

COMM 381 Issues in Contemporary Sport

MW 10:00-11:30

ASC 204

Instructor: Bill Morgan PhD

Office: G 21-C, ASC

Office Hours: MW 1:00-2:00 or by appointment

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Course Description

This course will explore major social and ethical issues in contemporary elite sports, and how those issues are taken up in the discourse of popular media and the like. In particular, we will examine the current worrisome state of youth sports, the ethics of college sports, the case for and against football, and the effect the market has on the ethics of sport. We will read, discuss, and critically reflect on the main claims made in the readings, and then read and think some more about their critical import.

Texts

Almond, S. Against Football. Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014

Emundson, M. Why Football Matters. New York: Penguin House, 2014.

French, P. Ethics and College Sports. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004.

Huizinga, J. Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture. Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.

Hyman, M. Until It Hurts: America's Obsession with Youth Sports, and How It Harms Our Kids. Beacon Press, 2009.

Sandel, M. What Money Can't Buy. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012.

Walsh, A., Giulianotti. R. Ethics, Money, and Sport. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Selected Essays on electronic reserve marked by an asterisk * in the course plan. To access the reserve log into ARES (the library's electronic reserve site), look up my name under instructor, and then the course number and name for this class.

Course Objectives

1. Students will learn to recognize and distinguish critical social and political questions from other sorts of intellectual considerations that are relevant to modern sport.
2. Students will be introduced to various types of critical analysis and develop acceptable competence in applying them to social/political issues in sport.
3. Students will be exposed to select critical readings of sport that challenge both the typically uncritical and facile way the media covers and discusses sport, and the way dominant groups use sport to further their political ambitions and agendas.

Course Requirements

1. **Two exams.** These exams are designed to test your understanding of the main arguments discussed in the class readings. They will require you to answer specific questions regarding these arguments and/or to define central concepts used in these arguments. The first exam is scheduled for **Oct. 11th**, and the second exam is scheduled for **Dec. 11th, 8:30-10:00** (finals week). Each exam will cover only the readings discussed before the actual date of the exam in question, which means that the second exam will not be cumulative, but only cover the readings assigned after the first exam is administered. The results of both exams will be worth 50% of your final grade.
2. **Special Assignment Video and Critical Reaction Paper.** Sept. 6, I'll be away at a conference in Canada. Your assignment that day will be to watch on your own the Documentary "League of Denial: The NFL's Concussion Crisis," and write a critical reaction to the video examining the response of the NFL to this public crisis. It should be two typed pages long (double-spaced), and is due our next Monday class, Sept. 11. Be prepared to discuss your critical response in class, so please hang on to your assignment and turn it in at the end of class that day. We will reserve around 20 to 30 minutes of class for discussion of your critical reaction to the video, and then proceed to discuss the readings assigned for our Sept. 11th class. The assignment will counted as part of your class participation grade and be graded as * Outstanding, + Satisfactory, and - Unsatisfactory.
3. **One critical essay** The paper is to be a critical analysis of a particular issue(s) raised in one of the four main sections of the course readings: The Ethics of Children Sports,

The Ethics of College Sports, the Ethics of the Sport Market, and the Ethics of Elite Football. **The paper will be due exactly, no exceptions, one week after we finish the last essay/chapter of each section.** So the due date of your paper will depend on what section topic you choose to write on. The paper is to be no more than five pages (the page requirement will be strictly enforced to encourage concise writing), double-spaced, and follow a regular format. The purpose of the paper is to evaluate your own ability to think and write about issues in a thoughtful and critical manner. The essays will be worth 25 % of your final grade.

4. **Class participation.** This class will put a heavy emphasis on class participation. This requires a thorough and close reading of the book chapters and essays assigned for each class and, of course, mandatory attendance at each class. That means you cannot get an A in this class unless you are fully engaged in the class readings and discussions. Minimally acceptable engagement in class includes **no browsing of cell phones or the web during class** (those who do not adhere to this policy will be barred from bringing their computers to class after two violations). To facilitate such class discussion, **you will be required to turn in once a week a minimum of four questions** (two reading and two critical discussion questions) for the readings assigned for each class (**typed, double-spaced**). This requirement will be worth 25 percent of the final grade. If the first letter of your last name falls between A to K your questions are due on a M, if it falls between L to Z they are due on W. The questions will be graded as + satisfactory or - unsatisfactory. The questions are to be turned in at the beginning of class. I will not accept late assignments nor will I accept questions from students who are not in attendance on the day they are due - - so please don't give your assignment to a classmate to hand in for you. Class participation will count as 25% of your final grade, which also includes your two page critical reaction paper to the "League of Denial" video.
5. You are permitted two unexcused absences. **Each unexcused absence beyond these two will result in a 2% reduction from your final class grade.**
6. **All requirements** must be completed in order to pass the class.

Grading Scale

A	94-100%	C	74-76%
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A-	90-93%	C-	70-73%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	84-86%	D	64-66%
B-	80-83%	E	63% and below
C+	77-79%		

Course Plan

August 21 Introduction

Part I The essays in this section focus mainly on definitional issues (what features define play, game, and sport, and what relations obtain between them), and in part on what place these social practices should hold in our contemporary lives

Aug. 23 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, Chaps. I, III.

28 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, Chaps. XI, XII

Aug. 30 Suits, *The Elements of Sport* *; Thompson, *A World Without Work* *

Sept. 4 **Labor Day, Holiday**

6 Special Assignment, Viewing on your own of “League of Denial: The NFL’s Concussion Crisis.

Part II The essays in this section will concern the ethics of youth sports, and will examine the delicate relation between paternalism and liberty as these notions apply to this realm of sports. In particular, we will explore why the paternalistic role that is characteristic of most parent-child, coach-child relations, in which parents and officials who play a loco parentis role in children’s lives are not only morally permitted but morally obligated to interfere with children’s choices and preferences when it is necessary to protect and promote their best interests, often breaks down in youth sports with significant negative consequences.

11 Class Discussion of “League of Denial” Video, Hyman, Until It Hurts, Chaps. 1-6. Critical Reaction paper due at end of class.

13 Hyman, *Until It Hurts*, Chaps. 7, 8, 9, Postscript; Video “Football High: Bigger, Faster, But Safer?”

18	Dixon, "Sport, Parental Authority, and Children's Right to an Open Future" *
20	Russell, "Children and Dangerous Sport and Recreation" *
25	Peterson, "What Makes for a Good Sports Parent?" *
Part III	The readings in this section will be devoted to whether elite college sports weaken, undermine, or support and possibly strengthen the academic mission of institutions of higher education.
27	French, Ethics and College Sports, Chaps. 1, 2.
Oct. 2	French, Ethics and College Sports, Chaps. 3, 4
4	French, Ethics and College Sports, Chaps. 5, 6
Oct. 9	Brand, "The Role and Value of Intercollegiate Athletics" *
11	First Exam
Part IV	This set of readings will examine the role of the sport market and its effects on the ethics of sport.
16	Sandel, What Money Can't Buy, Introduction, Chap. 3
18	Sandel, What Money Can't Buy, Chap. 5
23	Walsh, Sporting Mammon, Chaps. 1, 2
25	Walsh, Sporting Mammon, Chaps. 3,4
30	Walsh, Sporting Mammon, Chaps. 5,6,7
Nov. 1	No Class
Part V	These readings will be devoted to football and whether this most popular American sport is ethically defensible.
Nov. 6	Edmundson, Why Football Matters, Chaps. 1, 2, 3.
8	Edmundson, Why Football Matters, Chaps 4, 5, 6.
13	Edmundson, Why Football Matters, Chaps. 7, 8, Conclusion
15	Almond, Against Football, Preface, Chaps. 1, 2
20	Almond, Against Football, Chaps. 3, 4
22	Thanksgiving Holiday
27	Almond, Against Football, Chaps. 5, 6, 7
29	Almond, Against Football, Chaps. 8, 9, 10, Epilogue
Dec. 4	Study Day

Dec. 11 **Final Exam 8:30-10:00 am.**

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *Scampus*, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.