

# "In the Ballpark"

## Sports and American Identity

**Room and time:** Seminar Room (Attemsgasse 25, Top Floor, SR 34.D2), Wednesday, 15:15-16:45 · **Course number:** 512.313

**Lecturer:** Univ.-Prof. Dr. Stefan L. Brandt · **Office hours:** Thur, 4-6 p.m. (Room DG-0036) · **Email:** [stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at](mailto:stefan.brandt@uni-graz.at)

**Description:** The cultural history of America can easily be told through the lens of sports. From its beginnings, America has fashioned itself as a competitive country in which everybody can climb the social ladder if they only try hard enough. The American Dream, that ideology of upward mobility (allegedly regardless of a person's origins and background), finds its analogy in sports such as baseball, football, and basketball. To this day, sports heroes are often constructed by the media as role models for girls and boys. The fascination of athletes such as Muhammad Ali and Lance Armstrong is not unlike that of action stars and other film heroes. This course will investigate the cultural background of this obsession, beginning with the fitness craze in 19<sup>th</sup>-century America and the cult of bare-knuckle prize-fighting around the turn of the century. Subsequent sessions will deal with the representation of baseball as an 'all-American sport,' ethnic masculinity and the construction of a black counter-imagination, the revolt of the white athlete in the 1990s, and the development of the 'body machine' in professional body-building. We will specifically explore the question why some American sports seem qualified as vehicles of cultural (and national) self-formation and why some athletes are constructed by the media as role models and others are not.

**Teaching and Learning Method:** This is an interactive course. Participation in group discussions as well as contributions to the discussion forum on the Moodle course site will be part of the final grade. Each meeting will be held by 'experts' who organize the session by means of questions, games, video clips, and group work. The most relevant facts will be conveyed in a short information block. The experts will upload their questions for the discussion forum 6 days in advance!

**Materials:** All texts will be made available on **Moodle**. Please watch films in the **Media Archive!**

**Aims:** The seminar sheds light on the historical background and cultural representation of American sports. Students will be familiarized with the significance of sports in the U.S. national imaginary.

**Assessment: A.)** regular attendance (*no more than 2 absences!*) and active in-class participation, as well as **nine** (!) substantial entries in the discussion forum (1/3); **B.)** presentation as part of an expert session plus 3-page handout and online questions (1/3); **C.)** research proposal (2 pages) and final paper (10 pages) (1/3). You need to pass each section to pass the course.

**Deadline for Final Papers** (including declaration of honesty): Friday, July 14, 2017. *There is no (!) extension of this deadline.* Please indicate on a **post-it** attached to your final paper if you would like to get detailed feedback!

## Syllabus

- 08 March**      **Introduction – Sports and American Identity**  
Basic texts:  
Benjamin Rader, "Sports in Early America" (2004). [Moodle]  
Wiley Umphlett, excerpts from *The Sporting Myth and the American Experience* (1975). [Moodle]
- 15 March**      **Bodybuilding as Nation-Building: From the Muscular Christianity Movement to Arnold Schwarzenegger**  
Main text (reading required):  
Simon Wendt, "Bodybuilding and Masculinity in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century America" (2011). [Moodle]  
Companion text (optional):  
James A. Mathisen, "Muscular Christianity" (1990). [Moodle]  
Keywords: Bodybuilding; Fitness Cult; Muscular Christianity; Physical Exercise; *Pumping Iron* (film); Schwarzenegger.
- 22 March**      **Boxing and Social Class in American Literature**  
Main text (reading required):  
Jack London, "A Piece of Steak" (1909). [Moodle]  
Companion text (optional):  
Ernest Hemingway, "The Battler" (1925). [Moodle]  
Stephen Matterson, "Sports Literature" (2003). [Moodle]  
Keywords: Bare-Knuckle Fights; Bloody Sports; Boxing; Darwinism; Poverty; Social Class; SportsLit; Survival.
- 29 March**      **From Rags to Riches – The Prizefighter as American Hero**  
Main example (viewing required):  
*Rocky* (film, dir. George Butler, 1976). [Watch in the Media Archive!]  
Companion texts (optional):  
*Ali* (film, dir. Michael Mann, 2001).  
Keywords: American Dream; Class Struggle; Jack Dempsey; Muhammad Ali/'The Greatest'; Upward Mobility.

- 05 April**      **Baseball – The All-American Sport**  
 Main example (reading required):  
 Allen Guttman, “Baseball – The National Game” (1988). [Moodle]  
 Additional texts (optional):  
*Field of Dreams* (film, dir. Phil Alden Robinson, 1989).  
 George C. Rable, “Baseball and the American Presidency” (1989). [Moodle]  
 Keywords: Babe Ruth; Baseball Cards; Jackie Robinson; Leagues; Patriotism; Pitching; Racial Integration; Team Sport.
- 26 April**      **Sports and the Civil Rights Movement I – Protest, Rebellion & the Politics of Ethnic Equality**  
 Main example (viewing required):  
 “1968 Summer Olympics, Black Power Salute.” Documentary. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gck5arjMGBg>.  
 Additional texts (optional):  
 Eva Boesenberg, “Who’s Afraid of Shaq Attaq? Constructions of Black Masculinity” (1998). [Moodle]  
 Keywords: Basketball; Black Power; Colin Kaepernick; Michael Jordan; Nike Commercials; T. Smith & J. Carlos.
- 03 May**      **Independent Study Unit– Research Proposal**  
 Stay at home and create a 2-page research proposal for a potential final paper to be handed in on May 17.
- 10 May**      **Sports and the Civil Rights Movement II**  
 Guest Lecture: Patrick B. Miller (Northeastern Illinois University), “Reading Sport History into Civil Rights Studies”
- 17 May**      **White Sports? Cycling, Golf, and Tennis as Scandalous Sports**  
 Main example (reading required):  
 John Sinnott & Tom McGowan, “Lance Armstrong’s Demise: How an All-American Hero Fell to Earth” (2013).  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/10/22/sport/lance-armstrong-profile-cycling-usada/>  
 Additional texts (optional):  
 Gary Younge, “Tiger Woods” (2010). <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2010/may/29/tiger-woods-racial-politics>.  
 Keywords: Cycling; Doping; Dress; Elite Sports; Golf; L. Armstrong; Steroids; Tennis; Tiger Woods; Whiteness/Race.
- 24 May**      **Women and Professional Sports**  
 Main example (reading required):  
 “Why Girls Playing Sports Is So Important” (2014). Interview with Mia Hamm. <http://time.com/3319338/mia-hamm-soccer-fifa-sports-girls/>  
 Additional texts (optional):  
 Jane Curry and Marjorie Bingham, “American Women and Sport” (1992). [Moodle]  
 Rachel Moss, “What if Male Sports Stars Were Asked the Same Questions as Female Athletes?” (2015). [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/04/cover-the-athlete-sexist-questions-women-in-sport\\_n\\_8470420.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/11/04/cover-the-athlete-sexist-questions-women-in-sport_n_8470420.html).  
 Keywords: Femininity; Gender Roles; Mildred Didrikson; *Pat and Mike* (1952 film); Women’s Soccer.
- 31 May**      **American Football – Masculinity and the National Paradigm**  
 Main example (reading required):  
 Douglas Hartmann, “The Sanctity of Sunday Football: Why Men Love Sports” (2003). [Moodle]  
 Companion texts (optional):  
 Michael Miller, “American Football: The Rationalization of the Irrational” (1997). [Moodle]  
 Keywords: American Exceptionalism; Fantasy Sports; Full-Contact Sport; Gridiron; Masculinity; NFL; Scoring; Super Bowl.
- 07 June**      **American Football in Europe – Going Transnational**  
 Guest Lecture: Richard King (Washington State University), “Traveling Football: Representing the NFL in Austria”
- 14 June**      **Skateboarding as an Urban Protest Movement**  
 Main example (viewing required):  
*Dogtown Boys* (film, dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2005). [Media Archive]  
 Companion text (optional):  
*Dogtown and Z-Boys* (film, dir. Stacy Peralta, 2001).  
 Keywords: Action Sports; Dogtown; Freestyle; S. Peralta; Tricks; Urbanity; X-Games.
- 21 June**      **Sports under the Colors of the Rainbow – Queerness, Gender-Coding, and the Gay Games**  
 Main text (reading required):  
 Greg Louganis, excerpts from *Breaking the Surface* (1995). [Moodle]  
 Companion texts (optional):  
 Gordon Waitt, “Gay Games: Performing ‘Community’ Out from the Closet” (2003). [Moodle]  
 Keywords: Coming Out; Gay Games; Greg Louganis; Martina Navratilova; Queerness.
- 28 June**      **Rolling on the Floor with Laughter – American Sports as a Parody**  
 Main example (viewing required):  
*BASEketball* (film, dir. David Zucker, 1998). [Media Archive]  
 Companion text (optional):  
*Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story* (dir. Rawson M. Thurber, 2004).  
 Keywords: Caricature; *Horse Feathers* (Marx Brothers film); *Naked Gun* (film series); Parody; spoofs.

**Deadline  
 Research Proposal TODAY!**

**Bring 2 library books to  
 TODAY’s session!**

**FINAL PAPER DUE ON JULY 14**

Don’t forget to check out books from our Department Library and use them!