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**Sports in South America: A History**, Matthew Brown, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2023, viii + 277 pp., £40 (hardback), ISBN978-0-300-24752-7

‘Sports in South America: A History’ by Matthew Brown, is an important addition to the rather limited field of study of the history of South American sport. Most previous work focuses on football as the dominant sporting continental endeavour, is usually based on the traditional powerhouses of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, and tends to establish the introduction of sport to South America by British migrants as founding moments of sporting practice. Brown successfully challenges these tendencies by focusing on indigenous and colonial sporting cultures and practices across South America that predate the influence of the British informal empire, and additionally sheds light on the importance of other sports and how these became part of nation-building projects and debates. Therefore, significant South American sportsmen and women that have been ignored from previous histories are given a central place in Brown’s work. The development and political significance of football, is, of course, debated, but this is only part of a rich panorama of sporting analysis that includes indigenous activities including tejo, palitun and zinucati, cockfighting and bullfighting, cricket, boxing, tennis, golf, cycling, gymnastics, mountain climbing, motorsports, aviation and equestrian sports. The practice of these sports is evaluated within a social and political context of ongoing debates about nations and their citizens up until 1930.

The book is divided into two sections; the first section, comprising six chapters, focuses on ‘The Beginnings of Sports’, in which Brown first discusses indigenous and colonial sporting or physical activities, before moving onto how and why sports introduced by Europeans and North Americans gained traction and popularity. Brown argues that sports such as football, cricket and tennis did not diffuse into a vacuum; instead, they built on existing cultural practices and meanings that already had political significance. He shows that sport was already part of the construction of collective identities, exclusions and inclusions long before the first football was kicked. Exclusions were not just based on race, but also comprised issues of ‘civilized’ and ‘barbarous’ behaviour about violence, moral values, and moneymaking around sports as well as their potential impact on practitioners, spectators and the community. Some of these sports existed on the margins due to identity associations with indigeneity or Black communities (for example capoeira). Others were side-lined from histories as part of a deliberate attempt to cultivate a sense of modernity (cockfighting). However, some achieved some respectability and acceptance as part of religious festivals and national celebrations as countries negotiated the mixed-race nature of their nation. These issues of exclusion/inclusion, civilization/barbarism and national construction continue at the forefront as Brown examines how sport was increasingly popularised through the importance of diverse sports in educational establishments, clubs, businesses and a general rise in associationism given an emphasis on modernity. The efforts of British pioneers such as Alexander Watson Hutton and William Leslie Poole coincided with state-driven educational prioritization of physical education for the health and strength of the nation’s citizens in the 1880s and 1890s. The schoolchildren doing gymnastics, military drills and other sports would then lead the drive to create their own multisport clubs in the early decades of the twentieth-century that could represent their own neighbourhood, class, diasporic identity or workspace. The first section concludes with a discussion of sport as a business, analysing sport’s increasing commercial role and path towards shamateurism and finally professionalism.

The second section takes readers up to 1930, ending with an analysis of the 1930 men's football World Cup, hosted and won by Uruguay. This section is organized thematically based on the purposes of sport and how it was narrated, deployed and manipulated, in addition to how it corresponded with ongoing narratives of nation across South America. Brown first explores the issue of beauty, art, stand style, looking at how different sports became gendered and racialized and deemed as appropriate for the nation's advancement. The female sporting body, in particular, became a locus for national concern; tennis players could demonstrate grace, health and have their bodies sculpted by exercise for the pleasure of the male gaze and future motherhood, but women footballers were seen as anathema to national prerogatives given the violence and masculinising potential of the sport. These notions of masculinity and femininity are explored further in fascinating chapters on endurance sports (long distance running, cycling, swimming and mountain climbing), controlling or shaping violence through regulating and drilling sports such as boxing, and then a highly original chapter on South American prowess and enthusiastic participation in motorsports and aviation. Brown shows how these sportsmen and women fostered national and transnational knowledges and encounters, allowing South Americans to learn about their own territory and their neighbours through sporting exchange. Indeed, South Americans were early proponents of sporting internationalism; through sport, South Americans saw the chance to become visible and share the international stage through competing in the Olympics, going on sports tours in or hosting their own multisport competitions.

In addition to the precise contextualisation of sport within national histories, the many untold stories of South Americans' sporting prowess and participation are a delight. Are historians aware of Mariátegui's career as a horse racing journalist, describing and critiquing events at the Lima hippodrome? Why do we not commemorate those swimmers somewhere in Paraguay or Argentina who first taught John Trudgen the front crawl? How many people know that Alberto Justiniano Olid was the first person to cycle across the Andes from Buenos Aires to Valparaiso? These stories and more, and why these sporting performances matter, is central to the significance of this excellent book. Not only does it open multiple paths of potential study to other sport historians, encouraging us to move away from football's often all-encompassing glare, but it shows that any book on international sport that does not recognise these histories will inevitably be flawed. Finally, Brown, in acknowledging and praising South American librarians, archivists and historians for their work in discovering, preserving, and digitalising a variety of primary sources, makes a call for the continuation and support of this important work, plus ensuring its availability. This book certainly shows the value of heeding his call.

(1009 words)

Peter J. Watson, University of Leeds

[p.j.watson@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:p.j.watson@leeds.ac.uk)

Apartment 39 The Willows, 400 Middlewood Road, Sheffield, S6 1BJ