

ANNOTATIONS

HORSPPOOL, David. *More Than a Game: A History of How Sport Made Britain*. John Murray Publishers. 2023. 326 pp.

Britain has traditionally been regarded as a cradle for some of the most popular sports today. David Horspool's work centers on the development of various sports and elucidates how these evolutions have influenced British society. A significant contribution of Horspool's approach lies in his original book, which is divided into ten chapters, each chronicling the development of a specific sport in relation to a particular societal theme.

In this manner, the author examines horse racing within the context of betting, scrutinizing its precarious balance on the edge of legality. He also investigates the evolution of boxing in relation to issues of race and the struggles of black fighters for recognition, while the narrative of tennis is framed through the lens of the fight for equal treatment regarding rights for women—highlighting the impact of tennis legend Suzanne Lenglen, whose appearance in Wimbledon was marked by her shorter skirts and trademark headscarf, symbolizing the Jazz Age.

Horspool also recounts the history of cricket, which is traditionally upheld as a British national sport. To trace the origins of this portrayal, the author transports readers to the 19th century, a period during which the leading authorities adopted a distinctive strategy compared to other sports such as football and rugby. The decision was made to preserve the status of cricket by organizing the most significant matches featuring both amateur and professional squads. Consequently, cricket remained a domain largely populated by men from the upper classes of the social hierarchy, who jealously guarded their status. In contrast, football authorities acknowledged that the game, played by individuals from all sectors of society, naturally belonged to the community at large. In cricket, however, the "gentleman amateurs" maintained control over the sport and profited from it as though they were professionals.

In the subsequent chapters, Horspool delves into the complexities of land negotiations pertinent to golf, examines the political aspects of involvement in cycling, and discusses rugby's role in shaping Welsh national identity within Great Britain. Rugby in Wales emerged alongside industrialization, with the valleys that provided coal, iron ore, and limestone-making Wales the world's first industrial society by the 1850s - also being home to the majority of rugby clubs. The sport's popularity was further bolstered by a remarkable victory in Cardiff in 1905 against the legendary All Blacks, the rugby team from New Zealand. Throughout the 20th century, the Welsh national team became a source of identification for the nation, providing a counterpoint to their English neighbors, particularly during times of economic downturn. Following a match between Wales and England in 1980, English captain Bill Beaumont

remarked, “We were being blamed for the closure of coal mines. If we had also been blamed for the weather or the price of bread, I wouldn’t have been the least surprised.”

In one of the concluding chapters, Horspool focuses on the development of the world's most popular sport - football. He explores the evolution of British fan culture and describes the roots of hooliganism, stating that “violence undoubtedly increased and became more organized from the 1960s,” though he acknowledges that media representations, particularly by tabloid newspapers, exaggerated the phenomenon. He notes that violence has been an intrinsic aspect of football from its inception and has never disappeared.

Through these examples, the author adeptly illustrates the intricate connections between each sport and salient issues in the development of modern British society, whether it be the aristocracy's efforts to maintain their social standing or societal minorities' struggles for equal rights through successful sport careers.

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