Sport and British Jewry: Integration, Ethnicity and Anti-Semitism 1890-1970.

By David Dee. Published in 2013 by Manchester University Press (240 pp., $100 USD, hardcover)

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The history of Jewish communities of the Diaspora has been an important area of scholarly study for many years, as the substantial number of journals, books, and articles devoted to the topic continue to demonstrate. In America, substantial works by, inter alia, Levine and Riess have provided a solid basis of research on Jewish involvement with sport. In Britain, by contrast, there has been a popular misconception that Jews were disinterested in physical pursuits and what Dee calls “a paucity of research” (p. 5) to set the record straight. A few studies in recent years have begun to explore the history of Jewish involvement in sports such as boxing or horseracing, but Dee’s subtle, scholarly, and nuanced work is the first book-length treatment of the role that Anglo-Jewry played in British sport over the last century or so before 1970, and the way sport affected their life experiences and individual, community, and cultural identities.

After an introduction, the structure of the book is broadly chronological, and addresses its key themes in three very substantial chapters. Chapter 1, Integration and Anglicisation, explores topics such as the Jewish youth movements before World War I and the role of Jewish competitive sport up to 1939, and uses a case study of the (very atypical) public-school and Oxford-educated Olympic athlete, broadcaster, and journalist Harold Maurice Abrahams (born a Jew but became a Church of England convert), briefly deconstructing the film Chariots of Fire in the process, to show that whereas privileged Jews might become more “thoroughly Anglicised” (p. 69), it also placed them in an awkward social milieu. Dee concludes that sport “shaped the aspirations and identities of many young Jews of immigrant heritage” (pp.70–71) at a time in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when there was tension among the new immigrants from Eastern Europe, the existing community leaders, and the non-Jewish society. It played a vital role in Anglicisation.

Chapter 2 focuses upon the ways that interest in sport affected British Jewish religion and ethnicity from the late Victorian period up to 1970. The impact was clearly complex, and, as Dee demonstrates, could cause significant intergenerational and intracommunity debate and tensions, sometimes helping Jews move closer to mainstream British society culturally and physically, but sometimes undermining adherence to and concern for the Jewish faith and Sabbath observance. In a particularly interesting section, Dee explores the “muscular Judaism” with its stress on physical regeneration, of the British Maccabi movement, founded in 1934. He argues that in Britain its subsequent attempts to create a “new Jew” through the fusing of Judaism, Zionism, and sport had only limited success. But sporting participation in the movement’s international completion, the Maccabiah, the “Jewish
Olympics,” provided early opportunities of competition for future elite performers such as Angela Buxton (tennis) or fencer Allan Jay. Dee also examines what he terms the “Golden Age” of Jewish professional boxing, although this has attracted more substantial scholarly interest for some time.

Sport has rarely figured in general studies of anti-Semitism in Britain, most recently Antony Julius’s *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford University Press, 2010). Here Dee’s comprehensive research makes another major contribution, especially in his analysis of the sporting anti-Semitism of British Union of Fascists propaganda in the 1930s, although he is rather weaker on the earlier period. He also shows the ways in which Jews were able to respond, often assertively, to their exclusion from clubs and respond to press and public prejudices and stereotypes.

This is a highly competent first book from a young scholar, and it deserves to be read by a wide academic audience—not only by social and cultural historians of sport and the twentieth century and Jewish studies more generally, but also by those interested in identity, ethnicity, and racism. Thanks to Dee’s wide-ranging and in-depth research, the reader gains a good sense of Jewish participation in various forms of physical recreation, such as boxing, football, or golf, not just as spectators and participants at all levels of performance, but also as administrators and organizers. Even as social class coverage is generally strong and Dee teases out the complexities and subtleties of sporting relationships well, much of the emphasis in the book is on masculinity and male experiences of sport. There may well be more to be said on gender, and one wonders if there are parallels to be drawn from Linda Borish’s fine studies of Jewish women in American sport history. Equally, it would be good to see Dee explore the period before 1890 in more detail at some point. But Dee’s engaging, insightful, and very readable account is a very useful addition to the history of sport.

**Sport & Christianity: A Sign of the Times in the Light of Faith**

Edited by Kevin Lixey, Christoph Hubenthal, Dietmar Meith, and Norbert Muller. Published in 2012 by the Catholic University of America Press (257 pp., $24.95 USD, paperback)

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*Sport & Christianity: A Sign of the Times in the Light of Faith* endeavors to answer a basic question: “Is there such a thing as Catholic perspective on sport?” (p. vii). This is an interesting and important question for several reasons. First, “there is undoubtedly a need for the wide world of sport to receive competent advice and orientation, especially with regard to its inherent moral, religious, and cultural questions” (p. x). Second, historians have often misunderstood or outright denied the Church’s generally positive assessment of sport, embodiment, and play. The book aims to shed light on these two issues by offering a “Christian vision of sport in order to provoke debate and reflection” (p. xvi).

The text is the result of an international seminar of Catholic sport theologians that was held in 2007 at the Catholic Academy in Mainz, Germany. The seminar