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Game Plan: A Social History of Sport in Alberta by Karen L. Wall (review)

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Game Plan: A Social History of Sport in Alberta.

By Karen L. Wall. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012. xvi + 534 pp. Photographs, illustrations, appendixes, notes, sources, index. \$34.95 paper.

As we approach 2017, the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation, and start to make commemoration plans, Karen L. Wall's *Game Plan* offers what is arguably the first integrated history of Alberta's sporting past. A compilation and celebration of the diverse scholarship on the topic, Wall's book is a timely addition to the historiography of Canadian sport. In a complex narrative, Wall offers snapshots into moments of the past in an attempt to synthesize research on the history of sport in the province to date. Yet she also expands on this scholarship by offering her own analyses of team and individual sports and organizational bodies contextualized within dynamic gender relations, cultural tensions, and other social, political, and cultural movements taking place throughout Alberta and the country. It is an ambitious task.

In 364 pages of captivating text and pictures, Wall considers the place of organized sport, recreation, and leisure in Alberta's cultural identity. She begins the book with a chronological narrative of how core sports in the province developed and changed, moving from preindustrial times, to industrialized capitalism, to the twentieth century, to the present. She considers the roles of social institutions, the church and education, for example, in shaping individual character and collective imaginations through sport and leisure practices and how these institutions helped to encode notions of amateurism while encouraging certain ways of playing.

In part 2, Wall tells a tale of the growth of organized sport in the province and how sport was used as a vehicle for social reform. Offering sometimes brief and at other times more in-depth glimpses into moments of the past, she focuses on core winter and summer team sports and individual sports to tell the stories of clubs, teams, and provincial heroes and heroines while also introducing us to lesser-known athletes from rural and smaller urban areas outside the Calgary-Edmonton corridor.

Part 3 is where Wall's research and analysis are most engaging and insightful. Here she offers analyses of gender, sexuality, race, class, social control, media, and entrenched value systems, unpacking the power relations at the heart of organized sport in Alberta, systems that welcomed and validated certain types of bodies and ways of playing the game while marginalizing and excluding others. She explores urban politics and how sport has been one component of a shared identity and pride for Albertans, in sometimes troubling ways.

This book, especially its exhaustive and comprehensive bibliography and index, is an incredible resource for students, researchers, and community enthusiasts, as well as a formative piece of research on the history of sport in Alberta. Yet, as Wall writes in her concluding sentence, "this is one sketch of the history of sport in Alberta; other versions will continue to emerge."

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