

**Donald G Kyle and Gary D Stark, eds, *Essays on Sport History and Sport Mythology*. Texas A & M University Press, 1990. pp. 154.**

As the editors have stated, this publication arises from the twenty-fourth annual Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures held at the University of Texas at Arlington in March 1989. Papers were presented by Donald Kyle, 'E Norman Gardiner and the decline of Greek sport'; Stephen Hardy, 'Entrepreneurs, structures, and the sportgeist: old tensions in a modern industry'; Richard Mandell, 'Modern criticisms of sport'; and Allen Guttmann, 'Eros and Sport'. An additional contribution to the volume was the winning entry in the 1989 Webb-Smith Essay Competition by Steven Riess, 'Professional sports as an avenue of social mobility in America: some myths and realities'.

As Jack Berryman states in his introduction to the five edited papers, the fact that sport history was chosen as a topic for the Webb lectures indicates the recent stature of the subject in academic circles. Many are aware that sport history encourages sport mythologising, 'a tendency to misinterpret, oversimplify, misrepresent, or even falsify the actual record'. The academic credentials of all five authors are excellent; all have contributed greatly to the field of sport history through their publications and presentations. Their offerings in this volume enhance those credentials.

The contents of the essays range widely. Kyle focuses on sporting myths of ancient Greece which are included in the writings of Norman Gardiner. Kyle concludes that just as Gardiner's mythologies came from his life, his world and his sources, we must realise that we will be demythologised by future generations of sports historians – 'that's how the game is played'.

'Sportgeist' (the spirit of sport), and the lives and careers of four American sporting personalities of the nineteenth and early twentieth century – Henry Chadwick, Albert Spalding, James Sullivan and Senda Berenson – are used by Hardy to show that 'all the modern structures in American sport have not prevented the recurrence of ... ancient tensions ... In this regard we are no more modern than the ancient Greeks.'

The hoary belief that sport provides opportunity for social mobility is re-examined by Riess using sub-sections which consider professional boxing, basketball, football and baseball. Although there has always been sufficient 'rags to riches' stories to lead people to believe of the 'possibility', the reality is that professional sport has provided upward mobility far very few.

Mandell is critical of the lack of depth that scholars have given to the study of the role and significance of sport in respective societies. His essay considers the relationship between physical education and sport, especially in continental Europe, and he expresses his appreciation of the way in which German scholars have pioneered 'sport criticism of the sort that might be of interest to people dissatisfied with the overwhelming bulk of journalism or escapist literature'. In contrast to the Germans, Mandell states that 'earnest sports criticism in the American tradition seems to be merely angry, not theoretical'.

The questions as to how much eros has to do with out human response to sports as participants and as spectators was sufficient stimulation for me to seek answers in Guttmann's essay. After a consideration of the Greek and Roman world, Guttmann asks whether twentieth century behaviour is all that different from ancient antics. It isn't, and he cites examples of swimmers (Johnny Weissmuller selected to play Tarzan because he had sex appeal) and the performance of skaters, divers and gymnasts whose movements might well arouse spectators more than their bodies at rest.

In summary this collection of essays is fascinating and thought provoking. Each essayist has included extensive references for further reading. A conclusion by the editors which went beyond the motivating introduction would have enhanced the publication.

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