

BOOK REVIEW

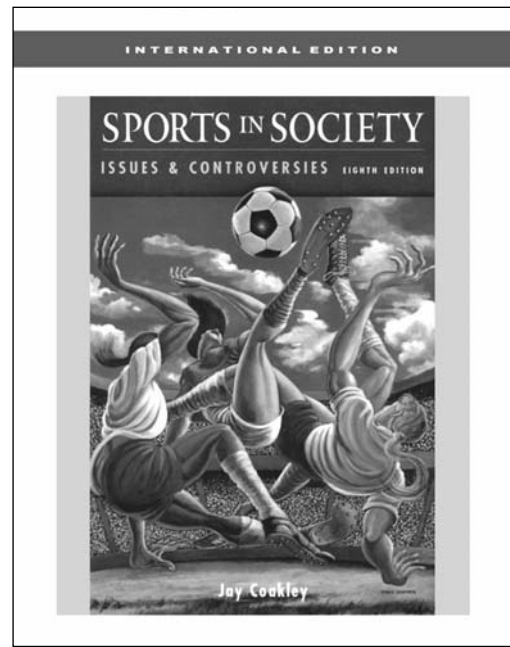
Jay Coakley (2003). *SPORTS IN SOCIETY: ISSUES & CONTROVERSIES*. 8th edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill. pp. 614

In our hands we are holding the new, eighth, edition of the book written by one of the most famous American sociologists of sport Jay Coakley. From the very beginning of his academic career Coakley has given lectures in sociology of sport in numerous American and, as a guest lecturer, in European universities. His role in promoting sociology of sport is multidimensional – he was the first and long-standing editor of the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, the president of the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport and the principal of the Sport Sociology Academy in the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance. In 1996, Coakley was elected a Fellow in the American Academy of Kinesiology & Physical Education.

Since it has been first published in 1978, the book *Sports in Society* has gone through profound changes – the author systematically and extensively revised the text in a four-year rhythm. However, due to the accelerated current social development, in which the existent social norms and values quickly lose their shapes and people conform to newly born behaviour patterns, the author has been forced to shorten time periods between any new, expanded editions of his book. Does this fact contribute anything to the thesis on the “galloping humankind”?

In sixteen chapters the author presents a global overview of sociological issues and questions related to sport, thus offering a reader a critical insight into the role and status of sports in contemporary society. The eighth edition updated and added important material to the previous edition due to the fact that the field of sport sociology had expanded tremendously. The updates include new pieces of information, new literature citations (more than 270 new reference entries), a large number of photographs, and something for the sciences of sociology, and probably of kinesiology as well, quite new – the contents of the book are linked to the supplemental digital material available through the Online Learning Centre (www.mhhe.com/coakley8e). In this way a reader (there are particular guidelines for lecturers and students) is provided with a simple and quick access to plenty of various sources arranged in an issue-related order.

In the first chapter (*The Sociology of Sports*) Coakley defines the field of sociology of sport indicating the connection of sport with the fundamental institutions of society, such as family, economy, media, politics, education, and religion.



By explaining how can sociological theories (*Using Social Theories*) be helpful in rethinking and understanding of sport as a social phenomenon, Coakley presents in an easy-to-survey and detailed overview of fundamental sociological theories (functionalist, conflict, interactionist, critical, feminist, and figurational).

To understand the meaning of contemporary sport, for example, the phenomenon of enhanced occurrence of alternative and extreme sports, one must get an insight into sports variations in time and place (*Studying the Past*). Sports has changed its role from a play *per se*, the self-contained one, to the current role in which athletes are trying to surpass (to the death) their own physical and psychological capacities in order to become and stay equal participants in the process of globalisation.

Comprehension of sports in general is transforming rapidly, simultaneously with the development of sociology of sport as an auxiliary, theoretical-empirical sociological discipline. Coakley writes easily, in a popular manner, using simple language, and he has succeeded in his goal to present complex sociological theories as easily-understood concepts which readers, kinesiologists, sociologists, students and others, may understand without in-depth experiences in sports, sports science, or detailed knowledge of general sociology, sport sociology, sport jargon and statistics

Dealing with the issues of socialization and education (*Sports and Socialization; Sports and Children; Sports in High School and College*), deviance (*Deviance in Sports*) and violence (*Violence in Sports*) in sport, the author indicates the fact that sport is (just) a reflection of the world in which we live. If the deviant behaviour is the one that deviates from the accepted norms and social rules, and is as such subject to sanctions, how can we understand ever-growing conformity to doping in sport? By introducing the theme of connectedness between terrorism and sport, Coakley confirms the interrelatedness of society and sport. The sport fields have transformed into battlefields of modern era; they are no longer places of chivalrous contests in which rules are strictly obeyed, but they have become places in which athletes fight for the attention of media (*Sports and the Media*) and political goals (*Sports and Politics*). Sport is transforming into a big business with one rule only: to achieve the highest accomplishments possible as the ultimate goal; the way in which athletes are to succeed in their strivings is no longer important (*Sports and the Economy; Social Class*). Therefore, media and politics are becoming more and more important institutions, side by side with sports, with an ever growing influence on it.

The expanded chapter on gender relationships and equity (*Gender and Sports*) explains the differences between sex and gender, the latter being socially conditioned, the differences between men and women, and focuses on the issues of origins of gender roles in sport and in society. Coakley also speaks about racial ideology (*Race and Ethnicity*) within sport structures presenting them as a form of

eth(n)ically based discrimination. The novelty in his approach is a discussion on the ever more present feministic discourse. His considerations of world religions, especially of religious fundamentalism, and their cultural connections with sports (*Sports and Religions*) are particularly interesting.

The eighth, expanded edition has a threefold purpose: first, to reveal the relationships between sociology and one of its youngest branches – sociology of sport; second, to encourage readers to think critically about sports as parts of social life; and third, to facilitate in-depth learning about sports in society by means of published literature combined with resources available through the Internet and World Wide Web. Coakley uses the concepts, theories and research, obtained in thirty years of his investigations in the field, as tools of critical considerations and of promotion of approaches to sports which will make it more democratic and more humane, at the same time contributing to democratic and humane changes in society.

Therefore, it is my opinion that this book is worth enough to be translated into the Croatian language, thus making it more accessible to Croatian readership, especially to the students of kinesiology, but also to a wider community of scholars and researchers, professionals, policy makers, administrators, and athletes, that is, to all people who are closely, directly or indirectly, involved in sports. The future of sports (*Sports in the Future*) is best described by the author himself: "...we can be consumers who accept sports as they are, or we can be citizens who use sports as contexts for actively making the world a better place".

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