

Sports in U.S. History

HIS276/W

MW 9-10:15am

Location: Morey Hall 205

Instructor: Brianna Theobald

Contact Info: brianna.theobald@rochester.edu

454 Rush Rhees Library

Office Hours: W 2-3:30pm and by appointment

Course Description: Recent acts of protest by high school, collegiate, and professional athletes--including, at times, a refusal to play--remind us that sports are not and have never been separate from the world of politics, nor are they isolated from social, cultural, and economic contexts. Rather, sports reflect the society in which they are embedded and at times have spurred change in these realms. This course will explore U.S. history in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the lens of sports. Among the many questions we will consider are: How might one define a sport, and how have popular understandings of sport changed over time? What functions have sports served in American life? How have sports reinforced inequities in American society, such as those along racial, socioeconomic, and/or gendered lines? To what degree have sports defied these boundaries, acting as agents of democratization? Above all, we will ask: What does it mean to study sports historically?

The College's credit hour policy on undergraduate courses is to award 4 credit hours for courses that meet for the equivalent of 3 periods of 50 minutes each week. Students enrolled in HIST 276/W are expected to devote at least one hour each week outside of class to analyzing the course readings, working alone or in groups, and to researching in depth their topics for the final paper.

Required Reading:

Theresa Runstedtler, *Black Ball: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Spencer Haywood, and the Generation that Saved the Soul of the NBA* (Bold Type Books, 2023).

**All other required readings and media will be available to students on Blackboard. I encourage you to print the readings, take careful notes, and/or have your laptop or other device available so you can access the readings during class discussions.

Grade Breakdown:

94-100% = A	87-89% = B+	77-79% = C+	67-69% = D+
90-93% = A-	83-86% = B	73-76% = C	63-66% = D
	80-82% = B-	70-72% = C-	60-62% = D-

Assessment:

Much of your grade will be derived from *writing*. We will talk more in class about what constitutes a good paper, but at this point it suffices to note that I expect students to submit polished, well-organized work. I encourage students to visit me during office hours to brainstorm essays, work through problems, and, if necessary, discuss strategies for improvement. Additional writing assistance is available through the U of R Writing and Speaking Center. Learn more about this resource here: <http://writing.rochester.edu/tutoring/index.html>.

Students will write at least two short papers in this course. For Paper 1, each student will read Henry Beach Needham's 1905 essay "The College Athlete" as well as one or more articles that they locate independently on controversies surrounding amateurism and college sports in the twenty-first century. Students will then write a short paper (2-3 pages) that compares the articles' themes and arguments. Paper 1 is due via Blackboard at the start of class on Monday, Sept. 16.

Paper 2 requires students to read *Black Ball* and write a short paper (3-4 pages) that compares the NBA and its media coverage in the 1970s, as depicted by Dr. Runstedtler, with the NBA's image and coverage in the 2020s. Paper 2 is due via Blackboard at the start of class on Wednesday, Nov. 6

To encourage everyone to be following sports in the news and thinking about sports-related developments historically, each student will submit three short analyses of contemporary news articles; these analyses should briefly summarize the article's contents and, more importantly, consider how the event, issues, or themes in question relate to (or diverge from) the historical material we are exploring in class. These Sports in the News write-ups should be submitted via Blackboard anytime between Sept. 4 and Nov. 26, although I ask that you not submit more than one analysis per week. Analyses should be 2-3 paragraphs in length, and they must include the link to the article that prompted your analysis.

While most of our course materials focus on baseball, basketball, and football, I encourage students to use the final project as an opportunity to follow their particular interests. Each student will complete a capstone project for the course that they will select in consultation with me by early October. Students should send a one-page project proposal to me via email by the start of class on Monday, Oct. 7. Examples of possible capstone projects include a video, a website, a podcast, or a research paper, among many other options. **Note that students taking the "W" version of the course must write a 12- to 15-page research paper as their final project**, a rough draft of which is due on Wednesday, Nov. 20.

The remainder of a student's grade will be based on participation. To be adequately prepared for class, students need to have completed the assigned reading listed on the schedule below. Class sessions will be a mix of lecture and discussion, and students are expected to participate regularly in these discussions. If you are concerned that you will not be able to make your

engagement with course material visible to me during our regular class sessions, please let me know so that we can figure out workable alternatives. I will keep a record of attendance, but it will not directly affect your grade unless a student's lack of attendance becomes a major problem. If for any reason you need to miss more than one consecutive class session, please let me know, so that we can work together to make sure you stay on track. Note that in previous semesters, students have reported that regular attendance improved both their performance in and experience of this course.

Participation:	20%
Paper 1:	15%
Paper 2:	15%
Sports in the News:	15% (3 @ 5% each)
Final Project:	35%

Course Policies and Expectations:

Late Assignments: Assignments are due via Blackboard at the start of class on the date indicated on the below schedule. If you are unable to meet an occasional deadline, there is a two-day grace period before a late penalty is applied. The grace period is yours to take as needed, no questions asked or permission required. Following the grace period, assignments incur a 10-point penalty for every 24-hour period or portion thereof that passes from the deadline until the assignment is submitted. Papers submitted more than a few days after the deadline may not receive the same level of instructor or TA feedback.

Accommodation Policies: I'm happy to make accommodations as recommended by UR Disability Services. Should you need accommodations, I encourage you to make these arrangements sooner rather than later.

Academic Integrity: Academic honesty is at the core of the historical discipline, and you'll find that it is something I care deeply about. All work submitted must be your own, prepared especially for this course. The use of AI tools is not outright prohibited, but the writing and analysis you submit must fundamentally be your own, and you are responsible for the quality and integrity of the work you submit. I will report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the University's Board on Academic Honesty. That said, I am happy to discuss any questions you may have about what does and does not constitute plagiarism, provided this conversation occurs *before* you submit the assignment. For helpful discussions of plagiarism (including subtle instances), see the American Historical Association's "Defining Plagiarism," <https://www.historians.org/teaching-and-learning/teaching-resources-for-historians/plagiarism-curricular-materials-for-history-instructors/defining-plagiarism>.

Schedule:

Part I: Setting the Stage

Week 1:

- M Aug 26: Introductions and Looking Ahead
- W Aug 28: Why Sports History?
Reading: Gorn and Oriard, "Taking Sports Seriously"

Part II: Amateurism and Professionalism

Week 2:

- M Sept 2: NO CLASS—Labor Day.
- W Sept 4: Nineteenth-Century Amateurism
Reading: Pope, *Patriotic Games*, ch. 2

Week 3:

- M Sept 9: Amateurism and the Olympics
Reading: Llewellyn and Gleaves, *The Rise and Fall*, intro & ch. 1
- W Sept 11: Sports in Higher Education
Reading: Ingrassia, *The Rise of Gridiron University*, ch. 2

Week 4:

- M Sept 16: Crises in Amateurism
Reading: Needham, "The College Athlete"
Paper 1 due via Blackboard at the start of class.

Part III: The Color Line in Sports

- W Sept 18: Jim Crow Sports
Reading: Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment*, ch. 2

Week 5:

- M Sept 23: Boxing across the Color Line
Film: Watch *Unforgivable Blackness, Part I* (about 2 hours)
- W Sept 25: Sports and Empire
Reading: Tardif, "Assimilationist Athletics"

Week 6:

- M Sept 30: Immigrant Sporting Cultures
Reading: Alamillo, *Deportes*, ch. 1
- W Oct 2: Jackie Robinson and Beyond

Reading: Tannenbaum, “The Desegregation of Sportsman’s Park”

Part IV: Sports and Social Movements

Week 7:

M Oct 7: Sports for Women
Reading: Cahn, *Coming on Strong*, ch. 4
Final project proposal due via email at the start of class.

W Oct 9: Battles of the Sexes
Reading: Ware, *Game, Set, Match*, pp. 1-11
Boys”

Week 8:

M Oct 14: NO CLASS—Fall Break.

W Oct 16: Understanding Title IX
Reading: Ware, *Game, Set, Match*, ch. 2

Week 9:

M Oct 21: A Black Power Platform
Reading: start *Black Ball* (aim for intro & ch. 1)

W Oct 23: NO CLASS—Research/writing day.

Part V: Sports as Big Business

Week 10:

M Oct 28: Fight of the Century
Watch: *One Nation Divisible* (about 1 hour)
Reading: continue *Black Ball* (aim for ch. 2)

W Oct 30: Oilmen and the NFL
Reading: continue *Black Ball* (aim for chpts. 3-4)

Part V: Sports as Big Business

Week 11:

M Nov 4: Sports in the Media
Reading: continue *Black Ball* (aim for chpts. 5-6)

W Nov 6: The NBA in the 1990s
Reading: finish *Black Ball*
Paper 2 due via Blackboard at the start of class.

Week 12:

M Nov 11: The Business of College Sports

Listen: *Burn It All Down*, interview with Victoria Jackson

W Nov 13: NO CLASS—Optional one-on-one meetings.

Part IV: Global Politics

Week 13:

M Nov 18: Athletic Diplomacy

Reading: Brown, “Swinging for the State Department”

W Nov 20: Cold War Olympics

Reading: Soares, “Cold War, Hot Ice”

HIST 276/W rough drafts due via email at the start of class.

Week 14:

M Nov 25: Sports and Sovereignty

No reading. In-class Film: *Spirit Game*

W Nov 27: NO CLASS: Thanksgiving Break

Part VI: Wrapping Up

Week 15:

M Dec 2: Paris in Historical Context

Reading: articles posted on Blackboard

W Dec 4: Ongoing Histories

Reading: articles posted on Blackboard

Week 16:

M Dec 9: Final Projects and Discussion

****Final projects due via Blackboard by 11:59pm.**