1D Benjamin Downs, Louisiana State University & Adam Love, University of Tennessee

“Busted Coverage: Colorblindness and the Desegregation of Mississippi State Football”

Mississippi State University became the first white institution in the state of Mississippi to compete against a racially-integrated opponent during the 1963 NCAA Men’s Basketball Tournament. This moment, commonly referred to as the “Game of Change,” is often invoked to position MSU as racially progressive, particularly when compared to its in-state rival, the University of Mississippi. However, the experiences of some initial Black students at the university provide a contrasting narrative. After the university desegregated in 1965, the first Black varsity athletes, Robert Bell and Frank Dowsing, made their debut in the 1970 football season. The current study examined newspaper coverage of Bell and Dowsing during and immediately following the desegregation of Mississippi State football from 1970-1973. In the post-Civil Rights era, a “color-blind” racism has emerged as the dominant form of racial ideology, characterized by the use of subtle, coded language that invokes racialized meanings without direct mention of race (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Notably, we found that a similar “color-blind” ideology appeared to dominate newspaper coverage of Bell and Dowsing throughout their careers. Our presentation will provide insight about the ascendency of “color-blind” racial logic during the initial years of athletic desegregation in the South.

1D Robert Turick, University of Florida & Trevor Bopp, University of Florida

“Racial Stereotypes and The NFL Draft”

The NFL Draft, an annual event in which NFL teams select eligible college football players, is one of the most anticipated televised sporting events of the year (Adamson, 2016) and has increased in popularity in recent years (Gagnon, 2013). Despite the event’s popularity, several scholars and journalists have criticized the draft by stressing how the evaluations of a group of predominantly Black athletes by a group of predominantly White men parallels the slave auction process (Livingston, 2013; Scott, 2014; Taibbi, 2015). Additionally, such evaluations tend to highlight racial stereotypes commonly attributed to athletes. Previous research suggests that assumptions regarding racialized stereotype differences between Black and White athletes exists within sport. Black athletes are viewed as naturally physically superior and are more individualistically driven than their White counterparts, who are characterized as being mentally superior and having a stronger work ethic (Anshel, 1990; Bopp & Sagas, 2014; Buffington, 2005). Such assumptions can negatively impact a draft prospect’s positioning as well as sustain racially disparate stereotypes. The purpose of this study is to ascertain, through a content analysis of online player profiles and live telecasts comments, to what extent coverage of the NFL Draft contributes to the perpetuation of those racialized stereotypes.

1D Alaina Di Giorgio, University of Tennessee

“The Biracial Athlete: What Box Will I Check?”

Being a minority brings about questions that would have never surfaced if you were white. As a biracial athlete, not only are you asked your nationality and ethnicity your whole life, but you are also asked to check which box you fit into. Categories like ethnicity list classifications like “other” or “prefer not to answer,” as if it may be safer to not disclose who you truly are, until more recently, “two or more races” made an appearance on the paperwork. When it comes to a biracial athlete’s skill, are they seen as an all-around athlete, or are their cognitive abilities brought to the forefront? This paper will analyze the representation of biracial athletes in the media while looking through a personal lens on experiences through sport as a former athlete coming from a multicultural upbringing.
The concept of framing has been drawing a lot of attention and research in recent years, and it is being used to label various topics, discussions, and viewpoints in the media. Due to the freedoms of the First Amendment, coupled with the fast-paced world of social media, the majority of events are displayed on media devices across the world in a matter of seconds. The media is responsible for finding all of the latest information and shaping the information in a way to control the opinions of the masses. The world of sport has become increasingly popular in the mainstream media, and professional athletes are becoming celebrities in their own way. Professional athletes differ from your everyday movie stars and artists because they are portrayed in a ‘superhuman’ nature. For example, an American football player by the name of Johnny Manziel has become an iconic superstar in the media, but has been represented in an unorthodox frame of analysis. In this session, we would like to discuss framework and how the media has the ability to define the success of athletes based on their race, beliefs, and athletic ability.