

A Wrestling Life: The Inspiring Stories of Dan Gable

David R. McMahon

Kirkwood Community College, Iowa City Campus

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Bennett is not a historian, however. He struggles to move between larger historical trends and the localized histories of the writing programs. Broad swaths of history are glossed in such a manner as to prove meaningless and unhelpful to readers: “Rapid changes touched everybody and divided the forward-looking from the backward-glancing. Was the future the solution or the problem? Was the nation halfway to salvation or farther from it than ever before?” (18). Bennett wishes to destroy the canard that MFA programs were apolitical, removed from larger forces such as Cold War fears and strategies, but he winds up reiterating another one—that of a Cold War consensus. He relies on ill-defined terms such as “Cold War agenda” and “Cold War intellectual consensus” without explaining or identifying whose agenda was being carried out. Bennett ignores the scholarship that proves the very idea of a Cold War consensus was another fiction, albeit a politically useful one. As scholars such as Alan Brinkley have documented, this “consensus” was an illusion, particularly when it came to intellectuals and writers. Writers were more often the target of Cold War apparatus than its beneficiaries. However, Bennett only touches on this briefly when he discusses Engle’s dismaying encounter with Red Scare allegations in 1952 that led to the cancellation of an invited lecture at Marshall College.

Workshops of Empire is not recommended for general readers, as it is challenging in both its prose style and its assumptions. However, it will certainly prove of interest to researchers of Iowa history for its treatment of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop and the intriguing use of archival evidence from the Paul Engle Papers at the University of Iowa, a collection that deserves further study.

A Wrestling Life: The Inspiring Stories of Dan Gable, by Dan Gable with Scott Schulte. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015. xvi, 155 pages. Illustrations, appendixes, index. \$23.00 hardcover.

Reviewer David R. McMahon is professor of history at Kirkwood Community College, Iowa City Campus. Much of his research and writing have focused on Iowa’s sport history.

Often described as the most successful coach in collegiate history, Dan Gable earned the right to impart life lessons. The architect of one of the most dominating dynasties in collegiate sports—coaching the University of Iowa Hawkeyes to 15 national wrestling titles, his views on life and how to succeed are worth considering. Fortunately for Gable, he found an eager partner in Scott Schulte. Published by the University of Iowa Press, *A Wrestling Life* is an easy read but rather light fare for an academic press. It has merit in sports literature if only for what it ignores.

For aficionados of wrestling and fans of Gable, of whom there are many, much here will be familiar. Movingly, he discusses the tragic incident that fueled his manic ambition to become the embodiment of amateur wrestling. His eldest sister, Diane, was murdered by a classmate in 1964 in the Gable family home. His family already had troubles, but this tragedy compelled Gable to become the hyper-focused athlete of legend and the popular cultural icon we know him to be.

At times, Gable can be preachy. For this he will be forgiven by those who idolize him. Sport historians, however, would like to know more than Gable's life lessons. What scholars would like to know he does not seem very interested in telling. At an event in Iowa City to celebrate the publication of the book, Gable criticized Nolan Zavoral's *A Season on the Mat* (1997) for not conforming to his expectations, although it is a more revealing book than *A Wrestling Life*. There are hints in this book (and in that book launch talk) of a darker history. For example, there is the abandoned run for governor prompted by Karl Rove and Gable's admission that the drive to win made him unable to comment on the tragic events that unfolded around him in Munich in 1972.

Anyone familiar with the history of Iowa wrestling has heard the rumors of wild and reckless behavior by his wrestlers—drinking and fighting their way through Iowa City—as the program rose to prominence. I would like to know more about that—again, something hinted at during the memorable evening that launched the book. Historians are often interested in things historical figures are unwilling or unable to talk about.

A Wrestling Life is a revealing choice for an academic press. Clearly, the publishers hoped that this book would sell, and no doubt it has. Gable's website advertises the book along with motivational speaking engagements. *A Wrestling Life* is an obvious example of how academic presses have been forced to appeal to larger audiences. If this helps the cause of academic publishing, so be it. But there is more to know about the history of Iowa wrestling than is revealed in this book.