

gion. Members of the general public, however, will discover a very good read and thank Indiana University Press for taking “a chance” on a nonscholarly book (p. ix).

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Shake Down the Thunder: The Creation of Notre Dame Football.

By Murray Sperber. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993. Pp. xxii, 634. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$25.00.)

Under the Tarnished Dome: How Notre Dame Betrayed Its Ideals for Football Glory. By Don Yaeger and Douglas S. Looney. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993. Pp. 299. Illustrations. \$23.00.)

Notre Dame, as Don Yaeger and Douglas S. Looney remind their readers, is many things. It is a distinguished university partially supported by an endowment in excess of \$600 million and generous alumni and friends. The formula for synthetic rubber was discovered there, and today researchers at Notre Dame are working on ways to control the spread of disease and searching for the secrets to the origins of the universe. But beyond the economic and academic successes of the administration and faculty, Notre Dame is a state of mind. Traditions, not boom boxes, echo around the campus. Notre Dame is Knute Rockne, the Four Horsemen, Win One for the Gipper, and Frank Leahy's five national championships and four consecutive undefeated seasons. “Notre Dame,” write Yaeger and Looney, “presents itself as all that is good and great about college football. It is an image of winning without breaking—or even bending—the rules . . . It is an image of winning without becoming a football factory, without forfeiting its academic soul. But even more than symbolizing all that is wonderful about football, Notre Dame stands for the very best in American higher education” (p. 73). The thesis of Yaeger and Looney's *Under the Tarnished Dome* is that by placing Coach Lou Holtz at the head of its football program, Notre Dame has become a Miami of the Rustbelt, cashing in its proud tradition for mere victories.

One trouble with Yaeger and Looney's account of Notre Dame's fall from grace is that the descent is measured from a false elevation. To understand Holtz, one has to know the history, not the mythology, of Notre Dame football. Holtz's career at Notre Dame makes no sense without a firm grounding in the reality of Knute Rockne. Fortunately, Murray Sperber's *Shake Down the Thunder* presents a well-researched and even-handed discussion of the Rockne era. Reading *Shake Down the Thunder*, one begins to understand Rockne as he really lived, before Hollywood, Ronald Reagan, and a team of hagiographers reinvented his life.

Knute Rockne, Sperber argues, functioned quite well on the same moral and ethical playing field as the other coaches of the 1920s. The difference was that he was smarter, more driven, and better able to work in the gray areas. Although he was always ready to extol the virtues of the student-athlete for the right price on the after-dinner lecture circuit, in private he put little stock in the hybrid. His coaching career at Notre Dame was studded with transgressions. He sidestepped NCAA recruiting rules by using an informal “bird dog” network of former players, Notre Dame alumni, and friendly sportswriters. He attracted outstanding talent to Notre Dame with promises of campus jobs, which he virtually controlled, and summer jobs, which he successfully delivered. And he showed far more interest in the athletic side of his “student-athlete” wards. George Gipp, Rockne’s most famous player, was a case in point. Gipp’s troubled academic record presented a stark contrast to his string of athletic accomplishments. Raised in a rough mining town on Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, Gipp’s passions centered on football, baseball, pool, cards, and any other activity that involved betting. Since he evidently never discovered a successful way to bet on academics, he demonstrated no interest in that area. His transcripts show that for two of his four years at Notre Dame (he died in his fifth) he received no grades. In his sophomore year, he did not even bother to show up at Notre Dame until October 14—he missed the first two football games—and he dropped out of school in November after breaking his leg in a game. The next year he again showed up late and this time played a full season, but a blank transcript suggests that he did not actually register or attend any classes. At one point Notre Dame expelled Gipp, but when Michigan, Pittsburgh, West Point, and other major football powers began bidding for his services, Rockne convinced President James Burns to reinstate his star player. Father Burns undoubtedly believed that the Gipp affair would be soon forgotten. As Sperber notes, Father Burns “had no way of knowing that within nine months George Gipp would become Notre Dame’s first consensus All-American, would die, and then, twenty years later, would be sanctified in a Hollywood film” (p. 108).

It should be emphasized again that Rockne and Notre Dame’s ethical standards were no worse—and actually, as far as the Notre Dame administration is concerned, they may have been slightly better—than the other college powers of the period. Sperber gives example after example of the ways Rockne adapted to and succeeded in the ethically wide open world of big time athletics. Rockne, comments Sperber, “learned to swim with sharks . . . and not bleed” (p. 60). One aspect of the world that Sperber documents is the system of choosing officials for games. During the Rockne era, sportswriters often doubled as football officials and special college publicity agents. For a price—a quite nice price—sportswriters would

use their positions to drum up interest in a game and then officiate and report on that same game. It was a system worthy of the worst excesses of Boss Tweed; abuse was inherent in the arrangement. If sportswriters liked a coach, they showered him with favorable publicity and good calls. They like best the coaches who paid the most. And they really liked the Rock. Walter Eckersall of the *Chicago Tribune* worked many of Notre Dame's biggest games and was Rockne's favorite. After working one early-season game, Eckersall wrote to Rockne, advising him to "get your backs to time their shifts more. They were badly off last Saturday and were in motion nearly ever time" (p. 90). As a friend of Rockne's, Eckersall passed on his gentle criticism in a private letter rather than whistling infractions during the game.

Shake Down the Thunder is a long, detailed book, the result of Sperber's thorough research in the office files of the Notre Dame athletic department (which includes Rockne's daily correspondence) and in the administrative archives of Notre Dame. It is an important book for anyone interested in the origins of big time college athletics, higher education in America, the emergence of Irish Catholicism as a force in American culture, and the role sportswriters played in forming the Rockne and Notre Dame legends. It details Notre Dame's victories and defeats from 1900 to 1941, the truth behind the myths, and Rockne's career as a coach and entrepreneur. At times, it engages in overkill; some readers might tire of Rockne's negotiations with referees and problems with ticket-hungry Notre Dame supporters. But these problems are small.

Only on one important point would this reviewer disagree with Sperber. Throughout his study, Sperber tends to side with the would-be reformers of college sports. Perhaps Sperber is correct; perhaps they were battling for academic standards and cleaner—if not pure—amateurism. Implicit in the code of amateurism, however, is a class-based ideal that was exclusive and fostered a restriction of competition. Rockne disliked reformers, probably for no better reason than that he suspected they were hypocrites and made life harder on him. The world Rockne championed was open and democratic. He believed that no one should be excluded and that excellence should be rewarded. An immigrant, Rockne's vision was as deeply American as Horatio Alger's and John D. Rockefeller's. That vision proclaimed: everyone take your mark, get set, go. The winner is the one who gets there first.

That notion remains strong at Notre Dame where winning *is* important. If it were not, Gerry Faust would still be greeting everyone he saw on autumn afternoons at Notre Dame. As Yeager and Looney certify, Faust was an "eminently decent man" who loved Catholicism, Notre Dame, and every player with whom he came in contact. Father Theodore Hesburgh once observed, "I think [Faust] should have been a priest" (p. 89). But he became a coach instead, a

very successful one at Cincinnati's Moeller High School, but a not very successful one at Notre Dame, where "not very successful" translates as "very bad." After the 1985 season Faust resigned and Notre Dame, led by Father Edmund Joyce, hired Lou Holtz to revive the fighting spirit and winning ways of the Irish.

This Holtz did. Yaeger and Looney focus on the methods Holtz used to turn the program around. Based mostly on interviews, nearly one hundred of them with former players, Yaeger and Looney detail the steroid, academic, and human abuses at Notre Dame. They recount tales of Holtz's pressuring players to play hurt, physically and emotionally abusing players, and doing whatever it took to win national championships. Next to the sanitized image of Rockne, Holtz begins to look like Mephistopheles in the land of the Golden Dome. Read next to Sperber's account of Knute Rockne, however, Holtz seems like just another successful coach swimming laps with the sharks and not bleeding.

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"Come, Blackrobe": De Smet and the Indian Tragedy. By John J. Killoren. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. Pp. xv, 448. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95.)

Father John J. Killoren, S.J., offers another biography of Peter John De Smet and his role in Native American history. The author follows many trails: De Smet's life; Jesuit missionary activities in the Far West; the fur trade; Indian policy; and the destruction of the American bison. Chronologically, Killoren surveys the years from 1774 to 1878 but concentrates on the years between De Smet's first trip west of St. Louis to his death. Chapter 2 is a staccato rendering in chronological format of information related to the fur trade and De Smet's life from 1823 to 1840; however, De Smet often becomes lost on the trail in other chapters which are a severe critique of United States Indian policy and of the individuals involved in its formulation and implementation.

Killoren maintains that De Smet's story is no ordinary biography, but the story of an exceptional Jesuit evangelical who developed a unique spiritual relationship with Native Americans, who exercised influence with them, and who was one of the very few Americans of his time who understood what the disappearance of the bison meant for Indians on the Plains: poverty, reservations, and dependence on the largess of the United States government for survival. The author accepts at face value the hundreds of reported baptisms of Indians by priests and leaves unanswered the question as to whether or not Indian peoples actually understood Catholicism and comprehended the intricacies of concepts such as the Trinity. Or did Indians simply, hospitably, fit De Smet's Catholic