

Sports Literature

Stories of Heroes, Triumph, Defeat, and Disgrace

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Syllabus

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sports is one of the central discourses of American culture with a unique blend of positive themes such as heroism, pride, identity and negative themes of cheating, scandal and disappointment. Nearly every American paper has an entire section devoted to sports and outlets like *Sports Illustrated* and ESPN give constant access to scores, athletes, and up to the minute information about current sports stories. People play fantasy sports and collect all types of sporting memorabilia. Live sporting events draw thousands of attendees and millions more watch on television. Millions are spent developing and marketing equipment, uniforms, and training regimens. And sports controversies about athletes' behavior and salaries, about owners' millions, about performance enhancing drugs, cheating scandals, gambling, race, gender and sexuality abound.

Sports also shape the ways we experience the world around us and reveal what American culture values. We root for underdogs, praise perfection, admire record breakers and records that can't be broken. We laud dominance, but love the upset. We celebrate the long sought victory or the final second heroics with as much vigor as we decry the blown call or the final, fatal error. And we know that when it comes down to it, no win is certain until the game is over. Emotion and expectation play as much a role in sports as the facts, statistics and rules of the game.

This course will examine the way the discourses surrounding sports are expressed in writing. Specifically, we will look at the various themes that arise in both fiction and non-fiction writing about American sports and American sports figures. Through a combination of reading, writing and research, we will explore the following questions:

- 1.) What are the histories of sports in America?
- 2.) What types of writing is done about sports in America? Who does that writing?
- 3.) What purposes does writing about sports serve?
- 4.) What themes are recurrent in writing about American sports?
- 5.) What does writing about American sports reveal about American culture?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course, students should be able to

1. Articulate an understanding of the history of sports in America through reading, writing, and research
2. Identify and articulate of the connections between sports and American culture and the ways those connections are expressed in writing
3. Locate various types of writing about sports, including fiction and non-fiction

REQUIRED TEXTS & MATERIALS

- *The Best American Sports Writing of the Century* edited by David Halberstam
- *Dark Horses and Underdogs* by Les Krantz
- *The Natural* by Bernard Malamud
- *Shoesless Joe* by W.P. Kinsella
- *Friday Night Lights* by G.H. Bissinger
- *The Game They Played* by Stanley Cohen
- *Pre: The Story of America's Greatest Running Legend Steve Prefontaine* by Tom Jordan
- Additional materials assigned by the instructor
- A sports related novel or non-fiction work from *Sports Illustrated's* list of the top 100 sports books of all time

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The following requirements are designed to help you meet the goals of this course so that you will be able to complete this course successfully. You must complete ALL the requirements fully to receive a passing grade for this class.

READING, ANNOTATIONS, & DISCUSSION

You will be assigned reading throughout the semester. You are responsible for completing the reading and coming to class prepared to discuss the readings with your classmates.

You are also responsible for producing written annotations for the texts we read. Annotations will be in double-column style as detailed on the Annotations Assignment Sheet.

You will also be responsible for working with a small group to lead a portion of discussion during the semester. Your group will be responsible for helping your classmates engage with the assigned text(s) for the week. You can lead a discussion with discussion questions, do a small group activity, begin with some type of writing or take any creative approach you think will encourage discussion and active engagement with the text.

PROJECTS

Sports History

This is a group presentation project in which you will work in small groups of 3-4 to present the history of a sport in America. Your presentation will include information about its origins, general information about how it's played, information about its importance to America at particular times in history (i.e. during war, at the Olympics, after tragedy, etc.) and its current role in American culture.

Book Annotation

This is a class project for which each of you will do one part. You will choose a novel, collection of short stories, or book length non-fiction work written about sports in America that is not assigned for the semester. After reading the book, you will write a 1-2 page annotation of the book that we will combine into a collection of annotations, with a class-written introduction to show the themes in the works and to describe the organization of the collection. Your individual annotation needs to include bibliographic information, information about the author, a brief summary, and an evaluation that reveals the themes in the book and their connections to American culture. It also must include some non-textual element (audio, video, still images) that enhances your annotation.

Connections Essay

This will be a 5-7 page paper that demonstrates some connection between at least 4 of the works we have read this semester. Your goal is to make an argument about a specific element or the in the texts we have read to that point in the semester You will have a list of questions, begun by me and developed by the class, to prompt your thinking for this essay.

Researched Essay

This 8-10 page paper will be the final project of the semester. You will need to select a theme related to sports writing to pursue and develop an argumentative, researched essay that articulates your theme and supports your claims with works (including those we’ve read this semester) and outside research and criticism. Possible starting points for this project include gender in sports, heroism in sports, sports and community, sports and nationalism, student athletes or commercialism.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance in this class is expected. You need to arrive on time and prepared for class—having done your reading and any additional homework—to be considered in attendance. When you come to class unprepared you inhibit my ability to teach, as I prepare for each class assuming you have done your reading and work, and you waste not only my and your classmate’s time, but your own.

Timeliness is also a part of attendance. I will take attendance at the beginning of class, before any other activity. If you are not present when I take attendance, you will be marked absent for that day. If you arrive late, you must speak to me after class and ask me to mark you present; I will not do this automatically. If you fail to speak to me; you will be considered absent.

If you must miss class for any reason, you **MUST** contact me ASAP concerning your absence if you expect to stay on track to complete the course. **You may miss up to 3 classes**, but choosing to miss class may mean missed in-class work that will negatively impact your final grade. For each class you miss beyond the 3, you may have 10 points deducted from your final grade.

You are also responsible for completing any reading or work that is assigned on the calendar for the days you miss and for the day you will return to class. Again, failing to come to class prepared wastes both my time and yours.

ASSESSMENT

The grading for this course will be point-based with each activity earning points based on the activity’s breadth and difficulty. You will have the option of revising any written project, except the final paper because it will serve as the final exam for this class. Any revised project can improve by one letter grade.

PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES	POINTS AVAILABLE
Annotations	50
Class Discussion Facilitation	25
History of Sport Presentation	25
Book Annotation & Work on Collaborative Anthology	30
Connections Essay	30
Researched Essay	40
TOTAL	200

Final Grades

Final grades will be determined by the sum of the points you earn over the course of the semester.

TOTAL POINTS EARNED	LETTER GRADE
180-200	A
160-179	B
140-159	C
120-139	D
0-119	F

COURSE & CLASSROOM POLICIES

WASTED TIME = WASTED LIFE

This is the overarching policy for this class. All the policies, above and below, stem from this principle. I value my time highly, and I assume that most people value their time and don't want it wasted. There are always other, and sometimes better, things we can do with our time. I will make a concerted effort to make class time the best possible use of your time and expect you to respect both my time and the time of your classmates. This means coming to class with reading and work completed and prepared to actively participate in discussions and activities during class time. It also means not waiting until the last minute to schedule meetings with me, not arriving on time for meetings with me, not turning work in late, and e-mailing me so that I have enough time to respond to you before you need to submit your work.

REQUIREMENTS FOR SUBMITTING PROJECTS

We will, as much as possible, do everything electronically in this course.

Papers should follow MLA format. See the basic guidelines below.

- Essays must be word processed, double-spaced, and have standard 1" margins on the right and left sides, top, and bottom of the page.
- The font used for your final drafts should be 12-point Times New Roman or another similarly proportioned and sized font.
- Pages must be numbered and use the appropriate MLA format.

The Writing Center has excellent resources for citing and formatting according to the MLA Guidelines available.

ONLINE SUBMISSION

Papers will be submitted to me digitally. I will return a digital copy of the file with my comments and a grade. To submit your files, follow the guidelines below.

- 1.) File Format: Text files need to be in .doc, .docx, .PDF, format for me to access them from my home computer. If you have concerns about file format, please ask. We can figure it out together.
- 2.) File Name: THIS IS IMPORTANT!!!! I get lots of files from the class, so please use your file name to identify your file. The format I would like is:
Lastnameassignment Example: **wittebookannotation.doc** for the Book Annotation Project

DUE DATES

ALL work is due ON THE DAY AND AT THE TIME on the day I request it. DO NOT wait until right before the deadline, as the internet may not work wherever you are. I will not take late work in by e-mail, in my mailbox, or in my office unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand.

Late work reflects poorly on your work ethic as a student and will prevent you from successfully completing the course. **Papers submitted within 48 hours of the due date will be accepted with a 10% grade deduction, and will receive NO feedback, only a grade.** Without this feedback it will be difficult for you to successfully revise or make improvements for your next papers. Papers will not be accepted more than 48 hours past the due date.

Note about the Collaborative Book Annotation Project: If you fail to submit your work on time for this project, you will hold up the entire class' completion of this project and you may have your work omitted from the collaborative version. Be cognizant of the time and work of your classmates as you work on this project.

REVISION POLICY

I believe writing is a process and that you should have the option of revising your work if you don't achieve the result you were aiming for. So, you will have the option of revising your written work this semester, with the exception of the final Researched Essay.

You have the option to revise all the papers you write this semester to earn a more successful grade. For me to accept your revisions, you must:

- Participate in workshops
- Submit your original draft on-time
- Submit revisions before the deadline listed on the schedule

Papers that earn enough points to be an A will not be eligible for revision and papers that are revised to earn enough points to be an A will receive no additional feedback, even if they have not earned the full amount of points.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Please refer to the university's academic honesty policies in regard to intellectual property and plagiarism. These policies and penalties apply to our class, as well as to all other classes. We will discuss plagiarism and academic honesty in depth this semester.

MOBILE DEVICES POLICY

I recognize the value mobile devices can have in a classroom (and the importance of keeping up with the scores) so I will leave it to you to police yourselves and your classmates in terms of the use of mobile devices in the classroom. I do ask, however, that you minimize the intrusion into other people's class time by putting your phones on silent or vibrate so that Lady Gaga or Taylor Swift doesn't announce every time you get a text, e-mail, or phone call.

CONTACTING ME BY E-MAIL

RESPONDING TO E-MAIL

E-mail is the best way to contact me outside of class and office hours for help with questions about your writing or about my assignments. Please note, however, that email can be unreliable. Servers

may be down, computers may malfunction, etc. As a result, I cannot be responsible for any email messages that are lost or addressed incorrectly.

If you email me something, I will email you back, ordinarily within 24 hours. However, if you don't receive my email reply, this means that I did not receive your message and that you should discuss the content of your email with me personally. If you e-mail me after 9:00pm, I will not respond to you until morning. Additionally, if you e-mail me within 15 minutes of the start of class, I will not respond to your e-mail until after class.

I DO NOT discuss grades over e-mail because people have a tendency to be more hostile over e-mail than in person. If you have a question or concern about a grade, please make an appointment to see me and we can discuss it.

CLASSROOM DECORUM

This classroom is a place where ideas are exchanged. We will spend much time in discussion, both as a class and in small groups. You may hear ideas and opinions that you do not agree with. Disagreements and disputes can provide lively and productive discussion about many issues. However, any time you disagree with a classmate, you must take the time to listen to his/her position and if/when you respond to that position, you must do so respectfully. We will spend time in class discussing how to appropriately defend your own position and refute another's position. **But the basic ground rule is that you cannot attack another person's comments or writing in such a way that you attack the person rather than the ideas he/she is presenting.** Although it is difficult, you must try to separate the person, who has feelings that can be hurt, from the ideas that he/she is presenting. You are much more likely to sway someone's opinion if you can find a point of common ground and work from your commonalities than if you simply bulldoze or berate him/her.

A FINAL NOTE

If you have any questions about this syllabus or other class matters, please be sure to talk to me. While it is my job to instruct you and help you meet these requirements, it is your responsibility to understand what is required of you and to complete these requirements in a timely manner. It is better to ask your questions early in the semester to ensure you spend your time most wisely and efficiently this semester.

I will do my best to help you with any questions or situations you bring to my attention in a timely manner, but a failure to plan ahead on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part. Waiting until the last minute to prepare your projects may prevent you from completing the necessary requirements or from submitting excellent work. So, please speak to me early and often about ANY concerns you may have about completing this course

Course Calendar

UNIT 1

"WE ARE": PRIDE & IDENTITY

WEEK 1

Tuesday

In Class:

Course Introduction

For Next Class:

Read: *Friday Night Lights* Preface, Prologue, Chapters 1, 2, & 3 (Pages xi-72)

Thursday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

Sign up for History of Sport Presentations

Sign up for Discussion Facilitations

For Next Class:

Read: *Friday Night Lights* Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7

WEEK 2

Tuesday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: *Friday Night Lights* Chapters 8, 9, 10

Thursday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Select a novel, collection of short stories or book length non-fiction work about sports to read and annotate for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology Project

Email and Confirm the Title of Your Selected Work for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology with Instructor

Read: *Friday Night Lights* Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14

WEEK 3

Tuesday

DUE: Email and Confirm the Title of Your Selected Work for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology with Instructor

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: *Friday Night Lights* Chapters 15, 16, Epilogue and Afterword
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 14 (Pages 60-65)

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Football**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "The Day Bobby Blew It" (Pages 90-128) and "Olympic Army" (Pages 135-137)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 1 (Pages 2-7) and Chapter 13 (Pages 56-59)

WEEK 4

Tuesday

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu" (Pages 304-317) and "Pain" (Pages 455-460)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 8 (Pages 34-39) and Chapter 35 (Pages 154-159)

Thursday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Brownsville Bum" (Pages 204-218) and "No Más" (Pages 461-465)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 37 (Pages 164-167)

UNIT 2

TRIUMPH: HEROES, UNDERDOGS & COMEBACKS

WEEK 5

Tuesday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

Introduce Individual Component of Collaborative Annotation Anthology Project

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Medora Goes to the Game" (Pages 466-477)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 6 (Pages 26-29) and Chapter 7 (Pages 30-33)

Thursday

In Class:

History of Sport Presentation: Baseball

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: *The Natural* "pre-game," "batter up" sections 'I shoulda,' 'at the clubhouse,' 'when'

WEEK 6

Tuesday

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**

Introduce New Unit

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: *The Natural* remaining sections of "batter up"

Thursday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

Introduce Connections Essay

For Next Class:

Complete Reading of Your Selected Work for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "The Silent Season of a Hero" (Pages 3-22)
"One Strike is Out" (Pages 165-169), and "The September Song of Mr. October"
(Pages 526-541)

WEEK 7

Tuesday

DUE: Complete Reading of Your Selected Work for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Centre Court" (Pages 372-399)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 25 (Pages 110-113) and Chapter 44
(Pages 196-199)

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Track & Field/Running or Golf or Tennis**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Complete Annotation of Your Selected Work for the Collaborative Anthology

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Pure Heart" (Pages 548-563)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 12 (Pages 52-55) and Chapter 15
(Pages 66-71)

WEEK 8

Tuesday

DUE: Annotation of Your Selected Work to Instructor for the Collaborative Anthology

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Ghost of the Gridiron" (Pages 253-264) and "Ego" (Pages 713-737)

Thursday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: Selection from "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner"
From *Dark Horses & Underdogs* Chapter 27 (Pages 120-123)
From *Best American Sports Writing* "Into Thin Air" (Pages 630-667)

WEEK 9

Tuesday

In Class:

Discuss Readings

Introduce Researched Essay

For Next Class:

Read: *Pre* Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Basketball**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Complete Connections Essay

Read: *Pre* Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

WEEK 10

Tuesday

DUE Connections Essay

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**

Discuss Readings

Introduce Collaborative Annotation Anthology Project & Google Docs

For Next Class:

Copy and Paste Your Annotation into the Google Doc

Read: *Pre* Chapters 10, 11, 12

Thursday

DUE: Copy and Paste Your Annotation into the Google Doc

In Class:

Discuss Readings

Discuss potential final formats for the Collaborative Annotation Anthology Project (Word Document, Google Doc, PDF, Web Platform, etc.)

For Next Class:

Email and Confirm Topic for Researched Essay with Instructor

Read all annotations and bring in a list of possible themes for organization

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Resurrecting the Champ" (Pages 668-696)

UNIT 3

DISGRACE: CHEATERS, SCANDALS & FALLEN HEROES

WEEK 11

Tuesday

DUE: Email and Confirm Topic for Researched Essay with Instructor

Read all annotations and bring in a list of possible themes for organization

In Class:

Introduce New Unit

Discuss Readings

Decide Organizational Characteristics for Annotations Anthology

Create groups for each section of Annotations Anthology, including introduction

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "A Brother's Keeper" (Pages 542-547) and "Tangled Up in Blue" (Pages 593-610)

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Hockey**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: *The Game They Played* Preface, Prologue, Part 1 and Part 2

WEEK 12

Tuesday

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Written report from group detailing which annotations fit their section and in what order they would plan to put them

Read: *The Game They Played* Part 3

Thursday

DUE: Written report from group detailing which annotations fit their section and in what order they plan to put them

In Class:

Discuss Readings
Negotiate final sections for Annotations Anthology
Discuss Content of Annotation Anthology Introduction

For Next Class:

Read: *The Game They Played* Part 4, 5 and Epilogue

WEEK 13

Tuesday

In Class:

Discuss Readings
Groups meet to work on collection and section introductions

For Next Class:

Read: *Shoeless Joe* Part 1 and 2

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Summer Olympics or Lacrosse or Soccer**
Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Complete Collection and Section Introduction and Section Ordering

Read: *Shoeless Joe* Part 3 and 4

WEEK 14

Tuesday

DUE: Completed Collection and Section Introductions and Section Orders to the Google Doc

In Class:

***Discussion Facilitation:**
Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read all introductions and look over section orders; come prepared to discuss final changes

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Obit on the Dodgers" (Pages 174-177)
From *Dark Horses and Underdogs* Chapter 21 (Pages 92-97)

Thursday

DUE: Notes for any final changes or edits to sections or introductions

In Class:

Discuss Readings
Discuss final polishing work on Annotation Anthology, including title
Meet with Anthology Section groups if necessary

For Next Class:

Complete Assigned Components of the Collaborative Annotation Anthology

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "The Making of a Goon" (Pages 564-573) and "The Chosen One" (Pages 611-629)

WEEK 15

Tuesday

DUE: Components of Final Anthology for Assembly

In Class:

Discuss Readings

For Next Class:

Read: From *Best American Sports Writing* "Racing's Angriest Young Man" (Pages 289-303) and "The Kentucky Derby is Decadent and Depraved" (Pages 355-371)

Thursday

In Class:

***History of Sport Presentation: Winter Olympics or Boxing or Horse Racing**

Discuss Readings

For Next Week:

Complete Researched Essay

WEEK 16

DUE: RESEARCHED ESSAY

Display/Distribute Final Anthology