

B. SPORT AND SOCIETY: WHY SPORTS ARE LESS THAN WAR, BUT MORE THAN A GAME

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Tuesdays, 1:00-2:30 p.m. Norris University Center

Sports are more than entertainment, more than pop culture. They are a social institution no less than education, religion, or the military. They are the oldest form of “reality television” and the most expensive, highest earning media product in the world. Americans, no less than perhaps people from the England to Turkey to India, see sport as a metaphorical training ground for “life,” one reason politicians take such a keen interest in it. Life in this case includes industry and commerce, domestic and international politics, gender and sexuality, race and ethnic relations, religion and spirituality. In the United States, if you can name it, sports have an analog for it. This course considers sports in some of these various contexts, while also looking at international experiences and examples.

Jan. 13 Why Study Sport?

“After all, it’s mere entertainment.” It is much more, and scholars have only recently taken notice.

Jan. 20 Primitive Games to Modern Sport

What is sport anyway? Is golf a game or a sport? What about horse racing? Sport is more than play and more than a game or contest, but definitions vary.

Jan. 27 From “Reputable Waste” to Human Right

In the early to mid-19th century, sport was a lower-class activity. Today “the right to play” is a basic human right, according to the UN, the IOC, and the Pope. What changed? And what’s next?

Feb. 3 Britain and the United States

It is said that the Greeks invented sport, that the British wrote down all the rules, and the Americans made it a business. Cliché, but there’s a lot of truth to it.

Feb. 10 Canada, Brazil and the Middle East

Sports give identities to nations and communities, as well as individuals. There is a reason Kenyans run, Brazilians love soccer, Canadians play hockey, and Hungarians excel at water polo.

Feb. 17 Sport, Sex and Gender

For women and for men, sport is a primary testing ground for gender identity. Today it is also a testing ground for sex identity, as international sport governing bodies wrestle with questions about sex and equality of competition.⁸

Feb. 24 Sport and the Experience of Black Americans

Sport is one of the few ways Americans can talk sanely and idiotically about race at the same time. Other countries have similar stories to tell, but the American sport experience is unique.

Mar. 3 “Mediasport”

Sport and modern mass media were born at the same time and for the same reasons. But they have been joined at the hip from the beginning, and today sport is the last media product that still aggregates live global audiences.

Mar. 10 What’s Happened to College Sports?

Money and media happened. It is the same as what happened to previous eras of college sports. The era of name-image-likeness (NIL) deals and bizarre transfer portals is new but is also a uniquely American phenomenon. And today, as in previous generations, no one is quite sure who’s in charge.