

**Proceedings of the
SPORT LITERATURE ASSOCIATION
41st Annual Conference**

Compiled by Hannah Anderson

**June 19-22, 2024
University of Maine
Orono, Maine**

Host: **Bruce Pratt**, University of Maine
President: **Adrian Markle**, Falmouth University
Program Chair: **Matt Tettleton**, University of Texas at Arlington
Technical Facilitator: **Cory Willard**, Mount Royal University

DAY ONE: Wednesday, June 19, 2024

Official Welcome

Bruce Pratt, Conference Host
Maulian Dana Bryant, Penobscot Nation Ambassador
Jason Hoyt, University of Maine Events and Hospitality
Adrian Markle, SLA President

Session 1: Touch Gloves and Come Out Swinging

Panel Chair: **Mark Baumgartner**, East Tennessee State University

From Saving Grace to Violated Space: Baseball in Stephen King

Fred Mason, University of New Brunswick, fmason@unb.ca

Stephen King's love of baseball is well known. He wrote editorials or letters about baseball in the *Bangor Daily News* many times over his career. His essay "Head Down," about his son's Little League state championship run, was published in the *New Yorker* and selected for *Best American Sport Writing* in 1991. King's baseball obsessions were given full vent in *Faithful*, the memoir of the Sox's 2004 championship season, cowritten with Stewart O'Nan. In *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon* (1999), baseball features as the "saving grace" for Trisha McFarlane as she's lost in the woods for nine days. In more recent fiction however, baseball is a space of normality and joy that is violated by murder, ghosts and other horrors. After a break-through season, catcher Billy Blakely

(*Blockade Billy*, 2010) is revealed to not be an imposter and he flies into a murderous rage. In *A Face in the Crowd* (2012), Dean Evers begins to see people in the crowd at Rays games on TV, who he knows are dead. He eventually ends up at the game himself, “doomed to baseball.” *The Outsider* (2018) starts at a baseball game, with the shockingly public arrest of Little League coach Terry Maitland for the brutal murder and assault of a local child. In these works, baseball as a place for fandom and community is juxtaposed against creeping tension, psychosis, and supernatural evil; baseball is a violated sacred space, a place of good things and good people that serves to accentuate the bad as it happens.

Narrative Structure in Adrian Matejka and Youssef Daoudi’s *Last on His Feet*

Michele Schiavone, Marshall University, schiavon@marshall.edu

I am proposing a paper titled “Narrative Structure in Adrian Matejka and Youssef Daoudi’s *Last on His Feet*” on the graphic novel *Last on His Feet: Jack Johnson and the Battle of the Century*, by poet Adrian Matejka and artist Youssef Daoudi, published in 2023.

I have presented on African American boxer Jack Johnson in two past SLA conferences: the first time, on different literature based on Johnson, and the second time, on Adrian Matejka’s book of poetry on Johnson, *The Big Smoke*.

This graphic novel tells the story, round by round, of the epic fight (also called “the Fight of the Century”), between Jack Johnson and the then retired champion Jim Jeffries, which took place in Reno, Nevada, in 1910. For years, no white boxer would fight Johnson, citing the color line, but the true reason was most likely fear of losing to a black man. In 1910, after Johnson had become the first black heavyweight champion, Jim Jeffries was persuaded to come out of retirement to avenge the white race. Johnson easily won the fight, which set off riots around the country.

Besides containing excellent art and text, this book is interesting in the way it tells not only the story of the fight, but of Johnson’s entire life. The fight is the ongoing plot line, but as each round ends, the story seamlessly transitions into Johnson’s relationship with his white wife Etta Duryea (who kills herself), his previous fights, and his family background in Galveston, Texas. It also goes forward to tell of his arrest for supposedly violating the Mann Act, his time in Europe as he evaded capture, and his death from a car crash. Illustrations of the racist newspaper cartoons are also included. Along with the action of the present (the fight against Jeffries), the novel repeatedly shows Johnson as an older man telling the story of the fight as part of his stage act, which was the only job Johnson could get once his boxing career and prison time were past. He was a curiosity,

an articulate black man who fought, played music, and quoted Shakespeare. Each section begins with something like a poem, Johnson as the speaker.

“Take Your Beating:” Reckoning with the Inevitable in William Fay’s *Saturday Evening Post* Fiction

Josh Sopiartz, Governors State University, jsopiartz@govst.edu

William Jerome Fay, perhaps best known—if at all—for his writing work on the Elvis-lead musical comedy, *Kid Galahad*, and “Alfred Hitchcock Presents,” during the early 1960s, published more than two hundred short stories during his career. These stories, on a range of interests—from hardboiled detective fiction and tales of military heroics, to saccharine Christmas tales, conventional love stories, and slang-filled celebrations of New York City nightlife and its music, appeared in magazines including *Collier’s*, *Argosy*, *Cosmopolitan*, *The Elks Magazine*, and more. The lion’s share of his fiction, however, involved sports—primarily boxing—and appeared in one of the United States’s most-circulated weeklies of the mid-twentieth century, *The Saturday Evening Post*, with its estimated four- to five-million annual readers, between 1939 and 1962. Of his sixty-three *SEP* stories, twenty-seven—including the first and last stories he wrote for the magazine—feature boxing or boxers.

This paper isolates Fay’s *Saturday Evening Post* boxing fiction of the 1950s and interrogates one particular theme—that of the aged prizefighter—through a close reading of three stories, “I’ll Never Fight Again” (1953), “Nolan’s Last Fight” (1954), and “Take Your Beating” (1955). These stories reflect the anxiety of radical change permeating the post-War zeitgeist, analogized through the boxer’s fading body, and his recognition that it is time to move on from the past.

Session 2: Poetry

Panel Chair: **Scott Palmieri**, Johnson & Wales University

Robert Watson, UCLA, rnwatson@humnet.ucla.edu

Abstract not available.

Ron Smith, St. Christopher’s School, smithjron@aol.com

Abstract not available.

Bruce Pratt, University of Maine, obdriveway@aol.com

Abstract not available.

Session 3: Creative Zoom (Remote Presentations)

Panel Chair and Technical Facilitator: **Cory Willard**, Mount Royal University

From *The Diary* (novel)

Joyce Duncan, East Tennessee State University, joyced1001@cs.com

Abstract not available.

from *Bruise* (novel)

Adrian Markle, Falmouth University, adrian.markle@gmail.com

Abstract not available.

Let's Go Team: Sport as Model for Community Building in Creative Writing Courses

Angie Abdou, Athabasca University, aabdou@athabascau.ca

During a dip in my passion for my Creative Writing profession, I fell into a new role – swim coach. I did not expect the new job to change the old, yet it did: rekindling my enthusiasm, increasing my commitment, and – most of all – changing the way I find meaning in the writing and learning processes, for myself and for my students. Noticing my enthusiasm for the pool, and my anxiety around the page, I started to explore the difference in my approach to mentoring swimmers and mentoring writers. I recently wrote a paper called “From the Pool to the Page: How Coaching Swimming Made Me a Better Creative Writing Teacher” (forthcoming in the Routledge Guide to Creative Writing Pedagogy). It briefly outlines the five main lessons I have taken from the swimming pool to the creative writing classroom. I presented that paper at SLA 2023, which sparked Adrian Markle to invite me to write a follow-up paper for his creative writing anthology. In this new paper, I will expand on one of those points: how to consciously work at building community drawing lessons from my experience as a swim coach.

The main reason I never have any doubts about the value the swim club adds to our athletes' lives is the importance the other coaches and I put on creating a positive culture and building community. We teach the athletes to support each other through failure,

cheer each other through success, help each other through the tough parts of training, and share their joy of the sport. Even when our swimmers are not best friends, they count on each other as a kind of extended family and achieve that warmth and happiness associated with a group of people who truly “get” each other (weird goals, constant eating, chlorine hair, and all). I’ve realized I can accomplish the same with every class, marking that particular group as a community (a team!) for the duration of our time together, hoping those connections will extend into other classes and into post-degree life. This presentation shares my sport-inspired exercises geared toward fostering healthy writing communities.

DAY TWO: Thursday, June 20, 2024

Session 4: Creative Writing

Panel Chair: **Michele Schiavone**, Marshall University

from *The Disobedience of Love* (novella)

Robert Wallace (author), bwallace@nc.rr.com

Creative narratives have the ability to inform, and, in addition to entertaining readers, tell us about the world we live in. In the best of narratives, they, too, have the ability to change hearts, minds, and behaviors. Sport literature is no exception. Sport used as a vehicle to explore the human condition as a central theme, or tangentially, can, ultimately, not only aid in propelling a narrative forward, but can draw attention to our critical understanding of a major social issue. Sport narratives can not only inform us, but when done well can challenge assumptions.

In this panel I propose to read a portion of a novella titled “The Disobedience of Love.” The novella is about an all-women’s baseball team. A portion of this was published in *Aethlon* in a short story titled “So I Turn My Face Away From the Sun.” This story, additionally, was included in the most recent special teaching addition of *Aethlon*. Furthermore, Aurora Blanchard, a graduate student, presented a paper titled “Ecofeminism in an Unlikely Genre: Sports Literature” at the 2023 conference, where she discussed how Mother Nature aligns with female characters in “So I Turn My Face Away From the Sun” and Bernard Malamud’s *The Natural*. “The Disobedience of Love” is an expansion of “So I Turn My Face Away From the Sun” into a novella. The twenty-minute reading would not be the previously published short story but a different section of the novella.

“Five for Five” (creative nonfiction)

Scott Palmieri, Johnson & Wales University, spalmieri@jwu.edu

Somewhere near the middle of a row in the middle of my eighth-grade homeroom, not far from the end of middle school, I await morning announcements, which begin with the end of the Pledge of Allegiance. I hate every day here. But I can't wait for this one to start, my last chance to emerge from the endless middle.

Part of me is still in yesterday, our last baseball game of the season, only our third win, when I have five hits, my last a bloop that drops well enough behind the second baseman, far enough from the right fielder. A cheap hit but a clean hit. No other middle schooler in the world is five for five.

“Five for Five” narrates the internal drama that unfolds for a middle school baseball player, who anticipates his imminent fame, thanks to his recent athletic conquest- going five-for-five at the plate in his last game of the season- and the ever-important homeroom morning announcements. In the final days of middle school, will he finally rise from these cruel and tangled years thanks to baseball, or will no one ever know the perfection that was his for one sweet day?

“A Hockey Name” (fiction)

Bruce Pratt, University of Maine, obdriveway@aol.com

Abstract not available.

Session 5: Sport and Cultural Narrative

Panel Chair: **Mark Noe**, Pennsylvania College of Technology

“Let’s Say It’s All Text”: Reading the Indigenous Athletic Body, Sport as Lexicon, Sport as Homefinding, and Rewriting Sports Narratives as Creative Practice

Hannah Anderson, University of Calgary, hannah.anderson@ucalgary.ca

Winner: Lyle Olsen Graduate Student Essay Contest

In her poem “Snake-Light,” Natalie Diaz (Mojave and Akimelo’odam) suggests that everything is “*book*: a form bound together,” including “the animal, the dune,/the wind in the cottonwood and the body” (Diaz 82). Diaz’s wide-ranging discussions of queer

desire, physicality, land, and sport highlight a vital component of Indigenous texts – that separation of land, body, sport, Indigeneity, physicality, and kinship is not a possibility. Thus, engaging in and writing about sport requires that I, as a female Métis athlete, writer, and literary scholar, relearn how to “read a text in anything” to write and speak my homefinding into being (Diaz 82). If Indigenous identity “by its very nature calls into question [systems] of settler colonialism, a system that [...] has removed me from my land [and] erased me from my history,” then drawing on both Métis ways of knowing and being and my athletic body as text is not only a way to reclaim my existence as a Métis woman, but an act of resistance (Simpson 7). In negotiating these understandings in relation to sports literature and my own research practice, I examine basketball as lexicon, Mojave identity, and physicality in Diaz’s *Postcolonial Love Poem*; Choctaw baseball as kinship building and resistance in Leanne Howe’s (Choctaw) *Miko Kings*; creative writing, athletics, and writing the body as homefinding and resistance in my research practice; and the subsequent intersections of embodied knowledge, story, and cultural survivance. In focusing on not only making space, but taking up space, I must also prioritize the ways in which my embodied experience and presence as Métis resists and rewrites traditional views of both scholarship, sport, and creative writing.

A Study of Sport Culture in the Middle East with Reference to Arabic Literature and Cinema
Hatim Allahabi, Independent Scholar, lahabihatim@gmail.com

This paper primarily questions the nature and status of ‘sport literature’ in Arabic and sheds light on the cultural background of sport in the Middle East. Following the descriptive approach, the study critically investigates Arabic movies that discourse sports such as boxing football/soccer. The latter is known as ‘the charming ball’ in Arabic and is the most popular sport in the Middle East. The said paper attempts to explore how sport is approached in a number of selected films in terms of social, cultural, and political aspects. The study also tends to figure out the impact of sports on the collective psyche of Arab fans. The paper studies some major themes such as capitalism in sports, sport fanaticism, manipulation and corruption, masculinity, leadership, the role of the audiences, the hero-fan relationship, the significance of sports, the suffering and challenges that sportspersons go through, etc. The major findings of the research paper pertain to reasons behind the paucity of sport literature in Arabic, limited kinds of sports, and masculinity as a part of the culture. The paper also touches upon the role of religion and culture in the stagnancy of women’s sports in the region.

Write and Write It Again: Using Reflective Autoethnography and Practice-Led Creative Writing to Creative New Narratives of Women in Sport
Kasey Symons, Deakin University, kasey.symons@deakin.edu.au

Works of fiction that centre depictions of Australian Rules football aimed towards an adult readership are exceptionally rare considering the sport's immense popularity in Australia. Representations of women are further limited in the sport literature, with only few examples of women authors also writing on the sport. As fiction is an important and productive way to explore complicated ideas, the few examples of women writing on Australian Rules football fiction we do have, offer many new ways to consider the sport's place in society, but are restricted in their representations of women from a fan perspective. Sports sociologist, Stacey Pope has shown that most researchers of sports fans 'seem to "add" women to their analysis, almost as a side-product to the main research focus, and perhaps as a response to feminist critiques or else the alleged rising numbers of female fans at matches' (Pope, 2012). Thus, it is important to 'add' women's voices and experiences back into sporting narratives and use the power of creative storytelling to unpack the gendered complexities and nuances women as fans of sport can experience. This chapter details a process of engaging autoethnography and practice-led creative writing to navigate positionality, lived experience, as well as challenge and reflect on the existing work on fandom to create sports fiction. This work extends on the existing literature to explore the use of creative writing to continue to add women back into the sports fiction discourse.

Session 6: Special Presentation

Introduction: **Joyce Duncan**

Presenters: **Dick Crepeau, Don Johnson, Jeff Segrave**

Lifetime Achievement Award to Susan Bandy

Session 7: Sport on Stage and Screen

Panel Chair: **Thomas Bauer**, University of Limoges

Soccer's Suffragettes: Staging UK Women's Football History

David Kilpatrick, Mercy University, DKilpatrick@mercy.edu

Soccer's Suffragettes: Staging UK Women's Football History

Three recent plays written for stages in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and England – *Rough Girls* by Tara Lynne O'Neill (Lyric Theatre, Belfast, 2021), *Sweet F.A.* by Tim Barrow, Paul Beeson,

and Bruce Strachan (Tynecastle Park, Edinburgh, 2021), and *Invincibles* by Amanda Whittington (Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch, 2023) – represent a trend towards sportcentric drama that features female athletes. The representation of soccer action on stage poses a unique challenge that these three plays negotiate in various ways that explore and exploit the kinship of sport and theatre. This trend on stage can be traced in mimetic relation to Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves* (2015), and further back to the screen with a fictional trio from the first decade of this century: *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), *She's the Man* (2006), and *Gracie* (2007). As such, they expand a subgenre of the literaturisation of association football, launched with the soccerati of 1990s Cool Britannia, as well as signal a shift in sport historiography (responding to rediscoveries of lost histories while demanding more research into forgotten players, clubs, and matches). Each play examines women's football clubs that emerged from factories during the Great War until the 1921 ban on women's football in Britain, with eyes to the surge of interest in women's football this decade. As such, these plays offer strategies for remembrance and revision as a response to sport's mimetic impulse: re-presenting play and players from the past (refusing their erasure with narrative recovery) to inspire and enrich play in the present.

“The Hope that Kills You”: *Ted Lasso*, Ethical Masculinity, and the New Sincerity
Matt Tettleton, University of Texas at Arlington, matthew.tettleton@uta.edu

This paper explores the soccer-based streaming television series *Ted Lasso* and its scholarly and popular reception. Particular attention has been paid to the show's critique of toxic masculinity and the way it presents an alternative formulation for an ethical masculinity for the twenty-first century founded on vulnerability and communication between male characters. This paper argues that the artistic mode in which *Ted Lasso* conveys meaning shares thematic and aesthetic concerns with the New Sincerity as described by David Foster Wallace in “E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction.” Through a reading of key moments in *Ted Lasso*, with particular focus on its allusions to sports films and 1990s romantic comedies, this paper shows that *Ted Lasso*'s most important work is the way it tied its vision for ethical masculinity to its aesthetic investment in sincerity.

Wes Anderson's Sporting Worlds: From Social Capital to Visual Pleasure
Maxence Leconte, Trinity University, mleconte@trinity.edu

Following the release of his latest feature-length movie, *Asteroid City* (2023), Wes Anderson continues to be hailed by many film pundits and the general public as a

universally beloved indie filmmaker and uniquely recognizable auteur. While many aspects of his cinematic style and subject matters have received critical and scholarly attention, I posit that a vital albeit elusive element visible in each of his films is yet to be studied: the presence of sports.

This presentation, inspired by the works of Baker (2003), Crosson (2013), Bauer and Leconte (2020) on the intersections of sport and cinema, seeks to question the added value of sporting disciplines in Anderson's filmography, in a style representative of the variegated meanings they can elicit when playing on the screen. In equal parts cultural, sociological, and philosophical, the subsequent examinations will unravel the multidimensional discourse shaped by cycling, exercising, tennis, diving, skiing, and other sports displayed in Anderson's large filmic repertoire, to help us understand why their presence contributes to the "deft balance [...] and reactionary sentimentality" (Dorey, 172) crafted by the filmmaker. While the following research attempts to capture the complete influence of sports in all of Anderson's cinematic works, the breadth and depth of their presence on the screen compels us to focus on a qualitative examination rather than a quantitative one; a detailed survey of his nine films finds that sporting references can be observed over one hundred and eighty times, across twenty different disciplines (figures 1 and 2). As such, a thematic analysis of their combined function in Anderson's films appears most appropriate and logical for the sake of a fifteen-minute presentation. Consequently, I intend to focus on the following.

My talk will begin by discussing the connections between sports and cultural capital, and how their relationship offers an entry point into the use of disciplines such as cycling, swimming, and golfing in Anderson's films, which not only help the viewer situate the unique personality of the characters on the screen, but also understand the façade many of them project as they attempt to create a distinct personality, or fit in a different social milieu. Essential components of any sporting narrative, lusory themes of performance and failure find a natural place in Anderson's plots as well, which will be studied thanks to the practice of martial arts, exercising, and tennis, all of which actively participate in the expression of strength, vulnerability, and forgiveness part of the filmmaker's universe. Finally, I will examine the aesthetic dimension of athletic activities to explain Anderson's powerful attraction to sporting realms; the visual beauty and symbolism communicated by skiing, yoga or more simply athletic wear and trophies can be read as a heuristic device capable of conveying tangible and metaphorical messages enhancing the cinematic vision and values of the filmmaker.

DAY THREE: Friday, June 21, 2024

Session 8: Critical Zoom (Remote Presentations)

Panel Chair and Technical Facilitator: **Cory Willard**, Mount Royal University

The Catcher in New York: Baseball and Post-9/11 America in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*

Mizuki Nakamura, Osaka University, mizuki961114@gmail.com

This presentation takes up Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, which meticulously depicts the complex mental condition of those living in post-9/11 New York, to explore the roles of baseball in the post-9/11 American literary work. It pays special attention to two scenes where the protagonist Keith plays catch with his son Justin.

In the novel, Justin is likened to a pitching machine that keeps throwing a ball at peak velocity. As Keith is obsessed with gambling in his attempt to recover from the trauma of 9/11, Justin also reenacts the crashing scene with another flying object, a baseball. As this may suggest, their awkward game of catch reflects their trauma caused by the act of terrorism.

On the other hand, recovery from trauma does not follow a straight path and repetition is rather an essential element. Moreover, according to a perspective in positive psychology, it is necessary to provide the traumatized with an event that evokes positive emotions. Given these insights, their game of catch functions as a good father-and-son memory, which may contribute to their recovery from trauma.

Finally, by applying baseball-related associations to the novel, such as its homecoming narrative and the practice of retaining sacrifices in the official records, it becomes clear that the remembrance of 9/11 can be seen as "home" to which Americans should return in contemplating twenty-first-century American history, and that such baseball references suggest the potential of America's renewal out of the sacrifice of that tragedy.

Tennis as Narrative, Narrative as Tennis: The Narratology of John McPhee's *Levels of the Game* (1969)

Joseph Hunter, University of Manchester, joseph.hunter-4@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Ashe's signature— "Arthur R. Ashe, Jr." —is about halfway between bold and timid, and well within the sub-Hancock zone. Graebner's signature, full of sweep and dash, is pi Hancock squared. The "G" is two and a quarter inches high. He waits, a foot behind the baseline, for Ashe's serve. It is wide. And now Graebner knows that Ashe's second serve

with almost certainly be a twist to the backhand. If Graebner wins this point, he will damage Ashe's morale and set himself up to break through in the game...

– John McPhee, *Levels of the Game* (1969), pp.119-20

By making a connection between the way each player writes their signature and their service action, John McPhee offers us a key to understanding both the thesis of his book and the book's narrative technique. The book offers a detailed description of a game of tennis between Arthur Ashe and Clark Graebner at the 1968 US Open, with frequent diversions and backgrounding to show that each player's tennis style, like their signature, stems from their particular individual make-up. But likewise, the non-linear narrative of the book is in part an enacting in the text of the layered, complex way each of the players (and the informed crowd watching) experiences the game as it happens: as *narrative*, with all the complexity and nuance that the term implies.

That a game of tennis is a form of narrative, seems, on the one hand, like a given: there are key protagonists, a plot (with a beginning, middle, and end), and 'readers' in the form of the crowd. McPhee's book, however, deploys narratological technique – namely analepsis and variations in story speed – to deepen our understanding of the layered nature of this 'narrative'. By drawing on the narratological frameworks of critics such as Gerard Genette and Mieke Bal this paper will unpack how McPhee presents tennis as a narrative, and structures his narrative like tennis.

Coming of Age with Poison, Magic, and Violence on the High School Football Team: A Queer Ecofeminist Reading of Genevieve Hudson's *Boys of Alabama*

Aurora Blanchard, University of Missouri- St. Louis, abb79@umsl.edu

Genevieve Hudson's debut novel *Boys of Alabama* explores Southern Gothic themes such as death, nature, and masculinity through the lens of Max, a German teenager who moves to Alabama and becomes the running back for the high school football team. The boys on the football team blur into one mass, moving as a faceless unit. As they homogenize, the charisma of a Fundamentalist Christian leader in the community influences them to drink poison, commit acts of violence, and follow God. Max befriends the town's nonbinary witch named Pan and they conspire to bring the animals back to life that the boys on the football team have slaughtered in displays of masculinity. Through the framework of both queer theory and ecofeminist theory, the *Boys of Alabama* asks readers to confront the construction of Southern football in the face of complicated intersecting identities such as gender, sexuality, religion, and nationality. This research explores how American values are subverted (queered) and/or upheld by existing power structures in Hudson's literary construction of a high school football team.

“When the ball comes, it comes as a mark of a question”: The poetry and philosophy of Torben Ulrich (1928-2023)

Preben Philipson, Espergærde Gymnasium, prephi65@gmail.com

After his tennis and music career in Denmark, he went on to live fortyfive years in California. As a tennis player as well as a sports debater Torben Ulrich was unconventional not to say provocative. Ulrich was a curious, poetic sportsman and sports debater. And Buddhist. And philosopher. He saw rather his opponents as with-ponents - He didn't accept the binary logic, seeing win and lose as contradictions. The match was not a fight but an ongoing dialogue with the ball and each other.

The key question for Ulrich was: “When the ball comes, the *moment* the ball comes towards *you*.....”. The ball came towards Ulrich, as tennis champion in Denmark, at Wimbledon and during Davis Cup matches. Even as a master he still toured the world. From writing columns on jazz (*Jazzmosphere*) he turned to philosophy and poetry. He named his poetry *song lines*, where he explored the situation: *When the ball comes, it comes as*..... He saw himself as a ballplayer, therefore he did not write when the *tennis ball* comes. Just *the ball*.

From a concrete ball, *the ball* moves on to be a metaphor. “*When the ball of somethingness comes, it*...”. Through his poetry Ulrich explores and develops the philosophy of tennis and other ball games. But also opens our eyes to ballgamelike situations in life.

Session 9: Special Presentation

Introduction: Bruce Pratt, University of Maine

DAY FOUR: Saturday, June 22, 2024

Session 10: Courts with Nets

Panel Chair: **Kasey Symons**, Deakin University

“There is No Sweeter Sport in the World”: Tennis in the Life and Works of Vladimir Nabokov
Jeffrey Segrave, Skidmore College, jsegrave@skidmore.edu

On “The Heresy of Zone Defense”: Dave Hickey on the Aesthetics of Sport

Mark Baumgartner, East Tennessee State University, baumgartnerm@etsu.edu

In 2021 America lost one of its foremost thinkers on art and democracy, Dave Hickey. Though mostly known for his art criticism, Hickey often wrote about a wide variety of subjects, including Chet Baker, Hank Williams, Lester Bangs, Susan Sontag, Flaubert's "A Simple Heart," the Vegas Strip, Nevada gubernatorial politics, among many others. He is the author of several books of criticism, including *The Invisible Dragon: Essays on Beauty, Pirates and Farmers: Essays on Taste*, and *Air Guitar: Essays on Art and Democracy*, for which he received a MacArthur Genius Fellowship. The proposed conference presentation will focus on Hickey's occasional contributions to sports writing, including his interest in surfing, mixed martial arts, and basketball. Of particular interest is his now-classic essay, "The Heresy of Zone Defense," which examines the history of rule changes in organized basketball. In "Heresy," Hickey traces the sport from its inception in 1891 through Game 5 of the 1980 NBA finals, and Julius Erving's incredible behind the backboard layup over the top of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. His essay juxtaposes formal innovations in the game with ideas as far-ranging as the aesthetics of a Jackson Pollack painting, post-industrial commerce, and the perils of university administration. My aim is to unite some ideas found across his writing on sport, art and democracy, and reflect on what they might mean to an audience in contemporary America.

The Hyper-Professional Turn: The Lived Experience of the Athlete in Contemporary American Fiction

Tommaso Villa, University of Lincoln (UK), tvilla@lincoln.ac.uk

In this paper, I will demonstrate that contemporary American literary fiction about sports signals a thematic shift towards the body and the lived experience of the athlete. Owing to the influence of phenomenologists including Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hubert Dreyfus, the novels of authors such as Tracy O'Neill, Katherine Hill, Chad Harbach, and Emily Nemens portray the athlete as the product of the combination between an innate autotelic disposition and years of incessant training. Such portrayal is personified by a specific type of protagonist I have named the 'Hyper-Professional Sports Hero'. This is in contrast with past depictions of athletes in the genre. In previous texts, in fact, the athlete's experience tended to subside to different themes such as the dichotomy between play and professionalisation, transcendence, nostalgia, and metafiction. As I will indicate, this shift began with the work of Richard Ford in *The Sportswriter* (1986) but found a more comprehensive expression in David Foster Wallace's fiction and nonfiction, most notably in the novel *Infinite Jest* (1996) and in the posthumous essay collection *String Theory* (2016). Indeed, while Ford uses the athlete merely as a juxtaposition for his

protagonist's middle-class stasis, Wallace deploys his own experience as an amateur tennis player to highlight the existential outcomes of repetitive training for his subjects and characters. Finally, I will show that Hyper-Professional Sports Heroes mark a radical departure from previous fiction in their configuration as embodiments of neoliberal values, identifying them as specifically contemporary figures.

Session 11: Sport, Literature, and Loss

Panel Chair: **Hannah Anderson**, University of Calgary

Cast into the Heart of the Mud: Loss, Friendship, and Carp in Kate Small's Lateral Lines

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Kate Small's "Lateral Lines" opens with the unnamed, 31-year-old narrator having suffered the unexpected death of her 40-year-old husband Joe in a climbing accident on Mt. Shasta. To process the grief and connect with the memory of her dead husband, the narrator—along with two other women, Hiroko and Noleen—attend a grief group, enroll in casting and tying lessons, and take up fly fishing a golf course pond at night for carp. Alongside the narrator's learning to fly fish to process grief, one of the main subplots of the story is the way carp function as a symbol for the strength to endure amidst the trauma of a damaged world. Each of the women in the story are processing their own traumas while simultaneously coming together and forging a friendship centered around healing and the pursuit of a local "trash fish." Within the story, we see trauma take many forms—both emotional and ecological.

This presentation shall explore the role of fly fishing as a means of healing from trauma as well as the symbolic power of carp—alongside my own experiences learning to love this trash fish and the polluted urban waterways they often occupy. Ultimately, I conclude that to love someone or something also courts the pain of losing them and that to love this planet we live on and the others we share it with requires the irony of at once loving and embracing the stewardship of wild and scenic rivers while at the same time loving the carp and concrete ditches that we share urban and altered spaces with.

It Is about the Bike

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When mentioning "Horrid" Lance Armstrong, English travel writer and bicyclist Tim Moore, believes as do I, he got it wrong—it is about the bike. Before "winning" seven consecutive Tour de France races, 1999-2005, Armstrong beat testicular cancer which had spread to his abdomen, lungs and brain. He repeatedly denied using performance

enhancing drugs and tests found no evidence. Ultimately technology caught him, he confessed and lost his yellow jerseys. Had it not been for his elite status as a bicycle racer I doubt there would have been a book at all. Too often the bicycle is dismissed as nothing more than a machine carrying the individual to complete challenging goals. This paper will focus on the activity of one bicycle traveler, Daryl Farmer, whose memoir, *Crossing the Divide*, examines two long distance bicycle journeys separated by twenty years. First he went as a two-time college dropout, and then then returned to reflect on his travels. When during that second ride someone stole his bicycle, he realized its importance and his connection to it in a more intimate, personal fashion. He understood in a new way the reality that the bicycle was more than a collection of tubes, wires, gears and wheels, that he and it were equal participants. Aristotle referred to the whole being greater than the sum of the parts, an idea expanded on by a medieval philosopher, Indigenous peoples, a twentieth century polymath and a contemporary political theorist. Without their acknowledging the bicycle, it is an actant in journeying.

Soccer and Violence: Jean-Pierre Mocky's *The Death Penalty* (1984)

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Jean-Pierre Mocky's *The Death Penalty* (1984) is an interesting example of French sports fiction, belonging to a long tradition of fictional discourse on criminality that shares stereotypes, conventions of representation and narrative or visual structures. It takes us back into French post-Giscardian society, where people lived under the threat of structural unemployment and in fear of a precarious personal and family life, all of which led to individuals' dissatisfaction, anxiety, and disappointment. Tinged as it was with economic and political crisis, this context allows us to better understand how exacerbated militancy developed among the supporters of a sport as popular as football. As indicated by Séan Crosson, "to understand the functional role of sports films, it is first necessary to examine the role of sport itself in society". That said, alongside the role of sport as a phenomenon of identity and outlet for violence, lay the seeds of a revolution in which the footballing pleb turned on "its King". The *Death Penalty* tells the banal and sordid story of a referee (Maurice Bruno, played by Eddy Mitchell) who was chased by a group of supporters, led by Rico (played by Michel Serrault) and intoxicated with frustration and rage after he awarded a penalty to the other team. Waylaid outside the locker room, stalked in a supermarket, and attacked at his home, the referee, accompanied by his friend Martine Vannier (played by Carole Laure), had no alternative but to go through this nightmarish odyssey to the end. Based on the employment of a sports related news item, the aim of this article was to analyze the political, cultural, and social meaning of supporter violence towards football referees during the 1980s. Behind the irony and sometimes humor of this "social caricature" can be seen the reflection of a modern society in which sport played (or not) a key role in collective pacification.

