

JOURNALISM 4313C: SPORTS WRITING

INTRODUCTION

Sports writing is unique because it combines multiple journalistic skills. From straight news to investigative work to features to writing columns that are both serious and off-beat, sports reporting can be both demanding and incredibly entertaining. This class is designed to give you a taste of as much as possible. I'll go fast and expect a lot. You should expect a lot from me as well.

THE WORK

The focus of this class is reading, watching, gathering, generating ideas and writing. While sports itself is the emphasis, the goal is for you to understand the transcendent value of sports in society and how to write about it. The key is to develop and execute good story ideas. With that in mind, there will be two weekly assignments, at least one report on the required reading and one group project that will factor into your grade.

BEAT WORK - You are required to file a 500-word weekly report on your beat. The report will be on stories you have read and/or other information you have gathered on your chosen beat.

The weekly beat report will breakdown this way:

What happened - 150-to-200 words on the events of the past week. Did the team win or lose, how did that happen, were there any minor or major injuries, etc.

What will happen - 50 to 100 words on what to expect in the coming weeks. Are there some key games coming up in the season? Will there be any lineup changes? Is a player coming back from injury soon or starting rehabilitation? What do you need to keep track of?

Stat tracking - 50 to 100 words on some key stat or stats you have seen develop in recent days or weeks. This can range from how the team is doing in the fourth quarter to how a particular player has improved his or her play.

Idea generation - You must generate three weekly ideas about your beat or things related to your beat. You then must take no more than 50 words to "sell" the idea. Why is the story or event important? How important is the story?

Where and how should the story be played? Can it be illustrated in a interesting way? What makes the story unique? Please note, this can't include simple game coverage, but can include a special idea related to how a game is covered. For instance, if a coach is about to win his or her 100th game, perhaps there is a special angle with which to approach that event. Most important, we will be talking about your story ideas each week as a group. How you pitch your ideas is important.

Contacts/Sources - You are required to make contact with three people who are directly or indirectly connected to your beat. You must give me contact information on each of these people and explain their connection to the beat you cover.

WEEKLY WRITING - You will do at least one story every other week, sometimes more. The stories can be on your beat or not. Assignments will cover a range of formats from straight news to game coverage to feature to column writing. The assignments will range in length and will include deadline situations.

READING - You are expected to read all of "The Best of American Sports Writing 2013." You must read at least one story each week and be ready to discuss that story in class. There are no correct answers. There is only how much thought you put into what you're reading.

GROUP PROJECT - You are expected to do a group writing project. Each group will include three or four students. Each group will choose a topic which will require research and extensive interview work. At the end, the group is expected to write a resulting story together. Do NOT simply divide the project into sections and have each person write a section. The goals of the project should be obvious.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

It's vital, it's expected and it will be demanded if it's not volunteered. Participation will not be graded other than to say that if you don't participate, you're hurting yourself. This is an advanced class. You're expected to share thoughts and ideas.

Furthermore, because the classes will be three hours, listening to me drone on about a subject is going to be really boring. Come armed with questions on the weekly

subject or anything you have come up with on a weekly basis. Most important, listen closely and come up with questions along the way, which is a crucial skill if you're going to become a good interviewer.

GRADING

Beat work - 40 percent

Writing, class participation - 40 percent

Group project - 20 percent

TEXTBOOK

"The Best of American Sports Writing 2012"

Aside from the textbook, you should be reading about your given beat in whatever daily or weekly sources you can find. This can include the Gainesville Sun, the Orlando Sentinel, The New York Times, any of dozens of websites, magazines and television shows that deal with sports.

THE INSTRUCTOR

Jason Cole is an NFL reporter for Yahoo! Sports. Prior to joining Yahoo.com in July 2006, Cole spent 15 years covering the Miami Dolphins and the NFL for *The Miami Herald* and the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel*. At the time he left, he covered the Dolphins longer than anyone in the history of the team. Prior to that, Cole covered the NBA and high school sports in California. He has won numerous awards from the Pro Football Writers of America, Associated Press Sports Editors and other organizations. His work has been featured on *ESPN*, *HBO Real Sports*, *Cinemax*, *The Phil Donahue Show* and in the *New Yorker* magazine. He is the co-author of *Giant: The Road to the Super Bowl* with Plaxico Burress. Cole is a graduate of Stanford University and resides in Gainesville.

Contact information

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Note: I check email regularly, so please handle most of what you need that way. Please call only if it's really important. I'm on the phone constantly.

LECTURE SCHEDULE

- 1-7 - Introduction, game-story writing, idea generation
 - 1-14 - Sports beat writing and learning the game
 - 1-21 - Journalist or entertainer? The synergy of sports reporting.
 - 1-28 - Covering the major events ... the Super Bowl.
 - 2-4 - Guest Speaker John Lowe, Detroit Free Press.
- Also: Searching public records, investigative and enterprise reporting in sports
- 2-11 - Working with sports information directors and coaches (update on progress on projects)
 - 2-18 - Column writing
 - 2-25 - Sports writers on TV and radio
 - 3-4 - SPRING BREAK
 - 3-11 - Ethics and conflicts in sports reporting (welcome to ESPN)
 - 3-18 - TBA
 - 3-25 - Women and minorities in sports writing
 - 4-1 - Internet reporting
 - 4-8 - Writing a sports book
 - 4-15 - Getting a job
 - 4-22 - Group projects due

BEATS

You must choose a beat to cover by Wednesday of the first week. There are all types of beats ranging from traditional (football, baseball, prep sports) to non-traditional (pro wrestling, ultimate fighting, poker).

There are a number of University of Florida team sports that are in-season during the spring semester. They are: Men's and women's basketball, men's and women's tennis, swimming, baseball and track & field. You are free to pick one of those sports or to develop another beat, such as following one of the local high schools or even outdoor sports, such as hunting, fishing and boating.

As you make your choice, consider a few things. First, do you know the sport and are you interested in it? Both knowledge and interest will make life easier. Second, how much coverage will there be for you to follow in local newspapers. For instance, you might love gymnastics, but there may not be very much coverage to evaluate. This can be both good (you can develop your own ideas) and bad (you

may struggle to get basic information). Third, picking a really popular sport (UF men's basketball) may seem like an obvious choice because there is so much information available. However, the demand among media outlets to cover the team may make it difficult for you to get the type of access you need for the stories you want to write. Furthermore, coming up with original ideas might be more difficult, although there will be tons of information.

GROUP PROJECT TOPICS

The following are some suggested ideas for stories. Feel free to develop your own idea. However, you must choose a subject by the end of the week. Only one group can work on a given subject.

Where do athletes fit into the social pecking order of the University of Florida and what does that mean for the school as a whole. Are athletes given preferential treatment in certain ways? Are they discriminated against in some sectors of the school?

Do college athletes deserve to get paid? Most athletes are on scholarship, but scholarships come with limitations that athletes sometimes find hard to live with. Meanwhile, schools such as Florida continue to generate big money for the athletic department. Who benefits? With college coaches making upwards of \$4 million per year, do athletes deserve more?

What's the impact of a national championship for Florida on the social, political and economic environment of Gainesville?

Take an in-depth look at the financial records of the Florida athletic department. Who gets what? What is the money spent on? How much do coaches make, particularly when compared to professors and other administrators?

The life of a UF baseball player. What's the time commitment for baseball players in a sport that plays four or five times a week?

The agent game. Athletes are consistently approached by agents and often times athletes approach agents. The attraction is money and other benefits. What can schools

such as Florida, which less than a decade ago dealt with nefarious agent Tank Black, do to control the agent-athlete relationship?

EXTRA CREDIT

This is pretty simple. I want one song suggestion a week, preferably new music but it can be something old, unique and rare that I might not have heard (there's plenty that qualifies). Anything goes, so make it something that's spiritual and by that I mean something that touches your soul, inspiring you in some way. Be willing to put yourself out there in some way.

Cole's Playlist (in no particular order)

In One Ear - Cage The Elephant
Brian Wilson (live) - Bare Naked Ladies
Kid Things - Counting Crows (you'll find it after about a four-minute delay at the end of St. Robinson In His Cadillac Dream)
Take On Me - Reel Big Fish
Not My Slave - Oingo Boingo
Nineteen Forever - Joe Jackson
Not For You - Pearl Jam
What's So Funny About Peace, Love and Understanding - Elvis Costello & the Attractions
El Matador - Los Fabulosos Cadillacs
Battle Flag - Lo Fidelity Allstars (lyrics warning)
Stuck Between Stations - The Hold Steady
Crosseyed and Painless (live) - Talking Heads
American Girl - Tom Petty
Oh the Warm Feeling - Van Morrison
Tangled Up In Blue - Bob Dylan
Exodus - Bob Marley
Gimme Shelter - Rolling Stones
Let My Love Open the Door (E. Cola Mix) - Pete Townsendsend
Take It To The Limit (Live from San Francisco) - Etta James
Wish You Were Here (Live) Limp Bizkit and John Reznik
Imagine (Live) - Neil Young
Smells Like Teen Spirit - Nirvana
One - U2
When I Fall In Love - Stevie Wonder
Champagne Supernova - Oasis
In The End - Linkin Park

Biko - Peter Gabriel
What's Going On - Marvin Gaye
Master Of Disaster - John Hiatt
Light of Day (live) - Bruce Springsteen
Doctor Wu - Steely Dan
Typical - Mutemath
Hey Hey My My - Neil Young & Crazy Horse
My My Hey Hey - Neil Young & Crazy Horse
Rollercoaster - Red Hot Chili Peppers
Got Me Floatin' - PM Dawn
Fortunate Son (Live, State College) - Pearl Jam
Werewolves of London - Adam Sandler
Higher Ground - Red Hot Chili Peppers
Pressure Drop - The Specials
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