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Sport and It's Female Fans

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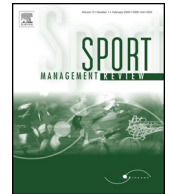
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Book review

Sport and its Female Fans, K. Toffoletti, P. Mewett (Eds.), Routledge, 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017 (2012). 216 pp., ISBN: 978-0415883818

Sport and Its Female Fans is a collection of essays edited by Kim Toffoletti and Peter Mewett, providing a current and fresh perspective on a seemingly under-researched population: female sports fans. Women are the central focus throughout the book. This focus is grounded in major components of the book, such as the fact that much of the research is done from feminist theoretical frameworks. Women are even found in the smaller details, such as the book's dedication "to our daughters" and the opening lines of the acknowledgments: "We wish to acknowledge all the women who follow sport. We hope this book goes some way toward recognizing the commitment and passion of female sports fans" (p. xv).

It is important to note that the words female and woman/women are used interchangeably throughout the text; with the exception of one chapter that compares women's and men's basketball, all references to "women's sports fans" indicate women *as* sports fans, not fans of women's sports. The same is meant for "female sports fans." The foreword and introduction provide a concise rationale and overview of the book. As a collection of essays, the sports covered include rugby, rodeo, soccer/football, basketball, and ice hockey throughout New Zealand, Australia, North America, and Europe. Covering such a wide array of topics and locales proves interesting, though perhaps not all relevant to American sports consumption. Beginning in the acknowledgments, and continuing throughout the text, there is recognition that sports historically – and contemporarily – are considered part of the man's world, and as such, there are difficulties, challenges, and obstacles faced by female sports fans.

The book is intended to debunk the myths of female sports fans as simply women ogling male athletes or being dragged along to sporting events by their husbands and boyfriends. Further, the authors asserted that this edition is "the first book-length contribution" (p. 1) to women's fandom. While much research has been done on women actively participating in sports, very little has covered women's spectating behaviors in fandom. This book considers the intersections of gender, race, class, ethnicity and locality, demonstrating that there is no one "type" of female sports fan, perhaps the perfect argument for market segmentation by sports teams.

The book's 10 chapters (one essay each) are broken into three distinct lines of inquiry: historical, empirical and textual. Chapter One's (Field) essay on women ice hockey spectators in the 1930s will prove interesting to historians and hockey fans alike. The second chapter (Allon) of this edition focuses on the history the National Rugby League (NRL) of Australia and its female supporters, who, until the 1970s, were not allowed to sit with men in the stands. To the rugby neophyte, however, it was difficult to understand exactly what the NRL was, as well as its context. Noting that women make up 40% of NRL fans, the author stressed a need for historical analysis to complement the emerging field of contemporary research on women's sporting cultures: "While female sports fans may no longer be quarantined in 'the ladies stand,' the fight to take female sports spectatorship seriously, including increasing and enlarging the definitions, accounts and histories of female sports fandom, continues" (p. 30). Chapter Three (Cere), on female football "ultras" fans (i.e., extremely dedicated soccer fans in Italy), included some history, but also moved toward the contemporary. Through analysis of media accounts, including newspapers and other documentaries, the author attempted to make ultras visible through four areas: history, culture, experiences, and violence, racism and the media. She did a good job of outlining the first three areas, but fell short in the last section on violence and racism, barely touching racism and making weak connections between media, violence and the roles of female ultras.

The book's focus switches to more empirical work in Chapters Four (Thompson and Forsyth) through Seven (Obel), using qualitative interviews, focus groups, and grounded theory to explore female fans of rodeo, football and rugby union, including one essay with an emphasis on the sexual objectification of male athletes' bodies. Interestingly, despite their frequent talk of men's bodies and sexual desire, the women interviewed in Chapter Six (Toffoletti and Mewett) were both quick and careful to point out that objectifying men is considered to be a bonus and not *the* reason for supporting the players, team, and game.

The remainder of the book shifts from empirical data collection to textual and narrative analysis, with a focus on the marketing of women sports fans. This is done through television advertisements, an online blog community, and a comparison of National Basketball Association and Women's National Basketball Association websites. Chapters Eight

(Wenner), Nine (Hardin and Whiteside), and Ten (Meân) may be most helpful to current practitioners in sports, helping to outline distinctions that are found in language and marketing techniques between men and women.

At just more than 200 pages, including all references and tables, this book is an easy and mostly enjoyable read, recommended to anyone interested women's sport and female fan experiences from a variety of standpoints: historical, marketing, and sociocultural. Given the heavy reliance on theory and empirical research, the text may feel inaccessible to those without postgraduate education, but valuable bits of information could still be gleaned from skimming the book, particularly in regards to media intentions and female fans. The world wide web has sparked many new ways for all sports fans to increase their consumption. How can marketers, practitioners, and faculty use technology to further the experience of female fans (through blogging, websites, etc.)? *Sport and Its Female Fans* provided history and background before attempting to answer this question. In addition to the marketing utility of this book, scholars seeking exemplars on qualitative methods would be wise to read this edition.

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