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**Bockino, David, Game On: How Sports Media Grew Up, Sold Out, and Got Personal With Billions of Fans**

Bockino, David, Game On: How Sports Media Grew Up, Sold Out, and Got Personal With Billions of Fans. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2024, 352 pages; Index. Price: $36.95.

Reviewed by Lisa Timpf

In *Game On: How Sports Media Grew Up, Sold Out, and Got Personal With Billions of Fans*, David Bockino explores the evolution of sports media over a hundred-year period. Bockino’s book traces important developments in the field of sports media, beginning with radio broadcast of a 1921 boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier, and taking us through to the present.

Bockino’s choice of narrative structure—chapters focussing on, and providing detail about, specific innovations or events—keeps the story interesting. Rather than a simple chronology (this happened this year, this happened that year), the focussed structure makes for an entertaining read, while at the same time giving the reader an understanding of key events and key players. Bockino notes that events like the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, the New York Yankees vs. Brooklyn Dodgers World Series in 1947, and the Colts-Giants NFL Championship in 1958, among others, all signalled pivotal moments in the growth and direction of sports media. He puts these events into context, both from a media perspective and from a cultural viewpoint. Bockino follows the growth of sports media, starting from a time when people were uncertain what its purpose ought to be, through the growth of interest in and demand for information about sports, the rise of sports media platforms, and ultimately the presentation of sport as a spectacle.

Bockino notes that in the 1920s and 1930s, “as the world lurched from a war to a boom to a depression to another war,” sports figures were viewed as “mythical heroes.” He discusses important personalities like sportswriter Grantland Rice, promoter and wrestler “Gorgeous George” Wagner, and former NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle.

One of the chapters I enjoyed most was “Libber vs. Lobber,” in which Bockino discusses the significance of the 1973 “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match between Billy Jean King and Bobby Riggs. Bockino describes this event as “part carnival, part television extravaganza, part tennis match,” and discusses the cultural climate before, during, and after the event.

Bockino notes that the exponential rise in the popularity of television, which went from “only a few thousand sets in operation” in the United States at the start of the 1940s, to fifty thousand at the end of World War II, and over ten million by the beginning of the 1950s, had a huge impact on the demand for sports coverage. He discusses other developments, such as the launch of the world’s first commercial satellite, Early Bird, in 1965, which meant that “live broadcasts could now be beamed much further than cables and radio towers had ever allowed.” Floodlights that allowed for night games, and slow motion replay, were some of the other important developments that enhanced sports media coverage.

The increase in sports coverage was not without controversy, and Bockino briefs the reader on that as well. Some feared that broadcasting games over the radio, and later via television, would keep fans away from the stadiums. But despite resistance, and at times, litigation, the march of progress seemed inexorable. Bockino states that “as Americans began watching more sports, they began wondering more about the players and the coaches and the teams,” which led to the increasing popularity of sports-focussed media, including magazines like *Sports Illustrated*.

In the later chapters, Bockino talks about the shift toward greater personalization of the fan experience, discussing on-demand broadcasting, market segmentation, fan-centered media like talk shows and fan-written sites, and other phenomena.

Bockino’s sense of humor comes out in comments like “Money, the undefeated champion of anything and everything, would eventually win out.” Though applied in this case to the debate about whether the World Series should have a commercial sponsor, it’s an observation that could be applied to many situations described in *Game On.*

*Game On* includes extensive chapter notes, a selected bibliography, and an index. Containing an ample number of facts and quotes, *Game On* is entertainingly written, comprehensive, and insightful. Bockino speaks with authority on shifts in culture, technical and tactical innovations in sports media, and key sporting events and personalities. Readers interested in sport media, or more generally sports and culture, will find *Game On* worth checking out.