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# Business Books

By Andrea Sachs

Sneaker Wars By Barbara Smit Ecco; 383 pages

What does David Beckham's superstardom have to do with a pair of warring Bavarian brothers in the early 1900s? More than you think, according to this compelling book. Smit tells the story of Adi and Rudi Dassler, partners after World War I in a sports-shoe factory in tiny Herzogenaurach, Germany. The two got their spiked running shoes onto the feet of Olympic star Jesse Owens in 1936, but a bitter family feud soon split their business in half, resulting in the founding of Adidas (Adi's outfit) and Puma (Rudi's company). The whole town got into the act, says the author: "People always looked down, because they were careful to see what shoes others were wearing before they started a conversation."

By the mid-1950s, both firms had developed into respected sporting-goods companies with small but loyal followings in the U.S. But it would take the next generation of Dasslers to take Adidas' distinctive three-stripped shoes and, eventually, clothing to an unheard-of level of international success, outpacing Puma. Adi's son Horst did an end run around the rules preventing Olympic athletes from accepting compensation by giving them free shoes. It worked: at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, more than 70 of the track medals were won by athletes wearing those three-stripped shoes. As a result, Horst was able to establish himself firmly in the international sports business.

Although that feud is part of sports lore, the saga of Adidas also holds insights into the durability of a global brand. Adidas survived corporate intrigue, near bankruptcy and being outmarketed and overtaken by Nike. It is still the No. 2 maker of sporting goods in the world.

Nike may have perfected it, but celebrity sponsorship was the ticket to the top for both Adidas and the smaller Puma. Jets quarterback Joe Namath paraded around Manhattan in the 1970s in his swanky white Puma sneakers, and fans bought hundreds of thousands of pairs. Namath had an unprecedented deal: \$25,000 a year, plus 25¢ for each shoe sold. Quaint, isn't it? The competition for star endorsers would define the battle for sporting-goods supremacy. By the time soccer star Beckham signed on in 2007, Adidas committed to a lifetime deal reportedly worth more than \$600 million. Says author Smit: "It was the ultimate destination of a ride that had taken sports from jolly amateurism to unapologetic greed." Isn't that also known as competition?

**Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World They Are Making**  
By David Rothkopf Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 376 pages

There are just over 6,000 people in the superclass. So says the author of this fascinating book, a field guide to the world's most elite citizens. See the rich and powerful in their natural habitats, from Davos and Bilderberg to the Bohemian Grove. "That such a group exists is indisputable," says Rothkopf, who includes such power brokers as heads of state, CEOs of the world's largest companies, billionaire

entrepreneurs and even a handful of terrorist leaders. Is there a master list? Yep, but the author is a tease. "The day after it was published, it would be obsolete." No fair!

**Why Should the Boss Listen to You?** By James E. Lukaszewski Jossey-Bass; 188 pages

Most business books counsel readers on how to get a corner office. But here comes a book for the aspiring second banana. The author sets forth the seven (of course, seven) disciplines of the trusted adviser. These include commonsense attributes such as thinking strategically, developing a management perspective and advising constructively. The payoff for being influential, says Lukaszewski, is having power. "Actually seeing your recommendations become marching orders is something amazing to behold and to achieve," he writes. But don't forget: the boss always gets the credit.