

Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators*. Columbia University Press, New York, 1986. Index, notes. pp.ix+236. \$US24.95.

Sports spectators have been counted, scrutinised and analysed more in the past decade than ever before. Many sports historians have beavered away profitably in his/her section of the grandstand, peering at the faces of the crowd at the colosseum, the medieval tournament, the cock fight, the modern crowds at cricket, football or horse-racing. Crowd studies have also been a growth area in popular culture as well with studies of crowds at the circus, the theatre, at public executions, involved in food riots and many other activities. One problem, however, is that historians of spectatordom have tended to work in isolation: most researchers have tended to focus on one or two themes and have explored a chosen crowd in a particular sport or even sports: violence is one of the favourite topics but others have looked at attendance figures, crowd structure, crowd rituals and other facets of spectatorship.

Particularly welcome then is a book which is not another micro study of particular spectators but which is a macro view, observing sports spectators on the widest possible panoramic screen, both in terms of time and of the issues of debates generated by crowd studies.

The first four chapters trace sports spectators from antiquity to modern times, while the next four chapters look at issues in relation to contemporary spectators: hooliganism; whether spectatorship dehumanises; the impact of new forms of mediated spectatorship (such as radio and television) and many other questions. Guttman suggests that certain repeated questions run through the length of the text:

Who were and who are the sports spectators? What has been their social status and gender? Have they normally been participants as well as fans? To which sport have they been most attracted? What kinds of behavior have characterized the spectator's role? How violent (or peaceful) have the spectators been? Has spectator violence increased or decreased? (p.4)

It is, without doubt, a most ambitious undertaking. Guttman admits that 'reliable information about sports spectators in the past [particular in ancient and medieval times] is in very short supply' simply because our ancestors cared more about the participants than the watchers. The author suggests that it is also extremely difficult to frame worthwhile conclusions covering the entire gamut of sports spectators. Some initial conclusions, such as that 'male spectators have always outnumbered female' were later scrapped from the final draft because they were 'too insipidly general'. Guttman has written an exceptional book worth consulting by those who have, or intend to, write on spectators but also by sports historians in general. Because *Sports Spectators* looks not only at the watchers of sport but must, of necessity, touch on the organisation and economics of sport, class segregation of sport and the changing character of sport, Guttman has written another history of sport which is every bit as worthy as the recent histories written by Bill Baker and others. Guttman's book supplements existing histories since, while it covers similar ground at some points, it has a different starting point and focus. Another impressive feature of the book is that North American Guttman is not only at home with spectators in his home territory but writes authoritatively about spectators in Europe, Britain, Ireland and Australia. His notes indicate that he has made wide use of non-English, notably French and German, sources.

*Sports Spectators*, in addition, is more than a compelling and persuasive synopsis of a host of crowd studies, it poses some wider questions about the rise of sports spectatorship per se, issues which have been neglected by those immersed in micro studies. Guttman has an interesting explanation as to why the more boisterous and unruly preindustrial sporting crowd became more civilised spectators in the nineteenth century. He suggests that a 'culture of spectatorship' was another aspect of the games ethic. Spectators in the nineteenth century, like players, were encouraged to behave

in a sportsmanlike manner. Clergymen, schoolmasters and the press all praised certain forms, and criticised other forms, of spectator behaviour. The press also built up spectator anticipation about the character of a contest and shaped, to some extent, the way in which spectators watched and behaved. This tradition has continued into our times with the papers and television rewarding and publicising certain forms of crowd behaviour. Television, and television commentators, have 'encouraged', for instance, the production of crowd banners in cricket.

Another very worthwhile aspect of *Sports Spectators* is that it challenges popular and conventional wisdom on crowd violence since 1850. Drawing on the concept of 'the civilising process' developed by Norbett Elias, Guttman argues that behaviour in public places has been characterised by a general decrease in expressive violence. Sporting crowds, in the late nineteenth century, were better behaved relatively than preindustrial crowds. Guttman has a worthwhile point here. Some historians, including myself, may have been guilty of focussing too much on incidents of crowd violence in the late nineteenth century (in the interests of suggesting that crowd violence is not a new problem) and may not have emphasised sufficiently that sporting crowds, which were larger than ever before, were relatively civilised in their behaviour.

Guttman admits that soccer hooliganism, and other contemporary forms of violence, may represent a reversal of the 'civilising process' but puts forward a novel perspective. It is feasible that 'soccer hooliganism represents the residual behaviour of lower-class youths who are not yet - but eventually will be - "civilized" (p.173).

There are also useful short discussions about what is known, and the limits of our knowledge, of the reading, listening and watching-at-home sports public.

Undoubtedly specialists of one crowd or another will disagree with some points here and there. I must admit that I could find very few points of disagreement, though one did arise probably from Guttman's previous preference for cultural history. In the introduction Guttman records that he has shifted his emphasis from the cultural history of *From Ritual to Record* to social history. This modification of his intellectual stance was in part a response to

the work of Richard Gruneau, Stephen Hardy, Alan Ingham and others. For most part the transition seems to be successful in that the book is a successful blend of cultural and social history. However, on p.80 there is a questionable proposition which seems to rely too much on cultural, and not enough on social, history: Guttman writes that "it may be that cricket, once the very symbol of bucolic community, has declined in popularity because there is no longer any bucolic community to symbolize'. Although cricket does have its bucolic myths and rural origins, there is no question that it made a successful transition to large urban centres such as London, Sydney, Bombay and Karachi. Also I'm puzzled by the notion of decline: is it a moral decline? a decline of the traditional [Test] game or what? And when did it occur?

This is a very enjoyable book to read. It is written stylishly like Guttman's previous works. There is also a refreshing balance and judiciousness in Guttman's stance. Guttman is not blinkered by a cultural conservative view of a golden age myth, which leads many to chastise the modern sports spectator, nor is he afraid to hand out some constructive criticism of the contemporary fan where he/she deserves it. American spectators, he suggests 'acquiesce supinely in the advertisers' interruptions of the game' for 'if sports spectacles are a species of drama, ... they are unquestionably mutilated dramas, whose mutilation arouses little protest' (p.142).

The book concludes with a final flourish which will convey some of the breadth and perspective of *Sports Spectators*:

Fortunately, there is no need in despair over the nasty aspects of representational sport. We must remind ourselves that the historical record contains good news as well as bad, fair play as well as foul ... If we really need to feel represented by athletes, we might think of them not as black or white or Protestant or Catholic or Russian or American but as men and women whose performances help existentially to define what it means to be human. In the immensity of astronomical space, we are alone on this tiny planet, on the spinning ball of earth. In that sense, all of us are on the home team. May the best person win (p.185).

Richard Cashman  
History  
University of New South Wales