

There You Have It: The Life, Legacy, and Legend of Howard Cosell

John Bloom

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Howard Cosell was one of those personalities who was either loved or hated. Loud, smart, unattractive, and possessing a distinctive (and according to detractors, most grating) voice, he was, nevertheless one of the most influential sports journalists of all time.

John Bloom produces a compelling biography of the man dubbed “the mouth that roared.” On the one hand, Cosell helped bring the “toy department” of network broadcasting into the limelight with his hard-hitting, take-no-prisoners attitude, along with his colorful use of language. On the other hand, as Bloom points out, the same attributes caused many to dismiss him as a self-aggrandizing megalomaniac. (Even the photo on the book’s cover seems to present Cosell in an attacking posture.) As usual, the truth falls somewhere in between.

The author praises Cosell as one of the first of the social sports journalists. He was ahead of his time when it came to race relations, which Bloom attributes in no small part to Cosell’s Jewish heritage, which made him more sympathetic to the underdog than many of his contemporaries. He stood firmly in Muhammad Ali’s corner, even when the boxer came under great criticism for his stance regarding Vietnam. Cosell was also no friend to Olympic czar Avery Brundage, whose racist attitudes extended as far back as the Berlin Games in 1936, and continued through the political debacles in Mexico in 1968 and the murderous terrorist attacks in Munich in 1972—a tragedy which brought the sports journalist back to his own Jewish roots.

As Cosell became more famous, he used that notoriety in areas that might have detracted from his credibility, including hosting a weekly variety show as well as the *Battle of the Network Stars* competitions.

Despite his championing minority causes, Cosell nevertheless suffered an “Al Campanis” moment: during a Monday Night Football game, he referred to a black player as a “little monkey.” According to Bloom, that incident may have contributed to the downward trend in his career thereafter. Cosell’s attempt to stand by his record only served to fuel his critics, who thought his protests echoed the old refrain “Some of my best friends ...”

Cosell wrote three books, *Cosell*, *I Never Played The Game*, and *What’s Wrong with Sports*, in which he was anything but reticent about sharing his opinions of his profession and himself. Bloom gives a much more objective—and ultimately sympathetic—word portrait of this complex broadcasting legend.

RON KAPLAN (September 6, 2011)

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