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Allen Guttmann. *The Erotic in Sports.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 175 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-10556-9.

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What do we really see when we gaze upon the sinew, muscle, and sweat of modern-day athletes? Amherst College professor Allen Guttmann insists that the thrill of competition is only part of what motivates spectators. A large part, he insists, is frankly voyeuristic and sexual; it is the human body itself that captivates us. He further asserts that sports eroticism is as old as the games themselves, as he traces display and gaze from the ancient Greek palestra to the modern multi-purpose stadium.

Guttmann draws upon a variety of sources, including art, film, photography, and literature, as well as more standard documentary historical sources. He then filters his sources through various analytical lenses, borrowed from psychology, literary criticism, the classics, sociology, and history. This herculean effort is encapsulated in a breezy 175 pages, with the overall result decidedly mixed.

Most readers will likely find the book's first section, a survey of erotic presentation in sports, to be the most compelling part of this study. Guttmann is especially incisive when demonstrating unexpected sexuality. His remarks on the ways in which supposedly staid Victorians viewed semi-naked body builders and boxers in near pornographic terms is another nail in monolithic assumptions about middle class propriety. Later on, Guttmann also raises intriguing questions about gender, arguing that objectification of the male body in sport has been far more common than that of the female sports star. He even presents evidence that this has led to an odd form of discrimination, with women sports stars complaining that the emphasis on male bodies tends to denigrate women's achievements on the playing field.

Guttmann is on less solid ground when he moves from documentation to speculation and armchair psychology. In the chapter "Eros Imagined," he moves into the realm of film and literature and catalogues incidences in which sport and eroticism intersect. Once he moves from the realm of documentary films, like those of Leni Riefenstahl, and into the domain of Hollywood and the popular press, Guttmann's argument is strained. These media are not about sports per se, and one ought not to expect such images to give us a functionalist perspective on athletics. In fact, most scholarship of sports on film points to the ways in which sports are badly and inaccurately presented.

Guttman misfires again when he argues that sports are essentially a form of sexual foreplay. Here he badly over-reaches. After demolishing Marxist and feminist critiques of sport as reductionist, he proceeds to give a similarly reductionist Freudian reading, spiced with selective post modernist theories on homosexuality. Again, too much of the evidence is rooted in Hollywood rather than ESPN. I doubt we learn much about how a modern track audience perceives athletes from the film *Personal Best.* Similarly, it's a crude use of Freud to argue that hard male bodies are phallic symbols.

In Guttmann's concluding paragraph, he tempers earlier remarks and concludes that sports are about eros and athletics. This strikes me as the book's most original contribution. Some might argue that it is common sense to connect sexual attraction with the athletic body, but Guttmann shows us that this practice is far more pervasive than conventional wisdom holds. Had he contented himself to making this point and locating it within the games and the audiences that view them, this would be a more convincing study. But far too much of the current analysis strains like a hyper-extended muscle.

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