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Todd Cleveland, Tarminder Kaur, and Gerard Akindes, eds., *Sports in Africa, Past and Present*. Publisher: Ohio University Press, 2020. xi + 299 pages. ISBN 978-0-8214-2425-4.

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*Sports in Africa, Past and Present* provides a delightful mix of biography, historiography, research-driven theoretical arguments, and pedagogical insights gained from a broad range of scholars on sports in Africa.<sup>1</sup> This edited volume results from the compilation and selection of papers presented at the annual Sport in Africa Conference.<sup>2</sup> For anybody remotely interested in the history, culture, and politics of sports in Africa, this book is a keeper.

Like the historiography begun in 1987 by William Baker and J. A. Mangan, the book starts from the premise that sports are not merely silly games but rather important lenses through which to study social change over time. (3) The editors base this argument on the colonial and postcolonial histories of Africa, demonstrating that sports were more than popular forms of recreation and physical exercise and were made part and parcel of the colonizer's "civilizing mission." This volume shows that missionaries and colonial officials employed "Muscular Christianity" to control the bodies, passions, and social and cultural practices of the colonized. As the editors note, however, Africans hardly constituted "passive consumers" of these sports, making them their own in various ways – even when postcolonial nationalists continued some of the old ways for social control in independent Africa. (4) As the editors explain, few skeptics remain among social historians whether sport is a social domain worth studying. (6) It seems that we have largely moved past such skepticism.

To reassure the few doubters who remain, however, this volume's authors go beyond the old social construction argument to examine various social, cultural, and political angles on the history of African sports. After the excellent introduction in which the volume's editors lay out these stakes, the book is divided into eight thematic parts. Part One is the sole part with only one chapter, in which Albert Grundlingh and Sebastian Potgieter examine the historiographical development of sports history in South Africa. Part Two, quite possibly the most delightful part of the book for this reader, contains three chapters by three veterans of African sports history in North America: Todd Cleveland, Matt Carotenuto, and perhaps the doyen of African sports history in North America, Peter Alegi. Each scholar shares approaches and literature that

have been key to their success in American university classrooms in building interest not just for African sports history but for African history in general. In Part Three, authors Trishula Patel and Chuka Onwumechili with Jasmin M. Goodman demonstrate how Indian cricket players in South Africa (Patel) and women soccer players in Nigeria (Onwumechili and Goodman) resisted colonial and postcolonial hegemony over their lives through sport. Part Four illuminates how Black South Africans “crossed racial boundaries” through sport during the *apartheid* era: David Drengk through an examination of surfing in the Transkei and Todd H. Leedy through a history of competitive cycling. These two chapters are some of the most enjoyable in the volume because they focus on sports so different from the usual offerings on football, rugby, cricket, and track and field. Part Five continues this unorthodox approach to the study of sport by two chapters on the “margins” of African sports history: one by Solomon Waliula on the Kenyan culture of watching English Premier League football matches on televisions in neighborhood kiosks, and another by Tarminder Kaur on the “unorganized structure” of “gambling games” of South African soccer. Part Six brings us two chapters on African sports migration to Europe. Ernest Yeboah Acheampong, Michel Raspaud, and Malek Bouhaouala, plus Christian Ungruhe and Sine Agergaard, focus on African footballers traveling to Europe to achieve dreams left unrealized in their home countries. Part Seven, biographies of two accomplished African athletes by Francois Cleophas and Michelle Sikes, comes as a pleasant respite from some of the more theoretical arguments earlier in the volume. Finally, in Part Eight, Derek Charles Catsam, Mark Fredericks, and Marizanne Grundlingh each bring us a thoughtful chapter on the heritage and legacies of South African sports history.

As one might expect, sources and methods used by writers in such an extensive volume vary. Almost all authors, however, depend on ethnographic field work and personal interviews to some extent. The chapters in Part Six especially depend on these personal interviews to capture the stories of African football migrants to Europe. Mark Fredericks and Marizanne Grundlingh employ material culture to make spatial arguments about heritage, museums, and sports stadiums. Scholars, of course, also make use of the growing secondary source literature on African sports. Cleveland, Carotenuto, and Alegi employ the contents of their syllabi to make larger historiographical and theoretical arguments, in addition to their pedagogical ones.

Among the book’s strengths are its readability and flexibility for research and pedagogy. Eminently readable – and thus low on jargon – at an average length of 10-15 pages, each chapter provides a manageable building block in the edifice of the African sports history highlighted by these authors. To say it is low on jargon, however, is not to say that it is low on theoretical sophistication. These authors make interventions in literatures on gender, race, class, environment, and heritage and museum studies. Each chapter is nicely set up to be used independently or grouped with the other chapters in the respective thematic part

of the book to be read by students in undergraduate and graduate seminars or even introductory lecture courses on African and/or sports history – not to mention by the ordinary sports fan who just wants a good read about a topic or genre of history that interests them. The chapters on biography or sports on the margins (Parts 5 and 7) would likely be especially interesting to these readers.

The editors anticipated this reviewer's primary criticism with a section in their introduction entitled "A Note Regarding the Predominance of South African Sports Scholarship." (8-10) In spite of this disclaimer, the book is out of balance – an imbalance that calls into question the title's claim about Sports in *Africa*. As the authors note themselves, half of the chapters cover South African sporting histories. (10) The rest focus almost exclusively on other Anglophone African countries. The opening historiographical chapter by Grundlingh and Potgieter zooms in solely on South Africa. One wonders why one would not, when building a case for greater interest in African sports history, feature at least a few histories of Francophone and Lusophone African countries as well. Of course, this is an edited volume that largely depends on which scholars attend the conferences that produced these papers. Scholars of Francophone and Lusophone Africa have not been excluded from these conferences, but a broader, more diverse section of Africanists could be sought before the next conference or edited volume to help correct this imbalance.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from this criticism, which is partly outside the editors' control, this book should ignite years of research and thousands of pages of valuable African social and cultural history. It will become a staple of many courses dealing with African sports history, culture, and politics. There remains much to be done in this field, but Cleveland, Kaur, and Akindele have provided a wonderful tool with which future scholars can get started. The ball is now in their court.

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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A broad range of scholars in terms of academic seniority, professional geography, and ethnic/national identity. One should note the critique, however, in the next-to-last paragraph of this review.

<sup>2</sup> The conference was held at the University of Ohio in Athens until 2014. Since 2017, the conference has been held on the continent, including South Africa, Zambia, and Senegal.

<sup>3</sup> One should note, however, that Todd Cleveland is a scholar of Lusophone Africa. See Todd Cleveland, *Following the Ball: The Migration of African Soccer Players across the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 1949–1975* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017), <http://www.ohioswallow.com/book/Following+the+Ball>.

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