



A Social History of English Rugby Union

Tony Collins

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From the myth of William Webb Ellis to the glory of the 2003 World Cup win, this book explores the social history of rugby union in England.

Ever since Tom Brown's Schooldays the sport has seen itself as the guardian of traditional English middle-class values. In this fascinating new history, leading rugby historian Tony Collins demonstrates how these values have shaped the English game, from the public schools to mass spectator sport, from strict amateurism to global professionalism.

Based on unprecedented access to the official archives of the Rugby Football Union, and drawing on an impressive array of sources from club minutes to personal memoirs and contemporary literature, the book explores in vivid detail the key events, personalities and players that have made English rugby.

From an era of rapid growth at the end of the nineteenth century, through the terrible losses suffered during the First World War and the subsequent 'rush to rugby' in the public and grammar schools, and into the periods of disorientation and commercialisation in the 1960s through to the present day, the story of English rugby union is also the story of the making of modern England.

Like all the very best writers on sport, Tony Collins uses sport as a prism through which to better understand both culture and society. A ground-breaking work of both social history and sport history, A Social History of English Rugby Union tells a fascinating story of sporting endeavour, masculine identity, imperial ideology, social consciousness and the nature of Englishness.

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