

**UHON 302-007**  
**University of New Mexico**  
**American History via Sport**  
**Monday 4-6:30pm**  
**Professor Ryan Swanson**

Office: SHC 19C  
E-mail: swansonr@unm.edu  
Office Hours: Monday 8-10; By Appointment



**Course Description**

This course is an analysis of American history *using* sport. It's not a history of sports class. We live in a sports obsessed society. The sports connection starts young. Millions of American boys and girls spend their afternoons and weekends playing in soccer leagues and on t-ball teams. The kids might do it for the post-game popsicles, but their parents yell at the referees and spend increasing amounts of money for these supposedly formative experiences. Beyond the kiddie realm, high school, college, and professional sports serve as powerful community building institutions. These athletic endeavors help define American identity, perhaps as powerfully as political, religious or media constructs do. Take the Super Bowl for example. Super Bowl Sunday is a treasured American holiday. It demonstrates Americans' fondness for (among other things) competition, violence, consumerism, and good food. The day has become such a ubiquitous part of American life that I always wonder who these people are that reportedly don't watch the big game. What are they doing?

In this course we will explore the role of sports in American society from a historical perspective. How, we will ask, did sports become so important? What positives and negatives result from America's unique sporting construct? In doing so we will read several lively books, investigate primary sources such as sports contracts and statistics, and we will assess the role of Hollywood in creating American sports lore. While one might argue that a game is just a game, I think you'll be convinced by the end of the semester that sports are an invaluable lens by which to examine American society.

**Course Design and Participation:**

This is an upper division, honors class; therefore I assume that you have a general knowledge of U.S. history. Students should take personal responsibility for filling in the gaps in their knowledge when it comes to basic people and events. If you come across a person or event that seems important but you don't know it, look it up. Use the Internet or a standard textbook to refresh basic chronology as needed. In this course you will be asked to read, discuss, and write about the role of sports in U.S. history. This is a seminar course. Exactly no class sessions will consist solely of a lecture from the professor. Make sure to do each week's assigned reading *before* coming to class so you can contribute.

**Required Readings** The following books are available for sale in the bookstore:

Elliott Gorn. *The Manly Art: Bare Knuckle Prize-Fighting in America*. 1986.  
Laura Hillenbrand, *Seabiscuit: An American Legend*  
Don Van Natta Jr., *Wonder Girl: The Magnificent Sporting Life of Babe Didrikson Zaharias*  
Michael Lewis, *Moneyball: The Art of Winning an Unfair Game*

**UNM Learn:** The syllabus and all supplementary readings are available via blackboard. The supplementary readings are usually short, but *vital* to this class.

## **Learning Objectives:** (By the end of the semester students should....)

1. Be able to analyze primary documents
2. Compare works from various disciplinary, cultural, and chronological perspectives
3. Construct persuasive arguments, both verbally and in written form

## **Grades**

Attendance and Participation	25%
2 Analysis Papers (3-5 pages)	40%
Digital Storytelling Project	35%

**Grading Scale: A = 93-100%      Credit = 70-92%      No Credit = 0-69%**

**\*\*NOTE\*\* Deadlines are FIRM; requests for extensions will not be granted.** The *only* exceptions to the “no extensions” rule will occur in cases of illness (documented by doctor’s note) or family emergency of which I am informed *before* the assignment is due. *Lots of other work does not count as an emergency.* Late assignments will be penalized by a third of a letter a day, including weekends and holidays (A day-late B becomes a B-). Plan responsibly; submit work on time.

## **Office Hours:**

I’m here to help. I am excited about history and sports, and about being part of UNM and the Honors College (heck, I’m just excited!), and I welcome opportunities to discuss the course and your progress in it. In addition to scheduled office hours, please feel free to email me to set an alternative time to meet. I rather obsessively check my email Monday through Friday. I am not available to meet immediately prior to the start of class.

## **Description of Requirements**

**I. Class Participation (25%).** You are required to attend and participate in this course. Taking an active role in discussions and activities comprises just as much of your responsibility in this class as writing the papers and taking the quizzes. The way to prepare for discussion is to do the reading listed on the syllabus before coming to class, listen to your classmates’ responses to the reading, and contribute your own. The class participation grade honors the fact that interaction with each other comprises a major part of this course. In this class you will also be asked to participate in sports play (at a very low-key, recreational level).



**Absences:** You get one free absence for the semester. After that freebie, missed classes will decrease your participation grade.

**Reading Quizzes:** If I get the sense that people aren’t quite keeping up with the reading – I reserve the right to give a reading quiz or two. Reading quizzes will be straight-forward and designed to ensure that you are keeping up with the course content. They will count towards participation.

**Discussion Leader:** Once during the semester you will be “on deck” with special responsibilities for the class meeting. Each student will be randomly assigned one class session for which they are the Presenter and on that day will be in charge of doing three things: 1) providing a class-opening summary and analysis of the day’s reading (10-15 minutes), 2) assembling a list of class discussion questions, 3) identifying and **bringing hard copies** of a short primary document that will contribute to our discussion.

**II. Analysis Papers (40%).** You will turn in two response papers during the semester. In each 3–5 page paper, you will respond to an interpretive question. There are two sources of questions for these papers. 1) Use one of the questions on the study guide provided for each unit. 2) If you have a burning question/topic that you would like to address, get email approval from the professor. You must get *prior* approval to do a non-list question. The email

will be your proof that you did so. A paper prompt, explaining the assignment parameters, will be posted on Blackboard.

All papers must be thesis-driven and analytical. They must engage with the texts and primary sources we use in class. No outside research is necessary. All papers must state a thesis, organize the paper to support that thesis, and use evidence (specific examples from the text) to prove the point. Don't simply tell a narrative story. You must cite your sources. All papers will be due at the beginning of class on the specified date. You must hand in a hardcopy.

**III. Digital Storytelling Project (35%).** The final project for the course will consist of primary document research, historiographical interpretation, and captivating story-telling. The end product will be a 5 minute video, or digital story. For more on digital storytelling see [digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu](http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu). You will turn in a project pitch with bibliography, a story board, a first cut, and final cut of this project. You will present your project to the class in early May. A project prompt will be posted on UNM Learn.

**How Paper Grades are Determined:** Papers will be evaluated on three main criteria: thesis, organization, and evidence. Each of these categories will be discussed more fully in the context of each assignment, but in general, a paper that does a good job in each category is a B. A paper that almost does is a B-, and a paper that performs well in each category and goes beyond in one category is a B+. A paper that is satisfactory but weak in one or two categories is a C. A D paper is weak in three or more categories, or omits one criterion completely (i.e. lacks evidence). An A range paper performs exceptionally well in each category, and achieves something extraordinary in two or more categories.

**Appealing a Grade:** You are always welcomed and encouraged to discuss a paper with the professor. But if you want a grade reconsidered, you must first submit (by email is fine) a paragraph in which you evaluate your paper in each of the 3 criteria. Having the appeal in written form ensures that you take the time to assess your own paper and that I will be able to fully consider your appeal. Please remember that a grade does not reflect process (it does not measure whether you worked hard) and it certainly does not reflect a value judgment about you as a person. Rather a grade constitutes an evaluation of the quality and analytical rigor of the thesis, evidence, and style of a single piece of work. Appeals must be submitted no later than one week after graded papers are returned in class.

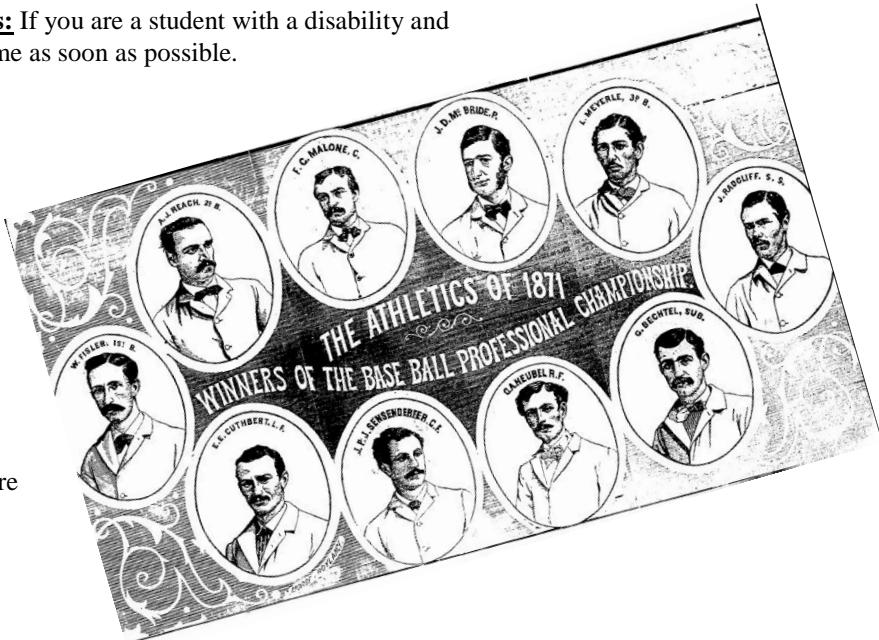
#### Adds/Drops

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me as soon as possible.

#### **Classroom Format:**

While there will be some variation, we will most always follow this basic class schedule. First, we will read a representative primary document from the period in question. This is not one of the pre-assigned readings for the day. Rather this analysis will occur in class. Second, the day's discussion facilitator will give a summary of the pre-assigned reading, as well as a few questions. Third, we will move to a time of discussion and group analysis. During class we will often work in groups, watch film excerpts, debate, etc. Engagement, curiosity, and respect are the keys to a successful classroom environment. Remember, we're all in this together!



**Course Schedule:**

**1/23 Week 1: Course Introduction and Syllabus**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Why Sport History is American History" (UNM Learn)

**1/30 Week 2: Colonial Times and Games**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Mutually Incomprehensible Play"
2. "History of Cricket in the US"
3. "Rules of Cricket"
4. "Rules of Rounders"

**2/6 Week 3: The Civil War Era and Creation Stories**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Union Prisoners" (Image)
2. "A Raid from Pennsylvania"
3. "Gettysburg Base Ball Festival"
4. "Base Balls and Ballots"
5. "The Baseball Hall of Fame and Doubleday"
6. "Creation Myth of Cooperstown"
7. "Pedestrianism Mania"

**2/13 Week 4: Immigration Fighting and Identity**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

*The Manly Art* (All)

**Response Paper 1 Due Wednesday 2/15 by 5pm**

**2/20 Week 5: The Progressive Era: The College Game and Amateurism**



**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association Handbook"
2. "History of Harvard Sports"
3. "Turning the Tide: Progressivism and Southern Football"
4. "Jack Johnson: Rebel of the Progressive Era"

**2/27 Week 6: 1920s: The Golden Age of Sports Heroes**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Barnstorming with the Bambino"
2. "Ruth Denies Orgies"
3. "Ruth Mobbed"
4. "Ruth Show Over"
5. "How Charles Lindbergh Became the World's First Crackpot Celebrity"

**3/6 Week 7: Suffrage – Finally!**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

*Wonder Girl* (All)

**Response Paper 2 Due Friday 3/10 by 5pm**

**3/13 Week 8: No Class Spring Break**

**3/27 Week 9: The Decline of Rural America**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. "Women Playing When 6-6 Ruled"
2. "IGHSAU"
3. "More than a Game"

**Digital Storytelling Project Pitch due 3/27**

**4/3 Week 10: Depression Era Sport**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

*Seabiscuit* (All)

**Digital Storytelling Project Storyboard Due**

**4/10 Week 11: World War II**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. “Baseball and World War II”
2. “Greenlight Letter”
3. “War Games”
4. “A Defense of War and Sport Metaphors”
5. “Drill and Kill”
6. “Sports: War Games”

**4/17 Week 12: Muhammad Ali**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

1. “Champion as Long as He Wants”
2. “The Hidden History of Muhammad Ali”
3. “The Importance of Muhammad Ali”

**Digital Storytelling Project 1<sup>st</sup> Cut Due**

**4/24 Week 13: Technology and Analytics**

**Read in Preparation for Class:**

*Moneyball* (All)

**5/1 Week 14: Digital Storytelling Project**

**Presentations**

**Final Digital Storytelling Project due 5/1**

