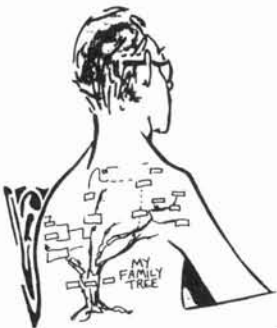


MORMON TATTOOS

EVERY TATTOO A MISSIONARY



Seuf/WAYMENT

LIGHTER MINDS

WARD BALL: MORMONS' DARK SECRET

By Robert Kirby

DRAW CLOSER. I'm about to tell you a Mormon secret. Here it is: Believe it or not, the LDS church still uses blood in one of its sacred ordinances. It's a sinister, grueling affair accomplished only with a lot of groaning and screaming. It's called ward basketball.

For those unfamiliar with Mormon culture, ward ball is one of our darker secrets. It's the modern-day equivalent of the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

The main purpose behind the Church's sports program is one of fellowshipping. The Church hopes people will use sports competition as a bonding experience. It works. There's nothing that draws people closer together quite like lusting after each other's blood.

Mormon roundball is divided into three degrees of glory. First, there's Young Men's ball, comprising kids ages 12 to 18. Here, impressionable young men are introduced to the mechanics of sportsmanship, team cooperation, and cursing. Unofficially, ward ball also is supposed to instill in young LDS kids basic street survival skills. Ward ball is to Mormons what tai kwan do [?] is to Koreans. Mormon kids will need these skills when they're called on missions to places so rough and obscure that even the angels have to look them up in an atlas before fearing to tread there.

The second degree of ward ball glory is the varsity ward team. These are the 18 to 30 something priesthood holders, pseudo-jocks with intense attitudes about the celestial nature of ward ball. These guys shoot hoops

like maybe Bill Laimbeer and Dennis Rodman are spiritual giants instead of freaks of nature.

Second-degree ward hoopsters are skilled in two areas of roundball glory: the laying on of elbows and the bellowing of insults nasty enough to hurt the feelings of Gadianton robbers. To them, fellowshipping comes after the ballgame. It's what they do to make up for being such overly competitive jerks that they fouled out in the first quarter.

Finally, there's the "veteran team" or third degree of ward ball glory. The term "veteran," of course, is a polite euphemism for older Mormon men. These are guys long past their roundball prime, guys who can't hold a full-court press for longer than a minute without resorting to the sacred ward ball ordinance of trodding on tongues.

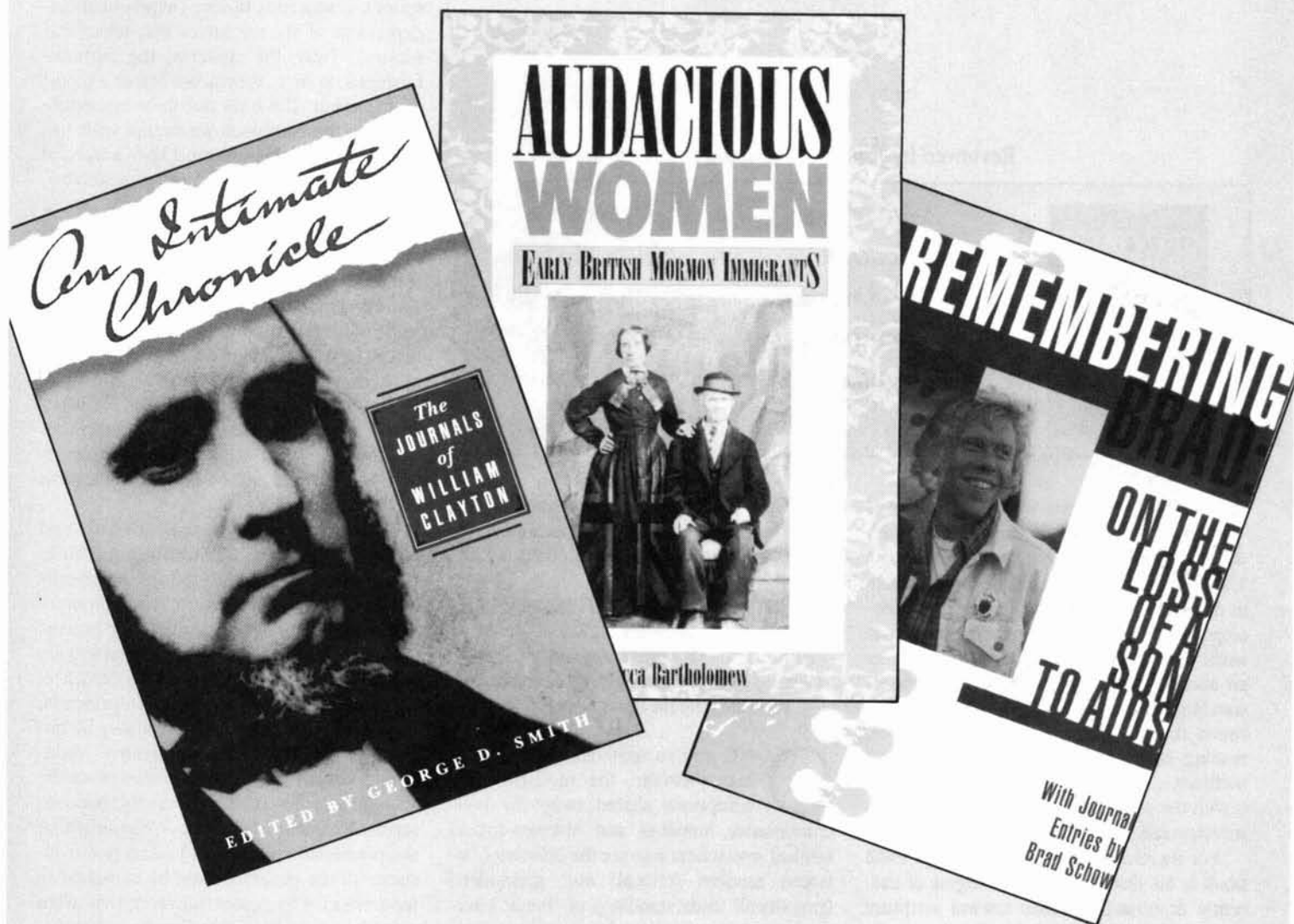
To have a real veteran team, the starting five alone should be high priests and represent roughly half the total body fat of the entire ward. Unlike the priesthood, ward ball is not exclusively the domain of LDS men. Mormon women shoot hoops too. However, as it is with gentile roundball, few people pay attention to LDS women's sports. This has less to do with females' sports skills than it does with the female attitude about sports.

Mormon women don't usually take ward ball so seriously. It's not that women can't hold a grudge. I should know. I've had plenty held against me. For them, sports aren't episodes of bloody religious Jihad. Throw a few elbows in a women's game and they don't start a fight that requires a bishop and a fire hose to break up.

As mean-spirited and nasty as it sounds, ward-ball behavior has its roots set deep in the LDS faith. Ultrasecret modern-day revelation indicates that the War in Heaven started at a ward ballgame.

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