

**Jeff Hill and Jack Williams, eds, *Sport and Identity in the North of England*. Keele University Press, 1996. pp. viii + 187. £35.**

Having watched some of the television coverage in the US and some in Canada of the final days of the Atlanta Olympics, the difference in representation provides weight to Hill and Williams's suggestion that the effects of sport upon social consciousness is an important area of study for sports historians. And if, as Patrick Joyce suggests, 'meanings truly make subjects' then the meanings that were made of Carl Lewis' and Michael Johnson's efforts in the US, and the meanings that were made of Donovan Bailey's efforts in Canada, are worthy of analysis. More importantly for the present discussion, the identities which such meanings evoke, suggest that this volume is a timely foray into the field.

While this is as much a collection of discrete essays as it is an integrated look at sport, identity and their interrelationship—which the lack of a concluding chapter highlights—the contributors each produce careful, unique, and often colourful insights into the problematics of sport and identity in a distinctive regional environment, the North of England. In their introduction, Hill and Williams stress that while the North is typically thought of as a geographical area, it is as much an idea that exists in popular minds. As a soft, sedate, southerner who was born in London and believes that the North is a state of mind that begins at the Watford Gap, I found this set of essays particularly helpful in elaborating on that state of mind! The essays show how Northerners have seen themselves, how Southerners have seen Northerners, and the nature of the relationships between the two. At times, the North has been seen to be a victim of the South, while it has also been seen as oppositional to the South, and productive of notions of the otherness of North and South. Otherness has been a matter of both style and substance as a number of the authors discuss.

To the Southerner, there is little that distinguishes a northerner more completely than a Geordie accent, and for those familiar with the work of Alan Metcalfe, his chapter on the mining villages of East Northumberland is another example of the careful, thoughtful and insightful scholarship for which this Geordie is renowned. He illustrates the ways in which sport both represented and reinforced the values of these mining communities, but ensures that his reader appreciates that this sense of community was a contested domain which required four preconditions (permanent settlement; stability of population; a

conducive physical layout, and the influence of the colliery itself) for community to develop. Sport served as a vehicle for interaction between groups in the community—it was common currency, and thus a significant element in community as well as personal identity among the miners.

Tony Mason and Jeff Hill both look at football in the North. In a short but subtle look at football as a spectator sport, Mason queries whether the game might have contributed to an awareness of ‘being from somewhere called the North’, and asks if there was a distinctively Northern style of play, (perhaps indicative of Northern masculinity?) which promoted a Northern identity regardless of status (amateur or professional). He contends that the idea of a Northern consciousness is a slippery concept that has changed over time, particularly with the development southward of professional football. For Mason the attraction and identification has been to a local club rather than a region. Likewise in his chapter on Cup Finals, Hill suggests that town and club-based identities were more powerful and important than regional concerns although a North-South FA Cup Final always offered added spice, and highlighted the otherness of North and South. Hill’s reliance on local newspapers as sources of collective meaning and community identity is particularly useful, since he reminds us of the importance of this medium as being both descriptive and creative in its reporting. It both presents and represents meanings. It also reminds us that the media have been influential in shaping the meanings we attach to sport long before the Dream Team, Carl Lewis or Donovan Bailey appeared in Atlanta to be presented and represented as sporting heroes.

The themes of representation and sporting heroes are carried on in Holt’s chapter in which he looks at how heroes are created, how they have related to their admirers and whether there are distinctive characteristics of northern sporting heroes that differentiate them from those found elsewhere around the country. While concentrating mainly on the major team sports of cricket, football and rugby league, Holt carries us beyond these activities by looking also at traditional sports such as boxing, rowing, ‘potshare’ (road bowling) and knur-and-spel, in order to place some of the more modern heroes of cricket (Len Hutton), rugby league (Billy Boston), and football (Stanley Matthews), in historical context. He reminds us that the camera has had a significant impact in ‘wrench[ing] great performers from their roots in a regional male

community closed to outsiders'. (I was also reminded that the opposite can be true when I drove through the city of Oakville, Ontario to see large signs carrying the message that Donovan Bailey was a resident of that city). Holt asserts that 'individualistic sports like athletics . . . seem to have been rather more appreciated in the South', although a discussion of the extraordinary impact of Gateshead and the influence of one Northern hero, Brendan Foster, on track and field in general, and distance running in particular, might have been an interesting exception to prove Holt's rule.

Northern sports, (and the heroes they produced) were, as the other contributors stress, part of a separate world of male virtue. As Holt so wryly puts it, 'Female achievements were ignored. Animals were more readily accepted than women as the objects of sporting admiration.' It is because of this that Catriona Parratt's look at the separate world of women through the educational and recreational programs at The Rowntree Cocoa Works in York at the turn of the century is so revealing. As Parratt notes, 'the congruence between the sexual division of labour and the rhetoric and practices of recreation at the York Cocoa Works was apparent'. The aim of the recreational and educational programs offered by Rowntree's was the production of an exemplary working-class womanhood, and this meant assuming the characteristics which identified these young working women as wives and mothers. Parratt stresses that there was always tension between the identities of wife/mother and worker, and the firm's programs can be seen as an attempt to resolve these tensions.

Rowntree's were not the only company offering recreational opportunities for workers but, as Quakers, the Rowntree's perhaps saw their programs in a rather different light from those of other large family-owned businesses of which one example might be W D and H O Wills in Bristol. Since this is a case study, Parratt isn't able to assess fully the distinct influence of the Quaker background of the Rowntrees on these programs. Nevertheless, the import of the nineteenth century Quaker ideology to these programs should not be downplayed when viewed through our more secular late-twentieth century eyes.

Jack Williams's chapter shows that church and church-affiliated sports clubs were an integral part of the Northern sporting scene in the early years of the twentieth century. And, as he suggests, an analysis of church sports clubs can help in assessing the claim that English society

was becoming more secularised before World War II. Williams offers measures such as numbers of teams, manner of play, and on-field conduct (sportsmanship and sharp practices) to assess this. The chapter is somewhat long on analysis and short on synthesis but nevertheless Williams does offer thoughtful insights into working-class identity and notes that church sport helped to reinforce a number of divisions in society: male, female; respectable, non-respectable; and Catholic, Protestant.

One of the most commonly recognised divisions in society, race, has reared its head in football in a particularly ugly fashion, as the chapter on Sport and Racism in Yorkshire by Holland, et al shows. While this piece bears little resemblance to the others in the collection, in terms of its methodology or the way in which it addresses the issue of Northern identity, what it does have in common with the other chapters is its readability. All the chapters are stylish (does this make them un-Northern?) and written with an understanding of the conflicting loyalties and assumptions which underlie the sporting identities found in the North of England.

If I have one criticism it is, as noted earlier, that there is no concluding comments from the editors. Their comment in the introduction that 'the main conclusion to be drawn from this collection of essays is that different sports, in different localities, and at different times, have helped to construct, express and consolidate differing perceptions of Northernness' deserves more elaboration than the one brief paragraph that the authors offer. The essays do indeed show that there can be many answers to the question 'Who have been the Northerners?' But some effort at synthesis would, to this (lazy?) southerner, have helped specify more clearly the variety of identities which have emerged within one region of a small sporting nation in a range of activities, over time.

As the Olympics come to a close and Atlanta assesses whether it has been successful in demonstrating the meaning of 'southern hospitality' to its Olympic visitors, we are again made aware of the importance of the relationship between region, sport and identity. How timely this excellent collection of essays is!

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