

War, Religion, Youth, and the Movies

As we've seen at the beginning of our journey through the places, spaces, and times of college sports, war and the skills of war have always been closely linked to the development of athletic games in most societies. The games highlight important combat attributes:

- They focus on the prime military age of the male populations in most societies.
- They highlight and develop skills valuable in war at the time the sports are created.
- They reward and motivate young people of military age to cultivate military skills in anticipation of war and conflict.
- They see sports as training for critical warlike skills because the games are always about dominating and defeating an opponent.
- Although much attention and reward are always provided to the winners, much of the purpose sports teaches are the skills needed to defeat an enemy.
- Over time, the skills required for war change as technology, ideology, and purpose of war changes.
- To remain relevant, sports modify their artificially constructed rules so the games speak more clearly to the elements required for successful victory in current circumstances.

All of this applies in one way or another to the development of the intercollegiate versions of sports during the 1900-2020 era.

Football as War and Battle

An 1887 Century magazine article spoke of the **“satisfaction in knowing that this outdoor game is doing for our college-bred men, in a more peaceful way, what the experiences of war did for so many of their predecessors in 1861–65....”**

Six years later Francis A. Walker, president of MIT and the survivor of a wound at Chancellorsville and a stint in Richmond’s grim Libby Prison, expressed his gratitude that the Civil War had revealed **“how much nobler are strength of will, firmness of purpose, resolution to endure, and capacity for action, than are the qualities of the speechmaker and the fine writer.”**

And, Walker continued, it was football that demanded **“courage, coolness, steadiness of nerve, quickness of apprehension, resourcefulness, self-knowledge, self-reliance,”** and developed **“something akin to patriotism and public spirit.”** It even did so in the spectators, for **“the blood of the whole community is stirred by physical contests among the picked youth of the land, as once it was only stirred by tales of battle.”** Football, finally, was an antidote to the **“selfish individualistic tendencies of the age.”**

Football as a **metaphor for war** perhaps found its quintessential expression in an astonishing sentence by University of California president Benjamin Ide Wheeler in a 1906 article:

“Two rigid, rampart-like lines of human flesh have been created, one of defense, the other of offense, and behind the latter is established a catapult to fire through a porthole opened in the offensive rampart a missile composed of four or five human bodies globulated about a carried football with a maximum of initial velocity against the presumably weakest point in the opposing rampart.”

David Starr Jordan. "Football: Battle or Sport?" *The Pacific Monthly*, March 1908, pp. 335-343

Theodore Roosevelt, writing for the children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, called for the rugged sports development of “***in-reared manliness***” as a substitute for frontier living and told his audience that:

“in life, as in a football game, the principle to follow is:

***Hit the line hard;
don't foul and don't shirk,
but hit the line hard!”***

David Starr Jordan. "Football: Battle or Sport?" *The Pacific Monthly*, March 1908, pp. 335-343

Football is beautiful, and as American as shock and awe [2014]

Mark Edmundson, LA Times, August 23, 2014

Football is a tank attack, a sky-borne assault, a charge into the trenches for hand-to-hand fighting. Football is following orders and sticking to the strategy; it's about acting as a unit and taking hits for the group. Football is generals (coaches) and captains (quarterbacks) and the enlisted guys who play on the line.

.

Football is about destruction. Sure, you win by getting more points than the other team, but to get more points, you generally have to slam the life out of your opponents. You try to do away with their skill players — by violence. Knock out the first-string quarterback and chances are you will win.

.

From this point of view, football and war could enter a mutually energizing relation with each other: **the more football, the more war; the more war, the more football**. If the modern world is truly a place where a nation must be ready to fight constantly in order to survive, then perhaps football serves a general good. But whether the only way to thrive as a nation and a people is through the capacity for warfare, one can certainly doubt.

What happened to war over the years since 1900?

Between 1900 and 2020 many elements of society changed and prompted changes in the way we present, understand, and construct sports in college. Perhaps as is often the case in college sports, football provides an easily understood metaphor for the changing expectations about conflict.

Football, is a warlike metaphor for positional battle over territory. It has lines of conflict, it has territory to be conquered, it has fixed and organized battles to be fought, it has subtle strategies and innovative tactics, it has secret plans design to produce victory, and it has a rhetoric of violence and destruction.

But as warfare changed after the Second World War, with the rise of proxy warfare, terrorist conflicts, unwinnable mini-wars without clear objectives or territory to conquer, football's metaphors change. With the technification of warfare and the specialized skills required, football developed sophisticated specialization, complex strategies and tactics, and deployed statistical analysis to design strategy. Players only played in their specialty, not in the entire game. At the same time the possibility of global war became complex and technical on the large scale, football shifted its metaphor of the clash of great armies in major battles and adopted behaviors more reminiscent of corporate and global commercial conflict, with high tech offense and defense, complex strategies, computerized assistance.

While the global context for the combat of warplanes, nuclear confrontation, control of the sky, the seas, and technology itself remained critical, the low level conflict that took so many lives found little resonance in the design of the football paradigm.

More satisfaction perhaps came from the opportunity of audiences to avoid engaging the complexity of limited and unresolvable warfare while living vicariously in a more glorious past where major victories were won by the the heroic action on a clear cut field of battle.



Sports and
Religion



Religion is a fundamental activity that addresses values and purpose in life. Religion has always been closely linked to the process of war, and thus to the exercise of athletics associated with training for war.

In the US, sports has often had strong religious connections (with Notre Dame being one of the key examples), with prayers and other religious manifestations serving as a ritualized part of the performance of athletic events. Although originally taken for granted as an appropriate part of the sports environment, as it was in war, modern attitudes towards religious expression and observance became substantially more complicated as the presumed uniformity of religious beliefs around various versions of Christianity broke down with the growing numbers of individuals who did not share a Christian perspective.

Because the Constitution of the US specifies the separation of church and state, the issues of involving religion in sports in any formal way became a controversy that eventually ended up in the Supreme Court.

As we can see in the slides that follow, while technically public-funded sporting events (including secondary school and college) can not offer religious presentations (prayers or blessings) as part of the games, students, coaches, ministers, and religious groups found ways to inject their religious commitments into the powerful spectacle of college sports.

Supreme Court bans student-led prayer at football games [2000]

By Tony MauroSpecial to freedomforum.org 06.19.00

In its most significant school prayer ruling in years, the **Supreme Court** today **ruled** [6-3 decision] that Texas **public schools may not begin football games with organized prayer**, even when recited by a student.

...

Justice John Paul Stevens objected most of all to the district's "majoritarian process" of allowing students to elect one of their own to give a season's worth of football-game messages. That, said Stevens for the majority, "guarantees ... that minority candidates will never prevail and that their views will effectively be silenced." Stevens added, "School sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are non adherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community."

...

Philip Baum of the American Jewish Congress said he hoped the decision would bring to an end the "massive resistance," especially in the south, to the constitutional demand for religious neutrality.

...

The Texas district's policy was challenged by two families — one Mormon and one Catholic — whose real names were not used in the litigation because they feared reprisal. ...

Fundamental to the Supreme Court's ruling in the case was Stevens' assertion that by devising a policy to allow pregame prayer, the Texas school district had not created a public forum in which the student's speech freedoms would be given greater protection. Instead, the school policy allowed only for "appropriate" messages and imposed other guidelines that give the student's message "the imprint of the state."

...

Stevens' only concession to student religious practices came late in his opinion: "**Nothing in the Constitution** as interpreted by this Court **prohibits** any public school **student** from **voluntarily praying at any time** before, during, or after the school day. But the religious liberty protected by the Constitution is abridged when the State affirmatively sponsors the particular religious practice of prayer."

Tony Mauro covers the Supreme Court for American Lawyer Media and is a legal correspondent for the First Amendment Center.

<http://www.freedomforum.org/templates/document.asp?documentID=12727>

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes has taken a key role in the process of continuing to engage sports with religion. In large part this reflects their strong commitment to evangelizing and bringing their perspectives into the forefront of students lives.

Here is the FCA Perspective

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes is touching millions of lives... one heart at a time. Since 1954, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes has been challenging coaches and athletes on the professional, college, high school, junior high and youth levels to use the powerful medium of athletics to impact the world for Jesus Christ. FCA is the largest Christian sports organization in America. FCA focuses on serving local communities by equipping, empowering and encouraging people to make a difference for Christ.

The FCA Vision: To see the world impacted for Jesus Christ through the influence of athletes and coaches.

The FCA Mission: To present to athletes and coaches and all whom they influence the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.

The FCA Values: Our relationships will demonstrate steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ and His Word through Integrity, Serving, Teamwork and Excellence.

Integrity: We will demonstrate Christ-like wholeness, privately, and publicly.

Serving: We will model Jesus' example of serving.

Teamwork: We will express our unity in Christ in all our relationships.

Excellence: We will honor and glorify God in all we do.



Here are contrary perspectives against a religious involvement in sports

Gods and games: Is sports a religion? Is religion a sport?

Sports fans pay the ticket price or tune in for the action. But are they getting a dose of religious proselytizing instead?

Are super stars using their status to push sectarian and exclusionary religious beliefs?

Web Posted: February 3, 1999 <http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/sports1.htm>

JAN. 18, 2005

After organized worship, athletic competition is perhaps the oldest communal impulse known to mankind, and today sports and religion mirror each other as never before, experts say.

"Super Bowl Sunday" on Feb. 6, 2005, is a case in point: a Sabbath-day event that will bring thousands to a contemporary cathedral - and tens of millions more via television - to watch gridiron gladiators who call on God's help for their success.

But more than ever before, scholars, religious leaders, and the general public are wondering whether the intimate connections between religion and sports are such a good thing. Drug scandals, violence on the playing field and in the stands, recruiting violations and ethical lapses are clouding sports at every level, from the pros to college to kids' leagues. Money seems to be the ultimate goal, and good sportsmanship often seems a thing of the past for fans as well as athletes, not to mention the excesses of parents and coaches.

And though religious traditions often praise athletes for their displays of skill and virtue, "sports" in the modern context often denotes a winner-take-all competitive mentality that is anathema to many religious teachings.

http://www.religionlink.org/tip_050118a.php

“The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national state/church watchdog with more than 22,700 members, issued a report today **condemning more than 25 public universities** for allowing football coaches to impose their personal religion on players by hiring Christian chaplains.

Only 54% of college-aged Americans are Christian and many of the teams investigated have non-Christian players, but 100% of the chaplains investigated are promoting Christianity, usually with an evangelical bent. These chaplains preach religious doctrine, including apparently creationism, to the athletes.

Chaplains regularly lead the teams in prayer, conduct chapel services, and more. These religious activities are not voluntary, as the universities claim, because, as the report notes, "student athletes are uniquely susceptible to coercion from coaches." Players have educational, financial and career reasons to obey their coach, whatever he asks.

This type of activity is illegal at a public university, but coaches think they can get away with it because, as Ole Miss head coach Hugh Freeze put it, "I do everything through the FCA [Fellowship of Christian Athletes] platform." But even the FCA seems to recognize the problem. Their own legal analysis says that, "In a public university setting, there must be adequate separation so that an employee's views are not perceived as connected to a university course" or the university itself.

FFRF sent copies of the report, which includes a model policy for universities to adopt, to the university presidents at those public colleges and universities with the most flagrant chaplaincies including:"

Auburn University
University of Georgia
University of South Carolina
Mississippi State University
University of Alabama
University of Tennessee
Louisiana State University
University of Missouri

University of Washington
Georgia Institute of Technology
University of Illinois
Florida State University
University of Mississippi
University of Wisconsin
Clemson University

Religious manifestations are injected into the spectacles of sports, even when they are formally banned, when players and coaches assert a religious sentiment that, because it is not formal, is hard to prohibit. The prayer huddle has been a popular method to bear public witness of religious faith.



East Carolina-Virginia Tech 2007 Post Game Prayer Huddle

North Dakota State vs Youngstown State in the 45th annual Harvest Bowl game, Saturday, Nov. 3, 2018, Post Game Prayer. This is possible also because the activity is after the end of the formal game.



Fields of Faith, a ministry outreach of Fellowship of Christian Athletes, is a student-led prayer movement on football fields across the nation. (Fellowship of Christian Athletes. October 2019) Again, these are after the event is formally over, and therefore difficult to prohibit.



The rituals displayed here raise multiple issues.

The first is a recognition that students, staff, and others are free to speak about their religious beliefs as long as the behavior is voluntary and that no public institution endorses the activity. So a prayer huddle could be construed as a voluntary exercise of free speech.

A second consideration is whether the university has implicitly approved these informal religious gatherings by providing a specialized and often televised forum for religious expression that people who are witnessing the game did not choose to experience.

A third consideration is whether individual players are free to express or not express religious view, and whether the Christian religious views that are part of most of these displays are being forced on players who may not be part of that faith.

Here, the question is whether a coach or other official of the team or program, in participating in a religious activity, formal or informal, that is organized around players, creates a coercive situation in which a player who may not share the Christian beliefs of the activity feels required to participate because the coach leads or is involved in the activity.

The following slides offers some examples of these challenges.

Air Force Academy looking into football team's pre-game prayer rituals

By Zach Barnett - December 9, 2015





WHY BAYLOR AND SOUTH CAROLINA'S POST-GAME PRAYER MATTERS

ED USZYNSKI
MARCH 25, 2017

W

hile it's become customary in football, the conclusion of the Baylor/South Carolina Sweet 16 game produced something rarely seen in college basketball: a post-game prayer huddle.

[Share 99](#)

As TBS announcers Verne Lundquist and Jim Spanarkel prepared to put the finishing touches on their broadcast of the game, they were both captured by the scene that unfolded at mid-court.

"Interesting," Lundquist said. "The celebration started, and Perry Clark one of the assistant coaches (for South Carolina) came out and said, 'Calm down.' And look at this. This is a remarkable scene of sportsmanship."

Both teams huddled together—coaches, players, and other staff—with arms slung around each other and heads bowed. Apparently someone offered a prayer from within the circle though it was not clear who may have initiated it.

The TBS feed quickly moved from showing the circle to other action happening around the court, with the typical frenetic editing we've come to expect from our sports media viewing. If this had been TBN instead of TBS, perhaps we could have absorbed a longer view of this rare occurrence and been able to appreciate the moment with Lundquist and Spanarkel who were properly silent—even reverent?—given the unexpectedness of the gesture.

But whatever. As Spanarkel finally said, "It's a great scene."

Bearing Witness in Public Forums



Florida Gator Soccer Team 2007—Prayer Huddle

West Point Launches Inquiry Into Football Team's Post-game Prayer

September 28, 2016

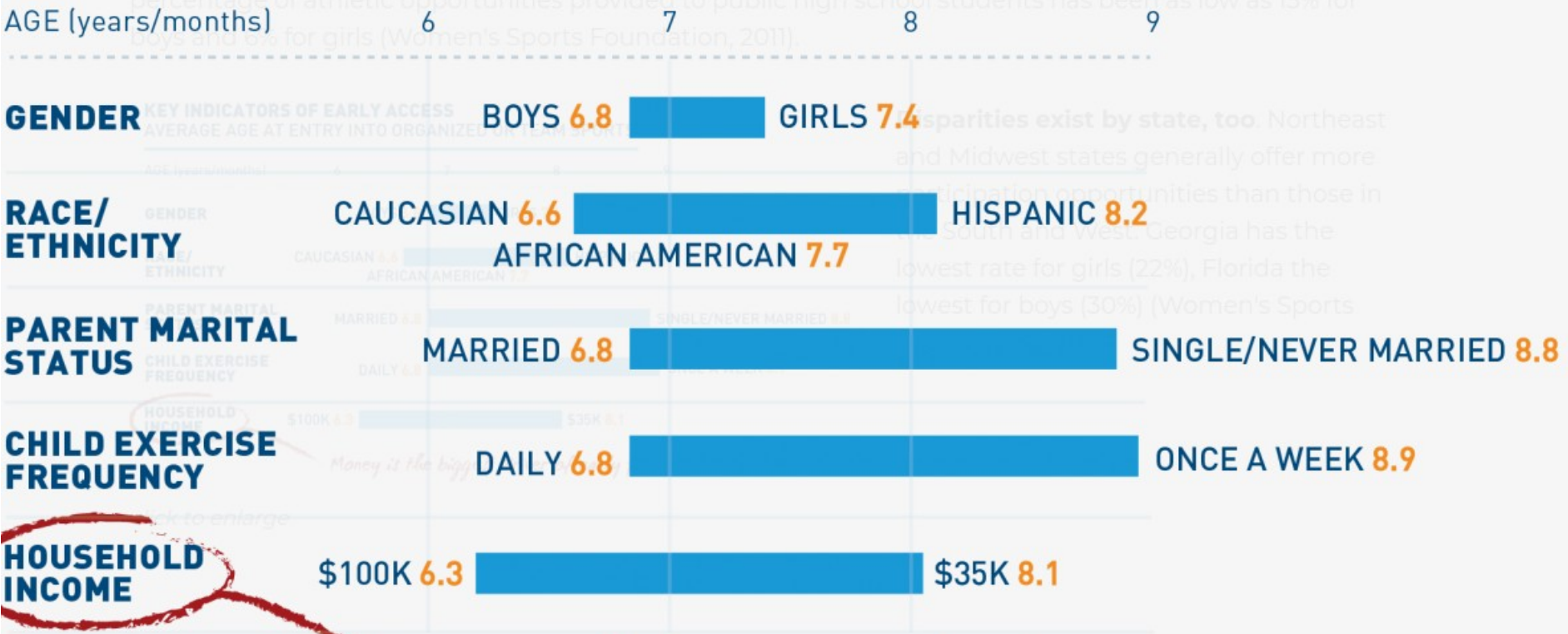


Officials with the U.S. Military Academy pulled a video clip of the football team's postgame locker-room celebration offline Monday and have launched an inquiry into whether a team prayer violated players' rights to religious freedom. After Army West Point's 28-13 upset win over Temple on Friday in Philadelphia,

Sports before College

KEY INDICATORS OF EARLY ACCESS

AVERAGE AGE AT ENTRY INTO ORGANIZED OR TEAM SPORTS



Money is the biggest driver of early participation.

AVERAGE ANNUAL FAMILY SPENDING ON ONE CHILD (AGES 1-18)

SPORT	TOTAL COSTS	REGISTRATION	EQUIPMENT	TRAVEL	LESSONS	CAMPS
Baseball	\$660	\$166	\$121	\$175	\$106	\$100
Basketball	\$427	\$86	\$74	\$114	\$61	\$88
Bicyling	\$1,012	\$120	\$504	\$247	\$29	\$106
Cross Country	\$421	\$130	\$87	\$147	\$22	\$31
Field Hockey	\$2,125	\$409	\$521	\$934	\$86	\$132
Flag Football	\$268	\$74	\$68	\$58	\$27	\$36
Tackle Football	\$485	\$91	\$110	\$83	\$116	\$76
Golf	\$925	\$81	\$364	\$238	\$88	\$113
Gymnastics	\$1,580	\$152	\$111	\$763	\$422	\$104
Ice Hockey	\$2,583	\$634	\$389	\$829	\$389	\$302
Lacrosse	\$1,289	\$411	\$280	\$281	\$68	\$231
Martial Arts	\$777	\$82	\$86	\$107	\$467	\$25
Skateboarding	\$380	\$20	\$109	\$81	\$24	\$141
Skiing/Snowboarding	\$2,249	\$168	\$1,174	\$434	\$281	\$56
Soccer	\$537	\$158	\$125	\$107	\$66	\$73
Softball	\$613	\$141	\$159	\$187	\$66	\$53
Swimming	\$786	\$116	\$59	\$388	\$154	\$68
Tennis	\$1,170	\$115	\$122	\$352	\$471	\$95
Track and Field	\$191	\$51	\$47	\$49	\$20	\$14
Volleyball	\$595	\$242	\$66	\$170	\$53	\$54
Wrestling	\$476	\$102	\$59	\$172	\$62	\$54
All Sports	\$693	\$125	\$144	\$196	\$134	\$81

Note: Additional expenses calculated as "Other" were also counted but are not shown on this graphic.

Source: Aspen Institute/Utah State University 2019 National Youth Sport Survey (1,032 youth sports parents)

CORE SPORT PARTICIPATION BY DEMOGRAPHIC

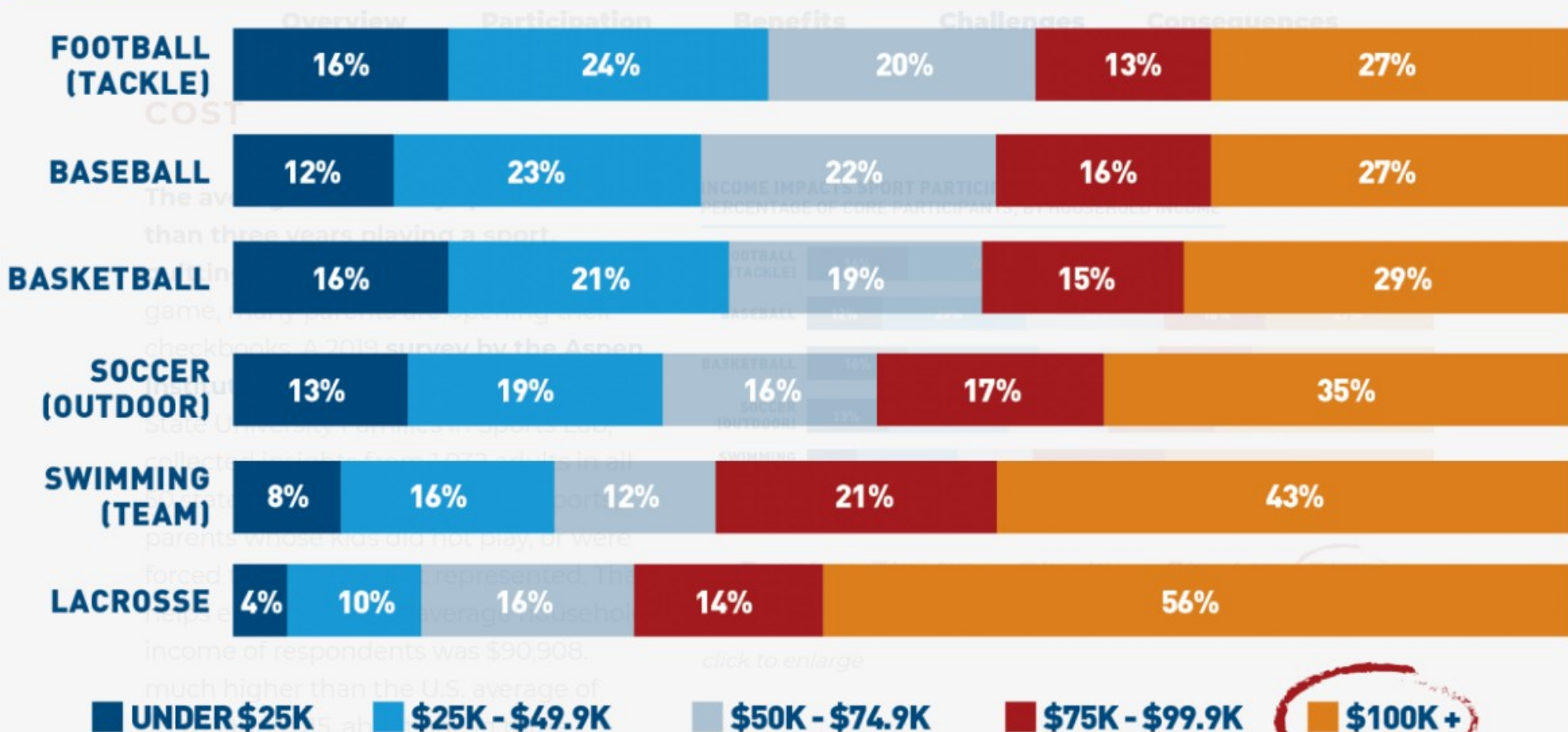
Children ages 6 to 12 who played a sport on a regular basis

	2012	2018
Male	49.1%	38.6%
Female	33.5%	31.4%
Household Income Under \$25,000	33.8%	21.6%
Income \$25,000 to \$49,999	36.0%	30.7%
Income \$50,000 to \$74,999	42.4%	39.4%
Income \$75,000 to \$99,999	46.1%	41.0%
Income \$100,000+	48.8%	42.7%
African American/Black	38.9%	34.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	34.8%	36.8%
Caucasian/White, Non-Hispanic	44.1%	39.7%
Hispanic	38.5%	33.1%

AGE CHILDREN QUIT REGULARLY PLAYING A SPORT (AGES 3-18)

INCOME IMPACTS SPORT PARTICIPATION

PERCENTAGE OF CORE PARTICIPANTS, BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Families that can afford more, play more.

Source: Aspen Institute/Illah State University 2019 National Youth Sport Survey (1,032 youth sports parents)

Did NCAA Student-Athletes Compete on High School or Club Teams?

	High School Team Only	Both High School and Club	Club Team Only	Neither High School nor Club
Men				
Baseball	13%	85%	2%	0%
Basketball	7%	91%	2%	0%
Football	73%	25%	1%	1%
Golf	58%	31%	8%	3%
Ice Hockey	15%	59%	24%	2%
Lacrosse	13%	82%	2%	3%
Soccer	8%	77%	13%	2%
Swimming	8%	79%	10%	3%
Tennis	38%	35%	18%	10%
Track & Field	67%	28%	2%	4%
Wrestling	23%	77%	0%	0%
Women				
Basketball	6%	92%	2%	0%
Field Hockey	15%	79%	6%	1%
Golf	51%	32%	10%	6%
Gymnastics	1%	10%	88%	1%
Ice Hockey	7%	66%	27%	0%
Lacrosse	12%	81%	1%	6%
Rowing	7%	13%	32%	49%
Soccer	5%	88%	6%	1%
Softball	5%	94%	2%	0%
Swimming	7%	79%	12%	2%
Tennis	35%	33%	22%	11%
Track & Field	62%	34%	2%	2%
Volleyball	6%	91%	2%	1%

Estimated Probability of Competing in College Athletics

	High School Participants	NCAA Participants	Overall % HS to NCAA	% HS to NCAA Division I	% HS to NCAA Division II	% HS to NCAA Division III
Men						
Baseball	482,740	36,011	7.5%	2.2%	2.3%	2.9%
Basketball	540,769	18,816	3.5%	1.0%	1.0%	1.4%
Cross Country	269,295	14,303	5.3%	1.8%	1.4%	2.1%
Football	1,006,013	73,712	7.3%	2.9%	1.9%	2.5%
Golf	143,200	8,485	5.9%	2.0%	1.6%	2.2%
Ice Hockey	35,283	4,323	12.3%	4.8%	0.6%	6.8%
Lacrosse	113,702	14,603	12.8%	3.1%	2.5%	7.3%
Soccer	459,077	25,499	5.6%	1.3%	1.5%	2.7%
Swimming	136,638	9,799	7.2%	2.8%	1.2%	3.2%
Tennis	159,314	7,785	4.9%	1.6%	1.0%	2.3%
Track & Field	605,354	28,914	4.8%	1.9%	1.2%	1.7%
Volleyball	63,563	2,355	3.7%	0.7%	0.7%	2.3%
Water Polo	22,475	1,072	4.8%	2.7%	0.8%	1.3%
Wrestling	247,441	7,300	3.0%	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%
Women						
Basketball	399,067	16,509	4.1%	1.3%	1.2%	1.7%
Cross Country	219,345	15,624	7.1%	2.7%	1.7%	2.7%
Field Hockey	60,824	6,119	10.1%	2.9%	1.4%	5.8%
Golf	79,821	5,436	6.8%	2.8%	1.9%	2.1%
Ice Hockey	9,650	2,531	26.2%	8.9%	1.1%	16.2%
Lacrosse	99,750	12,452	12.5%	3.7%	2.6%	6.2%
Soccer	394,105	28,310	7.2%	2.4%	1.9%	2.9%
Softball	362,038	20,419	5.6%	1.8%	1.7%	2.2%
Swimming	173,088	12,980	7.5%	3.3%	1.2%	3.0%
Tennis	189,436	8,596	4.5%	1.5%	1.0%	2.0%
Track & Field	488,267	30,326	6.2%	2.8%	1.5%	1.9%
Volleyball	452,808	17,780	3.9%	1.2%	1.1%	1.6%
Water Polo	21,735	1,217	5.6%	3.3%	1.1%	1.2%

Sources: High school figures from the [2018-19 High School Athletics Participation Survey](#) conducted by the National Federation of State High School Associations; data from [club teams](#) not included. College numbers from the NCAA [2018-19 Sports Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report](#).

Chance of NCAA Athletes Going Pro

	NCAA Participants	Approximate # Draft Eligible	# Draft Picks	# NCAA Drafted	% NCAA to Major Pro
Baseball	36,011	8,002	1,217	791	9.9%
M Basketball	18,816	4,181	60	52	1.2%
W Basketball	16,509	3,669	36	31	0.8%
Football	73,712	16,380	254	254	1.6%
M Ice Hockey	4,323	961	217	71	7.4%

Last Updated: April 8, 2020

Pop Culture and College Sports

Sports at the Movies

Let's Go To the Movies

As is always the case, mass market entertainment is designed to capture the key elements of popular interest at any given time on any topic.

For sports movies these reflect the predominant themes related to the public's enthusiasm and attitudes towards sports competition and their consuming interest the lives of the players and coaches.

Today, some of the movies from past eras seem dated, simple, and often misleading about the social-cultural context of their times. But the movies do not seek truth in most cases, they seek a niche in the entertainment economy that comes from satisfying public expectations or addressing current public concerns.

In the movies captured in the slides below we see examples of the heroic such as *Knute Rockne: All American* (1940), and the corrupt in the movie about the 1950s game fixing and gambling scandal in *The Basketball Fix* (1951).

Uplifting stories are core themes in many sports movies with sports being seen as a mechanism for individuals to find meaning in their lives and recover from tragedy. Classic among these is the small town basketball story in *Hoosiers* (1986) or the very popular example of the overwhelming influence of football loyalty on family and children in *Rudy* (1993). A case of a modern triumph of personal integrity over corruption in college basketball is highlighted in *Blue Chips* (1994). *Varsity Blues* (1999) offers a popular soap opera, with an attractive ensemble cast in a high school football drama.

[Continued next slide]

Documentaries and serious drama about sports, society, and culture have also proved popular such as *Hoop Dreams* (1994) focused on the effort of talented inner-city Black high school basketball stars to translate their skills into college, or *Elevate* (2011), a movie follows the difficult path of Senegalese basketball talent as they seek a place in US intercollegiate athletics. A different view comes from *In the Game* (1994) a documentary, and among the relatively few woman-centered films, about a Stanford University women's basketball season.

An exceptionally effective film, *Love and Basketball* (2000) by Spike Lee, captures the drama and personal challenges of a man and woman, basketball stars in high school, who both struggle to achieve success in collegiate sports and find personal fulfillment in their relationship. *A League of Their Own* (1992), an exceptionally effective women-focused movie, recounts the rise and fall of professional women's baseball during World War II as the men's version of the sport collapsed.

The Blind Side (2009) is a college focused drama based on a true story about the achievement of a disadvantaged Black athlete whose relationship with a white family supports his triumph in both college and eventually professional football. *Creed* (2015) is a classic boxing movie that echos the *Rocky* series.

Finally, Will Smith's *Concussion* (2015) captures the origins of the current controversy over the health challenges of contact sports, especially football.

[Continued next slide]

These are but a small sample of sports related movies, and everyone interested in sports will have many more among their favorites. When we pick a favorite sports movie it may be useful to try and identify the core values the movie presents back to us that supports and encourages our enthusiasm. We can consider why there are so many fewer good sports movies focused on women and identify the many negative role stereotypes accorded women in the movies we've seen or like. When we find a woman focused movie like *A League of Their Own*, what values and attitudes are captured and how are the conflicts of values in the movie resolved.? We may find of course, that the movie does not resolve the conflicts or resolves them in a way that, in the end, relegates the women to subordinate status.

We have included here mostly high school and college movies, but what differences emerge in the themes and values expressed by movies focused on professional sports or on Olympic sports? We can ask, why there are so many high school sports movies. Is it because the high school frame makes it easier to contain the central drama and conflicts? Is it because the high school frame avoids all the complications and complexities of intercollegiate sports?

We can also consider the changes in sports movies over time not only in values expressed but also in elements of the drama emphasized to capture our attention.

And, why are there so many boxing movies? Boxing is, of course, no longer a college sport, and it pales in comparison to professional football in terms of audience. Still, we watch *Rocky* in its many iterations, we are intrigued by Clint Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* (2004) or the prior biopic of *Ali* (2001). Perhaps the small canvas of boxing allows a much greater opportunity to explore individual character development and develop the themes of heroism, exploitation, and redemption.



Knute Rockne: All American (1940) is the inspirational film biography of the famous and Notre Dame football coach, Knute 'Rock' Rockne (Pat O'Brien). The immortalized coach is brought to life in this excellent, episodic film characterization directed by Lloyd Bacon - it portrays his sportsmanship, emphasis on teamwork, his determination to win, and his wholesome influence on the many young men who played on his squads.

<http://www.filmsite.org/knut.html>

The film is best known for its famous line of dialogue, spoken by Rockne's most famous player, George Gipp (Ronald Reagan), a real-life football star who died young of pneumonia and provided an inspiring anecdote to his coach. Gipp tells his coach:

Some day, when things are tough, maybe you can ask the boys to go in there and win just one for the Gipper. Later in a memorable scene (duplicating what actually happened at half-time in a 1928 Army game), the team coach quotes his player in a pep talk to his losing football team at half-time:

Well, boys, I haven't a thing to say. Played a great game -- all of you. Great game. I guess we just can't expect to win 'em all. I'm going to tell you something I've kept to myself for years. None of you ever knew George Gipp. He was long before your time, but you all know what a tradition he is at Notre Dame. **And the last thing he said to me, 'Rock,' he said, 'sometime when the team is up against it and the breaks are beating the boys, tell them to go out there with all they got and win just one for the Gipper. I don't know where I'll be then, Rock,' he said, 'but I'll know about it, and I'll be happy.'**



The Basketball Fix

1951 - USA - Sports Drama

PLOT DESCRIPTION

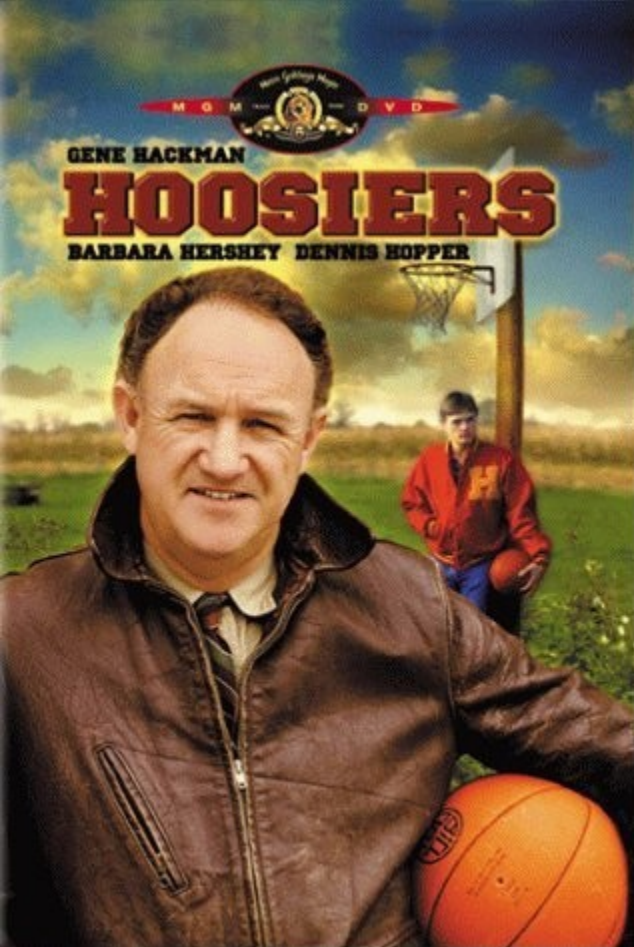
The title tells all in Basketball Fix.

Talented young basketball star Johnny Long (Marshall Thompson) allows success to go to his head. To keep on living in the manner to which he is accustomed, Johnny agrees to shave a few points here and there at the behest of gambling boss Mike Taft (William Bishop).

Thoroughly disgusted, sportswriter Peter Ferredey (John Ireland), the man who discovered Johnny, prepares to blow the whistle at the risk of his own life.

Waiting anxiously on the sidelines throughout is Johnny's girl friend Pat Judd (Vanessa Brown).

This otherwise ordinary programmer is distinguished by the excellent cinematography of Stanley Cortez. ~ Hal Erickson, All Movie Guide



Plot Summary for **Hoosiers** (1986)

Based on the true story of a small-town Indiana team that made the state finals in 1954, this movie chronicles the attempts of a coach with a spotty past, and the town's basketball-loving drunk to lead their high school team to victory.

Summary written by Thomas Pluck {stripey@winternet.com}

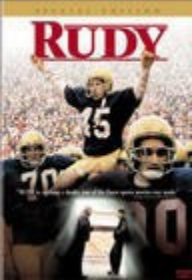
A high school basketball coach and the town drunk try to shape the local boys squad into an unlikely contender for the Indiana state championship in this sports fantasy.

Summary written by Keith Loh {loh@sfu.ca}

A classic tale of redemption, this film features a volatile coach and a former star player-turned alcoholic leading a small-town basketball team on an improbable run to the Indiana high school championship game. Coach Norman Dale encounters several hurdles in his path: a feisty teacher determined to keep the best player from going out for the team, a town chock full of second-guessing fathers, and a group of undisciplined athletes. Story inspired by the Milan (Indiana) Indians' state title of 1954.

Summary written by David S. Johnson {davidsjohnson@bigfoot.com}

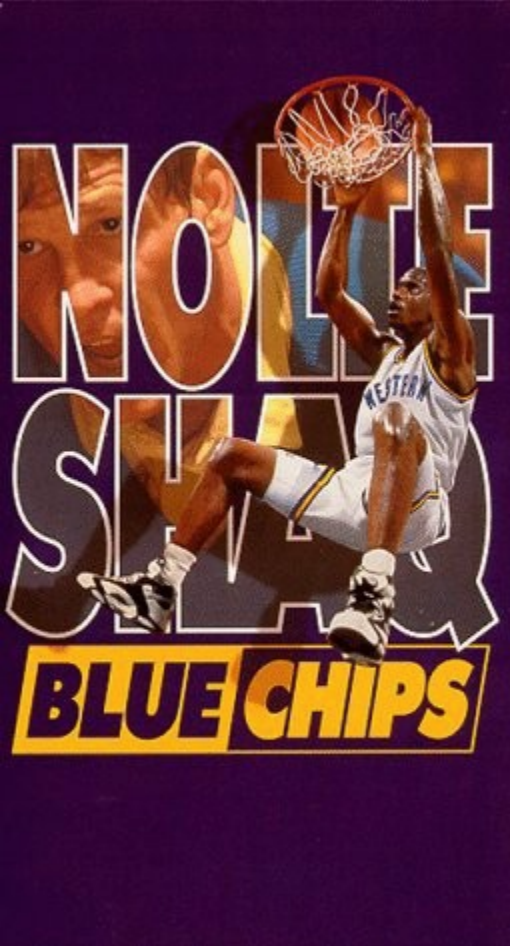
<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091217/>



Plot Summary for **Rudy (1993)**

Rudy grew up in a steel mill town where most people ended up working, but wanted to play football at Notre Dame instead. There were only a couple of problems. His grades were a little low, his athletic skills were poor, and he was only half the size of the other players. But he had the drive and the spirit of 5 people and has set his sights upon joining the team.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0108002/>



Editorial Reviews

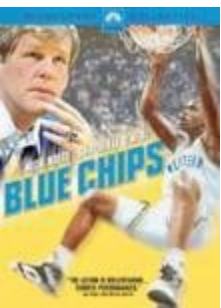
Amazon.com

Here's another smart sports movie penned by Ron Shelton (Bull Durham, White Men Can't Jump). It's an incriminating look at major college recruiting in the days of secret payoffs, circa the early 1990s.

Coach Pete Bell (Nick Nolte) seems to be the only honest man left in sports, and the pressure to win at his UCLA-like school soon takes its toll. For action fans, the well-staged games are only at the bookends of the movie: the film is about scandalous recruiting and the passion of the coach.

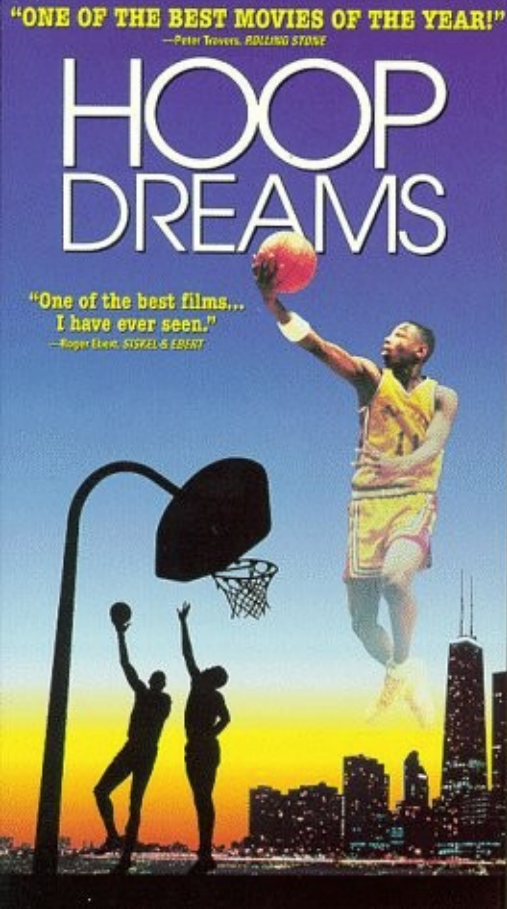
Shaquille O'Neal's ballyhooed debut is short and sweet as a nearly mythical basketball warrior. The biggest acting surprise is Boston Celtic legend Bob Cousy's deft debut as the school's AD.

The film is a little too preachy at times, but the sermon is worth listening to, especially with some solid laughs from Shelton's stinging pen. Director William Friedkin's change-of-pace film would only be half the movie without Nolte, who is instantly believable as the workaholic coach. In game situations where opposing coaches are the likes of Bobby Knight (one of many excellent cameos), Nolte comes off as the real thing. --Doug Thomas --This text refers to the DVD edition.



In his 35th year as head coach, Bud Kilmer (Jon Voight) is trying to lead his West Canaan Coyotes to their 23rd division title. Uncompromising and omnipotent, Kilmer is deified in the small Texas town, as long as the team is winning. But when star quarterback Lance Harbor (Paul Walker) suffers a season-ending injury, the Coyotes are forced to regroup under the questionable leadership of second-string quarterback Jonathan Moxon (James Van Der Beek). His irreverent attitude and approach to football come into direct conflict with the coach's inflexible game plan. [<http://www.movieweb.com/movies/film.php?1377>]





(1994)

Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com essential video

This completely absorbing three-hour documentary follows the lives of two inner-city African American teenage basketball prodigies as they move through high school with long-shot dreams of the NBA, superstardom, and an escape from the ghetto.

Taking cues from such works as Michael Apted's *35 Up*, director Steve James and associates shot more than 250 hours of footage, spanning more than six years, and their completed work actually moves like an edge-of-the-seat drama, so brimming with tension, plot twists, successes, and tragedies that its length--170 minutes--is never an issue.

Yet, what makes the film more impressive is how James moves his scope beyond a competitive sports drama (although the movie has plenty of terrific, nail-biting basketball footage) and addresses complex social issues, creating a scathing social commentary about class privilege and racial division.

The film opens by introducing William Gates and Arthur Agee, two Chicago hopefuls, as they are being courted and recruited by various high schools to play ball, and continues until the pair are college freshmen. James allows the audience the experience of not only watching their journeys and daily routines (it's a sobering portrait of inner-city life), but also witnessing their maturation. Each takes a separate path along the way, stumbling over several obstacles (William suffers injuries, Arthur fails to meet his coach's high expectations); but James takes particular care to stress the importance and strong commitment of each character's family along the way, giving the film a essential center. The parents and siblings emerge with as much depth and complexity as the two main "characters," and turn *Hoop Dreams* into an unforgettable film experience. --Dave McCoy
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/6303413145/102-5013565-7804923?v=glance#product-details>



New York Times: October 20, 2011/ MOVIE REVIEW | 'ELEVATE'

For These Men, Basketball Means Hope

By ANDY WEBSTER

It's impossible not to be moved watching Anne Buford's "Elevate," a documentary about Senegalese basketball players given a chance to play and receive an education in the United States.

Their journey begins in Dakar, at the Seeds Academy (it stands for Sports for Education and Economic Development in Senegal), a boarding school where top West African players can receive full scholarships to American prep schools. The film follows four: Assane, who attends South Kent School in Connecticut; Aziz, who goes to the Lake Forest Academy in Illinois and sustains a knee injury in an early game; Byago, who is initially rejected for a visa but winds up at the College of Southern Idaho; and Dethie, also at South Kent, who aspires to be a doctor but struggles with his SATs.

We see these young men struggle with assimilation — mastering English and learning to drive, meeting girls, facing a headmaster hell-bent on sending one to Princeton — and feel their joy on trips home. And we exult when they graduate.

But no one is more inspiring than Amadou Gallo Fall, a Senegalese man who, early in life, was discovered by a Peace Corps worker and granted a Stateside basketball scholarship. Mr. Fall, a former scout for the Dallas Mavericks, founded the Seeds Academy to nurture his countrymen. His conviction, level gaze and firm eloquence instill pride, drive and determination in his players. Mr. Fall, a coach on the court and in life, is the real champion here.

In the Game (1994)

Before ESPN's "**The Season**," there was PBS's "**In the Game**." This documentary takes you inside the 1993-94 season of the Stanford women's basketball team. It is a behind-the-scenes look at the intensity and determination it takes to be an NCAA Division I basketball player and lets us peek in on the coaching style of Tara VanDerveer, who transformed Stanford into one of the top women's basketball teams in the country.

<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/issues/family/article.html?record=989>

'We just know this is our season--we want it all! So there's nothing that's going to get in our way,' says Trisha Stevens, one of the stars of the 1990 Stanford University women's basketball team. In this FRONTLINE report, producer Becky Smith takes a behind-the-scenes look at the Stanford team, its coach, and the season they set out to win the biggest dream in college sports--a national championship. Smith's six-month record of the team's 'miracle season' captures their spirit and determination, details coach Tara VanDerveer's strategy and tenaciousness, and chronicles the grueling twists and turns on the road to the title. The program poses important questions about the obstacles facing women's athletics which continue to fight for equal opportunities, funding, and media coverage.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/programs/info/1213.html>

Draft Day (2014)

It's draft day in the NFL and as general manager of the Cleveland Browns, Sonny is forced to come up with a big move. After trading for the number one pick, Sonny has to choose between a lower-ranked linebacker with a questionable past or a celebrated quarterback with a questionable future. All the while, Sonny is walking in the footsteps of his father and personal complications force their way to the surface.

- Written by Anne Campbell

At the NFL Draft, general manager Sonny Weaver has the opportunity to rebuild his team when he trades for the number one pick. He must decide what he's willing to sacrifice on a life-changing day for a few hundred young men with NFL dreams.





In this specific sense — its attention to women's experiences, in relation to and separate from those of the men in their lives — the film again makes you see with new and appreciative eyes. Camille, Nona, and Monica have very different experiences, to be sure, but each is represented with a similar respect, and Monica's is clearly shaped by her understanding of what was available to her mother's generation.

Where the girl faces hurdles based in discrimination against women as professionals and as athletes, her mother and Nona embody the long term cultivation of a "woman's place," their simultaneous internalization and resentment of such limits.

Where Nona waits for her husband at home, priding herself on raising a decent and sensitive son, Camille is caught between two hard places: she fears her daughter's independence, but she also admires and encourages it. Woodard's complex, subtle performance conveys this contradiction, as her eyes betray that she sees in her daughter the potential and resilience she has long ago learned to suppress in herself.

Monica fights her role as a "girl" from jump. During the film's "First Quarter" (it's organized to emulate a basketball game), her early relationship with Q is awkward and vaguely cute. When they aren't scrabbling for the basketball in the driveway, they're testing out social and interpersonal boundaries. "Wanna be my girlfriend?" asks Q, with not an idea in his head what that might mean. They agree to initial terms (a first, five-second long kiss), but in the next heartbeat are fighting again, as Monica refuses to give up her own bike in order to ride on Q's with him.

They remain buddies and mutual courtside boosters, until the film's "Second Quarter," when they've grown up into Sanaa Lathan and Omar Epps and are playing high school ball. While Monica struggles with her game and her aspirations to be the first woman in the NBA (Camille is on her case about being too tomboyish), Q's a natural talent, a star point guard already being wooed by his dad's alma mater, USC.

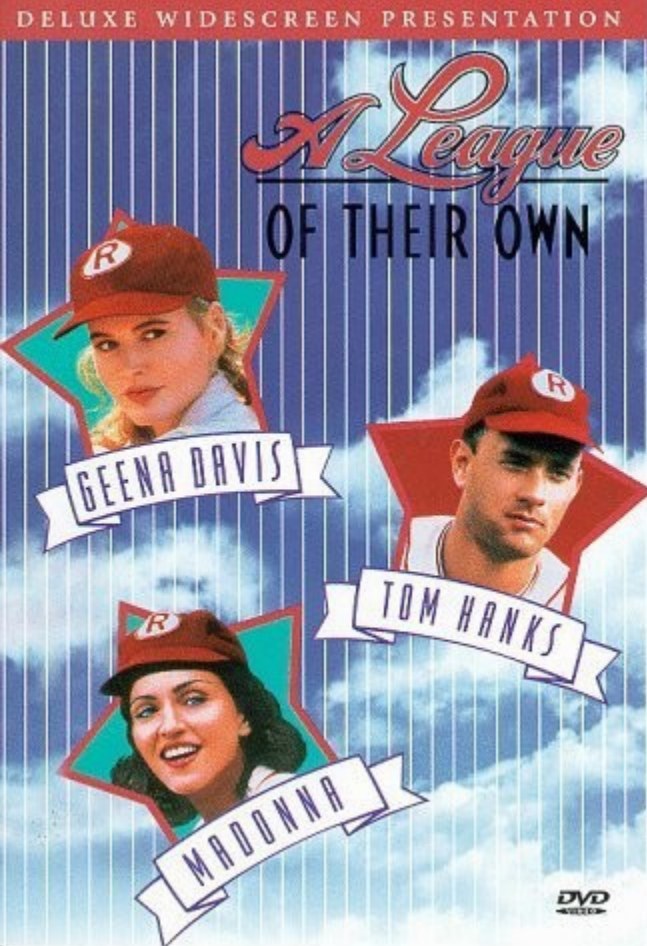
The film is hardly subtle concerning the first part of its title, and its strength is its emphasis on the second, especially as it follows Monica's stop-and-start career. Still, in high school, love rules: she resents having to carry love notes to him from other girls and he's jealous that her date for the Spring Dance is some college hunk lined up by her more traditionally feminine sister.

<http://www.popmatters.com/film/reviews/l/loveandbasketball.shtml>
(2000)

Love and Basketball (2000)

•An unusual romantic sports drama by Spike Lee, revolving around male and female basketball players. In 1980s Los Angeles childhood friends Sanaa Lathan and Omar Epps hang out together through school and college. As their relationship blossoms, they become a couple and share their mutual dream of, and striving towards, professional basketball careers.

•<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/cgi-bin/iowa/issues/family/article.html?record=989>



(1992)

Two sisters join the first female professional baseball league and struggle to help it succeed amidst their own growing rivalry.

Plot Synopsis:

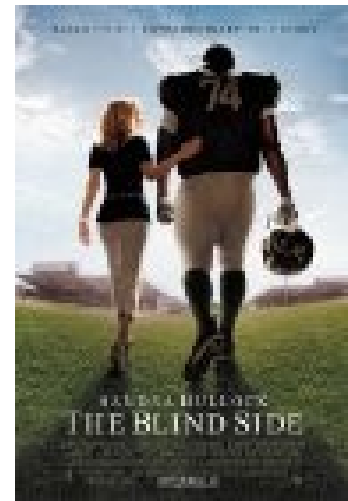
The Second world war is beginning. Most of the baseball players are being drafted. In an attempt to save the sport, several owners formed the All American Girls Baseball League. The film begins in the 90s as one of the players from the 40s leaves to attend their installation in the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The story told in one long flashback, is of two sisters who play in the inaugural year of the league. They have to establish themselves with baseball professionals, the public and each other as they try and live the lives of women athletes in the 1940s.



The storyline features Michael Oher, an offensive lineman who plays for the Baltimore Ravens of the NFL.

The film follows Oher from his impoverished upbringing, through his years at Wingate Christian School (a fictional representation of Briarcrest Christian School in the suburbs of Memphis, Tennessee), his adoption by Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy, and on to his position as one of the most highly coveted prospects in college football.

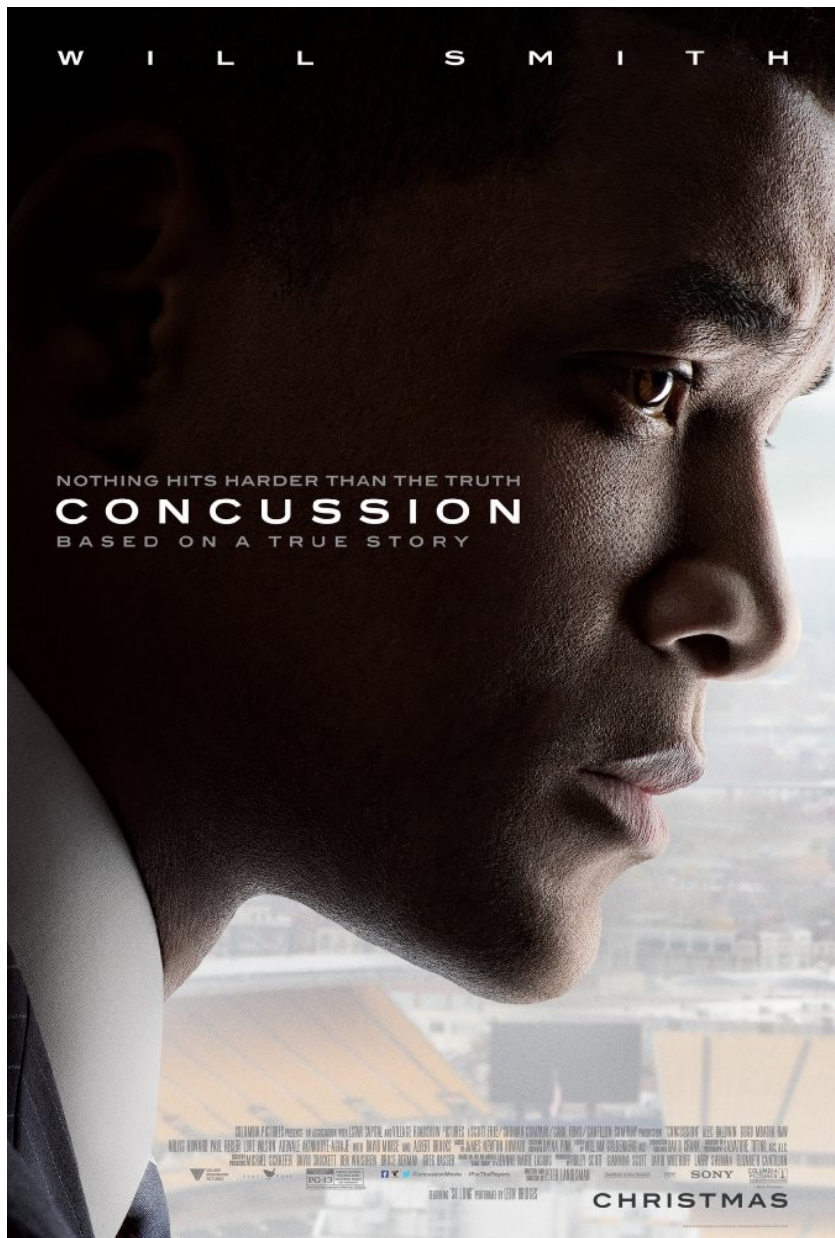




(2015)

Creed

Adonis Johnson lost his mother when he was young and would get into constant trouble and end up in foster care or juvenile detention. One day a woman goes to see him and tells him that her late husband is his father. And her husband's boxing great, Apollo Creed. She would take him in and educate him but he feels the need to be a boxer like his father. So he moves to Philadelphia and approaches Rocky Balboa and asks Rocky to train him. Rocky tries to talk him out of it but it's something he needs to do. Eventually Rocky offers to train him and when he beats a great boxer and his connection to Apollo is revealed, he is offered a chance to fight a world champion and all he needs to do is take the name Creed.



(2015)

Will Smith stars in Concussion, a dramatic thriller based on the incredible true David vs. Goliath story of American immigrant Dr. Bennet Omalu, the brilliant forensic neuropathologist who made the first discovery of CTE, a football-related brain trauma, in a pro player and fought for the truth to be known. Omalu's emotional quest puts him at dangerous odds with one of the most powerful institutions in the world.

Thanks for participating in this journey through the history of intercollegiate sports in America. We have only touched on the surface of many of the remarkable characteristics and dynamics of this unique American invention, but you are surely well placed to continue the conversation about college sports.

In an easier time, we would traditionally have this last in-person class as something of a celebration that included pizza, soft drinks, and cookies in the Campus Center. As we say in sports "Maybe Next Year!"

Take care and have a great Summer,

John

