

POL 197H (Winter 2026)
Sports and Politics: Identity, Activism, and Political Economy
Mondays, 11am-1pm

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Office hours: Mondays, 1.30-3pm or by appointment

Land Acknowledgment

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and, most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Course Overview

The course aims to introduce first year students to key themes, concepts, and issues in political science – power, nationalism, political regimes, activism, colonialism, race, gender, sexuality, and political economy – through the lens of sports and those who participate in them. Sports are a microcosm for broader political, economic, and societal trends. At the same time, sports and those involved in it impact politics. As such, there is a two-way relationship between sports and politics. This interaction provides fertile and interesting ground to introduce students to the study of political science. Each week, the course will pair concepts, themes and issues in political science with examples from the world of sports.

Course objectives

- Introduce key themes, concepts and issues in political science using examples from the world of sports.
- Develop critical thinking skills.
- Develop critical reading, writing, and presentation skills.

Format and delivery

This is an in-person, seminar course. The format involves in class discussions, online discussion board tasks, weekly readings, audio and visual material, and assignments. **It is extremely important that you review all assigned readings and audio-visual material prior to class each week, and come prepared to discuss the material.**

Attendance, participation, and course expectations

This is a seminar course; sessions will be devoted to class discussion, including group work. The class is student-driven; I will typically offer remarks to introduce topics and facilitate discussion. You are expected to attend class each week and come prepared for discussion by reviewing assigned course material prior to each class session. To help facilitate active discussion, each student must also identify and post at least one question or issue raised in the week's assigned material on Quercus by 9am every Monday before class.

Readings and Audio-Visual Material

All assigned readings and audio-visual material for a particular week are available electronically under Modules in Quercus (q.utoronto.ca). In each week, one or more concept/context readings are paired

with examples from sports. You should ideally read the concept/context reading first before reviewing the sports-related readings and audio-visual material. I will also periodically post guiding questions or comments to help you through challenging course material. I reserve the right to remove or substitute a reading with another if necessary during the term. This is unlikely but I will give you plenty of advance notice if I do so.

Course evaluation and requirements

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

1) Weekly Attendance and Class Participation: 10%

Beginning in week 2, I will take attendance each week. You will not be penalized for any absences due to extenuating circumstances. If you have to miss class due to extenuating circumstances, please see policy and procedures on “Absence from Class/Missed Course Work” on page 3 of the syllabus.

You are expected to participate actively in class discussion and group work. To that end, you must come prepared each week to discuss the assigned course material. You do not have to understand all the readings/assigned material but you must review the assigned material ahead of class and bring any questions/issues you would like discussed to class. You will be evaluated both on the quality and degree of class participation.

2) Discussion board posts: 5%; Due by 9am every Monday before class for weeks 2 to 11

For weeks 2 to 11, each student must identify and post at least one question or comment that the assigned readings or audio-visual material for that particular week raised for you. Posts could be any question or comment of your choice pertaining to the assigned material for that week’s session. For week 11, you are required to post a comment on your group podcast. There are 10 required posts through the term. You will automatically receive 0.5 points for each weekly post you submit.

3) Reading annotation assignment: 5% ; Due by 9am on January 19th

In order to develop your ability to engage deeply with academic articles, you will be asked to complete a reading annotation assignment using the Hypothesis annotation tool in Quercus. Details and instructions can be found on Quercus.

4) Critical Reflection Papers: 50% (2 x 25%); Paper 1 due by 9am on February 2nd and Paper 2 due by 9am on March 9th

You are required to write two critical reflection papers. Each paper should be 4-5 pages in length. Details and assignment questions can be found on Quercus.

5) Group podcast: 15%; Due by 9am on March 30th;

You will each be randomly assigned to a group. Each group will be tasked with researching and producing a 10 minute podcast about a topic related to the content of the course. This could be any sporting event/athlete/issue that illustrates the link between sports and politics. We will listen to all group podcasts as part of the discussion in the last class (March 30th). Podcast group composition and assignment instructions on Quercus will be posted by week 4 (Jan 26th).

6) Individual Reflection Paper on Group Podcast: 15%; Due by 9am on March 30th

Each student is required to submit a 2-3 page reflection on the group podcast. Assignment instructions will be posted on Quercus by week 4 (Jan 26th).

Course policies and procedures

Emails: I will attempt to respond to all emails within 48 hours (excluding weekends and holidays). Questions on course material cannot be adequately addressed via email. I will discuss course material or address substantial questions in class meetings, during office hours or by appointment.

Quercus, student email, and course information: This course will use Quercus to disseminate all course-related information and assignments. Please ensure you have a valid U of T email. It is your responsibility to log on to Quercus regularly and obtain relevant information. To login, please go to: q.utoronto.ca

Submitting written assignments: All written assignments and responses have to be submitted through Quercus.

Rough drafts and electronic copies of papers: Students are strongly advised to keep rough/ draft work and electronic copies of their papers before handing it in. These should be kept until marked assignments have been returned to you and the grades posted on ROSI.

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools and Apps: Students may use generative AI tools for the following two purposes only: 1) Check spelling/grammar of your reflection papers, group podcast scripts or weekly discussion posts; and 2) Generate a bibliography/list of sources for further research for the group podcast. You cannot use AI tools for any other purpose including writing final reflection papers, generating reflection paper outlines, generating final group podcasts, generating final group podcast scripts, generating weekly discussion posts, and generating summary notes of course readings or audio-visual material that are used in assignments. The knowing use of generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Microsoft Copilot and other AI writing and coding assistants for purposes other than 1) and 2) listed above may be considered an academic offence in this course. This course policy is designed to promote your learning and intellectual development.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Please familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>). It is the rule book for academic behaviour at the U of T, and you are expected to know the rules. Failure to understand what constitutes plagiarism and academic integrity at U of T will not be accepted as an excuse.

Potential offences include, but are not limited to:

Papers:

- Using someone else's ideas or words without appropriate acknowledgement.
- Copying material word-for-word from a source (including lecture and study group notes) and not placing the words within quotation marks.
- Submitting your own work in more than one course without the permission of the instructor.
- Making up sources or facts.
- Including references to sources that you did not use.
- Obtaining or providing unauthorized assistance on any assignment including
 - working in groups on assignments that are supposed to be individual work,
 - having someone rewrite or add material to your work while "editing".

- Lending your work to a classmate who submits it as his/her own without your permission.

Misrepresentation:

- Falsifying or altering any documentation required by the University, including doctor's notes.
- Falsifying institutional documents or grades.

The University of Toronto treats cases of academic misconduct very seriously. The consequences for academic misconduct can be severe, including a failure in the course and a notation on your transcript. If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. For further information on appropriate research and citation methods and plagiarism, please see <http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources>. If you are experiencing personal challenges that are having an impact on your academic work in this course, please speak to me and seek the advice of your college registrar.

Plagiarism Detection Tool: Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to the University's plagiarism detection tool for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the tool's reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of this tool are described on the Centre for Teaching Support & Innovation web site (<https://uoft.me/pdt-faq>).

The use of the University's plagiarism detection tool is voluntary. Should you choose to opt out, please speak to me about alternate procedures.

Absence from Class/Missed Course Work: Students who are absent from academic participation for any reason (e.g., COVID, cold, flu and other illness or injury, family situation) and who require extensions/other consideration for missed academic work should contact the instructor as soon as possible, and no later than one week after returning to class. Students requesting extensions/ other consideration must provide documentation. The following are recognized forms of documentation: Absence Declaration via ACORN, U of T Verification of Illness Form (VOI), College Registrar's letter, or Letter of Academic Accommodation from Accessibility Services.

Late penalty: Assignments handed in any time after the specified deadline will be treated as late. There will be a penalty of 4% per each late day or fraction of a day for late papers (including weekends and holidays). The cut off time for the determination of each late day is 5pm.

Appealing grades: If you would like to appeal your grades, please submit a written grade appeal to me within a week of receiving the graded paper. To submit a grade appeal, please email me a detailed written statement explaining why you believe your grade should be changed. Please note decisions on appeals are at my discretion. Once an appeal is submitted, I will examine the entire assignment (and not specific questions/parts). Please note that your grade may go down, go up or remain unchanged after this process.

Code of Conduct: The University of Toronto expects all its members to behave responsibly and with courtesy and respect for others at all times. The University of Toronto is committed to equity, human rights and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect where all members of our community can express themselves,

engage with each other, and respect one another's differences. Students should make sure to read the University's Student Code of Conduct (<https://governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/secretariat/policies/code-student-conduct-december-13-2019>) and the University's policy on the Appropriate Use of Information and Communication Technology (<https://www.provost.utoronto.ca/planning-policy/information-communication-technology-appropriate-use/>).

Accessibility: Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please contact Accessibility Services (studentlife.utoronto.ca/as); Phone: 416-978 8060.

Registrar Support: Students are encouraged to contact their registrar promptly if they experience unexpected challenges during the course that may require accommodations.

Health and Wellness: Students can access a wide range of programs and services to support their health and wellbeing. Many of these programs are listed at:

<https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/department/health-wellness/uoft.me/myssp>

Crisis support: If you feel distressed, please know that you are not alone and please reach out for help. For further resources, please see: <https://studentlife.utoronto.ca/task/support-when-you-feel-distressed/>

Reading List

Week 1 (January 5th): Introduction: Sports and Politics

- No assigned readings
- In class: Not Just a Game (we will watch part of the documentary in class).

Week 2 (January 12th): Nationalism and Sports

Concepts and context

- Mylonas, Harris and Maya Tudor. 2023. *Varieties of Nationalism: Communities, Narratives, Identities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press {Chapter 2, pgs. 15-30}

Nationalism and Sport

- Horgan, Colin. "At the World Series the Blue Jays belonged to Canada – and large parts of the US too". *The Guardian*. November 3rd, 2025. {2 pages}
- Barnes, Sarah. 2025. "National Sport, national identity: the changing role of hockey in Canada", Canadian Museum of History; <https://www.historymuseum.ca/blog/national-sport-national-identity>. July 22nd, 2025. {2 pages}
- Lieberman, Evan. 2025. "What the U.S. Open Tells Us About America". *The New York Times*. August 23rd, 2025. {2 pages}
- Watch: Joe's Basketball Diaries; Season 1, Episode 1: "Does Sport Transcend Borders?" {29 minutes}

Week 3 (January 19th): Race and Sports: Breaking Barriers; Reading annotation assignment 1 due by 9am

Concepts and context

- Marx, Anthony. 1996. "Race-Making and the Nation-State." *World Politics* 48(2): 180-208

Jackie Robinson and the Integration of Baseball

- Tygiel, Jules. 2002. *Extra Bases: Reflections on Jackie Robinson, Race, & Baseball History*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press {Chapter 1: "Introduction to the Jackie Robinson Reader", pgs. 3-14}
- Williams, Yohuru. 2021. "I've Got to Be Me: Robinson and the Long Black Freedom Struggle" in Long, Michael G.. *42 Today: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*. New York, USA: New York University Press, 2021 {pgs. 113-127}
- Watch: "Obama on connection to Jackie"; mlb.com; January 16th, 2017 (2 minutes)

Week 4 (January 26th): : Race and Sports: Athletes and Activism Over Time

Concepts and context

- Chenoweth, Erica. 2021. *Civil Resistance: What Everyone Needs to Know*. New York: Oxford University Press {"A Brief Introduction, pgs. 1-26}.
- Suzanne Staggenborg and Howard Ramos, *Social Movements* (3rd ed.; Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016). {Chapter 1, pgs. 1-11}

Athletes and Activism Over Time

- Watch: Vox, 2021. "The Story Behind This Iconic Olympics Protest" (9 minutes);
- Hartmann, D., 2019. The Olympic "Revolt" of 1968 and its Lessons for Contemporary African American Athletic Activism. *European Journal of American Studies*, 14(14-1): 1-24
- Trimbur, Lucia. 2021. "Taking a Knee, Making a Stand: Social Justice, Trump America, and the Politics of Sports" in Watson, Nick J., Grant Jarvie, and Andrew Parker (eds). *Sport, Physical Education, and Social Justice: Religious, Sociological, Psychological, and Capability Perspectives*. Routledge. {pgs. 162-176}

Week 5 (February 2nd): Gender and Sports: The Fight for Equal Opportunity and Pay; Critical Reflection Paper 1 due by 9am

Concepts and context

- Collins, Patricia Hill and Sirma Bilge. 2020. *Intersectionality*. 2nd ed. Newark: Polity Press. {Chapter 1; Read the following sections only: "What is Intersectionality", "Using Intersectionality as an Analytical Tool"; and "Power Plays: The FIFA World Cup"}.

Equal Pay and Women's Sports

- Ware, Susan. 2011. *Game, Set, Match: Billie Jean King and the Revolution in Women's Sports*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press {Prologue, pgs. 1-14; Epilogue, pgs. 207-214}

- Watch: PBS Newshour (September 6th, 2023), “Billie Jean King and her legendary career and fight for equal pay in women’s sports” (8 min 36 seconds)
- Kuper, Simon and Stefan Szymanski. 2022. *Soccernomics: Why European Men and American Women Win and Billionaire Owners are Destined to Lose*. New York: Bold Type {Chapter 7, Unbanned: The Case for Reparations for Women’s Soccer, pgs. 118-129}

Week 6 (February 9th): Gender, Sexuality and Sports: The Practice of Sex Testing and Transgender Athletes

Concepts and context

- Hawkesworth, Mary. 2013. “Sex, Gender, and Sexuality: From Naturalized Presumption to Analytical Categories” in *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics / edited by Georgina Waylen, Karen Celis, Johanna Kantola and S. Laurel Weldon*. Oxford University Press. **{Read the first six and a half pages until the section “Exploring the Connections among Sex, Gender and Sexuality”}**.

The practice of sex testing

- Padawer, Ruth. “The Humiliating Practice of Sex Testing Female Athletes”. *New York Times*. June 28, 2016.

Transgender Athletes

- Powell, Michael. 2022, “What Lia Thomas Could Mean for Women’s Elite Sports.” *New York Times*, May 29, 2022.
- Watch the following segments on the debate around transgender athletes from ESPN’s “Outside The Lines” program (2023)
 - “What does science say about the transgender athlete debate?” (7 min 21 seconds)
 - “What does legislation say about the transgender athlete debate?” (8 min 10 seconds)
 - “The human experience behind being a transgender athlete” (9 min 49 seconds)

*******February 16th: Reading Week, No class*******

Week 7 (February 23rd): Soft Power and Sports;

Concepts and context

- Nye, Joseph. 2017. “Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept.” *Palgrave Communications* 3 (1): 1–3.

Politics of Mega Sporting Events and Stadium Construction

- Listen: “Hey, Remember the Olympics?”, *Why it Matters* (Council on Foreign Relations), <https://www.cfr.org/podcasts/hey-remember-olympics> ;_36 minutes
- Grix, Jonathan, and Donna Lee. "Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction." *Global society* 27, no. 4 (2013): 521-536.
- Peltier, Elian. 2024. “China Keeps Building Stadiums in Africa. But at What Cost?”. *The New York Times*. February 10th, 2024.

Week 8 (March 2nd): Authoritarian States and ‘Sportswashing’;

Concepts and context

- Loxton, James. 2024. *Authoritarianism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. {Chapter 1, “What is authoritarianism”}
- Levitsky, Steven., and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*, The Crown Publishing Group. {Introduction, pgs. 1-10; Chapter 1, pgs. 11-32}.

Sportswashing

- Ganji, Sarath K. 2023. “The Rise of Sportswashing.” *Journal of Democracy* 34 (2): 62–76.
- Listen: “What is Sportswashing – and Does it Work?”, *Freakonomics*, March 4th, 2024. (71 minutes)

Week 9 (March 9th): The Business of Sport: Part 1: Hosting Mega Events and Part 2: Why Some Governments are Spending Large Sums on Sports; Critical Reflection Paper 2 due by 9am

Concepts and context

- Vamplew, W. (2022). *Sports economics for non-economists*. New York: Routledge. {Chapter 1, “The Sports Business is Different”, pgs. 1-7}

Hosting Mega Events

- Baade, Robert and Victor Matheson. 2016. “Going for the Gold: The Economics of the Olympics”. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 30(2): 201-218

Why Some Governments are Spending on Sports

- Listen: “Why Governments are Betting Big on Sports”, *Freakonomics*, Episode 640. July 11, 2025. (50 min)

Week 10 (March 16th): Colonialism and Sports;

Concepts and context

- Kohli, Atul. 2022. *Greed and Guns: Imperial Origins of the Developing World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. {Chapter 2, “Why Imperialists Imperialize”, pgs. 6-33}

Colonialism and the Diffusion of Sports

- Alegi, Peter. 2010. *African Soccerescapes: How a Continent Changed the World’s Game*. London: Hurst and Company. {Chapters 1; pgs. 1-13}
- Dubois, Laurent. 2010. *Soccer Empire : the World Cup and the Future of France*. Berkeley: University of California Press. {Introduction: The Language of Happiness}

Week 11 (March 23rd): Podcast preparation session

- No readings
- Groups will meet with instructor and report on progress of group podcast assignment.

Week 12 (March 30th): Conclusion; Group podcast and individual reflection papers on podcast due

- No readings; Groups will present their podcasts