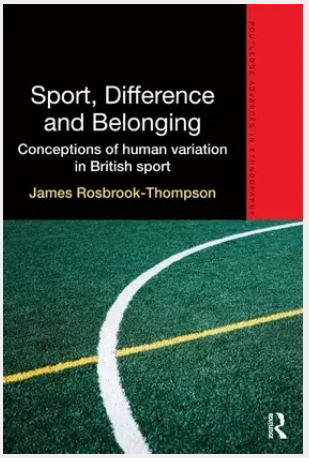
Rosbrook-Thompson

Sport, Difference and Belonging

Conceptions of Human Variation in British Sport



This book combines historical and ethnographic components in examining the ideas about human variation subscribed to by coaches, commentators and sportspeople themselves. The book begins by interrogating the idea of the ‘impulsive’ black sportsman (and the ‘impulsive’ black male more generally), documenting how it came into being and gathered momentum throughout the course of British history. Drawing on the work of Paul Gilroy and Ian Hacking, the author then investigates whether such raciological ideas figure within the everyday behaviours of a group of young footballers. Presenting an original ethnographic study undertaken at Oldfield United, a semi-professional football club situated in London, he explores how raciological ideas (and other notions of human variation) shape the self-understandings of the club’s players and thereby influence the possibilities for action available to them. In conceptualising the sense of "feeling alien" experienced by club personnel – in relation to mainstream discourses of nationhood, to politics, to the basic functioning of the nation-state and, at bottom, to the qualifications and requirements of British citizenship – ‘Sport, Difference and Belonging’ challenges the ability of the cosmopolitan tradition to make sense of contemporary urban phenomena and seeks to develop the sociological concept of denizenship. This book will be of interest to academics and students in the fields of sociology and social policy, ‘race’ and ethnic studies, urban studies, the ethnographic method, and the sociology of sport. It may also appeal to politicians, policy makers and those working in the field of ‘race relations.’

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