

## BOOK REVIEWS

Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon. The South African Game: Sport and Racism. Zed Press, London, 1982. 352 pages.

This is an extremely useful history of the role of sport in South Africa. The book provides an analysis of the use of sport as an extension of the system of apartheid. The subject-matter is very well organized, with chapters devoted to such topics as "Sport in South African History;" "Rugby: The Chosen Sport of a Chosen People;" "Sport and Apartheid;" and "International Responsibility: Lessons of the 1981 New Zealand Tour."

The authors have been able to carefully analyze the control of sport in South Africa by the white minority, documenting the extent to which the South African regime has been able to manipulate sport towards its own ends. From the inception of institutionalized sporting programs in South Africa, traditional skills such as hunting, archery, spear throwing and numerous forms of wrestling and dancing, have never been recognized by Whites as sport events, except in so far as they conform to European norms. (This situation is, of course, closely paralleled in the international Olympic movement itself\* and in most independent African countries). Despite this, they show that sport has had an overwhelming reception by Black South Africans, in spite of all the barriers the government has placed to restrict their participation. This work documents the progression of control over all segments of society in South Africa, with a special emphasis on Sport. It presents the social role of sport, and how facilities and opportunity for white and black sportsmen and women differ greatly, just as in all other areas of life in South Africa.

An example of the type of detail in this work is the discussion of how Rugby came to be the symbol of the White sport. In spite of its having been a British introduction, the Afrikaner began to adopt the sport as much for its symbolic significance, as for its inherent athletic appeal. "Rugby is seen as a collective sport of combat, which values physical endurance, strength and rapidity, the warrior values of struggle and virility, fellowship and shared effort.... It is a sport ideally suited to 'ideological investment' and the Afrikaners, who consider themselves to be a civilizing elite, a pioneering people conquering barbarism, recognized an image of their own ideology in its symbols"(p.6). Part of the appeal no doubt lay in the elite origins of the modern forms of Rugby which came out of the British public school system of the Victorian era.

---

\*See Carol Thompson: "The Broken Rings of the Olympic ideal," in this issue. Ed. K.M.

The chapter on Sport and Apartheid is a scathing investigation of the overall inequalities in South Africa, again with a particular focus on its sport policy. Public expenditure for sport per capita is given as 3.6 for Whites, and 0.026 for Blacks, with Coloureds listed at 0.077 (estimated from official statistics published in 1977). Other statistics given refer to the sporting facilities available to the different racial communities in South Africa, and the estimated shortfall in such facilities when compared to even the official standard ratio of facilities to players. For example, the shortfall for Africans was 91% in Rugby, 97-100% in swimming, 57% in football (soccer). Further, this indicate that even these statistics are not able to fully present the massive disparities between white and black facilities as a whole, either in absolute terms or per capita.

The authors then go on to show in historical fashion the changes that have taken place in the government's attitude and policy towards Black sport during the periods 1900-1970s, including the change in focus of the government as part of their plans to establish the "homelands" and thereby foster the myth of "international" sports links with South Africa particularly in light of the international boycott on sport with South Africa. The work also investigates the variety of sporting bodies which have developed in that country, especially concentrating on the role of SACOS (S.A. Council on Sport), a non-racial federation. SACOS, an associate member of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, claims that they are actively working for a non-racial future for sport, and that when apartheid legislation has been repealed and the country freed from racial exploitation, their affiliates will then be able to claim international recognition. It has not sought that recognition at present as they believe that under current laws of apartheid sport cannot be organized in a non-racial fashion, and therefore no organization can claim to fulfill the twin requirements of the Olympic Charter of representativity and non-racialism.

After reviewing the state of play in South Africa from 1971-1981, the authors then discussed the attempts by South Africa to break the international sports boycott, and the 1981 New Zealand tour, with all its repercussions, are well documented. As the test case of South Africa's capacity to tour abroad, New Zealanders were drawn within this extremely emotive issue. The conflict inside New Zealand generated intense feelings. On one side ranged the government, the New Zealanders for whom rugby was also a symbol of their culture. On the other, the anti-apartheid organizations, the churches (those attached to New Zealand's liberal tradition), the great majority of the middle class, and the Maoris. The enormous demonstrations and resulting civil disobedience are seen as having sharpened political tensions within New Zealand, and also having a significant influence on future attempts by the South Africans to tour

abroad.

It is the opinion of this reviewer that the particular conclusion drawn by the authors is extremely well taken: they write: "it is true that sport will not free South Africa from racialism; it is also true that sport cannot be played non-racially while apartheid is enforced. But if we wish seriously to support the struggle against apartheid, we cannot pretend to do so by ignoring the appeals of those within South Africa who are today struggling in the most difficult circumstances, for freedom, and for freedom in sport. They have called upon the outside world to boycott South African sport; as sportsmen, they have voluntarily isolated themselves. Isolating South Africa is therefore an act of solidarity..." (p. 315).

Clearly this book has a lot to offer those interested both in understanding the mechanisms of oppression in South Africa, and in the methods of peaceful resistance some are using to oppose this same inhuman system. For those interested in sports and its international ramifications, especially concerning topics such as the international boycott of South African sportsmen and sportswomen, the "South African Game" must be read.

J.A. Distefano  
Ph.D. Candidate  
History Department, UCLA