

Allen Guttman, *A Whole New Ball Game: An Interpretation of American Sports*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1988. Bibliographical essay, index, notes. \$US27.45; \$US12.05 paper.

Sports historians generally, and regular readers of *Sporting Traditions* in particular, will be familiar with the previous work of Allen Guttman. He is the author of *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (1978), *The Games Must Go On: Avery Brundage and the Olympic Movement* (1984), and *Sports Spectators* (1986).

In *A Whole New Ball Game* Guttman presents us with a highly readable series of essays that unfolds on several levels. He admits at the outset that he has 'not endeavored to produce a "complete" or even a comprehensive history of American sports...' (p.11). What we have at the empirical level, then, is thirteen chapters on various aspects of the historical, social and cultural evolution of American sport. At another level, as indicated by the sub-title, the book is an 'interpretation' of American sports based on 'a paradigmatic definition' of sports as 'rule-bound autotelic activities' (p.3) - an interpretation which can be worked out within the context of 'modernization theory inspired by [Max] Weber' (pp.10-11).

At the first or historical/descriptive level, this book is

highly successful. Guttmann writes clearly, selects his material well, and consistently places sports history within a broader historical and cultural context. The early chapters deal, among other things, with the 'premodern sport of Aboriginal Americans, Puritan attitudes toward sport, the Southerner as sportsman, Muscular Christianity, and the evolution of child's play from spontaneous activity to the production of six-year-old champions' (p.91).

The second half of the book focuses on the development of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, black athletes, women in sports, drugs, and 'the distortion created by obsession and excess' (p.184). The final chapter on 'The Future of American Sports' is only 5½ pages in length and somewhat resigned in tone. More on that in a moment.

Each chapter of this book provides a useful overview and fresh insights into a significant aspect of American sports history. For example, Guttmann sides with those who have argued that, on the whole, the Puritans retarded the emergence of modern sport. He considers why and how Southerners sustained their 'premodern' approach to sport until the rise of a new industrial South brought them into line with the rest of the nation. He follows the evolution of baseball from its early days to 'night games on artificial turf in a domed and weatherless stadium equipped with cocktail lounges and a razzle-dazzle electronic scoreboard...' (p.53).

Corruption in sport, a theme that runs through the whole book, takes on major dimensions in the discussion of intercollegiate athletics in the United States. There are the 'legal' distortions represented by the \$450,000 per year salary of Alabama football coach Bear Bryant, and the \$3,000,000 in television booty doled out to the 1983 Rose Bowl participants. Add to this the recruiting scandals, the illicit payments to players, the exploitation of black (and white) athletes, drug abuse on a massive scale and it is little wonder that those who seek reform feel they are 'trapped in the academic equivalent of the international arms race' (p.114).

Because the book covers such a massive range, there are inevitably selective observations with which individual readers may quibble. The most serious for me occurs on p.156 where Guttman concludes an otherwise supportive chapter on women in sports with the statement, 'On average, men are taller and heavier than women, have faster reaction times, more acute vision, better spatial perception, and greater muscular strength'. He then goes on to say that women are more flexible than men and 'surpass men at very long distance running and swimming'. After the 'taller and heavier' bit, I have difficulties with most of the rest.

The major problem with the book, however, does not involve differences of opinion on gender strengths and weaknesses but what seems to me insufficient development of the book's promising subtitle. After the initial reference to Weber and his own 'heuristic paradigm' (p.11), Guttman returns only in very general ways to modernisation theory as an interpretation of American sports. I am not suggesting that the book should have been weighed down with obtuse theory. Indeed, the clarity with which it is written is one of its great strengths. However, as the reader 'proceeds from chapter to chapter, the interpretative framework tends to recede from view. I think 'essays on the development of modern American sports' might have been a more accurate subtitle.

Guttman, like many of us, is deeply concerned about the state of American sport and the prospects for its future development. Everything indicates that sport will become even more 'specialized, rationalized, bureaucratized, and quantified' (p.185). The world of sport will be increasingly divided between those who play for the pure enjoyment of it and the elite who run 'serious' or 'big-time' sports and who have transformed preparation for the Olympic Games, for example, into something resembling 'a NASA countdown' (p.186). Because sport is so obviously a reflection of the culture that produces it, Guttman holds out little hope for substantive change: 'I cannot imagine the United States experiencing a cultural revolution of the magnitude required to shake the nation loose from the spell cast

by modern sports' (p.187).

In his final paragraph Guttman has the courage to admit that he feels deeply ambivalent about the future of modern sport: 'After flourishing in the heyday of the New Criticism, the term 'ambivalence' has fallen into disrepute. This is unfortunate. How else can we respond to a phenomenon as complex as American sports?' (p.190). Many who read this valuable and interesting book will agree.

Dennis Phillips
History
Macquarie University