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National Pastime: How Americans Play Baseball and the Rest of the World Plays Soccer

Stefan Szymanski, Andrew Zimbalist

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This is the story of two great sports. One is "America's game," while the other is "the world's game." Baseball and soccer are both beloved cultural institutions. What draws fans to one game is often a mystery to fans of the other. Despite superficial differences, however, the business and culture of these sports share more in common than meets the eye. This is the first in-depth, cross-cultural comparison of these two great pastimes and the megabusinesses that they have become. In N *ational Pastime,* Stefan Szymanski and Andrew Zimbalist illustrate how the different traditions of each sport have generated different possibilities for their commercial organization and exploitation. They pay special attention to the rich and complex evolution of baseball from its beginnings in America, and they trace modern soccer from its foundation in England through its subsequent expansion across the world. They illustrate how Victorian administrators laid the foundation for Major League Baseball (MLB) and soccer leagues such as the English Premier League, Italy's Serie A, and the European Champions League. The authors show how the organizers of baseball and soccer have learned from each other in the past and how they can continue to do so. Both sports are rich in tradition. In some cases, however, these traditions—often arbitrary rules established by long-defunct administrators—have obstructed the healthy development of the sport. By studying the experiences of other sports, it might be possible to develop new and better ways to operate. For example, soccer might benefit from greater cooperation among teams as in baseball. On the other hand, MLB could learn from soccer's relegation rules and more open system of ownership, thus avoiding some of the excesses (competitive imbalance, uneven team resources) associated with monopoly. Nat *ional Pastime do*es not advocate the jettisoning of all tradition to adopt wholesale the approach of another sport, of course. In an era of globalization, where business interests are increasingly looking to transplant organizational ideas in order to maximize profits, the authors argue that fan-friendly reforms may be necessary in order to avoid something worse. Ultimately, they propose no simple solutions, instead suggesting specific reforms to the organization of baseball and soccer, drawing on each other's experiences. Lively and accessibly written, this book is essential reading for business analysts, journalists, policymakers, and managers of both sports. Most of all, however, it will appeal to baseball and soccer aficionados, whether they root for the New York Yankees, Manchester United, or Real Madrid.

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