Jeffrey O. Segrave

Department of Health and Human Physiological Sciences

Skidmore College

Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

Email: [jsegrave@skidmore.edu](mailto:jsegrave@skidmore.edu)

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Ruth, Greg. *Tennis: A History from American Amateurs to Global Professionals*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2021, 319 pages.

Greg Ruth’s book is an important and significant contribution to the extant academic literature on the history of the modern game of tennis. As Ruth rightly notes, in the past, book-length studies of tennis by academic historians—and, I might also add, sociologists—have been few and far between. The two most notable exceptions are Heiner Gillmesiter’s *Tennis: A Cultural History* (1990) and E. Digby Baltzall’s *Sporting Gentleman: Men’s Tennis from the Age of Honor to the Cult of the Superstar* (1995). More recently, however, greater attention has been paid to the history and cultural evolution of the sport of tennis. Among the most notable studies of late may be included Susan Ware’s Game, *Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women’s Sport* (2011), Eric Allen Hall’s *Arthur Ashe: Tennis and Justice in the Civil Rights Era* (2004), Robert Lake’s *A Social History of Tennis in Britain* (2014), and Kristi Tredway’s *Social Activism in Women’s Tennis: Generations of Politics and Cultural Change* (2020). While Ruth’s *Tennis* covers some of the same ground as these previous publications, it offers a new comprehensive perspective by propounding an historic periodization of tennis that traces the transformation of the sport from a *fin de siècle* pastime of a western social elite into a global mass entertainment spectacle and by putting noteworthy events, such as the Kramer Cup and the Laver Cup, into historical context.

Ruth identifies three constitutive eras. Period one spans the years 1873-1926 and traces the emergence of the game from its humble beginnings in Wales to the privileged courts of Australia, France, and, especially, America where the game was codified, defined, and popularized as an exclusively amateur sport. However, the era is also marked by a nascent professionalization as the game travelled from the east to the west coast of America and to the luxuriously sundrenched courts of the French Riviera. If the era started with Major Walter Winfield on the singular green lawn of a Welsh country estate, it ended in 1926 with Suzanne Lenglen cavorting on courts all across the United States as part of the first commercially promoted international professional tennis tour.

The second era runs from 1926-1968, and depicts the ever-triumphant progress of the commercialization and professionalization of the game. This era is primarily marked by the evolving confrontation between the tradition-minded associations who wanted the game to remain an exclusively amateur pursuit and the professional players and promoters who embraced the game as a way to maximize the financial rewards of a burgeoning entertainment industry.

The final period runs from 1968-date, the era of money matters and the ascendance of the professional game, an era marked by open tennis, the rise and fall of Lamar Hunt’s World Championship Tennis, the emergence of sports agents and agencies, and the establishment of the Association of Tennis Professional’s Tour and the Women’s Tennis Association’s Tour. Since 1990, professional players dominate the game whose direction and fate they now largely control.

In his tripartite periodization of tennis, Ruth identifies and integrates into his discourse two primary threads that ran throughout the history of the game, namely competition for control of the game, a competition waged primarily between those who skirmished to protect the amateur sanctity of the game and those who powered its growth as a professional sport, and competition for the money, the story of how the financial benefits associated with the sport became increasingly evident and alluring as the sport increasingly attracted a world-wide audience.

There are two other ways in particular that make this book appealing and compelling. First, Ruth offers snapshot biographies of critical figures who came to personify the myriad issues and conflicts that characterized the contentious growth of the sport. Some of the figures, including Bill Tilden, Pancho Gonzales, Althea Gibson, Ted Tingling and Suzanne Lenglen are well known. Others, like Charles Pyle, Gene Mako, Lew Hester, Gladys Heldman, and Mark McCormack are perhaps less well known. But, by intermingling history and biography, event and personality, Ruth brings the conceptual narrative of the book to life, saving it from becoming a pedantic report on historical developments. Second, and perhaps most importantly, Ruth pays close attention not only to the racial and gender inequalities that were baked into the institutionalization of the game but also to the challenges that arose in the face of the stodgy white paternalism that exercised hegemony over the game. With regard to women, in particular, Ruth exposes the dynamics of play, fashion, gender, and sexual identity, and reveals how pioneering women, from Elizabeth “Bunny” Ryan to Althea Gibson to Billie Jean King to Renée Richards, championed the feminist cause and paved the way for tennis to become the most prominent global sport for women.

In order to tell his story, Ruth relies on a wide variety of primary and secondary sources. Most impressively, he uses archival records, oral history collections, organization and association minutes, interviews, diaries, published player and promoter memoires and instructional materials, newspaper articles, press releases, as well as academic books and articles. Moreover, the book is heavily documented with 50 pages of endnotes, a 14-page bibliography, and a 10-page index. In short, the book is meticulously researched and authenticated.

The ultimate result is an exhaustive and absorbing account of the massification of one of our most hallowed sports, the quintessential history of a sport that has moved from class to mass, from amateur to professional, from leisured pastime to celebration capitalism, to use historian Jules Boykoff’s apt description of modern sport. There may be some who will find the detailed attention to the dynamics of organizational politics, and the constant reference to an alphabet soup of tennis organizations and associations, tedious and confusing. But, for those of us intrigued by the history of a sport that has epitomized the tension between the private and privileged and the public and polyglot, and that has showcased the problematic treatment of women in a sport in which they excel on a global scale, this, simply put, is a must read. It is, quite frankly, the best comprehensive treatment of the development of modern tennis yet written.