

Jennifer Macrory, *Running with the Ball: The Birth of Rugby Football*. Collins Willow, London, 1991. pp. viii + 214. £14.99.

In her more than fifteen years as a librarian and archivist at Rugby School, Jennifer Macrory has faced a barrage of requests for information and clarification on the details of the development of Rugby's unique form of football. *Running with the Ball* is in some ways, an attempt to stem this tide of continuing questions about the genesis and development of rugby football. It seems likely to succeed because it offers a readable account of the evolution of the game based largely on primary sources while providing examples of original documents and contemporary recollections and illustrations to provide a context for Macrory's commentary. And it is a commentary rather than an historical analysis because, in general, Macrory describes the history and development of the game from a Rugbeian viewpoint, rather than offering an in-depth analysis of the broader context within which this unique game developed.

Running with the Ball was published to coincide with the 1991 Rugby World Cup, held in England and though the book was written with Rugbeians in mind, the potential audience for such a book was very broad. It will appeal to those looking for a coffee-table book, being elegantly produced with a colourful fly leaf, although containing only black and white reproductions inside. Similarly, scholars wishing to gain ready access to original documents will find this a useful source of information. Macrory provides a sensible and balanced view of such issues as: the influence of Webb Ellis; hacking; hacking over, and the notion of status rivalry between Rugby and other schools in the development of their own football games.

Although Macrory was trained as an historian, sadly there are no footnotes in the text and only a very limited bibliography. Macrory uses information from the sporting press of the time, most of the more important was collected in a scrapbook by Old Rugbeian and RFU member A C Guillemard for the critical years, 1862-3. She uses this information

liberally throughout the text, although sometimes without reference to the original source or author. This is unfortunate, for while the evidence is still useful, without knowledge of the original source the historian is either left with the task of searching for the original, or of communicating with Macrory - both of which are tasks the book seems to have been designed to prevent!

In her commentary, Macrory attempts to provide answers to three questions: why Rugby's game developed its peculiar characteristics; why this game rather than the unique forms of football played at Winchester, Eton, Harrow or others of the 'Great Schools' should have survived and developed into a national sport; and, how the game spread internationally. In attempting to answer these questions Macrory offers arguments based largely on human agency. After initial chapters dealing with the history of football from harpastum and campball to cnapan and street football, the reader is moved rapidly to a discussion of the William Webb Ellis story and the Blaxam correspondence regarding the birth of running with the ball. Macrory provides a 'no-nonsense' assessment of the Webb Ellis story. She also displays some awareness of alternative explanations of the role and place of Webb Ellis. While she is dismissive of W J Baker's (1981) Carlylean assessment of the Webb Ellis myth, she is harshly critical of Dunning and Sheard's (1979) 'sociological interpretation of rugby football's development in terms of a series of class struggles (p. 49)'. Macrory is able to offer no new evidence or insights regarding the initial development of the game and concludes that 'the popular history of Rugby football was written in 1900 quite literally in a tablet of stone (p. 36)'. That no new evidence has come to light is unfortunate for those looking for a more complete analysis of the game, but like the former researchers of the subject, Macrory has had little beyond the complete correspondence of the 1897 Old Rugbeian Society Report on the Origins of Rugby Football to

draw on for answers. For Macrory, it was ultimately 'the flexibility of the game and the willingness of Rugbeians to adapt to prevailing conditions which allowed the game to adjust and ultimately survive (pp. 47-8)' in its early years.

As an alternative explanation, it could be argued that the formation of rules in 1846 to overcome the confusion caused by 'certain disputed points' in the unwritten rules of the game suggests a desire to maintain the 'inner-directed existence' of the rugby game, and in fact limited the flexibility of innovation and adaptation. The writing of the rules was perhaps another sign of the strong influence of Thomas Arnold and his push for formal procedures in the boys' conduct of their own affairs (p.57). Unfortunately, Macrory does not assess the merits of either of these, or any other alternative explanations, to the development of the rules or the early codification of the game beyond Rugby School. However, she does provide excellent overviews of the development of individual sets of rules, the introduction of caps, the production of 'a good oval ball', and the use of 'H'-shaped posts, and the logistics of a try at goal as the heart of the book. For those interested in the details of such changes in the game, the quirks of 'running in' and the beginnings of codification, these chapters will provide enjoyment. When dealing with these strictly Rugbeian elements, Macrory is at her most assured.

In discussing the diffusion of the game, Macrory relies almost entirely on 'Arnold's men' as the agents of diffusion to other schools, notably Marlborough, Cheltenham, Haileybury, and Wellington although, in fairness to her, she does note that this may have been fortuitous. Likewise at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Trinity College, Dublin, it was Rugbeians, Macrory believes, who developed the game. Even in Scotland she suggests that it was the influence of Old Rugbeian headmasters at Fettes, Merchiston Castle and Edinburgh Academy that promoted the game in a narrowly defined geographic and social community. However, as Tranter (1993) notes, a form of rugby had been played by clubs in

Scotland since 1824. While this may only account for the ease of adoption of the rugby code, it may also suggest a view of diffusion as essentially emanating from one source, carried by specific Rugbeian agents and developed in a linear fashion, may be far too simplistic a view of the development of the handling game not only in Scotland but also in England.

Similarly, in her discussion of the great football question—the quest for a universal code — an over-emphasis on Rugby School, Rugby's Football and the Old Rugbeian influence gives a somewhat slanted view of the debate. It was 'their unshakeable belief in their own game (p. 209)', according to Macrory, encouraged Rugbeians to remain constant to their game, despite considerable pressure to compromise. 'Rugbeians of the Arnold generation and after were perhaps unusual among public school men of their day in their strong conviction that they had a duty to propagate the ideals which had been impressed upon them at school (p. 211).' Macrory goes further and states that: 'It is to these Victorian men ... that modern Rugby football owes its place in twentieth century sport (p. 212)'. While there is little doubt that Rugbeians were influential in development and diffusion of their game beyond the confines of Bigside, the broader context in which this development took place is barely addressed in this book. The influence of Muscular Christianity, the impact of notions of manliness, civility and health civility, the rhetoric of nationalism, all of which were central concerns of the upper-middle classes who played and promoted sport in general and rugby in particular during the latter half of the nineteenth century, are barely mentioned. This limitation is unlikely to trouble rugby enthusiasts or Rugbeians past, present or future (since it will confirm for them that their predecessors taught the world to play the game), but it should signal a caution to scholars of sport and rugby. For this book lacks a broader context.

Despite this reservation, Macrory writes fluently and clearly and has undoubtedly added to the body of knowledge about the genesis of running with the ball. She has also provided access to a collection of original documents and pictures currently unavailable in one place to anyone unable to make the trip to Rugby School. This, in itself, is enough to warrant spending the cover price of 'fifteen quid' on this elegantly-produced and readable book.

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Witold Rybczynski, *Waiting for the Weekend*. Penguin Books, New York, 1991. Bibliog., index, pp. 260.

Imagine the following situation. After a week of serious work you allow yourself to relax at the weekend. Listening to Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' puts you in the right mood to help you and your body unwind. You take a book and dive into someone else's thoughts.

Witold Rybczynski discusses such feelings in his book *Waiting for the Weekend*. He uses nearly 250 pages to sensitise the reader about the meaning of the weekend, something usually taken for granted. Rybczynski's thoughts are easy to follow as he introduces every chapter with personal views of leisure that he illustrates with many examples. This individual understanding he uses to catch the interest of readers and lead them back to the history of leisure from ancient Rome through the Enlightenment to the widespread possibilities of the weekend in our times.

Carried on by the music of Vivaldi, used as a motif woven through the whole book, you have to answer the question of whether you see yourself as a slave of work or as a slave of the weekend. You may not agree with