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NFL Football: A History of America's New National Pastime by
Richard C. Crepeau (review)

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distinct periods from antebellum to the Black Lives Matter movement, which may help other scholars in framing change and continuity in the various episodes of Black athletic resistance. A final essay by Miciah Z. Yehudah aggressively challenges the sports industry as a “tentacle” of modern colonialism and white supremacy. Readers will be curious to weigh his very critical interpretations of Michael Jordan, Muhammad Ali, and others who have inhabited their activism “traditions” against the cloying infatuations that have been manufactured around athletic celebrities.

Yehudah’s essay contrasts immensely with the piece that follows it, the first of the third part of the book on gender and identity. F. Michelle Richardson and Akilah R. Carter-Francique outline the pioneering role of Black sportswomen and their historical activism to overcome limited access and multiple levels of discrimination. The editor, alongside Christina Kanu, returns volley by exhibiting that most Black male athletes suffer academically and personally after athletic dreams die. Together, these three essays constitute a formidable list to teach with or structure a debate about whether Black athletes *should* persist in the face of multiple modes of exploitation.

A final, slightly ill-suited triad of articles centers on media and artistic analysis. The high school athletic recruiting process is a site of conversion for athletic aspirations, talent-hungry coaches at predominantly white institutions, and the commercial interests of websites that traffic in statistical information, notes Travis R. Bell. He suggests that the mediated construction of recruits further reifies student athletes without consideration for their burgeoning identities and draws them away from their academic potential. The essay has little in common with the subsequent chapters on U.S. sports films and sports fetishism in African American art.

The collection as a whole proves difficult to reconcile. On the one hand, many good articles seem extremely helpful as summaries of Black athletic histories and the critical engagement with narratives of Black achievement in sports. On the other, the collection can feel repetitive when each author outlines their engagement with similar theoretical frameworks, yet it can also feel disconnected as its authors’ arguments represent disparate modes of research and claims to argumentative certainty. In the end, readers of this journal will find the first two parts potentially useful at a time when sports history discussions cannot be disentangled from questions about race, especially in America.

—Brett Beber
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Crepeau, Richard C. *NFL Football: A History of America’s New National Pastime*. Rev. ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020. Pp. xi + 298. Bibliography, index, and notes. \$125.00, hb. \$19.95, pb. \$14.95, eb.

The National Football League (NFL) seems nearly omnipresent today in the United States. Even people who are not football fans know the team names and recognize the star players. That was certainly not the case one hundred years ago when the league was founded at a car dealership in Canton, Ohio. How this change occurred is the story that Richard C.

Crepeau tells in *NFL Football: A History of America's New National Pastime*. Originally published in 2014, the University of Illinois Press issued this revised edition in 2020 to coincide with the NFL's centennial. The author has expanded a couple of chapters from the previous edition and added a new chapter.

The book is divided into three sections: "The Formative Years," "The Rozelle Era," and "The New NFL." Within each section, chapters are often thematic, which occasionally means there is some repetitiveness. The first section examines the birth of professional American football in the 1890s and its slow growth through the early decades of the twentieth century. Initially centered in the factory and mill towns of the Ohio Valley, professional football developed as a game to entertain the working class on Sundays. By 1920, team owners decided to create an organization, the American Professional Football Association, the forerunner of the NFL. The league's first decade was rocky; few teams survived into the 1930s. (An excellent appendix lists all NFL franchises by the year they were founded, including those that folded.) Crepeau moves through the NFL's formative years quickly. The league's founding and first decade are covered in about thirteen pages. The author then summarizes the next decade and a half (1930–45) in twelve pages. This is mostly a work of synthesis, so Crepeau cannot be blamed if the literature on early professional football and the first several decades of the NFL is thin. But readers hoping for more on the formative years will be disappointed.

Crepeau begins to hit his stride by the third chapter, which examines the late 1940s and 1950s. In this chapter, some important themes emerge—the NFL as a business enterprise, the reoccurrence of labor disputes, race and racism in the league, and the role of television in shaping the sport. These themes are continued into Part 2, which looks at what Crepeau calls "The Rozelle Era." This is the book's longest section, and it forms the core of the book. In this middle section, chapters follow a general chronology but are also organized thematically. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the rise of professional football as a major cultural phenomenon in the 1960s, as well as the NFL's dispute and eventual merger with the American Football League (AFL). Television, of course, played a major role in propelling professional football to the forefront of American culture. As Crepeau notes, "The landscape of the NFL changed permanently with the coming of television, the AFL, and the commodification of nearly everything" (61). Thanks to the game's seemingly made-for-television controlled violence and drama, Crepeau argues, by the end of the 1960s, "football was clearly the national pastime" (90). In Chapter 6, the author takes a deep dive into television contracts and the ever-increasing amounts of money that they brought to the league. After discussing expansion, battles over team moves, and the league's handling of various publicity problems (Commissioner Pete Rozelle's specialty) in Chapters 7 and 8, Crepeau turns to labor disputes in Chapter 9. His coverage of the formation and growth of the NFL Players Association (NFLPA), as well as the three major strikes of the 1970s and 1980s, is excellent and probably makes Chapter 9 the strongest one in the book.

Section 3 begins with the rise of Paul Tagliabue as the new commissioner following Rozelle's retirement, and the subsequent chapters focus on Roger Goodell's tenure as commissioner. Although Crepeau does not ignore social and cultural issues in the book's concluding section, at times, it comes across as largely an institutional history of the league from 1990 to the present, with the commissioners—Tagliabue and then Goodell—as the

central actors. The author devotes two pages, for instance, to Goodell's handling of Baltimore Ravens running back Ray Rice's assault of his fiancée in 2014; the emphasis is on Goodell, not on domestic violence. The final chapter examines the Super Bowl as America's gaudy new national holiday.

Crepeau's book examines the NFL as a business and a cultural phenomenon. It succeeds on both accounts. Anyone looking for a short overview of the NFL's meteoric rise to America's national pastime should begin with Crepeau's book.

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Dichter, Heather L., ed. *Soccer Diplomacy: International Relations and Football since 1914*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2020. Pp. 286. Index and illustrations. \$60.00, hb. \$47.82, eb.

In 2014, Heather L. Dichter and Andrew L. Johns published *Diplomatic Games*, a book about the links between sports, statecraft, and international relations. However, as Thomas Zeiler remarked in the conclusion, no chapter in that collection was dedicated to football. Six years later, Heather Dichter presents the public with a new collection—*Soccer Diplomacy: International Relations and Football since 1914*. This time, the book is dedicated entirely to the most popular sport in the world and its role in international relations.

Soccer Diplomacy shows how soccer works as a catalyst for international relations. Gathering researchers from all over the world, the book presents different contexts that illuminate the relationship between soccer and international diplomacy. Original sources and documents collected from a multitude of sites—from NATO archives, international sport organizations archives, and multiple Foreign Affairs archives—are used. One of the main merits of the collection is precisely that sources on diplomatic archives dialogue with archives of national and international sports institutions. Often, the idea of sports autonomy has kept these two fields of investigation separated.

According to Dichter, the book's chapters are organized around three interpretative axes. The first is that of football in the service of public diplomacy as a tool of the national state. The second is investigating the investment of nonstate actors in football; one can think, for example, of studies on football agents, the circulation of clubs and national teams abroad, and even the role of international sports organizations such as FIFA, UEFA, CONCACAF, and CONMEBOL. Finally, the third dimension hybridizes the first two and reflects on "the relationship between subnational, national and transnational diplomatic elements" (7). One of the best examples is the history of the organization of sporting events, which invariably requires collaboration between international sports associations, the nation-state, and politics at the regional level.

It would be interesting to resume a provocation made by Sarah Synder: can historians of international relations see fans, players, and coaches as diplomatic actors? Can football be talked about as a form of diplomacy? Or as a diplomatic language? (25). Peter Beck's methodological distinction between *soccer diplomacy* and football as diplomacy