

## USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION AND JOURNALISM

ASCJ 420 – Athlete Speak: Communicating to the Professional Athlete

Spring 2016

4 Units

Day/Time: M 6:30-9:20 PM

Classroom: ANN 309

Instructor: Erit Yellen

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Office Hours: TBD

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the communication strategies of professional athletes, their public relations and branding teams, and media. We will study how athletes build (and diminish) the brand of their team and sponsors. Professional athletes communicate to a wide variety of audiences. Their communication teams must strategize to reach each of these audiences and create a positive impression of the athlete before each of these audiences. We will explore the various messages created in the name of the athletes, messages that may, at times, seem self-contradictory. We will discuss ways in which communication teams create a larger brand for athletes that is meant to subsume and make sense of these various communicated images. Students will learn theories of sports communication and have the opportunity to interact with professionals who employ those theories to create effective communication strategies for athletes.

### SPECIFIC STUDENT OUTCOMES

1. Students will learn essential communication strategies employed in sports media, public relations, and brand management.
2. Students will use theories of sports communication to analyze the brand management of an elite athlete and to create an alternative communication strategy to build the athlete's brand for new audiences.
3. Students will engage in discussions with professional public relations executives, sports agents, and athletes regarding sports communication strategies, crisis communication, and image development.

### REQUIRED READING

- *The Sports Industry's War on Athletes* NEED SITE & PUBLISHER
- *The Business of Sports Agents*

- [http://www.amazon.com/Athletes-Media-Playbook-Interviewing-Community/dp/0989960609/ref=sr\\_1\\_5?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1436050690&sr=1-5&keywords=athlete+communications](http://www.amazon.com/Athletes-Media-Playbook-Interviewing-Community/dp/0989960609/ref=sr_1_5?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1436050690&sr=1-5&keywords=athlete+communications)

### ***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.

[Website for DSP](#) and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### ***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 University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

### ***Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis***

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on [Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness](#).

### **SUMMARY OF CLASS ASSIGNMENTS/GRADES**

"What is Your Sports Story" Statement - 10%

Athlete Communication Analysis from the Athlete Perspective – 25%

In Class Participation – 20%

Homework – 15%

Final Presentation – 20%

### **SPORTS STORY ASSIGNMENT**

All sports enter public communication as narratives. Students will write a brief paper explaining their own experience of sports, the story they would sell as athletes, fans, or students.

## TENTATIVE SEMESTER SCHEDULE

### WEEK 1

#### Introduction to Overall Course

- What we will be covering throughout the semester, goals, objectives and student introductions.
- “What is Your Sports Story” Roundtable with students
- Discussion on Current State of Athletes and sports in today’s society & media

Homework & Reading (TBD on professional athlete guest speakers):

Research on the next week’s guest lecturer, that athlete (provided by professor) and be prepared to ask athlete questions directly related to those articles.

**Assignment:** 1-2 page paper on “What is Your Sports Story?”

What is your “why” of taking this course?

What about Sport inspires you?

### THE ATHLETE:

### WEEKS 2, 3 & 4

#### Direct Athlete Perspective from a Professional Athlete: Past & Present

- We will dive into what the professional athlete experiences from a few major sports and professional athlete guests.
- The course will spend these weeks hearing from and talking directly with professional athletes from different sports & different backgrounds, gaining an understanding of each objective when they are or were playing.
- The Q/A will also focus on these athlete’s perspectives on what they think are the top 3 priorities an athlete needs to effectively communicate to and with all of their different obligations as well as what they need from everyone else around them in communicating back.

**Homework:** for these first few weeks, draft a one-page summary after each class of the athletes’ perspective, picking 2-3 key points they made. Be prepared to discuss at the beginning of next class.

By Week 5, Finish Full Book (224 pages) “The Sports Industry’s War on Athletes”

### WEEK 5

#### Summary of Direct Athlete Perspective Weeks

- Key Learnings and Takeaways from what the athletes talked about.
- Focusing on what was the surprising parts of what they said and how can that be better expressed.
- Discussion of “The Sport’s Industry’s War on Athletes”

- Be prepared to compare the book with what the professional athletes spoke about in class.
- Address the differences between each athlete as well as similarities

Reading: The Business of Sports Agents pages 1-50

## WEEK 6

### Athlete Story from an Agent Perspective

- From signing a client, negotiating contracts and sponsor deals. Communicating with a professional athlete during this process and keys to success.
- What are the questions, as an athlete, that you should ask when hiring an agent and what to be aware of in that relationship?
- Guest: TBD Sports Agent

Reading:

<http://www.mensjournal.com/magazine/the-nfls-alpha-agent-goes-to-war-20150420>

The Business of Sports Agents 50-100

Homework: Draft One page summary from the agent's perspective on how to effectively communicate with a professional athlete. Be prepared to discuss in next class.

## WEEK 7

### Athlete Story from a Sports Publicist Perspective

- Discuss homework assignment from previous week briefly on summary of communicating to an athlete from the standpoint of an agent.
- What is a Publicist in Sports?
- Background of Sports Publicists
- GUEST: Publicist TBD

Reading: <http://www.mensjournal.com/magazine/the-woman-who-bails-out-the-nfls-bad-boys-20141114>

Homework: Summarize communications from the Publicist perspective and be prepared to discuss in next class.

Reading: "Business of a Sports Agent" 100-150

## **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE**

## WEEK 8

### Athlete Story from a Team/Governing Body Perspective

Discuss previous week's lecture from a publicist's perspective.

- What are the expectations of an athlete's team or governing body?
- How does the team handle these requests with the athlete?
- Which athletes usually get the most requests from the team?
- Guest: TBD from a team

Homework: Summarize communications from the team and be prepared to discuss in next class.

Reading: "Business of a Sports Agent" 150-200

## WEEK 9

Athlete Story from a Sponsor Perspective

In this week's perspective, the class will aim to answer questions like:

- What are the obligations an athlete has to their sponsors from social media posts, appearances to doing PR and Media?
- What if the sponsor is non-team/league sponsor? How is that handled?
- Guest: TBD from Sports Sponsor

Reading: "Business of a Sports Agent" 200-224

## WEEK 10

Athlete Story from a Philanthropic Perspective

Discuss previous week's lecture from a sponsor perspective

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joshua-kusnick/why-athletes-need-to-exer\\_b\\_5767928.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joshua-kusnick/why-athletes-need-to-exer_b_5767928.html)

## WEEK 11

Athlete Story from a Reporter/Media Perspective

Discuss previous week's guest from an athlete charity

Guest: Reporter from the Media

Assignment: Watch Film from Doc Filmmaker for following week

## WEEK 12

Final Group Student Presentations

## WEEK 13

Final Group Student Presentations

## WEEK 14

Final Group Student Presentations

## WEEK 15

Athlete Story from a Documentary Filmmaker

Discuss previous week's guest from Reporter/Media Perspective

Guest: Sport Documentary Filmmaker

### *HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS*

General homework assignments will be a one-page summary of the guest lecture and learning from the previous class due next class. The summaries may or may not be collected. However, prepare as if they would be collected every class and definitely prepare to discuss.

Each guest lecture summary should have the following:

Perspective: (i.e., Athlete, Agent, Publicist, etc.)

Objective: (what is the main goal from this perspective? i.e. For sponsor: To maintain relationship with athlete and make sure the athlete properly represents the brand).

Summary: From that perspective, what are the key takeaways or learning that an athlete should know when managing this relationship? Or what should the perspective know or be aware of to be more effective in communicating with the athlete?

### *WRITING ASSIGNMENT*

5-7 Pages

Analysis of Athlete Communication Directly from the Professional Athlete

Spring 2015

As fans and consumers of sports, the pulse of the industry lies within the professional athlete. Yet, we often don't get the opportunity to have 1:1 conversations with them about their own involvement in the industry off-of-the-court or the field.

During the first 5 weeks of this course we were able to hear directly from professional athletes on their experiences with communication across multiple entities and responsibilities. We heard inside details and had candid conversations across a variety of sports and events as it pertains to their profession.

You are to analyze the top 3 priorities of an athlete's objectives in communicating from what you have learned so far in hearing from retired and current athletes. You will address what you think these 3 priorities in communicating should be and how the athlete should go about handling.

Write this paper as if you were trying to help a professional athlete understand what their priorities are in balancing their multiple obligations in a what to do/what not to do sort of way. Use specific examples from class and the guest lecturers to back up your analysis.

The paper should clearly display why the athlete should choose to structure their communications in the way you are suggesting citing other strategies that are similar in effectiveness.

FOCUS on the skills that the athlete will need to effectively communicate.

This paper is NOT a communications plan but almost a short listing of what an athlete should focus on when they are seeking to successfully prioritize and communicate within their full scope of obligations according to what you have learned so far (Mainly Weeks 2, 3 & 4).

### *FINAL PRESENTATION/PAPER*

Students will prepare and present an analysis of the communication strategies taken up by publicists and agents for a particular athlete, team or league. In groups of three or four, they will mount a professional power point and video presentation that will analyze strengths and weaknesses in the current strategies and offer alternative strategies for developing new audiences and strengthening current audiences for an athlete, team, or league.

3 weeks into class, groups and subjects will be assigned. The professor will assign specific athletes who will be the focus of the presentation and further parameters will be discussed.

12-15 sources, 3-5 page outline, full paper along with it. 10 page presentation. Students will be assigned athletes by the professor.

Students must submit subjects for approval by the third week of the semester. Their subject must be an athlete, team, or league that is currently active. Groups will prepare an outline with a cited references page. Group presentations will run twenty minutes and must employ key strategic concepts discussed in class.

### NOTES ON THE COURSE:

All of these forms of communication become one stream of communication representing the athlete. How do we make the communication more efficient to help the athlete build and maintain their brand?

This course is focused on communication management by professional athletes and the strategies for managing those streams of communication. Communication strategists who can succeed as athletes and also succeed as celebrities representing brands, organizations, etc.

Athletes have to create one character/persona that can still be subsumed as the elite athlete. Different audiences engaged but still have to strategize to fit into one athlete.