

foundations orchestrate public loathing of “political correctness” on campus (it’s really just “civility”). Violent inner-city males and TV violence aren’t the problem; the gun industry is. Overblown concerns about on-line smut, missing children, teen moms, and illegitimacy all divert us, Glassner says, from “facing up to our collective lack of responsibility toward our nation’s children.”

So what should we fear? Glassner has his list, a distinctly political one: “hunger, dilapidated schools, gun proliferation, and deficient health care for much of the U.S. population.” To resolve these real problems, we must “finance and organize.” Where Ross prescribes better-informed individual choices, Glassner seeks a solution in collective action.

—Peter Huber

### HOME TOWN.

By Tracy Kidder. Random House. 338 pp. \$25.95

American culture of the late 20th century holds that everything significant happens in the big city. It is acknowledged, perhaps, that strong character and noble suffering exist in the rural heart of this great country, but the national secular religion maintains that our political, artistic, and civic genius resides in the great metropolises of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago; secondarily in the old and new worlds of Boston, San Francisco, and perhaps Miami; and, somewhat grudgingly, in the decadent bureaucratic pits of Washington. Left out of the calculus are the smaller cities and towns where the society carries out its essential business and endures its angst in microcosm—left out, that is, until a schoolchild slaughters his classmates and teachers, or a tornado wipes out a community.

Now along comes master chronicler Kidder, who focuses his considerable talents on Northampton, Massachusetts. Like every other distinct community across America that has its own soul, Northampton is hardly immune to outside influences and internal dysfunction. Far from it. But its people know who they are and what they want from life; their pride in their community and their

fundamental faith in the future gets them through all manner of adversity and confusion. “If you do all your growing up in the same small place,” writes Kidder, “you don’t shed identities. You accumulate them.” During his several years of intense reporting in the town, he particularly followed the life and times of one Tommy O’Connor, the youngest member of a large working-class family who became a policeman and whose experiences offer a winding, revealing (if at times overdramatized) path through the recent adventures of Northampton.

Some will insist that Northampton is not in any sense typical—that, for example, the presence of Smith College distorts and softens its experience. But Kidder does not claim to have looked for anything representative of a grand phenomenon. As with his other successful and sensitive works, including *The Soul of a New Machine* (1981) and *House* (1985), he has sought merely to tell a good story in a way that teaches us something. That he has done.

—Sanford J. Ungar

### HARD BALL:

*The Abuse of Power in Pro Team Sports.*

By James Quirk and Rodney Fort. Princeton Univ. Press.

248 pp. \$22.95

When I was growing up in a Boston suburb, for \$2 I could watch NBA double-headers in Boston Garden or sit in the Fenway Park bleachers and see the Red Sox fade. Today those humble seats go for \$12 and \$14; getting closer to the action can run as high as \$85 at the Fleet Center, where the Celtics now play their home games. The



good old days were never quite as good as we remember them, but such examples do show how much has changed for the average fan. Now, *everything* seems big league: the money made by owners and investors, the players' salaries, the television contracts, the ticket prices. At the very top, the quality of play in baseball, football, hockey, and basketball is probably better than ever, but the expansion of the leagues has meant a dilution of talent. Blackout rules and premium-channel cable contracts, meanwhile, keep games off free TV. As a result, fans now pay more to see less talent play less often.

Economists Quirk and Fort have written a short, accessible book that explodes some myths (e.g., the escalation of player salaries has driven up ticket prices) and compellingly argues for radical change. In examining this big-money industry—teams in the four major professional leagues earned more than three-quarters of a billion dollars in 1996—their analysis is economic, but their methodology is that of investigative journalists: follow the money.

The authors show that the major financial beneficiaries of the big TV contracts are the owners, not the networks or the stations. But most of that largesse flows through the owners to the players, who, since the advent of free agency and strong unions in the mid-1970s, have earned something approximating their financial value to the organization.

Just as the owners grumble at contract time, most pro sports teams operate on thin profit margins. And winning does not always increase net profits.

So who's to blame for the fans' plight? According to the authors, the culprit is the leagues, which are structured as monopoly cartels. Protected by Congress from the antitrust lawyers at the Department of Justice, they are able to extract tax breaks and other bribes from state and local politicians who are desperate to keep teams in the neighborhood. Quirk and Fort recommend splitting each of the big-league cartels into several competing leagues, on the model of the AT&T breakup. But they do not address the political obstacles to their plan—the millions that the leagues and owners spend on Washington lobbying and campaign contributions.

Creating a competitive environment for professional team sports is an issue waiting for an ambitious politician, one who is willing to stand up to entrenched interests. It would take a politician running for national office without a full-blown agenda, probably a Republican who believes that consumers benefit from competitive markets. Ideally the candidate would know about pro sports from personal experience as, say, a managing partner of a major league baseball team. Are you listening, George W. Bush?

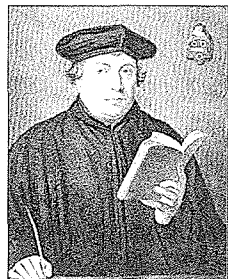
—Marty Linsky

## Religion & Philosophy

### MARTIN LUTHER: *The Christian between God and Death.*

By Richard Marius. Harvard Univ. Press. 542 pp. \$35.

When the great Catholic humanist Desiderius Erasmus advocated a moderate approach to reforming the corrupt and corrupting 16th-century church, Luther the absolutist would have nothing of it. A figure of prodigious energy, but wracked and agonized and subject all his life to spells of depression, Luther railed against Erasmus and other champions of reason. We



know the dignified and purposeful Erasmus through his portrait by Hans Holbein the Younger. The Luther of this absorbing and dramatically shaped new biography should have sat for Hieronymus Bosch, or for Edvard Munch in our own century.

Marius, the author of a biography of Thomas More, regards Luther's temperament as his tragedy, and the author's sympathies are with the Erasmuses of the world. He concedes Luther his peculiar greatness, but he does not forgive the defects of character and personality that, in Marius's uncommonly harsh view, brought