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Patrick B. Miller, ed. *The Sporting World of the Modern South*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. x + 400 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-252-07036-5; \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02718-5.

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Sport and the Modern South: From Roses in Alabama to Hockey Pucks in Nashville

Nearly two weeks after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast region, the displaced New Orleans Saints began the 2005 NFL season with what some sportswriters called a “miracle” victory over the heavily favored Carolina Panthers. John Carney kicked a 47-yard field goal with three seconds left to win the game for the Saints and bring momentary relief for an ailing city and region. In an article for ESPN.com, scholar Richard Lapchick called the Saints’ 23-20 triumph a testament to the “healing power of sports.” Lapchick’s piece described the real and symbolic importance of the Saints to the city of New Orleans and the entire Gulf Coast community. As Lapchick explained, an e-mail from a former graduate student who worked for the Saints organization summed up the team’s significance:

“I believe that the New Orleans Saints can and should be an extremely instrumental part in rebuilding the spirit of this city and its people. I believe that the Saints and the Fleur-de-lis symbol can become something that these lost, displaced, desperate people of New Orleans can rally behind to realize that New Orleans does in fact have a future and that we will find a way to recover and rebuild this community. Can you think of a more immediate thing that people from all walks of life can identify with?”[1]

September 25, 2006 witnessed the return of the Saints to the New Orleans Superdome and the Crescent City. After a year on the road, the Saints gave their fans a night to remember by beating the Atlanta Falcons in front of a

national audience on *Monday Night Football*. The year-long saga of the New Orleans Saints offers proof that sports do indeed matter in our society. Though the extent to which sports can bring healing and togetherness is debatable, there is no question that who wins and loses and, in the case of the Saints, who simply steps on the field of play, mean a great deal in modern American life.

Within the past decade, historians of the American South have begun to examine the meanings and significance of sport. *The Sporting World of the Modern South* is the first collection of scholarly articles on the ties between sport and southern culture, society, and politics. Twelve of the thirteen essays have appeared previously in academic journals. These essays, along with the introduction by editor Patrick Miller, ask several key questions. First, what is the relationship between sport and the modernization of the South? Second, to what extent have southerners drawn upon traditional southern notions of honor, manhood, and white supremacy to find meaning in sport? Third, how has sport challenged the region’s social hierarchies of race and gender? Lastly, what role has sport played in southern myth-making and the shaping of modern southern identity? *The Sporting World of the Modern South* will undoubtedly be a valuable collection for not only students of sport in the South, but for those attempting to understand the broader southern experience following the Civil War.

In part 1, “The Transformation of Southern Sport: Gender, Class, and Some Meanings of Modernity,” Miller,

Robert Gudmestad, Pamela Dean, and Andrew Doyle argue that the New South of industrialization and urban growth made possible the development of organized sport. By the 1920s, white southerners had embraced the modern world of organized athletics, yet they rarely portrayed their participation in sports as a fully modern endeavor. Instead, white southerners emphasized honor, glory, manhood, and gentility traits most commonly associated with an earlier period of southern history as they played Yankee-invented games that were perfectly in tune with the new, industrial world of efficiency, rationalization, and bureaucratization. The emergence of modern sport in the late nineteenth century simultaneously promoted “the New South and the culture of the Confederacy” (p. 70). In his study of college football and southern progressivism, for example, Doyle shows how white Alabamians and other white southerners saw the 1925 Alabama Crimson Tide football team as the embodiment of both New South progress and traditional southern male honor. On its way to victory in the 1926 Rose Bowl championship, the Crimson Tide became the *de facto* team of the South. An *Atlanta Journal* headline proclaimed that, with the Crimson Tide’s Rose Bowl defeat of the University of Washington, “Dixie Acclaims Her Heroes” (p. 108). Doyle illustrates that the Alabama players had become Confederate heroes reincarnate. This time, however, the sons of Dixie walked off the field as winners in a game known nationally for its technical and scientific aspects.

In a similar vein, Dean’s study of women’s athletics at southern colleges points to the blend of tradition and modernity in southern sporting culture. Playing basketball encouraged women to be self-reliant and competitive, values most southerners did not associate with the “ladies” of the region. Basketball and other forms of physical competition never revolutionized gender roles, though. “The concealing screens of fences (to shield the female athletes from ‘public gaze’), modest bloomers, and sisterly song” insured that the “New Woman” remained mindful of the social expectations placed on southern women (p. 95). As the first part of this collection demonstrates, southern sport owed its development to vast economic and social change, though the cultural meanings attached to these games had roots in the southern past.

Part 2 addresses the question of race. The essays in “Race Relations and Southern Sports: Athletics ‘Behind the Veil’ and the Process of Desegregation” tell a story of conflict, not just between blacks and whites, but also within black and white communities themselves. Sports had the potential to subvert the region’s racial caste sys-

tem. Miller illustrates how black colleges and universities during the interwar period turned to sport as a way of both challenging white stereotypes and asserting black manhood and independence. Though some black educators were skeptical about the growing emphasis on sports, many blacks concurred with a 1924 Howard University newspaper editorial that suggested that athletic success could “destroy prejudices; to learn and to be taught; to facilitate a universal brotherhood” (p. 129). Articles by Charles Martin, Jack Davis, and Russell Henderson trace not only the efforts of southern blacks to strike down Jim Crow in sports, but also the divisions and tensions among white southerners over desegregation. The integration of sports in the South and across the United States, albeit no panacea for racial problems, broke down some important social barriers and helped make a once-closed society more open and inclusive.

The final section, “Myths, Symbols, and Stereotypes in Southern Sport: The Shaping of a Regional Identity,” analyzes the mythmaking side of the recent South. Both southerners and non-southerners have found great symbolic value in such sports figures as University of Alabama football coach Paul “Bear” Bryant and NASCAR driver Dale Earnhardt Sr. Bryant and his teams, much like their 1925 predecessors, won the hearts of fans across Alabama and the South during the 1960s and 1970s because they embodied success and respectability, something white southerners struggled to find during the tumultuous days of the civil rights movement. At the same time that the Crimson Tide squads were seen as symbols of progress, the coaching style and tactics of Bryant seemed to recall an earlier era when middle-aged white men earned respect and led disciplined, unquestioning young men to victory both on and off the field. On the race track, Earnhardt and other stock car competitors gained fame and notoriety for their daring exploits and disregard for human safety. The southern origins of NASCAR proved to be useful in the expansion of the sport during the 1990s. The image of the moonshine-running speedster may have had little actual relevance for the non-stop advertising and public relations machine known as NASCAR. Nonetheless, the rural, southern backgrounds of many stock car drivers offered up images of a simpler world to fans, many of whom were upwardly mobile and capable of affording tickets to the high-priced races. Earnhardt, a master of recent sports marketing, still remained the “last Confederate soldier” in the eyes of his closest fans (p. 317). Ted Ownby’s article “Manhood, Memory, and White Men’s Sports in the Modern South,” on the other hand, cautions scholars not

to indiscriminately link southern athletes to traditional notions of southern masculinity. The technical, scientific, and rationalized world of modern sport has kept football players, race car drivers, and even hunters from carrying on the traditions of the raw, hedonistic “helluvafella” described by W. J. Cash in *The Mind of the South* (1941) (p. 338-339).

To assess the strengths and weaknesses of this volume is to also evaluate the early state of the historiography on southern sport. The collection provides smart, interesting essays that represent the first salvos in the debates over sport and southern history. The ties between sport and modernization are made clear throughout the various essays. Any discussion of modern southern identity needs to address how sport shapes and reflects southernness in an age of skyscrapers and suburbs. The central development in the twentieth-century South, the civil rights movement receives extensive treatment and proves that race is a top priority for scholars of southern sport. Historians have also given much consideration to the role of gender in shaping southern sport. Class, the third wing of the social history trinity, has played a lesser role in the historiography of southern sport, though several essays speak to that theme. While not explicitly stated in Miller’s introduction, the collection as a whole points out the growing influence of the university in modern southern life, a topic yet to be fully explored by historians of the South. Those studying the role of universities in twentieth-century southern politics, society, and culture would do well to consult *The Sporting World of the Modern South*.

The question of resistance to the modern sporting culture needs some clarification and additional research. In his article on college sports in the New South, Miller contends that, by the first two decades of the twentieth century, southern opposition to sport gave way to popular acceptance of such modern games as football. Prior to this time, many southerners, particularly evangelicals, saw sport as a negative influence on society. University leaders such as W. A. Candler at Emory led the evangelical charge against the violent sport of football and the raucous atmosphere that seemed to naturally accompany the game. Football, Candler insisted, was “needless” and shamelessly promoted “gambling and other immoralities,” thus distracting people from more important matters of spirit and mind. In spite of this resistance, however, “sport won out” by the 1920s (pp. 41-42). While there is no question that football had become a popular pastime by the twenties, especially among the burgeoning southern middle class, to what extent did evangelicals

embrace sport and to what extent did they simply tolerate it? Did they truly make their peace with sport by the 1920s? Or, did evangelicals continue to be thorns in the side of the southern sporting establishment? Additionally, when did evangelicals finally incorporate sport as part of evangelical Christian culture? When, for instance, did southern churches begin to establish sports teams or use the rhetoric of sport in sermons and their broader evangelical message? Though these questions do not dispute the fact that southerners had flocked to sports, namely football, by the 1920s, the precise relationship between evangelicals and sport since that decade calls for further research.

As an overview of such a young field of scholarship, the collection does not, understandably, cover several important topics and themes. One topic in need of study is the growth of professional sports in the South over the past five decades. Big-time professional sports came late to the South, yet when they came, they arrived en masse. Next to the desegregation of sport and the increasing participation of women in athletics, perhaps the most important development in post-World War II southern sport has been the expansion of major-league franchises into the former Confederacy. Since 1960, the four major sporting leagues have established nearly thirty teams in the South. In Charlotte, the Hornets basketball franchise came and went in little more than a decade, only to see a new NBA team in the Queen City by 2004. The NFL made its way to Atlanta, Tampa, Nashville, and Jacksonville, among other southern cities. Nearly half of all Super Bowls have been played in southern cities, with New Orleans leading the way with nine. Even hockey has set up residences in Nashville, Atlanta, Raleigh, Tampa, Dallas, and that most frigid of climes, Miami. What explains this era of expansion? What impact did the civil rights movement and the changing postwar economy have on this expansion? How has this trend affected southern culture and society? What has it meant to southern cities’ economies? Has the influx of professional sports affected southerners’ sports loyalties? Also, how has the influx of minor-league baseball, minor-league hockey, arena football, and other kinds of professional sports teams affected smaller cities? Last, but certainly not least in the discussion of big-time sports, what does Atlanta’s Olympic coup in the 1990s say about the recent South?

At the opposite end of the spectrum, youth-league and high-school sports have also become a more prevalent part of southern society in the post-World War II period. Future studies of southern sport should con-

sider how sport has affected the socialization and development of children and youth, as well as athletics' role in the cultural life of local communities. With regards to race, scholars of the post-civil rights South need to examine how sport shaped race relations after the dramatic 1950s and 1960s. To what extent did sport help bridge racial barriers? Were new barriers erected? How do black sports figures from the South compare to some of the prominent white heroes like Bryant and Earnhardt? What do such individuals as Hank Aaron, Michael Jordan, Herschel Walker, and other black athletes reveal about southern mythmaking and identity in the post-civil rights era? The role of women in southern sports also needs more study. Did Title IX, for instance, have a greater impact on the conservative South than in other parts of the country? What does it say about post-1960s southern life when one of the most recognizable figures in southern sport is a fiery, demanding leader like University of Tennessee women's basketball coach Pat Summitt? In addition to expanding the relationship between gender and sport, what role, if any, does class play in the sporting culture of the region? Has the acceptance of sport simply meant the tri-

umph of middle-class values? Or, have working-class and poor southerners crafted their own sporting culture?

As with any scholarly field in its infancy, there will always be plenty of room for new topics, questions, and approaches. Admittedly, many of the aforementioned issues are still in the process of development, thus making the historian's task of discerning change and continuity, as well as long-term significance, a potentially messy one. Nevertheless, the field of southern sport history is an open and exciting one. *The Sporting World of the Modern South* serves as more than a starting point for scholars. Thanks to its breadth, insightful analysis, and, quite simply, the fascinating nature of the topic itself, this collection is indispensable for those inquiring into the complex relationship between southerners and the games they play.

Note

[1]. Richard Lapchick, "The Healing Power of Sports," ESPN.com (September 14, 2005); <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?~page=lapchick/050914>.

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