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Gaming The World: How Sports Are Reshaping Global Politics And Culture



Synopsis

Professional sports today have truly become a global force, a common language that anyone, regardless of their nationality, can understand. Yet sports also remain distinctly local, with regional teams and the fiercely loyal local fans that follow them. This book examines the twenty-first-century phenomenon of global sports, in which professional teams and their players have become agents of globalization while at the same time fostering deep-seated and antagonistic local allegiances and spawning new forms of cultural conflict and prejudice. Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann take readers into the exciting global sports scene, showing how soccer, football, baseball, basketball, and hockey have given rise to a collective identity among millions of predominantly male fans in the United States, Europe, and around the rest of the world. They trace how these global--and globalizing--sports emerged from local pastimes in America, Britain, and Canada over the course of the twentieth century, and how regionalism continues to exert its divisive influence in new and potentially explosive ways. Markovits and Rensmann explore the complex interplay between the global and the local in sports today, demonstrating how sports have opened new avenues for dialogue and shared interest internationally even as they reinforce old antagonisms and create new ones. *Gaming the World* reveals the pervasive influence of sports on our daily lives, making all of us citizens of an increasingly cosmopolitan world while affirming our local, regional, and national identities.

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Customer Reviews

One of Financial Times (FT.com)'s Books of the Year in Nonfiction Round-Up in the Sports list for 2010

"This book is a valuable contribution to the burgeoning study of sport in a global perspective. . . . Markovits and Rensmann's erudite analysis presents many of the key issues and offers interesting points to consider as the sports world continues to change at a remarkable pace."--John Harris, Times Higher Education

"[Gaming the World is a] very readable guide to the recent globalisation of sport by academics who understand both US and European sports. Packed with examples, from David Beckham to Kobe Bryant, the book explores the tension between sport's globalisation and the fact that most teams still arouse the greatest emotions in their local areas."--Financial Times (FT Critics Pick 2010)

"[Markovits and Rensmann] set forth a number of provocative notions growing out of the internationalization of sports stars and the globalization of soccer (the result, they smartly argue, of Britain's reach in the 19th century)."--David M. Shribman, Bloomberg

"Fascinating on matters both large--the late 19th--century dissemination of newly codified sports from two competing economic and cultural 'cores' (Britain/Europe and North America) to countries around the world--and small: the spread in recent years, from North America to Europe, of the wave, high fives and player tattoos. Best of all is their discussion of how high-end sports have managed to go global, so that Manchester United boasts fans from Beijing to Lima, while maintaining the local identities that give teams their emotional power."--Brian Bethune, Macleans

"Markovits and Rensmann provide a valuable contribution to the literature on global sport. Sports are changing at a remarkable pace, and they provide a way to communicate globally using a common language. Looking at soccer, basketball, football, baseball, and hockey, the authors illustrate the dynamics of change and highlight the influences of globalization at local and international levels."--Choice

"Gaming the World is so well researched and presented that its readers, who will likely already possess a solid base of sports knowledge, will find themselves agreeing with much that is there, nodding along with the revelation of facts and statistics as if they knew them all along. This is to the credit of the authors, as in most cases the depth of the material presented will greatly enrich the reader's understanding of the issues, while also providing a very satisfying confirmation of previously held suspicions. . . . Gaming the World, with its detailed study of how sports affect globalization and how globalization affects the culture of sports, is a broad step forward for this academic discipline as a whole."--Jonathan Lutes, IP Global

"[T]hey are fluent in the language of sport, knowledgeable guides through its history, and thoughtful thinkers about its impact."--Jeremy Schaap, Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs

"[A]n informative page-turner, which will be valuable for scholars of the GDR, graduate students concerned with methodology, and undergraduates studying modern German history."--Peter C. Caldwell, German History

"[T]he book merits attention for overdue insights into a

brassy, invigorating, and value-shaping facet of contemporary life that too many intellectuals ignore at their peril--one the masses know well enough to take to heart and mind ('the wisdom of the crowd')."--Arthur B. Shostak, *European Legacy*

"I am thrilled to have read this book because it discusses what I am most passionate about: sports and how their very existence, with soccer as a major contributor, have helped shape history on a global scale. As a player, fan, and ambassador of soccer, I am beyond pleased that the authors give my sport its due. Every soccer person, sports fan, and scholar of sports must read this book."--Brandi Chastain, Olympic gold and silver medalist, Women's World Cup champion

"For those of us turning to the sports page of our daily paper first, here is the book we have been waiting for. *Gaming the World* offers an up-to-date analysis of the capitalist dreamscape of an important leisure industry. Transformed by globalization, exposed to local and national backlash, marked by American and European exceptionalisms, and rife with symbolic politics, Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann argue, we are what we play--contaminated cosmopolitans in a global civilization still tethered to our local and national roots. What fun!"--Peter J. Katzenstein, Cornell University

"This is an exciting book full of stimulating observation and wondrous detail. It illustrates convincingly the central role of sports in our contemporary cultural complex, highlighting their globalizing and cosmopolitan potential but also their national and local reference. The authors bring home their many powerful arguments through a stunning range of evidence."--Modris Eksteins, University of Toronto

"This is a valuable, stimulating, and illuminating book that offers an ambitious, intellectually substantial, analytically sophisticated, and constantly thought-provoking consideration of an important subject. The authors convincingly link their analysis of sports to big questions about the contours, dynamics, and continuing inner tensions of modernity. They also make their subject come alive for the reader. You don't need to be a sports fan to find this book engrossing and enlightening."--Jeff Weintraub, University of Pennsylvania

Gaming the World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture by Andrei Markovits and Lars Rensmann is an excellent follow up to Markovits' previous volume on sports, *Offside*. *Offside* was focused on the development and formation of modern sports--soccer, rugby and cricket--in 19th century England and their expansion across the globe in the first period of globalization. This is contrasted with the developments in the U.S. which developed its own unique sports environment revolving around baseball, football, basketball and hockey. *Gaming the World* continues the analysis of sports in the second period of globalization starting in the 1970's in a comparative manner.

Specifically, the world plays soccer and the U.S. does not. But this work is much more than 'why is there no soccer in America', Markovits and Rensmann show how sports can illuminate both the positive and negative reactions to globalization. Sports can alter entrenched and unchallenged prejudices by an athlete, seen as an unknown other, excelling on the playing field. Thus, exposing the hollowness of those previous held views. Making it possible to expand acceptance by a community. It can also work in the opposite way by intensifying attachment to a unique local identity coalescing around 'my team'. The local becomes a refuge from the forces of globalization. *Gaming the World* shows that sports do matter. Their impact is felt beyond the narrowly defined space between the lines.

Great read! I use this book in my sports and politics class.

Sports are the object of such a rabid obsession in modern society that intense discussion of them rarely needs exceed wins and losses. Indeed, as Vince Lombardi's favorite saying went: "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing." Andrei S. Markovits and Lars Rensmann don't reject the wisdom of that famous mission statement in *"Gaming the World,"* but they push the boundaries of sports talk far beyond the information found in a box score. Never before has the world been as globalized as it is now in the 21st Century, and never before have sports like soccer, American football, baseball, basketball, and ice hockey been as popular as they are now throughout the West and throughout the world. Markovits and Rensmann examine these conditions through a fusion of ideas about sports and about globalization. They consider, for instance, how forces of globalization were able to turn to soccer from a game played by English schoolboys into a ubiquitous global language, and how "other footballs" like rugby and American football survived, flourished, and carved popularities of their own. Conversely, they examine sports as an agent of globalization and modernization -- how figures like Jackie Robinson were able to help dismantle oppressive forces in society by first deconstructing them on the playing field. Markovits and Rensmann's appraisals, though, remain candidly honest. While the cosmopolitan soccer clubs of Europe have helped ease racial tensions, the authors aren't afraid to face the harsh reality that European soccer remains an occasional bastion of racism and violence. Likewise, they confront the fact that, while women's sports have enjoyed a massive growth in popularity (especially in the U.S.), they still attract a disproportionately small share of our attention. Throughout, the authors convey a deft understanding and respect of the forces driving sports culture, sports industry, and sports fandom. It's also quite clear that they possess a firm comprehension of the work of their contemporaries and predecessors in the academic

study of sports. If they are great sports scholars, though, Markovits and Rensmann are also great sports fans, and they communicate their ideas so naturally that sports fans should find the conclusions of "Gaming the World" quite intuitive, as if they knew them all along. For students of sports, "Gaming the World" is an essential component of any collection, and for sports fans it's an eye-opening guide to approaching a familiar interest in an entirely new way. "Gaming the World" is such a compelling exploration of a global phenomenon that even those apathetic toward sports, after reading it, might find themselves tuning into a sporting event (like this summer's ongoing World Cup) just to see what all the fuss is about.

What a read! I read this book from cover to cover during my first sit down and immediately went put it on my reading list for a closer, much more detailed read. Just like Markovits's (with Hellerman) first book on sports, *Offside: Soccer and American Exceptionalism* which thoughtfully explains why soccer is not among a major player in American hegemonic sport culture, *Gaming the World* hand holds the reader through an amazingly well theorized and well researched explanation as to how sports have globalized during the past 100 years, and why certain exceptionalisms still exist. For me, however, I am once again amazed with exacting detail that Markovits and Rensmann put into their research. Indeed, I had no idea that the Fab 5's (my alma mater's much maligned basketball team from the 1990s) love for baggy shorts permeated throughout and forever changed the world of soccer, or that Seven Nation Army (a song by one of my favorite bands, The White Stripes), has traveled across the Atlantic Ocean twice to become the official song of ESPN's coverage of the Premier League. These tidbits, of which there must be hundreds, make reading this book an absolute joy. Nothing like being able to impress sports fans at events and bars throughout the country with details like these. For me, however, I was once again dazzled by the scholarly analysis that I have come to expect from both Markovits and Rensmann. This book truly shines in a number of arenas (I will summarize my favorites, as explaining everything would be the subject of a journal length review): Chapter 4, and its analysis of women's role in sport, particularly how women in the United States and Europe took different---albeit, reasonably similar---risks in carving a position for themselves in the soccer world. It goes on to detail how the United States has become a woman's soccer power house (also detailed in *Offside*), but really provides an interesting explanation of how women broke down every barrier that FIFA and national associations placed on women's soccer leagues, as they grew from infancy to extreme popularity between the 1960s and the 1990s. Chapter five moves us away from this story of soccer as an agent of increasing gender equality, to the stands of European soccer stadiums, where we begin to understand the increasingly

rampant levels of right wing extremism---even neo-nazism---exhibited by fans of many teams. The authors compare this to the relatively benign levels of racism and anti-semitism exhibited in American stadiums (read: almost none), and try to explain this divergent outcome. As a student of extremist parties in Europe I find this trend an alarming one, and found Markovits and Rensmann extremely fair in their explanation of this phenomena. I look forward to further work in this area, and am glad that Markovits and Rensmann dedicated an entire chapter to this dangerous trend. *Gaming the World* is a dazzling book, explaining the ways in which globalization has effected the sport culture in Europe and the United States, and how the sports have used their immense institutional strengths to resist these changes. I would recommend this book, with much enthusiasm, to sports fans AND academics alike.

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