



Sport and the Emancipation of European Women: The Struggle for Self-Fulfilment

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medals at the Olympics' model has severe limitations. Ince covers track and field in Cuba, reminding us that track stars were emerging there in the 1940s with high class men and women athletes in a range of field events. Likewise, the name of the Haitian, Silvio Cator, deserves more than the eight lines given to him for breaking the 26 feet 'barrier' in the long jump in 1928.

Running for Black Gold and *Black Meteors* are attractive books for the athletics fanatic – 'a dream for statisticians and track and field buffs'. They are not dominated by Jamaica and Kenya, nor by world record holders Usain Bolt and David Rudisha, but they are thin on historical, sociological and cultural perspectives. In both books there are long appendices and short bibliographies that could be valuable for scholars entering the world of modern sport in two significant regions of the world.

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Gigliola Gori and J.A. Mangan (eds), *Sport and the Emancipation of European Women: The Struggle for Self-Fulfilment* (London: Routledge, 2014). Pp. 190. £85.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-415-86984-3

This book is a collection of 12 papers about women in sport, all of which were first published in February 2012 in the *International Journal of the History of Sport* (volume 29, issue 2). The book's subtitle, *The Struggle for Self-Fulfilment* seems more appropriate than the main title of *Sport and the Emancipation of European Women*. This is because although the papers are concerned with women's involvement in sport and leisure pursuits, none of the authors claims that involvement in sport has led to the emancipation of European women, only that it can serve as a vehicle for self-fulfilment or realisation as one of the editors, J.A. Mangan, acknowledges in his epilogue.

The papers fall mainly into two categories: first, the efforts of women to achieve inclusion in sport and recognition for their achievement and, second, discussions of the female body. The first group includes papers by Annette Hofmann on the ski jumpers Paula Lamberg and Johanna Kolstad; then Thierry Terret and Cécile Ottogalli-Mazzcavallo on female fencing; Ivana Matteucci writes about Italian women's football; Sandra Heck discusses Modern Pentathlon in Germany; and an overview of

participation in Portugal following the 1974 revolution is provided by Maria Claudia Pinheiro. Papers that focus on the theme of the female body in physical culture and sport include those of Anssi Halmesvirta investigating doctors and the female body in Finland; Sylvain Ferez on the process of sexual categorisation of sport; and Helena Tolvhed on the coverage of female athletes in the Olympics by the Swedish popular press. The Swedish experience shows that females in sport are frequently portrayed as women rather than as athletes. This was a contrast to East European sportswomen under the Communist system who were presented as athletes, first and foremost. Hans Bonde, discussing female gymnastics in Denmark, emphasises that women in sport were expected to display traditional aspects of femininity such as grace and beauty as they worked towards health and fitness as well as athleticism.

The focus on the female body and its perceived weaknesses, an idea reinforced by medical discourse, is a common theme throughout these papers. This labelling of women as the weaker sex has been used as a justification for the restriction of women's sporting participation and ambition. Biological determinism has deemed what kind of physical activities women should do and also how they should do them. The case studies from Denmark and Finland discussed in the collection, give examples illustrating the role of male physicians in determining what kind of activities were appropriate for females, but this discourse was almost universal in sport across European and other cultures. For instance, Hoffmann's paper on ski-jumpers, as well as being about female participation in sport, mentions discussions of the effect jumping and, more importantly, the impact on landing could have on a woman's body. Fears of displacement of the uterus and impaired fertility succeeded in keeping women out of ski-jumping competitions. It wasn't until 2014 that women's ski-jumping was included in a Winter Olympic programme. Bi-categorisation by gender can sometimes be problematic and can have a humiliating, if not devastating, impact on those who do not fit neatly into biological determined roles of male and female, such as transgender athletes. Gender testing has been around in crude form since the 1960s. Homophobia is another consequence of this gender bi-categorisation. As Gori explains in her Prologue 'the female body becomes sexualised, controlled and oppressed (p. 8). Sylvain Ferez's discussion of sexual classification provides a revealing insight into this process.

Perceived female weakness has led to the gender bi-categorisation of sport. Over the twentieth century there have been women and their supporters who have challenged these ideas and have worked for the acceptance and recognition of female participation in sport and other activities.

In Italy, the Girl Scout movement attempted to provide activities for girls that challenged the accepted perception of what was expected of the female child and young woman, as discussed by Roberta Vescovi.

Discussions on the other key theme of the collection – women's participation in sport – demonstrate how women's access to sport and participation in high-level competition has not been equal to that of men. Female athletes have had to work hard and campaign for recognition of their sport. Acceptance of women as international competitors with their own world championships has been problematic. Sometimes this is blamed on the reluctance of men but if too few women in a limited number of countries are involved in a sport at a sufficiently high level it can be difficult to establish a valid world championship or Olympic competition. This can be a reason for exclusion of a female event from elite sporting competition. It also fails to encourage other female athletes to become involved in the sport and denies them appropriate role models.

The collection of papers does not really compare male and female sport. There is a paradox that while sport reinforces male hegemony and plays an important role in the construction of masculinity and male identities, for women it can emancipate them from traditional gender roles and oppression, roles that can also be oppressive for men. There is also a need for a comparison among women of different classes, as called for by J.A. Mangan. He acknowledges that 'the thrust for emancipation of the female body in Europe was by the middle class and largely benefitted the middle class' (p. 175). Access to sports facilities is an important factor restricting sporting participation by women. Added to this are competing cultural factors, including, in the past, medical orthodoxy, which has now been overcome but which is now replaced by other preoccupations, such as physical image and stereotypes of femininity reinforced by the media and peer pressure. Sport alone is not a vehicle for women's emancipation; cultural, social and economic factors are the true drivers of change but it can be a useful barometer of attitudes to and of women, one of a number of things that can measure emancipation. As Mangan concludes, *Sport and the Emancipation of European Women* is a work in progress, a story that has not yet reached its final chapter.

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