

**Susan E Cayleff, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*. University of Illinois Press, 1995.**

Susan Cayleff's biography of Babe Didrikson Zaharias is a highly readable, thought-provoking study of an exceptionally talented athlete. Cayleff raises a number of important questions about the way in which myths about public figures are created, and how historically specific conceptions of femininity can influence not only how a sportswoman's life is represented, but also how it is lived.

Cayleff, although clearly admiring her subject, is not reverential. We are presented with a Didrikson who is charismatic, yet often disagreeable, competitive and pushy. The author seeks to position her subject in a Valhalla of American icons. Cayleff writes that Babe's 'name, image, and impact transcended her deeds. She was like Mohammad Ali, whose magnetic presence overshadowed not only his competitors, but his era.'

Indeed, in terms of sporting accomplishment, Babe was one of the best 'all around' athletes of the twentieth century who overshadowed her competitors. Her feats were achieved in athletics, tennis, baseball, bowling and, most famously, in golf, it makes a fascinating story.

Similarly, just as Ali's story cannot be removed from the socio-political upheaval of his time, Cayleff skilfully sets Babe's outrageous talent against a range of contexts. This book contains fascinating analysis of consumer culture, the genre of sports journalism, and the way in which class influenced people's responses to women athletes. There is also insight into the early years of the Ladies Professional Golf Association, and the continuing tensions between amateurism and professionalism in sport.

Primarily, however, this is a story about the construction of ideals surrounding femininity and the construction of Babe Didrikson —by the press, public and herself — in response to these ideals. Cayleff's aim was to reveal 'three lives': 'Babe's as she lived it, hers as she created in and chose to mythologise it, and my interpretation of her sleight of hand'.

The unravelling of these threads in the Babe Didrikson story makes compelling reading, and Cayleff sets about challenging the plethora of myths which surrounded Babe, particularly her relationships with her husband George Zaharias, her companion Betty Dodds and her fellow companions on the athletics and golf circuits.

Yet, while Cayleff must be commended for tackling some of the ambiguities of Babe's life and times, she does not go far enough. Cayleff fails to resolve Didrikson's 'inarticulateness' on issues such as sport and

gender and her often explicit racist attitudes, in a way which could substantiate her earlier equation of Babe Didrikson with Mohammad Ali.

In some ways the comparison between Babe and Ali is justified. They were show people, talented tricksters who created self-defining myths. Yet where Ali used his position to challenge constructions of race, Didrikson was, in Cayleff's own words inarticulate:

... about sports, gender, or sex discrimination. Nor was she a conscious role model for other women athletes. She acted in keeping with the behaviour and values of most exceptional women from the 1930s through the 1950s (p. 249).

By placing sport at the centre of an examination of gender roles, Cayleff sought to demonstrate how Babe and other female athletes provided 'a cultural arena for negotiating changes in sexuality and gender'. Yet Babe was not a negotiator. She accepted prevailing norms, indeed implicitly entrenched them through her own myth making.

By comparing Babe to Ali, an athlete who was 'negotiating changes' in a different cultural context, Cayleff highlighted the ambiguity of Babe Didrikson's legacy to a degree which is not adequately addressed in the pages of this book. I do not wish to criticise Babe Didrikson for what she wasn't. On the contrary — flawed people make the most interesting biographical subjects. Rather, I wish to question the suitability of a comparison, which I feel, owes more to authorial hyperbole than serious analysis.

It is as readers that we must attempt to understand not only the lasting consequences of Babe Didrikson Zaharias's feats and silences, but what we expect from those who emerge as sporting heroes in our times.

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**Graham McNeice and Ian Collis, *That's Rugby League: New Light on Football's Greatest Controversies*. Sydney, 1996.**

*That's Rugby League* is a companion piece to the video of the same name produced by Graham McNeice and is a useful addition to the still relatively underdeveloped literature on the code. The author's approach is to focus on some of the game's most famous incidents and events, and each is addressed in separate section. A feature of the book is that all the photographs are taken from film material used in the video, with new