

# Cultural Politics of Sport

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:30-12:30  
and by appointment

CES 308  
CUE 419  
T/TH 9:10-10:25

This class concerns itself with sport. It centers its attention not on the play of the game, wins and losses, or the triumphs and transgressions of superstars, but rather on how individuals and institutions interpret them. It highlights the ways in which competing uses and understandings of physical culture articulate with social arrangements, systems of meanings, and force fields. In place of a sweeping, and superficial survey, our discussions will pivot around a single sporting world, football. In this context, we collectively will identify and explore a series of themes or problems, always vigilant to the manner in which race, class, gender, and sexuality anchor, inform, and animate them.

This class is different from many courses. It is a writing-in-the-major course, meaning students will write regularly. It emphasizes student involvement as active learners and engaged discussants. More important, and less familiar: the content of the course is emergent, rather than pre-determined. Collectively, we will select problems to be researched and facilitated by clusters of students. We will also collaborate on how to weight the required assignments.

# Learning Goals

This class has the following objectives. It seeks to...

1. foster an appreciation of the social, cultural, historical significance of sport;
2. enhance understandings of the ways in which sports are inherently political;
3. detail the centrality of race, gender, class and sexuality to sporting cultures;
4. demonstrate the persistence of structures of inequality within sporting institutions;
5. define thinking about fandom and its place within sports industrial complex;
6. trouble the myths of the American Dream, meritocracy, and amateurism;
7. and improve students' critical literacy and communication skills.

## Policies

### Academic Integrity

PLAGARISM OR CHEATING OF ANY KIND ON ANY ASSIGNMENT WILL NOT BE TOLLERATED AND WILL RESULT IN A FAILING GRADE IN THE COURSE. (Consult the WSU Student Handbook for further details). In other words, do your own work.

### Students with Disability

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, please visit the Access Center. All accommodations MUST be approved through the Access Center (Washington Building, Room 217). Please stop by or call 509-335-3417 to make an appointment with an Access Advisor.

### Commitment to Campus Safety

Washington State University is committed to enhancing the safety of the students, faculty, staff, and visitors to the Pullman campus. As part of this commitment, the university has prepared this Campus Safety Plan, containing a listing of university policies, procedures, statistics and information relating to campus safety, emergency management and the health and welfare of the campus community. See: <http://safetyplan.wsu.edu/> and <http://oem.wsu.edu/>.

# Requirements

On the second day of class, we will collectively discuss how to weigh each of these elements. Students should bring their valuing of them and a rationale to this class session, and be prepared to discuss it with their peers. Once, we reach consensus around the value of each requirement, I will (a) provide a hard copy to each student, while also posting it in the course space and (b) provide and post more detailed assignments.

**Note: To pass the class, students must complete all assignments however weighted.**

## Attendance & Participation

The success or failure of this class (both in terms of pleasure and learning) derives from the active, thoughtful, and respectful involvement of everyone. Consequently, I will evaluate students daily for their contribution to class discussions. Getting a good score for this portion of the class is not simply about talking regularly in class (although this helps). Rather, I will take into consideration what is said, how it contributes to ongoing conversations, how it engages readings, films, ideas, and peers. A few suggestions: come to class prepared; take notes on films and readings; bring questions; anticipate differing opinions; realize there is much to learn; appreciate other perspectives; be open to new ideas; treat everyone with respect.

**Note: Students, who text, engage in side conversations, arrive late, leave earlier, fall asleep, enter and exit the class, or otherwise distract and disrespect the class, will not receive credit for participation on that day.**

## Question and Quote

At the start of each class period, students will submit one typed question and one typed quote from the readings assigned. Questions should be open-ended. They may address specific readings or a theme running across several readings. Quotes may be anything from the readings that resonates with you. Student may be asked to share their quotes or pose their question to the class. On occasion, an alternate assignment will be substituted for this requirement.

## Writing Assignment #1: Super Bowl Analysis

A brief, interpretive essay, running 3-5 pages in length. Based on readings, class discussion, and independent research, this writing assignment makes sense or explains the significance of one element of the annual spectacle. Analysis on one or more advertisements, media coverage, pre-game rituals, the halftime show, color commentary, or other topic selected in consultation with the instructor.

## Writing Assignment #2: Response to *Against Football*

Almond labels *Against Football* a manifesto, meaning it is a call to action, marked by passion and polemic. This writing assignment asks students to respond to his manifesto or elements of it. In 5-7 pages, they may amplify and extend Almond's argue, push back against it, reject it, highlight crippling absences, or reformulate it. Class discussion, personal experience, and additional research constitute the foundation for the core argument.

## Writing Assignment #3: Practical Remedies

Building on their cluster collaboration, students will write a roughly 7 page paper that offers an argument for a set strategies and concrete actions to address the identified problem. Student may restate the problem, but the bulk of the paper should be devoted to outlining the practical steps devised to alleviate or end it. Use of library and online resource will be required for this paper.

## Collaborative Cluster

In working groups (2-4 students depending on class size and calendar), students will identify a problem or theme, which will occupy one class period after Spring Break. While this assignment is interactive and collaborative, it is not a typical group project. Students should break down the theme or problem into smaller units which individuals will present using case studies, illustrative examples, and the like. Each student will provide 1 reading on the subject or example. Key elements include:

- Attending Information Literacy Activity
- Working Constructively with Peers to define problem and organize class
- Identifying Reading
- Providing 1 reading to Dr. King 2 weeks in advance electronically.
- Presenting an example highlighting problem (roughly 10 minutes)
- Write Up: presentation outline, assessment of self and peers, lessons learned

**No late papers. Plan accordingly.**

**No extra credit.**

## Readings

There is one required text in this class, *Against Football* by Steve Almond. It is available for purchase at the Bookie and Crimson & Grey. Additional readings will be posted in the course space, circulated via email, and distributed in class.

## Communication

My office hours are listed above. I am happy to make appointments for other times as well.

Email is the best way to communicate with me. I check and respond to my email regularly. Students should not, however, anticipate an instantaneous reply, nor me to be available outside of normal business hours. In other words, please allow 24 hours for reply and note that after hours and on weekends, my response will be slowed to non-existent.

Students are responsible to ensure that their email accounts of record are up-to-date with ZZUSIS and Angel.

Student also should be proactive with their communication. If something is interfering with your learning, it is better to tell me once you become aware of it and it is manageable

## Course Schedule

(Subject to Change)

13 Jan	Introduction/Orientation/Overview
15 Jan	Logistics/Mechanics Bring Requirements & Rationale (Typed)
20 Jan	History Read: Almond, pp. 1-23.
22 Jan	Ritual Read: Arens + Foley
27 Jan	Language and Psyche Read: Dundes
29 Jan	Super Bowl
3 Feb	Super Bowl
5 Feb	Super Bowl

10 Feb	Identifying Problems Bring a list of themes for cluster collaboration (typed)
12 Feb	Information Literacy @ Library (Tentative) Super Bowl Analysis Due at the start of class!
17 Feb	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
19 Feb	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
24 Feb	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
26 Feb	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
3 March	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
5 March	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
10 March	<i>Against Football</i> , selections.
12 March	Open  Response to <i>Against Football</i> Due at the Start of Class!
17 March	Spring Break. No Class.
19 March	Spring Break. No Class.
24 March	Student Conferences
26 March	Student Conferences
31 March	Student Presentations
2 April	No Class.
7 April	Student Presentations
9 April	Student Presentations
14 April	Student Presentations
16 April	Student Presentations
21 April	Student Presentations
23 April	Student Presentations
28 April	Dead Week. No class.
30 April	Dead Week. No class.

## Some Guidelines

This class seeks to promote mutual growth and shared learning about challenging subjects. To achieve this ideal, we will have to work together, treat one another respect, and push ourselves to get beyond our comfort zones. We will encounter difficult topics and sensitive material that may at times disturb or offend. This is perhaps unavoidable given that the readings and discussions prompt us to take up themes often left silent in our society, including race and racism, power and oppression, conflict and struggle. With this in mind, the following guidelines are meant to encourage open, productive, and reflexive conversations.

- Acknowledge the existence of institutionalized forms of oppression, particularly racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism.
- Create a safe environment for discussion. Think about the language in which you choose to express yourself. Be aware that how you talk may impact others and their willingness to share. Avoid words that hurt, stigmatize, stereotype, or silence others.
- Be respectful. Do not interrupt. Do not belittle. Listen to others. Treat others with the same dignity and compassion you would expect.
- Be engaged. Commit yourself to the material, to getting at its political and personal implications.
- Be open to others and their opinions.
- Actively participate.
- Read critically. Ask yourself: What is significant in this piece? What are the central arguments and what do they mean? What do they teach? How do they challenge? What feels or emotions do they evoke anger/sadness/laughter?
- Reflect on your position. Recognize where you are at, that is, how your life, desires, and interpretations fit in a broader social context. Be willing to name your prejudices, ideologies, and privileges.
- Resist the temptation to dismiss positions before you take them seriously.
- Ground your comments in evidence.
- Agree to actively work against myths and stereotypes.
- Appreciate the knowledge and experience of your peers.

- Avoid blaming.
- Assume the people we study and who comprise this learning community always do the best they can.
- Agree to question accepted understandings and challenge myths and stereotypes.
- Remember class discussions should not be about embarrassing, showing off, winning, losing. Our meetings rather should be about dialogue, self-reflection, and learning.
- Turn off. Tune in. Be Here Now. Before each class turn off your cellphone and other electronic devices. Stow your laptop.