

ACCESS AMERICA

“Trinity” of Sports Demonstrates American Beliefs

Popular games cast light on moral decisions in real life, says religious scholar



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Throughout history, sports express core beliefs of the societies from which they emerge, starting with their

display of principles for how the individual person should relate to society. In the United States, the games of American

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football, baseball and basketball illustrate fundamental values of the country and the striving to reconcile individual freedom with sacrifice for the common good, argues Craig A. Forney, a professor of religious studies. The author says that the three sports provide a key to moral decisions in real-life situations and an insight into the collective dreams of Americans.

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From the Ambassador

Physical fitness is not just a matter of improved muscle tone or reduced body fat. Healthy bodies support alert and active minds, which in turn are able to apply themselves vigorously to the challenges of today’s world. In the United States, promoting physical fitness in adults and children has been a goal of the federal government since the administration of President John F. Kennedy. Working alongside civic groups, businesses, and sports stars, President Kennedy spread the message across the nation that fitness was more than a personal goal, it was a national priority. He demonstrated his own commitment to fitness by not only challenging the U.S. Marines to complete a 50-mile hike in 20 hours, but by completing the hike himself, along with many other civilians who were inspired by his efforts. Today, the President’s Council on Physical Fitness continues to encourage Americans to discover the benefits of fitness.

The physical fitness challenge is one that the United States and Tunisia face together. In both countries, obesity rates are rising, and children are particularly at risk. By emphasizing fitness in the school, home, and workplace we can make strides towards reversing these trends and creating a healthier generation of citizens. Physical fitness is a lifelong commitment that benefits everyone.

—Robert F. Godec

From the IRC

Books

Sports in America.
Michener, James A.

Baseball.
Seymour, Harold

The Official NFL encyclopedia
Barron, Bill

*The franchise : building a winner
with the world champion Detroit
Pistons, basketball's bad boys*
Stauth, Cameron

*Quest for Gold: the Encyclopedia
of American Olympians*
Mallon, Bill & Ian Buchanan

Online resources

The home page of the National Basketball Association

<http://www.nba.com/>

Official Site of the National Football League
<http://www.nfl.com/>

Official Site of Major League Baseball
<http://mlb.mlb.com/>

Guidelines for Personal Exercise Programs
<http://www.healthierus.gov/>

A Guide from the National Institute on Aging:
<http://www.nia.nih.gov/>

— *Khaled Ben Bhouzid*



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AMERICAN FOOTBALL – COLLECTIVE ACTION

The game of American football, the “ultimate team sport” in the United States, expresses dedication to self-sacrifice and to action as a collective force during times of crisis. The ball carrier follows the blocking of many teammates, the offensive linemen work together to protect the quarterback and free up a teammate to handle the ball for the benefit of the team.

On defense, players cooperate to “team tackle” the opponent with the ball. In kicking situations, individuals almost link arms in the creation of a human wall to keep the opposition away from the kicker or kick returner.

The game of football displays great concern for actions as a collective group, revealing American devotion to unified efforts as a nation and voluntary restraint on individualism in times of crisis.

BASEBALL – INDIVIDUALIST DREAM

In contrast to football, American baseball illustrates dedication to the ideal of individuality -- the virtue of individual freedom mindful of the freedoms of others. Baseball players act as independent individuals who represent a team, a sharp contrast to the group actions of football.

In American baseball, a player enters the batter’s box very much alone. He is introduced by his personal name and, sometimes, the playing of personalized music. In a duel-like setup, one batter at a time faces one pitcher on the mound. By way of offensive and defensive performance, each player produces a unique set of

statistics, generating a long list of numbers that distinguish every member of a team.

The individuality of baseball extends into all facets of the game. Teams wear uniforms of group identity, but individual players exhibit distinctive ways to shape the cap and wear the game socks. The substitution of one player for another receives public announcement and faces of individuals on the field often fill video displays and TV screens.

In diverse ways, the game of baseball illustrates American striving for individuality, displaying national dream of an ideal future of unprecedented liberty that does not impede common tasks.

BASKETBALL – DIFFICULT BALANCE

Representing the third element to the moral equation, basketball expresses commitment in the United States to balance collective interests with the pursuit of greater independence for individuals.

On the one hand, basketball encourages self-sacrifice for cooperation with teammates, especially by way of passing the ball. The best teams keep the basketball moving in a show of exceptional togetherness. Individual players “dish the ball off,” “pick” for, and “feed” teammates in an unselfish manner.

In “loose ball” situations, a player will dive on the floor, enduring painful contact with the ground to secure the ball for others. When not in possession of the ball, players play “team defense” to continue the group effort.

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But along with its concern for cooperation, basketball also portrays aspiration for individuality, a striving for something ideal to counterbalance the periodic need for uniformity of behavior.

Basketball generates many one-on-one contests, engaging individuals in a personal struggle against individual opponents. A long list of statistics underscores the individual accomplishments by each member of a team, while court uniforms allow abundant self-expression by way of diverse tattoos, body piercings and hairstyles.

Television frequently focuses on the distinctive faces of individual players, particularly during moments of “free throws” and personalities of individual players (e.g., “Magic” Johnson, Michael Jordan, Shaquille O’Neal) dominate the game well beyond what is possible in football.

THE WORST, THE BEST, THE MOST TYPICAL

Taken together, the three most popular sports in the United States illustrate national values applied in a variety of real-life situations. Displaying moral thinking for times of exceptional adversity (e.g., external threat or natural disaster), football expresses commitment to self-sacrifice for collective action. Baseball depicts American devotion to the ideal of individuality in the service of personal self-expression and of common goals. In a perfect complement to football and baseball, basketball presents the reasoning for commonplace situations with their precarious balance between collective good and the striving for individual freedom.

This article is adapted from an article on America.gov, a web site delivering information about current U.S. foreign policy and about American life and culture produced by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of International Information Programs

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Photo courtesy Ines Ghalleb

Ines Ghalleb Near East & South Asia Ugrad program(NESA)

Home in Tunisia:

Nabeul

Home in the U.S.:

Clarion, Pennsylvania

Fondest Memory of the U.S.:

Having lunch and dinner with friends from all over the world.

My experience:

I studied for one academic year at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. I stayed in the dorms and shared the room with an American student. I made the acquaintance of the other NESA students and some international and American students, who became my best friends. Clarion University is somehow big (hosting around 6,500 students), which allowed me to participate in various clubs: the photography, English and Philosophy club. I also dedicated my free time to traveling to different places in the States. I visited Pittsburgh; The Niagara Falls; New York City; Washington D.C.; Philadelphia; Atlantic City; Florida (Orlando and South Beach Miami); San Francisco, C.A.; and one of the Hawaiian islands (Maui). I also participated in the English Association of Pennsylvania State Universities (EAPSU) conference, held in California University of Pennsylvania, where I had the opportunity to read a few of my poems.

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My year in the States was full of nice surprises and challenges. I enjoyed my classes, my trips and the good company of interesting and nice people. I tried to make it an exceptional year and I believe I have succeeded in doing so.

Lessons Learned:

I learned that I should never give up the pursuit of my own dreams and that there is always something new to see or know, so life should be built on a continual eagerness for the discovery of the world around (people, places and experiences) and equal enthusiasm for setting new and challenging goals.

Advice for others:

My advice would be that the person should try to have a lot of friends from different backgrounds, study as hard as one could, and sign up in different trips and conferences.

What I miss most about the U.S.:

Diversity and living the day fully.

Photo courtesy Ines Ghalieb



Calendar

Statement of Purpose Workshops

Wednesday, June 25

AMIDEAST

10:00 AM

Graduate Statement of Purpose workshop

11:30 AM

Undergraduate Statement of Purpose workshop

Summer Film

Series: Multiculturalism in the U.S.:

Friday, July 11

American Corner at AMIDEAST

2:00 PM

The Last of the Mohicans

Friday, July 18

2:00 PM

Glory

Free English Conversation

Every Thursday

American Corner at AMIDEAST
4:00 PM

Weekly discussions on topics from films and music to religion. Topics are posted weekly in the American Corner and at AMIDEAST.

Study in the USA Consultations

Every Tuesday-Friday

AMIDEAST Advising Resource

Library

9:00 AM-4:00 PM

Browse materials from U.S. universities consult resources on applications and scholarships.

Open Access

Every Monday-Friday

American Corner at AMIDEAST

10:00 AM-6:00 PM

Peruse books and magazines in English on topics from history to pop culture and more.

American Corner at AMIDEAST

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