

John Williams and Stephen Wagg (eds), *British Football and Social Change. Getting into Europe*. **Leicester University Press, Leicester, London and New York, 1991 Index pp. 258, \$US9.95 paper, \$US35 hardbook.**

In recent years football in Great Britain appears to have been recovering from the long running sore of hooliganism. Two of the clearest signs of the improving health of the game came with the Football Supporters' Association, formed in 1985, and the fanzine phenomenon which has burgeoned in recent years. Both these 'movements' emerged from fans concerned about threats to the game, not just from the hooligans on the terrace, but from the other hooligans, from self-interested sponsors and egomaniacal directors to the gutter press. In 1987, in direct response to soccer's sickness, the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research was set up at Leicester University, where the sociologists Eric Dunning and John Williams, among others, had

established a fine reputation for their research and writing on the problem. Dunning is one of the pioneers in the academic study of sport, preceding even Chas Critcher, also in this volume, who comments wryly on his 1979 article as having been written when 'academic articles about football [were] an aberration' rather than the growth industry they have become. Williams has been at the front line in more than one sense, much of his research into hooliganism being conducted as a participant observer.

This book is one of several that have been inspired by the work of Leicester Centre for Football Research, but owed its more immediate inspiration to the Florence conference on the theme 'Football and Europe', held in May 1990, just before Italia 1990.

Co-author with Williams in this collection of thirteen essays is Stephen Wagg, author of an excellent analysis of the recent history of football, *The Football World*. Most of the contributors are scholars concerned about the future of the game, and have been themselves active in promoting its best interests. Rogan Taylor, for instance, was a founder member of the Football Supporters' Association, and Adrien Golderberg was an originator of one of the best known fanzines, *Off the Ball*. It is this combination of passionate interest in the game and scholarly detachment that give this collection its theme and consistency. Although concerned about the game today and its future in the new Europe, the foundation of this book is solidly historical.

British Football and Social Change should be essential reading for any course on sports history. It covers the wide spectrum of problems confronting sport today, and not just football. The first chapters deal with the present state of the game, introduced by Ian Taylor who discusses in his typically forthright way the reverberations of the Hillsborough disaster and the (Justice) Taylor Report. Articles follow on the way football is played and how it is watched. It concludes with the relationship between British football and Europe, the days of 'splendid

isolation' long gone but with the perils of the 'New Europe' of 1992 very much in mind.

Readers will pick their own favourite essays. For me one of the most revealing was the chapter by John Williams and Jackie Woodhouse on women and football in Britain. In the years just after the first World War massive crowds turned up to see women's games in Britain, and the famous Dick Kerr's X1 also toured France and the United States. Surprisingly for an account that covers developments up to at least March 1991 there is no mention of the immensely successful Women's World Cup which was brought to its happy conclusion in China in November 1991. Wagg's article on the media and the England team is a sickening reminder of the depths to which the gutter press in Britain has sunk. Setting the new standards is the American Rupert Murdoch's *Sun*, whose outrages against common decency is a reminder that there are odours more foul in British society than its football hooligans.

An update on the hooligan problem itself can be found in Williams' article on the subject while Rogan Taylor presents the other side of the picture with a historical summary of supporters' associations, a fuller account of which will appear in his forthcoming book on the subject. Steve Redhead, a lawyer who seems to share some of the endearing idiosyncrasies of our own Neville Turner, albeit based on the Beatles rather than Beethoven, and author of several books on popular culture, links fans to pop songs, dress and youth culture in general to present a rosier picture than the more sombre caution of Williams.

Articles on economic trends (Tony Arnold) and the collapse of communism in eastern Europe (Vic Duke) have themes which can easily be related to other sports, but even an article like Alan Tomlinson's on the historic rivalry of the Football Association and the Football League, and its potentially catastrophic climax in 1991, highlights one of sport's and not just football's problems: the greed inspired by excess wealth and its threat to the fun without which football and all sport is pointless.

One of the great successes of this book is that although it is a compilation, it has a theme and a consistency. The theme is contemporary football and its problems, the consistency comes in the sympathies of the contributors, whose criticisms of the would-be destroyers of the game are based on detached research and passionate commitment.

Bill Murray
La Trobe University.