CLASSICS OF SPORT JOURNALISM
SPST 3180/JMC 3190 (028:183/019:144)
SPRING 2015
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9.30-10.45 pm in 27 MacBride Hall
Dr. Thomas Oates
Office: 728 Jefferson Building
thomas-oates@uiowa.edu
Office hours: Wednesdays 10-12 pm, Thursdays 11-12 and by appointment

Course description and objectives
In only about a century, sports journalism has developed a kind of canon. This course is not meant to provide an exhaustive guide to this canon. Nor is it an argument about what should or shouldn't be included. The syllabus presents some works commonly listed as “great” or “classic,” often included on “best-of” lists. What are some of the features of this group of texts? How is their role in the development of sport journalism explained? In addition to these questions, we will consider the uses and limitations of canonical thinking itself.

Required texts
John Feinstein, A Season on the Brink: A Year With Bob Knight and the Indiana Hoosiers (Simon and Schuster, 2011). Available at Prairie Lights. $16.


Joan Ryan, Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters (Grand Central Publishing, 1996). Available used online from $.01

Course rules and responsibilities

- Lectures – Lectures will review and further develop concepts and themes from the readings, and will introduce new concepts, themes, and examples. Slides from each lecture will be posted on ICON, but these slides will provide mere outlines, so regular attendance is crucial.

- Discussions – Five times during the course, discussions will provide opportunities to review material from the previous week or two, seek clarification about course concepts and other details, and work towards success on the papers. Usually, questions pertaining to the week’s material will be posted on ICON’s discussion board one week before the scheduled discussion. Students can earn ten points by fulfilling two requirements: 1) Posting to the discussion board by 8 pm on the day before the discussion will earn you five possible points. (2) Participating in the in-class discussion will earn you five possible points. Students may complete a make-up assignment only if they have an excused, properly documented absence. The make-up is due at the next class meeting or, in the case of illness from the flu, whenever you are well enough to return with an “Absence from Class” form (see below). See the course document on ICON marked “discussion guidelines” for more details.

- Computer responsibilities — You are responsible for knowing how to use a computer. This includes maintaining back-up files of your work. Losing an assignment due to failure to back up a file will result in a “zero” for the assignment. You must have an uiowa.edu account and be able to receive e-mail there. Check this account regularly and forward to your primary account if necessary. All email communication
for the course (both sent and received mail) must move through your uiowa.edu account. Course announcements will also be posted on ICON, so be sure to check in regularly.

- **Attendance and professionalism** – You should treat this course with the level of professionalism you would bring to a job. Your do not need to dress up, but please observe the following guidelines:
  
  - Be courteous and professional in your correspondence for this course, using proper grammar and proper modes of address.
  
  - Come prepared and be ready to contribute. Do not skip class meetings. Focus on the material when in class.
  
  - Do not read the newspaper, text, sleep, surf the web, pass notes, or otherwise engage in behavior that detracts your (and possibly others’) attention from the course. I would prefer that you not use laptop computers and will provide documentation about why throughout the semester.

In the unlikely event that you miss a class, please remember the following:

- Absences from discussion meetings will lower your participation grade. It’s impossible to participate when you are absent, you may be out of the loop in future discussions because of something you missed.

- It’s your responsibility to obtain notes, assignment sheets and whatever else you might have missed – do not ask me for them if you missed class. It might be a good idea to find a partner and agree to fill each other in when you miss class. Never, ever ask if you missed anything important. Assume that you did and take the necessary steps to catch up.

- Excepting officially excused absences or other extraordinary circumstances, you will not be allowed to make up work you missed. If you are sick with the flu, please do not come to class until you are well again. You need not bring a doctor’s note in such circumstances. Instead, please use the “Absence from Class” form available here: http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/Student/FormsforStudents/tabid/79/Default.aspx

- **Studying** —The Center for Teaching recommends a 2:1 ratio of time spent studying per hour in class, which translates to 5-6 hours per week for this course. This course has a challenging reading load, so 5-6 hours will be necessary to do well. You should use this time to complete and carefully review the assigned reading, review your notes on readings and lectures and complete written assignments. Some weeks will be more work-intensive than others, so plan ahead and budget your time accordingly. Start your written assignment early.

- **Deadlines** – Deadlines are to be treated with the utmost seriousness. Papers are due at the start of class on the date marked in the syllabus. Any late paper will be penalized one letter grade, and will be penalized an additional letter grade for each class period that passes without a submission. For example, a paper assessed as a B+, but turned in two class meetings late would receive a D+.

- **Reading Report** – Once this semester, you will write a short report on one of the assigned reading. Your report should focus on what you found most interesting, but it must identify the reading’s focus (an athlete, a team, a game, a season), its style (reportage, reflexive elements of new journalism, chronicle, essay, echoing literary devices like mystery stories), and its themes? (plot points, characters, connections to wider events at the time it was written). You must also pose two questions for the class to consider
• **Final Paper** – A final paper will be due on the Tuesday of exam week, so do not make travel plans for finals week unless you plan to submit the paper prior to leaving town.

• **Academic Fraud** – We are bound by the Code of Academic Honesty, in which each of us agreed to do “my own academic work and to excel to the best of my abilities, upholding the IOWA Challenge [http://thechallenge.uiowa.edu/meet/index.html]. I promise not to lie about my academic work, to cheat, or to steal the words or ideas of others; nor will I help fellow students to violate the Code of Academic Honesty.” Attempting to disguise another’s work as your own is therefore strictly forbidden. Words that are not your own must be clearly identified by the use of quotation marks. Paraphrased material must be properly cited. I examine papers carefully for signs of plagiarism and will prosecute offenders to the fullest extent of university policies. Consciously or unconsciously plagiarizing is lazy, foolish, self-defeating, and extremely ill-advised. The University provides penalties for plagiarism ranging from disciplinary probation to dismissal from the University. We will review the proper techniques to research and write papers and tests correctly to avoid even accidental plagiarism. If you are in doubt as to whether you may be plagiarizing, ask me for help. Ignorance or indifference to these guidelines is not a defense. For more details, see [www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml](http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml).

• **Office hours** – You should feel free to stop by during office hours to receive clarification about course concepts or assignments, discuss ideas for projects relating to the course, or just to talk about the course topic in an unstructured way. Come alone or if you prefer, with a group of classmates. Don’t be a stranger.

• **Reacting Safely to Severe Weather** – If the warning system indicates severe weather, we should immediately seek shelter in the innermost part of the building, if possible at the lowest level. Stay clear of windows and free-standing expanses. The class will reconvene after the severe weather has ended.

• **Special accommodations** – I want to hear from anyone who has a disability that may require some modification of seating, testing or other class requirements. Please contact me during my office hours, by e-mail or after class. Special academic arrangements for students with disabilities are handled in cooperation with Student Disability Services ([www.uiowa.edu/~sds/](http://www.uiowa.edu/~sds/)). Students who feel they need special accommodations for any aspect of the course are encouraged to contact SDS and to speak with me early in the semester, so that accommodation can be made as soon as possible.

• **Conflict resolution** – Should conflict arise, please seek to resolve them with me directly. Students seeking to resolve a conflict should first contact myself, then, should the issue remain unresolved, Horace Porter (DEO, Department of American Studies). For more information, see the CLAS Student Academic Handbook at: [www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml](http://www.clas.uiowa.edu/students/academic_handbook/ix.shtml).

• **Sexual harassment policy** – Sexual harassment will not be tolerated. We all have a duty to report incidents of sexual harassment immediately. See the UI Comprehensive Guide on Sexual Harassment at [www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html](http://www.uiowa.edu/~eod/policies/sexual-harassment-guide/index.html) for assistance, definitions, and the full University policy. Immediately report any concerns to Professor Oates or to the DEO of American Studies, Horace Porter.

**Requirements**

The schedule of papers and tests, as well as the credit assigned to each, will be as follows:
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Quizzes</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Periodic (unannounced)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion participation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Semi-weekly (6 @ 10 pts. each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Report</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Tuesday of Exam Week</td>
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<td><strong>Course total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
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**Grading scale**

Course grades will be distributed according to the following scale

- **A** 278 and above
- **A-** 277-269
- **B+** 268-260
- **B** 259-248
- **B-** 247-239
- **C+** 238-232
- **C** 231-219
- **C-** 218-209
- **D+** 208-200
- **D** 199-188
- **D-** 187-179
- **F** 178 and below

**Calendar**

**Week 1: Introductions**

- January 20: Introductions and Syllabus Review
- January 22: Tools for Interpretation

**Week 2: The “Golden Age”**

- January 28: Discussion #1

**Week 3: New Journalism**

- February 3: Gay Talese, “The Silent Season of the Hero,” Norman Mailer, from *The Fight*
- February 5: Discussion #2

**Week 4: New Journalism**

- February 10: Brad Darrach, “The Day Bobby Blew It”
- February 12: Discussion #3

**Week 5: Levels of the Game**

- February 17: John McPhee, *Levels of the Game*
- February 19: John McPhee, *Levels of the Game*

**Week 6: Levels of the Game**

- February 24: John McPhee, *Levels of the Game*
- February 26: Discussion #4

**Week 7: Workshops**

- March 3: Workshop #1
- March 5: No Class – Read John Feinstein, *A Season on the Brink*, Chapters 1-6
Week 8: All Access
March 10  John Feinstein, *A Season on the Brink*, Chapters 7-13
March 12  John Feinstein, *A Season on the Brink*, Chapters 14-end

**Spring Break: March 14-22**

Week 9: Investigation
March 24  Discussion #5
March 26  Joan Ryan, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters*, Introduction – Chapter 3

Week 10: Investigation
March 31  Joan Ryan, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters*, Chapter 4-6
April 2   Joan Ryan, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The Making and Breaking of Elite Gymnasts and Figure Skaters*, Chapter 7-8

Week 11: Sports Writing as Philosophy
April 7   Bill Buford, “Manchester”
April 9   Discussion #6

Week 12: Sports Writing as Philosophy
April 14  David Foster Wallace, “String Theory”
April 16  Discussion #7

Week 13: Sports Writing as Myth
April 21  Gary Smith, “The Chosen One”
April 28  George Plimpton, “The Curious Case of Sidd Finch”

Week 14
May 5    Workshop #2
May 7    **Wrap-up and Review**

Exam Week
**Final Paper Due Tuesday by 5 pm**