

that was dominant in the sport for much of its history.

For these reasons alone the book represents a useful addition for scholars of the code. And its treatment of the game and its many spectacular on-field incidents should see it being popular with fans of rugby league. Its serious flaws, though, make it less valuable to those not well versed in the history of the sport, and the book is not suitable as a text on the game's social history.

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**Jim Silver**, *Thin Ice: Money, Politics, and the Demise of an NHL Franchise*. Fernwood Publishing, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1996. Illus. pp. 192.

While it may seem a little unusual to review books concentrating on ice hockey in an Australian journal, this book deserves attention. Jim Silver, a political scientist at the University of Winnipeg has produced an incredible insider account of the problems and ultimate demise of the Winnipeg Jets, a professional hockey team formed in 1974 in the World Hockey Association and later admitted to the National Hockey League when the two leagues merged. The Jets lurched from one financial crisis to another before finally being sold and moved to Phoenix in 1996. This book resonates well with the books on the USA reviewed by Kim Schimmel elsewhere in this issue of *Sporting Traditions*.

Silver was a leader of the group 'Thin Ice' formed in Winnipeg to argue against the spending of public money on the Jets or a new arena to keep the Jets in Winnipeg. He outlines his bias from the start and provides a richly-detailed account of the events that led to the fall of the Jets. Winnipeg, once one of the fastest growing cities in Canada and third in population has declined dramatically in recent decades to be the seventh largest Canadian city and one of the poorest. In this context it seemed to Silver that the repeated expenditure of millions of dollars of local and provincial public money to prop up the team so that Winnipeg could keep a hockey team playing at the highest level was not justifiable. He concedes that the Jets were important to Winnipeg, but there were limits to how far governments should go in support.

In this story we see an excellent case of the repeated subversion of democracy that all too often takes place in debates over the public funding of professional sports and sporting venues for professional teams

and major events. Indeed, local debates was frequently stifled by the City Council and the local media who adopted an uncritical boosterist attitude while covering up or neglecting to analyse in detail the real financial costs of propping up the Jets. Some polls showed that the vast majority did not support mass outlays of public funds, but the media played this down in favour of one poorly worded question that showed a majority supported the idea of keeping the Jets.

Silver outlines the history of this saga from the NHL's initial reluctance to accept the small market Canadian WHL franchises of Quebec, Winnipeg and Edmonton (the former two now relocated to the USA and Denver and Phoenix) and local Winnipeg business leaders' failure to support the Jets financially. As a result, the city was left owning 32 per cent of the team and covering the financial losses incurred by the Jets. In total over \$40 million in losses were covered by the city between the late 1980s and the sale of the franchise.

The issue of the Jets and a new arena came to a head in May 1995 as one of many deadlines approached. The local, provincial and federal government agreed to contribute a total of \$111 million to fund a new arena contingent upon a similar amount being raised privately. Local citizens rallied and raised millions of dollars to save the Jets, but the business community failed to produce large supporting funds needed., The issues mobilising the public were dramatic ones as Silver outlines: 'For many the mobilisation of May 1995 was an expression of cultural nationalism. Our game, Canada's game, was being stolen by the Americans, and Jets' fans weren't about to let that happen' (p. 137). For the business community, the issue was about keeping Winnipeg 'on the map'. Indeed, the latter group held the prospect of business relocation over the Council on several occasions in attempts to extract further funds.

In an excellent conclusion, Silver argues that the May 1995 public mobilisation dramatically revealed the capacity of sport to mobilise people. 'When combined with the power of old-fashioned civic boosterism, the events created a potent ideological brew, an astonishing display of people power' (p. 172). Indeed for the highly mobilised minority who supported saving the Jets at any cost, their passion gave them great leverage as any local politician who dared vote against the needs of the Jets were targeted for electoral defeat and public abuse. (Silver's office was ransacked during the crisis and he received many threats). Silver further argues that this case demonstrates how 'Democracy is imperilled when such certainty

and intolerance are loosed on the community, and particularly when it occurs on behalf of those who already wield the bulk of power' (p. 172).

While the specifics of the Winnipeg Jets issue may seem remote from the Australasian context, the links between civic boosterism, local political economy and sport resonate clearly with events in Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and beyond in the past two decades. Additionally, this case outlines the perils of private ownership as well as public ownership by civic entities as models of professional sports organisations. There is a stark contrast between sports run by local business supported by local governments and sports run for the benefit of the bulk of supporters. We have only just begun to discuss these issues in Australia. Silver's book should be compulsory reading for anyone examining the inner workings of professional sport, civic boosterism and indeed the broad political economy of sport.

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