*Jump Shooting to a Higher Degree: My Basketball Odyssey* by Sheldon Anderson

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Sheldon Anderson writes like he plays basketball: Disciplined, a little rough at times (or “on the nose,” as they say), but, generally, the “right way.” Without having to explicitly state it, Anderson is a fundamentalist. This is quite evident in his adherence to a “fundamentals basketball” approach and in his academic writing style, which, although not necessarily on display in this memoir, is well-received in historical circles. I jumped at the opportunity to review Anderson’s book because I have had the pleasure of playing with and against him at a couple of pick-up basketball games at the North American Society for Sport History’s annual conference. (Although I hope I don’t receive any “basketball justice” for my opinions!). It was at these conference basketball games that I also encountered historian Chris Elzey, who is featured in the book and, along with Dan Nathan, provided reviews for the back jacket of the book. They both praised Anderson’s “bildungsroman.” Indeed, *Jump Shooting to a Higher Degree* chronicles Anderson’s love affair with the sport of basketball and, taken in its entirety, results in a beautiful – almost poetic in its gruffness – coming-of-age story.

In particular, the first two chapters illustrate the life of a white youth growing up in 1960s Minnesota. I found these introductory chapters provided an almost ethnographic examination of a mid-century, midwestern basketballer, harmonizing rural life, brotherly love, religious upbringing, and Americana. Chapter 3 set the stage for the subsequent two chapters, with a smattering of historical lessons based on Anderson’s first stint playing professional basketball for a high-rolling German club after his collegiate career came to an end. Chapters 4 and 5, in which he recounts his experiences travelling beyond the Berlin Wall, deliver an excellent anecdotal German political history. He truly “lived it.” He fashioned a career out of his experiences, leveraging a basketball gig in Communist Poland to fund his PhD research behind the Iron Curtain (the focus of Chapter 7), becoming one the first Western scholars to gain access to Community Party files. The final chapter and epilogue rounded out his career both in basketball and academia, name-dropping some of his rec league buddies and exceptional talents he shared the court and classroom with.

*Jump Shooting* is essentially a memoir, not an academic text, and as such leaves itself open to some scrutiny. As a critical sport historian, author of *The Forgotten Legacy of Stella Walsh* (Rowan & Littlefield, 2017) and *The Politics and Culture of Modern Sports* (Lexington Books, 2015), one would think that Anderson would not gloss over some of the relatively serious issues he encountered throughout his sporting life. For instance, he only briefly commented on the fact that “sports were something that girls didn’t have the chance to do” in the 1960s (p. 24), or that one of his former coaches was charged with sexual molestation (p. 28), or that corporal punishment in school hardened him (p. 31). These are serious issues in the contemporary sport space that could have benefited from a heightened critique that a sport historian of Anderson’s status could have provided. In this sense, Anderson was rather flippant throughout the text, referring to “brewskies,” “chatt[ing] up a few birds” (p. 70), or that “those Catholic boys were horny and rabid” (p. 48). Amusing as it may be, to some, there was an underlying lamentation of the fact that things were done differently “in those days.” For better or for worse, Anderson’s nostalgia was palpable. Additionally, there were certain parts of the book in which it felt as though Anderson were trying to get the last word in an academic argument about, for instance, who ended the Cold War. This is to be expected in a memoir, but it is worth pointing out as an example of how this book is truly *his* odyssey.

Despite some of the cringe-worthy lines, *Jump Shooting* attains its objective of highlighting the characters and experiences that have shaped Sheldon Anderson’s life. Now in his 70s, Anderson still plays basketball and teaches. For all intents and purposes, he has led a full life, combining the twin ideals of a healthy mind in a healthy body. In commenting on the need to switch exercise outlets in the not-so-distant future, Anderson offered one of his most insightful comments: “Basketball is social play. Swimming is solo drudgery” (p. 193). Sheldon Anderson is a basketball lifer, and the sport has influenced his life in myriad ways. *Jump Shooting to a Higher Degree* captures his odyssey, while engaging readers with Communist Polish history, Midwestern autoethnography, and basketball sociology.