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## Evaluating Sport "Hero/ines": Contents, Forms, and Social Relations

Jeremy W. Howell

University of San Francisco, [howell@usfca.edu](mailto:howell@usfca.edu)

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# Evaluating Sport "Hero/ines": Contents, Forms, and Social Relations

Alan G. Ingham, Jeremy W. Howell,  
and Richard D. Swetman

This essay engages in a reflexive analysis of how to say something "officially recognized as intellectual" about some person who is emotively sensational. This essay has two parts: (a) a position statement on hero/ines that invites engagement in a process of rediscovery and reconsideration how the privileged, intellectual class can write biographies that, in C. Wright Mills' terms, truly integrates the subject's biography with the historical and socially constructed essence of his or her *being*; and (b) an inquiry into whether celebrated individuals are truly worthy of respect and in what ways he or she may be reactionary, reformative (playing by the rules of liberal democracy with some changes in mind), or revolutionary.

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*In studying a structure, it is necessary to distinguish organic movements (relatively permanent) from movements which may be termed "conjunctural" (and which appear as occasional, immediate, almost accidental).* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 177)

We introduce this essay by quoting from Gramsci because it directly relates to the difficulties we have worked through in trying to say something rational about someone sensational. As we began to discuss our thoughts on the place of sport hero/ines in common culture, we found ourselves debating the contradictions that exist in performing our "official" intellectual function while being aware of our emotional investment both with and in the popular. Triggering this debate was our returning to *Sport Magazine's* (1986) rank listing of the 40 most influential people who have made a huge impact on the nature of sport as we

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A.G. Ingham is with the Department of Physical Education, Health and Sport Studies at Miami University, Phillips Hall, Oxford, OH 45056. J.W. Howell is with The San Francisco Bay Club, 150 Greenwich St., San Francisco, CA 94111 and is affiliated with the University of California, Berkley's Extension Program. R.D. Swetman is a Doctor of Chiropractic serving the community of Stanwood, WA.

1. Jackie Robinson	15. Ted Williams	29. Willie Shoemaker
2. Muhammad Ali	16. Howard Cosell	30. Al Davis
3. Pete Rozelle	17. Willie Mays	31. Avery Brundage
4. Arnold Palmer	18. Chris Evert	32. Curt Flood
5. Vince Lombardi	19. Joe Namath	33. Bob Cousy
6. Branch Rickey	20. Bobby Orr	34. Bear Bryant
7. Red Auerbach	21. Jim Brown	35. Pele
8. Marvin Miller	22. Mickey Mantle	36. Pete Rose
9. Bill Russell	23. Wayne Gretzky	37. Jim Norris
10. Billy Jean King	24. Casey Stengel	38. Abebe Bikila
11. Wilt Chamberlain	25. Sugar Ray Robinson	39. Jim Bouton
12. John Wooden	26. Paul Brown	40. Bill France, Sr.
13. Jack Nicklaus	27. Martina Navratilova	
14. Roone Arledge	28. Henry Aaron	

Figure 1 — The 40 who changed sport. Based on December 1986 *Sport Magazine* special issue.

know it in American culture in particular (Figure 1). While we argued over whom we thought was worthy of either inclusion or exclusion in this listing, it became evident that much of the time we were engaged both as academics with a cultural-critical perspective and as everyday fans of sport, and that we seemed to have serious epistemological problems in wearing both hats.

We are sure that all of you would have your own debates on this list of sportspeople and would recognize your own problems arising from your position as both fan and intellectual. This paper is an attempt to map out the ways in which *we* have tried to resolve our difficulties on this matter while hoping that what we have to say might inform the broader inquiry into the theorizing on sport hero/ines in contemporary culture.

In attempting to answer these questions, we found that the multiple meanings attached to the concept of hero served only to further obfuscate analysis. For instance, Carlyle (1950) opined that heroes are “the leaders of men . . . the modelers, patterns, and in a wide sense creators of whatever the general mass of men contrived to do or attain” (p. 9). Mailer (1968) notes that a hero “embodies a fantasy and so allows each private mind the liberty to consider its fantasy and find a way to grow” (p. 377). Emerson (1865) celebrates the hero as a defier of the “Blue Laws of the World” (p. 242). And Klapp (1962) characterizes the hero as “a jack—to lift people above where they would be without the model” (p. 123).<sup>1</sup>

All of the above characterizations allude to the hero/ine as a resistant or transformative type. She or he is fantastic, defiant, an exemplar of a better way. Thus it would appear that our hero/ines disclose what has not yet been institutionalized, what is only dreamed of, or what has not yet been forced into the Procrustean bed of convention.

In debating *Sport Magazine's* list, and in turn, thinking about our selections of hero/ines, we began to ask whether the hero/ine is constitutive in the develop-

ment of a new order or merely constituted by the social-structural forces of the historical moment. The constitutive hero/ine is a key agent in the direction that social development takes. The constituted hero/ine is one who is simply in the right place at the right time. As Hook (1943) observed:

Fashions of interpretation have shuttled back and forth between historians and philosophers of history during the last hundred years. On the one hand we have sweeping forms of social determinism (both idealistic and economic) according to which the great man is a symbol, an index, an expression, an instrument or a consequence of historical laws. . . . On the other hand, we have the conception of the possibility of perpetual transformation of history by innovators whose existence, strategic position, and shattering effect upon their fellow men cannot ever be derived from the constellation of social forces of their day. (pp. 18-19)

In our several attempts to write this essay, we first turned to Giddens (1973, 1976) in the hope that we could find a middle ground between the problematics forged by Hook (1943) and Carr (1961). But Giddens' work, we decided, was intellectualistic and did not really address the emotional/emotive, social actions that are anchored in the "popular" or the way in which the social-identification process actually works. Thus, we continued to ask, "Where is the middle ground in the relationship between dominant and subordinate cultures, and *who* authorizes social action as heroic?" On the one hand, it could be defined/authorized by those who already possess hegemonic cultural power; on the other hand, it could be defined by the popular, for example, Queen Elizabeth's official honor roll that nebulously rewards individuals for their long-term public service to the State or their long-term celebrity status anchored in the popular.

For Carr (1961) heroism lies in the recognition of the great person as an "outstanding individual who is at once a product and an agent of the historical process, at once the representative and the creator of social forces which change the shape of the world and the thoughts of men" (p. 55). For Hook (1943) it lies in the idea that outstanding individual action "can count decisively only where the historical situation permits of major *alternative* paths of development" (p. 109, emphasis ours). Hook (1943) stated:

Where a genuine alternative exists, the active presence of a great man may be decisive—*may be* because other elements come into play to decide the issue between alternatives, and they may weigh more heavily than the element of personality. (p. 116)

Thus, Hook opines:

Both the eventful man and the event-making man appear at the forking points of history. The possibility of their action has already been prepared for by the direction of antecedent events. The difference is this: In the case of the eventful man, the preparation is at a very advanced stage. It requires a relatively simple act—a decree, a command, a common-sense decision—to make the decisive choice. . . . The event-making man, on the other hand, finds the fork in the historical road, but he helps so to speak, to create it. (p. 156-157)

Or, in Carr's (1961) words:

The great man is always representative either of existing forces or of forces which he helps to create by way of challenge to existing authority. But the higher degrees of creativity may perhaps be assigned to those great men who . . . helped to mould the forces which carried them to greatness, rather than those who . . . rode to greatness on the back of already existing forces. (pp. 54-55)

For both Carr and Hook, then, the great or event-making individual embodies a dialectic: She or he is historically constituted and, within the limits set by objective possibility, historically constitutive. Does the "celebrity" fit in either of these categories?

So we the *professorial chroniclers* of social development have to meet a challenge. In Gramscian terminology, this challenge is to articulate an historical conjuncture or an organic movement to an individual's influence on events. To put it another way, our mutual challenge is to critically analyze the structural, objectively determined possibilities and to determine the nature, cruciality, and scope of an individual's intervention into historical process.

In your selection of hero/ines, therefore, you must decide where your conscience resides. You must decide how, in your reflexive autobiographical analyses, your political conscience corresponds/articulates with your sport hero/ines and how you portray their images to both a collegial and lay public. Depending upon your own biographical intersections with history and social structure, and your subject's biographies, the sport hero/ine can be characterized or caricatured as reactionary, "re-formative," reformatory, or transformative (even revolutionary) in your analyses concerning consequential agency. All of this, of course, begs the question of whether any person with *athletic* celebrity status can make a difference in the socioeconomic and political life of the intra-institutional and inter-institutional configurations in which they live.

### **Evaluating Sport Hero/ines: Contents, Form, and Social Relations**

To further map out our relationship to our hero/ines, and to address our personal contradictions as fan and intellectual, we again turn to Gramsci. At the heart of our theorizing on hero/ines is Gramsci's (1971) statement:

"Conjunctural phenomena . . . give rise to political criticism of a minor, day-to-day character, which has as its subject top political leaders or personalities . . . [whereas] organic phenomena . . . give rise to socio-historical criticism whose subject is wider social groupings beyond the public figures and beyond the top leaders. (pp. 177-178)

Where do our celebrated athletes fit into this Gramscian picture? For us, a primary question in comprising a rank order of hero/ines, is whether a sport hero/ine presents or represents organic movements or conjunctural moments. Can an athlete make a difference? If so, how do we appraise their interventions or actions? How does the *will* of an athlete connect to the reproduction or transformation of the general social process? If we wish to locate sport hero/ines within this context

of the reproduction of the status quo or their attempts to transform it, then we must be more specific in addressing the question of determination, and we must ask if a cultural institution such as sport reproduces, dramatizes, or is actually capable of transforming social arrangements in other institutions.

For now, we offer a simple observation: All institutions are comprised of contents, form, and social relations, and are recognizable as institutions when the contents, form, and social relations are joined in a relatively specific way and with relatively high frequency over time. Preservation and innovation can occur in the contents, the form, and the social relations. At times, action in one domain may not affect the other two; sometimes an action affects all three; and there are occasions when action in one institution spills over into other institutions. The spill-over scenario, we believe, should be central to considerations concerning the constituted or constitutive hero/ine.

First, let us illustrate the problem introduced above. The "Fosbury Flop" is an example of an innovation in the content domain of sport. It had no impact upon either the overall form of track and field or upon the social relations of production. In short, it was a performance-enhancing technique that occurred within the established rules of the high jumping game (i.e., its sanctioned form) and within the existing relations of production and the invested values of sport (e.g., the pursuit of the record).

We recognize that the distinction between content and form is hard to comprehend, and we use a newspaper article by Mark Bradley (1990) to illustrate this point:

To watch Jose Canseco—as anyone who gets ESPN<sup>2</sup> does often—is to get carried away. Here's a guy who can (and does, regularly) hit a 450 foot homer and, two innings later, steal second on a pitchout. To watch Canseco is to start issuing pronouncements, such as, "A guy like this can change the whole fabric of the sport."

But that's getting carried away. Great as he is, Jose Canseco won't change baseball. Fact is, Canseco isn't even an original. Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays were once what Canseco is. Eric Davis could still be.

The only difference between Canseco and his antecedents is that he's the fastest big guy ever. But that's a *nuance* [italics added], not a departure. Jose Canseco is an immense talent, but he is no pioneer. (p. D2)

What Bradley is stating is that Jose Canseco is an exemplar in the prosecution of the contents of the sport of baseball. When Bradley looks for pioneers, he selects Sparky Anderson and Whitey Herzog. Why?—because they were conceptualists. For Bradley then, brains rather than brawn count as hallmarks of distinction.

While Bradley's (1990) argument reproduces the invidious comparison between mental and manual labor which is a primary determinant of class structuration, or social stratification, he does make a point for us: namely, that tacticians should be regarded more highly than technicians because they transform form. Thus, they modify the rules that govern form and, in so doing, inevitably transform the contents or the practices of technicians.

Here we should note that tacticians do not necessarily alter the relations of production mainly because they are part of both the *capital function* and the

*labor function* (see Crompton & Gubbay, 1977, for expanded definitions). As part of the capital function, their innovations are circumscribed by the profit/performance principle—an ideology to which franchise owners and event entrepreneurs subscribe. As part of the labor function, their innovations link mental labor to manual labor, thereby increasing the proficiency of the latter and its surplus-value, production potential (see Mandel, 1970; Rosdolsky, 1977).

Typically we celebrate and are fans of the exemplars in the content domain and the innovators in both content and form (e.g., the outstanding performer and/or trend-setter in sport, business, or art). We, like many of the journalists polled by *Sport Magazine*, will honor people such as Wilt Chamberlain, Chris Evert, Mickey Mantle, Willie Shoemaker, Pele, or Ted Williams. This popular use of the concept of hero/ine suggests less social-structural, boundary-breaking endeavors. That is, we often use hero/ine to refer to individuals who vindicate rather than transcend structural principles and dominant moral and cultural values. Here the hero/ine is the pinnacle of a society's hegemonically constructed image of itself. After all, fame and greatness are often conflated. As Boorstin (1968) puts it:

Discovering that we (the television watchers, the movie goers, radio listeners, and newspaper and magazine readers) and our servants (the television, movie, and radio producers, newspaper and magazine editors and writers) can so quickly and so effectively give a man fame, we have willingly been misled into believing that fame—well knownness—is still a hallmark of greatness. (p. 327)

For us, a celebrated athlete may have fame and notoriety, but should a hero/ine have more? Should she or he have greatness? A celebrity is famous because she or he arouses the sensations, but although hero/ines are, in this sense, sensational, we believe that they should have unbridled commitment. A celebrity, in appearances, is "above" everyday life; but a hero/ine may be truly embedded in it. For example, the "magic" in Magic Johnson requires further study and, hopefully, someone with both intellectualist and popularist sensitivities will pursue it.

How do we view those whose agency is directed at the relations of production? Here, we are concerned primarily with the exercise of power in terms of consequential human agency. In general terms, power can be used to consolidate or to change existing social relations. When used by dominant groups, power can be used to exclude (to preserve monopoly) or to include (incorporate) subordinate groups. When used by subordinate groups, power often takes the form of usurpation (e.g., to bite into the resources and privileges accrued by dominant groups and to democratize access to valued positions). Here, we must note that usurpationary action aimed at redressing *status* inequality may not redress *class* inequality and vice versa—if one lives by the liberal-democratic ideology, merit should be the key criterion of both status and prestige. But property is the issue—who has it and who controls its use. Power, regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, is power.

So the key question is who exploits whom—in the capital-labor relation, women can exploit men; blacks can exploit whites if the former hold property and the latter do not (see Giddens, 1973; Parkin, 1979; Turner, 1988). Also, we

note that subordinate groups do not always use their power to usurp. They may (a) seek to consolidate what they have by resisting egregious strategies of dominant groups, (b) attempt to incorporate themselves into the prestige socialization system (see Goode, 1978, on prestige as social control), or (c) turn a skeptical ear to transformative vanguards who claim to be acting on their behalf, but not their behest.

In sport we can find many examples of such categoric, distributive, and relational negotiations and struggles (see Dewar, 1993, for definitional work). Moral and ideological protests related to ascriptive (categoric) and distributive discrimination often exemplify this struggle (e.g., Affirmative Action, Title IX in the U.S.A.) and can be contested usually under liberal democratic principles. In such cases, the usurpation claims may be resolved within the existing, overarching structural principles with reform and accommodation, but not revolutionary upheaval in mind.

In addition to the conflict of interests that derive from distributive issues, we feel we must address the conflicts that are anchored in intra- and intersystemic contradictions (e.g., the mixed modes of production existing in any historical period). In principle, conflicts anchored in systemic contradictions appear to derive from the competing claims of both the dominant class and the transitional classes seeking to replace it (e.g., the rise of the bourgeoisie within the estate society). If sport did and does indeed dramatize systemic contradictions, where would we look for our hero/ines? Sensitized to the long-term, historical process, some might turn to Arnold of Rugby, Gulick of Springfield, Hulbert of Chicago, Spaulding of Chicago, Rozelle of the NFL as our archetypes. After all, each helped to replace the aristocratic ethos with the bourgeois ethos (Ossowska, 1970) at different organic and conjunctural moments.

We can also choose to honor those who assisted in the liberal democratic, transformative process and dramatized changing social relations (e.g., Jessie Owens, Jackie Robinson, Bill Russell, Billy Jean King, Curt Flood, Arthur Ashe, and Joe Louis) or those who resisted the transformation process (e.g., Avery Brundage). All of us, in some way, may have to evaluate the reproduction/transformation contradictions that are embodied in the sport and social careers of Muhammad Ali, Curt Flood, Florence Joyner, Martina Navratilova, and Billy Jean King.

But if Curt Flood appears in "The Forty," why not include Joe Kapp, Oscar Robertson, or Ed Garvey? If *Sport* includes Marvin Miller, why not include Peter Seitz of the National Labor Relations Board? Who contributed more to the transformation of the relations of production in baseball concerning the age-long fight for free agency? And what did each of these individuals and their constituencies dramatize concerning the capital-labor relation at large and the production/consumption relation? What would we say about de Coubertin and Brundage vis-à-vis Uberoth and Samaranch concerning the "Olympicist" ideals? Do we merely pay lip service to the reactionaries, since they are the residual, and perhaps the reactionary ghosts that haunt the present (irrelevant really)?

It is interesting to note that only Brundage appears in *Sport Magazine's* "The Forty Who Changed Sports" (see Figure 1). Why not list the man who "Snickered" and "McDonaldized" the Olympics as a man who changed sport? Drapeau lost his chapeau in Montreal; but Uberoth wore his capitalist hat so well he turned an embarrassing profit with Los Angeles Olympics and forced

moral decisions concerning how to give the profit away. The Uberoth way is now *the* way of the IOC. The IOC has now become a franchising agency to which many elite athletes accede in order to extract economic values from the exchange and surplus values that are owed to them.

Our point is this: If we are concerned with social-relational issues, then where do we look for our hero/ines? Ingham and Hardy (1984) gave us a conceptual guideline when they stated that the fundamental determinants of relational conflict are somewhat different in the recreational realm of sport and in the representational/professional realm of sport. They argued that, in the recreational realm, the contest is over the public control<sup>3</sup> of the private use of time and space, and the moral control of this space and time remain points of contention (see Adelman, 1986; Donnelly, 1993; Goodman, 1979; Metcalfe, 1993; Reiss, 1989) and a place to seek out our hero/ines (e.g., the urban environmentalists, the "progressive" social formations in the urban reform movements, and the moral reformers of leisure who would become the "rational recreationalists"; see Ingham, 1978).

In the representational/professional realm, Ingham and Hardy (1984) argued that the contest concerns the private and, we add, the state control of social-productive labor power. Free agency and the adequate compensation for services performed have been and remain points of contention (see Dworkin, 1981; Noll, 1974; Staudohar, 1986). Maybe our would-be hero/ines are situated here. In their attempt to forge a connection between the two realms, Ingham and Hardy (1984) point out that both realms have been engulfed by the logic of capitalism and, therefore, the primary relational issue lies in the increasing power of capital over the production and consumption of sport-related services and goods (see Clarke, 1993; Clarke and Critcher, 1985; Hardy, 1990a, 1990b; Ingham, Howell, & Schilperoot, 1987).

Obviously, Ingham and Hardy (1984) elevate class determinants over status determinants in their analysis. After all, class- and status-relational issues are played out generally within the constraints and enablements of the prevailing political economy and, in late capitalist societies, under the hegemonic umbrella of liberal democratic thought. Thus, regardless of the site of contention, there is a recurring theme, and it addresses the gap between what a system promises and what it actually delivers.

As should be expected in liberal democratic societies, this material and moral drama has been relatively consistent: Its plot concerns distributive justice, and its dramatis personae argue about who gets what, how, and why. The liberal democrats on stage argue about equality of opportunity; the social democrats, usually in the wings, argue about how to achieve equality of condition; and the radical democrats, typically marginalized, debate over strategies to seize the stage. Perhaps our hero/ines lie wherever we situate ourselves in the political-economic issues, in whatever political space we choose to inhabit in the contemporary world in general, and the sport world in particular.

### **Hero/ines, Fans and Intellectuals: Strategic Intervention**

*All men are intellectuals. . . but all men do not have the functions of intellectuals in society.* (Gramsci, 1971, p. 9)

We again turn to Gramsci to make some final comments on the key contradictions we think academic authors face when writing biographies about their

hero/ines. In this essay, we have tried to show you how to view archetypal and prototypical hero/ines that have influenced our own practices by their level of agency. In other words, *we* admit to an emotional investment in our hero/ines based on some exterior judgement on their "heroic" actions. We can justify our evaluations based upon *our* political principles. So we ask you to join us in the same political and self-reflexive exercise.

After some 14 years of work, we note some very real contradictions that were, and remain, difficult to resolve. For instance, one problem is that hero/ines have biographies that also intersect with history and social structure. As they move through the various socially constructed topographies at different conjunctural times, they may exhibit contradictions in word and deed. Thus, our praise may turn to dispraise and vice versa: Honor may be accorded in one arena and shame in another. Inconsistent behavior may or may not lead to deep (i.e., debilitating) embarrassment depending upon our willingness to bracket off the terrain or the time that the inconsistent behavior occurs.

Bracketing off leads us back to the key contradiction we have faced. In searching for our intellectual correctness in the form of objectivity, we not only bracket off the terrain or time but we also bracket off our affective identity. All kinds of examples spring to mind. Our self-reflexivity has forced us to distinguish between appearances and essences; to admit that we can be enraptured by a performer or a performance and, later, wonder why our "trained" reason and political consciousness were suspended temporarily in our empathetic and sympathetic exhilaration or despondency.

In our professional capacities, we may question the constitutional issues surrounding free agency and monopsonistic labor practices in professional sport yet become angry when a player's strike interferes with our recreational plans. We may vote against the construction of a downtown sports stadium but be first in line for championship tickets. We may be ideologically sensitive to the plight of the American Indian, but engage in the tribal worship of teams using insulting and socially injurious nicknames like "Redskins" and "Braves." We may read and inform our cultural studies with feminist theory, yet males of all social stratifications may eagerly await the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. We may be against the privatization of leisure but subscribe to privatization in our leisure pursuits because there is little public sector provision—intellectual social democrats but liberal democrats at "heart." We may be ideological environmentalists, but a clear cut for skiing is OK, whereas one for logging is not.

The major problem for our social analysis on hero/ines, then, is the analysis itself. Analysis involves reason, but human action can be both instrumentally and substantially rational or irrational (see Mannheim, 1940). Our human essences and emotions subvert our instrumentally-rationalized intelligences. "Fan-ciful" irrationality, for the academic, is not supposed to outweigh reasonable thinking. Our official function is that of the intellectual not the fan, of reason not of impulse. However, we are all given to "fan-tasy." In his philosophical analysis of Freud, Herbert Marcuse (1966) stated:

With the establishment of the reality principle, the human being which, under the pleasure principle, has been hardly more than a bunch of animal drives, has become an organized ego. It strives for "what is useful" and what can be obtained without damage to itself and to its vital environment.

Under the reality principle, the human being develops the function of *reason*: it learns to "test" the reality, to distinguish between good and bad, true and false, useful and harmful. . . . Only one mode of thought activity is "split-off" from the new organization of the mental apparatus and remains free from the reality principle: *phantasy* is "protected from cultural operations" and stays committed to the pleasure principle. (p. 14)

What we see in this idea is as follows: While we all now operate under the reality principle, we, the so called intellectuals, have asserted that we are more capable than they, the fans, to test reason by virtue of our epistemological, methodological training. In this sense, we have portrayed an "us" and "them." Yet, as the debate continues, relatively speaking we have a specious distinction. For it is clear that, although we try to bracket off our professorial, occupational identity from the totality of ourselves via the rigorous training in disciplined objectivity, when it comes to analyzing sport hero/ines, we also appear quite capable of blurring our "official" professorial function with our essentialist, emotional identities.

Depending upon our ideal and material interests, we select or have an elective affinity with already encoded heroes and villains. And many of these people were encoded for us and by us as fans. As fans, it was exactly these pleasures of common culture that, much of the time, determined the extent of our emotional investment in many of our hero/ines. As fans, we were, and are, concerned with the immediacy of the sensations experienced in common culture.

As intellectuals we denigrate impulsive, affectual action—but it exists. The question, then, is how do we let it inform our studies? For the more enlightened, and less objectivistic (in the neo-positivistic sense of the term), the answer has been an epistemological one. In writing on our hero/ines should we, as authors, first reveal our true ideological and political positions as feminist, Marxist, poststructuralist, married, single, men, women, yuppies, or cyber punks? Having done this, are we then justified to state who our hero/ines should be? While we understand the virtues of this, we also see the drawbacks that we, as cultural theorists continually face. For instance, we may not exhibit a consistent pattern of affiliations/identifications across issues or throughout *our* biographies. This is an epistemological nightmare. There are far too many determining factors on our numerous ideological, political, and affective identities. We, the official intellectuals, are just not stable or consistent. Thus, the career of the hero/ine may be determined by the length and strength of *our* commitment and by the time it takes for a conflict of interest involving our hero/ines to be resolved.

We agree with Grossberg (1988) that such self-reflexive, self-revelatory writing too often ends up as an endless commentary on ourselves in that authors have to somehow magically reveal the determining biographical, historical, and structural conditions influencing their thinking. As Grossberg continues: "This response to the challenge of critical author-ity surrenders what little authority may be left to such practices and consequently, surrenders the possibility of historically strategic intellectual and political work" (p. 66).

What then is *our* answer? Well, it begins with our question. How do our hero/ines articulate with our own subjectivity and our actual or fantasized social practice?

Why are we writing this essay? What is our strategy for political practice? Really, it revolves around intervention and, as such, cultural writing must be

seen as a strategic issue. If our political practice is writing, then our hope is that strategic writing (in a war of strategic position) may open new possibilities regarding how we think about the impact of our hero/ines on common culture. Depending upon our strategic position, we and you choose a cast of characters.

We think it important to understand that we are intellectuals writing about sport fan-tasies: It helps us understand our own personal contradictions as intellectuals and fans. Being a fan allows us to live in the popular and to discuss the popular in popular ways. Think of Magic Johnson and his contraction of HIV through his, as he put it, "accommodation" of so many women. "Flo Jo" (Florence G. Joyner) clearly expresses femininity in appearances yet, in a distributive sense, could be celebrated as a liberal democratic feminist (see Dewar, 1993).

Clearly there are many contradictions at work in the depiction of Magic or Florence or Martina or Arthur (Ashe), and many others as hero/ines. Defining actions as "heroic" depends upon our own ideological identities. But, it is hard to even begin to understand the depictions of Magic et al. as heroic without fully comprehending their contributions in content and form but particularly their social-relational places in common culture. Understanding this helps create some critical distance for us as intellectuals in that it allows us to live within the popular, define the important questions to be asked, the connections to be made, and the connections that need to be challenged when it comes to the relationship between our hero/ines, our academic "responsibilities" vis-à-vis our grounded aesthetics and our "common" cultures vis-à-vis the hegemonic culture.

What we are saying is that we, the intellectuals are "they," the fans, when it comes to connecting our subjectivity with that of the sports hero/ine. We must realize that if we want our writing and teaching to change things of the present into possibilities in the future—the goal of all intellectual practice—then we cannot artificially be separated from our existence in everyday life, pleasures, and fan-tasies.

Like Grossberg (1988), we do not see the contradiction between intellectual and fan to be an epistemological problem but rather a strategic "concrete historical dilemma" (p. 67). It is a political concern. We are not defining our authority to declare the politically correct hero/ines and some version of the right interpretation of heroic action nor, in some objective stance, to define the different interpretations we have as fan and intellectual. We are not falling back upon our "objectivist" training as academics.

Actually, the intellectual is not necessarily governed by an abstract (objectivistic) academic purpose and many (nonuniversity) intellectuals are not governed by the "rules" of the academic tribe. Instead our analysis is determined by informing political practice both as intellectuals and fans. The intellectual has the possibility, resources, and function to define the way in which our athletes can be inserted, reinserted, or deconstructed in contexts, directions, and struggles deemed worthy of public and popular attention. Recording their biographies for us is not the art of the sardonic academic. In this sense, distinctions between involvement and detachment have a spurious ring.

## Conclusion

Are our self-proclaimed sport hero/ines reactionary, progressive, or revolutionary, and do their interventions in the cultural make a difference in the general social process? In response to these questions, we must return to the concept of

agency. All human beings, including fans and intellectuals, are engaged wittingly or unwittingly in the sociohistorical process. Social history is made by all of us; it does not naturally evolve. The only way to find the place of the true dialectic of personality and social structure in history is to do the concretely, historically, and contextually specific analyses, and to theorize through the everyday. Maybe this is the only purpose in looking at hero/ines for in so doing we locate ourselves.

Critical writing, as Williams (1977) has explained, is practice: It changes the world. Our hope and belief is that strategic writing on hero/ines and their career actions, may outline new possibilities for commenting on the importance of sport in our culture and for situating ourselves in everyday life via-à-vis the ivory tower.

Generally, we have left the autobiography of the personality (even when ghost-written) and the biography to the historian (some socially stimulative and most, boringly empiricistic). We in sport and cultural studies have contributed little to the biographic intersection with social structure and history. We conclude with the Millsian triad. Unfortunately, we end up with a dismal appraisal of our sport hero/ines' contributions to reality as against their emotively generated "fan-tastic" fantasies. We merely provide a scaffold, as Max Weber once put it, upon which we, as a totality, shall construct the edifice of a sociologically imaginative orientation to biographic writing.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>We add that we have avoided the political correctness of adding [*sic*] to original quotations. These writers lived in different historical conjunctures and, while sensitive to the issues of their times, were accustomed to the use of "man" as a generic expression of the humankind.

<sup>2</sup>ESPN is a pay for cable television channel rather than a regular over-the-air network channel. It is one brainchild of Ted Turner.

<sup>3</sup>We borrow from Ingham and Hardy (1984) who in turn borrowed ideas from Stuart Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, and Roberts (1978): "We use the term 'public control' rather than 'bourgeois control' because . . . the regulation of recreation/leisure . . . operates most successfully when anchored in consensus—spontaneous or constructed. Thus, public control involves . . . the ideologies of subordinate groups . . . presented as conjoint articulations (also see Sumner, 1979, chs. 8 and 9)" (pp. 155-156).

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