

The pure sport, unsoiled by secondary, mostly pecuniary interests, does it exist? Possibly, yes, but it's getting to be an endangered species, and it was never to be found among sports that, for its continued existence and public appeal, have had to rely heavily on money being spent and changing hands. Sports like Formula 1 and boxing are strong candidates for that category of sports, as well as horseracing. Vincent J. Bartimo and Rosalind P. Muller tell of unfair play in American horseracing in *Not at Any Price: Integrity in Professional Sports*. Susanna Hedenborg, idrottsforum.org's special correspondent on equestrian sports, has read Bartimo's and Muller's book, and in her review she emphasizes the importance of biographical literature to open up new areas for academic research.

Unfair play in American horseracing

Susanna Hedenborg

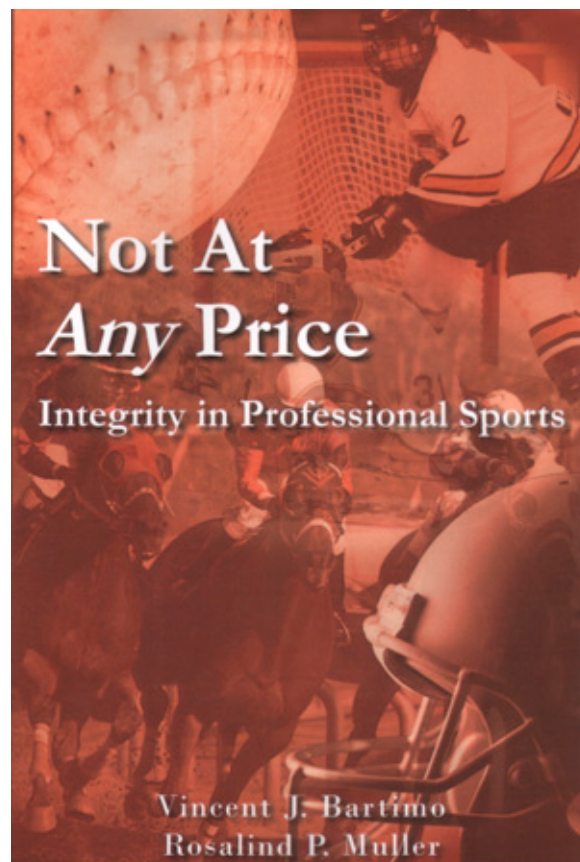
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Vincent J. Bartimo & Rosalind P. Muller
Not at Any Price: Integrity in Professional Sports
190 pages, pb.
Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse 2006
ISBN 1-4259-0427-0

Very often books on horseracing focus on the jockeys, the horses, certain races or racecourses and very seldom the history of the people working in the administration. The book *Not at any price* describes the hard work of two people, Vincent Bartimo and Rosalind Muller, who, as president and director of publicity, created successful racecourses in America. The book is also a story of how these two people worked against unfair play at the tracks.

When horseracing is written about it is often connected to unfair play, drugs, mafia and gambling scams. Whether horseracing is more often subjected to these problems is difficult to know. It seems to me that this is a way of writing a good story, fiction or non-fiction.[1] Maybe this way of presenting the sport can be connected to early professionalisation and the connection to gambling – an explanation given by the authors. The professionalisation is often contrasted to the “good old days”. The authors argue strongly against this development, probably as a consequence of losing their jobs in a conflict on one of the racecourses. However, whether the “good old days” have ever existed is strongly questioned by some researchers.[2]

In a way this book emphasises the problems of unfair play, though not by using them for making a good story. Instead it is a guide to building a professionalised sport in a winning way: for example how to schedule races so that



they do not collide with other important races (in Sweden racing is very centralised and controlled by a national board, in America every track has a possibility to decide whether or not a certain race is to be held) and deciding on good days for gambling (one of the stories demonstrate that Easter Sunday turned out to be a bad day, because of the weather conditions). The book is also interesting as it tells a bit of the story of the differences between the big and small tracks – and the people that surrounds them.

To understand the world of horseracing, more research into who is sitting behind the totalisator counter windows, cashiers of the racecourses, secretaries and directors and so on, is essential. Many of them are women. Can their work be analysed in terms of gender? What kind of working conditions do these groups encounter? Are they, like Bartimo and Muller, met by people who would like them to change their ethics? Working conditions connected to time are of equal interest. They work when most of us are free to enjoy our leisure time. And Bartimos and Mullers book show that these working hours are very long. Most importantly, the work of under-paid and under-estimated administrators is the basis of all stadium sports, and an important foundation for professionalised sport – so how will our understanding of professionalised sport change if the needs and interests of these groups are taken into serious account? Who will write their history?

This book is not written to answer these questions. However, as in many other cases of the history of hidden groups, biographical writing is a necessary start. And hopefully it will alert researchers to look more thoroughly into the administration behind the stadium sports.


[1] Cf., inter alia, *Great horse racing mysteries*, (2004); see also Dick Francis' popular mystery books.

[2] Vamplew, Wray, *Pay up and play the game. Professional sport in Britain*, Cambridge 1988, pp. 77–80

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