

Comm 499 Special Topics
Issues in Contemporary Sport
M W 2:00-3:20
Room ASC 204

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Office Hours, Mon. 3-4:00 and by appt.

Course Description

This course will explore major social, political, ethical, and aesthetic issues in contemporary elite sports, and how those issues are taken up in the discourse of the popular media. In particular, we will examine the current worrisome state of youth sport, the doping scandals that have rocked some of our most popular elite sports, the vexed and complicated relation of present day high-performance sport to major social and political movements of our times, the masculine barriers that still stand in the way of women's participation in and consumption of sport, and the often overlooked aesthetic and artistic features 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

Huizinga, Johan. Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture. Beacon Press, 2000.

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

Markovits, Andrei, Albertson, Emily. Sportista: Female Fandom in the U. S. Temple University Press, 2012.

Moller, Verner. The Ethics of Doping and Anti-Doping. Routledge, 2010.

Morgan, William J. Why Sports Morally Matter. Routledge, 2006.

Zang, David. Sports Wars: Athletes in the Age of Acquarius. University of Arkansas Press, 2001.

Bernard Suits. The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia. Broadview Press, 2005.

Voet, Willy. Breaking the Chain: Drugs and Cycling: The True Story. Random House, 2002.

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

Course Requirements

1. **Two essay exams.** These exams will be of the essay variety, and will require you to answer specific questions that test your understanding of the arguments discussed in the class readings. 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. **Two critical essays** The papers are to be critical analyses of particular issues discussed in the course readings. Each paper is to be 8-10 typed pages, double-spaced, and follow a regular format. The purpose of the papers is to evaluate your own ability to think and write about issues in a thoughtful and critical manner. The essay will be worth 30 % of your final grade.
3. **Class participation.** This class will put a heavy emphasis on class participation. This requires a thorough and close reading of the essays assigned for each class and, of course, mandatory attendance at each class. To encourage class participation, you will be required to write a paragraph for each assigned reading in which you are to articulate what you take to be the main point of the essay and why you think it is the main point. These should be typed, double-spaced, and handed in on the day we discuss the readings in class. Class participation will count as 20 % of your final grade.
4. All requirements must be completed in order to pass the class.

Grading Scale

A	94-100%	C	74-76%
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

Theme for Week 1-4 Readings: Will focus in part 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 (Huizinga will claim, for instance, that play is the wellspring of culture itself; Suits will argue that game playing is central to utopian life).

Weeks 1-2 Introduction, Huizinga, Homo Ludens, Chaps. 1-8

Weeks 3, 4 Suits, The Grasshopper, Preface, Chaps. 1-8, 13-15.

Theme for Week 5-6 Readings: Will concern the delicate relation between paternalism and liberty as these notions apply to so called youth 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.

Weeks 5, 6 Hyman, Until It Hurts, Chaps. 1-9, Postscript

Theme for Week 7-9 Readings: Will investigate the "inside" doping tactics that high-performance athletes and their representatives use to circumvent doping control authorities, and examine the ethical issues of both doping and anti-doping advocates.

Week 7 Voet, Breaking the Chain, Entire Book, Mid-term Exam.

Weeks 8, 9 Moller, The Ethics of Doping and Anti-Doping, Chaps. 1-10.

Theme for Week 10-13 Readings: Will consider the social, political, and moral meanings of elite contemporary sports. In particular, we will concentrate on the interesting and long historical connection between progressive

political movements and sports, and how in the 1960s sports came under especially acute political scrutiny.

Weeks 10, 11 Morgan, Why Sports Morally Matter, Intro., Chaps. 2, 3, 5-7.

Weeks 12, 13 Zang, Sports Wars, Chaps. 1-7.

Theme for Weeks 14-15: Will analyze the complicated and contradictory character of women's involvement in sports, in which the impressive gains they have made as participants in sports have been offset by the struggles they continue to face as consumers of sport by an overwhelmingly male sport audience that refuses to recognize them as true fans and, therefore, as legitimate athletic media spokespersons.

Weeks 14, 15 Markovits, Sportista, Chaps 1-6, Conclusion.

Theme for Week 16: Will take up the oft ignored aesthetic side of sports, how aesthetic judgments regarding sports performances figure in major ways in select sports such as gymnastics, diving, figure skating, and the like (indeed, in these sports athletic success is not determined by measuring or recording physical feats but rather by judging their qualitative excellence), and whether sports of this kind qualify further as forms of art, and athletes as artists in their own right. We will further consider how aesthetic judgments of athletic excellence are frequently implicated in political judgments of their worth and social significance.

Week 16 Best, "The Aesthetic in Sport,"* Kupfer, "Sport: The Body Electric"*
Critical Papers Due last day of classes.

Exam Period Final Exam

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/>.