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Book Reviews

WILLIAM GILDEA. *When the Colts Belonged to Baltimore: A Father and a Son, A Team and a Time*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994

VINCE BAGLI and NORMAN L. MACHT. *Sundays at 2:00 with the Baltimore Colts*. Centreville: Tidewater Publishers, 1995.

Sports history has been one of the most rapidly growing subdisciplines of social and cultural history. Almost nonexistent as an academic field two decades ago, its practitioners have since generated a wide-ranging literature, and the usual scholarly apparatus journals and professional organizations. Yet, as is often the case scholars study a topic of popular interest, their work has done little to excite or engage the general reader. Sports histories written for the average fan focus on the great athletes, teams, and games. Academic histories try to imbed those sports in the social and cultural milieu of their community, explaining why they attract the interest they do, and how they shape public space.

Recently, two books have appeared which bridge the gap between the popular and the scholarly. Ironically, both also focus on the same team—the former Baltimore Colts of the National Football League. William Gildea's *When the Colts Belonged to Baltimore: A Father and a Son, A Team and a Time* is a personal memoir of what the team meant to him. Gildea was a young boy when the Colts were created. His father was a busy manager for a chain of drug stores. Watching, discussing, and reading about sports were central to their shared father-son experiences. Gildea describes their autumn ritual of attending mass, and driving across Baltimore to Memorial Stadium, sharing insights into the upcoming game. He also locates the Colts in his geographic memory, explaining where the team fit into the landscape of trolley routes, movie theaters, and schools that made up his youth.

As Gildea says: "When I think of the Colts I think mostly of Pop. The Colts were the generational glue that bound us, and fixed him in my memory. When I still sometimes imagine him with me, I know its because that's where he was on so many Sundays. (p. 310) For many other fathers and sons in Baltimore, Colt games probably played a similar function.

Besides just his personal relationship to the Colts, Gildea describes the role the team played in shaping Baltimore's sense of civic pride. The Colts were Baltimore's first major league franchise, and the residents responded by adopting the players as members of their extended family. Having worked as a sports writer for *The Washington Post* and other area newspapers Gildea has the contacts among the former players and fans to show what appears to have been a warm, friendly relationship between the two groups. Players were present in local restaurants, at lodge meetings, and stayed late after preseason practices to sign autographs or just talk with the fans.

The sense of community between players and fans continued until March 28, 1984, when Colt owner Robert Irsay, trying to stay one step ahead of a Maryland law giving the state eminent domain over the team, packed the team's equipment into eleven moving vans, and left town in the dead of night. In an interview Steve LaPlanche, a captain in the Anne Arundel sheriff's department, described how he spent that night watching the moving vans pull out, only leaving when Chris Hinton, one of the Colts' offensive linemen, took him home.

While the loss of a team might move the fans, like Gildea, to contemplate the role it had played in their community, Vince Bagli's and Norman L. Macht's *Sundays at 2:00 with the Baltimore Colts* shows that the players could contemplate the role the community had played in their team as well. Organized as an oral history, with thirty-one interviews, primarily of players and coaches, this book also straddles the line between traditional and academic sports history. The players discuss themselves as players, remembering their great games and championship seasons, but the fact that the Colts are no longer there continually draws them back to their relationship with the people and city of Baltimore.

This could be done through simple affirming statements, like that of Ernie Accorsi, who said: "This sounds crazy, and maybe it happens in other places, but these guys played for the town." (p. vi) It could also be more analytical. Don Shula pointed out that Baltimore was primarily a blue collar city. Fans had limited money for entertainment. The fact that they chose to spend their money on the Colts was something Shula saw as proof of their loyalty,

sincerity, and friendship. The team was determined to respond in kind.

The early team management under owner Carroll Rosenbloom was given credit by many of the players for developing the sense of player-fan-Baltimore solidarity. Gino Marchetti, a Hall of Fame defensive end, remembered being sent to speak at local civic groups, and the way Rosenbloom prodded him and other players to get involved in business. Marchetti explained that he came out of retirement in 1966 not because he wanted to, but because the team needed him, and "because the organization was always so good to me." (p. 34) Joe Ehrmann remembered the teams widespread involvement in local charities and non-profit institutions. Ehrmann himself became a non-denominational minister, and returned to Baltimore to work with underprivileged youth.

For some players, like Lydell Mitchell, the very sense of being part of a team tied into a community and a tradition made Baltimore a good place to play. In his interview he said: "To this day, the most significant thing I remember about Baltimore was as a rookie in 1972, when the alumni came back and the guys ran out through the goal posts to the middle of the field. That was exciting to me. When I saw that, I said, 'Man, I hope I have a long career here and do that.'" By the time Mitchell's career was over, though, the Colts were almost gone.

Perhaps the best proof of the special ties between the Colts and the people of Baltimore is the fact that, even after the team had left, many of the old players remained. Bagli and Macht point out proudly that sixteen of their first twenty-five interviews still made their homes in Baltimore, even though they had no family ties to the area. And they have remained active in the community. Recently, when Parks Sausages, the first African-American owned company to sell public stock, and a Baltimore institution since 1951, ran into financial difficulties, Lydell Mitchell was one of the investors who helped organize a bailout.

When the Colts Belonged to Baltimore: A Father and a Son, A Team and a Time and *Sundays at 2:00 with the Baltimore Colts* are not academic books. They lack footnotes and a historiographic setting. They are, however, books sports historians need to be aware of. They provide interesting models for how scholars might approach the question of the role of spectator sports in American communities and the American imagination.

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