

FURTHER READING

CHAPTER 12

This file contains additional readings from earlier editions of *Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies*, and some extra materials provided by Jay Coakley. These have not been included within the book as much of the content is explicitly focused on the USA, but users of the book may find these readings useful and interesting. Please feel free to send your feedback and/or suggest additional readings to us at jcoakley@uccs.edu or e.pike@chi.ac.uk.

Topic 1. Media networks and the International Olympic Committee

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Topic 5. The antisociological bias in the media coverage of sports

Topic 1. Media networks and the International Olympic Committee

The Olympics are a good example of the marriage between sports and television. When the Olympics (as represented by the International Olympic Committee) and television companies first came together, the relationship was a true love match; each partner was concerned about the other. Then, as both partners “did their own thing” and grew in separate ways, the relationship became a marriage of convenience. Finally, after both partners became passionately involved with transnational corporations, the relationship turned into a marriage based on money.

During their marriage of over fifty years, both the Olympics and television companies have changed, partly on their own, and partly due to each other’s influence. As in all marriages, it is a constant struggle to maintain a true balance of interests over the long run. Many people think that television has been the dominant partner in the marriage, and that the Olympics have done more giving than receiving. But a look at the record shows that the Olympics, as represented by the IOC, may not be a powerless partner.

First, history shows that money from the sale of television rights has established the legitimacy and power of the IOC, fueled the organization and growth of the Olympic movement around the world, and turned the Olympic Games into the largest single television event in the world. The IOC receives one-third of the total amount paid for television rights to the games. The remaining two-thirds go to the Olympic Organizing Committee (OOC), which, as host of the games, is expected to cover all expenses. The amount received by the IOC is divided into thirds, with one share going to the international federations for each of the Olympic sports, a second share going to promote unity between the national Olympic committees (NOCs), and a third share kept by the IOC for its own administration. In 1964 (Tokyo), the IOC split about \$500,000 into thirds; but in London in 2012 there will be \$1.2 billion to divide! These figures clearly indicate that the IOC has used television to gain power and legitimacy, and that television has made the Olympics an increasingly visible and significant world event.

Second, television networks in the United States have benefited from their coverage of the Olympic Games. Benefits have come in the form of advertising revenues and programming content. The Summer Olympic Games occur at a time of year when TV viewing rates are low in the U.S. This means that televising the games can boost a network’s ratings and give it a stage for promoting its new fall lineup of shows. The Winter Games are also valuable to a network, because they usually occur during the “February sweeps,” when crucial viewer ratings are compiled and used to compute advertising rates. Therefore, even if a network breaks even or loses money on Olympic coverage, there are considerable carryover benefits of presenting either the Summer or Winter Games. This is the major reason the bidding levels have escalated to such high amounts through the games in 2012. Television executives know that covering the Olympics can boost annual profits and build corporate status and power in the U.S. and around the world.

Third, while the IOC has made changes in the Olympic Games to meet the needs of television, those changes have been made voluntarily through negotiations, not dictated by television. Over the years, the IOC has made the Summer Games a seventeen-day rather than a fifteen-day event, so that there would be two extra prime-time weekend days of competition to generate advertising revenues. The dates for some Winter Games have been shifted so that the host U.S. network could benefit from the February ratings period. The IOC, however, did not

approve these changes without receiving something in return; in fact, they partly explain why rights fees paid to the IOC and organizing committees have increased so dramatically.

Game locations are very important to U.S. television networks. When locations permit live telecasts during prime-time viewing hours in the United States, the potential for advertising revenues goes up. This drives up bids from the networks, and it probably has influenced IOC members to choose locations such as Mexico City, Montreal, Lake Placid, Los Angeles, Calgary, Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and Vancouver for ten Olympiads since 1968. Before television was a source of big money for the Olympics, only two out of fifteen summer games were held in the Western Hemisphere (1904 in St. Louis and 1932 in Los Angeles).

The scheduling of events during the games also has been influenced by television interests. In most cases the changes have been minor. Also, there have been only minor changes in the rules for events; for example, athletes are required to wear visibly displayed numerals on their uniforms so that television commentators can identify them.

Finally, the Olympic Charter has undergone one change to accommodate television: it now states that the IOC can award exclusive broadcast rights to a single television company, and that no other companies can show any film coverage of an event until after the end of the broadcast day in which the event occurred.

Overall, it seems that the IOC and the Olympic Games have had enough power to resist major changes based on the interests of television. Changes have occurred, but all marriages involve compromises by one or both partners. And the compromises made on the part of the Olympics have gained the games power, resources, and status. Some people argue that the IOC and the Olympics have sold their collective soul to television for money. But I would say that both the Olympics and television have joined together more closely to sell themselves to transnational corporations that are using them both for their own purposes. Those corporations have been interested primarily in delivering their messages to people in the U.S. and other wealthy countries around the world. Therefore, the real losers may be the residents of those countries of the world that don't have high per capita incomes.

Jay Coakley

Topic 2. Ideological themes in U.S. sports media coverage

It's not easy to identify themes underlying the images and messages in mediated sports. Analyses using critical approaches have focused on the extent to which images and messages in mediated sports represent dominant ideas about social life and social relations in society as a whole. This is especially the case in connection with themes related to nationalism, competitive individualism, teamwork, aggression, and consumerism.

This should not surprise anyone who has read about, listened to, and viewed sports in the United States. The images and messages in mediated sports clearly emphasize nationalism and national unity grounded in traditional American loyalty and patriotism. In fact, the sports that were "invented" in the United States—football, basketball, and baseball—are the most widely televised sports in the country. Other sports may get covered, but if they don't fit with traditional ideas about what it means to be an American, they will not receive priority coverage. When teams or athletes from the United States are competing against teams or athletes from other countries, the sport events are usually framed in an "us versus them" format. When American teams or athletes win, media commentators declare proudly, "we won."

Media images and messages also emphasize individual efforts to achieve competitive victories, even in the coverage of team sports. Games are promoted with announcements like this: "Philip Rivers and his Chargers are looking for blood against Jay Cutler and the Broncos"; or "It's LeBron James versus Kobe Bryant as the Cavaliers face the Lakers." These promos emphasize the idea that individuals must take responsibility for what happens in their lives, and that team failures can be traced to individual failures and flaws. This idea is central to the ideology of American individualism, which influences everything from the structure of our welfare system to how employees are evaluated and rewarded in the economy.

Apart from emphasizing individualism, media images and messages also stress teamwork, in the form of obedience to authority, group loyalty, and willingness to sacrifice for the good of the group. Media coverage clearly identifies coaches as the organizers and controllers of teams; commentators praise athletes for being team players, and praise coaches for their ability to fit players into team roles that lead to victories. This teamwork theme clearly fits with ideology underlying the American market economy and most American business organizations: teamwork means loyalty and productivity under the direction of a leader-coach.

The importance of mental and physical aggression is another theme underlying the images and messages in mediated sports. Athletes are described as warriors. Rough, aggressive play is described as a sign of commitment and skill. Tackles in football are described as bone-crushing hits, hard fouls in basketball are described as warnings to the opposition, and brush-back pitches in baseball are said to keep batters on their heels. Even the scores on the late-night news are full of violent images: the Heat annihilated the Knicks, the Jets destroyed the Dolphins, the Blackhawks scalped the Bruins, Hingis blew away Davenport, and on and on. The scores start to sound like the results of military operations in a war!

In fact, the language of media sports in the United States is a language of violence and warfare. Aggression is celebrated, while kindness and sensitivity are dismissed as indications of weakness. This clearly fits with the ideology many Americans use to determine strategies in interpersonal, business, and international relations: "kicking ass" is a celebrated goal, and failing to punish the opposition is a sign of weakness. Presenting games as personal confrontations and mean-spirited turf wars has long been a strategy in media sports. As professional wrestling has

taken this strategy and pushed it to an extreme, people wonder what it says to viewers; but pro wrestling has only extended and amplified the hype that has been used by the media to promote mainstream sports for many years.

Finally, the emphasis on consumerism is clear in the media coverage of sports: over 15 percent of televised sports consists of commercial time, ads fill newspapers and magazines, and Internet sites use multiple strategies to attract attention to ads located on screens containing scores, commentary, and links. “TV time outs” are a standard feature of televised football and basketball games, and announcers remind media spectators that, “this game is being brought to you by. ...” Super Bowl commercials are even the subject of special analyses, and media audiences are polled to see which Super Bowl commercials they liked and did not like. Commercial images and messages promote consumerism. The audiences in mediated sports are encouraged to express their connections to teams and athletes by purchasing shirts, shoes, jackets, official NFL hats, official NBA sweatpants, and Notre Dame coffee cups, among literally thousands of other branded products. This is clearly consistent with consumer ideology in American society. “You are what you buy” is one of the tenets of a market economy.

Overall, the images and messages in the media coverage of sports in the U.S. stress themes representing conventional ideology and widespread ideas about how the world does and should work: order, control, and tough discipline are essential; gender differences are grounded in nature, not culture; the primacy of the nation must be preserved, unless capital expansion requires a blurring of national boundaries; individuals must be accountable, work in teams, and out-produce others; and consumption is essential to happiness as well as the basis for identity. These themes run through media sports. This is the reason media coverage of sports is heavily sponsored by people and corporations with power and influence in society—they favor these themes, and sponsor images and messages that infuse them into the public consciousness.

Jay Coakley

Topic 3. Consequences of watching violence in sports

Media coverage of sports is designed to heighten drama. This is done by emphasizing the “stakes” associated with rewards for competitive success or risks of participation. Therefore, the narratives contain exaggerated accounts of action and conflict, and they lead viewers to anticipate roughness and violence. Of course, most viewers realize this, and even though they are more interested in seeing intense and highly motivated action than violence, they go along with it because it increases the tension excitement associated with watching. However, when violence is perceived to interfere with highly motivated action and efforts to achieve success, the entertainment value of media coverage is often compromised. Violence for the sake of violence is not likely to attract consistently large audiences. It is only when roughness and violence are attached effectively to story lines that emphasize other important values that they attract people over the long run.

The connection between watching and hearing descriptions of violence and learning to accept and use violence is a difficult one to study. People see many images and hear diverse comments as they watch sports. Even though violent incident may be the first one mentioned in their summary of an event, this does not mean that they think of violence generally in positive terms, or that they did not learn other things, completely unrelated to violence, in the process of watching. People pick and choose what they will focus on and think about in connection with their media experiences. The meanings given to their experiences will reflect their choices, but it is very difficult to say how those meanings will be applied to the rest of their lives. For example, they may be entertained by a violent incident and even talk about it later, but when it comes to making applications to the rest of their lives, they may emphasize images and narratives about cooperation and teamwork, achievement, expectations for success, the importance of skills and good strategies. Much more than violence occurs in sport events, and we need research that identifies the impact of all the images and messages associated with watching the media coverage of sports.

TV sports announcers realize these things and work hard to provide commentary that emphasizes drama, roughness, and suspense during the events. Their orchestrated excitement generally contributes to a positive entertainment experience, even when viewers know that the commentary contains exaggerations and questionable statements about what is actually occurring on the field of play or in the minds of players. Viewers want to be entertained, and generally appreciate excited announcers and emotion-packed commentary, even when the game is pretty ordinary. However, this does not mean that they are entertained simply by watching or hearing commentary about aggression and violence.

Finally, research shows that watching aggression in sports does not have short- or intermediate-term effects on the way people play sports themselves, unless the viewers strongly identify with aggressive players and then play in situations in which they have opportunities to imitate their models. This form of imitation seems to occur often enough for it to be a problem in certain sports, and there is a need to discourage violence among both potential models and potential imitators. There is also some evidence that short-term effects may exist when people who are already angered, view aggressive acts on TV; these results may not be reliable, however, because they were obtained in lab studies rather than in everyday life settings. There may be long-term general effects of watching aggression in sports, but they are difficult to identify in research. Watching certain sports may be associated with aggressive behavior in society, but it

probably doesn't cause this behavior. As I noted earlier in the chapter, the causes of violence are more likely to be grounded in gender, racial or ethnic, and class relations than in watching athletes tackle one another in televised games.

There is no clear indication that watching sports on television makes people more violent or more accepting of violence in their own lives. This issue is difficult to study, because watching television sports is only a small part of people's lives, and violence is usually only a small part of what occurs in a televised sport event. However, there is a need to study how people actually interpret the action they see in televised sport events and how they relate those interpretations to situations and relationships in their own lives. The fact that people respond to and talk about violence in an event does not mean they accept or morally permit violence in everyday life. More research is needed on this issue.

Jay Coakley

Topic 4. Dave Zirin discusses problems in sports journalism

Dave Zirin, an independent journalist, may be the best sports journalist today. To see who he is and hear some of his ideas, go to this video:

MSNBC (Zirin, Dave). 2008. Dave Zirin on 2008 sports and politics highlights. *The Nation Online* (December 30): http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090112/zirin_video

To read about why he writes a regular column in *The Nation*, go to:

[Did You Know The Nation Has a Sports Writer?](#) Habiba Alcindor; sports make a great framework for examining politics.

Zirin's columns in *The Nation* for 2008, 2007, and 2006:

[The Year in Political Sports](#) In 2008, the wall between sports and politics, which we are told is as immutable as Gibraltar, was not only challenged, it was thoroughly breached.

[Where Have All the Black Coaches Gone?](#) The path to the White House shouldn't be easier than the path to coach college football at Oregon State.

[Mark Cuban Libre](#) Billionaire Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban has been accused of insider trading. Is he guilty or just a target because of his larger-than-life persona and populist appeal?

[No Obamamania for Brandon Marshall](#) All the Denver Broncos wideout wanted to do was celebrate Obama's victory--but his teammates censored him and the media ridiculed him. Why?

[Merrittocracy](#) Merritt Paulson, son of Henry Paulson, asks the city of Portland to fund his new sports stadiums even though he can afford it.

[Palin Drops the Puck](#) The best-known hockey mom in the country gets booed at a game in Philadelphia's Wachovia Center. Failing candidate, failed bank, failed stunt: you can't make this stuff up.

[Sarah Palin's Extreme Sports](#) Politicians routinely manipulate Americans' fixation with sports. But Sarah Palin plays an extreme--and disingenuous--version of the game.

[Remembering the Bear](#) Don Haskins made his mark on college basketball and on America, as he fought to make the hardwood a level playing field for all.

[Q&A with Jim Brown](#) The Hall of Fame football legend discusses his experiences working with gangs in the black community and why the death penalty just doesn't work.

[Why He Fears the Fist: A Response to Jonah Goldberg](#) You can tell right away that Goldberg didn't read a book, an article, even a fortune cookie, about the 1968 Olympics before whipping out his laptop.

[Olympic Trials](#) If China's leaders believe they've released enough steam for a smooth Olympics, they could be in for a surprise.

[Can NASCAR Be Saved From Itself?](#) Mauricia Grant, the first black, female inspection official in NASCAR history, is suing her former employer for sexual and racial misconduct. It may be the best thing that's ever happened to the sport.

[Grand Theft Hoops: The Stealing of the Sonics](#) Two Oklahoma corporate raiders have stolen one of Seattle's most beloved sports franchises with an unlikely accomplice, the NBA's commissioner, David Stern.

[Nader Tackles Sports](#) It's a little known fact, but Ralph Nader is seriously interested in sports, which is why he believes there should be a Bill of Rights just for the fans.

[Well, There You Go. Imus the Bigot Is Back](#) Is Don Imus irredeemably stupid or just a run-of-the-mill racist?

[A Conversation With NBA Union Man Billy Hunter](#) Billy Hunter has a progressive spine and a background that has taken him from working with Huey Newton to sitting across the table from the most formidable commissioner in sports, David Stern.

[Can Soccer Stop the Violence?](#) In South Africa ethnic violence against foreigners is beginning to spread and the growing voice of opposition comes from an unlikely source--soccer stars.

['Like He Died Twice': Mary Tillman's Lonely Quest](#) The mother of Pat Tillman reflects on how the Pentagon has distorted the truth about his death and the NFL has exploited the tragedy.

[Blogged Down](#) Some sportswriters just don't get it.

[Why Do We Care About the NFL Draft?](#) For fans, the pigskin meat market is mindless fun, but for young players, football is no fantasy.

[Can the Golden State Warriors Save Oakland?](#) The Warriors will miss this year's NBA playoffs, but they can still be winners by reaching out to at-risk youth in Oakland.

[Sportswriters Swoon Over DC Ballpark](#) A ballpark for rich folks displaces the poor. But the Washington Post fails to utter a discouraging word.

[Carrying a Torch for Tibet](#) Protest is as much a part of the Olympic tradition as lighting the torch.

[Steroid Circus on Capital Hill](#) Roger Clemens's face-off with lawmakers moved the guardians of our democracy far beyond the absurd.

[We Might Be Giants](#) A Patriots Super Bowl win was written in the stars. But every once in a while, the double-digit underdog can win.

[White Noise on the Golf Channel](#) After days of dithering, the Golf Channel finally suspends a commentator who joked about lynching Tiger Woods. What took them so long?

2007

[The Mitchell Report Is a Fraud](#) George Mitchell's long-awaited report on steroids in baseball slanders players, gives owners a pass and never acknowledges its author's conflicts of interest.

[Sports 2007: It Was a Very Bad Year](#) Michael Vick's sentencing to twenty-three months in prison caps a depressing and scandalous year for professional sports.

[The Rockies Get Off Their Knees](#) As baseball's most sanctimonious team heads to the World Series, the Colorado Rockies are playing down their holier-than-thou image.

[The Fall of Marion Jones, Inc.](#) The sports establishment is shocked, shocked at her steroid-fueled Olympic wins. But didn't they also play a role?

[The Sick Knicks](#) Exposed in court as sex harassers, the coach and owner of a storied basketball team have turned Madison Square Garden into a toxic workplace.

[Those Cheating Patriots](#) In an era of technology-driven sports, the question of what is and isn't cheating can get pretty murky. But Bill Belichick and the New England Patriots were caught red-handed.

[Cleaning Up After the Orioles](#) Thanks to some major-league grassroots organizing, workers who keep Baltimore's Camden Yards pristine are close to winning the right to a living wage.

[Give Bonds His Due](#) It's official: He's the new home run king. Will the media ever get over it?

[Who Let the Dogs Out on Michael Vick?](#) With the indictment of the Atlanta Falcons quarterback on federal conspiracy charges for running an alleged dogfighting operation, the media went into attack mode.

[Reclaiming Sports](#) Political struggle and its relation to sports is a question not of the past but of the future.

[High Impact: What Football Owes Its Players](#) Congressional hearings about head injuries in the NFL raise questions about the consequences for old-timers and present-day players.

[Sheffield Strikes Out on Latino Players](#) Slugger Gary Sheffield's intemperate remarks about the black/Latino divide have rattled batting cages and plunged baseball into the immigration debate.

[Jason Giambi, Truth-teller](#) Jason Giambi finally got around to telling the truth about baseball and steroids. So naturally, Major League Baseball is out to smear him.

[Football and Nikki Giovanni at Virginia Tech](#) Tragedy uncovers the diverse world of a school that had been known only for football.

[Don Imus and the State of Women's Sports](#) It's been thirty-five years since Title IX was passed, and women athletes are still battling the kind of sexism Imus espouses.

[John Amaechi's Timeout](#) The openly gay former NBA star speaks eloquently against homophobia, the war in Iraq and racism.

[Out of the Closet and Onto the Court](#) Former NBA player John Amaechi's admission that he is gay exposed the league's compassion and bigotry.

[A Tale of Two Coaches](#) Kudos to Lovie Smith and Tony Dungy for being the first two black coaches to lead teams to the Superbowl. But hold the applause for the NFL.

[Muhammad Ali: The Brand and the Man](#) The day The Champ turned 65 was marked by the release of a line of snack foods bearing his image. Lost in the hype was Muhammad Ali's proud history as a war resister.

Zirin, Dave. 2006. The slave side of Sunday. *The Nation Online* (January 20):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060206/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2006. The value of a number. *The Nation Online* (February 6):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060220/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2006. The Olympics we missed. *The Nation Online* (February 22):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060306/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2006. Baseball in the Ashes. *The Nation Online* (October 23):
www.thenation.com/doc/20061106/southpaw

Zirin, Dave. 2006. Bonding with the Babe. *The Nation Online* (May 8):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060522/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2006. Sacrifice Play. *The Nation Online* (May 15):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060515/zirin

Zirin, Dave, and John Cox. 2006. Using Soccer to Kick Iran. *The Nation Online* (May 16):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060529/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2006. Ricky Williams Dreams of Canada. *The Nation Online* (May 26):
www.thenation.com/doc/20060612/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2005. What's My Name, Fool? *The Nation Online* (August 2):
www.thenation.com/doc/20050815/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2005. Etan Thomas Rises to the Occasion. *The Nation Online* (September 14):
www.thenation.com/doc/20050926/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2005. Pat Tillman, Our Hero. *The Nation Online* (October 24):
www.thenation.com/doc/20051024/zirin

Zirin, Dave. 2005. Sheryl Swoopes: Out of the closet--and ignored. *The Nation Online*
(November 4): www.thenation.com/doc/20051121/sheryl_swoopes_out_of_the_closet

Zirin, Dave. 2005. The silencing of Carlos Delgado. *The Nation Online* (December 7):
www.thenation.com/doc/20051219/zirin

All Zirin's columns in 2008:

12/18/08 - [Enduring Dixie: College Football Today](#)

12/12/08 - [BOOKS! JEWELRY! MUSIC! It's the Edge of Sports Holiday Picks](#)

12/08/08 - [Burress and the Bloomberg](#)

11/21/08 - [Mark Cuban Libre](#)

11/13/08 - [Did Tiger Woods Pave the Way for Obama? Are you Kidding?](#)

11/10/08 - [No Obamamania for Brandon Marshall](#)

11/05/08 - [They Call Him Mr. Brown: Edge of Sports Interview with the Inimitable Jim Brown.](#)

10/23/08 - [Merrittocracy: The Paulson Sporting Doctrine](#)

10/13/08 - [Palin Drops The Puck](#)

10/10/08 - [Sarah Palin](#)

09/29/08 - [Vince Young and the NFL's Depression Denial](#)

09/20/08 - [Leave Josh Alone](#)

09/15/08 - [The Passing of the Bear](#)

09/08/08 - [Why We Need A People's History of Sports](#)

09/02/08 - [Gustav and the Dome](#)

08/25/08 - [The 2008 Olympics: Subterranean Rot](#)

08/24/08 - [Remembering Gene Upshaw](#)

08/15/08 - [Women's Gymnastics: The Big Mac of the Beijing Games](#)

08/12/08 - [Bush, basketball, and Bombast in Beijing](#)

08/04/08 - [China's Olympic Trials](#)

08/01/08 - [Why He Fears the Fist: A Response to Jonah Goldberg](#)

07/30/08 - [Kermit Washington's Remarkable Redemption](#)

07/23/08 - [Spying on a Sportswriter](#)

07/16/08 - [Baseball's All Star Blackout](#)

07/10/08 - [Who is Mauricia Grant? NASCAR Knows](#)

07/02/08 - [Grand Theft Hoops: The Stealing of the Sonics](#)

07/01/08 - [Talkin' Sports with Ralph Nader](#)

06/26/08 - ["Well, There You Go": Imus the Bigot Is Back](#)

06/17/08 - [The Over-Exposure of Danica Patrick](#)

06/09/08 - [Can Soccer Stop the Violence?](#)

06/02/08 - ['Like He Died Twice': Mary Tillman's Lonesome Road](#)

05/28/08 - [Tiger, Tiger, Burning Blight](#)

05/22/08 - [What I want to Ask Mary Tillman](#)

05/12/08 - [Boss's Boycott: The Bonds Vanishes](#)

05/07/08 - [Blogged Down: The Seduction of Buzz Bissinger](#)

05/05/08 - [There's No Place Like Home: Refocusing Olympic Protest](#)

04/28/08 - [The NFL Draft: From Fantasy to Farce](#)
04/21/08 - [Can the Warriors Help Save Oakland?](#)
04/15/08 - [Shedding Light on the Torch](#)
04/06/08 - [Common Bond for Uncommon Men: Roberto Clemente and Martin Luther King](#)
03/30/08 - [Washington DC's Sporting Shock Doctrine](#)
03/22/08 - [China's Brutal Olympic Echo](#)
03/19/08 - [Brett Favre: The Restricted Archetype](#)
03/10/08 - [Why the Wire](#)
03/03/08 - [The Senator from Comcast?: Arlen Specter and SpyGate](#)
02/26/08 - [Can't Knock the Hassle: Chavez Challenges Baseball](#)
02/20/08 - [When Paint is Not Enough: NBA All Star Weekend Comes to New Orleans](#)
02/15/08 - [Amongst the Slime: Rocket Roger Comes to Congress](#)
02/06/08 - [Soccer Star Stands for Gaza](#)
02/04/08 - [We Might Be Giants](#)
02/01/08 - [The Super Bowl: Who Stole the Soul?](#)
01/30/08 - [The Firestone Strikes Back](#)
01/28/08 - [Male Fraud: What we are Missing at Rutgers](#)
01/22/08 - [Super Bowl Slavery](#)
01/15/08 - [Dennis Brutus Smacks Down Hall of Fame](#)
01/11/08 - [It's To Lynch a Tiger?!?](#)
01/07/08 - [Butts on Parade: Clemens meets Wallace](#)
01/01/08 - [Taking Back Sports in '08](#)

Topic 5. The antisociological bias in the media coverage of sports

Even though the content mediated sports are slanted, most people do not give much thought to how and why sports are re-presented as they are. In fact, most people just enjoy what they read, listen to, and view. In an article on this topic, sociologist Dan Hilliard* explains that televised sports deal with controversy and conflict as they are connected with individuals and personality issues, not as they are connected with social and cultural issues. Thus, television coverage may mention controversy and conflict in terms of the actions of particular sport team owners, but not in terms of an ownership system where leagues are organized as cartels and operate in monopolistic ways. Coverage may focus on an individual who tests positive for drugs, but it will not focus on the politics of drug testing or on the way the organization of sports and sport cultures may encourage or even reward drug usage. Coverage may emphasize the character defects of the drug user, but not the defects in the system in which drugs are used or the social and cultural issues raised by drug usage.

According to Hilliard, the only time social, cultural, or ideological issues get raised in the television coverage of the Olympics, for example, is when Cuban athletes defect to the U.S., when Chinese athletes take drugs because of their “system,” or when communist countries experience contentious political problems that might be indirectly related to sports or sports training. It seems that television “uncovers the sport-ideology connection in its coverage of the communist states, just as it obscures that same connection in coverage of American athletes.” But overall, the coverage discourages any form of critical social analysis. This leads Hilliard to conclude the following:

Because television is so much a part of the way most people experience sport, recognition of the antisociological bias in televised sport may be a first step in developing greater public awareness of the ideological work embedded in sports programming (p. 98).

Many sociologists agree with Hilliard, questioning the way media re-presentations of sports are incorporated into people’s ideas about sports: their definitions of what sports are, what they should be, how sports should be included in their lives, and how they should evaluate themselves when they participate in sports. For example, does the almost exclusive focus on gold medals in the Olympics encourage people to set unrealistic expectations for themselves when they play sports? Do young people who watch sports on television as they grow up learn to define sports as activities that resemble media sports? Research is needed to answer these and other questions, but at this time there are good reasons to believe that people’s ideas about sports are heavily informed by the images and messages re-presented in mediated sports. Furthermore, the themes underlying these images and messages also can inform our ideas about social relations and social life in general. In other words, cultural ideology is embedded in media coverage.

*Hilliard, D. 1994. Televised sport and the (anti)sociological imagination. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 18(1), 88–99.