



Sports: An Illustrated History (Oxford Illustrated Histories (Y/A))

David G. McComb

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Sports are such an integral part of human culture that it is hard to imagine a newspaper without a sports section or a television news program without a sports commentator. Sports have become a multinational megabusiness. Professional athletes are paid enormous sums of money and fans proudly wear the jerseys of their heroes. Cities risk bankruptcy to construct stadiums and nations subsidize athletes to carry their colors in international competition. Major sporting events draw record numbers of TV viewers and electrify sports enthusiasts from every walk of life, income bracket, and ethnic identity.

Athletic competition may be as old as humankind. Throughout history, sports have exerted a forceful influence on almost every facet of life, from politics and war, through culture and the arts, and on to issues that literally concern life and death. The ancient Greeks, by universal accord, ceased all wartime activities for the duration of the Olympic games, while historians believe that players of the ancient Mexican game "ollama" may have been executed at the end of each competition.

Sports: An Illustrated History is an engrossing and lively account of the evolution of sports through various civilizations around the world. Historian David McComb uses sports history as a window into world history and society. This lavishly illustrated volume is not limited to the sports we know well and often play in our backyards, on school teams, or playgrounds. McComb describes the ball games of Mesoamerica, Sumo wrestling in Japan, martial arts in China, wrestling in ancient Egypt, the Olympic Games of classical Greece, and the gladiator fights in ancient Rome. He brings to life medieval tournaments and peasant ballgames, tracing the roots of modern sports.

The histories of cricket, soccer, rugby, baseball, football, basketball, hockey, golf, tennis, bicycle racing, skiing, and other contemporary sports are covered in depth. The author introduces us to the greatest sports personalities over the centuries: legendary Greek wrestler Milo of Croton, decathlete and baseball player Jim Thorpe, mile-runner Roger Bannister, soccer magician Pele, boxing champ Muhammad Ali, tennis great Billie Jean King, and many others. Woven into the narration are stories about the role of women in athletic competition, the participation of African Americans and other minorities in sports, violence in sports, media coverage, and the sharpening distinction between professional and amateur sports. Following the thread of McComb's fascinating narrative, we visit the great stadiums of the world, become familiar with the strongest and fastest athletes, visit with championship teams, and learn how and why the international sports organizations and competitions were put together. The book concludes with a discussion of the growth of international competition and the modern Olympics.

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