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Richard Holt, Tony Mason. *Sport in Britain 1945-2000.* Oxford and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. xi + 212 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-631-17154-6.

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Football Players to Fit Pensioners:

Football Players to Fit Pensioners: "Sport for All" in Contemporary Britain

In 1998, members of the Marleybone Cricket Club (MCC) responded to the cancellation of two sponsorship deals and the loss of a nearly $8 million National Lottery Grant by finally voting to admit women into their ranks after over two hundred years of male exclusivity. The decision meant that for the first time a woman other than Queen Elizabeth II would be allowed to stroll through the hollowed grounds that were virtually synonymous with cricket, and thus sport, in Great Britain. In the face of such momentous change, club president Colin-Ingleby Mackenzie provided steady assurances that the MCC's bar would continue with its "gentlemen only" policy. For one of the club's less egalitarian members, this concession was not enough. When asked why he voted against allowing women to join the MCC, this traditionalist responded incredulously, "Because we are a cricket club!"

Old habits and traditions always die hard, and the post-war period has been an era of particularly dramatic change in Britain's sporting culture. In their comprehensive, yet succinct, survey of British sport since 1945, Richard Holt and Tony Mason faced the daunting task of squeezing five decades of British sport history into one slim volume for the Blackwell series, "Making Contemporary Britain." The result is an authoritative work that skillfully highlights the relationship between sport and post-war British society, where the authors place everything from amateur boxing to yoga within the wider context of recent British social history.

In their introductory chapter, Holt and Mason take a half-century view of British leisure practices, tracing broad patterns of continuity and change in both sport participation and spectatorship. Their interest here is primarily in the grassroots, and the authors begin by outlining the factors that led to an increase in post-war leisure possibilities for the weekend athlete; then turning to a summary of the ways in which Brits of different class, gender, and ethnicity have participated in an increasingly democratic culture of sport and leisure. Also included in this section is a welcome, though very brief, discussion of disabled sport. Above all, we learn from the authors' bird's eye vantage point that class (occupation) remains the number one determinant of which sport an individual in Britain will play. Of course, if that individual happens to be a woman, athletic endeavors like cricket, rugby, and boxing are practically forbidden-still widely considered exclusively masculine domains.

Chapters Two and Three explore the steady decline of the amateur ideal, that peculiarly British notion that a real sportsman plays for the competition, not the cash. While supporters of this creed could point to Roger Bannister's brilliant 1954 Oxford mile as all that was right with both English sport and England, by the 1980s the only amateurs British audiences were cheering for were the ghosts of Harold Abrahams and Eric Liddel in "Chariots of Fire." Holt and Mason highlight how rapidly improving international competition, declining deference to established social hierarchies, a concomitant rise in the ideals of meritocracy and Thatcher-era individualism, and, most importantly, the soaring market value of sport, all weakened the amateur ideal's position from post-war guiding light to the embarrassing worldview of a few privileged "old farts" (p. 37). In the year 2000-when big-money corporate sponsors and Murdochian media moguls reign-the archetype of the "stiff upper lipped" amateur has been rendered woefully anachronistic.

The book's Fourth and Fifth Chapters trace the rise of professionalism and explore the all-powerful role of the media in post-war British sport. As the authors suggest, professional sport and the media are so intertwined that one is practically inconceivable without the other. Be it new technology like global satellite feeds or older mediums such as the venerable BBC, the media not only brought sports into British pubs and living rooms at all

hours, it literally transformed the way people understood the games themselves. Watching Wimbledon became a rite of early summer; snooker was reinvented as a form of mass entertainment on the telly; and football was transformed from a game into a business, and then on into an industry. In the sixties, sportsmen like George Best became national celebrities, while the likeness of Manchester United's David Beckham has attained the current status of global commodity.

In Chapter Seven, Holt and Mason explore how sport has been used to convey social identity. They examine regional and working-class identity through a discussion of hooliganism, and then move on to a survey of Scottish, Welsh, and Northern Irish identity as exhibited on the nation's playing fields. We learn that football is a soapbox for anti-English sentiments in Scotland, that rugby brings the classes together in Wales, and that sport in Northern Ireland widens existing social divisions. The final chapter, "Government," traces the symbiosis between Parliament and players and investigates the ever-increasing role of the government in assuring British success in elite athletic competition. In the immediate post-war environment, Labour distanced itself from frivolous sport. However, the onset of affluence, the realization that other nations were passing Britain in sporting excellence, and a slew of ignominious defeats (losses to the West Indies in cricket and the United States in football stung the most) led to the creation of the Wolfenden Committee and the Sports Council, organizations charged with the dual task of improving the standard of competition among the nation's best and raising levels of participation among the rest.

Squeezing all of this information into a slim introductory volume is yeoman's work, and Holt and Mason have done an excellent job, not surprising considering their status as two of Britain's finest and most prolific sport scholars. Of course, the need to provide a cursory overview of such a rich subject will unavoidably leave many questioning why certain topics were emphasized and others ignored. Though the authors make the effort to include information about women's sports, for example, all we really learn is that women are indeed participants in Britain's sporting culture. Left unexplored are the meanings of sport for British women and the ways in which sports have served as an arena in which they could assert values and identities of their own. Likewise, the authors never go much beyond the notion of sport as a reflection of the society in which it is played. The presence of a growing number of black athletes on the British Olympic team "reflects" the fact that post-war British society is increasingly multiracial. This is only part of the story, however. Instead of thinking purely in terms of reflection, which implies passivity on the part of sport, I was left wondering about the power of sport to alter national consciousness. In other words, when an athlete of Afro-Caribbean ancestry like Daley Thompson wins the gold medal in the Olympic decathlon under the mantle of the Union Jack, does his appearance on the podium merely reflect British racial integration, or might it also affect notions of British identity and national representation?

Admittedly, this is a question that dovetails with my own research interests, and Holt and Mason cannot be expected to write a synthesis wholly satisfactory to both sport scholar and general audience alike. What the authors have provided is an eminently readable and concise introduction to British sport for the non-sport historian. Both erudite and accessible, *Sport in Britain* skillfully melds general trends with revealing anecdotes, offering a wide-angle and balanced view of post-war British sport that will be of interest to anyone seeking insight into the connections between sport and social history.

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