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### **Review/Reseña**

Brenda Elsey. *Citizens & Sportsmen: Fútbol & Politics in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Chile*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012.

## **Football, History and Politics in Chile**

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When I first played amateur football in Santiago de Chile I was a newly-arrived English teacher whose vocabulary in the Spanish language was sparse, and whose ability to string even the most basic sentence together was non-existent. To make matters worse, none of the Chileans I met had ever heard of my team, Wycombe Wanderers Football Club. Imagine my delight, therefore, when the games began and my new *compañeros* shouted ‘corner!’, and ‘penalti!’, and we embraced together in celebration of each ‘gol!’ Afterwards I was commended for the respect I had shown towards ‘*el fair play*,’ and it was agreed that a drink or two would be in order to celebrate my arrival and the arrival of my two English co-workers, who had all joined the

team in Quinta Normal, Santiago, together. The players were a motley crew of old stagers, middle-aged midfielders who refused to acknowledge the waning of their skills, and a few students at the nearby Universidad de Santiago de Chile. Together we piled in to cars and pickups, and headed across town to middle-class Nuñoa where one of the players lived, and who proposed to host our *copa de bienvenida* with beer, wine and pisco.

It was 1993, and although Patricio Aylwin's Concertación-led government had been in power for three years, General Augusto Pinochet remained as head of the armed forces, and civilian-military tension was obvious even to a political ingénue like me. (On 11 September, a month after our arrival, tanks had rolled onto the streets to fire water canons at protesters marking the twentieth-anniversary of the military coup that ended Salvador Allende's presidency and his life.) In the early hours, when the pisco bottles had been emptied and bonds of eternal friendship had been pledged, our host insisted on driving us back across town. Racing along the Alameda (the Avenida Libertador Bernardo O'Higgins, as it had been renamed by Pinochet's regime) our new friend greeted every red traffic light with exhortations ("Turn Green! Come on! Turn Green!") followed by admonitions ("You lose! You lose!") as he ignored every single traffic signal, swerving past vehicles that thought they had the right of way, swearing and tooting his horn whilst wearing the most wonderful, gleeful and exhilarated smile on his face. I clutched my seatbelt and dreamt of England.

At the time I felt that that I had been lucky to escape with my life from a drunk driving nightmare, and resolved to be more careful about getting the bus or metro home after an evening out rather than accepting lifts from kindly drunks who refused to countenance my paying for a taxi. Having read Brenda Elsey's excellent new book *Citizens & Sportsmen*, however, I begin to recognize in my hazy memories the bigger social, cultural and political horizons of my footballing in Transition-era Santiago. Elsey argues persuasively that amateur football had been, during the early twentieth-century, a key locus for the elaboration of working-class civic involvement and then, in the 1960s and during Allende's presidency, a crucial site for local political activism and resistance to centralist and consumerist authority. It makes me think that my footballing friend and his refusal to recognize

a stop sign might be an episode demonstrating how activities linked to amateur football represented an outlet for his discontent with authority. Or was he just drunk and showing off to foreigners?

This magnificently-researched book delves into the subject of amateur football in Chile from its origins all the way through to the late twentieth century. It is a pioneering monograph that should do much to open up the cultural and social history of organised sports in Chile, and I hope that it is not long before the book is translated into Spanish and published there. Although the author's principal focus is on amateur (as opposed to its much more celebrated counterpart, professional) football, and overwhelmingly on Santiago rather than other cities or towns, she does a great job of linking her local stories into bigger national processes, and of explaining their relevance to key debates in Latin America history, the history of sport and of civic engagement and democratic practices. Elsey also tries hard to fit the material into gender history but, with a few exceptions, the type of source material being employed doesn't really allow any persuasive conclusions in this regard.

The book begins with a clear statement of intent. Rather than being a history of football for its own sake, or an explanation of how sports diverted popular groups from social or economic problems ("serious matters"), the author's hypothesis is that football acted as a way-in to serious matters, that sports created communities and enabled community activism that would otherwise have remained circumscribed and limited by central government and socio-economic elites. This is a radical suggestion, especially for a Latin American country such as Chile where (in comparison to Argentina or Brazil, for example) studies of the role of football in the political engagement of the working classes and/or colonized peoples are few and far between.<sup>1</sup> (One of the fascinating sub-themes of the book, which reoccurs in most chapters, is the way that Chilean football elites, players and supporters tried to raise the level of their national team in order to combat what they saw as the inherent slur in being beaten by other Latin American countries they believed to be racially inferior). Studies of race and football have shown that the sport played an important role in allowing elites, players and supporters to define themselves, challenge themselves and, indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> For example Eduardo Archetti, *Masculinities: Football, Polo and Tango in Argentina* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); Alex Bellos, *Futebol: The Brazilian Way of Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002).

understand themselves better. Laurent Dubois recent book on football in the Francophone world, *Soccer Empire*, is a great example.<sup>2</sup> Yet Chile is not France, as the Chilean directors, managers and publicists cited by Brenda Elsey concurred throughout the history of the game. For some of them, indeed, France and Britain remained as beacons to be emulated, and sport became, like commerce, one means to this end. Many saw football as a way to improve Chilean men, to civilize them through the inculcation of the values of physical fitness, endurance, repetition, fair-play and all the others which they saw as encapsulated in Europe. Others, with a different view of the relation between global powers and local communities, saw football as a way in which Chile might make its mark on the world by asserting itself and its unique identity.

It is probably fair to say that until recently, when football followers in the major national leagues of Europe thought of Latin American football, they didn't get much further than the successes, celebrities and histories of the game in Brazil, Argentina and, to a lesser extent, Uruguay. Mass migration of footballers to Europe from Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela has changed this in the last decade or so. Nevertheless, with the possible exception of the fame garnered by Iván Zambrano at Real Madrid in Spain in the early 1990s, Chile has no Pelé, no Maradona, no Asprilla, no national global superstar. And, although Chile hosted the World Cup in 1962 and reached the semi-finals, this tournament is generally passed over by scholars and historians seeking the greater drama, controversy and color imagery of the other Latin American tournaments (particularly Brazil in 1950 when the home team lost to Uruguay in the Maracanazo, and 1978 event held in Argentina in the midst of the Dirty War).

David Goldblatt's compendious book *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football*, does make a good effort to include the Chilean experience within a global narrative of the sport from its pre-Columbian origins, British institutionalisation and harmonisation of the rules, commercialization, globalization all the way up to the present day where "after nearly a century and a half of global industrialisation, whose geographical course and social organisation carved the main

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<sup>2</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (University of California Press, 2010).

channels into which the planet's football cultures have flowed, the world sits on the brink" (910). The Chilean case as described by Goldblatt fits into this narrative: British origins, first in Valparaíso and then in the clubs of Santiago. Then the Creolization of the game, as it was taken up first by middle-class men aspiring to emulate the British, and then by the working-classes who filled the stadiums and then the teamsheets as the twentieth-century takes shape. Finally, according to Goldblatt, the Chilean experience of political elites trying to use the game in order to win popularity (the building of the National Stadium, the hosting of the 1962 World Cup) mirrors that of Brazil and Argentina, as does the experience of the 1970s, "football under the Latin American generals," which in Goldblatt's view condemned Chilean football to the doldrums, corruption and the violence of street hooligans.<sup>3</sup>

Brenda Elsey's book acts as a marvellous corrective to this interpretation, stressing the agency of Chilean working- and playing-people in grasping control of their sport, using it to express themselves and employing it as a channel towards greater and related social goals of respect, infrastructure, education and equality. She argues that club culture "politicized football in a way that did not occur in neighboring countries" (8). Chapter 1, "*Rayando la Cancha: Marking the Field: Chilean Football, 1893-1919*" does follow the standard narrative of the arrival of the game with the British, and the establishment of the first, elite clubs as sites for social display just as much as for sporting encounters and enjoyment. To my mind this chapter doesn't really break out of the nation-centred paradigm that all previous writing on Chilean football follows—it doesn't ask, as it could, about the origins of the club directors with their Hispanised first names and Anglo surnames, who retained much power in local clubs and even at national level well into the twentieth century. Rafael Edwards, Juan Livingstone and Juan Ramsay, for example, were surely as much part of a British imperial network as they were integral to the Chilean sporting and political elites. This quibble apart, the chapter is bold and authoritative, covering every explanation of the popularity of the game at the turn of the century, drawing on contemporary newspapers and sports pages as well as debates of legislation in Congress. Chapter 2, "The Massive,

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<sup>3</sup> David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football* (London: Penguin, 2007).

Modern and Marginalised in Football of the 1920s”, examines how the Creolized game, now largely run and played by Chileans born and bred in Chile, was expanded, particularly under the populist administration of President Arturo Alessandri. Elsey argues strongly that it was a concern with defining and promoting the right type of masculinity, as well as a homogenous mestizo national identity, that shaped the administration’s dealings with the sport. I wondered whether a useful line of analysis might have been mislaid here. The emphasis shown by many urban reformers, club leaders and radicals on temperance, education and restraint might suggest some continuities with the role of British, largely Protestant, immigrants in the earlier phase of the game’s development. The links between football and evolving ecclesiastical policies regarding urbanism are noted by the author; but the sources she cites lead me to wonder if more might be made of the ‘spiritual’ dimensions, and background, of football’s development in this period when British commercial and financial influence in Chile was still considerable.

The next two chapters lay the chronological progression to one side in order to focus on a series of case studies. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the further politicization of football in the 1930s, linked to the process of professionalization and the fracturing of the ideal of the sportsman into two broadly-opposed camps—the professional, run by capitalist directors where profit and victory were privileged above all else; as against the amateur, run by and for *barrio* dwellers, where community cohesion and sporting ethics triumphed over other concerns. For the history of amateur football, Elsey relies heavily on the publications of the amateur clubs themselves and the leftist political movements they were linked to. Nevertheless, the argument is clearly and persuasively made that the schism had occurred by the time of the inauguration of the National Stadium in December 1938, during which President Alessandri’s speech was roundly booed. As the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne MP discovered at the London 2012 Paralympics, being booed at what was supposed to be the culmination of a national, political and cultural event can be profoundly disorientating as well as humiliating. Alessandri’s successors, the Popular Front governments led successively by Pedro Aguirre Cerda and Juan Antonio Rios, themselves attempted to capitalize on popular

culture including football, which Elsey suggests “became a template for future political coalitions, especially the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende” (91). The details provided here on barrio clubs, for example those in the Renca municipality, are fascinating, though sometimes they feel mouth-wateringly brief at the expense of generalized cultural analysis (i.e. 97: “this incident [the holding of a celebratory barbeque in 1935] sheds light on the creation and re-creation of political difference that entered into daily social interactions”).

Chapter 4, “The ‘Latin Lions’ and the ‘Dogs of Constantinople’: Immigrant Clubs, Ethnicity and Racial Hierarchies in Football, 1920-1953”, is a solid, stand-alone analysis of the role of football clubs in shaping racial hierarchies and the assimilation (or not) of immigrant groups. The examples, which here are pleasingly and convincingly detailed, are: the Italian community, represented by club Audax Italiano, the Spanish community through Unión Española, and the obvious example of club Palestino. The author selects several examples to demonstrate what scholarly work on race and nationhood in this period might lead us to expect: that the Europeans were welcomed as contributing to the ‘improvement’ and ‘defense’ of the Chilean race, and that the Arab Chileans (grouped together as Palestinians) had to cope with and overcome severe racial stereotyping and discrimination, even at the same time (and often, because) of their success in certain areas of the Chilean economy. The way both of these Others were treated in football clubs and football politics was a reflection of the way in which Chile was being imagined as a nation of mestizos—consciously and comparatively so, in relation to Argentina, Brazil and Colombia, and where the indigenous presence was being categorised as historic rather than contemporary. As Joanna Crow has shown, indigenous Chileans were often excised from contemporary imaginings of the Chilean nation and remembered instead as brave, *historic*, Araucanian warriors.<sup>4</sup> The prime example here was the marketing of Colo Colo, Santiago’s most successful professional club, as representing the mestizo nation through the imagery of Aracaucanian bravery.

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<sup>4</sup> Joanna Crow, *The Mapuche in Modern Chile: A Cultural History*, University of Florida Press (forthcoming January 2013).

In Chapter 5 “‘Because We Have Nothing...’: The Radicalization of Amateurs and the World Cup of 1962”, the author argues that national elites who intended their hosting of the prestigious tournament to further embed a sense of national homogeneity, further economic progress and enhance the country’s image on the world stage, were left short of all three of their goals. The quote comes from Carlos Dittborn, a Santiago football club chairman, who pleaded with FIFA that “Because we have nothing, we want to do it all.” In modern parlance, the World Cup was to regenerate Santiago and leave a legacy in economic as well as cultural terms. Nevertheless, as Elsey shows, the ‘boom’ in barrio clubs in the 1940s and 1950s, emerging out of widespread dissatisfaction with the professional model and the disenfranchisement of working peoples, was not fully incorporated into the planning and organization of the World Cup. In part, this was because of the devastation and chaos of the 1960 earthquake, which left tens of thousands dead and the authorities playing catch-up to put the tournament on at all. Elsey argues that more significant was the barrio clubs’ alternative interpretation of what football was for (community, rather than profit) and how the 1962 World Cup crystallized and brought into relief the different visions of the two types of football being organized, amateur and professional. By this stage of the book the passing football fan may have given up wanting to know a little about the big games and big names of professional football—a cursory few lines about Garrincha, the Brazilian star of the 1962 World Cup, are not enough to distract the author from an impassioned presentation of the ordinary people, men, women and children, who were able to represent themselves and their communities through football. The discussion of the ‘Republic of San Miguel’, formed in the anarchic suburb of Santiago in this period, provides telling detail and memorable episodes that underline just how amateur footballers had come to have such a different perspective on politics and sport from their professional counterparts.

Chapter 6 is where the book’s hypothesis regarding the cultural split in football politics, developed over nearly a century, really comes home to roost. In “The New Left, Popular Unity and Football, 1963-1973”, Elsey shows how these local, regional and sometimes national differences in opinion about how and when politics and football should

meet, found their apotheosis in the 1960s as “amateur football organizations, which were largely in favor of the Allende government, fervently debated how political viewpoints should influence everyday cultural practices...[and] envisioned how sports could develop in new ways under socialism” (207). Vividly evidenced discussions of youth and the new left, gender and politics, and the UP’s cultural policy, argue for the symbiotic relationship between the barrio clubs and the new left’s revolutionary politics in opposition and, after 1970, in government. A lengthy Epilogue describes, in often poignant terms, the destruction of the barrio clubs and their ethos—now tainted as ‘Communist’—after the 11 September 1973 coup. Not only were football stadiums used to house and torture political prisoners, but football clubs and their directors were persecuted with the same savagery as the other civic organisations with which they shared many personnel. Elsey notes with approval the Soviet Union’s refusal to play in the National Stadium in November 1973, thus forfeiting the opportunity to play in the 1974 World Cup, and details the efforts of international solidarity groups to use football to make political points during their exile abroad. But really the entire post-1973 period only serves to accentuate the remarkable phenomenon of politicized, often radical amateur football across Santiago until the coup. Relegating the last quarter of the century to the epilogue demonstrates clearly where the author’s sympathies and interests lie. Her conclusion is that “the story of [Chilean amateurs’] commitment to civic engagement, solidarity, local action, and ‘making’ politics may be the most exciting and threatening of all” (253).

In conclusion, then, this book is a major contribution to the history of Chilean sport and to the cultural history of Chilean politics. Its innovative attempt to combine the two yields many valuable insights, which I hope to have summarized here. To my mind the lingering British legacy in Chilean sporting culture—not just the names of the clubs, the directors, the sites of stadiums, the rules and regulations, but also the ethos and links of sport to commerce—are rather underplayed, despite the many throwaway references to Anglo names throughout the book. The book’s most significant flaw, however, lies in its bibliography, which, unaccountably, doesn’t include a list of archives consulted. Furthermore, journals and magazines are cited in footnotes but only occasionally included in the bibliography, hidden

away amongst books and secondary sources. The Introduction states that

the research for this study is based upon virtually unexamined records, chiefly club documents, neighborhood publications, and sports magazines” as well as “petitions...in newspapers or congressional records...histories commissioned by football clubs as well as the autobiographies of sportsmen... Clubs’ statutes, bylaws, and annual reports. (10)

It is frustrating, therefore, that we never learn if the author consulted private archives or unpublished materials—one suspects not, after a careful trawl of the footnotes. This means that “club documents” must mean publications held by the clubs, rather than unpublished letters and minutes still held by clubs or municipal archives themselves. It was frustrating to have to work this out by myself, and still carry the doubt that I might have missed something—a clearly identified and classified bibliography of primary and secondary sources should surely be an integral part of every scholarly monograph.

*Citizens & Sportsmen* is a cultural history that is particularly interested in shifting the debate over inclusion/exclusion in citizenship and nationhood, and in analyzing the grounds on which this debate has taken place over time in Chile. The many local examples it presents create a vivid collage, enabling the reader to imagine the intensity, frustration, joy and anger that football and its politics created at the forefront of campaigns to foment civic engagement and democracy in Chile in the twentieth century. I can now appreciate the significant political edges of of my own first footballing experiences in Chile in 1993, where sport became a site for loosening the bounds of Transition-era politics and society, self-expression and resistance.