

Eric Midwinter, *Fair Game: Myth and Reality in Sport*. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1986. pp.x + 173. \$34.95.

Eric Midwinter's *Fair Game* rests on a premise that is revealed from the outset.

The myth of sport is that it is meaningful. At core it is not. It is, or should be, merely diversionary for player or watcher. The reality of sport is that people believe or presume it is meaningful, and, for varying motives, they act accordingly.(p.2)... Sport's proper concern is 'disportment', people turning aside for relaxation from the serious matters of economic survival or political contest.(p.3)

Building on this premise, Midwinter makes some telling points as his book unfolds. He is particularly good when discussing 'Professionals and Sporting Values' (pp.88-94), 'The Spectator,-viewer' (pp.106-111), and 'Sport and International Politics: South Africa, the Olympics' (pp.145-152). His general theme is how commercialism, sponsorship and politics have created a false significance for sport, that it now possesses an unwarranted importance of its own that goes far beyond the simple pleasure of playing and watching games.

Fair Game is an easy read divided into ten short chapters. The first six endeavour to provide an 'historical perspective' of sport, the next three discuss sport's involvement with commerce, government spending and politics. The concluding chapter provides Midwinter's personal solution to how [British] sport could/should be restored to its appropriate place in society.

While the central ideas and thrust of this book are both perceptive and purposeful, there are serious flaws in the way the book is written. Besides the fact that it lacks any documentation, bibliography or an index, *Fair Game* is imbalanced. While Britain was the founder of so many modern games and sports, the British example is given an inordinate amount of attention. Lip service is paid to Empire/Commonwealth countries, with Australia gaining the greatest exposure, while Europe and the Americas are confined to the barest of entries. Moreover, for a book that purports to talk about sport in general there is an excessively heavy reliance on cricket. Again and again Midwinter turns to county cricket when examples are needed for proof or emphasis. Particularly tiresome are the continual references to W.G. Grace. The author's familiarity with the great man is taken too far in a work not devoted to Grace himself.

Unfortunately, the flaws in *Fair Game* do not stop there. Having established that increasing urbanisation and industrialisation during Victorian times underpinned the emergence of modern sport, Midwinter fails to carry through the link into later times adequately. No account of the evolution of professionalism is provided either. General statements are made without sufficient substantiation. The use of analogies is taken to an absurd level. Examples of proof are taken from time periods sometimes a century apart. The style of writing is particularly quirkish. Compare as the figures clad in druidic white flitted quietly about the verdant sward' (p.42) - with - '...a token for first one and then another piece of political bullshit or brigandry' (p.147). Furthermore, journalistic tricks are frequently used. 'Of course', 'obviously', 'rightly', 'fairly', 'properly', are strewn throughout the book. Perhaps even more alarming is the moralistic tone that frequently appears. 'Modern sport is...irrevocably bedevilled...' (p.35), 'authorities ignored the outrageous dismantlement of local government perpetrated in 1972' (p.45). Midwinter is one who wears his heart on his sleeve, something not wrong in itself, but his blueprint in chapter ten for how sport could/should be changed bears the mark of a sermon.

What recommends *Fair Game* is its central ideas. There are strong arguments that sport has been corrupted, misused, and given a false importance. Unfortunately, Midwinter's expression of his central

ideas is more about making an impassioned plea than it is good history. In trying to wear more than one hat, Eric Midwinter has fallen between the stools of sports traditionalist, social analyst and social historian.

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