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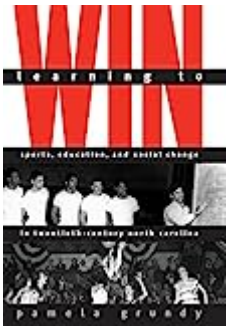

Pamela Grundy. *Learning to Win: Sports, Education, and Social Change in Twentieth-Century North Carolina.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001. x + 377 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-4934-7.

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Defeating Discrimination in North Carolina

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This book on the development of sport and education in North Carolina is an excellent example of social and cultural history, and it should appeal to both scholars and those persons generally interested in the history of sport, particularly basketball. Pamela Grundy does a wonderful job of placing the North Carolina experience within the broader context of twentieth-century American history, effectively treating local, state, and national developments. Grundy investigates the role and influence of sports in North Carolina culture and society. This story of North Carolina sport emphasizes that "native-born citizens" themselves have become Americans largely through sports participation and accomplishments. Anyone who follows college athletics, especially college basketball, should read this book. The players themselves would benefit from this provocative account of the development of sport in North Carolina.

The primary cultural value of sport exists in the lessons that coaches, players and sports fans learn from sports participation. These values, including sportsmanship, goal-setting, and teamwork, are often overlooked by society, as people focus on the popular entertainment value of sports. This book ignores famous professional athletes such as Michael Jordan. Instead, Grundy looks at the typical high school, textile mill, and college level players and describes the influence of sport and education in their daily lives. She does include the names of several prominent North Carolina players, such as Charlie Scott, the first black basketball star at the college level in the state.

Grundy provides a balanced treatment of both race and gender while concentrating on the struggle of African Americans to make inroads into white dominated sporting institutions. Grundy uses oral history extensively and cites sixty-three interviews in her bibliography. She also analyzes manuscript collections, newspapers and journals; high school, college, and university publications; and a rich secondary literature that includes books, articles, pamphlets, and videos. Grundy builds upon the recent scholarship of Glenda Gilmore, James Leloudis, and James D. Anderson.[1]

In her chronological account, Grundy begins with a chapter on the origins of men's college athletics during

the last two decades of the nineteenth century. As many people in the New South searched for order in an increasingly urban and industrialized region, Grundy argues that "metaphors of competition gained new prominence, particularly among the members of the state's expanding middle class, which was coming to dominate public affairs (12). Sports contests mirrored the "competitive conditions prevailing in the society at large, and the discipline, self-assertion and reasoned strategy that sports were credited with teaching meshed neatly with the qualities required for business and political success" (13).

Proponents of sports argued that they taught values such as discipline and character building and that sports trained southern men to bring the South into modern American society. In opposition, genteel reformers argued that athletics distracted students from educational goals. White college men viewed athletics as an opportunity to prove their superiority and justify their dominance in American business and politics and they believed sport was instrumental in their "vision of white manhood" (29).

African Americans, on the other hand, viewed collegiate athletics as an opportunity to challenge the developing social order and learn discipline, reasoned strategy, and self-control. Concurrently, African Americans faced several challenges, including insufficient funds and negative stereotypes regarding their savagery and heathen behavior. Many black institutions avoided athletics because sports participation might reinforce those same stereotypes.

Next, Grundy investigates the origins of women's athletics during the first two decades of the twentieth century. She determines basketball was the most popular collegiate sport for women at the turn of the century and "formed a central part of student life at many women's institutions" (41). Women were active in progressive era reforms and increasingly entered public professions and physical activity gained importance for the "new women" in the New South. Women viewed athletics, especially basketball, as a means to self-confidence and independence. Grundy claims many women progressive activists valued the qualities that basketball had been designed to teach, mainly discipline, teamwork, and determination, since they "offered effective preparation for the challenges young women would face once they ventured beyond college grounds" (66). However, many reformers wanted to remove women from unhealthy competition, and quickly physical educators began to promote women's exercise while they placed strict controls on competition (67).

Grundy begins to use her oral interviews in the third chapter on the growth of high school basketball between 1913 and 1934. From this point, she makes a significant contribution to the history of the relationship between sports and education in North Carolina. She carefully weaves her interviews and analysis of primary documents, always considering their implications in a larger context. Grundy shows that between 1905 and 1930, North Carolina's school officials opened several hundred high schools as part of a broad-based effort to prepare the state's citizens for an increasingly commercial and industrial society. The students played basketball in ever larger numbers because it was less expensive i.e. it required less equipment, fewer players, and both boys and girls could play.

In North Carolina, leaders saw the expanding system of public education as an ideal way to spread a similar gospel of training, discipline, and steady effort throughout the state and they encouraged competitive athletics to assist with those goals (74-75). Increasingly, entire communities supported basketball and it became a large part of their identity in the 1910s and 1920s. During the same period, social unrest manifested itself in the form of race riots, lynching, and labor conflict. Grundy maintains that, "the metaphor of American society as an athletic contest, in which individuals played designated roles in support of their various teams and in which an impartial set of rules sorted out winners and losers to a single, common standard, bore close resemblance to the view of society as a well-oiled machine and offered a similar justification for the hierarchical rankings such a system produced" (94).

In her chapter on sports and society between 1919 and 1936, Grundy steps up her use of interviews and continues to use them extensively throughout the remainder of the book. Grundy explains that by the 1930s athletic skills opened more doors and the state's universities "had expanded both their academic programs and their student bodies, and organized sports had assumed a new prominence in college life" (98). At a time when North Carolina's white colleges and universities expanded their curricula to meet the needs of an increasingly complex industrial economy and placed a greater emphasis on "practical" training, a debate ensued over the purpose of higher education and the direction of state society.

A major debate was waged over colleges as a place for intellectual ferment or cultural cultivation with an

aim to employment. Many people argued that athletic contests were an important part of cultural cultivation and espoused its practical applications to American industrial society. In the fall of 1935, UNC president Frank Porter Graham, an outspoken southern liberal and Social Gospeler, tried to downplay football's significance, including ending athletic scholarships, and was almost fired. Athletic scholarships became a means to upward social mobility that rested on individual ability and sports "maintained an almost mystical hold over North Carolina's white male population, influencing many men in ways they did not necessarily recognize or control" (125).

Grundy covers the growth of women's basketball between 1920 and 1953, effectively demonstrating that varsity athletic competition became an integral part of life in North Carolina and offered women a "major opportunity to earn respect and acclaim among their peers and within their communities" (129). Women's basketball was one of the most popular spectator sports in small towns and rural communities across the nation. In North Carolina, Grundy asserts, "women's basketball blossomed amid a series of cultural transformations that forever altered the world within which young southern women shaped their lives" (129).

Women's basketball gained popularity because it offered "freedom of movement, physical confidence, competitive spirit, individual accomplishment" values that were previously reserved for men (130). Women's basketball was an opportunity for African Americans to show "themselves as community role models and racial representatives, taking great pride in their ladylike demeanor, and most accounts of women's basketball, and demonstrate their strength" (139).

North Carolina women's basketball reached a peak in the decade after World War II. Women's teams were at times more popular than men's teams and women could also become community heroes. Grundy finds "women who ventured onto courts throughout the state claimed new ground for their sex, offering dramatic demonstrations of the physical confidence, self-assertion, and competitive spirit that had been so closely linked to men's sports" (148-49). Unfortunately, the popularity of women's basketball did not transform popular conceptions about the role of women in society (149). Grundy concludes, "basketball offered young women the means to confront this new world largely on their own terms, experimenting with the pleasures of heated competition and public acclaim while remaining rooted in the communities and in themselves" (157).

Next, Grundy focuses on the role of sports in the African American community between 1923 and 1957. She focuses on sports as a cultural value that shaped the lives of its participants. "Coaches sought to use the discipline and strategy of competitive athletics to prepare young people for the challenges of adult life. For coaches, athletics performed that role in many ways, fostering individual expression, teaching players how to work with others, building self-confidence, and harnessing the exuberance of adolescence in the service of a focused set of goals" (159).

In the face of Jim Crow inequalities, African Americans viewed education as the most promising means for racial advancement (161). Grundy maintains: "In a world where young African Americans faced a particularly broad array of psychological challenges, the lessons that athletics had to offer could also take on heightened significance, as teachers sought to gird their students emotionally as well as intellectually for a Jim Crow world" (162). Grundy argues "the discipline of self-restraint related to the realities of a world where even slight breaches of racial etiquette could spark a violent response. Athletic discipline thus became part of a broader cultural array of warnings and strategies…which encouraged participants to develop both verbal eloquence and cool self-control." (169). African Americans faced greater restrictions and job competition so scholarships were highly valued (173).

Black athletes became a major source of pride in communities around the state. Many blacks believed that "athletic talent could be used to further African American efforts to implement at home the principles of democracy they had fought for abroad" (185). In the postwar period, athletic programs grew with funding, and many coaches scheduled integrated games and called for equal participation in national athletic organizations" (187). In the early 1950s, black institutions gained acceptance into national athletic associations and national tournaments. Grundy maintains that through their challenges of national athletic organizations, "North Carolina black institutions began to realize decades of hopeful talk about using college athletic teams to foster racial respect" (189).

Grundy continues, covering the growth of college basketball from 1946 to 1965. At a time when basketball's popularity increased nationwide, North Carolina schools began to desire national recognition. Grundy determines "basketball became a North Carolina obsession through a combination of ambition, effort, and promotional skill" (193) Everett Case and Frank McGuire recruited from

their home states of Indiana and New York respectively, and they both enjoyed marked success at NC State and UNC. Recruiting violations and poor academic records led to sanctions and administrative reforms.

Grundy suggests that, "where sports had once been seen as a way to build discipline, honesty, and self-control, they were now regularly associated with deception, scandal, and unruly behavior" (216). North Carolina college administrators implemented reforms of college athletics, cutting funding and shortening schedules, much to the dismay of alumni. Regardless, the University of North Carolina, Duke, Wake Forest, and State soon returned to their former competitive status.

In the next chapter, Grundy deals with the decline of women's basketball. She maintains, "the thriving statewide network of women's basketball embodied a belief in the value of competitive sports and in a vision of womanhood rooted in the relatively egalitarian ethics that pervaded many state communities" (227). One of the biggest opponents of women's basketball were proponents of "physical education" and physical educators held "that women should separate themselves from the ills of an emerging industrial society and seek to exercise moral influence over a world too often tainted by a brutish struggle for superiority" (231). They installed extensive physical education programs that included intramural sports and opposed varsity basketball.

There was, however, greater interest in "big-time" athletics. A growing number of athletic scholarships helped maintain interest in men's high school sports but women had few opportunities. Growing interest in men's game hurt women's resources. For Grundy, the "dearth of women's athletic scholarships excluded women from the powerful equation that so profoundly linked male athletic skill to social, educational, and economic opportunities" (244). Cheerleading soon outdistanced the popularity of physical education "because it offered a prominent, public role in a major community institution as well as challenging activity" (251). Grundy claims, "throughout much of the country, visions of virile male athletes cheered on by alluring female cheerleaders became a key component of a postwar culture" (256).

In her final chapter on sport and the Civil Rights movement, Grundy depicts the struggles that African Americans faced in integrating into sports and North Carolina society. In the late 1960s, many North Carolinians resisted integration into college athletics but many whites, including coaches, supported desegregation. Equally important for African Americans, Charlie Scott and other successful black college athletes demonstrated that racial barriers could be broken (260). By succeeding at sports, African American athletes "could work meaningful changes on white Americans, gaining respect for their race as a whole and helping to combat the prejudice that stereotype, segregation, and political conflict had rooted in so many hearts" (261).

Integrating school teams did not, of course, completely transform North Carolina society but African American athletes helped influence a shift in the images of black manhood circulating through North Carolina society (282). Athletes such as Charlie Scott took an active role in civil rights movement. But the main message of their play would be one of acceptance, once again offering the hope that by proving their ability and following the rules, African Americans could indeed grasp the benefits of mainstream US society" (294).

In her epilogue on sports and social change, Grundy ties the book together in neat fashion. She describes the resurgence of women's basketball in the 1970s that was largely connected with the women's movement. She concludes that since the late nineteenth century athletics has influenced individuals and American society by developing the values of "discipline," "determination" and "creativity." Coaches and educators have labored "to combine instruction in strategy and technique with lessons in honesty, dignity, and mutual respect" (301).

While Pamela Grundy provides small discussions of football and cheerleading in her study, she primarily focuses on the history of basketball and its influence in North Carolina society. The book is well-written and presents valuable insight into the triumph that African Americans have realized in the realm of sports, especially basketball. At the same time, Grundy effectively demonstrates the challenges that women have faced in achieving sporting recognition on a par with their male counterparts. The fact that cheerleading remains a primary athletic activity for young women in most portions of the country reveals that room for improvement remains. But women's professional basketball leagues maintain a significant following and college tournaments have expanded. This book will assist anyone interested in the developments in the relationship between sports and education in the twentieth century. Students of sport and social history must read this work, especially for its extensive use of oral interviews.

Notes

[1]. Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women*

and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); James. L. Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

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