9G Neal Ternes, Florida State University
“Wake up the Echoes; Sport, Education, and Faith at the Convergence of Neoliberalism and Paleo-Conservative Politics at Notre Dame University”

This paper examines the evolving connections between faith and sport at the University of Notre Dame, perhaps the most iconic religious educational institution in the United States. While the conflict between neoliberalism and the political left in academia has been well documented, Notre Dame’s unique history and symbolic connection to paleo-conservative traditions – particularly through the social and religious significance of its football program – have been the site of their own set of political controversies. In this analysis, I document the shifting symbolism of faith and football at Notre Dame in order to highlight the growing friction between the free-marketization of education and the paleo-conservative ethics encoded into religious education institutions. Through a historical re-reading of the institutional space, combined with interview and ethnographic material, I locate the commercial re-organization of game day events and activities within a discursive framework which challenges both the claims of equality within the university community and the moral framework under which Notre Dame claims to operate.

9G Jeffrey Scholes, University of Colorado, Colorado Springs
“From Morality Play to Spectacle: Super Bowl Halftime Shows and the Religion They Express”

Super Bowl halftime shows have gone from being perfunctory performances that merely interrupt the play on the field to, for many, the reason to watch the game. The obvious explanation for the change is money—big stars performing at halftime keep those not interested in the game watching, which enlarges the market for advertisers. Yet economic reasons alone fail to capture the meaning of the historical trajectory of Super Bowl halftime shows. In this paper, I will demonstrate the role that religion has played in these presentations through the decades. First, the location of the Super Bowl halftime show in the midst of a sporting event will be highlighted for the role that sports plays in framing such events. And while lurking beneath the surface of these shows, the religious sentiment (or lack of it) of America is often reflected in them. From the early moral messaging of “Up with People” to the sheer spectacle of Michael Jackson in 1993 to the politically charged routine of Beyoncé of this past February, the history of the shows can, in part, be understood by attending to the primary way that American religion is being accepted and expressed for any given epoch.

9G Kylee Studer, Houston Baptist University
“Serving Two Masters: An Examination of How Faith Impacts the Recruitment of Student Athletes”

Few distinctively Christian universities boast Division I athletics. It is conceivable to understand that Christian values may not coincide with the current model of Division I athletics thus discouraging staunchly religious universities from venturing into the sphere of Division I sport. This presentation offers a case study of how the coaching staffs across 15 varsity sports at a Division I Christian institution are impacted by faith in their recruiting of potential student athletes and ultimately gets at how these coaches believe distinctively Christian values help or hinder their individual recruiting processes. Furthermore, this presentation offers an explanation as to if these coaches in question have to disregard Christian distinctives or recruit athletes with questionable moral standards in order to maintain a competitive program, or if these coaches hone their recruiting on student athletes where faith is a major component in that athlete’s decision-making process. Do these coaches feel pressure to serve two masters, faith and competitive sport, so to speak? In the end, this presentation seeks to recognize if an institution that prides
itself upon Christian values can maintain a high moral standard and yet be successful in Division I athletics by understanding the mindset of coaches in the recruiting process.

9G Andrew Meyer, Baylor University
“What Does a Disgraced American Cyclist Have to Do to Get Some Redemption Around Here? Biblical and Postmodern Readings of Lance Armstrong”

Before his “fall,” Lance Armstrong’s heroic-athlete depiction in the media was clearly an instance religious hero-worship. Today his image is that of a social pariah. Using biblical and postmodern theological lenses to examine Armstrong allows for new insights about how or if he will ever experience some sense of redemption. This presentation aims to: 1.) explore biblical themes of redemption found in the book of Isaiah, and situate them within the context of modern sport; and 2.) provide context for Armstrong’s redemption using a Radical Orthodoxy framework. This presentation seeks to explore the personal, professional, and philanthropic dimensions of Armstrong as an agent of social change (on and off his bike), and specifically for those in the cancer community. I will pose and addresses three questions: 1.) How does a biblical reading of Armstrong’s story provide context to questions of redemption for fallen hero-athletes? 2.) How can we use the postmodern theological lens of Radical Orthodoxy to think about Armstrong’s actions as already redemptive? 3.) Are we ready to forgive Lance Armstrong for his regrettable drug-related performance enhancing actions? This presentation seeks to provide new theological context of one of the most famous sporting dopers.