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Eric Bain-Selbo

# Violence in Southern Sport and Culture Sacred Battles on the Gridiron



Springer

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Sacred Battles on the Gridiron

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SpringerBriefs in Religious Studies  
ISBN 978-3-319-50058-4      ISBN 978-3-319-50059-1 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-50059-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016959402

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Printed on acid-free paper

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The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

# Pregame

This monograph most directly comes from an invited lecture that I gave in October 2016 at the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict at Arizona State University. Though I had written on the issues below on a number of different occasions, the invitation gave me an opportunity to edit, revise, and combine material in very new ways.

Some of the ideas in the first and second chapters appeared in my book *Game Day and God: Football, Faith, and Politics in the American South* (Mercer University Press, 2009) and in my chapter “On the sacred power of violence in popular culture” in *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture* (edited by Terry Ray Clark and Dan W. Clanton, Jr., Routledge, 2012). These ideas have been significantly revised and expanded, however, especially those sections dealing with the work of Rene Girard. Since those earlier publications, I have delved into Girard’s corpus much more significantly and found even deeper layers of meaning and insight vis-à-vis sport and football in particular.

The historical material in the third chapter also builds upon my work in *Game Day and God*, but much more thoroughly directed toward the issue of violence. I also have drawn upon additional resources, particularly recent works on the American South and Southeastern Conference football.

The fourth and final chapter feature summary claims and syntheses that extend my work in new ways. While drawing upon some of the research and conclusions found in the chapter I coauthored with Terry Shoemaker, “Southern Reconstructing: Sport and the Future of Religion in the American South,” that appeared in *Sport and Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (edited by Brad Schultz and Mary Lou Sheffer, Lexington Books, 2016), I reflect on the future of football and, in particular, its role in the American South.

In the First Appendix (think of the appendices as overtimes in a game), I draw inspiration from William James’s famous essay, “The Moral Equivalent of War.” I use it as a springboard for thinking about the cultural role of sport and, especially, violent sports like football. While the main body of this monograph grapples very specifically with one key aspect (violence) of one sport (football) in one specific