

*Sport and the New Zealanders A History.*

By Greg Ryan and Geoff Watson.

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Reviewed by R Michelle Schaaf

A quick glance at the images of the dust jacket resulted in a sigh of, “Here we go again! Not another atypical one-sided historical text”. A genuine appreciation of the illustrations and respect for both authors’ in-depth research and analysis over a span of eleven years, evolved. I do question whether the collection of 24 photographs and 2 illustrations was inserted in an ideal location (150 to 151). To aid the reader’s understanding, it may have been more advantageous to insert the collection, as and when referred to.

The book’s focal point, the sports that New Zealanders play and the significance of those sports to New Zealanders and their communities (8) is outlined as part of the Introduction. Six sub-themes: gender, ethnicity, class, commercial sponsorship and governance and patronage (9), illustrate how the concept of sport has evolved and been contested over time, in New Zealand.

Chapter One ‘Sport in New Zealand prior 1840’, is an overview of sport in Māori Society. Māori were profoundly changed by the Treaty of Waitangi, colonisation and Christianity (26). ‘Fatal impact’ with British colonialism caused a Māori population decline and dislocation, alongside an erosion of Māori games and leisure traditions, due to the introduction of British sporting alternatives.

Chapter Two ‘Laying the Base: 1840-1870’, outlines how European settlement and dominance over Māori dramatically transformed New Zealand. Both the export of people and capital from Britain created new opportunities and eased the transition of a British sporting world to New Zealand. (30) Land loss and Māori economic and political marginalisation during the 1850s to 60s, led to a decline in Māori involvement in festivals. (36).

Chapter Three ‘Building the pyramid 1870 – 1890’, glosses the geographic and demographic impediments to sport. Rugby was a platform through which a complex interplay between sport, class and geography happened (56). The 1870s marked rugby’s fastest growth in urban areas (59).

In Chapter Four, ‘Broadening horizons 1890-1914’, the authors track how sport became a vehicle of responsibility, used to promote amateurism and discouraging disputable behaviour. From 1914 until the 1990s, amateurism was enshrined in the dominant ideology in New Zealand sport. The ramifications of the Long Depression changed New Zealand’s economic infrastructure in ways which benefitted sport. Legal and education reform decreased working hours and encouraged sporting participation.

The two decades prior to the First World War were pivotal to the history of New Zealand sport. The organisational infrastructure and legitimating ideology governing sport was cemented. The administration of New Zealand sport became centralised and international competition became a regular occurrence.

The nexus between sport and identity are examined in Chapter Five ‘Towards national games: 1890-1920s’, (117-144.). The popular mythology of sport as a unifying element between Māori and Pākehā masked the complex reality of paternalism, selective inclusion and socio-economic

and geographical impediments that denied most Māori easy access to sport before 1914. While Māori were visible on the national and international sporting stage, their contribution was contradictory in representative rugby teams playing overseas. From 1884 onwards, matches began with haka, a reflection of the images of Māori that such teams wished to project of New Zealand. A counter-current emerged after 1905 and sparked a long history of British media condemnation of haka.

Women gained grudging acceptance in some sports; physical health and physically superior sons was the rationale for their involvement. This was a reflection of a complex co-existence of female agency and male control which shaped female sport. By 1914 New Zealand was visible in the sporting world.

Diversification and modernisation are the central theme of Chapter Six 'A new normal: 1920-1940', (145-174). The outbreak of the First World War was an historic turning point of horror, followed by volatile modernisation. The legacy of war for New Zealand sport varied. Many athletes never returned or were injured. Sport served as an antidote to the horror and sombreness of the war years. The 1918 Influenza and the Depression took hold by 1921. People were determined to enjoy themselves, as a distraction from the harsh realities of life. The growth of sport at the local level was significant and caused rapid expansion in sporting spaces, like parks and reserves.

During the 1920s and 1930s, sport was a vital component of a 'Māori renaissance'. Māori were self-determined and created Māori spaces within national sports organisations and intertribal, pan-tribal non-tribal sporting events. Māori leaders such as Āpirana Ngata, Te Puea Herangi and Tahupōtiki Wiremu Rātana further championed this self-determination that spurred improved Māori well-being and welfare; a revival of Māori culture and greater economic and political participation (158).

Sporting tours to New Zealand led by Pacific and Asian (Chinese and Indian) hockey, football and debating teams were popular and examples of diversification and internationalisation (173). Overall the era after the First World War was a time of growth and consolidation of traditional dominant male sports and reaffirmation of the sporting culture of the British empire.

Chapter Seven, 'Becoming inclusive? 1920-1940', (175-198) profiled the trends of female participation due to the inclusion of the working class into netball, hockey and marching. Sport provided women solidarity, a collective activity and female athleticism (182). The interwar media coverage gave women's sport visibility and recognition (83).

New Zealand in the mid-1930s was the land of sporting opportunities that was regulated by state intervention via legislation. Government funding for sport and recreations increased significantly between 1945 to 1949. Sport became a necessity for the well-being of New Zealanders during the world war. (195)

Chapter Eight 'Golden weather and a gathering storm: 1945 – 1970', (199-226) concentrates on the contrasting popular memory during this time, economic conditions were favourable and nostalgic; while counter currents of racism, gender stereotypes, juvenile delinquency and lingering provincial rivalries existed.

The Golden Era of New Zealand is at the centre of Chapter Nine ‘Playing under protest: 1970-1985’, (227-253). Between the 1960s to 1980s New Zealand sport experienced domestic and international success. Amateurism was viewed as archaic, autocratic and inflexible (228). New Zealand’s sporting relations with Australia was positive. In contrast, New Zealand’s sporting contact with South Africa was fraught with actions and sanctions that resulted in mass protest and dissent within sports’ own ranks throughout New Zealand. Baby boomers challenged prevailing attitudes in the pursuit of addressing social justice issues: Māori land rights, opposition to the Vietnam War and gender inequality. These social issues prevailed amongst a backdrop of the 1970s Oil Crisis, inflation, rising unemployment, industrial actions and unrest which was triggered by Britain joining the European Economic Community. The Springbok Tour was the most divisive event in New Zealand since 1913 (237). Rugby faced pressure from internal and external forces, both sculpting the commercialisation the code in New Zealand.

There was growth and consolidation for most sports and women’s sports. Second-wave feminism influenced women’s sport and emphasised the control over health and reproductive rights, political representation, gender discrimination and domestic violence. Pasifika and Asian women’s sport participation became more visible. (243). The 1980s also gave rise to television coverage, sponsorship and naming rights to competitions.

Chapter Ten ‘For money not love? 1985-2015’, (254-282) reflects on Rogernomics and its aftermath (254-262) and the imprint of New Zealand’s changing ethnic composition on the politics of representation and participation in sport. Professionalism and globalisation impacted sport; of note was the prominence of Māori and Pacific athletes as the shapers of amateur sport. New Zealand’s victory and financial success of the inaugural Rugby World Cup’s is a cause for celebration and enormous pride.

The 1996 Super 12 competition signal a new era in New Zealand sport. The late 1990s armed rugby players with the ability to optimise overseas rugby opportunities. As a consequence, a catch-22 relationship developed. On the one hand All Blacks representatives are active agents, involved in developing and perpetuating their own commodification with lucrative sponsorship deals but, on the other hand, their lived realities as celebrities is of becoming media fodder for public consumption and scrutiny on and off the field.

Chapter Eleven’s title, ‘And Sport for All? 1900-2015’, (283-309) alludes to the chapter’s focus, the development of inclusive sport participation. Milestones highlighted are the growing prominence and acceptance of women’s sport and professionalism, the significant advancements of sporting participation for lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender (LBGT) athletes and for disabled athletes, in particular the Paralympic movement.

Chapter Twelve, ‘Conclusion’ (310-316), leaves the reader with a summary of the book’s themes, reflections on the future of sport in New Zealand and questions that emphasize the importance of New Zealand public engagement in ensuring the future of sport in New Zealand (315-316).

Overall this book provides the reader with a comprehensive and chronological social and cultural account of sport in New Zealand, one that, throughout its chapters, is interrelated to historical events elsewhere in the world.