Philosophy of Popular Culture: Sport

PHIL 130
Instructor: Jon LaRochelle
MTWRF 12-2pm
204 CHA

Course Description

What is the social role of sport? How does it help or hinder social and moral development? What is the significance of spectatorship? What is the relationship between athletic practices and sexuality? How are the two co-constituted? What is the role of athletics in the mission and purpose of institutions of higher learning? Do sports have a role to play in higher education?

Given the persistent presence of sport in our everyday lives, these and many other questions call for detailed philosophical treatment. This class presents an opportunity to reflect philosophically on the role of sports in contemporary American society. As such, it will engage with both resources from the philosophical tradition and content from popular culture. Students will become familiar with some philosophical texts, but the focus will be on developing the ability to practice philosophy.

For this reason, class meetings will usually be split up into two parts. First, we will have a student led discussion about current or past events in sports. Discussion leaders are encouraged to get creative here, bringing topics and media to help us dig into some issue(s) that they consider important. Second, we will look at the assigned readings for a given day. This part of the class will usually begin with a student presentation summarizing and analyzing the assigned readings for the day.

Assignments

- Attendance - 15%
- 1 on 1 Meeting - 5%
- Discussion Leadership (x2) - 25%
- Presentation - 20%
- Writing Portfolio - 35%
  - 3 Journal Entries
  - In-class Writing
  - Final Paper (or Project)

Attendance — Attendance is fundamental to success in this course. You are allowed 1 unexcused absence. After that, each unexcused absence will result in the loss of 5 points of your attendance grade. This means that if you have 4 unexcused absences, the highest grade you can get in the class is a “B”. 6 or more unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.
To get an **excused absence**, you must communicate with me before class. Please explain your situation, and I will decide whether or not to give you an excused absence. If you are unhappy with my decision, you may appeal it to me in office hours.

**1 on 1 Meeting** — Each student will be required to sign up for at least one 15 minute meeting with me. These will be informal opportunities to get to know each other, discuss the course, and ensure student success.

**Discussion Leadership** — Each student will sign up for two days of discussion leadership (up to three students per class meeting). This consists of bringing material for discussion during the first half of the class, in coordination with the other leaders for that day. I encourage leaders to get creative here. Go beyond the materials and topics of the course, pursue your own interests, and give us all something thought-provoking to engage with.

**Presentation** — Each student will sign up for one presentation. On presentation days, up to two students will be responsible for introducing us to the assigned material for the day. Presentations should consist of three parts: summary, analysis and questions. **Summary** is, predictably, an account of what is going on in the reading. Talk us through it, explain the parts that you thought were more complicated, and make sure that we all have a clear sense of what’s going on. **Analysis** goes beyond summary, and attempts to draw out key themes or important ideas from the material. What should we all be sure to notice from the reading? What is particularly compelling about it. What, on the other hand, did you find unconvincing or incomplete in the author’s argument? Finally, **questions** are meant to be guiding questions for discussion. What jumped out at you as you were reading? What issues or questions were raised by the material? How does it relate to other aspects of the course? What part(s) of the reading should we explore in more detail?

I welcome students to discuss their presentations with me ahead of time. Feel free to arrange a time to meet with me and go over the material and your thoughts.

**Writing Portfolio** — Students will turn in a writing portfolio at the end of the course. The portfolio will consist of **at least 3 journal entries** and a **final paper**. This portfolio is meant to represent the development of your thought throughout the course—the development of your own philosophy of sports in popular culture.

- The **journal entries** should include at least one per weeks 1-3, although I would encourage you to write as often as you like. I will not set a page limit, but they should clearly show that you have grappled with the topic of the course. You can dig deeper into a particular reading, follow up on class discussion, think through a related event or topic that you encounter outside of class, or reflect in some other way on the topic of the course. Journals may be either typed or handwritten. Be creative! These are graded on the depth of your engagement, rather than form or content.

- Please also include all **in-class writing** in your final portfolio.

- The **final paper** will take up some theme from the course, preferably one that
you have already thought through in one or more of your journal entries. I will provide prompts in Week 3, but all students are encouraged to meet with me to discuss original paper topics.

- OR, students may complete a final project instead of a paper. The final project is an opportunity to creatively engage course material in a format other than traditional academic writing. Students who wish to go this route must submit a proposal (by 7/31), draft (by 8/7), and final version at the time of the scheduled final. Doing a final project does not exempt a student from completing at least three journal entries.

**Reading Schedule**

**Week 1 - Philosophy, Culture and Sport**
M - Introduction
T - Discussion of “philosophy”
   Plato’s *Apology*
   Suggested: PEL podcasts 1&2
W - Soccer, Football and American Identity
   — Study Abroad visitor at beginning of class
   Coulter, “America’s Favorite National Pastime: Hating Soccer”
   Beinart, “Ann Coulter is Right to Fear the World Cup”
   Acton, “There’s No Sport in the World More American Than Soccer”
   Kauzlarich, “The Sport That Makes the Flag (and the Confetti) Fly”
R - On Spectating
   Wallace, “Federer as Religious Experience”
F - Football and Concussions
   Gladwell, “Offensive Play”
   RadioLab 13.4 Part II

**Week 2 - Sports in Society**
M - Viewing of *Not Just a Game* documentary
T - Muhammad Ali and MLK
   MLK, “The Other America”
   Articles on Muhammad Ali (on CAN)
   Suggested: MLK, “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
W - What about LeBron?
   O’Connor, “LeBron a winner outside the gym”
   Silverman, “LeBron is a Better Leader Than MJ Ever Was”
R - “Throwing Like a Girl”
   Young, “Throwing Like a Girl”
F - 2015 World Cup
   Whitefield-Madrano, “Watching Women Want”

**Week 3 - College Athletics**
M - Viewing of *Schooled: The Price of College Sports* documentary
T - College Football and Ethical Pedagogy
Royce, “Football and Ideals”
W - College Football and Settler-Colonialism
   Standing Bear, “Later Days”
   RadioLab 13.4 Part I (on Carlisle)
R - Democracy and Education
   Dewey, from Democracy and Education
   Selections to be assigned in class
F - Student-Athlete Panel (?)

Week 4
M - TBD
T - TBD
W - Final Discussion
Final due @ scheduled exam time

Policies

Accessibility – I am committed to providing fair access to all students. Please submit all
disability accommodation requests in compliance with University policy. Contact the
Accessible Education Center (541-346-1155) for information.

Academic Integrity – We will take academic integrity very seriously in this class. In
addition to procedures laid out in the Student Conduct Code, plagiarized work will
receive an automatic 0 and result in failure of the course.

When in doubt about plagiarism or other issues of academic integrity, please ask me or
consult the Student Conduct Code.

Electronics – You may use electronics during class. Please be mindful of the fact that
texting, checking facebook/twitter/email/etc. can be distracting for others and be
detrimental to the class as a whole. I reserve the right to ban electronics if they are
used irresponsibly.

Email - I will aim to respond to email within 24 hours, or 48 hours on weekends. I
expect you to do the same.

Exceptions and Extensions – My official policy is that there are no exceptions to due
dates or course requirements. However, I understand that things happen, and you
shouldn’t be punished for unexpected events. All I ask is that you communicate with
me in advance. We cannot work out a solution if you do not communicate with me –
the earlier the better.

Food — Because of the timing of the course, feel free to bring lunch to class. However,
please try not to let it be a distraction for the rest of the class.