

Glynn Leyshon. *Travel by Coach*. Ontario: Glynn A. Leyshon, 2001. 136 pp. \$20.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-9695206-2-7.

Reviewed by Richard Arlin Stull

Published on H-Arete (September, 2001)

Travel by Coach chronicles the travails of feisty Canadian National Wrestling coach Glynn Leyshon as he travels the world with his band of wrestlers, to whom he dedicates his book. It is also the story of Leyshon's passion to promote the sport he loves best in his native Canada, and his grappling with incompetent wrestling officials, bored bureaucrats and indifferent organizations.

The book is a journal of Leyshon's twenty-five year career starting with his first high school coaching/teaching job in 1956 and finishing in 1980. It is, in Leyshon's words, not really about wrestling but the "human comedy." There are some cultural insights: Leyshon's respect for Russian training methods, their passion, work ethic and spirit; his appreciation for the exuberance of the Cubans; and his admiration for a savvy Soviet tour guide named Lena. Lena ultimately is invited to the Leyshon home in Canada and is a less-than-gracious house guest, primarily intent on making a capitalist killing before returning home to Russia. The coach, in the book's final chapter, reveals his greatest disappointment--never getting a shot at coaching the Canadian Olympic team, his final chance quashed by the Western-Bloc boycott in the 1980 Olympics.

But it's the anecdotes on almost every page that keeps the journal from getting tedious. Leyshon and his wrestlers are constantly strapped for money, are traveling 'by coach' and housed in less than adequate facilities. Every trip has its

share of human hilarity as clacking crustaceans invade their outdoor dining digs in Cuba, creepy crones and drunken "interpreters" turn up on a trip to Dracula's castle in Romania, and the Coach is caught atop a pole trying to filch a banner in Teheran while menacing thugs and their Persian pin-up girl friends circle below in pre-Ayatollah Iran.

Through it all the reader gets to know this combative coach with a wry eye for humor and high expectations for his wrestlers. He doesn't pull any punches here either, and his assessments of his wrestler's performances will make some of them wince if they didn't measure up to his expectations. But if humor is evidence of heart, there is much heart abounding in this small chronicle from the crusty Canadian coach. Even after the Russian tour guide doesn't charm them after being invited to visit in Canada, the Leyshon family, finding out years later how bad things were in Russia, still send her a care package. And, although his career in wrestling necessitates "travel by coach," it's evident that the coach knows that there's no place like home.

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Citation: Richard Arlin Stull. Review of Leyshon, Glynn. *Travel by Coach*. H-Arete, H-Net Reviews. September, 2001.

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