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Media Sports Stars: Masculinities and Moralities (Book Review)

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Brackenridge contends that her book has "an unashamedly political agenda, which is to bring about change in the way sport is structured and managed" (p. 5). She argues that "by changing the power relations between athletes and authority figures, and between men, women and children in sport, we can prevent sexual exploitation" (p. 231).

Brackenridge acknowledges that there is still much empirical research needed, including an analysis of the ways in which gender, social class, sexuality, disability, race and ethnicity make an impact upon people’s experiences of exploitation. Unfortunately, interspersed throughout the book is an ill-informed critique of postmodern research approaches, which Brackenridge sees as being of limited use for advocacy research. Her assumptions regarding postmodern research approaches limit an understanding of the ways in which feminist action research, such as the work by Pati Lather, has moved beyond moralistic models to engage with material, political practices. Rather than advocate theoretical coherence to tackle sexual exploitation in sport, perhaps a postmodernist turn would help to address the gaps that remain in research priorities that ignore power relations of race, class, sexuality and gender. Although not technically a book about sport history, Spotlight is a critical introduction to sexual exploitation in sport that has much to offer sport historians.

—CATHERINE VAN ENGEL
University of Alberta
Gary Whannel, however, is not taking the temperature of the world of sports but rather the body of Great Britain. It seems strange, for example, that nowhere in Whannel's book is there any mention of hip hop culture or the rise of women in sports; two items that are a major part of the contemporary American sports world. But in a country with a much smaller black population and without Title IX, these omissions are understandable and illuminating. In addition, Whannel's discussion of the relationship between "Lad" culture and the rise of men's magazines (like Loaded and Maxim) and sporting masculinity seems both specific to Great Britain and applicable to recent changes in male body image in the United States.

For analogous reasons, however, the sections in the book that do focus on non-British sports figures (such as Babe Ruth and Joe DiMaggio) are the weakest parts of the book. His brief discussion of Tiger Woods as the "new black sporting hero" (p. 177), for example, includes references to Michael Jordan, Arthur Ashe, and Magic Johnson that do not reflect the fact that the sports involved, tennis, golf, and basketball, resonate extremely differently and dissonantly in American culture. This consideration for the disjunct cultural characteristics of various sports is lacking in the British-centered parts of the book, as well. The masculinity constructed around cricket may be far different from that of English football, but this aspect is left unexplored.

Despite these occasional missteps, English Sports Stars is a well-thought out examination of sporting masculinity, but its real power is that it prompts readers, particularly North American readers, to consider that sporting culture relates not only to historic specificities, but geographic and national specificities as well. It is a reminder that representations of masculinity are always in competition and that culture is never singular.

—Andrew C. Miller
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It was the early 1980s and I had just finished filming a piece with Jean-Pierre Rives to preview the Five Nations Championship for ITV. He politely declined dinner but agreed to join us later at Chez Castel, the famous old Paris nightclub in St. Germain that the Parisian rugby set used as a clubhouse. There, he apologised for being late but explained he had been summoned to dine with President Mitterand. Who else was there? "Nobody, it was private," he replied with a slightly embarrassed smile.

It was confirmation that Rives had become a superstar whose circle of admirers reached far beyond the normal rugby circles but it was also further evidence of something I had been aware of ever since I first played against France in 1967. Rugby has enormous clout on the other side of the channel. When we (Wales) won the Grand Slam in Paris in 1971 President Pompidou made the speech at the banquet, high-ranking ministers abounded at rugby occasions and a number of prominent rugby men were elected as mayors in last year's local elections.

Although its heartland is confined to an area in the southwest which covers no more than one third of the country it rivals soccer as the national sport and the great, the good and the glamorous all want a part of it. A bit like Wales but with a rather more powerful cast!

Now, thanks to Philip Dine's fascinating study of the cultural history of French rugby, the bigger picture comes into focus. The author is an unashamed Francophile from Devon who also has a passion for rugby. Having learned French at his grandfather's knee, he appears to have read every book in the language that relates to rugby and has lovingly distilled the cultural essence from them to put his thesis together.

Rugby was introduced to France at the end of the nineteenth century by British ex-pats and was soon taken up by the universities and Anglophiles in Paris, but it was the ways it became a popular rather than elite sport and that it flourished in the cities, towns and especially villages of the rural southwest rather than the industrial cities of the northeast, as did most sports imports, that forms one of the main strands of this book.

Because the game is characterised by a ban on passing the ball forward and being in front of the ball when it is played there is a front-line which is peculiar to rugby, Sebastien Darbon expands upon this notion of territory to be defended, which is heightened by the violence that results from the physical contact of the sport. It struck a special chord with the French, especially in "The Midi," where ancient rivalries, going back to the Cathars and the Huguenots and involving the Basques and the Catalans in the far southwest, were still festering not far from the surface.

The story of how Rugby Union was adopted by the collaborationist Vichy regime in the Second World War (in 1941 Marshall Petain personally signed the decree to close down Rugby League which was becoming worryingly popular) yet survived the post-war purge of everything associated with Vichy to become a vital symbol of President de Gaulle's