

Albert Grundlingh, Andre Odendaal, and Burr ridge Spies, *Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society*. Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1995. Index. pp. 135. R39.95.

This slim volume is a valuable edition to the literature on rugby and sport in South Africa. While not without significant limitations, it is the first book among the many written on this subject to focus on the deeper social, historical, and political significance of rugby in this complex

society. Given the passions and controversies which have surrounded many South Africans' relationship with this game, it is long overdue.

Produced in some haste to precede the 1995 Rugby World Cup in the 'new' South Africa, *Beyond the Tryline* is more a collection of discrete essays than a fully-integrated monograph. There are three chapters by Albert Grundlingh, on 'The new (post-1990) politics of rugby', 'Responses to Isolation', and 'Rugby, Afrikaner nationalism and masculinity in South Africa' and Burridge Spies 'The imperial heritage: Rugby and white English speaking South Africa'. The sequence in which they are presented is counter-intuitive, opening with developments from 1990 to the eve of the World Cup, and then veering between black rugby, 'English' rugby, the impact of apartheid-era isolation, and finally rugby's relationship to Afrikaner nationalism and masculinity. While there was surely a logic to this ordering, it is not spelled out in the very brief (two-page) introduction; nor is there a conclusion to draw the various themes and insights together. The absence of a more fully developed introduction or a conclusion is regrettable, as the full significance of this novel analytical departure is not explored and exploited.

Of the individual contributions, Grundlingh's treatment of rugby and Afrikaner nationalism goes furthest in exploring the sport's 'deep play' in this key segment of South African society. One is left with a rich picture of the way in which rugby was absorbed, appropriated and exploited by the Afrikaner 'establishment' to become their 'national' game. Less richly explored, though still suggestive, is Grundlingh's treatment of rugby and Afrikaner masculinity in the same essay. Indeed, this piece and some brief comments in Odendaal's chapter strongly underscore the need for more work in the gendered dimensions of rugby in South Africa.

Also particularly noteworthy is Odendaal's exploration of black rugby. As he points out, this long and resilient sporting tradition has been neglected at best, distorted and disparaged at worst. Odendaal's contribution, building on a very small body of previous work, goes some distance towards giving black rugby its due. He provides an engaging account of the sport's early development in black communities, and some of its internal tensions and tribulations during the apartheid era in particular. Still, he is unable to give sufficient attention to the latter; and some parts of the story, such as that of black rugby in Transvaal, are introduced but then disappear. The reader is left to

speculate on why the sport's dedicated black following was so regionally constricted.

Grundlingh's discussions of the era of mounting isolation and of post-1990 developments are both solidly researched, and are particularly interesting for their brief but insightful interpretations of two larger-than-life rugby 'kingpins'—Danie Craven and Louis Luyt. One wonders, however, how the author might revise his rather sceptical and minimalist interpretation of the World Cup's probable significance had he been writing in its triumphal wake. The least successful of the chapters in illuminating rugby's societal significance is Spies' discussion of its white, English-speaking manifestations. Although a competent historical review, his analysis does not take us very far in probing the game's role in fostering South African identities and inter-communal rivalries.

In the introduction to *Beyond the Tryline*, the authors pose a series of challenging questions: What are the connections between rugby, nationalism, and class? What does rugby reveal about gender relations? What is the relationship between schooling and rugby? Did rugby ease race relations in South Africa, and can the game be regarded as a unifier? How important was rugby in the calculations of South African politicians? What has been the effect of greater commercialisation?' They neither promise nor deliver authoritative answers to most of these questions. Nevertheless, by posing and engaging them, they have taken the analysis of rugby in South Africa to a new and deeper level, and have laid down a marker form which future scholarly efforts may proceed.

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