



# SPORTING

## PEDAGOGIES

Performing Culture & Identity in the Global Arena

**MICHAEL D. GIARDINA**

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in the Global Arena



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New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern  
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**To my parents**

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# Contents

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<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	ix
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1. <i>Introduction</i> An Ordinary Citizen's Guide to Sport.....	1
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## **PART ONE: Sport in the Global Arena**

2. <i>Bend[ing] it Like Beckham</i> Stylish Hybridity in Popular British Culture.....	27
3. <i>Global Hingis</i> Flexible Citizenship & Cosmopolitan Celebrity.....	49
4. <i>Remembering the Titans</i> Screening "Race" in Disney's America.....	77
5. <i>Globalizing Dissent</i> Contested Patriotism(s) & Sporting Activism(s).....	99

## **PART TWO: Cultural Politics & Sporting Pedagogies**

6. <i>From Birmingham to Illinois</i> Re/centering Sport.....	129
7. <i>Performing Pedagogies of Resistance</i> Critical Pedagogy Against Empire.....	151
8. <i>Conclusion</i> The Partly Sunny Scholar?.....	179
 <i>References</i> .....	183
 <i>Index</i> .....	199

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Introduction:* An Ordinary Citizen's Guide to Sport

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There has never been a greater need for a militant utopianism that would help us imagine a world free of conflict, terror, and death.

— Norman K. Denzin, 2003

At every turn when there has been an imbalance of power, the truth questioned or our beliefs and values distorted, the change has always come from the bottom up, from our people.

— Gov. Howard Dean, M.D., 2004

I promise to be present to the scene.

— Lauren Berlant, 2000

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I, like countless others glued to their television screens, watched in stunned silence as the events of the day unfolded. The inexplicable image of a hijacked airliner slamming full force into the World Trade Center. The mind-numbing sight of both towers crashing to the ground as if imploded by a demolition team. The horrific close-ups of visibly shaken New Yorkers roaming the streets in panicked disbelief as plumes of ashen debris engulfed lower Manhattan. And the Pentagon, one of its sides caved in under the force of impact from another airliner, smoldering in the crisp morning air. In the days and weeks that followed, these defining images—repeated ad nauseam across the cable news airwaves and in celebrity studded telethons—were to become burned into our collective unconscious as the nation coalesced around patriotic rhetoric and renewed international offerings of friendship and goodwill captured, almost poetically, by an *Associated Press* photo of a man at a candlelight vigil in



## 2 Sporting Pedagogies

Germany with the words “Ich bin ein Amerikaner” emblazoned on his T-shirt that immediately called to mind John F. Kennedy’s proclamation of “Ich bin ein Berliner” during his historic 1960 visit there.<sup>1</sup> Amidst this shocking moment in time, there seemed to be a flickering light at the end of a dark, moribund tunnel—a sense that things would be okay, that we as a nation and members of a global community would band together in common purpose for the greater good with arms outstretched to heal the divide(s) brought forth by the inequities of our age.

And yet, as we have all too clearly seen, what was at once a national tragedy and time of mourning soon devolved into a larger international nightmare (cf, Alterman, 2003; Alterman & Green, 2004; Corn, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In the months following 9/11, the world watched as US President George W. Bush launched a military campaign into the heart of Afghanistan against the fundamentalist Taliban regime and Osama bin Laden (the international terrorist mastermind alleged to be responsible for the attacks). Not content with just one war, the Bush administration would under the false pretenses of the “War on Terror” (marketing) slogan (mis)lead the so-called “Coalition of the Willing” on a cowboy’s crusade against Iraq to oust its dictator, Saddam Hussein, and attempt to remake that country into a democratic state—by force—even though no connection between Iraq and 9/11 could be established. Almost immediately, anti-war marches and demonstrations broke out across America—in fact, across the world—in an effort to avert a senseless invasion and occupation by the United States and its allies (that would, as a matter of course, lead to an economic windfall for energy companies such as Halliburton, weaken the standing of the United States as a moral world leader, and cost [as of April 1, 2005] the lives of 1,533 American soldiers and over \$170 billion in additional defense spending). Conveniently forgetting Thomas Jefferson’s decree that “Dissent is the highest form of patriotism,” Bush’s McCarthyite administration—as well as right-wing commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Ann Coulter, and Sean Hannity, not to mention a fair number of voices from the So-Called Liberal Media (SCLM)—instantly branded peace activists and those who spoke out against United States foreign policy as unpatriotic, as traitors to their country in a time of “war.”<sup>2</sup> Summing up the overt attempt at silencing critics, White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer intoned that Americans

"need to watch what they say, watch what they do" insofar as speaking out against the (not-so-legally-elected) President or the administration in a manner not in keeping with complete acquiescence.<sup>3</sup>

As the old saying goes, times, they are a-changin' (just not for the better). A full year since the first bombs were dropped in "Operation Iraqi Freedom," the United States remains in the midst of a recessionary cycle (with 3 million jobs, mainly of the manufacturing variety, lost to "outsourcing") and at "war" with Iraq in a physical sense and with the rest of the world community in a geopolitical one. A growing sense of despair has struck the nation as an upcoming presidential election looms large on the horizon, with hot button social issues such as same-sex marriage and a woman's right to choose<sup>4</sup> further dividing us along political affiliationist lines (while record trade deficits and national security issues find nary a column inch in most mainstream newspapers). Creation of the USA Patriot Act<sup>5</sup> and passage of the ironically named "Clear Skies Initiative" (read: increase pollution) and "No Child Left Behind Act" (which leaves no school board left standing) have revealed the Bush administration's staunch neo-conservative (or, as some are wont to say, neo-*confederate*) agenda as having become firmly ensconced in the legislative mechanisms of federal law. Other, more draconian measures, such as military tribunals held in secret without the right of due process, facial recognition systems,<sup>6</sup> national identification cards,<sup>7</sup> and increased racial profiling tactics have also been openly suggested—and promoted—under the guise of securing the American "Homeland" (even though such measures are highly dubious in terms of their infringements levied against Constitutional protections such as the rights to privacy, free speech, and freedom of association). To put it ever so bluntly, the current state of American democracy as enumerated in its raced, gendered, and class-based struggles faces hard—perhaps terrifying—questions about an uncertain future in which an Orwellian regime of misrepresentation and propaganda is found operative in foreign policy, education, the environment, and economic policy.

Of course, as we have become all too well aware in recent years, the Bush administration's socio-political war of position, to borrow a phrase from Antonio Gramsci, is not limited solely to geopolitical domination or domestic policy movement. In fact, military-industrial complex incursions and c/overt legislative actions only begin to scratch

## 4 Sporting Pedagogies

the surface of the changing conjunctural realities of our present moment. Rather, such widespread changes manifest themselves and are rendered (in)visible in seemingly all aspects of (popular) culture experienced the world over. It is no wonder, then, that amidst, and directly related to, the stunning changes in everyday life since 9/11—revealed in discussions across university campuses, around office water coolers, and in local neighborhood pubs—there exists a growing collective feeling that matters of culture, identity, and global inter/connectivity are now quite literally matters of life and death. While some might ask “Why sport?” at a time when issues such as education, the environment, or civil liberties are under continuous assault from an illegitimate regime and right-wing commentators, I would agree with Michael Silk and David L. Andrews’s (2001) assertion that sport carries with it the most legible form of “cultural shorthand” for understanding the operation of power in a given context. And, similarly, as C.L.R. James (1993) presciently insists, we can get a better insight into the tensions and contradictions of contemporary society by observing and interpreting popular culture than by analyzing canonical texts:

It is in the serious study of, above all, Charles Chaplin, Dick Tracy, Gasoline Alley, James Cagney, Edward G. Robinson, Rita Hayworth, Humphrey Bogart, genuinely popular novels like those of Frank Yerby (*Foxes of Arrow*, *The Golden Hawk*, *The Vixen*, *Pride’s Castle*)...that you find the clearest ideological expression of the sentiments and deepest feelings of the American people and a great window into the future of America and the modern world. This insight is not to be found in the works of T.S. Eliot, of Hemingway, of Joyce, of famous directors like John Ford or Rene Clair. (p. 119)

What James is pointing to in this revisionary—in fact, radical—statement is that the popular arena is perhaps the clearest window into the contextual specificities of daily life, a context that reflects the crises and tensions of cultural integration and re/production in our time (McCarthy & Dimitriadis, 2000).

Significantly, sport formations have not been immune to the ongoing changes experienced in the United States since Bush was s/elected President: the present administration is currently carrying out mind-numbing assaults on Title IX<sup>8</sup> and steroid-testing drug policy, while likewise using the master trope of baseball as a myopic rallying cry to foster nationalist sentiments that ring hollow the patronage of “freedom” and “democracy.” Correlatively, we’ve witnessed also the sport-

media complex's response to the events of 9/11, where both the Super Bowl and World Series directly following it became havens for nationalistic fervor and rampant expressions of jingoistic patriotism, complete with war slogans and military leitmotifs (S. J. King, 2004). In addition, we recently saw the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, become a perpetual orgasm of faux American pride courtesy of Fox News Channel and its neo-conservative, right-wing brethren. Not to be outdone, popular sporting institutions themselves have continued to remain beholden to a politics of representation that reverberated throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s inasmuch as perpetuating a status quo premised on sport as sutured into the fabric of the (fictional) meritocratic American dream.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, sport—in its infinite manifestations—is representative of and influenced by more than just a United States-based context. The shifting paradigmatic conditions and multiple figurations of what Douglas Kellner (1995) refers to as the “global popular” have cultivated a fertile terrain for the rapid interconnectivity of popular cultural artifacts to be experienced the world over. Moreover, and given the intensification of diasporic flows of cultural and economic capital—aided most significantly by deepening patterns of aestheticization in popular culture as foregrounded in new modes of transnational advertising (e.g., what Silk and Andrews [2001] refer to as “Cultural Toyotism”) and new forms of electronic mediation (e.g., the Internet, WiFi, wireless PDAs, etc.)—the new millennial nation-state now comprises an increasingly fluid population where practices of identity construction are no longer bound by physical borders of nation-state formations (cf., Giardina, 2003a; Silk, 2001). Rather, practices favoring “flexibility, mobility, and repositioning in relation to markets, governments, and cultural regimes” (Ong, 1999, p. 6) have become common. Indeed, more and more people define themselves “in terms of multiple national attachments and feel at ease with subjectivities that encompass plural and fluid cultural identities” (Caglar, 1997, p. 169). Generally speaking, this can be seen in individuals who strategically and situationally patch together their identities from an international array of global television, popular music, and techno-culture so as to actively manipulate global re/configurations of cultural difference, racial hierarchy, and citizenship (cf, Kelly, 2003).

It is within the affectively charged realm of this global popular that we can see most clearly the intersecting vectors of popular politics, national identity, and cultural signification coming together. Truth be told, we are living in new millennial times where issues of hybridity, electronic mediation, the proliferation of images, and mass transnational migration have altered the contexts of modern industrial societies and heightened the role of meanings and representations in the organization of social, cultural, political, and economic life (Giardina, 2003a; Giardina & McCarthy, *in press*). Culture and identity have been dirempted from place and the cultural porosity precipitated by the movement of people, economic and symbolic capital, and the proliferation, amplification and circulation of images across the globe has deeply unsettled ethnic enclaves, even the dominant Eurocentric preserves (cf, McCarthy, 2002). Fields of affiliation and distinctions that human actors establish among themselves—as well as the cultural regulation and policing of multicultural populations—are being flexibly (re)-articulated with both empowering and (re)-productive results; the agential potency to break free from the bonds of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is waiting to be realized like never before (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2003).

And yet, more so than ever, we as “cultural citizens” in the modern world (Miller, 1998) are being seduced, inducted, and incorporated into ever-larger discursive systems and materialisms led forward as much by the state as by multinational capital (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, *in press*; see also Miller, 2004). We are being seduced by large-scale programs of affiliational and exclusionary renarration that hold out the possibility of identity makeovers, place swapping, and material exchange and im/material reward (McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2003; see also Butcher, 2004; Chadha, 1989; Giardina, 2003a; Kelly, 2003). Our daily lives are being colonized by massive systems of textual re/production that transgress the boundary lines between private and public life but which seem to have at the same time the potential to envelop us all in a dark shroud of lost opportunities (cf, Blum, 2004; Gates, 2003; McCarthy, Dimitriadis, Crichlow, & Dolby, 2005).

As with education, popular music, and cinema, contemporary sporting culture finds itself sutured into and through this context in both new and challenging dimensions. Building on Joe L. Kincheloe and Pe-

ter McLaren's (2000) understanding of the ways in which "particular cultural agents produce particular hegemonic ways of seeing"—and looking closer at the competing and often contradictory messages being disseminated through popular forms of sporting culture (cinema, television, literature, video games, etc.)—it is my belief that global (cultural) sporting agents, intermediaries, and institutions actively work as pedagogical sites to hegemonically re-inscribe and re-present (hetero)-normative discourses on sport, culture, nation, and democracy throughout an ascendant global capitalist order. That is to say, sites ranging from the stylish hybridity of British Asian characters in the 2002 box office hit *Bend it like Beckham* and the eminent malleability of professional tennis player Martina Hingis's mediated subjectivity across trans/national boundaries to the contested terrain of patriotism in a post-9/11 moment and the corporate commodification of youth culture by Disney as represented in its sport-themed films are *actively* engaged, as Henry Giroux (1995) has written, "in the cultural landscaping of national identity and the 'schooling' of the minds of young children" and adults alike (p. 65).

This book, then, is a reaction to and intervention into this context. More than that, it is conceived of as part manifesto, part personal narrative, and part cultural criticism about the need to enact a performative cultural study of sport. Organizationally, it is divided into two sections. In the first section, I interrogate a variety of cultural contexts in which popular sporting artifacts operate pedagogically in a contemporary moment defined by rapidly changing conditions of culture, identity, and power in a globalizing world where differently arrayed contexts shed light on the multiple figurations, limitations, and possibilities for a critical sporting imagination. In the second section, I address theoretical interventions into sport-oriented research, discussing various theories drawn from critical pedagogy, (British) cultural studies, and sport studies that move in the direction of a performative social science (cf, Denzin 2003). The two sections are linked by an understanding that "the cultural is always performative and pedagogical, and hence always political, and too frequently racist and sexist" (Denzin, 2003, p. 230; see also Diawara, 1996, Giroux, 2001).

Henceforth, I present radically contextualist readings of various popular sporting artifacts premised on—and seeking to excavate and theorize—the "contingent relations, structures, and effects that link

sport forms with prevailing determinate forces" (Andrews, 2002, p. 116; see also Andrews & Giardina, in press). In so doing, my aim is to "help critical researchers make sense of the world of domination and oppression as they work to bring about a more just, democratic, and egalitarian society" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000, p. 285), while at the same time enquiring into the "conditions of emergence" (Butler, 1999, p. 15) that constitute, signify, and re-signify (popular forms of) sporting culture within the global popular. Relatedly, this book will serve as a roadmap to teachers and educators at all levels looking for new ways to approach popular culture within the classroom. It is my sincere hope that this book will especially challenge those working within cultural studies/cultural theory to reflexively evaluate their own theoretical and methodological approaches to engaging with popular culture in general and popular forms of sport in specific as they work toward the possibility of profound emancipatory cultural interventions that lead to a radical, progressive democracy premised on the basic values of love, care, and equality for all humanity.

Before moving forward, however, I want to share with you a brief personal reflection on my own location in and scholarly relationship to contemporary sporting culture on the one hand, and the academy of higher education on the other. Let's call it "The Partly Cloudy Scholar."

### **The Partly Cloudy Scholar<sup>10</sup>**

I was in Paris a few years ago, snapping digital pictures of the advertisements adorning the brand new Nike football apparel store on Avenue des Champs-Élysées—not 500 meters from the Arc de Triomphe—when one of my traveling companions nudged me and said, rather sarcastically, "Ya do know, there's, like, this really important historical monument just down the street, right?" Perhaps still a twinge bitter after having sat through lunch at the *McDonald's* across the street instead of at a park bistro lazily slurping a bowl of *soupe de poisson*, I replied—with bemused irony—to the effect of "Yeah, but this is history, too. Just, not yet." Coupled with the strange sense of cultural dis/location we had just experienced when looking down from the observation level of the Eiffel Tower—where we noticed the outdoor basketball courts almost directly below us filled with Parisians, young and

old, most attired in Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant replica jerseys—there was something to be said for this paragon of global capitalism having taken up residence on one of the most historic streets in the world (not to mention the McDonald's across the way, the Planet Hollywood down the block, or the Virgin Megastore on the horizon). And, while we dutifully hit all the art galleries and cathedrals and other tourist sites indoctrinating us into “French” cultural history—save for the French Revolution walking tour, thus missing our chance to see Rue St. Severin (Vowell, 2002)—it was nearly impossible to get away from the seemingly ever-present specter of global consumer culture and projections of neoliberalism running rampant throughout the city.

But, it's not like that was a problem, *per se*. Being the flippantly insouciant twentysomethings that we most certainly were, we came to take comfort in the occasional unimaginative Planet Hollywood meal when the previous night's feast of *tête de veau* just didn't sit right, or in the brazenly stereotypical “American” sports bar so we could speak English to other, similarly dislocated Americans when our anglicized French just wasn't connecting. And when we stopped off to pick up a soccer ball at that shiny new Nike store so we could kick it around Park Centrale, I don't recall any of us asking whether the ball was made in a union shop or by 11-year-olds in Indonesia working for pennies a day (though the image of Steve Mosher's office-door poster may have danced in my head). And later still, when we got caught up in the excitement that was France winning EuroCup2000 while we were there, any thoughts of political implications or racial tensions surrounding the team and its win within a larger discourse of European sport and culture did not interfere with us enjoying our Carling.

These are the kinds of tensions at play in modern life that I find myself, as someone writing on sport and sporting culture from an academic perspective—but also having worked in sport on the professional side, not to mention having played sports all my life—confronting at nearly every turn in my scholarly life. To be honest, it's an odd relationship. A colleague of mine once said, “You have a deep ‘love-hate’ relationship to the products of popular culture you write about, don't you?” At the time I was dismissive of her comment but, in retrospect, I think she was/is right.<sup>11</sup> As Jim Denison and Pirkko Markula (2003) write in their call for a departure from “traditional” practices of sporting scholarship and representation, “More than



anyone...we [sport scholars] are aware that sport and movement experiences can be elusive, bodily, intense, and contradictory" (p. 9). It is this very contradictory nature of sporting culture that a great many of the few who dare write on sport—challenging at every step the normative frameworks that we have come to know since childhood, in essence disavowing all that we had taken on face value about the “unquestioned” and positive role of sport writ large in our daily lives, while at the very same time being able to surrender ourselves to the passion of a playoff hockey game or the light-hearted nature of a cousin’s youth soccer match—must come to terms with if we are to move the field forward and realize its promise, not just in words but in actions. So indulge me, if only for a moment.

In truth, I never had any allusions of becoming an academic or, dare I say with a cringe of self-consciousness, a public intellectual. A writer, perhaps, in later life, but not when I was younger. No, when I was a kid growing up in Southern California, all I wanted to be was a professional baseball player. Playing for the hometown team as if in some mythic fairy-tale story: what could be sweeter? Political conservatism, running just as strong in Orange County then as now, was nowhere to be realized on the social radar of my Little League teammates and myself as we listened unwaveringly to our coaches espouse teamwork, ethics, and fair play while at the same time being hell-bent on winning at any cost in our own pursuits of the American Dream. With my elementary school friends, I similarly devoured the latest Air Jordan sneakers—I think *everyone* in my 5th grade class had a pair—without thought, other than that they were “cool,” and waxed pseudo-philosophic about the Los Angeles Lakers making another championship run or Mike Tyson’s upset defeat at the hands of James “Buster” Douglas. Big-money contracts, global satellite broadcast rights, and the reiterative promotion of sporting narratives obfuscating race, class, and gender issues was clearly out of our immediate purview. To us, sport was fun, an escape from whatever worries we had about school or life in general.

As I grew older, moving swiftly through the halls of my private high school, I spent much of my free time playing tennis competitively (props to Coach Fumanti) or hanging out at (what was then known as) Anaheim Stadium, watching the Angels occasionally contend but ultimately come up short in their quest for a World Series title until years