BOOK REVIEWS

Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon by Leslie Heywood and Shari L. Dworkin. Foreward by Julie Foudy (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press Sport and Culture Series, Volume 5, 2003), 272 pp., $19.95.

Built to Win is the collaborate effort of two female weight lifters and academicians. It is an examination of the female athlete as a media image and the repercussions of recent changes in the ways female athletes are viewed through the media. The authors offer innovative feminist paradigms of female athlete media images, while arguing for a third-wave feminist view and suggesting that the more traditional feminist views have grown obsolete given recent socio-cultural developments.

Heywood and Dworkin examine different feminist movements as they view and advocate the empowerment of female athletes. Using interesting and distinctive modalities to examine the iconography of female athletes and gender role construction, they discuss the impact of media portrayal, female masculinity, female athlete body image, and even sexualized male body images. They creatively explore the image of female athletes through descriptions of their own experiences as athletes, discussions of advertising and news media portrayals of female athletes, interpretation of recent imagery of gender role messages in movies, and through a focus-group exploration of fifth and tenth graders perceptions of media images of female athletes.

In a very pro-athlete, humanistic and intriguing way, Heywood and Dworkin also tackle the issue of female athletes who pose in highly sexualized ways for men's magazines. They make an intriguing feminist argument that these sexualized images of athletes have actually been good for women in that the body image of the ideal woman has shifted from waif-ish and childlike to muscular and athletic expanding the definition of femininity in positive and healthy ways. The authors also suggest that the athlete's sense of authorship over their own body changes the meaning of the images with regard to power and degradation.

Sometimes sarcastic and critical, sometimes idealistically passionate with lavish imagery, it examines several aspects of the female athlete as cultural icon with an optimistic tone. The authors make a case that recent developments in women's sports have made substantial changes in the media portrayal of female athletes and they offer interesting new paradigms for understanding the cultural significance of representations of female athletes in the media.

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The War on Choice: The Right-Wing Attack on Women's Rights and How to Fight Back by Gloria Feldt with Laura Fraser (New York: Bantam Books, 2004), 326 pp., $12.00.

In her thought-provoking book, *The War on Choice*, Gloria Feldt raises an alarm. Her intention is not to present a nuanced discussion regarding the abortion debate. Instead, it is to alert unwavering, pro-choice Americans (and perhaps those open to her arguments) that the anti-choice movement's aspirations stretch beyond eradicating abortion rights. Furthermore, Feldt wants to motivate pro-choice supporters to take action. Feldt, who is president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, argues that pro-life activists are determined to dismantle a broad range of reproductive health services including family planning programs and comprehensive sex education in public schools. *The War on Choice* is a compelling and unsettling account of the tactics that the powerful and vocal pro-life forces are using to curtail women's reproductive choices.

Feldt documents the seemingly endless strategies anti-choice groups and politicians use to undermine women's reproductive rights. Her discussion includes various attempts to restrict access to contraceptives (for instance, attempts to categorize birth control pills as abortifacients) and the rise of abstinence-only sex education programs in public schools (according to her research, fifty-eight percent of all schools in the United States teach abstinence-only sex education). Moreover, she chronicles the use of inaccurate medical information to dissuade women from seeking abortions (for example, some pro-life groups claim there is an increased risk for breast cancer in women who have an abortion). In addition, she recounts attempts to grant fetuses the legal status of "person" (the *Unborn Victims of Violence Act* of 2004 defines a child in utero as "a member of the species homo sapiens, at any stage of development, who is carried in the womb") [93]. To conclude her book, Feldt dedicates a chapter which provides practical suggestions to individuals concerned about defending reproductive freedom. Examples of her proposals include participating in pro-choice lobby days, lobbying local officials to support pro-choice positions or volunteering with a pro-choice organization.

Feldt provides ample evidence to support her argument that reproductive freedoms are being eroded. Her work is generally well-documented and she relies on data from a variety of sources including newspapers, government resources, case law, scholarly journals and pro-choice and pro-life materials. However, Feldt is sometimes selective with her information. For example, she rightly fears that the *Unborn Victims of Violence Act* (2004) will undermine abortion rights because it specifies that "personhood" begins at the moment of conception; however, she fails to mention that the *Act*'s provisions do not apply to persons performing lawful abortions.

Feldt presents this highly controversial and complex issue in an accessible manner. For example, she shares her own experiences as a teenaged-mother prior to the availability of the birth control pill. In addition, she demonstrates the impact that anti-choice policies and legislation have on ordinary people. For instance, she provides a good analysis of the disproportionate, negative effects that cuts to publicly funded family planning programs and fetal homicide laws have on poor and minority women. She also assembles an ample collection of quotes from activists on both sides of the reproductive choice debate which show the intensity of the division over reproductive issues. Although Felt's writing style is generally fluid, some readers may object to her strident tone and highly charged language. For instance, she copiously uses words and phrases such as "zealot", "radical extremists" and "anti-choice insurgency".

Despite a few shortcomings, Feldt's book provides very good insight into the workings of the anti-choice movement. This is an important work, particularly in view of the recent appointments to the U.S. Supreme Court and South Dakota's recent legislation which severely restricts abortion. Feldt plainly shows there is a highly organized and relentless effort to curtail reproductive rights and freedoms. *The War on Choice* is essential reading for anyone who is concerned about protecting women's reproductive rights.

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When the Wood Clacks Out Your Name by Marjorie Maddox (Pittsburgh: Redgreene Press, 2002) 32 pp., $7.00.

Marjorie Maddox presents a collection of her baseball poetry. There are sixteen poems in this slim volume. The legendary and commonplace ballast of baseball — town ball re-enactors, Ty Cobb, Babe Ruth, the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League, Jackie Robinson, Little League, Cal Ripkin, grounds keeping, spectators, ballpark franks, rain outs, rituals, competitive strategy, the rules of the game — provide content to the poetry. Maddox knows well the historical and technical components of baseball. She is familiar with double plays, the infield fly rule, hook slides, knuckle balls, and batting grips. Her baseball poems, however, transcend the game, employing sports as a metaphor to explore gender, race, identity, character, mortality, and life itself.

Although poetry and baseball might seem, at first glance, an idiosyncratic coupling, the amalgam is neither new nor esoteric. During the game's formative years, poet Walt Whitman proclaimed baseball both laudable and distinctively American. The climactic lines of "Casey at the Bat," composed by Ernest L.

Thayer in 1888, remain a staple of the popular culture. Several notable sportswriters, including Grantland Rice and Bob Cooke, composed baseball poems. Donald Hall, the current poet laureate of the United States, has crafted many verses about the game. In *When the Wood Clacks Out Your Name*, Maddox adds to the canon of baseball poetry. "Clacks" are a series of sounds; this sequence of sounds defines poetry; and, in Maddox' verse, a sequence of sounds—a ball jumping off a bat, a headfirst slide, the cheers and jeers of fans—evokes baseball.

Director of Creative Writing and Professor of English at Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania, Maddox has published over 250 poems. She also has some interesting baseball connections. Maddox resides in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, birthplace of Little League and home to its annual World Series, and she is related to Branch Rickey, the iconic baseball executive who introduced the farm system and reintegrated the game. One of the entries in the collection, "Great-Uncle Branch," recalls a family photo of Maddox sitting, as a five year old, on the aged Rickey's knee at a family birthday. Although the young child knew nothing of her great-uncle's baseball exploits, the adult Maddox, via a poignant reference to her own daughter, now casts Rickey as part of the family legacy of "knowing how we fight the world and why (p.14)." As in the preceding, a number of Maddox's other baseball poems possess the perspective of gender.

Several of Maddox's baseball poems consider women's place. The game proves a mirror to barriers and opportunities encountered by women. Ruth biographers tend to objectify Ruth's sexual partners, treating these women, along with food and drink, as a manifestation of the slugger's appetite for life. In "The Babe's Babes," however, Maddox recognizes the humanity of Ruth's two wives and "those others" (p.6). Maddox depicts Ruth's first wife, Helen, a bride at 16, "oozing grief" (p. 7) at the Babe's infidelities. Yet, despite separation and her own eventual adultery, Helen, possessed of a Catholic conscience, did not end the marriage to Ruth; it took the "thick smoke" (p.7) of a fatal fire to end the legal union. In "The All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League," Maddox recalls an era when societal imperatives demanded that women ballplayers, with "skirts swishing up the dust," display a "fetching femininity" (p.9). Maddox portrays talented women athletes playing in a "four-plate circus, smacking of leather and noise (p.10)," imagery with multiple meanings.

Maddox belongs to a group of women from diverse disciplines who, during the past generation, have employed baseball to explore gender. In *Breaking into Baseball: Women and the National Pastime* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), Jean Hastings Ardell, writer and wife of a former major leaguer, uses the game to tell the larger history of American women over the past century and a half. Film director Penny Marshall's *A League of Their Own* (1992) views the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League as a reflection of gender perceptions and practices on the home front during World War II. Folk artist Malach Zeldis, novelist Sylvia Tennenbaum, filmmaker Aviva Kempner, and

Reconstuctionist Rabbi Rebecca Alpert find baseball a meaningful venue for exploring ethnic and personal identity. Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin's memoir, *Wait Till Next Year* (1997), utilizes baseball as the Greek chorus to recount her passage from girl to woman. In *A Woman's Work: Writing Baseball History with Harold Seymour* (2004), author Dorothy Jane Mills synthesizes an account of her first marriage with a vigorous assertion that she played a major role, hitherto insufficiently acknowledged, in legitimizing academic baseball history. For all of these women, however, Maddox included, baseball leads to multiple thematic concerns

Baseball is, or at least was, the national pastime, and in Maddox' verse it is a microcosm of the values and practices of the larger society. In "Rules of the Game," for example, she deftly comments on the sport's formal and informal protocols, including such arcane matters as the balk and the sacrifice bunt, employing nuanced, albeit gritty, language to render baseball a conduit to larger concerns. Maddox compares a foul ball, neither "a real hit or out," to "purgatory (p.25)." A "walk" assumes the quality of "earned leisure (p. 26)." Maddox likens a "three and two" count to that "fine line between do and die (p. 25)." And her "Patron Saints of Baseball" dictate that fans "read religiously to the end of the poem (p.4)."

Baseball is life, or so it appears in Maddox's poetry. Her verses have the snap, tempo, and authenticity of the game and of the larger human experience. Telling detail, evocative language, pregnant irony, pithy wit, and unexpected reversals burnish Maddox's lines. A creative intelligence animates her poems, investing them with verve and significance. *When the Wood Clacks out Your Name* will entertain, challenge, and inform readers, and one of Maddox's poems will even reveal "The Difference Between Women and Men."

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The Grasinski Girls: The Choices They Had and the Choices They Made by Mary Patrice Erdmans (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004), 290 pp., $24.95.

The Grasinski Girls is a story of six white working-class women of Polish ancestry born in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s who straddle the decades of the fifties' housewives and the seventies' feminists as they come of age, raise their families, and shape who they are as women, sisters, and mothers. Yet, written by a professor of sociology from Central Connecticut State University, *The Grasinski Girls* is more than the story of these women as it represents the majority of women in the post-World War II generation. Based on

the oral histories of Erdman's mother and aunts, this engaging and heart-warming book causes the reader to reflect on how their own lives and our times compare to those of the Grasinski's. Women of the postfeminist generation will confirm that "We've come a long way, baby"…but may also find themselves asking "But, what did we sacrifice?" and "Where do we want to go from here?"

The Grasinskis constructed their identities in the domestic sphere of their homes, local parks, and schools, what Erdman refers to as their "ordinary lives" (p. 4). Therefore, that is where Erdman studied their interactions and activities. She recorded the oral histories of her aunts and mother over a four-year span. Together Erdman and the Grasinskis reviewed the histories to hammer out "…a representation and an analysis of who [Erdman] thought they were and who [the Grasinskis] wanted to be seen as" (p. 4) to blend the voices of academia with the participants' narratives. Erdman goes to great length to describe her role in this study of feminine roles and expectations.

What results is a myopic, insider's view of the textured lives of these women that will swallow the reader with its entertaining passages as it causes you to evaluate your place in today's society in relation, especially, to social class and "life grooves" (p. 17). In talking about Fran, for example, who is described as resisting the ways a patriarchal society along with a strongly developing feminist perspective defined roles of women in the seventies, readers catch an authentic look at how one woman struggled to assert her needs while retaining her dignity within the life she chose to construct. I couldn't help but reflect on how my own identities as a woman might unknowingly be affected by cultural expectations that I just take for granted. Reading through each of the chapters Erdman presents helped me take a critical look at how issues such as how my ethnicity, position as a mother, my faith, my education, my class, and my profession are perceived by society and how that perception influences my identity as a contributing member of society. More importantly, perhaps, how do these factors shape how I value my contributions?

Erdman ends *The Grasinski Girls* by inviting the reader to consider finding her way "back to the kitchen" as she challenges her to "take seriously a set of values that are counterposed to competition and domination" (p. 226). Erdman doesn't intend to set feminism back a century. Instead, she seeks to help us appreciate the simplicity of womanhood, or, if you prefer, personhood. Rather than being driven by profession and one-upmanship, we are asked to consider being driven by relationships and to have our careers work for us so that we can enjoy the freedom to do almost anything and to recognize that we are the "invisible wealth we seek" (p. 227).

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