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## Book Review: *Sport History in the Digital Era*

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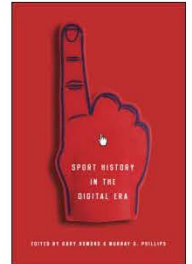
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# sport history in the digital era

Reviewed by Scott D. Peterson, Wright State University

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This book sets out to make history safe for the Internet age that has been thrust upon us ready or not in this century. The volume's stated aims include (1) seeking to distinguish between sport historian's use of digital tools and their engagement with digital history while incorporating philosophical and theoretical understanding, (2) illuminating the relationship between history making and the digital era, and (3) crowd-sourcing the project by including the perspectives of sport historians from five countries. The book is aimed at three primary audiences: sport historians, sports studies & sociology of sport scholars, and digital humanities researchers. A significant background issue that runs throughout the book is the resistance to digital history by many historians, which parallels the resistance to the introduction of theory by some of the same practitioners of history. The volume is organized with a three-part progression intended to reinforce and model its goals: Digital History and the Archive, Digital History as Archive, and Digital History is History.



Part One contains two chapters that examine ideological, institutional, political, and financial factors of digital archives. In Chapter 1, Wayne Wilson deals with the library's role in developing web-based sport history resources and addresses three key issues: the end of libraries debate, ownership vs. public profile vs. access, and the ethical questions of what records are digitized, who has access, and how much it will cost. In Chapter 2, Martin Jones and Bob Nicholson suggest putting digital archives into practice for sport history. The authors examine limitations of digital research, including the drawbacks of the digitization process, and the limitations of digital key word searches. The solution, according to the writers is to combine the strengths of quantitative digital analysis (i.e. key word search hits acquired through digital archive searches) and close qualitative analysis of key examples of the hits. This is a method the reviewer in his own research has used and can attest to its effectiveness at playing to the strengths of the traditional and digital approaches.

The six chapters of Part Two, Digital History as Archive, share a common thread of cultural production. In Chapter 3, Geoffrey Kohe takes the website of the New Zealand Olympic Committee as a case study that combines historical and contemporary elements to create a sport culture through digital visualizations and social media—at the risk of being fragile and politicized. Returning to social media in Chapter 4, Mike Cronin outlines its key uses (group sourcing, data collection, and social media as archive) with key issues (message transmission, ownership, and ethical questions). In Chapter 5, Tara Magdalinski offers several practical opportunities for incorporating Internet-based technologies into sports history pedagogy. Magdalinski argues that sport historians need to be competent and critical users of interactive Web 2.0 platforms (blogs, wikis, Twitter, etc.) while acknowledging the limitations of bringing them into the classroom. Some of the suggestions offered in the chapter that the reviewer has used with success include having students use blogs for active inquiry and engagement with theory and producing

multi-media history projects. Suggestions that he would like to use include connecting his students with students at other institutions to create a sense of community within the field and developing sports history websites as capstone experiences to allow his students to demonstrate their digital literacy.

In Chapter 6, Matthew Klugman employs sport fan sites as a source of primary material to be mined for analysis on the development of sport cultures, using fan blogs and discussion forums of Australian Rules Football. In particular, Klugman focuses on the intersection of sporting seasons, the passions they create—including the "group hopes" created by draft cycles (135). In Chapter 7, Rebecca Olive examines blogs from a cultural studies approach and advances an argument similar to that of Chapters 3 and 6: i.e. that blogs can shed light on cultural construction while also offering insight to historical practice. Olive effectively addresses the issues of representation and reflexivity in our postmodern and post-cultural turn era and how the semi-interactive nature of blogs allows them to be both a source and a site of twenty-first century folk culture (169). In Chapter 8, Holly Thorpe examines Facebook's role in the cultural production of memory and sports heroes through memorial websites.

Part Three, *Digital History is History*, contains two chapters that encourage sport historians to drop the "digital" tag and recognize that the digital era is changing the profession of history. In Chapter 9, Synthia Syndor argues that fiction, play, and art are connected and can be seen as parts of human nature (205) and that "Sport resonates with humans because it is a cultural formation that has biocultural, neurological association with what it is to be human" (213). Asserting that the Internet has done more to confirm than negate this premise, Syndor then asks her readers to make a seven-league leap with her: "Correspondingly, if we centralize the premise that sport is primarily a symbolic sacrifice—not a competition—then insightful transdisciplinary journeys are ahead" (215). After an analysis of three common historical approaches (Reconstructionism, Constructionism, and Deconstructionism) in Chapter 10, Fiona McClachlan and Douglas Booth advance Reconfigurationism as a fourth genre while supporting David Harlan's claim that historians must develop the skills of *bricoleurs*: "'They must become sophisticated multimedia ragpickers, quick, shrewd, witty readers of all the forms in which their culture represents the past, shuttling back and forth, to and fro, cutting and pasting, weaving and reweaving interpretive webs of their own devising'" (240). This process, according to the authors, ultimately encourages historians to turn toward the study of literary structures found in historical narratives (241) and may be the key to reaching today's students and readers who are drawn to the "mash-up" productions found in social media.

Once again, the solution to the problem of the Internet in historical research advocated by the book's editors and authors—i.e. to combine close reading from the humanities tradition with quantitative analysis made possible by the digital era—is a viable option based upon this reviewer's experience. Sport historians, sports studies and sociology of sport scholars, and digital humanities scholars will all find useful ideas for their research and their efforts in the classroom in the volume's ten chapters. Contrary to what newspaper editors and some scholars thought in the 1990s, the Internet is not going away any time soon, so we might as well embrace the aspects of it that are beneficial to research and education.

