

## CULTURAL/LITERARY STUDIES

*Football in the Americas: Fútbol, Futebol, Soccer.* Edited by Rory M. Miller and Liz Crolley. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2007. Pp. xv, 291. Illustrations. Map. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. \$60.00 cloth; \$25.00 paper.

The study of sports has become a well-developed sub-field of the social sciences and humanities over the past twenty years. A “cottage industry” of edited volumes attests to the breadth of scholarly subjects that sports’ history can illuminate. This collection of essays, edited by Rory Miller and Liz Crolley, stands out in its attention to economic structures and practices that shape football.

A substantial essay by Rory Miller comprises the first section of the book. Miller provides a useful synthesis of football’s history in the Americas and highlights pertinent work on the subject. This introduction is impressively thorough, especially given the disparity of existing research. Moreover, Miller lays out the book’s overarching concern with the current crisis in American football. Unfortunately, he

passes up an opportunity to discuss how a focus on the Americas rather than other geographical or thematic configurations, can enrich existing scholarship. Contributions from Richard Giulianotti and Alan Gilbert make up the second section of the book, entitled, "Football, South America, and Globalization." Giulianotti proposes innovative ways in which theories of globalization could shape future research agendas in the study of sports, or other cultural practices. His engagement with theoretical literature is a refreshing change from scholarship on football that marginalizes such concerns. Both Gilbert and Giulianotti take a critical stance toward professional football's "hypercommodification," and its role in reproducing the peripheral economic status of Latin America.

The third section of the volume features new research on the impact of globalization on football's fans, players, and social significance. An interesting essay by J. Sergio Leite Lopes compares the Brazilian defeats in the World Cup tournaments of 1950 and 1998 to demonstrate profound changes in national identity. In the earlier competition, Brazil's defeat was interpreted as a failure of the incorporation of African music and dance traditions into the national sport. After decades of success, the 1998 loss provoked widespread criticism of the influence of transnational corporations on the Brazilian team. Instead of blaming Afro-Brazilian and working-class players, as in 1950, fans accused Nike and other sponsors of placing unreasonable demands on star players. Including strong essays on the Argentine crisis of 2001 and Mexican fan clubs, this section highlights football as a vehicle for Latin Americans to express dissatisfaction with neo-liberal economic trends. These contributions suggest provocative avenues of inquiry, including the efficacy of cultural practices as sites of political critique.

The final portion of the book, "The Business of Football in the Americas," is the lengthiest and most uneven. Journalists, industry professionals, and academics strategize as to how American football can be rescued from corruption, financial ruin, and violence. The chapter by Katherine Jones, "Building the Women's United Soccer Association: A Successful League of their Own," is among the finest contributions. Her careful reading of the U.S. women's league's business plan shows how corporate models often fail to understand the creativity and sophistication of fans. She suggests that if directors and sponsors had not infantilized women's football, they may have garnered more interest in the league. The rest of the authors generally advocate that football clubs restructure themselves and adapt to "business lines" to garner maximum profit. This portion fits uncomfortably with other sections that highlight the negative impact of corporate influence on clubs' performances, inclusiveness, and role in their communities. At times, comparisons to European leagues ignore the broader economic hindrances to the viability of professional football in Latin America.

Overall, the volume will be welcomed by interdisciplinary research programs and could be used productively in undergraduate courses that treat popular culture and business history. The book should also be of great interest to students of sports

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management, physical education, and related fields. It is decidedly innovative in its ample attention to the relationship between economic and cultural practices.

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