

The Chicago Sports Reader
100 Years of Sports in the Windy City

Edited by Steven A. Riess and Gerald R. Gems

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Pp. 368. Maps, illustrations, notes, index. Cloth-bound, \$75.00; paperbound, \$24.95.)

While cities such as New York and Boston seem to dominate the narrative of the rise of sports in American history, Chicago—without question a sports-loving town—has also played its part, particularly in the period before World War II. The thirteen essays in this collection—all but one of which have been previously published—demonstrate Chicago's importance in the professionalization and commercialization of sports in the United States.

The editors' excellent introduction not only provides a chronological foundation upon which the array of essays are built, it also supplies additional context and detail for those essays that center on less familiar sports: cycling, car racing, and horseracing. To be sure, the city's more obvious sports stories remain, with Daniel Nathan's first-rate retelling of the Black Sox scandal and Walter LeFeber's well-known take on Michael Jordan and global capitalism. But the pieces that truly stand out are those that take on sports other than the Big Four and integrate them into a larger local and national history. Riess's own piece, for example, examines horseracing through the lens of organized crime, while Cord Scott's essay on car racing makes it clear why Chicago was chosen to host the 1893

Race of the Century, the first of its kind in the U.S., alongside the World's Columbian Exposition. In a similar vein, Bruce J. Evensen analyzes the Dempsey-Tunney fight within the context of the rise of sports media, demonstrating why his book on the same topic is far more than a history of the two fighters.

Because of its variety, this is a very teachable text. Short introductions to each essay provide solid background material and connect to the volume as a whole, and the scholars represented offer access to a variety of methodologies. Robin Dale Lester's essay on Amos Alonzo Stagg, for example, the first tenured coach in the U.S., demonstrates a near-perfect way to use biography to discuss the bigger picture. Susan Cahn's exceptional essay about the All-American Girls Baseball League—unfortunately the only one to focus specifically on gender and one of the few to deal with the later period—with its easy prose and sound arguments, shows how women's history should be integrated within a broader scope.

That Cahn's essay stands alone may be the only significant shortfall of this book, even though the introduction demonstrates the plentiful history of women in Chicago sports. And this collection certainly had

space for more essays devoted to women. The Chicago Blackhawks seem to be an important enough subject for the editors to have solicited John Chi-Kit Wong's essay, the only one specifically written for the collection. David Claerbaut's descriptive history of the Chicago Cubs stands out rather oddly with its lack of cited sources and little content that anyone other than a Cubs fan would care about, taking up space in an otherwise finely honed critical collection.

With that said, this volume makes a significant contribution not just to sports history or Chicago his-

tory, but also to the story of the development of mass culture in urban America between the Civil War and World War II. It is a worthy book, indeed.

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Catching Stories

A Practical Guide to Oral History

By Donna M. DeBlasio, Charles F. Ganzert, David H. Mould, Stephen H. Paschen, and Howard L. Sacks

(Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 2009. Pp. xii, 218. Illustrations, notes, bibliographies, index. Clothbound, \$26.95; paperbound, \$16.95.)

As someone who is deeply involved in the art and science of oral history and has contributed to a “how-to” book focusing on oral history, I often wonder how many more such books should join the pantheon. Keeping an open mind when a new book in this genre appears has, in this case, led to quite a find—*Catching Stories: A Practical Guide to Oral History*.

The authors did not intend this volume for the seasoned practitioner. They offer it primarily to those folks, from the county historian to the community volunteer, who want to “add oral history to their toolkit of

methods” and gain the “confidence to take on new projects” (p. ix).

Breaking the process into eleven chapters, the authors walk the beginner through oral history from initial idea to finished product. Giving readers the essential information to undertake and complete an oral history project should stand as the least accomplishment of a how-to book. *Catching Stories*' creators hit that mark and more by offering a piece that should be part of any fledgling, or veteran, oral historian's bookcase.

Having multiple contributing authors could cause a work to seem