

Geoffrey Lawrence & David Rowe (eds.), *Power Play: Commercialisation in Australian Sport*. Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1986. Index. pp.243. \$14.95.

Power Play is a prejudiced but significant contribution to Australian sports studies. Unlike most sports histories which purport, sometimes explicitly but more often implicitly, to be value free, this compilation of essays wears its heart on its tracksuit sleeve. The aim was to provide an original and provocative analysis of sport under capitalism' (p.13). It succeeds admirably; at times irritatingly so.

The book has two sections. The first six chapters deal with sport and Australian society and argue convincingly that sport must be set within the social structure created by Australian capitalism. A further six chapters present case studies based on Australian cricket and the Olympics showing clearly that both have been more than games. A postscript considers how the left should view popular culture including sport. Nine of the essays have been published elsewhere, *mainly in Arena*, but of these five have been revised and updated.

The editors supply an excellent introductory chapter in which it is suggested that sports historians and sports sociologists have experienced similar problems in getting their subject off (or should that be on to?) the ground. They provide a critical but fair over-

view of the current state of play, though perhaps in attacking - and rightly so - the myth-making of earlier authors they pick on some weak writing which would fail any rigorous academic test. Nevertheless they are correct in asserting that little attempt has been made so far to examine power relationships, gender and ethnic discrimination, or class conflict in Australian sport: generally there has been too much celebration and insufficient criticism. The following chapters then attempt to redress the situation.

Colin Tatz, a pioneer in the radical analysis of Australian sport, argues that modern sport, particularly at the professional level, is no longer play, but he does not fully consider whether it ever was; so the chronology of the corruption of sport is still on the research agenda. Bob Stewart analyses how in recent years Australian sport has become big business with the inter-related development of private sports entrepreneurship, televised sport, and corporate sports sponsorship producing a situation where the financial situation of a sport, or of a club, is no longer determined necessarily by the spectators, or at least by those at the ground. Jon Stratton and Jim McKay present two of the more 'theoretically complex' (p.13) peices which hide some pertinent points behind obscurantist sociological writing. Stratton argues that the late nineteenth century was a crucial time in 'the production of the Australian image of sport and its positioning in the structure of culture' (p.87) vis-a-vis such matters as attitudes to race, amateurism and gender. Unfortunately his hypothesis is undermined by a limited knowledge of British sports history. He is unaware of recent writings on muscular Christianity and also believes that the English middle class were excluded from participation in hunting, shooting and cricket (p.98). McKay, despite the worst presented footnote ever seen in sports history (p.131 n.16), makes a strong case that the sports policies of Australian governments, of left or right wing persuasion, have served to reinforce elitism and social disadvantage. Section one concludes with Paul James showing how nationalism and capitalism were combined in the 1983 America's Cup to make twelve metre yacht racing socially relevant.

In section two Australian cricket faces a hostile attack. Geoffrey Lawrence, both by himself and in partnership with David Rowe, castigates modern cricket for its overt and insidious reinforce-

ment of capitalist ideology including the socialisation of viewers into an acceptance of the values of capitalist society, the promotion of the myth of upward mobility as a reward for hard work, and, it would seem (p.161) for making productivity payments to players. Bill Lawry & Co., are condemned not for their inanity but for preaching the gospel of capitalism. Ian Harriss argues that Australian cricket in the interwar years changed in response to the needs of industrial society with scores becoming more important than style and winning taking precedence over gentlemanly conduct. Here the chronology of social change and developments in cricket is confusing. Other chapters examine the crass and subtle commercialism of the Los Angeles Olympics and discuss how the media have presented women in Australian sport. An editorial postscript raises the issue of whether sport should be seen as an expression of working-class values and interests or as a capitalist exploitative spectacle.

In their introduction the editors took issue with the late Kent Pearson and denied that empiricism was a first vital cog in the analysis of Australian sport. This lack of a solid statistical underpinning mars much of the material presented in section two. Is a two-day non-random sample sufficient to demonstrate that cricket commentaries encourage the virtues of capitalism? What proportion of reporting on women's sport is sexist? Too often these latter chapters substitute assumption and assertion for evidence and, for that matter, rigorous theory. The authors may well be right but they are disguising hypotheses as truths. Despite this criticism the chapters still perform a useful role, particularly for those readers 'less familiar with the sociological approach' (p.13), in highlighting the integral relationship between capitalism and sport and in demonstrating either the ignorance, or the culpable distortion, of the reality of sport in Australia by the media.

Too much sports history is devoid of relevance to the real world. This cannot be said of this book which sees a capitalist under every pitch, behind every goal and infiltrated into every press report: but then perhaps there is. However, it has to be wondered whether the working class spectator or sports viewer is as naive and susceptible as the authors implicitly suggest. Whether or not readers accept the philosophy of Lawrence & Rowe wholeheartedly, one message is clear: enjoy your sport but do not suspend your critical

faculties.

Wray Vamplew
Economic History
Flinders University