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Sports Books for Christmas

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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With Christmas just a few days away and all those last minute gift ideas eluding you, I have come to offer a selection of books for the sportsfan or fanatic on your Christmas list.

For those interested in women's sport or women in sport this was a particularly good year for books. Madeline Blais offers a particularly striking account of women's high school basketball. In *These Girls, Hope Is a Muscle* is the story of a season with the Lady Hurricanes of Amherst Regional High School in Massachusetts one of the most upscale and tweedy academic communities in America. Amherst is near the main artery of the liberal heart and not a place where one would expect to encounter a great sports story. But then this is the year that Northwestern is going to the Rose Bowl. Blais follows the teenage girls through the season game by game, and life by life. In the end what you get are stories of several lives along with the story of one life, that of the team. In each case the surprises are many and revelations are both mundane and startling while all are wrapped in the triumph of the spirit of sport.

In *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters* former Orlando Sentinel sportswriter Joan Ryan does an amazingly powerful expose on these two sports that feature little girls who find themselves under enormous pressures at the brink of puberty. This book gives new meaning to Child Porn as it looks at the obscene exploitation of girls whose lives are dominated by misled adults, the need to win, and the need to remain little dolls. The cost extracted includes eating disorders, weakened bones, stunted growth, and psychological fallout of major proportions. For all but a handful of these girls the payoff in a gold medal is not to be, while the cost of a life is nearly certain.

And finally in the category of women's sport comes the biography of one of the first great women in professional sport, *Babe: The Life and Legend of Babe Didrikson Zaharias* by Susan Cayleff. This is not a popular biography written to inspire, but a scholarly biography replete with feminist theory, class, ethnicity, and analysis of sexuality. It is a sophisticated and welcome piece of sport history that offers considerable insight into the cross-currents that make women's sport such an interesting field of study, and so instructive in seeking to understand the complexities of gender in America.

With Orlando now in hockey world I would recommend *Gordie: A Hockey Legend* for that new hockey fan at your house. Roy MacSkimming explores the life of one of the greatest hockey players of all-time, the man who was Wayne Gretsky's hero. Howe played thirty-two seasons, the best of which were in Detroit, and the last of which were on the same line with his sons. This is the story of the Canadian dream in the Canadian national sport, and it tells us almost as much about the Canadian national character as it does about Gordie Howe, and both are worth knowing.

As we approach the pinnacle of the college football season with all the bowls and all the millions of dollars they generate, it is startling to remember that at one prominent American University and pioneering football power made a conscious decision to eliminate football from the campus and concentrate on the academic mission of the university. In *Stagg's University: The Rise, Decline, and Fall of Big Time Football at Chicago* Robin Lester examines the first great mid-western football power coached by Amos Alonzo Stagg, who may have been the first football coach to make more money than the university president. Given the subsequent development of intercollegiate football it now seems remarkable that a university would chose the priority of academic over football prominence, but Chicago did, and it produced neither the end of universe as we know it, nor the collapse of the University of Chicago.

Among the 120 or so baseball books published this and every year, I would recommend two biographies. Charles Alexander's *Rogers Hornsby: A Biography* concludes a trilogy of biographies from the same baseball era by Alexander. His earlier works on Ty Cobb and John McGraw are nicely complemented by another definitive work on this Hall of Famer. The other is David Zang's *Fleet Walker's Divided Heart* which is more an essay on race in America than a biography. Zang has taken the rather limited evidence on the life of Walker, the first African-American to play major league baseball, and used it to explore the vicissitudes of race in America. The result is both startling and instructive.

Finally on the coffee table list is *The Sport's Photography of Robert Riger*. Riger was one of the premier sports photographer's of the past four decades and some of his best work representing a range of sports is collected here. For those looking for heroes, photo collections of Joe Montana and Cal Ripken Jr. are ready to under your tree.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau wishing you a Merry Christmas and reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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