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S. Janaka Biyanwila, *Sports and the Global South: Work, Play and Resistance in Sri Lanka*, Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 2018; xx + 375 pp., ISBN 9783319685014 (European Edition), €109.99 (hbk).

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Sport is a normal good in that demand for it (if we can think about sport generically) increases with the growth of income. Since the 1970s, its consumption has been enhanced by technological developments associated with its delivery and in the context of the rise of neoliberalism. Sport champions its ‘evangelical’ role in enhancing health, well being and community cohesion. Ever since its development as an entertainment or as an opiate for the masses, it has extolled a quasi-neoliberal rhetoric in that it should be self-governing and exempt from regulation and supervision by various arms of the state. Despite this and like neoliberalism it has few scruples in calling on the state to exempt it from paying taxes, helping it accumulate resources, such as stadia, associated infrastructure, grass roots training and security for the staging of games, especially mega events such as the Olympics, regional competitions and World Cups across a wide variety of sports. Such security costs run into billions of dollars at the expense of the public purse!

Sport, which initially emerged in the developed world, or what Biyanwila refers to the North, has in recent decades worked its way across the globe to less-developed nations, or what Biyanwila refers to the South. In the South, sport has marched to a different drumbeat from that in the North, finding itself entangled with colonialism, resistance and the use of sport to enhance national development.

This volume is concerned with providing a critique of the neoliberal agenda that has overtaken sport since the 1970s, with a particular focus on Sri Lanka. If nothing else, this volume makes a valuable contribution to the growing literature on sport in that it examines developments in a nation that has hitherto received little attention from scholars. What is also valuable is that it has been written by a Sri Lankan who was also a leading athlete (and coach) who participated in a number of international competitions, including the Atlanta Olympic Games in 1996. Biyanwila honed his skills as a student athlete in the American college system, which adds another dimension to his narrative.

Biyanwila bases most of his analysis on insights drawn from radical sociological writings on sport. His starting point is the International Sociology of Sport Association and its quest ‘to contribute to our understanding of sport and also to inform policy that will make the sports experience less wasteful of lives and resources’ (p. 9). In reading this statement, it seemed to me that neoliberals would also perceive themselves as having a similar objective. This raises difficult issues involving scholars indulging in normative ‘battles’ (why are your norms better than mine) and the associated denigration of positive

research. Should analysis be based on evidence of what is, or be resolved by the use of the megaphone: issues beyond the remit of a book review?

*Sports and the Global South: Work, Play and Resistance in Sri Lanka* is organised into three sections. The first and the longest is a meta-analysis of the growth of sport in the North and then in the South. Here, Biyanwila examines issues associated with sports employment (players and ancillary staff who build facilities and infrastructure and the organisation and presentation of games and tournaments), impacts on local communities, property rights and cities, the media, college sports in America and the Indian Premier League. The second is two chapters on developments in Sri Lanka, which is the strongest part of the volume. The third is a chapter on resistance to the neoliberal hegemony (with its contradictions) of sport. Here, he examines activities resulting from actions within sport and more broadly based campaigns by extra sports organisations.

Biyanwila's meta-analysis suffers a number of problems. It employs too much jargon and is highly repetitive. The same terms, concepts, observations and critiques are repeated again and again as Biyanwila works his way around various dimensions of the landscape that is sport. This material needed to be substantially shortened. He conflates Olympics (essentially individual sports) with that of professional team sports. They reflect different dynamics, not that sports of any stripe (individual or team) are uniform, both within and across nations. Given his time as a student athlete in America, Biyanwila unsurprisingly provides information on the American College system as a source of labour supply for sport. He implies that this model is the norm for the world; College Sports is just another dimension of American exceptionalism. These chapters can be contrasted with his examination of developments in Sri Lanka. He employs a more descriptive (shall I say empirical) approach which succinctly combines analytical and critical insights.

Biyanwila is concerned with the way in which sport dehumanises labour. He is concerned with both the players and the various 'support' workers who build facilities and provide other services associated with the production of game days, especially female labour. With the rise of neoliberalism, many 'support' workers experience precarious employment, struggle to earn adequate incomes and, in the case of construction workers, sustain injuries and death. Biyanwila is basically dismissive of the role of player associations as a source of resistance and makes a few passing references to them. He perceives them in traditional craft terms, though he does acknowledge the formation of the World Players' Association (p. 271). He appears unaware of an article by its Chief Executive Officer Brendan Schwab, which outlines its vision for enhancing the human rights of players (Schwab, 2017). Unfortunately, Biyanwila ignores developments which have occurred among player associations, especially in recent decades, where an extensive amount of activity has occurred.

In contrast to the decline in (traditional) unions across the globe flowing from neoliberalism, player associations have experienced substantial growth. More than half the player associations in existence in 2018 have been created since 1990: 123 player associations (team sports) and 17 associations of independent contractors (individual sports). In 2018, there were 197 player associations and 53 independent contractors (Dabscheck, 2017<sup>1</sup>). The Professional Footballers' Association, an English soccer players' body formed in 1907 operates as a welfare society where it has provided members with injury,

healthcare protection and funds for second career training. Most of its funds come from shares of broadcast revenue, which, at times, it has threatened industrial action to maintain. With low subscription levels for members, this involves a situation in which stars subsidise the welfare of lower division players (Dabscheck, 1979, 1986; Harding, 1991, 2009). Virtually all of the Australian player associations provide similar services to members.

In recent decades, there has been a growth in women's team sports. In the majority of cases, female players have been welcomed by male player associations as members and have provided them with logistical and other forms of support. If nothing else, it has enhanced their ability to negotiate with the governing bodies of their respective sports. In 2010, male Israeli basketball players went on strike in support of female players (Dabscheck, 2017).

Unlike mainstream trade unions, player associations are organised into various types of federations/confederations to pursue the collective needs of their athletes or athletes in general. Global federations operate in football/soccer, cycling, cricket, rugby and ice-hockey; national federations in the United Kingdom, France Italy, Australia and New Zealand: European Sports Federations in handball and basketball; the European Elite Athletes Association; and globally the World Players' Association as well as a European and World Alliance of Golfers (Dabscheck, 2017).

Despite these comments, S. Janaka Biyanwila is to be congratulated on the extent and breadth of his research. His material on developments in the South and in Sri Lanka, in particular, make a valuable contribution to the growing literature on the divide between the myths and reality of sport as it spreads and intensifies its reach across the globe.

## Note

1. The information here has been updated from when the article was first published.

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