

Gareth Williams, *1905 And All That: Essays on Rugby Football, Sport and Welsh Society*. **Gomer Press, Llandysul, Dyfed, Wales, 1991. Illus. pp. xiv + 250. £8.75.**

This book represents a delightful collection of essays on Welsh sport, in particular the Welsh sport of rugby union football and its place in Welsh society. Gareth Williams has provided sports historians with some of the best accounts of sport in the Principality over the years and *1905 And All That* is no exception. Avid readers of sports history will recognise some of the articles, however, since the book is essentially a collection of writings by Gareth Williams on rugby and sport in Wales, including some of his book reviews. Despite that, this book allows readers to explore sport and identity in Wales in a more unified context. Welsh purists are also catered for in that two chapters appear in the Welsh language, though one of these chapters covers similar territory to an English language chapter. Another chapter targets younger Welsh readers by providing player biographies of great Welsh players and even one notorious AU Black, George Nepia.

Williams writes sports history beautifully and successfully transports readers into the periods he discusses. Even if we have not witnessed Wales play at Cardiff Arms Park Williams provides a sense of what it might have been like in 1905, 1935 or 1969 and beyond. What makes Williams' sports history so valuable is that his excellent narrative skills are combined with a depth of analysis which appeals to the social historian.

For Williams, the crucial point in the flowering of Welsh national identity was on 16 December 1905 when Wales defeated the New Zealand All Blacks by 3-0, inflicting the only defeat suffered by the All Blacks on that tour. The Welsh victory was interpreted in terms of saving the mother country, or ironically, even saving the Empire. The 1905 match came at a time when Welsh rugby was at a high point, Wales won six Triple Crowns between 1900 and 1911. Sadly, for their fans, they did not win another until 1950.

Rugby in Wales developed its own dynamics fuelled by commercial and industrial expansion and high levels of immigration from rugby playing areas of the West country and North of England. Rugby was taken to south Wales by the commercial class educated in England and it was this group which promoted rugby in Welsh schools. It was the men working in the mines, however, who gave the game its unique 'Welshness' as they provided large numbers of the early players. The Welsh Rugby Union soon came under attack from the sanctimonious English and Scottish Unions whose interpretations of amateur were distinctly different from those in Wales (and indeed in many parts of England). The issue of professionalism has long been a problem in Welsh rugby as many working class and unemployed players have 'gone north' - defected to Rugby League in order to make money to survive. Williams charts these issues effectively in several chapters which link issues surrounding professionalism to the distinctiveness of Welsh rugby and compare the situation with other parts of Britain.

After a short introduction, the book proceeds with an overview of home country rugby history, though New Zealand and South Africa get an occasional mention. While this chapter has been published before in Tony Mason's edited collection, *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, it provides a nice framework for the chapters concentrating specifically on rugby in Wales. This chapter is still the best short overview of the development of rugby in the British Isles.

The following chapter deals with the making of Cardiff Arms Park. This explores an important area too often overlooked in sports history - the construction and meaning of sporting venues. Although Williams concentrates on the emergence of the stadium in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it would be nice to see work on the iconography and social and cultural meaning of Cardiff Arms Park (and other arenas) both in terms of physical space and as social texts experienced by thousands of spectators at a time. Wales playing at Cardiff Arms became the most potent and public symbol of Welsh national identity by 1905.

This book, and other works on rugby, suggest that Welsh national identity was the product of a specific set of historical, economic and demographic circumstances which were fuelled by Welsh success internationally (especially after England lost access to Northern Union players). This led to the creation of a new Welsh identity centred on rugby, industrial production and on the place of Wales as a vital component of the British Empire. It is remarkable that all this was achieved in a relatively short period. The place of rugby was so secure that decades of international failures did not diminish its position in Welsh consciousness and national life.

I have only a few minor criticisms of this book. Rather than a collection of everything Gareth Williams has written on rugby and Wales, I would have preferred a more integrated history of rugby and popular culture in Wales. This book hangs together very loosely and is more like an edited collection of miscellaneous chapters. The addition of some new articles would have enhanced the book. A few 'typos' appear, but not enough to mar a delightful text.

This book will be useful for all those interested in the emergence of modern British sport, the links between sport and national identity and the history of sport in Wales. Rugby historians will delight in this collection in particular. Williams is to be commended for reaching for a broad audience, academic and more general, and for writing enjoyable sports history. If one was pressed to answer the question posed by Gwyn Williams' thought-provoking title *When Was Wales?*, the answer suggested in this book would be on 16 December 1905 at Cardiff Arms Park. That day has shaped modern Welsh male national consciousness more than any other time.

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