

sport anthropology



NASSH 51

Washington, D.C.

26 - 29 May 2023

Session 1

The Intersection of Anthropology and History in Sport Studies

Susan Brownell, Alan Klein, Thomas Carter and Niko Besnier
with discussion by Mark Dyreson

10:30-11:45am EST | Location: Lincoln
Saturday, 27 May 2023

As part of the series organized by the Sport Anthropology Caucus of NASSH, this panel explores the intersections between the disciplines of anthropology and history in the study of sport. What can anthropological approaches add to historical inquiry, and vice versa? What deficiencies can result when anthropological works do not engage with historical approaches, or historical works do not engage with anthropological approaches? The panel members are senior sport anthropologists who will discuss ways in which they have synthesized the two disciplines in their own works. Brownell describes how the combination of an anthropological approach with access to embargoed documents provides a picture of the response of China and the International Olympic Committee to the human rights debates surrounding China's Olympic Games, which could not be obtained from one method in isolation. Klein employs anthropological methods and concepts to reexamine two legendary basketball games from decades ago, which involved an outpouring of racist vitriol against the Lakota of South Dakota when they played neighboring White teams; he concludes that the established accounts do not demonstrate a full understanding of Lakota resistance. Drawing on anthropological research on the Sport for Development and Peace sector, Carter analyzes how ideological discourses about sport shape current practices in the sector despite being historically deployed for different political purposes. Besnier focuses on how economic downturns in the Global South, a result of global socio-economic transformations in the late 20th century, led to the emergence of global mobility in rugby, as young men have little choice but to migrate, and a sport career represents the pinnacle of success.

Organized By:
Sport Anthropology Caucus 2023

sport anthropology

NASSH 51



Session 2

Racialized Bodies, Athletic Experiences: Communal Strategies of Resistance

Veena Mani, Bernardo Rios, Gabriel Torres Colón
and Tracie Canada

10:30-11:45am EST | Location: Regency AB
Sunday, 28 May 2023

Since the 1970s, anthropologists have struggled to identify how research on sport can contribute to anthropological theory. This endeavor has today obtained more traction as the various dimensions of play, performance, exercise, and sport have attracted scholars previously interested in other areas of concern, thereby representing great potential for understanding institutional and relational formations of embodied culture. One of the drawbacks to past anthropological sports scholarship is how an emphasis on the relationship between sports, colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism has not yielded a sustained effort to examine how subaltern athletes navigate their marginalized social positions.

Accordingly, we ask: How are athletes' bodies culturally marked through sport? In what ways are athletes used by (and potentially exploited by) teams, bureaucratic organizations, and nations? How do the tensions between competition and collaboration, inequality and fair play inform their lives and social worlds? How are athletes' lived experiences constituted, either at play or in the real world? Ultimately, what does research motivated by these questions contribute to the broader anthropological and historical questions about the body and embodiment, racialized and gendered experiences, and resistance and power?

In this second panel of anthropologists, we bring together scholars committed to researching the ethnographic complexity of athletes' lives as they inhabit sporting spaces while also navigating racism, labor exploitation, commodification, and multiple violences. Here, panelists examine the strategies enacted by marginalized athletes, across multiple sports, in order to challenge oppressive social and sporting regimes. These acts of resistance are part of a long history of racialized folks who build and rely upon communities of care to flourish.

Organized By:
Sport Anthropology Caucus 2023

sport anthropology

NASSH 51



Session 3

Racialized Bodies, Athletic Experiences: Colonial Legacies and Diaspora

Lisa Uperesa, Stan Thangaraj, Constancio Arnaldo
and Adia Benton

4:00-5:15pm EST | Location: Regency AB
Sunday, 28 May 2023

Since the 1970s, anthropologists have struggled to identify how research on sport can contribute to anthropological theory. This endeavor has today obtained more traction as the various dimensions of play, performance, exercise, and sport have attracted scholars previously interested in other areas of concern, thereby representing great potential for understanding institutional and relational formations of embodied culture. One of the drawbacks to past anthropological sports scholarship is how an emphasis on the relationship between sports, colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism has not yielded a sustained effort to examine how subaltern athletes navigate their marginalized social positions.

Accordingly, we ask: How are athletes' bodies culturally marked through sport? In what ways are athletes used by (and potentially exploited by) teams, bureaucratic organizations, and nations? How do the tensions between competition and collaboration, inequality and fair play inform their lives and social worlds? How are athletes' lived experiences constituted, either at play or in the real world? Ultimately, what does research motivated by these questions contribute to the broader anthropological and historical questions about the body and embodiment, racialized and gendered experiences, and resistance and power?

In this third panel of anthropologists, we bring together scholars committed to researching the ethnographic complexity of athletes' lives as they inhabit sporting spaces while also navigating issues of sports infrastructure, colonial exploitation, masculinity, and race-making. Here, panelists examine the entanglement of geopolitical histories and their intersection with global political economies of sport and migration to better understand the patterns we see today. These scholars seriously consider the experiences of those in the Pacific and Asian sporting diasporas by engaging histories of colonialism, imperialism, racism, and nationalism.

Organized By:
Sport Anthropology Caucus 2023