

Introduction to Communication and Sport

Imagine, for a moment, a world without sports. For some of you, this might be a welcome development. But for the overwhelming majority of Americans, sports occupy a key, if not central, place in their daily lives. The reasons for this are many. Sports, after all, are usually fun. Whether we play or watch, sports provide an expression of the human body's physical, and sometimes mental, possibilities. They are also educational. Millions of children participate in youth sports because we have come to believe that they provide life-long lessons about teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Sports can foster unity. Consider the instant bonds formed between strangers who wear the same team's jersey, or the patriotic spirit on display during international events such as the Olympics. Finally, sports are among the most vital and diverse industries in the United States. They generate billions of dollars in revenue and provide a wide range of professional opportunities. To imagine a world without sports would be to alter the conditions of everyday life in the United States.

To understand the impact sports have in American life, let us be more specific. Youth sports, for example, are among the most common activities for boys and girls throughout their childhoods. More than 17.5 million children play organized soccer, more than 260,000 play Pop Warner football, and 2.2 million annually participate in Little League Baseball (Hilgers, 2006). While these numbers provide us with some appreciation for the extent to which sports are important, they cannot fully describe the range of sports in which young people participate or the ways children play sports informally. Sports are also significant because they provide models of leadership for



Colors divided at UCLA/USC football game

young people, environments to develop interpersonal and conflict-resolution skills, and stories of inspiration when children use sports to develop their individual skills and character. All of which is to say that *communication* is central to how we play, watch, interpret, and evaluate sports.

Of course, youth sports beget other forms of sport. A quick glance at your college classmates offers an appropriate example. How many of them wear a sweatshirt or hat that features their favorite team? Perhaps your own wardrobe has these articles of clothing? Indeed, a positive affiliation with sports is one way that college students construct and communicate identity. Many students even choose where to attend college based on a campus culture organized around sports (Sperber, 2000). And, as a recent ESPN advertising campaign called “Never Graduate” illustrates, many of us maintain our allegiances to the colleges we attended. Using familiar rivalries such as Michigan–Ohio State or North Carolina–Duke, the ESPN commercials depicted adults who continue to be loyal to their undergraduate institutions. At the heart of the campaign was the idea that our college affiliation—*understood primarily as a sports affiliation*—communicates something essential about our identity.

Case Study: Cozart's Community

To truly understand the overwhelming impact that sport can have in the lives of athletes and fans, you only need to look as far as your own community. For instance, it's likely that you have developed a following for a local sports team (high school, collegiate, or professional) that has the potential to bridge generations regardless of the sport type. Such is the case for the wrestling program for Brandon High School in Brandon, Florida, which had held one of the longest-standing winning streaks in all of high school sports. In February of 1973, the team began a dual-meet winning streak that lasted until 2008. When the streak began, Russ Cozart was a wrestler on the team; he later became the coach in 1980. Since that time, he went on to win an additional 384 straight dual victories with wrestlers that he helped develop in the town's youth wrestling program. He raised three sons who also wrestled for him, winning multiple individual state championship titles. Athletes he coached in his first few years at Brandon remained in town and then encouraged their own children to compete and train under the tutelage of one of the most successful high school coaches of all time.

As the streak continued throughout the next three decades, Cozart created a following in the town as the streak itself began to take on a life of its own. Young wrestlers indicated they dreamed of one day competing for Cozart with the hopes that, with the streak on the line, they would be asked to step up and win one to ensure that the streak remained intact. Brandon relished in the success of its wrestling program as the team was invited to tournaments throughout the country. After more than 27 years and 459 straight victories, Cozart led his team into the championship match in the tournament he had created called "Beat the Streak," where he invited the best teams around the region to compete for a chance to beat his highly rated team. Coming down to the second to the last match of the evening, one of Cozart's most talented wrestlers was defeated, which cost the team its 460th straight win. Afterward, Cozart commented that "what this streak has done for this town and this school is give it a cornerstone, a gem, a diamond to look at and to hold up. I hope they keep it that way." In the weeks that followed, Cozart coached his team to his 18th state championship, producing four individual champions. The community has set its sights on beginning the streak all over again in the years to come.

1. What factors help cause a community to gravitate to its sport programs?
2. Can you think of sport franchises where fans continue to support their team despite a history of losing?
3. What are the communicative elements that are an integral part of the success of this program?

The stakes for understanding communicative practices may be even greater at the professional level. Especially because professional sports are inextricably linked to the media that broadcast, report, and opine about the games, it is next to impossible to escape the influence of professional sports. Consider that leagues such as Major League Baseball and the National Football League routinely set attendance records during the 2000s, or that the expansion of digital services makes consuming live sporting events more available through satellite providers and Internet feeds, or that fantasy sports have produced an entire industry that is dependent on, but also separate from, sports themselves, or that community officials often insist that the key to urban development or city pride is to invest in a professional sports franchise and/or arena, or that player salaries continue to rise, often driving up the cost of attendance along with them. There are many other features to add to this list. What is critical, once again, is that communication practices are essential to the success of professional sports—from expressions of collective identity found at live events to the images produced by sports media to the importance granted to sports in the vitality of a community.

Across all levels of competition, and through the media that cover these events, the very language of sports has become commonplace in American culture. As early as 1959, when Tannenbaum and Noah coined the phrase “sportsugese,” there has been an acknowledgement that sports influence how we think and talk. Inspired by both his experience as a sportswriter and the prevalence of sports language in the speeches of President Richard Nixon, Robert Lipsyte (1975) termed this phenomenon “sportspeak.” Indeed, as Segrave (2000) has pointed out, sports metaphors are commonly used to communicate ideas and feelings about politics, war, business, and sex. For instance, during the 2008 presidential campaign, both Democrat John Edwards and Republican Mike Huckabee compared themselves to the racehorse Seabiscuit, evidently because they embodied similar qualities of determination that characterized the 1930s thoroughbred. During the 1991 Persian Gulf War, General Norman Schwarzkopf famously referred to a military strategy as a “Hail Mary pass,” a familiar football reference. Meanwhile, business meetings are routinely punctuated with platitudes such as “this ad campaign is a slam dunk.” As for sex, American adolescence is commonly described through the quest to “get to first base” or “hit a home run.”

While language use is one indicator of sport’s prominent role in American culture, it is also worth noting that as an industry, commercial sport is the tenth largest in the United States (Zirin, 2005). Street & Smith’s *Sports Business Journal* estimates that the American sports industry is worth around \$213 billion. Meanwhile, we should point out that sport’s ability to generate media interest is almost unparalleled. The two most-watched television events in the

world are international sporting events—the Olympics and soccer’s World Cup (Tomlinson, 2005). With that popularity, television networks eagerly pay astronomical sums for the rights to broadcast sports. In 1999, for example, CBS paid the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) \$6 billion for an 11-year contract to broadcast the NCAA men’s basketball tournament (“CBS Renews”). For the right to broadcast the 2010 Winter Olympics and 2012 Summer Olympics, NBC paid the International Olympic Committee \$2.2 billion (Wilson, 2003). All of this demonstrates that the immense popularity generated by sports makes them among the most desirable commodities in the media industry.

Interview: Bob Costas, NBC Sports, and MLB Network

Q: What is the greatest contribution sport provides to modern society?

A: Sports are still the ultimate shared experience. Sport draws the attention of people from all walks of life in ways that few other things can. People now receive information and entertainment from niche outlets on television, radio, the Internet, and more, but big sports events are still much broader based. For all its flaws and issues, sports at its best can still be a shared experience that bonds individuals, groups, and even nations.

Q: How has the consumption of sport changed since you entered the business 30 years ago?

A: There is just so much more of it, even from the traditional formats. Add all of the ESPN networks, all of the regional Fox Sports networks, and the Internet and the mass of it has grown exponentially. Even if the coverage hadn’t changed, the sheer amount available would change sports tremendously. Of course, the coverage *has* changed—it is more highlight driven because of the presumed shorter attention spans of today’s fans. We are barraged with information—which is sometimes good and sometimes overdone. In fairness, much of the event coverage is technically superb and very well crafted, and truly journalistic efforts like HBO’s *Real Sports* and ESPN’s *Outside the Lines* stand out. On the other hand, in many areas the tone is mindlessly negative—even abusive. The worst of sports talk radio and the sports blogosphere do not just appeal to the least common denominator, they redefine it.

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Q: What is the impact of the evolving relationship between athlete, organization, and fan?

A: Athletes are more protected now by layers of agents and advisors. Some may think, “Well, the money is so great, what good does it do me to be all that accommodating to the media? Is it necessary to let the media present my image or can I control it myself?” Add to that a press corps that is generally more critical and snide and you can understand why many athletes are more guarded.

Q: How do you see the participation in and consumption of sports changing in the next several decades?

A: In ways we can’t fully predict! Over the next decade I’m sure new technologies will leave our present high-definition televisions, mobile phone videos, and Internet links outdated. If you want it and are willing to pay for it, you will have access to just about anything at just about any time. I would also expect at least some American sports to become more global, particularly baseball and basketball. We can’t know all the specifics, but it is fair to speculate that the future of sports will be bigger and more elaborate in virtually every way.

COMMUNICATION AND SPORT

What should be clear by now is that we are interested in sports primarily as phenomena of *communication*. Other academic publications and textbooks have studied sports through other perspectives. Indeed, the disciplines of anthropology, history, kinesiology, psychology, and sociology have contributed greatly to our understanding of how and why people participate in sports. However, they tend to do so without emphasizing the communicative practices that precede and frame the ways people participate in sport. Kassing and colleagues (2004) suggest that people enact, produce, consume, and organize sport primarily as a communicative activity. Thus, our focus in this text is to explore how and why sport can be understood and studied specifically from the perspective of communication, a field with a far-ranging set of interests and applications.

This is not to suggest that the field of communication hasn’t benefited from other academic disciplines. Sociology, in fact, is likely the academic field that has done the most to promote the serious study of sports. In 1978, the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport was founded,

which led to the publication of the *Sociology of Sport Journal* (*SSJ*). Just a few years later, scholar Richard Lapchick founded the Center for the Study of Sport in Society, housed at Boston's Northeastern University. This led to the publication of the *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, which alongside *SSJ* publishes the leading scholarship on the sociology of sport. Meanwhile, other academic fields cultivated the study of sport through publications such as the *Journal of Sport Behavior*, the *Journal of Sport Management*, and *Sport in History*.

The field of communication developed its interest in sport around the same time period. In 1975, Michael Real published a study of the Super Bowl called "Super Bowl: Mythic Spectacle." In that article, Real explained that the televised broadcast of the Super Bowl was arranged to emphasize the mythology of football as a ritualized expression of American identity. That sport could be used to communicate—and thus affirm and extend—American values became one of the early themes of communication and sport scholarship. Other early studies in mass communication confirmed the importance of sports. Trujillo and Ekdom (1985), for example, analyzed sportswriters' accounts of the 1984 Chicago Cubs to reveal how journalism is a means by which "American cultural values are displayed, affirmed and integrated" (p. 264). Meanwhile, Farrell (1989) recognized that the mediated production of the Olympic Games used international politics to create dramatic narratives that fostered national identity. By the time that Wenner's *Media, Sport, & Society* was published in 1989, it was clear that there was much to be gained through the communicative study of sport. These early studies were significant not only because they demonstrated the significance of sport but also because they blurred the traditional divisions of communication scholarship, therefore making the study of communication and sport a truly interdisciplinary endeavor.

The relationship between communication and sport further developed in the 1990s with studies that featured an increasingly diverse set of topics and scholarly methods. As Trujillo (2003) notes, "[D]uring the 1990s, communication students and scholars became very serious about studying sport" (p. xiii). This attitude stood in contrast to previous decades, during which many academics dismissed the study of sport as being trivial, much like the traditional view in news media that ridiculed the sports page as a "toy department" (Rowe, 2007). By the turn of the century, this seriousness prompted a robust interest in communication and sport that now cuts across virtually every area of inquiry in the discipline. Throughout the 2000s, communication scholars found new avenues for engaging in sport-based research, resulting in numerous conferences and publications, including several special issues of communication journals dedicated exclusively to

sport. The growth in communication and sport scholarship has provided invaluable resources for students and teachers alike. Until now, however, no one has done what we attempt to do here: to provide a comprehensive summary of the avenues for studying the relationship between communication and sport.

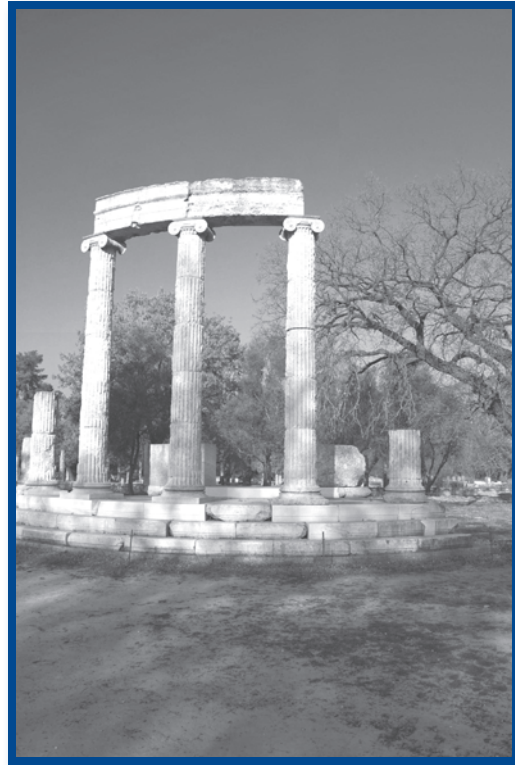
Before we continue, then, we should clarify what this book is *not*. First, it is not a reproduction of the sport sociology or history textbooks that have been widely used, even by communication scholars. Although we cover some of the same categories—media or identity, for example—we do so with a different set of intellectual assumptions. For example, whereas a sociologist might examine data that show a correlation between sport participation and success in business, a communication scholar is apt to investigate which communicative behaviors learned in and through sport enable or disable business success. Or, if a sport historian wants to reveal that baseball was invented in cities and not (as myth suggests) in the countryside, a communication scholar hopes to reveal why contemporary use of the myth retains symbolic significance. Thus, even for those of you familiar with studies of sport in other disciplines, this book should offer something new.

Second, it is not a handbook for practitioners. We know that many of you are interested in careers in “sport communication,” perhaps working for the marketing department for a sports franchise or in communications at a university athletic department. We make relevant connections to these professional interests throughout this text. However, primarily we take up how communication and sport can be studied and what they can tell us about one another. With this in mind, but before we offer an overview of the material covered in this book, let us turn our attention to some matters of definition.

Communication

It is virtually impossible to find a definition of **communication** that everyone can agree upon. If you have taken a public speaking course or an introduction to communication theory, you’ve likely encountered some of the more common definitions of this term. These definitions involve key concepts such as *sender*, *message*, and *receiver*, all of which emerged from telecommunications research in the 1940s (Shannon & Weaver, 1948). Communication scholars have used these simple concepts to develop increasingly sophisticated models of communicative practices. Today, communication is largely understood as a process wherein meaning is constructed and exchanged through a variety of symbols and media. Thinking

of communication as a *process* instead of a *product* allows researchers to examine more than the content of the “message” or the intention of the “sender.” Instead, scholarship may examine message construction, interpersonal influence, small-group dynamics, mass media, rhetoric and persuasion, and the performance of identity. Accordingly, in this book we adopt a broad and inclusive approach to communication, recognizing that different definitions and methods allow for greater understanding. Thus, if there is any single definition we would endorse, it is one in the spirit of Alberts, Nakayama, and Martin (2010), who define communication as “a transactional process in which people generate meaning through the exchange of verbal and nonverbal messages in specific contexts, influenced by individual and societal forces and embedded in culture” (p. 17).



World Heritage Site in Olympia, Greece

Sport

If it is important that we have a shared basis for understanding of the term **communication**, then it is equally important to define **sport**. You may have noticed by now that although the word *sports* is used in the opening pages of this book, we have chosen *sport* for the title. Before we explain this distinction, let us first settle on what makes something a sport in the first place. Guttmann’s *From Ritual to Record* (1978) is written in the sociological tradition of sport scholarship. Nevertheless, it provides a typology that helps define and delimit the scope of sport. Guttmann wants to distinguish between four levels of activity: play, games, contests, and sports. Play, he suggests, is “nonutilitarian physical or intellectual activity pursued for its own sake” (p. 3). When that play becomes organized, we have “games,” and when games have winners and losers, we have “contests.” Not all contests are games, however. As Guttmann notes, a war is a contest with winners and losers, but it is most certainly not a game.

Are all contests sports, then? Guttman doesn't think so. For example, he notes that just because *Sports Illustrated* writes about it, it doesn't mean chess is a sport. Thirty years later, we could amend this to say that just because ESPN televises it, it doesn't mean poker is a sport. What is required, Guttman claims, is that sports involve a *physical* component. Therefore, sports are defined as “‘playful’ physical contests, that is, as nonutilitarian contests which include an important measure of physical as well as intellectual skill” (p. 7). Following this definition, when we talk of specific contests such as basketball or golf, we will likely use the term *sports*. However, and much more frequently, when we refer to the institutional arrangement of leagues, teams, officials, players, fans, and media, we will use the term *sport*. With this in mind, we might also think in terms of Bell's (1987) definition, which states, “Sport is a repeatable, regulated, physical contest producing a clear winner” (p. 2).

PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES

In their foundational essay, “Communication in the Community of Sport,” Kassing and colleagues (2004) outlined four research areas that have defined communication and sport scholarship. That essay's focus on processes of enacting, producing, consuming, and organizing sport helped carve out an audience for a book such as this one. In this book, we wish to expand the terrain outlined by Kassing and company by casting a broader net. Specifically, we arrange the following chapters in four sections: Community and Sport Foundations, Negotiating Identity in Sport, Relational Issues in Sport, and Emerging Trends in Communication and Sport. Let us now provide an overview of the chapters to follow.

Community and Sport Foundations

Sport is a central feature of life in countries around the world. Our focus in this textbook, however, is primarily on the United States and the study of how Americans participate in the community of sport. With that in mind, what does it mean to study the “community of sport”? Bob Krizek (2008), who is interviewed in Chapter 2, states that it “is a diverse community with often disparate interests that compel us to employ a wide variety of research practices and theoretical frameworks” (p. 105). Thus, on the one hand, the “community of sport” is about those who study it from perspectives as varied as interpersonal influence, mass media effects, organizational behavior, political economy, and rhetorical criticism. However, this community is less about communication scholars and more about those who are invested more

directly in the community of sport. Accordingly, in Chapter 2 we examine how this community is constituted by participants, organizations, media, and fans. For example, think about the discussion that took place in early 2010 that led to the expansion of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) men's basketball tournament (from 65 to 68 teams). This decision had an impact on all of the four groups noted above. Expansion would mean more opportunities for players and coaches (participants) to advance to the tournament. The NCAA itself (organizations) would generate millions of dollars in additional revenue. CBS, which televises the event, along with numerous other television stations, newspapers, and Internet sites (media), stood to extend their reach and advertising dollars. Finally, followers of college basketball (fans) were either ecstatic at the prospect of more games to watch or worried that altering the format of the tournament would ruin an ideal sporting event. In this case, all four groups represent different interests in the community of sport. But significantly, those interests overlap, revealing the interdependence of participants, organizations, media, and fans.

The community of sport is also about understanding how sport constructs, maintains, or even threatens the communities in which we live. Fans often tell us a great deal about sport's impact on community. Thus, we turn our attention more specifically to Sports Fan Cultures in Chapter 3. As an example, consider how the connections between sports and the city of New Orleans were on display after the tragic effects of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Because the Louisiana Superdome was the most visible symbol of the storm's aftermath, it also was seen as vital to the city's revitalization efforts. Even as much of New Orleans struggled to recover, the Saints' *Monday Night Football* victory in 2006 offered beleaguered residents something to be excited about. Such a portrayal was not without its problems—it tended to gloss over ongoing struggles and inequities—but it nevertheless exemplified the connections fans often feel to their teams and cities. This is only one view of fandom, however. In Chapter 3 we examine various forms of fan behavior, including the motivations that guide fans to identify with certain sports or teams as well as the technological changes that have altered the terrain of sport spectatorship and consumption.



The Louisiana Superdome

Connections to the community of sport are commonly cultivated through mythologies that link fans with their communities or sports in particular ways. As we discuss in Chapter 4, myths are stories that are not necessarily true, but their communicative effect is that they feel true. Thus, they provide order and guidance for how people should navigate their worlds. Some myths are local. O'Rourke (2003), for example, revealed how fans of the Cleveland Browns developed an identification with their team based on the perception that the players embodied the blue-collar, industrial ethic that characterized the mythological working-class American. Other myths are national. Consider, for instance, the deeply ingrained belief that baseball, as the "national pastime," is somehow representative of America itself. Or myths may transcend such communities by taking on more cosmological, or religious, significance. Hence, some of the more pervasive sport myths are those that equate sports with religion: the "church of baseball" or the idea that the Super Bowl is a "religious festival" (Price, 1992). In each case, myths depend on heroic figures and universal values to impart their lessons. As a result, when we subscribe to a myth's lessons there are substantial consequences to our attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Negotiating Identity in Sport

Communication scholars have revealed that sport is one of the primary sites for the construction, maintenance, and contestation of identity. In the second section of the book, therefore, we turn our attention to the relationships between sport and both individual and collective identities. We begin in Chapter 5 with a discussion of gender and sport. As organized sport was institutionalized in the mid to late 19th century, it was largely preserved as a male-only domain. Gradually, and at times painfully, women have challenged and conquered the world of sport. It should be clear that when girls and young women see female athletes excel, that success communicates important messages about identity and self-esteem. Indeed, since the passage of the 1972 Educational Amendments, which included the landmark Title IX, sport has increasingly become a positive force in the lives of women. That is why many celebrated the victory of the U.S. women's soccer team in the 1999 World Cup as not only a triumph for the nation but specifically for Title IX as well.

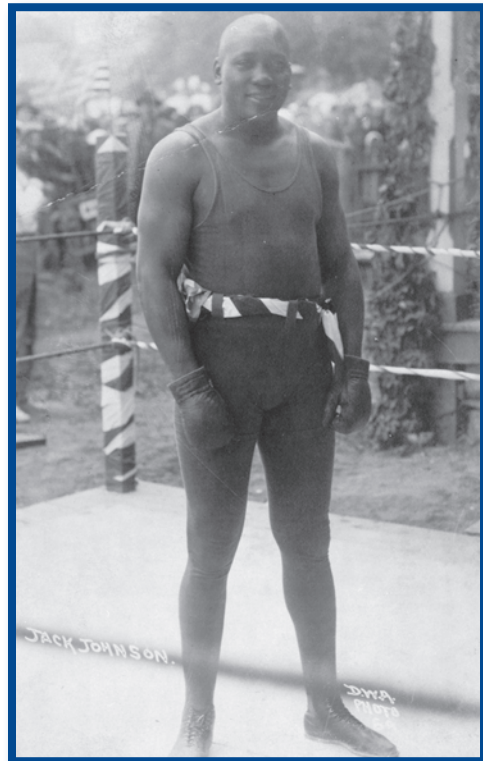
These gains have not come without resistance, however, and in Chapter 5 we also address problematic representations of female athletes, especially through the media. Overt expressions of sexism are increasingly rare; however, many more subtle iterations of sexism remain. This includes the tendency to provide different coverage to men's sports over women's

sports (Billings, 2007), the need to define women first as “feminine” and second as “athletic” (Shugart, 2003), and the all-too-common emphasis on female appearance over other characteristics. Although it is true that many male athletes are also featured for their appearance—New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, for instance—it is rare that appearance is the *defining* feature for men. In other words, Brady will always be a quarterback first, a sex symbol second. Can the same be said of racecar driver Danica Patrick?

The previous point also invites us to clarify that *gender* is not a synonym for *women*. Although the role of women in sport is perhaps the most central focus of communication and sport scholarship, we must also attend to sport’s role in the construction of masculinity and sexuality. The concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, for example, helps explain the dominant features of masculinity for a given culture. These features are often based on power, strength, and control and frequently come at the expense of women or gay men (Trujillo, 1991). Thus, in Chapter 5 we are careful to acknowledge the multiple identity positions that are implicated by the concept of gender.

If the media has been guilty of sexism with respect to representations of women, then a similar problem arises with respect to race and ethnicity. On the one hand, sport has been the rare institution in American history where racial minorities or non-U.S. natives have been visible, successful, and celebrated. A century ago, when African American Jack Johnson claimed the heavyweight boxing championship, the victory touched off nationwide riots and precipitated cultural anxieties about the diminishment of white cultural authority. Today, American sport is an arena of diverse races, ethnicities, and nationalities. Indeed, often the most beloved stars—LeBron James, Derek Jeter, Tiger Woods—are racial minorities.

The presence of these athletes, however, does not mean that Americans have transcended racial biases or even reached an understanding of what *race* means. Is race equitable with skin color? Ethnicity? Blood? Questions such as these can threaten the harmony that sport has the potential to cultivate. Meanwhile, despite the apparent



Jack Johnson

level playing field offered by sport, racial minorities are often subjected to questionable portrayals and remain marginal participants in managerial and ownership ranks. Meanwhile, what is communicated by a sport like college football, which consistently fields teams comprised largely of African Americans yet rarely coached by them? Or that in major league baseball, where players of Latin American and Asian descent are now commonplace, but the overwhelming majority of owners remain white? These kinds of questions, and many others, characterize our approach to Chapter 6.

Moving from the individual identity positions of the previous two chapters, Chapter 7 evaluates the mutual influence between sport and politics and nationalism. One of the most deeply held misconceptions about sport is that it is “apolitical,” or that it offers *only* an escape from the “real world” concerns of politics. However, if you have ever attended a live sporting event in the United States, you have likely participated in a political ritual that few of us would question. Specifically, most of us take for granted that the performance of the national anthem before a game is simply standard procedure, and few of us would think of it as “political.” Yet consider the uproar that has been caused over the years when someone dares to threaten the sanctity of the ritual. Jose Feliciano, for example, was widely reviled after he delivered what is believed to be the first nontraditional rendering of the anthem at Game One of the 1968 World Series. Years later, Division III basketball player Toni Smith attracted much criticism for her refusal to face the American flag during the anthem ceremony during the 2002–2003 season.

Both Feliciano and Smith earned scorn for “politicizing” sport. This charge does not stop elected officials from hoping to exploit sport for their own purposes, however. Presidents routinely throw out pitches at baseball games, invite championship teams to the White House, and appear for interviews during broadcasts in order to foster identification with American citizens. This can generate great favor—President George W. Bush was widely praised when he threw out the first pitch at Game Three of the 2001 World Series, just weeks after 9/11—or result in embarrassment—such as presidential candidate John Kerry’s attempt to bond with Wisconsin residents by referring to Green Bay’s storied Lambeau Field as “Lambert” Field. The international community is also aware of how U.S. politicians communicate through sport. When President Bush used the Olympic success of the Iraqi national soccer team as a symbol of his own leadership during the 2004 presidential campaign, it was seen by many as exploitative and disrespectful (Butterworth, 2007). In most cases, the mixing of sport and politics often sparks controversy about the degree to which they should remain apart from one another.

In the cases of gender, race, and nationality, the construction of identity is often produced, or at least guided, by the media, sports organizations, or



Barack Obama at the Major League Baseball All-Star Game

politicians. Because *athletes* are also part of this process, we turn our attention in Chapter 8 to the *performance* of identity in sport. What this means is that participation in sports is often a means for individuals to express who they believe themselves to be or to challenge conventional expectations about identity that they wish to change. The average sports fan, for example, assumes (probably unconsciously) that athletes are *exceptional* physical specimens and that athletic performance requires a fully able body. Disabled athletes challenge this assumption through their participation in sport. Golfer Casey Martin, for instance, garnered significant attention in 1997 when he sued the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) for the right to use a cart on the tour. Martin had a degenerative leg condition that limited his mobility. The PGA insisted that his request undermined the integrity of its rules, but the Supreme Court ruled in Martin's favor. Although his leg condition ultimately prevented him from pursuing a long-term career in professional golf—he is now the head coach of golf at the University of Oregon—the case helped redefine what it means to be an “athlete.”

Sexuality can also be understood as a matter of performance. Scholars influenced by the academic field of cultural studies view terms such as *gender* or *sexuality* on a continuum, meaning that there is no such thing as pure “masculinity” or “femininity,” but rather people *perform* their identities in

more or less masculine or feminine ways. Performances can take many forms, from choosing types of clothing to using specific words to participating in one sport over another. What is communicated, for example, when a teenage boy opts for figure skating over hockey? As we noted above, one of the common expectations about sport is that it privileges hegemonic masculinity, through which men are expected to be strong, tough, and heterosexual. Thus, the presence of a gay male in sport represents a challenge to the conventions of gender and sexuality. Perhaps this helps to explain why no male athlete while active in a major professional team sport in the United States has publicly stated he is gay. A discussion of the extent to which our performances reinforce or redefine identities, therefore, concludes our focus on negotiating identity in sport.

Relational Issues in Sport

Sport is often celebrated for its ability to foster relationships, develop teamwork skills, and find creative outlets for resolving conflict. Our attention to these issues begins in Chapter 9 with a discussion of parent–child relationships in sports. As participation in youth sports continues to climb, its impact on the family takes on growing importance. For many, sports are seen as means to socialize children. Kremer-Sadlik and Kim (2007), for example, revealed that family interactions during sports activities promote the idea that sport communicates and develops important cultural values. Meanwhile, sport also leads to more troubling phenomena, such as parents who identify too strongly with their children’s athletic achievements. The emergence of the so-called “helicopter parent” can arguably be traced to parental involvement in sports, as parents have long obsessed over issues such as playing time or the treatment their children receive from their coaches. For some, the stereotypical figure of the overly demanding father as depicted in the film *The Bad News Bears* remains a cautionary tale about the line between support and pressure.

If parental pressure is a significant issue, so too is the problem of the few but high-profile instances of violence committed by parents. Perhaps the most infamous incident came in 2000, when 44-year-old Thomas Junta beat and killed 40-year-old Michael Costin in a fight prompted by an incident between their sons in a youth hockey game. The case, along with other, less violent incidents, sparked discussions about parental behavior around youth sports. Many communities adopted codes of conduct that required parents to pledge they would maintain good behavior. That parents sometimes become the focus of youth sports invites communication scholars to consider how and why we invest as much in sport as we do.

In some ways, the relationship between players and coaches mirrors the relationship between children and parents. Coaches are often surrogate parental figures, and they are charged with communicating lessons about discipline and hard work even as they are expected to lead their teams to victory. Accordingly, communication scholarship has attended to the ability of coaches to motivate players, including an assessment of different motivation strategies. Although stereotypical portrayals of coaches in television shows and movies—such as the *Bad News Bears* portrayal we referenced earlier—tend to emphasize the role of anger and punishment, Kassing and Infante (1999) discovered that aggressive behaviors commonly lead to unfavorable perceptions of coaches, which leads to weaker performances. In Chapter 10, we explore coaching communication strategies, as well as the significance of the “coach” as a model for organizational leadership.

Coaches can affect the team environment as well. Communication scholars emphasize the term *small groups* over *teams*, but the terms share many traits. Teams are relatively small units that depend on organization and the distribution of tasks across the group’s membership. In this way, team sports are appropriate metaphors for understanding small-group communication processes that are found in organizations of every kind. Chapter 11 evaluates various issues related to teams, including cohesion, leadership, and organization. Turman (2003), for example, showed that coaches were instrumental in fostering team cohesion. Meanwhile, Hawkins and Tolzin (2002) concluded that baseball teams provide exemplary models of leadership for postmodern organizations.

Small-group communication is typically considered a part of organizational communication studies. In Chapter 12, we shift our attention to organizations and the specific set of issues prompted by crises. A crisis can occur at multiple levels—it can be macro-level, such as the national crisis in the United States precipitated by 9/11—or it can be micro-level, such as the Formula One racing industry’s response to a tire controversy. Brown (2004) addressed the first kind of crisis in his study of the role played by sports leagues in the healing process after terrorists attacked the United States. Organizations such as Major League Baseball or the National Football League, Brown suggests, served as positive and unifying forces for Americans shocked by the tragedy. Pfahl and Bates (2008), by contrast, analyzed the various responses from Formula One teams, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, Michelin, and others when a dispute over tires threatened to discredit the sport. Their study offers models for communication students and scholars to see how sport provides both positive and negative examples of image-repair strategies. Similarly, in our chapter we seek to understand crisis communication both for what it does well and for the lessons it invites us to consider.

Emerging Trends in Communication and Sport

One challenge in writing a textbook about communication and sport is trying to keep up with changes and new developments. In the final section of the book, we address two particular issues that continue to change the landscape of sport: commodification and fantasy sports. We do not suggest that commodification is entirely new to sport. Despite the contrary claims made by nostalgia buffs, sport has been a commercial enterprise just about from the beginning. Nevertheless, changes to the economy in the late 20th and early 21st centuries have produced new relationships between sport and commerce, which have subsequently altered player contracts, how sports are broadcast, who can afford to attend games in person, and what kind of facilities are built to host sporting events. Even as many are comfortable with these developments in professional sports, there are growing concerns about the increasingly blurred lines between commercialism and amateur sports. Thus, in Chapter 13, we hope to identify the key communication issues that have emerged out of the growing economic reach of sport.

One example of the commercial possibilities of sport can be found in the explosion of fantasy sports. Although many fantasy sports developed in the 1980s, the emergence of the World Wide Web in 1990s made fantasy sports a widespread phenomenon. With fantasy sports now a multibillion-dollar industry, there is little question that it is as much a part of the contemporary landscape as sports themselves. Fantasy sports allow for a new form of fandom and provide an outlet for friends, family, and sometimes complete strangers to communicate and connect with one another. Meanwhile, they also raise questions about addiction or threaten to distract employees who should be working instead of checking their fantasy statistics online. With these issues in mind, we approach Chapter 14 with the intention of viewing fantasy sports as an integral part of the communication and sport relationship.

It should be evident that the relationship between communication and sport is one that requires multiple approaches. The chapters in this book are as comprehensive an overview as is available. Yet we understand that additional topics and questions could be raised. It is our hope that the following chapters provoke you to consider how we might best understand communication and sport. Each chapter incorporates numerous examples and definitions of key terms. We also include three features in all but this and the concluding chapter: an interview with either a communication and sport scholar or a practitioner with experience in sports media, an example that provokes discussion about the role of ethics in communication and sport, and a representative case study that demonstrates the central concepts introduced in the chapter.

At the beginning of this introduction, we asked you to imagine a world without sports. Based on the range of topics included in this book, that is clearly not possible. Neither is it desirable. We are scholars and critics of sport, yes, but we also are fans. We have strong allegiances to our teams, from the Green Bay Packers to the Chicago Cubs to the University of Nebraska Cornhuskers. We played sports as kids and even try to play them as adults. We even participate in fantasy sports. In short, we are invested in the community of communication and sport in multiple ways. Throughout this book, we hope you will join us.

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