

Soc117 Sports as a Social Institution

Dr. Linus Huang

Summer 2012

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**Final Exam:** In-class, Thursday, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012

### **Course Overview**

To speak of “sports as a social institution” is to look at sports in two slightly different ways. First, sports themselves are institutions, which may be very local in nature—for instance, a variation of a game of kickball played only by a few neighborhood friends; or global in scope, as in soccer (“football” to everyone outside the U.S.) during the quadrennial World Cup. How do some sports grow from local phenomena to nationally or globally popular “codes” of play either performed or followed by hundreds of millions of people?

Second, sports are shaped by *other* social institutions such as race, gender, class, sexuality, violence, the emergence of fantasy sports, the profit motive, etc.—all of which potentially interfere with the presumed objective of winning or of sports-as-meritocracy. A sociological understanding of sports, therefore, entails an understanding of the different types of social meanings we invest in sports, and what consequences this has. Together, these two conceptual approaches will comprise an institutionalist understanding of sports that we’ll seek to build over the course.

### **Required Texts**

Readings for the course will come from three different sources. First, readings for the first week of class, and the first week ONLY, will be posted under the “READINGS” folder under the “Resources” tab on the course bspace site. They will be in PDF format.

Second, there are two required books, both available at ASUC:

- Eric Leifer, *Making the Majors: The Transformation of Team Sports in America*. Harvard University Press.
- Andrei S. Markovits & Lars Rensmann, *The Gaming World: How Sports are Reshaping Global Politics and Culture*. Princeton University Press.

Between bspace and the two books, that’s about half the course readings. The rest of the readings will come from a course reader, soon to be available at University Copy at 2425 Channing Way, south of campus under the Channing/Durant parking garage.

## Grading

Your grade will consist of three components:

1. **Four in-class quizzes** (7.5% each, 30% total) to be administered on the Thursday of the second through fifth weeks. These quizzes will cover the readings and class discussion of the previous week, including the readings to have been completed for the day of the quiz.

Absolutely NO make-ups will be possible for the quizzes. If you have a prior commitment on one of these days, come see me within the first week.

2. **A take-home midterm exam** (35%), to be distributed on July 16<sup>th</sup> and due one week later. The details of this assignment will be elaborated upon as the exam approaches.
3. **An in-class final exam** (35%), to be administered on the last day of instruction, August 9<sup>th</sup>, as per the standard practice of the summer sessions (which otherwise have no RRR week or separate exam period). The exam will be predominantly or all multiple choice.

The grading scale is as follows. ‘[’ means including, and ‘)’ means excluding, so ‘[83-87)’ for example means everything including 83 up to but **NOT** including 87.

A+	[97+	A	[93-97)	A-	[90-93)
B+	[87-90)	B	[83-87)	B-	[80-83)
C+	[77-80)	C	[73-77)	C-	[70-73)
D+	[67-70)	D	[63-67)	D-	[60-63)
		F	[0-60)		

## Lecture, Reading, and Assignment/Exam Schedule

- Jul 2 Mon Introduction: what is an “institutionalist” perspective on sports?  
*Readings:* none
- 3 Tue The game on the field/court/pitch  
*Readings:*
- Malcolm Gladwell, “How David Beats Goliath” *The New Yorker* 11 May 2009 (bspace)
  - Michael Lewis, “If I Only Had the Nerve” *ESPN.com* 18 Dec 2006 (bspace)
- 4 Wed **NO CLASS.** Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July.
- 5 Thu The social meaning of sports  
*Readings:*
- Richard Giulianotti, “Supporters, Followers, Fans, and *Flaneurs*: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities in Football” (bspace)
  - Douglas Foley, “The Great American Football Ritual” (bspace)

- Jul 9 Mon Gender and sport  
*Readings:*
- Jennifer Ring, “America’s Baseball Underground” (reader)
  - Jamila Aisha Brown, “The WNBA Problem: Play Like a Man, Act Like a Lady” (reader)
- 10 Tue Sports and the body  
*Reading:* Molly George, “Making Sense of Muscle” (reader)
- 11 Wed Sports and technology  
*Readings:*
- Bryan Sluggett, “Creating the ‘Pure’ Athlete” (M.A. thesis) ch 1, pp. 1-20 + ch 2 (reader)
  - “Pulling All the Strings” *The Wall Street Journal* 23 Nov 2010 (reader)
  - “The Pitcher as Science Project” *The Wall Street Journal* 12 Oct 2011 (reader)
- 12 Thu The media and sports  
*Readings:*
- Michael Messner, Michele Dunbar & Darnell Hunt, “The Televised Sports Manhood Formula” (reader)
  - Rick Horrow & Karla Swatek, “Remote Controlling What You See on TV” (reader)

### **QUIZ #1**

- 16 Mon The political economy of sports: are sports a “public good”?  
*Readings:*
- Andrew Zimbalist, “May the Best Team Win” (reader)
  - Rick Horrow & Karla Swatek, “The Government Gets Into—and Out of—the Game” (reader)
  - Rick Eckstein & Kevin Delaney, “New Sports Stadiums, Community Self-Esteem, and Community Collective Conscience” (reader)

### **TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM DISTRIBUTED JULY 16<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

- 17 Tue The political economy of sports: league structure and ownership  
*Reading:* Rick Horrow & Karla Swatek, “So You Wanna Own a Sports Team?” (reader)
- 18 Wed The institutionalization of the modern U.S. pro sports leagues: cultivating a “public”  
*Reading:* Eric Leifer, *Making the Majors* preface + ch 1, 4

Jul 19 Thu Institutionalization of the modern pro sports leagues: the NFL passes MLB  
*Reading: Leifer, Making the Majors ch 5*

**QUIZ #2**

23 Mon Institutionalization of the modern pro sports leagues: MLB and the NBA try to catch up  
*Reading: Leifer, Making the Majors ch 6*

**TAKE-HOME MIDTERM EXAM DUE IN-CLASS JULY 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012**

24 Tue *Moneyball* as an institution  
*Readings:*

- Michael Lewis, *Moneyball* ch 2, 3, 4, 12 (reader)
- “Hoop Data Dreams” *The New York Times* 4 May 2008 (reader)
- “Wall Street Trader Takes Quant Strategy to NBA” *The Wall Street Journal* 14 Sep 2010 (reader)
- “Can Statistics Explain Soccer?” *The Wall Street Journal* 24 Jun 2008 (reader)
- “It’s all ‘Moneyball’ Now” *The New York Times* 14 Oct 2011 (reader)

25 Wed Globalization of sport: how did soccer become the world’s sport?  
*Readings:*

- Andrei S. Markovits & Lars Rensmann, *Gaming the World* ch 2
- “Why Rugby Looks More Like the NFL” *The Wall Street Journal* 13 Oct 2011 (reader)

26 Thu Globalization of sport: the feminization of soccer  
*Reading: Markovits & Rensmann, Gaming the World ch 4*

**QUIZ #3**

30 Mon Globalization of sport: parochialism and its expressions  
*Reading: Markovits & Rensmann, Gaming the World ch 5*

We will watch the half-hour BBC America Euro 2012 feature “Stadiums of Hate” in class.

31 Tue Globalization of sport: American exceptionalism?  
*Reading: Markovits & Rensmann, Gaming the World ch 6*

- Aug 1 Wed College sports: the institutional context  
*Readings:*
- Welch Suggs, “Football, Television, and the Supreme Court” (reader)
  - Taylor Branch, “The Shame of College Sports” (reader)
  - “SEC Coaches Defend ‘Oversigning’” *The Wall Street Journal* 1 Mar 2011 (reader)
  - “The Beginning of the End for the NCAA” *Grantland* 1 Nov 2011 (reader)

- 2 Thu Should we pay college athletes?  
*Readings (yea):*
- “Let’s Start Paying College Athletes” *The New York Times* 30 Dec 2011 (reader)
  - “The Case for Paying College Athletes” *The Wall Street Journal* 16 Sep 2011 (reader)
  - “Why Jason Whitlock thinks we should give college football another chance” *Slate* 1 May 2012 (reader)
- Readings (nay):*
- “NCAA President Mark Emmert: Paying College Athletes is a Terrible Idea” *The Wall Street Journal* 11 Jan 2012 (reader)
  - “Rebutting Taylor Branch’s belief in paying student-athletes” *Sports Illustrated* 21 Sep 2011 (reader)
  - “College athletes already have advantages and shouldn’t be paid” *Sports Illustrated* 20 Jan 2012 (reader)

#### QUIZ #4

- 6 Mon Title IX and the reverse discrimination thesis  
*Reading:* Women’s Sports Foundation, “Who’s Playing College Sports?” (reader)

- 7 Tue Sports and violence  
*Readings:*
- Randall Collins, “On-Field Player Violence” (reader)
  - “Does Football Have a Future?” *The New Yorker* 31 Jan 2011 (reader)

We will watch the *intelligence*<sup>2</sup> debate “Should college football be banned?” from May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012 in class. The video will take the entire 100 minutes of class.

- 8 Wed Sports and violence: Discussion  
*Readings:* none

- 9 Thu **FINAL EXAM** (in-class)