

TEACHING
THE
ECONOMICS
OF SPORTS

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IT'S NOT JUST ANOTHER ELECTIVE

- Sports has an appeal that other sub-fields lack
- Monetary theory does not have a segment on the local news
- It is a way to attract students
 - Generates credit hours in itself
 - Stimulates interest in the major
- But –
 - It shares difficulties with other sub-fields
 - It has a unique set of problems

OUTLINE

- Preliminaries – how to structure your approach to the material
- Students – confronting a unique set of challenges
- Technology – proves to be particularly useful in a sports class
- Inclusion/exclusion – sport serves as a metaphor for society

WHAT IS THE COURSE ABOUT?

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- Is it a course about sports?
 - Use economic tools to analyze sports
 - Structure the course around sports, leagues or teams
 - Why is the NFL so much more successful than the NHL?
 - Sports analytics
 - Is James Harden overrated?

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 - Use economic tools to analyze sports
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 - Sports analytics – Is James Harden overrated?
- Is it a course about economics?
 - Use sports as a Trojan horse to teach economics
 - Structure the course around economic concepts
 - The industrial organization/public finance/labor economics of sports

MAKE YOUR CHOICE KNOWN!



"I promised her I wouldn't talk sports at least until the reception."

TEXTBOOKS

- At least 4 textbooks emphasize the *Economics* of sports
 - Blair; Fort; Kesenne; Leeds, von Allmen, and Matheson
 - All cover IO and Labor
 - Kesenne does not cover PF – perhaps because it is Euro-centric?
- Whatever you choose – it will be obsolete by the time you use it
 - 2020 alone saw: the 2020 Olympics cancelled – and “Russia” banned; brief strikes in several major sports; and two franchises’ changing their names
 - Teaching only from the textbook is not an option!

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

- Particularly important in this course
- Many (mostly male) students are overconfident because they think:
 - The course will be easy because they are big sports fans
 - We will spend the class talking about the local sports team
- Many (mostly female) students are terrified because they think:
 - They will fail because they do not know the infield fly rule
- You must warn/assure them that they will be tested on the Economics

DEALING WITH DIVERSE SKILLS

- One of the joys of the course is the wide range of students it attracts
- This also means that you have huge differences in interests and skills
 - MathEcon majors who want to develop a new sports analytics algorithm
 - Journalism majors who want to be sports reporters
 - English majors who are on the gymnastics team
- You must develop a class that will interest and challenge all of them
- You should plan on spending *a lot* of time in office hours

TECHNOLOGY: GETTING STUDENTS UP TO SPEED

- Students often have forgotten or never knew basic concepts
 - This is a problem for all electives
 - But it is especially acute here
 - Time spent reviewing basic theory is time not spent on course material
- One solution – record “mini-lectures”
- Give an incentive with short quizzes on LMS
 - Due before the relevant class

TECHNOLOGY: FILM CLIPS

- They can impress economic concepts
 - Comparative Advantage: Peggy Fleming (1968) v. Mao Asada (2010)
 - Rank-order tournaments: Kevin Costner's monologue in *Bull Durham*
- They can make the past more immediate
 - Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympia* as an introduction to the “Nazi” Olympics
 - Chart racial attitudes in boxing with Jack Johnson and Louis v. Schmeling
- They can be an entertaining “ice-breaker”
 - George Carlin on baseball v. football

TECHNOLOGY: ACCESS TO DATA

- Sports have abundant data
- This makes empirical papers easy to assign
 - Economics of Sports can be a good “writing intensive” course
 - But diverse skills even greater when it comes to econometrics
- One good “middle ground”: *pechakucha*
 - A stylized slide presentation
 - 20 slides for 20 seconds each
 - Only pictures - no words – I amend to allow 4 slides with data/graphs
 - Best for small classes

EXPANDING STUDENTS' HORIZONS

- Most students are US-centric
 - They know little about foreign sports or foreign societies
 - If they know any foreign sport – it is likely the English Premier League
- Sports can introduce students to foreign cultures
- Example – Nippon Professional Baseball can teach students about Japan
 - Why can NPB games end in ties?
 - Why does experience play such a large role in NPB salaries?
 - Why don't most NPB teams have cities in their names?

TACKLING DIFFICULT ISSUES

- Sports have allowed me to treat discrimination in an “arms-length” manner
 - Kahn and Scherer (1988) on racial discrimination in the NBA
 - Students responded very enthusiastically
- There are, sadly, always new examples
 - Black Lives Matter
 - Franchise name changes
- One issue that has affected my outlook – gender identification
 - Need for a binary classification
 - Runners like Castor Semanya and Duttee Chand do not fit easily