

Eric Halladay, *Rowing in England: A Social History. The amateur debate*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1990. Bibliog., illus., index, pp. 240. \$144.50.

One of the fascinating aspects of the British debate over amateurism was the way in which the drive for amateur purity was pushed by many to the point where it expressed less a concern over whether or

not a man should be competing for monetary reward, or rather a desire to make a sport socially exclusive. No better example is available to us than rowing, and the development of the sport in Britain until the 1950s was intimately bound up with this concern.

At first the argument seemed clear enough. In the early years of the nineteenth century rowing was marred by wagering and fouling, at least among the Oxford and Cambridge colleges which often employed watermen in their crews. The watermen competed hard, being quite prepared to foul in the process. Influenced by a Cambridge coach, T.S. Egan, the view came to be that the universities ought to purge their rowing activities of such outsiders: 'eight-oared rowing necessarily declines from its high perfection in the hands of watermen'. Linked with this was the view that true sport was not possible when contests involved money prizes.

It was a short step from this to the development of an exclusivity that seemed designed, as much as anything, to keep rowing socially pure. Surely, it was said, one could not speak of 'true' sport if some competitors were employed in occupations which were physically demanding, for such people had an 'unfair' advantage simply because of the chance of their occupation: 'justice to the amateur competitor in a muscular exercise demands that his opponents... should have developed their skill and anatomy alike by labouring for love and not for money'. This applied especially to people employed 'on or about boats'. Despite the absurdities that this often threw up - a paid tailor or an apprentice to a printer were ineligible, but the booking clerk at the Henley Great Western station was accepted as an amateur - those pushing for such tight restrictions (and in particular the Amateur Rowing Association) prevailed through much of England until well into the twentieth century. So determined were the purists, that some would have preferred not to compete internationally rather than have English standards lowered in competition with rowers whose amateur credentials were believed to be dubious. As the *Times* noted, in the USA 'amateur was an elastic term

and included coal-whippers, glass-blowers, hewers of wood and drawers of water'. As a consequence, the Australian carpenter, Bobby Pearce, was barred from Henley in 1928, and the Australian Olympic eight, all of whom happened to be policemen, were similarly excluded in 1936. Such attitudes were behind the ARA assertion in 1925 that it 'had never been in sympathy with the Olympic Games or Olympic Regattas'.

Intriguingly, the debate over amateurism also became intertwined with debates over rowing style. As the efforts of those whom Halladay calls the 'praetorian guard' succeeded in purifying the sport, so there developed a clear view on what constituted the 'correct' style for a gentleman. Halladay illustrates how this style was more a matter of aesthetics than efficiency, in much the same way that amateur batsmen were expected to favour the aesthetically pleasing, though very risky, offside play so beloved by cricket purists. Such an obsession with style could lead to bloodyminded opposition to methods and innovations which attempted to push out the boundaries of the sport. The Australian, Steve Fairbairn, with his emphasis on method rather than style - 'styles in rowing are like seasons in Australia, bad, damned bad and bloody awful' - was regarded with great suspicion by those who saw his coaching successes at Jesus College, Cambridge, Thames RC and London RC as merely illustrating a dangerous desire to win at all costs. For the diehards (who, perhaps not surprisingly, fought to keep women out of their sport) innovations such as the swivel rowlock or the sliding seat indicated a dreadful lowering of standards.

Despite the determination of the Cam-Isis-Thames axis to exclude working class rowers, Halladay makes it clear that there were limits to the reach of the South-Eastern autocrats. In many parts of England the locals effectively ignored the edicts which occasionally were made, well illustrating the point that regional attitudes can often affect centralisation efforts. This was partly a factor of distance from the South-East, and partly a typical regional rejection of the pretensions of those in the London area.

The strictness of the amateur definition and the tightness of the 'praetorian guard' control was weakened, in the end, by changes in English society. The growing internationalisation of sport meant that the 'Little England' approach became increasingly difficult to justify. The treatment of the Australian crew in 1936 was the subject of a question in Parliament, indicating growing lack of preparedness by politicians to leave the governing of the sport to those most closely involved. Of more significance was the passing of the *Physical Training and Recreation Act* (1937), which sought to raise the country's fitness and to improve sporting and recreational facilities throughout England and Wales. With government thus seeking to view society as a whole, regardless of class, it became harder for rowing's exclusive stance to be maintained, especially as government funds were available for those who met acceptable guidelines. Moves to remove the bar on manual labourers began almost immediately and were only delayed by the outbreak of war in 1939.

This work is an excellent account of the amateur debate, for it not only enables the reader to follow the twists and turns of that story, but it also gives us much understanding of the place of rowing in different parts of England and within different levels of English society. Having said this, the three appendices seem oddly out of kilter with the preceding seven chapters. Dealing with 'Boats and style', 'Health and training' and (most oddly of all) 'The North-East music halls and the Tyne professionals', these give the impression of being included to beef up the text. Perhaps they could better have been used as three separately published articles?

Finally, *can* that price be correct? I doubted that it could, until noticing the price of another Manchester University Press work in the May 1991 *Sporting Traditions*. What on earth is the press playing at? Suffice it to say that in this time of restricted university library budgets, this very worthy addition to any sporting collection will not be ordered for the ANU library by this reviewer!

Scott Bennett

Australian National University