

Religion and Sport

- Religion and sport using each other.
 - ▶ Sport using religion and magical practices (superstition)
 - What is ritual? [citing Womack, in S.J. Hoffman (Ed.) Sport and Religion. 1992] *Definition*: prescribed formal behavior with the following characteristics:
 - (1) repetitive
 - (2) stylized
 - (3) sequential
 - (4) non-ordinary
 - (5) potent
 - Kinds of ritual
 - initiation: e.g. shaving of hockey players, hazing: signals change of status to being in group
 - preparatory rites – control fear, influence outcome
 - day of game: eat same stuff, take same route to game, wear same clothes
 - pregame rituals; dress all one side first
 - activity-specific rituals [# times bounce ball before foul shot; kicker motions]

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- rites of protection
 - behaviors: e.g., step over foul line
 - habits: e.g., keep number, equipment the same
 - taboos: e.g., don't mention no-hitter
- When is it used?
 - *The concept of edge work-- Work in which the outcome is consequential, highly skilled performance is required, and the margin of error is very small. Can involve:*
 - danger (e.g. soldiers going into combat)
 - uncertainty and ambiguity
 - high likelihood of failure
- What are its functions?
 - focuses attention, induces motivation
 - signals to opposing team that you are serious
 - coping strategy for high risk, high stress activities
 - deals with ambiguity
 - expresses individuality
 - leads to cohesion within groups

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- How do superstitions/rituals develop?
 - Driven by emotion, especially anxiety
 - Correlation of the practice with success (or absence with failure)
 - Not costly
 - Related to obsessive-compulsive syndrome (when exaggerated)
- Religion is more than such practices; however prayer before games, etc. serves similar functions
- Film examples: *Bull Durham*
 - *There's a curse on my glove*
 - *Respect the streak*
 - *Women's underwear*
 - *The church of baseball*
 - *Abstaining from sex*
- VIDEO: *Glory of their times* (1990)
- *Discussion*. Their experiences.

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- ▶ Religion using sport
 - Churches, religious leaders, church-related universities – use for publicity, attendance, cohesion, continuation
 - Religious organizations within sport
 - FCA. Purpose is to spread the word.
 - AIA. In most places, they get to proselytize at half time. Not here.
 - Missionary groups use international events.
 - Impact
 - Positive: traditional values such as the Protestant ethic, emphasis on hard work, self-discipline, success
 - Negative: discourages dissent, can prevent student-athletes from speaking up to coaches, since obedience and submission to authority is part of ideology
 - No discussion of excesses and social problems within sport: violence on and off the field, date rape, drug use, spouse abuse are not issues these proselytizing groups deal with, nor do religious coaches, to my knowledge
 - VIDEO: Mt. Zion Academy: Religion and basketball

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■ Connections among sport, religion, and politics

- ▶ What are politics of athletic proselytizing groups?
 - All stand for Protestant ethic, the core values of the founding fathers of our country and of Christianity.
 - Also are associated with conservative social values – "family values", which go along with:
 - Conservative political agendas
 - Male dominance – keeping women in their place.
- ▶ The Promise Keepers (Becky Beal's "The Promise Keepers' use of sport in defining "Christlike" masculinity " J. of Sport and Social Issues, 1997). What are characteristics?
 - essentialism – belief in innate differences between men and women that are God-given
 - sport as demonstration of qualities of masculinity linked with superior leadership
 - sport as means to rally men around male superiority – sport is male, and better than female passive values
 - sport images and metaphors that conjure mental images of male superiority – e.g. life as a relay race (run by men)

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■ Legal aspects of prayer and proselytizing

- ▶ Public school prayers and the constitution. Sawyer, Journal of Legal Aspects of Sport, 1994.
 - Two guarantees in the first amendment
 - The government shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion (the establishment clause).
 - Or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (the free exercise clause).
 - Cases are mostly about the establishment clause.
 - Cases in 1962 & 1963 found that organized, devotional prayers in public schools are unconstitutional even if participation is voluntary.
 - In 1990, Bjornlun found that devotional team prayers led by a team member, a coach, or another school or non-school person are in violation of the Establishment clause.
 - Supreme Court in 1985 suggested that a moment of silence that could be adopted to meet a secular purpose would be OK if not worded so as to favor prayer. Bjornlun suggests that the same would be true of a moment of silence before a game.

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- Legal aspects of prayer and proselytizing (continued)
 - 1989 case disallowed pre-game invocations.
 - 2000 Supreme Court decision disallowed student-led prayer over PA before High School football games in Texas
 - VERY CLEAR that any form of group prayer violates the establishment clause.
 - However, recent court case (2002) allowing state vouchers in religious schools and Bush policy of allowing "faith-based" groups to be paid for doing welfare-type work may signal pending changes
 - What is legal depends on the decisions of courts and those decisions can change as political climates change
- ▶ The UW Athletic Division policy. *Discuss*

June 14, 1996

University Athletics and Religious Issues

INTRODUCTION

Given the inherent potential for athletics and religion to overlap in the world of college athletics, it is particularly important that public universities articulate policies and procedures which clearly define the appropriate relationship between the two. To this end, the Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin--Madison has requested the Chair of the Athletic Board to appoint this task force to address these issues. Because intercollegiate athletic activities receive intense scrutiny, and because important Constitutional principles are at stake in a state university, we recommend the following policy and procedures for everyone in the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics, including employees, administrators, coaches, and student-athletes.

POLICY

The Division of Intercollegiate Athletics respects and supports the right of each student-athlete and staff member to worship or not to worship, and to practice or not to practice, a religion as she or he chooses. The Division maintains an environment in which student-athletes and employees can work, learn, and compete free of harassment or intimidation based on religious beliefs or practices. The mission of the Division does not include sponsoring religious events or activities.