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BOOK REVIEWS

David G. McComb, *Sports in World History*, Routledge, New York-London 2004.

History of sport is a comparatively new academic field, still struggling for its fuller recognition. A number of departments and independent schools of sport and physical education treat history of sport and PE as a margin of “real” biological sciences, responsible for humanity’s physical condition. This is why any attempt to raise history of sport or physical education to a higher level should be appreciated. David McComb, Professor Emeritus of History at Colorado State University has been well known for his numerous works in general history, but first of all for his *Sports. An Illustrated History* and more recently for his *Sports in World History* which is an ambitious attempt to create a more general concept of sport in the history of mankind. In fact, this book is closer to historiography than historiography. It raises a number of important issues, showing sport in its double role: as a factor in general history, and as a stream of human life in itself, having its own, internal rules and, certainly, events. The role of this book in drawing readers’ attention to the historical significance of sport is unquestionable. However, while this general achievement of the publication should be highly praised as an important “step in the right direction” – to use an old phrase from the world of diplomacy – we should also point to some of its disputable aspects.

In my opinion the most important part of the book is *Introduction*, where some basic historical problems are discussed in order to delineate sport as an element of general history. This part of the book contains such important issues as the answer to the question *What is sport?*; then *The problem of periodization*; the essence of sport as discussed from the position of *Modernization theory*; sport’s cultural role in *Postmodernism*; and *Sport and culture* and *Sport as art* (original subchapter names are in italics). Finally, *Introduction* includes sections concerning *The organization of the book* and *Further reading*.

Specialized segments titled identically *Further reading* are carefully added to all chapters providing more detailed information to the problems discussed in the chapters. However, it is here, where we can find one of the weakest points of McComb’s book: all references are restricted to positions published in English. Even when McComb discusses problems of sports developments in the Soviet Union or under Nazis’ rule, he uses exclusively English-language sources written, for instances, by such eminent authors as James Riordan. One may ask what about Russian historians of Communist sports? Was the former USSR and is present-day Russia a small country without its own historical literature? Numerous scholars, e.g. Arnd Krüger, wrote extensively on history of German sports, especially in Nazi Germany. There have been also other European historians of sports, who wrote classic pioneering works, such as German Carl Diem and his *Weltgeschichte des Sports*, or extremely informative Michael Krüger’s *Einfuehrung in die Geschichte der Leibeserziehung und des Sports*. McComb’s references are missing such classic and pioneering books in history of sport like, for instance, *Geschichte de Sports aller Voelker und Zeiten* (1926) edited by A. Bogeng or *History of the Olympic Games* by Hungarian Ferenc Mezo, once awarded with the gold medal at the Olympic Literary Competition in Amsterdam (1928). The same can be said about French historians (beginning with J.J. Jusserand and ending with recent works of R. Hubscher), Italian (F. Fabrizio), Polish (R. Wroczyński), Bulgarian (A. Solakov), and many historians of sport representing non-English-speaking countries greatly contributing to both the development of sport and writing of its history. It seems odd that many books on sports history written in other languages than English have been translated into English and NOT CONSIDERED by McComb. The lack of such references deprives Mc Comb’s book of genuine universality because we cannot find there any competent information and discussion concerning

some important historical factors, if they are not raised by English speaking authors. Additionally the *Further reading* section limited to English language sources, seems to indicate that American or British readers are quite unable to learn foreign languages (which is sometimes quite right). Perhaps, out of sheer courtesy alone, some international publications should be mentioned in the references section. Only in one case I found a non-English author's name, most likely Chinese (Wu Zhongyuan, editor of *Sport in China* published in English by Human Kinetics).

Also the subchapter *What is sport?* is much disappointing. We could expect here an attempt to formulate a historic definition of sport. Meanwhile McComb offers us a worn-out and, in fact, superficial approach to sport based on sociological and biological elements. Such approach is then employed in all further considerations of particular issues. This subchapter gives us no answer what sport really is, if we want to evaluate it from a purely historical point of view. McComb tries to explain that sport is a kind of physical effort in which we can find "a combination of physical prowess, rules, and competition" considered to be "the main ingredients of sport". It is all true, but still one question remains: What is sport as a historical factor? The answer to this question should be the focal problem for McComb's book. But it is not. Moreover, all other English-speaking historians of sport known to me have attempted to define sport making precisely the same mistake: they regard sport as a phenomenon defined on the basis of motor and health sciences or – sometimes – sociology and media sciences. All of them can be characterized as users of NON-HISTORICAL ELEMENTS IN DEFINING THE HISTORICAL PHAENOMENON OF SPORT. In this situation I can only repeat after McComb: "Strangely enough, there has been a problem about defining the word 'sport'. Everyone knows what it means, and yet there is confusion". And McComb's book has certainly not clarified this situation either. Perhaps it would be useful to provide McComb and other historians of sport with some suggestions which I expressed earlier in one of my papers. A comprehensive historical definition of sport should in my opinion contain the following elements:

1) Conscious ludic activity of human beings having characteristics of free-will competition;

- 2) Taking part in human events and shaping vicissitudes of peoples and societies through many-sided bodily and spiritual development;
- 3) Historically shaped pacifistic character resulting from elimination of attempts in annihilating opposing individual partners or teams;
- 4) Ability to take part in general human events and co-operate with other fields of human activity in pursuing goals characteristic for human societies, including cultural, social and political developments;
- 5) Creation of its own principles which respect and contribute to the universal ethical system.

I entirely disagree with McComb, when he writes: "Traditional sports, those played by indigenous peoples, for the most part, rarely developed a global span. The sports that became global were those carried by the Europeans and Americans who breached into the world as a part of their historical evolution, communication, and influence". Nothing illustrates better the Euro-American phobia about other cultures. There is no global influence of sports other than "carried by the Europeans and Americans"? Is there? What about Asian martial arts such as Japanese *judo*, for instance, (by the way, McComb devotes to judo a half-page paragraph, denying his own thesis) or *aikido*, Korean *taekwondo* or Chinese *wu-shu* and their massive global impact? But there are also national traditional sports in particular countries, Mongolian *bökhin barildan* known also in its simplified form as *buh*, Turkish *jägli guresh* or Iranian *zurkkhaneh*. They are widely popular in those countries, practiced and watched by millions of people taking their national pride from their own ethnic traditions. Should they be included into the global cultural and historical image of the world, or should they be ignored just because they were not globally proliferated by way of European colonial expansion?

The contemporary globalisation of sport takes in McComb's book two out of five chapters. But globalisation means not only globalizing everything following a single model, but also, among many other interpretations of the word "to see everything globally, even if it is regional in its character". The latter is unfortunately missing in McCombs's book.

We should read McComb's book carefully, taking into account its positive sides, but also

criticize and even refuse its narrow vision of worldwide sport. This is why, a much more precise title of this book should be *Sports in the History of*

Western World: Based Exclusively on English-language Sources.

Wojciech Lipiński

Jacek Gracz, Tadeusz Sankowski: *Psychologia aktywności sportowej* (Psychology of sport activity), AWF Poznań 2007.

Psychologia aktywności sportowej (Psychology of sport activity) by Jacek Gracz and Tadeusz Sankowski is a unique and comprehensive compendium of psychology of physical culture. The authors provide readers with an extensive review of research into different areas of psychology. They present the current state of psychological knowledge in the broad, practical context of sport activity encompassing competitive sport, physical education, health education and even sport marketing. The vastness of this educational offer makes *Psychologia aktywności sportowej* an invaluable source of information and guidelines for students of physical education, physical therapy, tourism and recreation as well as for PE teachers, coaches, instructors and sport managers. The issues discussed by the authors definitely deserve some consideration.

The book begins with the definition and characteristics of psychology of sport activity. First, the concept and directions of modern psychology are discussed, followed by the definition of the profile of sport activity as a theory of activity, which according to the famous Polish psychologist Tadeusz Tomaszewski, is particularly explicative in the sport context.

The origins and history of development of sport psychology, being a survey of psychological issues on the basis of results of the most significant world sports psychology congresses, are discussed in the next section of the book. The authors then draw our attention to the problems of psychological diagnosis which is an indispensable component in many areas of sport praxis. Such aspects as psychological observation and interview, psychological experiment and psychological testing in sport and physical education are thoroughly analyzed.

The book then focuses on neuropsychological aspects of human behavior in sport. The authors underline the great significance of the proper functioning of the athlete's nervous system

and the role of awareness of this process by the so-called "physical educators."

What follows is an interesting section devoted to application of cognitive psychology in sport activity. The authors provide characteristics of the basic cognitive processes and reveal fascinating relationships between cognitive psychology, sport theory and human motor function, which form human motor habits and motor techniques.

The subsequent section of the book is devoted to human needs, motivations and emotions in the context of sport activity. It contains the necessary information for every animator of physical culture. Next, the authors focus on theoretical aspects of psychical resistance and its application in mental training and techniques of change of emotional tension in sport activity.

A significant part of the work is devoted to different aspects and functions of human personality. Apart from discussion of the most fundamental theories of personality, readers can find here up-to-date scientific data on the personality profiles of physical education teachers, coaches and sport managers. The book also discusses psychological issues associated with ontogenic traits. The authors provide characteristics of human interests, abilities, talents and temperament and show the ways in which these traits are related with sport practice. They also concentrate on the concept of attitudes in sport activity. The section contains a number of guidelines concerning the development of attitudes propagating relatively permanent readiness to undertake physical activity, engage in physical culture and improve one's quality of life.

In consideration of the profession of PE teacher or sport instructor, also the knowledge of principles of developmental psychology is emphasized in the book. Readers can find here a detailed analysis of psycho-developmental conditions of sport activity in children and adolescents.

Many psychological issues mentioned in the publication are discussed in the context of their application in the learning and teaching processes in sport activity. The book includes a great number of interesting, practical hints concerning the effectiveness of learning of motor elements in relation to the personality traits discussed earlier, e.g. interests, temperament, motivation and abilities.

Many subjects and solutions included in the work can be easily adapted in the practices of the sport and physical education community. The most useful seem to be various aspects of educational psychology and social psychology in relation with sport activity.

The concluding chapter discusses the psycho-social phenomenon of modern professional sport. The authors point to some pathological aspects of modern competitive sports such as doping and aggressive behavior, resulting from interactions between psychological and social conditions.

The publication contains numerous tables and figures, which underline and summarize the most important problems. For many readers they can be immensely useful in their search of more specific information from particular research areas. What should be noted is the transparent language of the book, which makes this outstanding scientific publication, including citations from many leading scientific sources, available to all readers interested in psychology of sport activity.

The authors encourage all physical education students and “physical educators” to reflect upon the motto included in their book, which emphasizes the humanistic translation of the Olympic motto *Faster, Higher, Stronger* into *More Vigorous, More Ambitious, More Courageous*. Such understanding of the Olympic motto has a profound effect on Man’s versatile development, which should be a superior goal in human activity in physical culture.

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