

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Martin Polley. *Moving the Goalposts*. London: Routledge, 1998. 236 pp. \$65 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-415-14216-8.

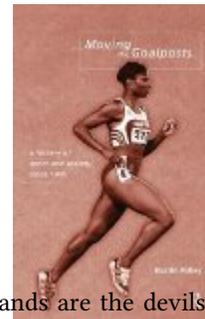
Reviewed by Duncan R. Jamieson (Ashland University)
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I have used a variety of textbooks while teaching a course on United States history from 1945 to the present, and none of them have included much in the way of sport. Granted, Martin Polley, Lecturer in History, King Alfred's University College, Winchester, is writing about sport and English society since World War Two, but he notes the same dearth of interest in the history of sport in England that I find in the United States. Thoroughly researched and documented, Polley's is a work of synthesis rather than primary research. His thesis is simply that sport is an integral part of society and that it needs to be considered in the widest possible context. It should not be viewed in a vacuum, and *Moving the Goalposts* certainly provides an excellent example of how to integrate sport history into general historical studies. Polley looks at the most popular sports in England, including football (soccer to those of us who are Americans), rugby, tennis, cricket, athletics and even elite sports such as polo.

Rather than using a strict chronological approach Polley has divided his work into major topic areas, beginning with sport and politics. Here he makes the argument that since World War Two the state has become increasingly interested in sport. While there are earlier examples of state involvement in sport (during the Middle Ages, for example, when the king canceled certain sporting events, or the late nineteenth century example of building playing fields), it has only been recently that the connection between the state and sport has become more pronounced. As Polley notes, the state utilizes the positive resources gained from sport: "physical health, social order, and local and national prestige" (p.16). Since the state has the right and obligation to improve people's lives, active development of a leisure program is quite in order. Under both Labour and Conservative governments, some welfare state monies went to sport. Since

most accept the concept that "idle hands are the devils workshop," a good deal of attention has been paid to utilizing sport to control juvenile delinquency. Sport also has international connotations. On the one hand, it can play a part in the nation's image in the eyes of the world. A good showing at the Olympics, for example, expands the nation's prestige. On the other hand, sport has been used to control another nation's activity; the shunning of South African teams as a way to end apartheid, or the boycotting of the Olympics to protest the Soviet Union's activity in Afghanistan.

In his chapter on "Sport, the nation, and the world," Polley examines how the nation gets its message out through sport. One very interesting aspect is the nationality of the player; in some sports England and Scotland can field teams while in others the United Kingdom fields a team. While Scottish rugby players enjoy beating Japan or the Irish or the Welsh, they live to beat the English, precisely because sport is so closely tied to other aspects of national life. Perhaps the biggest issue relative to sport since World War Two has been the rise of television, which brought in its wake a tremendous amount of commercialization. Sport has not been immune to this phenomenon, having witnessed a dramatic increase in viewing spectators and an equally dramatic increase in sponsorships. Again placing sport in its proper historical context, Polley aptly points out that sponsorships date back at least as far as the 1908 Olympics when Oxo provided various products to the marathon runners and used the race in its advertising. Here, as in all other aspects, there are both positives and negatives. On the positive side, fans find better facilities, while on the negative side, competition rules are sometimes changed to meet the demands of television. When a friend invited me to attend the Notre Dame-Navy football game, he pointed out the



referee who controlled the television time outs by standing on the field until the sponsors were done.

While sport has provided women the opportunity improve their situation in society, it has not led to total integration. Sport is still seen as a man's realm, unless noted otherwise. Women are still denied equal access to some sports—boxing, for example. The majority of money and attention continue to focus on male sports. Since a great deal of this relates to long held stereotypes, the same situation applies to sport and race. African Americans find themselves accepted where strength and physi-

cal prowess are important, but generally denied opportunities in those arenas requiring intelligence and finesse. Finally, along the same lines, sport remains closely tied to class lines, with different sports associated with different classes. *Moving the Goalposts* provides a good overview of the relationship of sport to other aspects of society. Researchers will find the extensive notes and thorough bibliography very helpful, as will those looking for a brief summary of the major changes in sport in England since 1945. This could certainly be used as supplementary reading in a class devoted to post World War Two British history.

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