



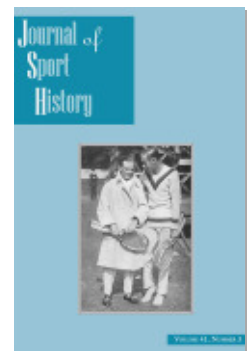
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Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics by Kuhn, Gabriel (review)

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In the postscript Klein outlines a brief history of golf architecture and encourages country club members to study styles and examples from the past when they renovate their courses. He realizes that some will object to proposed changes and suggests guidelines for club governance and political strategies for resolving disputes. *Wide Open Fairways* is well written, engaging, and persuasive. This book will not improve golfers' scores, but it will certainly enhance their appreciation of their golfing landscapes.

—GEORGE B. KIRSCH
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KUHN, GABRIEL. *Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics*. Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2011. Pp. 264. Appendix, illustrations, and notes. \$20.00 pb.

Gabriel Kuhn's *Soccer vs. the State: Tackling Football and Radical Politics* is a timely and passionate contribution to an increasingly public discussion of the politics of sport. Protestors in Brazil in the summer of 2013 raised important social justice questions about the diversion of public funds from basic needs to mega sporting events like the World Cup. Within the football world, there is substantial discontent with FIFA's unchecked global corporate power, and growing anxiety that the professional game has become just another corporate product. Writing as a former semi-professional player and community activist, Gabriel Kuhn brings a unique perspective to these concerns. Kuhn argues that joy and pleasure still come before these commercial relations, and despite the negative state of affairs, resistance exists both inside and outside the professional game.

In order to contextualize debates and undermine some of the lingering myths around class politics, Kuhn begins the book with a brief history of the game. Although the majority of footballers might have working class backgrounds, as Kuhn states, "it is problematic to claim that the rapid commercialization of the game during the last decades has 'stolen' the game from the workers—the game was never fully theirs" (p. 46). Instead, recent changes have limited working class people's roles to entertainers and consumers. The rest of the book is organized into three sections that delve into current resistance to this dynamic: Radical Debates on Football; Radical Intervention in the Professional Game; and Alternative Football Culture.

Kuhn opens the Radical Debates section by discussing the power of the world's most popular game and outlining five key political arguments marshaled against it. He acknowledges the validity of each argument, before deftly exposing its limits. For example, while fan violence is a very real problem, opponents tend to overstate how widespread it is. Kuhn argues that "the solution is not to fight football, but to fight a power structure that relies on mass control and distraction" (p. 59). The next two sections of the book build on this contention. Kuhn identifies five areas of intervention within the professional game: protests; social justice campaigns; personalities, or individuals using their status for social change; teams making political statements; and supporters' groups. Kuhn focuses most of the attention in this section on the complexity of the politics of supporters' groups and

Ultras, and on the inroads that they have made into changing football culture. Although the next section is shorter, it is a critical contribution to his argument. Based upon writings by, and interviews with, people involved on the ground in alternative football culture, Kuhn shows that football can be an important tool for gaining attention and bringing people together. While not revolutionary in itself, football's potential as a social force should not be underestimated. As Kuhn notes, "Soccer fans have done much more to open borders, to create international alliances, and to overcome prejudice and bigotry than what both the tabloids and the cranky leftist soccer critics want to make us believe" (p. 237).

Kuhn's book is not an academic text, but this does not mean it is any less well argued and substantiated. In addition to his own essays, which draw on scholarship and personal experience, he includes interviews, news articles, and an information-rich and useful appendix. His excellent selection of images also serves as critical information for his larger argument. The strength of the variety of evidence assembled is also an occasional weakness of the book. Kuhn's prose is often interspersed with other elements, such as interviews and images, which at times results in a confused layout that disrupts his narrative without adding to it. There are also places in the book, primarily in the debates section, when the book reads like a compendium of information, without an analysis that can link the distinct topics covered. Finally, although framed as a global analysis, the majority of the text centers on Europe with some additional examples from other locations.

Overall, this book is a lively and interesting contribution to the ongoing discussion of politics and sports. The personal commitment and experiences that Kuhn brings to the text, combined with his accessible prose, make this book appealing to a large and diverse audience of sports academics from multiple disciplines and to a general public of radical fans and non-fans alike. The title, *Soccer vs. the State*, is provocative, and despite the troubling contradictions inherent in the game, Kuhn demonstrates that football does play a positive role in social change.

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LOHN, JOHN. *They Ruled the Pool: The 100 Greatest Swimmers in History*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013. Pp. xx+209. Illustrations, appendix, and index. \$60 cb.
DE GEORGE, MATTHEW. *Duels in the Pool: Swimming's Greatest Rivalries*. Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013. Pp. xii+223. Illustrations, appendix, and index. \$70 cb.

After reading these books, I was uncertain how to responsibly review them. It is useful to have critical facts about the world's best swimmers collected in an easy to read series of books, yet I have some troubling concerns. *They Ruled the Pool* provides short biographic sketches of one hundred champion swimmers in rank order of their importance as determined by John Lohn, senior writer for *Swimming World Magazine*. The biographic sketches average just over 500 words. They focus almost entirely on the highlights of each swimmer's