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Review of *Sports, Peacebuilding and Ethics*

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Sports, Peacebuilding and Ethics, Linda M. Johnston, editor. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2014. Paperback, 211 pages, notes, author biographies, \$40.00. ISBN: 978-1-4128-5388-0.

Sports, Peacebuilding and Ethics features a distinguished group of scholar/practitioners examining questions and challenges of sport within the peacebuilding framework as well as several ethical dimensions of athletics. The editor and coordinator of the work Linda M. Johnston – executive director of the Siegel Institute for Leadership, Ethics, and Character and a professor at Kennesaw State University, and president of the International Peace Research Association Foundation – described the approach as a polygon, employing several divergent approaches. Thus the reader will experience a wide-ranging variety of articles.

The strongest feature of the book addresses sport as a component of a peacebuilding process in a post-war or conflict arena. The use of sport as an ingredient in peace-restoration is not new – the ancient Olympic games were developed in part to interrupt the wars among the Peloponnesian city-states. Recognition of sports within peacebuilding operations has grown substantially in the last twenty years as a result of the United Nations formally incorporating sport in many of its restorative operations. Sport in various forms has contributed to bringing together combatants to begin rebuilding trust and community.

The opening article by Johnston and Claudia Stura, “The Role of Sports in Peacebuilding,” posits sport not as a panacea but as a possible vibrant component of an overall peace program. They interviewed fourteen sport project managers running active programs in countries such as Northern Ireland, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Palestine, Israel, and several others. Common elements of success included: team sport programs aimed at children emphasizing the educational aspects of participation, while not overtly promoting peacebuilding; locally run, long-range sport programs integrated into larger peacebuilding efforts; establishing political-free atmospheres; mixing and pairing individuals and teams to breakdown polarization; lessening the competitive elements of sport; and the careful selection and continuous training of coaches overseeing the activities. The programs succeeded in building trust, mutual respect, open mindedness and listening skills along with other benefits in participants.

In “Sports in the Psychological and Social Demobilization of Child Soldiers” Kim Fletcher and Peter St. Pierre build a theoretical social and psychological framework for child-specific disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs. Sport has evolved in the reintegration of child soldiers from an unofficial activity to fill free time to being a formal component of rehabilitation requiring careful administration to be successful.

Adults also benefit from peacebuilding programs utilizing sports; two examples were related. Susan Hillyer wrote a personal account in “Coaching Women’s Softball in Iran: The Tale of One American’s Journey toward Peace and Understanding through Sports.” Invited to Iran to help develop women’s sports, she visited the country ten times between 2000 and 2007 introducing softball. Her article centers on the 2007 Iran-USA Friendship Games. Hillyer noted: “Through softball, we came into genuine relationship with one another. Through sharing this experience, we grew in our understanding of respect, fairness, cooperation, dignity, and vulnerability. (pg. 66)”

At a remedial level for adults, Niina Toroi researched how the horrors of genocide as well as the effects of rampant rape and the spread of AIDS were addressed in “Yoga Is Like Medicine’: Yoga as a Form of Trauma Relief in Rwanda.” Integrating men and women as well as Tutsi and Hutu peoples, yoga was an integral part of a total therapeutic program including trauma counseling and group discussions. She conducted in-depth interviews as well as group discussions with participants and found “...many benefits on an individual level such as: better sleep, feeling mentally more stable and calm, one can focus better, one is able to plan ahead, makes one laugh, allows one to relax, and helps one to forget problems (page 76).” Toroi also found benefits for both men and women in how they responded to each other socially outside of the holistic program.

Other articles focused on diverse, yet important, ethical aspects of sport ranging from immigrant assimilation to coaching leadership implications. In an interesting piece, Ji-Ho Kim researched how Korean immigrants to the US found Major League Baseball (MLB) as both a conduit and source of conflict towards integration. Overall, MLB was viewed as an opportunity to create social interactions between immigrants and Americans, which Kim noted has marketing implications. On an individual team basis, Stura through her research of a Division I women’s college volleyball squad detailed the building of team cohesion through trust, accountability, the role of the coaches and team rituals. The unfortunate circumstances around the Penn State football program brought to light in 2011 were analyzed in one piece using a three-level culture framework. M. Lee Brooks and Michael Shapiro looked at the marketing practices of professional sports and how they are aimed at protecting their product – resulting by implication in more ethical practices. As a role-model to move forward, Marion Keim described South Africa’s University of Western Cape’s establishing the first Interdisciplinary Centre of Excellence in Sports Science and Development. The thought-provoking concluding piece by H.E. Holliday builds a functional approach to sports in serving society if properly held in perspective.

The book is a reprint of the 2013 volume 18 edition of the journal *Peace and Policy*; credit is noted on its cover. *Peace and Policy* routinely re-issues its themed journals as books, while a laudatory practice to increase exposure, an opportunity was lost in not updating some of the articles. Several were outdated, clearly completed prior to 2012, two years before the book’s publication, which weakened some pieces.

While the differing research approaches, writing styles and article topics vary widely in *Sports, Peacebuilding and Ethics*, it nonetheless achieves its goal of stimulating thought regarding possible positive and ethical utilization of sports. The book will be welcomed by those familiar with sports as peacebuilding as well as those new to the topic – and could be used in college courses addressing ethics in sports.

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