



Communication Matters: The NCA Podcast | **TRANSCRIPT**
Episode 24: Sports Communication

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Participants:

Trevor Parry-Giles
Jason Edward Black
Daniel A. Grano
Abraham Khan

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RECORDING BEGINS

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Welcome to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. I'm Trevor Parry-Giles, the executive director of the National Communication Association. The National Communication Association is the preeminent scholarly association devoted to the study and teaching of communication. Founded in 1914, NCA is a thriving group of thousands from across the nation and around the world who are committed to a collective mission to advance communication as an academic discipline. In keeping with NCA's mission to advance the discipline of communication, NCA has developed this podcast series to expand the reach of our member scholars' work and perspectives.

Introduction:

This is *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Hi, listeners and welcome again to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. If you're a sports fan, you know that this year has been radically different because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pandemic has compounded other health concerns that were already present in sports particularly in football. At the same time, there have been these intense discussions around political activism in support of the Black Lives Matter movement by athletes, the representation of teams via inappropriate mascots and even the Washington Football Team's recent decision to change its name. So, today's episode of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast* will tackle some of these questions and many more related to sports communication with our guests Professors Jason Edward Black, Daniel A. Grano and Abraham Khan. First, let me tell you a little bit more about today's guests. Jason Edward Black is professor and chair of communication studies at the University of North Carolina-Charlotte. Professor Black researches in the areas of rhetorical studies and social change with an emphasis on indigenous resistance and LGBTQIA activism. Black is the author of *Mascot Nation: The Controversy Over Native American*



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Representations in Sports and American Indians and the Rhetoric of Removal and Allotment. Hi, Jason. Good to see you again and thanks for joining us.

Jason Edward Black:

Great to see you too. Thanks for having me on.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Daniel A. Grano is a professor in the department of communication studies also at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Professor Grano researches the intersection between sports and politics with an emphasis on health, the body, race, religion and public memory. Grano is the author of *The Eternal Present of Sport: Rethinking Sport and Religion* and is the co-editor of the book *Sport, Rhetoric and Political Struggle* with Michael Butterworth. Hi, Dan. Great to have you on *Communication Matters* today.

Daniel A. Grano:

Thanks so much for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Abraham Khan is an assistant professor of African-American studies and communication arts and sciences at the Penn State University. Professor Khan researches in the areas of civic engagement and African-American politics and social life with an emphasis on black athletes, the history of sports in the United States and sport as an agent of social change. Khan is the author of *Curt Flood in the Media: Baseball, Race and the Demise of the Activist Athlete*. Hi, Abe. Welcome to *Communication Matters*.

Abraham Khan:

Hi there. Thank you very much for having me.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Okay. So, let's begin with a sports related topic that is familiar to a lot of our listeners and many people out there in the broader general public, the health risks associated with playing football including the chronic brain damage that is associated with repeated concussions. Now, Dan, you've written about NFL's brain bank. Could you tell listeners a little bit more about what the brain bank is and how players have communicated their concerns about the toll of football on their health?

Daniel A. Grano:

Absolutely. So, the brain bank that has produced the most public research and the one that's most familiar to a lot of listeners is the repository affiliated with Boston University, School of Medicine.



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It's the largest tissue repository in the world dedicated to research on chronic traumatic encephalopathy. And the brain bank at Boston University collects samples from military personnel and former athletes from various sports. But by far the most famous brains in the collection belonged to former NFL players. And the bank has been producing research for several years that has cut against the NFL's denialism of football's harms to its players and the NFL's production of pseudoscience. That's the public face of the CTE crisis is really the Boston University repository. It's not the only body doing research out there but it's been the most influential. As far as player responses, they've really varied. We've seen earlier retirements from very successful players over concerns for long-term health. We've seen an increase in brain sample donations from living players' pledges to donate when they're deceased. And they have expressed obligation over the future health of their peers and the future viability of the game.

At the same time, there's been what I think is a disturbing shift in what Zack Furness calls the informed soldier trope. And this is the idea that players come into football understanding the risks and they enter into a kind of informed consent decree with the NFL and its fan base. And because CTE testing advances ideas about taking ownership over one's health, being more informed than ever and more capable than ever over making long-term health decisions, there's a lot of sort of neoliberal discourse around informed consent that I'm concerned is going to justify continued consumption of football even as we learn more about the health risks. And this is especially a problem given the fact that the NFL's labor force is 70% African-American and increasing in racial disparity as white participation declines.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

How does that filter down to like colleges and universities? I mean there's a lot of talk about the neoliberal university and I'm curious what your thinking is about how universities have communicated about athletics and sports in general around the whole COVID pandemic. I'm curious about your sense of college and universities' communications surrounding sports and athletics in this time of pandemic and health danger.

Daniel A. Grano:

So, over the summer, there was an open question about whether there would be fall sports and there was the expected balance of priorities between player safety and advancing the usual business of college athletic programs. Well, a lot of that surrounded football because especially for Division 1 schools, football is the financial lifeblood of the entire operation. And so, there was an interesting open discussion over whether the revenue generation for football had become so necessary that you would have to put the health of uncompensated college athletes at risk in order to keep athletic programs alive. The openness of that discussion at a time when there's been increased activism especially—and Abe's work speaks brilliantly to this—at the college level around race and labor injustices in college football, college basketball and other revenue



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generating college sports is really interesting. The problematic thing that occurred there is that while several players demanded that if they were going to come back, they needed greater health protections. They also started what was referred to in sports media as a quote unquote movement but we want to play a social media campaign. And the uptake of that phrase for sports media, for President Trump and for anybody who was interested in throwing these players into a high-risk situation was well, the players want to play and their parents want them to play. So, we may have some hesitations about the morality of all this but let's listen to the players and go ahead with this thing.

Abraham Khan:

One of the things that's happened especially over the last five years really since the Missouri football team went on strike is that athletes, college athletes, college football players have begun to recognize the amount of leverage that they hold relative to their institutions. And I think that one of the things that Dan has identified with the we want to play quote movement unquote is the fact that leverage cuts both ways. I mean in many ways, I think black athletes can leverage their interests against what a university might want or the way that a university is behaving. But it's also true that athletes who have a decent shot, who believe they have a decent shot of playing in the pros can ally with the neoliberal university in ways that in many ways cuts against what we might want to call the rank and file of college athletes.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

That's interesting. And a COVID 19 pandemic kind of brings all that to the fore, right? All that activism gets stirred up which is good. I mean it kind of simmers there the whole time but it's fascinating that it rears up I guess during a pandemic. That's a great segue to the whole issue of political activism by athletes. And Abe, you've researched this I know from both a historical and a contemporary perspective. What does the history of black or African-American or people of color, athlete of color activism teach us? What can we learn from like Curt Flood or others being more activists in the past?

Abraham Khan:

Well, Curt Flood's an interesting case and it's usually around the early fall every year that we start to have the debate over whether or not Curt Flood ought to be in the Hall of Fame. And Curt Flood, of course, is not in the Hall of Fame and there are all sorts of folks who've been arguing that he ought to be for years. And I don't really have much of a stake in that debate but I will say that Curt Flood's case is instructive I think in a variety of ways. But for me what became most interesting about Curt Flood's case was the way that Curt Flood revealed some of the divisions that existed inside black political culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s. And then we can see the way that those divisions sort of got run through the economic modernization of sport in the 1980s and 1990s and then the way that those divisions can kind of re-emerge as we see the



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resurgence of athlete activism. So, I mean I don't want to go too deep on telling the Curt Flood story. But Curt Flood sued for his free agency at a time where free agency didn't really exist. I mean it existed in some fashion in some corners of professional sports. But in 1970 essentially, especially in baseball, athletes had essentially no say over where they would spend their careers. They had no ability to negotiate for their contracts.

And so, when Curt Flood sued to become a free agent, really the most interesting thing that he did was that he went on national television with Howard Cosell. Howard Cosell said, Curt, you're a man who makes \$90,000 a year which isn't exactly slave wages. What's your retort to that? And his answer was a well-paid slave is nonetheless a slave. And now here's Curt Flood, a black man who goes on national television and calls baseball a slave holding institution. And so, we can see the way that this is explosive or provocative in the context of thinking of baseball as the national pastime. But baseball also gave us Jackie Robinson, right? So, baseball was in many ways regarded as the kind of vanguard of progressive racial action in the late 1960s and early 1970s. So, when Flood says, yeah, baseball's slavery, he really kind of activated different forces inside black political culture.

And so, that project began actually with this sort of hypothesis where I went looking for the racial story in Flood's case. And so, I think I'd find the racial story inside the black press, inside black newspapers, newspapers which still are circulating today like *The Baltimore Afro-American* and *The Chicago Defender* and *The New York Amsterdam News*. And what I was sort of surprised by when I did the research on this is that particularly in *The Baltimore Afro-American*, they had a sports writer there named Sam Lacy who at the time was pretty much the most well-known, kind of the old guard black sports writer, is that they advocated for Flood but they advocated for Flood in ways that in many ways sort of mimicked the colorblind accents that were being used by *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News*. So *The New York Times* and *The Sporting News* were also advocating for Flood. They were like it doesn't have anything to do with race, right? This is about fairness and the American way and everything else.

Then I went backwards and I started looking at the way that black newspapers covered Jackie Robinson and really what happened in 1970 is that the colorblind frames that they were using to promote desegregation in baseball just got sort of grafted onto Flood's case. But there was a radical story that was being told in the late 1960s that black newspapers weren't telling and that story was being told in radical media, it was being told by people like Harry Edwards. It was being told on the pages of *The Black Scholar* that made this sort of plantation argument, that sort of tried to frame sports through the plantation dynamic where essentially you had black athletes on college campuses, black athletes in the pros who were being used to generate wealth for white owners and white university administrators and everything else. And so, Flood's case basically



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disappeared by 1975 when free agency got taken up in baseball. But when free agency got taken up in baseball, that started the economic modernization of sports.

So, I love this number and if I'm getting too deep in the weeds, please stop me. But in 1945, the highest paid player in baseball was Joe DiMaggio. He made \$100,000 a year. In 1970, which is 25 years later, when Curt Flood sued for free agency, the highest paid player in baseball was Willie Mays who made \$145,000 a year. So, that's a 45% increase over 25 years. Fast forward 25 years later, the highest paid player in baseball is Cecil Fielder making \$9.2 million. And so, you have this massive economic sort of revolution in sports that black athletes had become instrumental to 25 years later. And so, what interested me was the way that Curt Flood fit into the story of the demise of athlete activism which was purported, right, if we listen to people like Bill Rhoden. The decline of athlete activism was made possible by all of this new wealth and all the economic opportunities that were presented to black athletes. So, by the time you get to LeBron James and The Miami Heat circulating that photograph of themselves wearing hoodies in 2012, we've got now a new story and a way to kind of reckon with the new story. But it doesn't mean that the economic forces have gone away. And so, we are sort of in this moment where the forces of athletic activism are sort of contending with corporate sponsorship, advertisers, the big money behind social media, league offices trying to get involved in what activist athletes are trying to do and the way that sort of money in sports is diluting I think the power of athletic activism.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

But this year, I don't know what you all think, but it seems to me it's been sort of a banner year for athletic activism in a way, the athletes that you hear about, Colin Kaepernick, LeBron as you point out, these WMBA stars who really just turn their back on the economic factors and say I'm going to go out there and do this work to promote BLM. I don't know. Is there a resurgence I guess?

Abraham Khan:

Well, there's certainly is a resurgence. But there are a couple of distinctions that I think are important to keep in mind. One is that when we think about sort of the athlete politics interface, right? That it's important to distinguish between what I could call a kind of participatory model and protest model. So, Jackie Robinson fully embraced the participatory model of political action with athletes. I mean he was a Nixon supporter and stumped for Nelson Rockefeller in 1966. And certainly, LeBron James wrote an op-ed endorsing Hillary Clinton for president in 2016. But then there's a protest model that seeks to sort of create remedial action from the outside. And Kaepernick was once part of that certainly when he took a knee in 2016 but then two years later, we found out that he had a big contract with Nike. And so, the other distinction that I think is important to make is that the platform, the notion of athletes now having a platform is a thing but what can be said on the platform is not exactly the same for all athletes. So, certainly, social media



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provides athletes with a so-called platform for civic engagement but once you enter into certain economic relationships, the scope of what can be said on the platform isn't.

So, Kaepernick first took a knee in 2016 and it sort of created this articulation to Black Lives Matter, there was a moment of opportunity for thinking about state violence through the lens of poverty and the way that maybe Black Lives Matter was connecting up with the Living Wage Campaign. But once Colin Kaepernick is now in a relationship with Nike, Colin Kaepernick now can say things about state violence, can say things about police violence, say things about the police shooting black people. But now that is constrained by the fact that he can't really deliver anti-capitalist messages. He can't deliver anti-corporate messages, right? Nike by definition cannot deliver anti-corporate messages. We need to sort of think of the full range of athlete activism as being I think determined by certain constraints and the way that those constraints are established by corporate partnerships and league office messaging, things like that.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, and it's part of the backlash that activist athletes face, right? So, you have a Laura Ingraham, I think it was her, telling LeBron just to shut up and dribble and the implied notion there is that you're making a lot of money to do this thing and that shouldn't give you any rights to do these other things.

Abraham Khan:

And that's where you get back to the plantation dynamic. I actually think that Dan can speak to this a little bit. I know that he and I have done some work on what this sort of backlash to political activism among athletes, in particular what the rise of the so-called conservative sports media now looks like. But basically, it seems to me that there is a long history. I mean Curt Flood was demonized and vilified for the same reason, right? John Carlos and Tommy Smith, we see them as heroes now. They were the two black sprinters who raised their fists at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. They were kicked out Olympic Village and Brent Musburger called them black-skinned storm troopers. So, this backlash is persistent. But what's interesting about it now is that there is a call for sports to be apolitical. But what that means is that we have to see the national anthem and the flyovers and sort of the militarism and nationalism that people like Mike Butterworth have been writing about now for 15 or 20 years. That's all apolitical, right? We're supposed to see that as not political. It's only when there is a challenge to the prevailing racial or social order that sports gets coded as apolitical.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, and I've also noted too that there's an increasing especially across the pond, increasing LGBTQIA activism with athletes in sports like soccer and rugby and the like coming out. And that



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becomes a political statement that is also bound up into all of this. And it's pretty interesting to see how all that plays out and how that activism proceeds.

Jason Edward Black:

We've sort of gone past the point that I was going to make. But Abe was referring to the marking of certain statements or gestures or actions as political and they usually do track with race and progressive politics. Nobody told Curt Schilling to shut up and pitch and Curt Schilling was active in right-wing politics for most of his career. So, while he was controversial, nobody ever tried to completely shut him down. And so, the right to even speak politically in those moments when it is an explicit political act, it's not background the way that the national anthem has been naturalized, even there, we have a way to police that kind of speech very differently along racial lines.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah. Well, and again living in the Washington DC area as I do, another domain of all of this activism has to do with the ways in which the plantation, as Abe talked about it, is structured around racist and traditionally problematic mascots. I know that Jason, you've written a lot about the Native American representations in sports. Yeah, Washington's football team did what they should have done probably 20 years ago, 30 years ago or I don't know, maybe when they were founded. But do you think there's anything meaningful in this kind of change? And are we stuck? I mean what's the state of play when it comes to sports communication and indigenous communities and mascotting and all of that?

Jason Edward Black:

I think the case of Washington's franchise is really complicated as it's been for, as you mentioned, the past 50 years or so. We have to remember that calls to change that particular mascot name and its imagery began in 1968. So, people tend to think of this as maybe a '90, '91 when Washington had some success in the Super Bowl or in the playoffs. But no, this dates back to generationally, right? It demonstrates that there's some progress here with an asterisk I would say. So, clearly we're seeing perhaps a recognition that decoloniality is alive and well when it comes to attempting to change names, logos and rituals associated with indigenous mascots. There's a sense that indigenous voices linked up with other anti-racist campaigns. It's probably no surprise that the summer of 2020 was the summer of the retirement of the Washington franchise's mascot, the CFL Edmonton team's mascot, a number of universities in Canada and of course, in the United States, high school teams and local teams have this past summer retire their mascots.

So, we're seeing indigenous lifeways, epistemology is connected with that. So, there's some success there. We're also seeing that perhaps the post-Dakota access pipeline protests, maybe the midst of the Idle No More movement, increased attention to the missing and murdered



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indigenous women, girls and trans folks campaigns are giving us some bite when it comes to recognition of indigenous power and indigenous empowerment. The asterisk here is that again, since 1968, there have been calls to change this mascot. It happens in 2020. It's sort of almost permitted because we needed another kind of anti-racist moment or racial reckoning to have native voices heard, to have anti-mascot voices actually heard. We've been to the Supreme Court five times in the past 25 years including in 2013 and 2014, the Amanda Black Horse case, we had the U.S. Trade and Patent Office take away what, six or seven of Dan Snyder's trademarks and symbols, those kinds of things. But even that didn't get us to the point of retiring these mascot names and symbols in Washington, right?

It took BLM. It took sort of the post-George Floyd moment. But at the same time that George Floyd is murdered in America, the what's the Wet'suwet'en case up in Canada where people are getting their heads bashed in for protesting fracking and oil rights, water rights is happening. The Mohawk Nation in the American northeast and in the Canadian east, same type of thing is happening. Murdered and missing indigenous women, girls and trans people, all-time high numbers as we get out of spring and into summer. The Navajo Nation, the Dene Nation, right? One of the most impacted groups, communities in the United States impacted by COVID. Much of this happens because the public health benefits that are appended to that nation and their territory and their sovereignty has been curbed in the past, right? So, all those things are happening. But it took another anti-racist measure to have indigenous voices heard. So, in terms of the assessment here, there are obviously good things going on but there are also some questions as to why now? Why haven't indigenous voices been heard? But visibility is good.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Let me ask you about that. One of the arguments that these mascots, wherever they happen, disadvantage or treat or affect, I guess influence indigenous communities unfairly. That there's some kind of impact of the chanting and the stuff on the indigenous communities. And it's always struck me that that's kind of a strange argument, that really maybe there's a moral argument for why we shouldn't be using these chants and appropriation of these nicknames.

Jason Edward Black:

There are ethical arguments that sort of broker into symbolic for sure. But there are material arguments to be made as well that are oftentimes ignored by the larger press. The anti-mascot campaign, as I mentioned, starting in the 1960s actually with the National Congress of American Indians begins not just with hey, you are brokering in violent imagery of the past or imagery that demonstrates that we're disappearing, dead, dying, right? That we can be played around with. But it also looks at the public health crisis tied to the ways these representations filter into native communities. Since 1968, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the NCA, the U.S. Health Department have issued voluminous reports on the ways in



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which native kids in particular, children in particular seeing these images, being bullied increases suicidal ideation, suicide rates, substance abuse rates, confidence going into college, high school dropout rates on and off the rez when it comes to indigenous nations. So, there is a material connection here that's been linked up by scientists across social sciences as well as medical sciences too. So, there is that material argument that is there.

But in terms of the symbolic and ethical, that should sort of be enough. When you were talking about colonized bodies, when we're talking about colonized people who have primacy, they have the inventional resource of primacy to territory here in this country, on Turtle Island. I mean let's go Canada. Let's go Central and South America too, right? That should be enough for sure and there's probably no coincidence here. There are no other racial and ethnic groups that have been colonized that are mascotted in the ways that indigenous people are. Why is that? Why is that? Right? So, there is something to be said about putting the equivalent of the Star of David or the cross on boxer shorts and selling them in your team shop, right? That's the equivalent of the eagle feather for many indigenous nations. So, the ethical argument definitely sticks. But there's the public health as well. So, there's some material arguments.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

So, what about Cleveland, Atlanta? What about Kansas City and Chicago's NHL team? I know you're a big NHL fan as I seem to remember. Are we going to see any changes there? What's at stake? What does the future hold?

Jason Edward Black:

Yeah, yeah. I am an NHL fan. It's always good to be a Toronto Maple Leaf fan because who's really going to argue with that mascot? So, there's always that. But no, absolutely. I actually thought when Andy Billings and I wrote *Mascot Nation* and we looked at the evidence that shook out and it's a book—I'm not trying to pitch here. But it's a book that engages in critical decolonial analysis based on a lot of fan data and poll data. So, I looked at the qualitative portions of these polls and connected it with postcolonial theory and looked at other public documents. What we found, what I thought we were pulling out of this is that the Washington franchise would be the last to go down.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, right.

Jason Edward Black:

There'd be some sort of line of declination and it's interesting because it's kind of the lowest hanging fruit. But at the same time, it's the hardest one because of Dan Snyder's money and interest here.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

Yeah, yeah.

Jason Edward Black:

I didn't think it'd be going this way. I thought it would be okay, we'll see the tomahawk chop retired, we'll see the caricature in Cleveland retired, Chief Wahoo retired and we'll get up to the Washington franchise. With the Washington franchise, with that domino falling, we're going to see a lot of changes and we already really have, right? So, Chief Wahoo which is the most grossly caricatured indigenous image in all of professional sports, I mean I'll take that to the bank and I'll argue it up and down, that symbol was retired what, three years ago. And as of 2018/2019, it's completely gone with the exception of the throwback days and of course, the non-trademarked sales of paraphernalia and merchandise. Sort of like I'm a Nascar fan too and the confederate flag is absolutely banned from tracks. But for years and years and years, you could buy it outside of the racetracks and smuggle it in and no one's going to stop you.

At any rate, we're going to see the changes. With Wahoo, that's one example. When Atlanta was in the playoffs—I can't remember seasons anymore because they're all off kilter now. We just had the Stanley Cup in September. I don't remember. I think it was the last baseball season, the Atlanta Braves had the tomahawk chop silenced. Part of that was because there was a Cherokee pitcher for an opposing team but also, there was a larger ground swell that the idea of mostly white people with painted faces hinging and unhinging their arms in a violent motion towards an opposing enemy was sort of problematic. We also saw during the Super Bowl this past year that Kansas City was hit quite a bit with the tomahawk chop which is also used there as well. If you watched the Super Bowl, you probably noticed you didn't hear chants. Whenever the camera would pan the fans, they'd pan to fans who were not dressed in eagle feathers and braves feathers and red face, right? They didn't show any sort of arrowhead stadium kind of images as much as typical.

And in Chicago, there have already been alternate designs talked about for the Blackhawks team. I am rambling here but all of that to say that I think we're going to see more and more challenges as we go forward. I cannot believe the Washington franchise was really the first big one to go with the exception of Wahoo. Real quick and again, I know I'm probably taking too much time. But there's also a difference between a word like the R-word in Washington being so incredibly pejorative and more what you may call generic imagery and names such as Indians and Braves. A little more difficult actually to change because people can say well, wait, we're not using the R-word, wait, we're not pointing at a particular native nation name like the Fighting Sioux at North Dakota which the NCAA retired in what, 2005, 2007. So, it'll take a little longer I think with some of those teams but we'll see.



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Trevor Parry-Giles:

We'll see, we'll see.

Jason Edward Black:

Yeah, yeah.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

What I'm most struck from this entire conversation is the broad range of ways to get at sports communication. One of the things about this podcast is that we always talk about how *Communication Matters*. I suspect you would all agree with me that sports is not just mere entertainment, that even if it is, it still may be worthy of study but it's not just mere entertainment. And the extent of which health concerns and players' concerns and the ways in which the neoliberal athletic establishment deals with those health concerns, the mascotting, the historical and contemporary dynamics surrounding sports activism, all of that seems to come together to me underneath this rubric of sports communication. Why should we keep studying this? Where do you all think it's going in the future? Why does it matter?

Abraham Khan:

I co-led a workshop at the Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute and it was about sports and politics. And one of the things that came out, we had a group there of, I don't know, we had about 15 or so. And one of the things that came out of that was the idea that the study of sports communication has derived a lot from the different epistemological traditions and theoretical resources in communication studies such as rhetoric or critical cultural studies or even things like content analysis and social scientific work in communication but doesn't seem to be giving much back. And the question then is what is sports' unique contribution to the study of communication? In other words, what can we know about communication that we cannot know unless we start studying sport? The reason I think I'm going to put Dan on the spot here a little bit is because one of the things that I've noticed over the last couple of days, really since Tuesday evening is the way that—I mean we've known I think for a long time that metaphors drive media coverage of elections and horse race coverage, for example, has been driving electoral politics, the coverage of electoral politics for a very long time.

But there's also just if you think about the way that the count of the votes has gone down for the past three days or so, we hear the idea that like Biden is pulling ahead or that Trump is like staving off a challenge. But there is a temporality that gets imposed on this process that simply does not exist inside the facts. And so, we're watching it the way we watch a baseball game or basketball game unfold when really the better metaphor is that we're counting different colored M&M's inside a jar. Now you can make a game out of counting the different colored M&M's inside the jar. But the M&M's are in the jar. It doesn't matter what order you count them in. And I know that Dan's



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book on religion and sport has dealt with issues of temporality. But I do think that if we study, for example, let's say the fan experience or the viewing experience of watching sports, how does that uniquely help us understand the way that we come to understand or frame politics and political events? So, I think it's something worthy of thinking about. So, when we think about the question of where the study of communication in sport goes in the future, I think that is probably the future in terms of the types of questions we might start asking.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

Well, and a related dimension to that would be the mediation of sports. Because I don't know about you but I always am struck by the differences between watching sports on television and being there. And what does that tell us about material communication practice and that kind of thing? So, yeah, I'm sorry, Dan. You probably were going to make a similar point.

Daniel A. Grano:

Maybe, maybe not. Abe is characterizing the count in very much the way that I've been experiencing or thinking about it as well. It really does feel like at least implicitly that the right framework for the way that people are misunderstanding it is it's akin to being way ahead in the game and then having your opponent eat into your lead and coming to terms with the fact of your defeat as a collective and building animosity at a collective level around that experience and the misunderstanding of that contrasted with, like Abe said, counting items in a jar is deeply problematic especially for the fact that the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, for example, explicitly set this up by not allowing any of the ballots to be open from the mail in ballots until the day of the election. They set this argument up.

So, putting that aside for just a moment, maybe we can go back to it, I kind of also have a pitch. I want to credit this or tag this to my and Mike Butterworth's introduction in sport rhetoric and political struggle where one of the concerns that we've been talking about for a while and Abe has written about this as well in Andy Billings' edited volume *Defining Sport Communication*. So, we've all been interested in the question as to why sport communication scholarship is often compartmentalized as sports scholarship and not as race criticism or public memory work or scholarship on activism in a broader sense, that these pieces are seen as sport pieces and compartmentalized as such including in editorial decisions in our journals and things like that. So, we have an import/export problem. And one of the things that Mike and I have written about is that we need a context-driven justification for sport that is both related to the broader problems that critical rhetorical studies take up, for example, or critical cultural studies take up but that is also unique enough that we can justify people who are not writing about sport spending time within the context and coming to understand how a unique cultural formation takes shape around race or public health or the body or sexuality or whatever other urgent problems that we're taking up within the discipline, that these take unique shape within sport and then they're distributed across



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the broader culture in ways that we need to understand as we do work that is not explicitly grounded in sport itself.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And the fact that they are disseminated initially through sport is important. It strikes me that that's a meaningful dimension to what you're suggesting. Yeah. Jason, what do you think? What does the future hold? Where do we go?

Jason Edward Black:

Yeah, I was going to say, first of all, most of what I've learned about sport communication and sport rhetoric is from Dan and Abe and Michael Butterworth's work. So, first of all, it's an honor to have been here on this panel with them. But it's also fantastic to hear their charges because I never really considered myself a sports scholar but rather a critical cultural scholar and what I learned from Dan and Abe and others' work is that sport is a context, sport could be a theory, sport could be a lens but really we're looking at these deeper issues of power that we do in other case studies. I've always been motivated to do sport more. Well, I'm motivated to do sport more now because I see those links and I think that Dan is absolutely right that when we can make those deeper connections, we expand it out. The future of sport research particularly in rhetorical studies, larger communication, I think it'll have a lot to do as they've already mentioned with fan experience or as we've talked about, fan experience and the connection of fans bodies to sport itself. Nothing is ever mere or only anything. It's never mere art or mere music or mere sports. In fact, sports what makes its commonality and its ubiquity is sort of what makes it an incredibly powerful context to study the things that we do. And looking at the ways that fans interact I think is going to be incredibly important. I think about the mascot controversy and the way that fans play Indian and they invest themselves. Read Dan's book, you learn about the religion of sport. You think about like football. You go to a cathedral, you've got these icons, you have the regalia, you have the ritual, all of that stuff. Looking at how fans interact is incredibly important here. And so, I think that's part of part of the future of it is looking at that merger I suppose. We wear sports, we are sports if we're fans, right?

Trevor Parry-Giles:

And that's as good a place as any to thank you all for joining me today. This has been a great conversation, a great increased understanding and actually kind of fun about the importance and role of sports communication. And I hope, listeners, that you've learned something as well about what sports communication means and its impacts on our larger lives. So, thanks for joining us, guys and this was great. This was a lot of fun.

Abraham Khan:

Thank you.



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Daniel A. Grano:

Thank you so much.

Jason Edward Black:

Thanks, Trevor. Appreciate it.

Trevor Parry-Giles:

In NCA news, I would like to thank everyone who joined us for the completely virtual NCA 106th annual convention. If you missed a session, you can watch a video of the session in Convention Central until December 31st. Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity to catch up on the latest issues in communication research and teaching. You must be registered for the convention and logged into Convention Central to view the videos. Visit natcom.org/convention to learn more. And we sure hope to see you next year, potentially in person in Seattle, Washington for NCA's 107th annual convention.

Listeners, I hope you've enjoyed this year's episodes of *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*. Together we've explored a host of communication topics from writing op-eds to remembering the 19th Amendment and everything in between. We'll be taking a short break in December for the holidays but we're looking forward to offering timely and exciting discussions on *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast* coming to a podcast service near you, starting again in January of 2021. Happy holidays from all of us at NCA to all of you who've listened to *Communication Matters, the NCA podcast*.

Be sure to engage with us on social media by liking us on Facebook, following NCA on Twitter and Instagram and watching us on YouTube. And before you go, hit subscribe wherever you get your podcasts to listen in as we discuss emerging scholarship, establish theory and new applications, all exploring just how much communication matters in our classrooms, in our communities and in our world. See you next time.

Conclusion:

Communication Matters is hosted by NCA Executive Director Trevor Parry-Giles and is recorded in our national office in downtown Washington DC. The podcast is recorded and produced by Assistant Director for Digital Strategies Chelsea Bowes with writing support from Director of External Affairs and Publications Wendy Fernando and Content Development Specialist Grace Hébert. Thank you for listening.

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