

Title:

Styles of the World: UIUC Baseball 1998-2008

About the Author:

Growing up, my life has been consumed by sports, whether it was baseball, basketball, skateboarding, or any other activity in between. Sports having this role in my life I believe has given me important characteristics like teamwork and perseverance. Baseball has been the sport that my life has basically revolved around for the past 12 years. It's one of the few sports that really is truly a "team game." Taking hitting and pitching lessons for most of those years has given me a wide variety of knowledge about the game, the culture, and the players who play it. I think that learning about the different variations of techniques that are used throughout the world would be very interesting. I'd like to see how players here in America integrate styles from baseball powerhouses across the globe, such as Japan, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic into their own playing.

Keywords:

Baseball, culture, sports, style,

Abstract:

I've reached a point in my life where I finally realized that my pitching career has most likely come to an end. However, I want to reflect on the past. I want to dig deeper into my life in the sport than just looking at the wins and losses. I want to see really how much culture affects the sport. This project is not only going to be an ethnography of the university's baseball team, but it will also be a self reflection piece on how my life was 100 percent baseball. By looking at the UIUC baseball team, past and current, I will analyze playing styles influenced by different cultures, athletes, coaches, and friends. I will do this via research and an attempt at an interview of players.

Initial Exercises:

Through the course so far, I've learned about different cultures and how sport affects their life and culture in general. The most interesting one in my opinion has been the Balinese cockfights. This ethnography written by Clifford Geertz is extremely in depth and really gets to the root of this type of gambling. Much of the way gambling is done is similar to the type of gambling you would see here in America, except much less organized. Alliances are formed according to hometown or relationship and bets are made accordingly. The way that the Balinese take care of their "fighter" would appear to be much like that of the care you would give to your own child.

This sport appears to be one of the main staples in the Balinese culture. Despite the illegality of this event, the people will still carry on with fighting, even with attempted police suppression of it. Geertz shows us how common it is for the fights to be broken up by police. He runs with the natives and explains how it appears that everyone has a plan and a place to run to. It really is astonishing how a game that is extremely illegal has such mystique that it seems it will never cease

to exist as a part of this culture.

For my personal ethnography, I know I want to involve baseball. I want to take a look at it from a different perspective other than being in the actual game. I'd like to see how different cultures affect the technique and play of players here, whether it's from seeing them play on television or something a coach has taught them. Foreign players definitely do have a distinct style of play depending on their country of origin. But it seems that all of these different ways are effective because they made it to the major leagues.

I know from my own experience that observing someone on T.V. can directly affect your style of play. If you see a player and you like how they pitch, hit, etc., you are prone to trying it next time you are playing baseball. Sometimes you like what they do and you integrate it into your own style. Sometimes you don't, and you just move on. I'm curious to see exactly how many players I meet and know a player that they try to model themselves after, whether the player is from here or on the other side of the globe. My guess would be that most kids that pay attention to baseball on T.V. will say that they like the style of a certain player and have incorporated at least something into their own play.

Susan Brownell is a world renowned anthropologist who specializes in Chinese sports. She received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1990. Her work is primarily done in China, where she covered the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. Her current profession is teaching as a professor of anthropology at UM-St. Louis. Previously she had taught at Middlebury College, the University of Washington, and Yale University. She was a track star here in the United States, as well as in Beijing when she went overseas to study Chinese language. She covered many things as an inside member of the Chinese culture, as well as an outsider making observations. One of the most important things she had noticed was how politics and social class were involved in sport. Dr. Brownell is also the author of the book, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* and has worked on many other pieces as well.

Ian Borden was an anthropologist looking strictly from the outside, compared to Susan Brownell who researched from the outside as well as the inside. Borden had studied the culture of skateboarding and its relationship with the world around. The sport has traditionally in the past been viewed as one that is looked down upon for the menace it causes to the public. The architecture of cities and towns can be incorporated into the world of skateboarding. When skate parks began to emerge, skateboarders were able to choose the exact kind of structures they would like to use when they skateboarded. Not only did it please the skateboarders, but it also pleased many citizens of the cities who would be less disturbed by the people skateboarding on public property.

Question:

The main idea surrounding my project is how different cultures can all take the same sport and change it to make it their own, not only in the sense of technical aspects, but also in the sense of the unique aspects of each specific culture. Every culture brings their own flare into the sport, both players and fans.

Plan:

My research plan is to interview as many current and former baseball players and see if they have an opinion about different cultures in baseball. I want them to say what they think how certain cultures play and if it has influenced their style at all. I know from my prior experience as a baseball player that nearly all teams have at least one player who is influenced by a culture of some sort. I've played against teams from all over the world, including Japan, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, so I have background knowledge on their behaviors and habits.

Data:

My past experience of playing baseball has exposed me to the many types of cultures that play the sport and how their culture is influenced by the game. One article I found through the EBSCO Host, "The Pitch of an Island," explains the influence of baseball in the Dominican Republic. Children start playing at an extremely young age and are supported by friends and family. They are scouted by professional teams when they are still young boys. This is one article that could be used as a prime resource as to baseball in cultures. A second article was "Ambassadors in Pinstripes: The Spalding World Baseball Tour and the Birth of the American Empire." This article shows how the baseball we know has influenced other cultures. Both articles I feel are a great start for me for a further understanding of how one game can be so widely different and influential to different people.

Discuss:

See paper.

EUI Links:

<https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1873>

This is a past ethnography done by a student entitled "The Rise of Baseball in Urbana-Champaign." It is a very good piece which describes the development of baseball here at the U of I since the 1800's. He also references how widely baseball has been expanded culturally.

Reflect:

To be completely honest, I never really expected to get out of this project as I did. I went into this thinking that it was just another project I had to complete to get through the course. This was one of the more interesting assignments I've ever done. Going out and researching the way I did, I learned more than I ever would have thought. Getting people's perspectives on one thing really opened my eyes. I believe that there is no better way to understand a topic that affects people, than actually discussing it with the people themselves. Sharing experiences can be a very helpful tool when researching. I believe that working online would have been much for useful if I had a different topic. But for my subject, it was not discussed online in depth. Therefore, talking to the baseball players was my only source of information. It turned out to be a very informative method. I hope students who are interested in baseball, and even other sports can continue this research into

a world I never knew existed.

Recommendations:

My research, in my opinion, cannot give recommendations to the university. However, I personally can give recommendations to students. Open your eyes. There's a whole new world out there you've never experienced. Explore. Do things you've never done before. I kept my view of baseball so straight and narrow, I missed a part of the sport that interested me. I believe that this assignment helped me broaden my view of the world, and of life in general. I hope that it opens new doors of experience for myself and I hope people can do the same.