

Both praying and playing: Muscular Christianity and the YMCA in north-east county Durham.

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Both Praying And Playing: "Muscular Christianity" and the YMCA in North-east County Durham

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Journal of Social History

Oxford University Press

Volume 35, Number 2, Winter 2001

pp. 397-407

[10.1353/jsh.2001.0122](https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh.2001.0122)

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Abstract

Sport apparently played an uncertain role in the YMCA in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Although the moral messages of sport were well recognised in the public schools and universities of the day, evangelical organisations such as the YMCA, have generally been seen as being reluctant to become involved in sporting ventures. Sport was condemned as sinful, immoral and an unwarranted distraction from the vital work of evangelism. In practice however, some YMCA branches did promote sports and games for the moral, physical and spiritual benefits they were seen as imparting. At the same time, there remained a seam of scepticism and opposition within the organisation. The debate within the local YMCA branches as to the

role, if any, sport should play, was in fact often protracted and keenly contested. In the case of County Durham it was the sceptics who largely won the day. This triumph should not be seen simply as a victory for moralists and the spiritually minded over the more liberal evangelical Christians. Rather the failure of the YMCA in Durham to effectively utilise sport as a means of mobilising their constituency was the result of both scepticism within the organisation, and apathy without.



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