *A Sociology of Sport*, Lipsky argues that sport has become a vehicle for the inculcation of values of the social and political hierarchy (for example, team work, success through hard work, social integration and fair play). AT the same time sport is a symbolic refuge from the real, but corrupt world of economics and politics, into a world, or separate reality, of absolutes which involve intense rituals, charismatic leaders, magical performances, illusion, temporal and spatial boundaries, and ultimately, victory. As a dramatic and symbolic world, it acts as a vehicle for the dissipation of pent up aggressions, the clarification of community held values, and the development of collective identity. The sportsworld experience, according to Lipsky both highlights, and compensates for the deficiencies of, and disenchantment with the wider society.

Lipsky goes on to show how the individual need for escapism, and the societal demand for compliance are integrated and mutually supported through sport. Since the sports fan views the game as above politics and demonstrably more satisfying and exciting, (offering a spectacle of excellence, heroism and identity) he or she will more readily embrace the concomitant sports creed.

But as Lipsky cogently points out, the sports creed with its emphasis on hard work, sacrifice, and competitive struggle, replicates the values that the larger society (in this case capitalism) uses to gain compliance and passivity from a diverse, multi-ethnic work-force. In particular, the sportsworld by highlighting the deprived social background of many of its sporting heroes, reinforces the belief that even the humblest person (or athlete), by adhering to the proper values, can gain fame and fortune (Mark Jackson, a player with the Geelong Australian Rules Football Club would be a good local example). His discussion of how the sports language has entered politics, (Chapter 6) and the political importance of sporting events (for example, Olympic Ice Hockey - Chapter 7) also highlight the importance of political socialisation through sport.

Lipsky, however, does not, as many critics of sport demand, argue for an overhaul of sport, but rather uses the symbolic rich-

ness of the sports world to highlight the squalor of its surrounding political and social environment. The challenge, he romantically suggests, is to 'transform our society by opening up the fences and allowing the beauty of the playground to spill over and transform the world into the euphoria of play' (p.152).

While Lipsky's view of sport is conservative (he is not particularly interested in changing sports structures) and has been articulated before, it nevertheless remains an incisive explanation of how sport has come to dominate so much of our lives, and why we ultimately become so addicted.

While Lipsky wrote this book for an American audience, and directed his analysis mainly to the major professional sports leagues, his view of sport can be usefully translated to the Australian scene. Our major team sports of Rugby, Cricket and Australian Football can be easily substituted for American Football, Baseball and Basketball. The growing concern by many Australian sports fans over the commercialization and politicisation of sport for instance, can be usefully explained by Lipsky's discussion of the 'utopia of escape' that sport provides. Lipsky's view on the easy ability of sport to inculcate important societal values also explains the strong conservatism of our sports organisations. Highly recommended.

Bob Stewart
Melbourne