

## Book Reviews

**Lincoln Allison, ed., *The Changing Politics of Sport*. Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993. pp. 238.**

The politics of identity and the politics of difference are core themes in contemporary political theory which conceptualises, describes and interprets the forces that validate political groups. Sport is one such force. Political entities, especially nation states, express, affirm and differentiate themselves through sport. The construction and reconstruction of political identities mark the present conjuncture and in this context Lincoln Allison's volume provides a timely update of sport's changing roles. Eight of the essays in this collection directly or indirectly focus on this issue. (Two others analyse sport and the law and sport as an environmental issue).

What role is sport playing in the politics of identity and difference in the post-Cold War era? Grant Jarvie and John Hoberman assign sport a prominent place. The restructuring of the nation-state, they argue, does not imply the emergence of a single global identity. Jarvie rejects the notion that downgrading national boundaries encourages re-evaluation of old identities. This assumes falsely that spatial conditions rather than historical memory connects modern communities (pp. 70-1). But human migration and flows of goods, information, knowledge and capital do not necessarily integrate people. On the contrary, local, regional and national communities continue to grasp the 'symbols and traditions, including sporting traditions', which give them a sense of identity (p. 76). Here I found Jarvie's notion of collective identity useful in its emphasis on *subjective feelings and values* based on shared experiences. The components of such experiences include senses of continuity with the past, shared memories of the past (in particular of historical turning points), and a sense of common destiny (p. 76). This conceptualisation assists critiques of globalisation and international culture. History, as Jarvie reminds us, continues to alienate and divide. John Sugden and Alan Bairner's chapter on sport in Ireland brilliantly illustrates this point.

Hoberman identifies three factors that will continue to stoke international sporting rivalry: the desire and determination of political elites to see their sporting representatives excel, the structure of international sport which encourages nationalism (albeit disguised as international fraternalism), and the commercialisation of Olympism (p. 16). Hoberman argues convincingly and his study of Norway (pp. 21-4) offers fresh material.

Jim Riordan is less sure about sport's role, suggesting that some of the pressures encouraging international sporting competition may have abated. After describing former communist Eastern Europe as the principal source of international rivalry, Riordan proceeds to analyse the new political leaderships who are dismantling the sports structures that once helped East European regimes gain international recognition and respect. During and since the revolutions of 1989 ordinary East Europeans have challenged elite sport associating their national sporting representatives with the privilege and coercion of former regimes (pp. 38-9). Hence the new leaderships are turning to commercial sport. But as Terry Monnington demonstrates in his essay on politicians and sport, market-driven professional sports such as basketball, boxing, rugby, motor racing and tennis, are just as available for patriotic manipulation as old style Soviet sport. If East European sportspersons no longer symbolise socialist vitality, this does not mean that the current leaderships will not seek political capital from sporting successes.

'Sport', writes Allison, 'is one of the most potent of human activities in its capacity to give meaning to life, to create and interconnect senses of achievement and identity' (p. 4). But this is not an intrinsic property of sport. The key to this potency, as Hoberman reminds us, is political organisation and manipulation (p. 24). Allison's collection is a solid introduction into the way sport helps constitute, differentiate and link political identities. Hoberman, Jarvie, Monnington, Riordan, and Sugden and Bairner in particular clarify sport's role in the construction of cultural, class and ethnic identities.

Gender and racial identities are less adequately covered. The volume contains no feminist perspective while Adrian Guelke's review of South Africa overlooks racial identities, racial integration and post-apartheid South African nationalism. This is despite a promising introduction where he observes that 'sport ... was the one area in which the reform process had brought the Whites benefits at little or no cost' (p. 151). In other words, white South Africans returned to international sport without conceding to black demands. Indeed, if the white-ruled National Party dismantled the formal racial structures of apartheid, it has not repudiated racism. Quite the contrary. Racism flourishes in all spheres of South African life: at the end of 1993, athletics, netball and tennis remain politically and ideologically divided, there are precious few sports development programs in the townships, racial slurs pervade integrated sports, and sporting symbols continue to fuel racial divisions. Guelke does not analyse these issues, opting instead for a safe overview of the Republic's readmission to international sport. Hoberman touches on the problem of racial identity in a more meaningful manner by simply drawing attention to the psychological processes that make it possible for black athletes to represent predominantly white societies (p.18). Monnington's description of US President Reagan's failure to attract black votes despite appropriating black sporting images (pp. 1367) is also more relevant.

A third shortfall in this collection is the poor conceptualisation of commercial sport's assimilation into, and/or transformation of, national political identities. While Hoberman and Riordan identify the issue, Allison's discussion of the politics of commercial sport (pp. 6-10) remains bogged in the internal conflict between the commercial-professional ethos and the amateur-gentleman ethos, and Christopher Hill, in his chapter on the Olympic movement, omits it altogether.

Hill's essay in fact draws my strongest criticism. He compounds an apologia for the International Olympic Committee by a weak conceptualisation of politics. Hill apparently believes that moral evaluation has no place in politics. He claims that 'it is impossible to adjudicate on the moral arguments' regarding Britain's boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics yet, somehow, 'the political arguments are easier to weigh up' (p. 94). Moral evaluation is the essence of politics; it is the method through which we discover the principles, virtues and attitudes that signify fair and just governance.

Overall, Allison's volume contributes to our understanding of sport's place in the politics of identity and differentiation. In particular, it offers students in sports-related disciplines a positive perspective on politics in so far as politics enables groups to form constructive identities and it reinforces a fundamental truth that sport contains no intrinsic properties which enable it to transcend and suppress political differences.

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