New Books in Sports Interview with Samir Chopra

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Hello colleagues,

I am writing to let you know about my latest New Books in Sports interview with Dr. Samir Chopra, Professor of Philosophy at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and author of The Evolution of a Cricket Fan: My Shapeshifting Journey (Temple University Press, 2021). In our conversation, we discussed how Chopra became an Indian cricket fan, the unique role that cricket plays in immigrant South Asian communities in Australia and the United States, the scholarly legacy of CLR James’ Beyond a Boundary, and the future of global cricket since the 1980s.

Please find the URL here:

In The Evolution of a Cricket Fan, Chopra mixes autobiography, ethnography, memoir, exile literature, and philosophy to better understand and explain how cricket helped him recognize and reshape his own post-colonial and immigrant identity. In the process, he also shows how cricket speaks to larger global patterns such as the tension between colonialism and post-coloniality in and outside of India, the interplay of the local and the national in the subcontinent, and transcendent and ephemeral qualities of live sporting events for fans of all stripes.

Chopra’s compelling work proceeds roughly chronologically recounting the experiences of a young, Indian self-avowed cricket tragic and his relationship with his own sense of identity from the 1970s until the present. In his first chapter, he tells us about his “perverse” attraction to English, Australian, and even Pakistani cricket, and his rejection of the Indian cricket team.

Over the next several chapters, Chopra exhumes and examines the moments that helped bring him back to Indian cricket fandom as well as those that helped to moderate his ultimate cricket nationalism. The pathway is winding and defies easy explanation: English biases against Pakistani cricketers lead him to a more critical view of those same English authors’ attacks on Indian players. He learns to appreciate his own national identity through the local even as his Punjabi background complicates the easy adoption of any Hindu nationalism. India’s victory in the 1983 World Cup helps him reclaim the Indian team but he struggles with the space between the genteel image of cricket he idolizes and its aggressive expression.
in Indian, Pakistani, Australian, and English players and fans.

The latter chapters detail his life after he leaves India – living first in New Jersey, afterward Sydney, Australia, and finally back in New York City. These sections are animated by cricket’s absence and presence. In the US, Chopra despairs cricket’s invisibility and to see it, he goes to great lengths (and sometimes great distances) to watch matches. This brings him face-to-face with many Pakistani cricket fans doing the same thing and he discovers comity and confrontation, if not in equal parts. He also becomes a devotee of the early internet, discovering cricket conversations and participating avidly in them. They reflect a new and more democratic (and even at times particularly South Asian) expression of the game.

In the final chapter, “Brave New Pitch.” Chopra gestures to another book he wrote of the same title that outlines some of his ideas about the future of the game. The Evolution of a Cricket Fan, however, deals mostly with the past and how he (and we) got here. It will be of broad appeal, but it will be especially interesting to people who want to know more about cricket, post-coloniality, immigration and exile, and the Indian/Pakistani relationship.

The "New Books in Sports" network features discussions with sports scholars about their most recent books. It is a part of the "New Books Network," a consortium of podcasts exploring recent publications across a wide range of fields. The podcasts can also be accessed via iTunes where a free subscription option is available.

Please contact me off-list if you have any recent book suggestions.

Best,

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Keith Rathbone is a Senior Lecturer at Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia. He researches twentieth-century French social and cultural history. His book, entitled Sport and physical culture in Occupied France: Authoritarianism, agency,
and everyday life, (Manchester University Press, 2022) examines physical education and sports in order to better understand civic life under the dual authoritarian systems of the German Occupation and the Vichy Regime. If you have a title to suggest for this podcast, please contact him at keith.rathbone@mq.edu.au and follow him at @keithrathbone on twitter.