

BASKETBALL AND THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE
HIST 340
Fall 2023
3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Professor Chris Elzey
Location: Music/Theater Building 1007
Day: M/W
Time: 12:00-1:15 p.m.
Office: Horizon Hall 3208
Email: celzey@gmu.edu
Office Hours: M/W, 10:45-11:45 a.m. (also by appointment)

Prerequisites for the course

None

Class Contacts

1. Name and phone number/email:

2. Name and phone number/email:

The Course

Basketball and the American Experience explores the evolution of basketball, from its invention in the 1890s to the early decades of the twenty-first century. We will use the game as a lens, examining such important themes in American history as the acculturation and assimilation of immigrants; racial, ethnic and gender discrimination; the rise of college athletics and professional sports; post-WWII affluence and its impact on American youth culture; the fight for civil rights; the role of media in American society; the women's liberation movement; international politics; and the erosion of the American Dream in a post-industrial world. Not much time will be spent discussing team histories and statistics. Instead, we will investigate how basketball informed the trajectory of American sport history, and how historical forces in turn shaped the game.

Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to explain:

1. The history of basketball in the United States
2. Why basketball was invented and the role it played in acculturating immigrants during the turn of the twentieth century
3. How the game reflected and reinforced issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and international politics
4. The evolution of a black aesthetic in the game, and its embrace by players, fans, and the media
5. How basketball mirrored and shaped attitudes of American disillusionment and protest during the 1960s and 1970s
6. The meaning of the game to both rural and urban America

7. The economic aspects of college and professional basketball
8. How basketball reinforced notions of masculinity and femininity
9. The ways in which important players, coaches, games, and historical events shaped the course of basketball history
10. The commercialization, professionalization, and globalization of basketball
11. The role of sports in a post-industrial America

Demonstrating effective, concise, and clear expression in writing and public speaking is an important part of the class.

Required Readings

You are to complete the readings for the day they are listed in the course schedule (see below). The required books are:

- Graham, Tom and Rachel Graham Cody. *Getting Open: The Unknown Story of Bill Garrett and the Integration of College Basketball*. New York: Atria, 2011.
- LaFeber, Walter. *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999.
- Lane, Jeffrey. *Under the Boards: The Cultural Revolution in Basketball*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007.
- Pomerantz, Gary M. *The Last Pass: Cousy, Russell, the Celtics, and What Matters in the End*. New York: Penguin, 2018.

Students are also required to read the following articles. All are located on Blackboard.

- Henderson, Russell J. "The 1963 Mississippi State University Basketball Controversy and the Repeal of the Unwritten Law: 'Something more than the game will be lost.'" *Journal of Southern History* 63 (November 1997): 827-854.
- Klein, Alan. "The Great Gathering: Lakota Basketball as a Site of Cultural Production." *American Indian Quarterly*. (Winter/Spring 2022): 1-24.
- Myerscough, Keith. "The Game with No Name: The Invention of Basketball." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12 (January 1995): 137-152.
- Treagus, Mandy. "Playing Like Ladies: Basketball, Netball and Feminine Restraint." *International Journal of the History of Sport* 22 (January 2005): 88-105.

Required Films

You are also required to watch several films. All are on reserve in the Johnson Center. Some are available via the Internet or video streaming companies. The films are:

- Magic & Bird: A Courtship of Rivals*
Black Magic
The Fab Five
Hoosiers

Hoop Dreams
Medora
On the Shoulders of Giants
Once Brothers
The Iran Job

Assignments and Grading

There are two exams. Each will cover material from class, the assigned readings, and films. The exams will consist of identifications, and short answer and essay questions. Each exam is worth 25 percent of your grade.

You are also responsible for writing two short papers. Each should be approximately 700 words. One of the papers will cover one of the required books, and the other paper is to be written on one of the required films. In each of the papers, I would like you to focus on a major theme presented in the book or film and then connect it more broadly to history. I will average the scores of the two papers. The average will count for 10 percent of your grade.

Quizzes (in-class) and assignments will count for another 10 percent of your grade. Quizzes may be announced or unannounced. The assignments may or may not be announced in class, but they will always be posted on Blackboard. Be sure to check email and Blackboard every day. The assignments are to be submitted in class. Please bring a pen or pencil, as well as writing paper, to each class (for quizzes). At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest quiz/assignment score and calculate the average.

The final requirement is a longer paper and an accompanying in-class presentation on a topic I will assign you and two or three of your classmates. The topics are:

- Ora Washington and the Philadelphia Tribunes
- Edmonton Grads
- Wheelchair Basketball
- Nera White and the Nashville Business College Basketball Team
- Women's Professional Basketball
- Julius Erving (Dr. J) and the 1976 ABA Slam Dunk Contest
- Pat Head Summitt
- Chuck Taylor and Sonny Vaccaro
- Morgan Wootten
- Yao Ming
- David Stern

The paper is not a full-blown research project in which you consult an exhaustive list of primary and secondary sources. Rather, think of the paper as an opportunity to do some research on the topic, write a 7- or 8-page paper (roughly 1,700 to 2,000 words) on it, and then present your findings to the class. Even though your group will be assigned the same topic, **each**

member is to write his/her/their own paper. The paper will count for 20 percent of your grade. The deadline is November 29.

IMPORTANT: The presentation is to be a collaborative effort. You will have 20 minutes of class time for the presentation. Please be mindful of the time constraint. Apologies in advance, but if your group exceeds the time limit, I will cut you off.

Working with your group outside of class (in-person and/or electronically) is the foundation of a good presentation. Each group member is required to participate. The use of audio-visuals is a good idea, though not required. The presentation is worth the last 10 percent of your grade.

Grade Breakdown

Exams (2)	50%
Longer paper	20%
Shorter papers (2)	10%
Quizzes and assignments	10%
Presentation	10%

Grading Scale

A 93-100	B+ 88-89.99	C+ 78-79.99	D 60-69.99
A- 90-92.99	B 83-87.99	C 73-77.99	F 0-59.99
	B- 80-82.99	C- 70-72.99	

Missed Exams, Quizzes and Assignments

Make-up exams will only be given if you have documentation (a doctor's note, for instance) excusing you from class. There will be no make-up quizzes. (Remember, I'll drop your lowest quiz grade.) Late papers and assignments will be penalized 5 points for each day they are late (Saturdays and Sundays included).

Academic Integrity

Students who violate the Honor Code will be dealt with severely and may receive a sanction that results in a grade of F or worse for a paper, assignment, or exam. Your adherence to the Honor Code is applicable to all the work you do in the course. It is your responsibility to understand fully what is expected of you. If you have questions about the Honor Code, information can be found on the website for the Office of Academic Integrity: <https://oai.gmu.edu/>.

Students with Disabilities

Accommodations for students with disabilities are available. However, you must first contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS). For more information, see the webpage of the Office of Disability Services at: <https://ds.gmu.edu/>. You can also call 993-2474 or visit the ODS office in SUB I, rm. 4205.

Diversity

The course adheres to GMU's Diversity Statement: "George Mason University promotes a living and learning environment for outstanding growth and productivity among its students, faculty and staff. Through its curriculum, programs, policies, procedures, services and resources, Mason strives to maintain a quality environment for work, study and personal growth." The full statement is contained here:

<https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/purpose-and-mission/mason-diversity-statement/>.

Student Services:

The Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) is an important resource for students who might be experiencing mental health issues during the semester. For more on SSAC, see: <https://ssac.gmu.edu/>.

Student Privacy

Maintaining student privacy through their educational records is a matter taken seriously in the course. And it's the law. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) mandates the safeguarding of educational records, among other things. To learn more about FERPA, see:

<https://registrar.gmu.edu/ferpa/>.

Enrollment Information

It is the responsibility of each student to ensure that he or she is enrolled in the course. Important dates to remember:

- Last day to add without incurring a financial charge is August 28.
- Final day to drop without having to pay a financial penalty is September 5.
- Last day for selective withdrawal is October 23.

Schedule

Week 1: Basketball at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

August 21:

Introduction

Lecture: Who Was Dr. James Naismith?

August 23:

Lecture: Amateurism and the Late Nineteenth Century: Basketball Takes Root

Read: Myerscough, "The Game with No Name: The Invention of Basketball"

Read: Begin Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

Week 2: Basketball, the YMCA Movement and Muscular Christianity

August 28:

Lecture: Senda Berenson and Turn-of-the-Century Women's Basketball

Read: Continue Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

Read: Treagus, "Playing Like Ladies: Basketball, Netball and Feminine Restraint"

August 30:

Lecture: The Original Celtics and Early Professional Basketball

Read: Continue Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

Week 3: America's Urban Game

September 4: (NO CLASS)

September 6:

Lecture: Teaching the Teeming Masses: Basketball as an Agent of Assimilation

Read: Continue Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

Week 4: The Jewish Influence on Basketball

September 11:

Lecture: Jews and Basketball

Read: Continue Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

September 13:

Lecture: Abe Saperstein: The Most Powerful Man in Basketball

Read: Continue Pomerantz, *The Last Pass*

Week 5: The Color Line in the College and Pro Game, 1900-1970

September 18:

Discussion: *The Last Pass* (papers due)

Presentation: Ora Washington and the Philadelphia Tribunes

September 20:

Discussion (2x): *On the Shoulders of Giants* and first half of *Black Magic* (papers due)

Read: Begin Graham and Cody Graham, *Getting Open*

Read: Henderson, "The 1963 Mississippi State University Basketball Controversy and the Repeal of the Unwritten Law"

Week 6: New York, Madison Square Garden and the Evolution of College Basketball

September 25:

Presentation: Edmonton Grads

Lecture: The Long Island University Blackbirds of 1935-36

Read: Continue Graham and Cody Graham, *Getting Open*

September 27:

Presentation: Wheelchair Basketball

Lecture: Snakes in the Garden: Gambling and College Hoops, 1950-51

Read: Continue Graham and Cody Graham, *Getting Open*

Week 7: Hoosier Hoops: Basketball in Indiana

October 2:

Presentation: Nera White and the Nashville Business College Basketball Team

Lecture: The Big O and the Mighty Tigers of Crispus Attucks High

Read: Continue Graham and Cody, *Getting Open*

October 4:

Discussion (2X): Hoosiers and Getting Open: The Unknown Story of Bill Garrett and the Integration of College Basketball (papers due)

Week 8 Racial Integration of the Game and the Evolution of a Black Aesthetic

October 10: (switch day; Monday's class meets on Tuesday)

Lecture: The White-Black Aesthetic: Pistol Pete

October 11:

Discussion: Second half of *Black Magic* (papers due)

Week 9: Women's Basketball

October 16:

Lecture: Women's Basketball before Title IX

Presentation: Women's Professional Basketball

October 18:

Exam #1

Week 10: Basketball and International Politics

October 23:

Lecture: The Game That Wouldn't End

Read: Start Lane, *Under the Boards*

October 25:

Lecture: The Game That Wouldn't End (cont.)

Presentation: Julius Erving (Dr. J) and the 1976 ABA Slam Dunk Contest

Presentation: Pat Head Summitt

Read: Continue Lane, *Under the Boards*

Week 11: Magic vs. Larry and March Madness

October 30:

Lecture: Making the Madness: The NCAA Tournament

Presentation: Chuck Taylor and Sonny Vaccaro

Read: Continue Lane, *Under the Boards*

November 1:

Discussion: *Magic and Bird* (papers due)

Presentation: Morgan Wootten

Read: Continue Lane, *Under the Boards*

Week 12: Basketball and Hip-Hop America

November 6:

Lecture: Nielsen Ratings Nightmare: The NBA and the Late 1970s

Discussion: *The Fab Five* (papers due)

Read: Continue Lane, *Under the Boards*

November 8:

Discussion: *Under the Boards* (papers due)

Read: Klein, "The Great Gathering: Lakota Basketball as a Site of Cultural Production"

Week 13: The Phenomenon of MJ

November 13:

Discussion (2X): *Hoop Dreams* and *Medora* (papers due)

Read: Start LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*

November 15:

Lecture: Mike, the Dream Team, and "The Other Dream Team"

Read: Continue LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*

Week 14: The Globalization of Basketball

November 20:

Discussion: *Once Brothers* (papers due)

Presentation: Yao Ming

Read: Continue LaFeber, *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism*

November 22: (NO CLASS)

Week 15: A Basketball World

November 27:

Discussion: *Michael Jordan and the New Global Capitalism* (papers due)

Presentation: David Stern

November 29:

Lecture: Personal Reflections on Basketball Globetrotting

Presentation: 3-on-3 Basketball

Discussion: ***The Iran Job* (papers due)**

Research papers are due in class

December 11: **Exam #2** (10:30 am-1:15 pm)