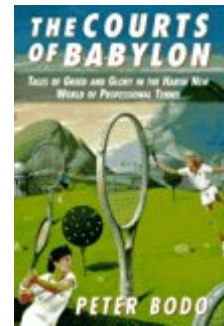


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Peter Bodo. *The Courts of Babylon: Tales of Greed and Glory in the Harsh New World of Professional Tennis.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1995. 480 pp. \$25.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-684-81296-0.

Reviewed by Lynda J. King (Oregon State University)
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Pro Tennis and American Values

The Courts of Babylon is *Tennis* magazine's senior correspondent Peter Bodo's highly personal expose of professional tennis. Each of its four sections begins with a chapter on one grand slam tournament, with subsequent chapters focusing on the issues (sportsmanship, race, and religion, for example) and the people in tennis today. His opinions on women in tennis ("The Gals of Babylon, Parts One, Two and Three") are given special attention, as are the stars of the 1970s and 1980s. Bodo does not spotlight today's stars, contending that their careers are still in the making and cannot yet be so closely analyzed.

In over twenty years spent covering tennis, Bodo has reached strong conclusions about just about every aspect of the post-professional game: good and bad guys, money, parents, agents, venues—even attire (to which he dedicates an entire chapter). Readers should be prepared to be amused, fascinated, and irritated by this book, for Bodo knows professional tennis, but neither pulls his punches in expressing his views nor shies away from taking a jab at anybody and everybody; politically correct he is not.

Surprisingly, given the wide range of his book, Bodo did not address the impact that professional tennis has had on amateur tennis, the game played by the people who support the professional game, the people who buy rackets, clothes—and, probably, this book. How has professionalism at the top affected this game, its sportsmanship, equipment, clothing, and attitudes toward the game of tennis? Also, the fact that some problems Bodo points out have very recently begun to be solved blunts his criticism; he acknowledges as much in the afterword. Still, Bodo's insider knowledge, passion for tennis, and thoughtful questions about the game make his book a valuable addition to tennis literature and the place of sport in American life.

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