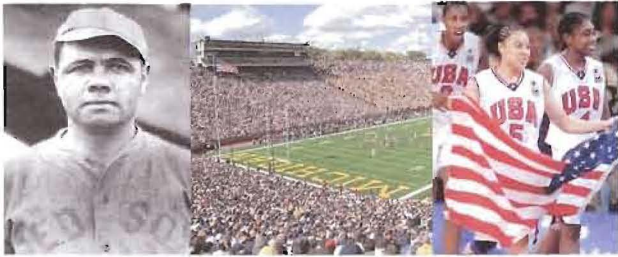


Professor Daniel A. Nathan
AM 234, American Sports/American Culture
TLC 301, WF 10:10-11:30 AM
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“These days, sports may be what Americans talk about best. With the most knowledge. The most passion. The most humor. The most distance. The most capacity for a cheerful change of mind. When we meet someone for the first time, it’s no accident that sport becomes the subject so often and so quickly. Yes it’s an easy, superficial topic—if we want it to be. But talking about sports has also become one of our best ways of probing people, sounding their depth, listening for resonances, judging their values.”

—Thomas Boswell, sports columnist

“Sport is a mirror. Sport is life. Through sport we might know ourselves.”

—David Guterson, writer

Course Description & Objectives

This course examines the history of American sports and some aspects of the contemporary athletic landscape as a way to consider cultural values. Sports fans beware: this is *not* a course in sports trivia, nor is it intended to glamorize the games we watch and play. Rather, we will attempt to situate American sports historically and culturally, paying close attention to issues of commercialization, race/ethnicity, gender, and class, among other subjects, such as globalization and fandom. Employing an interdisciplinary approach that makes use of primary documents, history, journalism, economics, anthropology, sociology, and film, we will examine recurrent cultural values expressed via American sports and iconic athletes. This course is not intended as a comprehensive survey of American sports. Even a cursory glance at the reading schedule reveals significant omissions. Students are encouraged to view those omissions as opportunities for their own research and study.

The course will heavily stress class discussion, centering upon considerations of the assigned readings (texts should be brought to class) and moving outward to broader questions of interpretation and cultural meaning. Discussions are collective endeavors that demand everyone’s preparation, attendance, and participation. Learning to participate in a discussion involves social and intellectual skills that are an essential part of one’s education. These include: listening to others and learning to absorb and synthesize their remarks; learning to respond constructively and analytically to others’ ideas; learning to develop and articulate positions of one’s own; responding to criticism; and learning to modify or discard an argument as one comes to see another, more satisfactory one. Students are expected to come to class eager to share their ideas about the topics under consideration and to question our readings and one another.

At the end of the course, I expect that we will have learned some critical skills, that we will have noted connections between the past and the present, and that we will have gained a better understanding of how and why American sports have performed various cultural roles and functions at different points in our history.

Books

D. Stanley Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society: An Anthology*, 8th ed.
Elliott J. Gorn and Warren Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports*
Warren St. John, *Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town*
Michael A. Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*

Films

Steve James, *Hoop Dreams*

Christine Herbes-Sommers, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, "The Difference Between Us"

Kenyon King, *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete*

Jay Rosenstein, *In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports*

Michael Ritchie, *Bad News Bears*

John D. Tulenko, *Big Time Losers*

James D. Stern and Adam Del Deo, *The Year of the Yao*

Requirements

Course requirements include two papers (the first will be 3-5 pages and the second will be 6-8 pages), active class participation and in-class writing assignments, and two presentations, one solo and one in a group, and a final exam. You must complete all assignments in order to pass this course. The break down of grades is as follows:

In-class Writing Assignments & Quizzes	10%	
Individual Presentation	10%	
Class Participation	15%	
Group Project	15%	
First Paper	15%	(due October 12)
Second Paper	20%	(due December 9)
Final Exam	15%	(December 15)

Attendance & Participation

Because the success of the course depends upon your participation, attendance is mandatory. Four or more absences will adversely affect your final grade: six or more absences and you fail the course.

Active participation requires that you attend class regularly (and on time), that you come to class prepared (i.e., having carefully read and thought about the assigned material), and that you share your perspectives, ideas, and questions.

Special Needs

Anyone who has a disability which may require some modification of seating, testing, or other class requirements should see me after class or during my office hours so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

Reading Schedule

- 9/9: Introductions, goals, policies, reading schedule
Gorn and Oriard, "Taking Sports Seriously"
Mangan, "A Personal Perspective: Twenty-five Years, IJHS"
- 9/11: Erchak, "Culture"
Macionis, *Sociology* excerpt
- 9/16: Guttmann, *From Ritual to Record* excerpts
9/18: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, xiii-33
- 9/23: Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight"
Gmelch, "Baseball Magic"
- 9/25: Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen"
Gorn, "The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine"
Birrell and McDonald, "Reading Sport, Articulating Power Lines"
- 9/30: James, *Hoop Dreams* (film)
10/2: Berkow, "Hope, and hope denied"
Ebert, "Hoop Dreams"
Vanderwerken, "Hoop Dreams: A Basketball Bildungsroman"
hooks, "Neo-Colonial Fantasies of Conquest"
Wise, "Looking Back at Broken Dreams: Film's Key Players Have Moved On"
- 10/7: Gorn and Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports*, xi-97
10/9: Gorn and Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports*, 98-182
- 10/14: Gorn and Goldstein, *A Brief History of American Sports*, 183-255
Jay, *More Than Just A Game: Sports in American Life Since 1945* excerpts
Zirin, *A People's History of Sports in the United States* excerpts
- 10/16: Scribner Library research session
- 10/21: Howard, "Social Psychology of the Spectator"
Brill, "The Why of the Fan"
McKinley, "It Isn't Just a Game: Clues to Avid Rooting"
St. John, *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* excerpts
- 10/23: No Class—Study Day
- 10/28: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 35-67
Ritchie, *Bad News Bears* (film)
Zang, *SportsWars* excerpt
- 10/30: Coakley, "Media," in *Sports in Society*, 9th ed.
Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 69-105
Crepeau, "There Seems to Be No End in Sight"
Nathan, "Sometimes, ESPN Seems Ubiquitous"
Deford, "High-And-Mighty ESPN Should Take It Down A Notch"

- 11/4: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 283-309
 Gates, "Delusions of Grandeur"
 Early, "Performance and Reality"
 Herbes-Sommers, *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, "The Difference Between Us" (film)
- 11/6: Rosenstein, *In Whose Honor? American Indian Mascots in Sports* (film)*
 Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 118-125
- 11/11: Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*, ix-90
 King, *Playing Unfair: The Media Image of the Female Athlete* (film)
- 11/13: Messner, *Taking the Field: Women, Men, and Sports*, 91-166
 Group presentation
- 11/18: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 229-254, 319-322
 Brand, "The Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics in Universities"
 Tulenko, *Big Time Losers* (film)
- 11/20: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 197-228
 Will, "Barry Bond's Enhancement"
 Sokolove, "The Lab Animal"
 Group presentation
- 11/25: No Class—Thanksgiving
- 11/27: No Class—Thanksgiving
- 12/2: St. John, *Outcasts United*, 1-225
- 12/4: St. John, *Outcasts United*, 226-300
 Group presentation
- 12/9: Eitzen, *Sport in Contemporary Society*, 373-411
 Stern and Del Deo, *The Year of the Yao* (film)
- 12/11: Gumbrecht, *In Praise Of Athletic Beauty* excerpts
 Group presentation
 Course evaluations
 Concluding comments
- 12/15: Final Exam, 1:30 PM - 4:30 PM, 301 TLC

Note: I reserve the right to make minor revisions in the reading schedule.

Screening Schedule

9/29:	<i>Hoop Dreams</i>	7 PM	(TLC 301)
10/27:	<i>Bad News Bears</i>	7 PM	(TLC 301)
11/3:	<i>Race: The Power of an Illusion</i> , "The Difference Between Us"	7 PM	(TLC 301)
11/6:	<i>In Whose Honor?</i>	10:10 AM	(TLC 301)
11/10:	<i>Playing Unfair</i>	7 PM	(TLC 301)
11/17:	<i>Big Time Losers</i>	7 PM	(TLC 301)
12/8:	<i>The Year of the Yao</i>	7 PM	(TLC 301)

Note: You are *not* required to attend these screening sessions, but you are required to have watched the films in question before we discuss them in class.

* I will not be in class for this screening; I will be in Washington, DC, at the ASA annual meeting.