

# native americans in sport and society

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The majority of Americans today cannot name half a dozen Native American athletes, if any. Baseball fans might recall both Jim Thorpe and Louis Sockalexis. Football fanatics may remember Jim Thorpe and, possibly if they support the Irish from Indiana, Tommy Yarr. For golfers, Notah Begay may come to mind when asked about Native American athletes. But few can ably discuss the Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School team of 1904, the Shiprock Cardinals, and SuAnne Big Crow. It is to these forgotten memories that the vast majority of indigenous athletes have been relegated, almost completely lost to sport history and popular consciousness. *Native Athletes in Sport and Society* attempts to reclaim these marginalized competitors and their experiences. The edited reader traces their lives and builds upon six overlapping themes: 1) play of power and the power of play within the lives and careers of indigenous athletes; 2) contradictions and conditions of possibilities sport has offered American Indians; 3) politics and poetics of identity; 4) representations and stagings of Indianness in the context of sport; 5) continuity and change; and 6) the lasting significance of indigenous athletes. It reveals that the "presence of indigenous athletes always poses questions about race and difference," and broadens scholarly considerations of race and lived experience in America. (xii) Reclaiming the experiences of male and female Native athletes in the twentieth century, C. Richard King's edited collection has done a valuable service to scholars of sport and race and Native studies by deliberately rending the framework of popular consciousness to tell a vastly different story about race in America. By utilizing biographies like Daniel P. Barr's "Looking Backward: The Life and Legend of Louis Francis Sockalexis," Jeffrey Powers-Beck's "Winnebago is a Great Nation!: George Howard Johnson's Life in Baseball," and William J. Bauer Jr.'s "The Forgotten Irish Indian: Ethnicity, Class, and Football in the Life of Tommy Yarr," King demonstrates through the collected essays the importance of narrating individual experiences in shaping our conceptualizations of racial categories in America.

Sockalexis' perceived involvement in the Cleveland Indians name, Daniel P. Barr convincingly argues, "has blurred the commentary that Sockalexis's playing career offers concerning Native efforts to assimilate into mainstream American society during the late nineteenth century" (22). Further, "The team's declining fortunes and Sockalexis's run of bad plays in the outfield undermined his promotional value" and effectively sundered his connection to Cleveland baseball until his rehabilitation in the 1990s as the origin of the Indians moniker. For Sockalexis, his Indian identity in mainstream American society and baseball was predicated on his commercial appeal to white middle-class fans.

Commercialism was not the dominating force in the life of George Howard "Chief" Johnson that it was in the life of Louis Sockalexis. His use of medicine rites, Powers-Beck vividly argues, and his approach to the game of baseball demonstrated a syncretism that allowed Johnson to forefront differing identities at specific moments that were not necessarily in collusion with his team's commercial whims. This "paradoxical assertion of his American Indian identity" guaranteed Johnson a measure of personal autonomy that Thorpe was constantly attempting to assert. The role of personal autonomy and commercialism blends in Bauer's impressive study of Tommy Yarr, the University of Notre Dame football player who began his career in 1929, and King's article on Notah Begay. Thirty-three years after Thorpe began playing professional baseball for Cleveland and only eight years after the death of George Johnson, Tommy Yarr encountered a very different racialized world than the ones of Thorpe and Johnson. "Journalists emphasized Yarr's biethnic identity in order to make him one of the team," writes William Bauer. "In the process they undermined the ubiquity of the frontier struggle on American sports pages and pointed out America's changed conception of mixed-blood peoples. Yarr was not a savage barbarian on the football field; he was an Irish Indian" (104). In effect, biracial status afforded the media an ability to camouflage Yarr's Indian heritage while still allowing Yarr himself to claim his ethnic status. For contemporary golfer Notah Begay, King persuasively argues, his Native American identity was always articulated against more familiar racial categories and persons, namely Tiger Woods. In this dynamic, Begay himself "lives and plays betwixt and between cultural categories" (224).

Examining the work of Barr, Powers-Beck, Bauer, and King collectively offers an opportunity to see the categories of race in America shifting to allow hybridity for both commercial and non-commercial reasons. By the early 1930s, Indianness was not just utilized for commercial appeal but could also create space for bi-ethnic athletes to challenge racial stereotypes. Further examinations of masculinity and class in the lives of Thorpe, Johnson, Yarr, and Begay could only add to the conclusions regarding the limitations and expectations of race in American that Barr, Powers-Beck, Bauer, and King have offered here.

Shifting away from individual to collective experiences, *Native Athletes in Sport and Society* aptly gauges the role of communal experiences of sport and explicitly shows how sport in American Indian communities tied to state and national imperatives of assimilation and education. Ann Cummins, Cecelia Anderson, and Georgia Briggs offer a more contemporary consideration of similar female gendered experiences in their essay, "Women's Basketball on the Navajo Nation: The Shiprock Cardinals, 1960-1980." Utilizing anecdotal narratives of Navajo women derived through public storytelling sessions, the authors deliver a vital resource for non-Native scholars of indigenous studies, namely the use of Native knowledge and ways of knowing within a Native framework of communication that does not reaffirm destructive stereotypes of the subjects themselves. More specifically, the authors model an alternative archival space from the standard subject interview that more easily accommodates Navajo ways of remembrance. Vicky Paraschak charts a similar intervention on behalf of Aboriginal females on the Six Nations Reserve when she writes against Canadian governmental records that claim that Aboriginal women have an "insignificant involvement" in sport. Paraschak's claim that "a systematic negative bias in terms of recognition may be at work in Aboriginal women's sport" may not be familiar to scholars of United States sport. Paraschak's essay is valuable as it decenters the geographic limitations imposed by United States national borders and offers the potential to consider all Natives as transnational athletes. Yet, the nuance of Canadian Aboriginal issues in conjunction with its governmental bodies is largely lost to readers unfamiliar with either Canadian history or Aboriginal studies.

By far the most intriguing essay for this reviewer is Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith's "World Champions: The 1904 Girls' Basketball Team from Fort Shaw Indian Boarding School." Well-grounded historically, it provides the most intriguing glimpses of ways in which sport was used as a tool of US government politics during the assimilation era. Peavy and Smith argue that the young women of Fort Shaw were able to shift journalists from the "general rhetoric of Indianness to specific individualized identities" in order to claim agency within the assimilation process. "From the standpoint of Superintendent Campbell and his colleagues, the fact that the girls on the Fort Shaw team could move easily and gracefully in the white world provided ample evidence that Fort Shaw was meetings- even exceeding- the goals of the government's Indian education system"(54). Echoing Gerald Gem's "Negotiating a Native American Identity Through Sport: Assimilation, Adaption, and the role of the Trickster," Gem concludes that "athletes experienced a broader exposure to the white world than did those who remained on reservations or were restricted to school campuses," the Fort Shaw women were simultaneously symbols of assimilation's success and defiance of carefully prescribed gender roles that mandated their roles as domestics and mothers, not athletes. In doing so, it reverberates with the collection's larger argument that sport "granted an emergent pan-Indian community the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and demand equality" (xiii).

*Native Athletes in Sport and Society* functions exceptionally well as an introductory text that brings Native athletes into considerations of sport and race in the United States. It creates a space in which to discuss multiple types and methodologies of sport history and works to ground important considerations of race and ethnicity with class and gender. King certainly corrects the "pattern of neglect" that ignores the "history and significance of Native participation" in American athletics. A welcome addition to the bookshelves of scholars, *Native Athletes in Sport and Society* will hopefully encourage further explorations of Native athletics and performance.

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