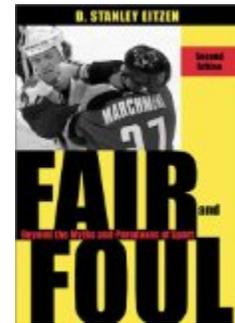


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

D. Stanley Eitzen. *Fair and Foul: Beyond the Myths and Paradoxes of Sport*. Lanham and New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003. vii + 187 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1952-7; \$87.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-1951-0.

Reviewed by Sayuri Guthrie Shimizu (Department of History, Michigan State University)
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The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Taking Sport (Very) Seriously

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Taking Sport (Very) Seriously

Like other institutions created and perpetuated by mortals, modern sport is multivalent. It is at once good and bad, divisive and unifying, uplifting and deflating, transcendent and materialistic, selfless and egotistic, grueling and fun. Viewed through the lens of American society, known world over for its uncanny ability to magnify human impulses, sport's paradoxical quality comes alive in glaring colors. In the hands of clear-eyed sociologist and concerned aficionado D. Stanley Eitzen, the inner contradictions of the beloved institution are rendered heuristic and thought-provoking.

This volume is an expanded and updated edition of Eitzen's sociological survey of American sport in a compact textbook format. As in its acclaimed first edition, the book's organizing principle—to capture sport's essence by examining its paradoxes—is exposed in style as well as subject matter. Eitzen's commentaries on the American sports scene are sweeping but specific, entertaining but depressing, clarifying but complicating. It is this heterogeneous quality that makes the volume both accessible and compelling.

Eitzen captures sport's paradoxes in the Super Bowl, an all-American ritual and most-watched American television event that grips the attention of 800 million fans in close to 200 countries. As fantasy, pageantry, and escape from reality, the Super Bowl is the quintessence of modern American sport. It also serves as a platform for

propagating social myths and collective identities. Eitzen deploys such engagements with sports that are familiar to any college-age student to elucidate the hidden workings of sports and their under-recognized connections to larger social issues. Just as students will realize that there is more to the Super Bowl than just beer, chips, and chili, they will be delivered a reality check about social mythologies built into familiar trappings of American sports, such as college mascots, sports superheroes, pro franchises, and college athletic scholarships. Each chapter points out a particular paradox that touches on issues such as race, gender, and class and asks the overarching question of who benefits (and who doesn't) under the social arrangements in which sports, professional and amateur, are played in the United States.

By the time readers finish the book, they will clearly see Eitzen's central point: sport, just like any other social institution, mirrors basic values, including unfulfilled ones, of American society. Modern sport suffers from bureaucratization, commercialization, greed and exploitation, racism, sexism, homophobia, ethnocentrism, and misdirected patriotism. Sport feeds on and creates stereotypes and myths, supported by its own iconography. In the age of mass communications, Eitzen reminds us, it is incumbent upon an informed citizenry to interrogate the media representations of sport and its favored heroes, heroines, and myths. By taking sport seriously, students will acquire another intellectual tool with which they can observe the society's fault lines and persistent and shifting stratifications. Eitzen gives con-

crete and engaging examples of the inequities and unfulfilled promises of American “democracy” as they manifest themselves in sports culture.

The most compelling part of the book is Eitzen’s discussion of collegiate sports, and here the reader can almost feel the combustive heat of his passion as a sociologist of sport and a concerned citizen-educator. Eitzen argues that the problems of big-time college sports—excessive commercialization, corruption of academic standards and missions, abuse of student athletes, and skewed allocation of resources—require structural remedies involving university leaderships and local communities. Even in the cases where the school’s athletic department operates on an independent budget, its all-consuming presence has insidious effects on campus life. For example, academic calendars and campus activities are often drawn around sports events, and the physical layout of campus can be determined by the paramount mandate to accommodate parking needs of weekend spectators. College sport, which has become a big entertainment business, often treats college athletes just as management of big industrial plants would treat workers, exploiting them to maximize profits. Eitzen’s unflinching illustrations of corrupt college athletic practices and their organizational sources will open students’ eyes to the blindingly obvious fact that their places of learning must be held to standards of accountability if they are to remain true to their original missions as educational institutions. Students may note other examples of baneful effects of the academic-industrial complex that they can cull from their own experiences. They may note, for instance, that the local community becomes complicit

in exploitation. Just as areas around military bases grow dependent on spillover economic benefits, college towns’ economies often develop co-dependent relations with a money- and publicity-generating athletic behemoth. Local newspapers can degenerate into publicity agents for local teams, which crowd out other news on home game weekends. Ruminations along these lines will provide sobering lifelong lessons in civics, something an educated, informed citizenry is supposed to seek out.

In this age of globalization, American sports culture is transmitted with increasing ease and speed around the world. Receivers of these American messages and practices produce their own local variations through selective appropriation and reinterpretation. At more concrete levels, American sport practices, which require relatively affordable paraphernalia of play, are increasingly dependent on the transnational system of production based on cheap Third World labor. College sport recruiters as well as professional scouts cruise in far corners of the world in search of new prospects, bringing deep reverberations to local ways of sport. A chapter on contradictions of American sport on a global canvas would further enhance the book’s elucidatory and didactic strengths, but this indulgent request should perhaps be reserved for the next edition of this highly readable and enlightening textbook.

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