

**Nicolas Fishwick**, *English Football and Society 1910-1950*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989). Bibliog., index. pp.xxii + 164. £25.00

In the last decade Association football in England has been well served by scholars. Tony Mason's *Association Football and English Society 1863-1915* appeared in 1980, Stephen Tishler's *Footballers and Businessmen* in 1981, Stephen Wagg's *The Football World* in 1984 and now Fishwick's study of the years 1910-1950. Somewhat surprisingly, Fishwick makes no reference to Wagg, despite the latter covering the inter-war as well as the post-war period.

*English Football and Society 1910-1950* is Fishwick's modified doctorate finished in 1984. Besides its title, the book owes much to Mason's earlier work. There are the chapters on the clubs, the crowd, the players, the press, the gambling, the workers. Where Fishwick does divert is the presentation of material on broadcasting and the football pools, both outside of Mason's orb. Fishwick also includes an excellent chapter, the book's first, on junior football which digs into the schoolboy, youth and non-Football League scene. I appreciated this material immensely for too few writers bother to explore grass roots involvement, particularly that of players. Fishwick here shows somewhat of an insider's view and it translates well onto the page.

The book is also at its best when explaining football's essential pull on workers. The Saturday afternoon match was not just about entertainment but an opportunity for people to become involved, to express loyalties, to exercise emotions. Fishwick is particularly perceptive when revealing the values and ideals of supporters which, though different from those of the middle class, had their own dignity and honour. Not only was the crowd's love of the game as selfless as those of any Corinthian, but it was also a lot more passionate.

To reveal his story, Fishwick has concentrated on three localities - Swindon, Oxford and Sheffield. This has allowed him to unearth many small, fine details that provide an informative local study. Yet as much of a strength as this is for the book, it is also much of the book's weakness. The introduction includes 'I have therefore attempted to use the local studies as reference points so that football and society can be studied in both microcosm and macrocosm' (p.x). The theory is fine. Use the regional to show the national. But it is no easy thing to do. How does one use Swindon, Oxford and Sheffield to state adequately the position of a game country-wide? Fishwick is aware of the problem and, in places, handles it. But overall the reader is left with the impression that the author struggles to fulfil his aim throughout his journey. The connections between micro and macro, are on occasions simply not there.

One further point is the last chapter. It bears all the marks of 'tack-on' material. Titled '"The opium of the people": football, politics and society', it races through issues that need far more space than a mere fourteen pages. The paradox of a political animal like the English Football Association decrying the encroachment of politics into football is not even mentioned. One is also left to wonder why the book fails to conclude a page before it does. The last two paragraphs, devoted to comparing workers at play with political Labour, are the first occasion that a link is forged. 'The football grounds of England were the Labour Party at prayer' (p. 150) is a wonderful image but one unsubstantiated by the body of the book itself.

Fishwick's text is easy to read, and his endnotes and bibliography are well documented. The dust-jacket photo is superb so the reader is left to wonder why Manchester University Press decided to forego pictures to accompany the text. There are plenty

of top quality available and they would have added much to reader enjoyment.

Conclusion? Fishwick's book is useful and, in places, reveals some real gems. Yet it is also rather frustrating. Its attempt to reveal the national through the local is never really successful, leaving the reader to wonder whether the book's title is too ambitious.

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