

BOOK REVIEWS

A Whole Other Ball Game: Women's Literature on Women's Sport. Edited by Joli Sandoz. New York: Noonday Press, 1997. 324 pages. \$13.00.

Joli Sandoz's first book is also the first collection of fiction and poetry written by women about women's sport. The pieces span a range of sports from golf to baseball and back again and were previously published between 1895 and 1995. Together they are a fairly complete sampling of the range of sports literature by and about women, and as a whole provide a compelling and often moving overview of the attitude towards women's sports by both the athletes and those who surround them.

Sandoz's work begins with a brief summary of the history of women's sports in the United States. From the first women's intercollegiate basketball game between Stanford and Berkeley in 1896 through the 1996 inaugural season of one of the newest women's professional basketball leagues (the ABL), Sandoz describes how women played sports despite the heavy opposition of society as a whole. Women and girls were warned against physical games because of the "danger" to their reproductive organs and frail bodies. Those who did show athletic prowess were labeled as mannish and feared either to be over-sexed or, alternatively, lesbians. Yet despite the disapproval of the culture, women and girls continued to play and continued to improve. Like Sandoz, who traces her own love of sport to her childhood, women played in gyms with each other and in the parks with their brothers until ultimately women's athletics gained a little more stature and a little more respect in American culture. Sandoz makes much of the century gap between that basketball game in California watched by five hundred vocal women to the Seattle Reign's debut in the ABL complete with vendors and photographers. To celebrate the advances, she collected a century of literature in *A Whole Other Ball Game* as evidence that while the respect level might have changed, the love of sport did not.

The oldest piece in the anthology, "Revenge," written by Abby Carter

Goodloe in 1895 describes the enthusiasm and pride of female athletes. It tells the story of young female college athletes frustrated by a newspaper article which pokes fun at the athletes at girl's colleges and suggests that their training and physical development is but a joke. When the women's leader expounds that "it is time the public was learning the true state of things—that girls can and do swim, and row and play golf and tennis, and run and walk about, just as their brothers do," her comrades cheer. They extract their revenge by inviting the male author out for the day, humiliating him at each sport he had mocked in his article. Although the story illustrates the class-based aspects of sport—these elite, white women golf and run track rather than play baseball—it also underlines the passion for the games, a passion reflected in each of the other pieces in this anthology.

Both the authors and their stories represent a wide range of sport and individuals, including women and girls of different races, classes, and sexualities. "Her Marathon" deals with working-class athletes who run in order gain control over at least one aspect of their lives. "Wet" tells the story of women who swim because the water liberates them from the limitations of gravity. "Posting-Up" examines what it is like to be a young woman struggling with her identity and her sexuality on a basketball team. Many of the tales address the joys of playing with parents, husbands, and siblings. The representative sports are limited, however, as some of the less traditional women's sports such as rugby, boxing, and ice hockey are ignored, but this may be from the dearth of literature rather than intentional neglect by the editor.

The diversity of authors represented in the volume is impressive: thirty-seven writers are included, and many are well-known in a variety of fields. Adrienne Rich's poetry appears as does the work of Ellen Gilchrist, journalist and broadcaster on National Public Radio. Mariah Burton Nelson, author of *The Stronger Women Get*, *The More Men Love Football*, has penned poetry for this anthology. Activist Toni Cade Bambara, author of the American Book Award winning *The Salt Eaters*, tells the story of a young girl who runs races in the park because she loves competition.

Sandoz has collected an enticing array of literature spanning the last century. Several of the stories are excerpts of novels. These pieces, including *Lady Lobo* by Kristen Garrett, are complete stories by themselves, yet they are tantalizing enough that they leave the reader curious about the characters, encouraged to jot down the author's name, to seek out the rest of the tale. Although the lack of structure is a bit irritating (Sandoz has no recognizable order to her collection—they are neither chronological or by sport), the content of the work is wonderful. This volume celebrates women's sport and women's literature and acknowledges the history of both.

Sarah K. Fields