8B Bernadette Compton, Bowling Green State University

“Historical Trends and Themes in Athlete Activism”

High profile athletes achieve a status that allows them to influence American culture (Gill, 2016). One way athletes do this is by being athlete activists (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). I will highlight three distinct historical trends in athlete activism. During the 1960s and 1970s, athletes such as Muhammad Ali, John Carlos, Tommie Smith, and Billie Jean King used the platform of sport as to advance social change during the civil rights and women’s rights movements (Gems, Borish, & Pfister, 2008). Following the 1970s and into the 2000s, however, many athletes shifted to being apolitical in fear of losing endorsements or their fan base (Kaufman & Wolff, 2010). Today we have seen a reemergence of athletes speaking out on social issues. Consistent with advances in social communication, technology and consumerism provide new outlets for activism. Athletes display activism through posting on social media, engaging with charitable organizations, and showing solidarity after tragic events, such as the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown (Demby, 2012; Gill, 2016). A comparison of these trends in athlete activism shows how activism has shifted over time. By analyzing these themes, we can develop a better understanding of social change through the platform of sport.

8B Vikki Krane, Bowling Green State University

“Conceptually Framing Social Justice Engagement in Sport”

As we consider various forms of athlete activism, what has been effective, and future directions for continued efforts, our sensibilities are grounded in feminist cultural studies (Krane, 2001). This perspective guides us to consider often unnoticed ways in which privilege and activism are supported and reinforced. Sport often reinforces maintaining the status quo and prioritizing competitive success over questioning authority or speaking out against injustice (Messner, 2002). Feminist cultural studies guides us to consider how gender, race, sexuality, and other social identities impact social justice efforts. This interaction of privilege and activism sometimes is limiting while at other times it opens opportunities. We also are interested in what motivates individuals to engage in social justice actions. As such, we integrate into our analysis social identity perspective, which links individual thoughts and behaviors to collective action (Wright, 2001). Combined, feminist cultural studies and social identity perspective set the foundation for us to understand how individuals become engaged in social justice and collective actions as well as frames these actions within the broader culture surrounding contemporary sport.

8B Chelsea Kaunert, Bowling Green State University

“Athlete Allies and Social Justice: Does Real Change Happen?”

Contemporary athlete activism has brought visibility to many important issues (e.g., Black Lives Matter, LGBT equality). Yet, previous research suggests that social justice initiatives through sport often promote the perception of inclusion instead of creating legitimate structural change (Bury, 2015). This critique of contemporary social justice initiatives is framed within feminist cultural studies and guided by questions posed by Bury (2015): Is there a true commitment to inclusion? Is there true institutional change? What change is beyond the media discourse? Often, athletes use their privilege to bring visibility to issues through digital media (Baer, 2016) and commodity activism (Duvall & Guschwan, 2013). These types of activism have provided new avenues for athletes to address social issues and have opened the door for more athletes to become socially engaged. However, the enduring impact and the long-term commitment of this type of activism may be questioned. In this critique, I also will consider how gender, race, sexuality, and other social identities impact athlete activism.
In this presentation, I offer strategies for creating theoretically framed, meaningful social change through sport using one campus-wide social justice initiative, *We Are One Team* (WA1T), as an example. Social identity perspective suggests individuals who perceive inequality as unjust become agents of social change (Wright, 2001). Evoking emotions such as sympathy and anger also can be effective tools leading to collective action (Iyer & Ryan, 2009). Critical pedagogy prompts us to create environments that value collaboration by highlighting diverse voices and deconstructing socially constructed ideologies (Fisette & Walton, 2015). Thus, education-based outreach projects employing critical pedagogy are an important first step. Guest speaker events that highlight voices from low-status groups as well as awareness-based projects such as photo campaigns are also important to illustrate the pervasiveness of inequality in the community. Helping athletes develop a social identity based on social justice and concomitant social norms of supporting social justice can lead to sustained activist efforts. Taking into consideration these insights from social identity theory and critical pedagogy, WA1T’s tactics aim to enhance athletes’ understanding of their privilege, increase recognition of inequality, cognitively and emotionally engage athletes in social justice, and encourage sustained efforts towards social justice.