Contemporary Applications: The Athlete and Athletics

THE HOMERIC ATHLETE HERO

The familiar fascination of the Greeks with the athlete and athletic games, which culminated in the official organization around 776 B.C. of the Olympic Games, has a parallel in contemporary culture, which also often takes its heroes from the ranks of famous athletes.

In Greece, athlete heroes are traceable back to the mythology of ancient history and to the epics of Homer. Some of the famous mythic athletic contests include a wrestling match between Zeus and his father, Cronos, to determine who would rule the world. Zeus' victory was often celebrated in festival games. In a number of instances in mythology, athletic contests determined which man would have a particularly desirable woman for a wife. King Oenomaus, for instance, held chariot races with men who wanted to marry his daughter Hippodamia. Oenomaus always overcame the contender, and slaughtered him, until a suitor named Pelops came along and bribed Oenomaus' charioteer to throw the race. Another example is Atalanta, who had a foot race with suitors for her hand in marriage. In this case, as in the case of Hippodamia, the suitor is able to be the victor only by devious means, not by superior athletic ability. Hippomenes distracts Atalanta by throwing golden apples in her path. Stopping to pick them up, she slows down, which enables Hippomenes to reach the finish line first. Another legend has it that Odysseus won the hand of Penelope by winning a foot race set up by her father, Icarios. (Also note below the bow-stringing contest Penelope contrives to determine which man she will marry.) Paris Alexander, who in essence
that became part of the first Olympic Games: wrestling, boxing, jumping while holding weights, foot racing, discus and spear throwing, and, later, chariot and horse racing. The Olympic contests were offered in homage to the gods, and only pure Hellenes and those who had not angered or dishonored the gods could take part.

Unlike funeral, festival, and Olympic Games, the athletic contests in The Odyssey lack religious significance. There is even something frivolous and irresponsible in the games Penelope's suitors invariably play before going in to consume Odysseus' food and drink and to corrupt his household. In books IV and XVII, they are described as amusing themselves with throwing the discus and javelin in contests. On two occasions athletic displays are intended to be entertainment for spectator guests. Two tumblers in Menelaos' palace whirl about for the amusement of Telemachos. Acrobatic dancers also entertain the court of King Alcinoos in book VIII.

Athletic ability often takes a far more serious turn when Odysseus participates. Even if such participation still has little direct religious meaning, it has to do with personal honor and greatness of heart. The reader has foreknowledge of the athletic superiority of legends and heroes when, at the court of Menelaos, mention is made of the fighting and running skill of Antilochos and of the wrestling skill of Odysseus. Odysseus' particular strength—as will be demonstrated in his sea journey to Phaeacia, his answer to a challenge there, and his activities in Ithaca—is in his huge shoulders and massive thighs. Thus, he excels in swimming (for nine days, floating in the sea on a piece of boat timber, he propels himself only with his arms), wrestling, discus and spear throwing, and archery. And although one tradition has it that he won Penelope in a foot race, he did not have the long legs and slim body of a runner. When he is challenged in Phaeacia, he feels confident that he can outperform others in almost any feat except running. And his ability to throw the discus much farther than any challenger on this occasion cools the ardor of the young Phaeacians to enter further contests with him.

On Ithaca, even though the surly Iros challenges Odysseus to a fight, the beggar tries to run away when he actually gets a good look at the size of Odysseus' thighs; he has to be carried to the fight by the suitors. Odysseus breaks his neck with a single blow.

Penelope sets up the third major contest to see who can best string Odysseus' bow and shoot through twelve axes. We are often reminded in the epics that the abilities of the athlete and the warrior are one. The outcome of the bow-stringing contest, like that of the earlier wrestling match, again reveals the athlete as a killer.
Odysseus' athletic ability seems to attest to his superior rank, his superhuman strength, and his courage, as well as his superior training and knowledge of a variety of sports. From the time of ancient myth to the Olympic Games, the athlete hero like Odysseus was considered almost superhuman. Cities idolized local men who won the Olympic Games, often turning them into minor deities. At their homecomings, they were invited to symbolically tear down a piece of the city wall, as a sign that the city which was the home of such an idol would be invulnerable to attack, just as today a local athlete who meets with success brings honor to his or her town, race, or the nation.

THE ATHLETE HERO IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

To a great extent the status of athletes in the modern world is similar to that held by athletes in The Odyssey. One assertion can be made with confidence: as in Homeric Greece, so in contemporary culture, athletics occupies a place of extraordinary importance. A comparison of the position of athletes in the two eras sheds light on both cultures. The Olympic Games begun in ancient Greece continue in the twenty-first century, involving, of course, not just one country but virtually all the countries of the world. But the Olympics have never been free of national and international politics. One example of this occurred in 1964, when South Africa was barred from Olympic participation in Japan. By 1968, the barring of South Africa had become a hot issue and various nations put pressure on members of the Olympic committee either to maintain the ban or lift it. At the 1964 Olympics in Mexico City, two African-American athletes who were receiving the gold and bronze medals raised their fists in a gesture of black power as the national anthem was being played. A noteworthy threat to boycott the Olympics planned for Moscow occurred in 1980. As a response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Jimmy Carter ordered a U.S. boycott of the games. As in ancient Greece, the athlete, almost as much as the political leader, represents his or her homeland, and those who excel in the Olympics bring great honor to their countries. The competition can become fierce as countries vie for gold medals in key events. For example, in the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, Utah, a French judge of the figure skating event was dismissed from the panel when she admitted yielding to pressure to award the gold medal to Russian rather than Canadian skaters (though the latter presumably had the superior performance). The intensity of national pride and competition was displayed when, at one point, the Russian Olympic team threatened to withdraw all its athletes.

The importance of athletics, and especially the Olympics, can be seen when extremism and violence enter the Olympic arena. On many occasions factions attempt to use athletes or the occasion of the games for political purposes. In 1936 Nazi leader Adolf Hitler became enraged when Jesse Owens, an African American, won gold medals in track events. By training Germans to win these events, Hitler had planned on proving to the world the superiority of the blond "Aryan" race. Even though Germany was the host country for the Olympics, Hitler snubbed Owens and made his disgust and anger plain for all to see. In 1972, again in Germany, tragedy struck when Palestinian terrorists took the occasion of the Munich Olympics to kidnap and murder eleven Israeli athletes. And a bomb was planted in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics, killing two people.

Many athletes are important not only as representatives of their countries, but also as inspirations to members of their race, as Jesse Owens was in 1936; as Jackie Robinson was in breaking the barrier of racial segregation in professional baseball; as Joe Louis was in boxing; as Althea Gibson was in women's tennis and golf; as Wilt Chamberlain was in professional basketball; as Arthur Ashe was in men's tennis; and as Tiger Woods was in the gentleman's game of golf.

While personal and national pride is often as apparent in— even endemic to—competitive athletics today as it was in King Alcinoos' court when Odysseus was taunted, the character of athletics today is in sharp contrast to that of Homer's Greece. One of the biggest differences is the importance of team sports and the emergence of superstar athletes, especially in professional football, baseball, and basketball. Many athletes who have achieved legendary, even heroic, status played team sports: Red Grange, Bronko Nagurski, Johnny Unitas, Tom Harmon, Joe Namath, and Joe Montana in football; Dizzy Dean, Hank Greenberg, Jackie Robinson, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ted Williams, and Joe DiMaggio in baseball; Wilt Chamberlain, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Larry Bird in basketball. Boston even named a major city tunnel for baseball great Ted Williams.

Because tremendous profits are realized from ticket sales and related businesses, many of these athletes are among the highest paid individuals in our culture. For example, Parade Sunday magazine of March 3, 2002, listed baseball player Mike Piazza's yearly salary as $15 million, basketball player Shaquille O'Neal's salary as $24 million, and pro football player Adrian Ross' salary as $920,000. Admittedly, the working life of such athletes is not very long, yet a comparison of these salaries with others in our society is revealing of our priorities. These high salaries are in stark contrast to a public school teacher's annual salary of $34,000, a child-care supervisor's salary of $25,000, a corrections officer's salary of $25,000, a firefighter's salary of $50,000, a college professor's salary at $71,000 or even the above-average salaries of a U.S. congressman ($150,000), a pediatrician ($103,000), or the president of a major university ($335,000).
The million-dollar salaries of athletes on professional ball teams, as well as those in such fields as boxing (Mike Tyson made $48 million in 2001) and professional tennis (Anna Kournikova made $10 million in 2001) are a far cry from the accomplished athletes in ancient Greece, who were awarded only olive wreaths.

American society at the turn of the twenty-first century continues to name its heroes from team sports: Barry Bonds, of the San Francisco Giants, who holds the single-season home-run record in baseball; Sammy Sosa, of the Chicago Cubs and Mark McGwire of the St. Louis Cardinals, who both surpassed the home run records of Babe Ruth and Roger Maris in 1998. Basketball heroes included Michael Jordan of Chicago Bulls and the Washington Wizards, Larry Bird of the Boston Celtics, and Shaquille O’Neal and Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers. Football had, among others, Peyton Manning, quarterback for the Indianapolis Colts; Kurt Warner, quarterback for the St. Louis Rams; and Jerry Rice, wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers and the Oakland Raiders. At the turn of the twenty-first century, nonteam sports also had their superstars, including Tiger Woods in golf and Venus and Serena Williams in tennis.

The contemporary athlete also differs from the athlete of ancient Greece in typically being far more specialized than was, say, Odysseus, a wrestler, swimmer, archer, and spear and discus thrower. Great athletes today tend to excel in one or two sports only.

Another stark difference is that while the hero athletes of *The Odyssey* are members of the nobility (Achilles is the son of a sea nymph, Odysseus is a king, and the athletes in Phaeacia are young aristocrats), most of the outstanding athletes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries come from the ranks of the poor and working classes. Many of them are African Americans, and some of them are women. Many of them are men of modest education. The exceptions include Bill Bradley, a Rhodes scholar, Princeton graduate, and later U.S. senator, who played professional basketball, and Byron “Whizzer” White, also a Rhodes scholar, Yale Law School graduate, and a U.S. Supreme Court justice, who made a reputation for himself as a college football player. Curiously enough, great athletes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have rarely been, as in *The Odyssey*, great warriors. On the contrary, boxer Muhammad Ali, one of the greatest athlete heroes of the twentieth century, was a conscientious objector on religious grounds during the Vietnam War.

It is the young who primarily perceive outstanding athletes as heroes, possibly because they are seen as hopeful evidence that one can rise above poverty, sometimes rise above racial inequality. The primary reasons why many young people name athletes as heroes are not so different from the reasons ancient Greeks admired athletes: for their skill, courage, drive, success, competitiveness, professionalism, discipline, and physical attractiveness. But to these qualities, many young people added charity, social responsibility, and moral leadership.

One of the documents that follows is a biographical sketch of the person chosen as the greatest athlete of the first half of the twentieth century—Jim Thorpe—a man who excelled in multiple Olympic events and played both professional football and baseball. Thorpe, a Native American with the rare ability to excel, like Odysseus, in numerous athletic endeavors, nevertheless stands in sharp contrast to the Greek king. Thorpe was a man doomed to poverty and badly treated by the country to which he had brought great glory in the Olympic Games.

The second document is pertinent to another Olympic winner, Jesse Owens, who was briefly lauded as a returning hero but not accorded recognition by his country until eight years after he died, when he was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal.

The third document consists of two tables. The first shows the number of athlete heroes among all heroes in a poll of schoolchildren. The second displays the rank order of “the most frequently selected praiseworthy athletes” in three polls. It illustrates the preponderance of players of team sports among athlete heroes.
JIM THORPE

Jim Thorpe, often called the greatest American athlete of all time, occupies a major place in the history of the Olympics written by Richard Schaar, a well-known sportswriter and broadcaster.

Thorpe had an impressive range of athletic ability in both individual and team sports. He was a natural athlete who, Schaar says, trained for his role in the 1912 Stockholm Olympics by sleeping while his teammates and competitors practiced their running and jumping. He was an all-American football player in college, and in 1912 scored twenty-five touchdowns. He was voted into the National Football Hall of Fame in 1963. He also played baseball for the New York Giants and the Boston Braves.

His fame in Stockholm was such that the king of Sweden presented him with bronze and silver presents and the 1912 Olympics was commonly referred to "the Jim Thorpe Olympics." A little town in Pennsylvania near the Carlisle Indian School he had attended was renamed "Jim Thorpe," and continues to this day. His birthplace in Oklahoma maintains a museum and hosts annual celebrations in his honor.

Stockholm was Thorpe's battlefield, as Troy was Odysseus', and awaiting the returning hero was a tragedy of epic proportions. As Schaar points out, when the Olympic Committee discovered in 1913 that Thorpe had played in a minor semiprofessional baseball league for a few bucks in 1910, he was stripped of his medals. He died in 1953, a victim of loneliness, poverty, and alcoholism.

Several significant events concerning Jim Thorpe occurred after the publication of Schaar's history. In 1982, the Olympic Committee restored his gold medals to his family after repeated appeals. And at the end of the twentieth century, as various groups were identifying the best men and women of the century in various endeavors, the U.S. Senate recognized Jim Thorpe as the American athlete of the century.

FROM RICHARD SCHAAP, AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF THE OLYMPICS

(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963)

Jim Thorpe, born in Prague, Oklahoma, on May 28, 1888, a member of the Sac and Fox Indian tribe, six feet tall and 190 pounds in his prime, was the finest athlete the United States has ever produced. In 1950, the Associated Press conducted a poll of American sportswriters to select the greatest male athlete of the half-century, 1900-49. Thorpe received 252 first-place votes; all his rivals combined polled only 141.

Thorpe could excel in any sport, but the three he played best were football, baseball, and track and field.

In the 1912 version of the pentathlon, a strenuous test of versatility combining five separate events, Thorpe defeated all challengers in the broad jump, discus throw, 200-meter dash, and 1,500-meter run. He proved he was human by placing only third in the javelin throw. Thorpe won the pentathlon gold medal by a mile.

In the decathlon, a blend of ten events, Thorpe defeated all rivals in the high jump, high hurdles, shotput, and 1,500-meter run.

The 1912 Olympic Games provided Jim Thorpe with his greatest glory. They also provided him, as matters developed, with his most bitter setback. In 1913, a year after the games ended, the International Olympic Committee discovered that Thorpe had earlier played baseball for money, declared him a professional, stripped him of his medals, and erased his records from the official Olympic history. (126, 127-128, 128, 135)
CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL FOR JESSE OWENS

Jesse Owens is another versatile athlete, but chiefly a runner and broad jumper, whose return home from victory can be compared and contrasted with Odysseus'. Owens, not a king like Odysseus, but the grandson of a slave and the son of a black sharecropper, won four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics and set records that remained unbroken in the twentieth century. With Adolf Hitler rising to power and eager to prove his racial theories, this became one of the most politicized Olympics up to that time. While the German athletes were cordial to Owens, Hitler and his henchmen insulted both Jewish and African-American athletes. One high official in the German Foreign Ministry told the daughter of the U.S. ambassador to Germany that the United States should be ashamed for allowing "non-humans, like Owens and other Negro athletes" to participate.

But in this historical moment before the outbreak of World War II, Owens stood as the grand embodiment of the vigor and hope of the United States. Like the athlete returning to his home in glory in ancient Greece, Owens was celebrated with parades and ceremonies in his home state of Ohio and in New York City. In the year following the Olympics, he was able to cash in on his fame with contests and endorsements. But after that one year of financial success, the returned hero faced continual obstacles. He was never able to compete in the Olympics again after he impulsively signed a contract that would have given him professional status. Although the terms of the contract were never carried out and Owens never received the pay that the contract promised, word of the contract reached the Amateur Athletics Union, and his amateur status was taken from him.

For a time Owens participated in exhibitions where he raced against horses, an activity from which he benefited financially but which he found to be personally demeaning. Thereafter, however, he had a constant struggle to make a living, became heavily in debt, and often found himself on a collision course with both the white establishment and younger black activists. Owens died in 1980. In 1988, a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives heard testimony to support the awarding of a Congressional Gold Medal to Jesse Owens, to be given to his widow. The record of the committee's hearings attests to Jesse Owens' status as a heroic athlete.
Jesse Owens never lost his dignity. Throughout his life he never gave in to setbacks. He became an inspiration both through the speeches he gave and the example he set. His speeches reflected his creed, "We all have dreams," he said, "but in order to make dreams into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline and effort. These things apply to everyday life."

Jesse Owens lived by what he said. We honor him today with Congress' highest honor. It is woefully inadequate and at least 8 years too late. Jesse Owens died in 1980, but his example and his triumph are timeless. The congressional gold medal is a belated recognition of his great contributions to the world of sports and the American spirit.

Ms. Pelosi has a statement.

Ms. Pelosi. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to commend you for holding this hearing today on this happy occasion.

Today's hearing on legislation to award the gold medal to Jesse Owens gives us an opportunity to recognize the achievement of a person who made a major contribution to American society. Jesse Owens' contribution to America goes far beyond his unparalleled Olympic achievements. He could easily and comfortably have rested on the laurels of his athletic accomplishments. He did not, however, and his humanitarian contributions to public service, civil rights and international goodwill made him a leader not only in the United States but in the larger world community. Awarding Jesse Owens a gold medal is an action long overdue.

STATEMENT OF HON. LOUIS STOKES, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF OHIO

Mr. Stokes. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of legislation which I introduced, H.R. 1270, to award a congressional gold medal to Mrs. Ruth Owens in honor of Jesse Owens. I am proud to serve as the author of this important legislation, to recognize the achievements of a great American and the greatest Olympic hero in our history, Jesse Owens.

This hearing comes at a very appropriate time, just 2 months before the 1988 Olympic games. As we send our athletes to Seoul, Korea, it is only fitting that we remember the athletes who brought home the gold in past Olympiads.

Jesse Owens was born in Alabama, the son of a sharecropper and grandson of slaves. His family moved to Cleveland when he was nine. He ran his first race at thirteen. He excelled at East Tech High School and set records at Ohio State University.

I would like to remind the members of the committee of Jesse Owens' performance at the 1936 Olympics. We just witnessed a heart-touching rendition of that great historic event. But the fact that Owens captured four gold medals and became the first athlete to capture that many deserves remembering.

Almost 52 years ago Jesse Owens traveled to Germany overwhelmed by Hitler's theories of white supremacy. Black members of the team were referred to as the black auxiliaries, by the Nazi hosts. It was in this face of racism that Jesse Owens captured four gold medals and the imagination of the German crowds, who rose to their feet. It was also a triumph of humanity and of the Olympic spirit over evil.

Mr. Chairman, I was eleven years old when Jesse Owens returned to the United States from the Olympics. I vividly recall sitting on an old horse-watering trough at the corner of 60th and Central Avenue in Cleveland and watching Jesse wave to the crowd from an open automobile.

In 1936 black ghetto youths such as myself had few heroes to aspire to be like. In 1936 there was only one black Member of Congress, Arthur Mitchell, a Democrat from Illinois. I can recall that almost every black family had three photographs of their heroes on the walls of their homes: Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Joe Louis and Jesse Owens. Those were the days when my friends and I would race against one another on the streets in an attempt to emulate Jesse Owens and hoping to become like him, an Olympic star.

He set high standards for all of us in Cleveland as we attempted to journey down the road of life. He was a gentleman, and carried himself with dignity. He was the consummate sports hero, gracious in victory. Throughout his life he maintained a commitment to community service and sportsmanship. He devoted and left his expertise to youth athletic programs. He traveled widely, speaking of the virtues of fair play and advocating the power of sports to bridge differences between races, classes and cultures.

Jesse Owens died in 1980, but his spirit lives on. He was more than a sports legend, more than a national figure, greater than a hero. He was the embodiment of fair play, perseverance under pressure, dignity in the face of discrimination and prejudice.

I have to say candidly, no matter how long or how difficult the race was, he rose to the occasion. His contributions to American sports, society and history are invaluable.

I am pleased that such a panel of distinguished guests has assembled today to reflect on the achievements of Jesse Owens and the importance of this legislation.

I also want to recognize the special efforts of an individual who is unable to be present today. Mr. Dave Albritton, a former United States high-jump champion and a teammate of Jesse Owens, and our distinguished former Congressman, Sam Devine. Dave was a teammate of Jesse Owens at East Technical High School and Ohio State University.

Dave contacted me in 1986 regarding the need for Congress to recognize the achievements of Jesse Owens. Due to recent surgery, Dave cannot be present today to witness the support for his good friend and teammate, but he was kind enough to submit a statement, which will be recorded in today's historical proceedings.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT H. HELMICK, PRESIDENT, UNITED STATES OLYMPIC COMMITTEE

Mr. Helmick. It is a privilege for the United States Olympic Committee to testify in support of this bill.
As we prepare for our opening ceremony in South Korea and as our athletes ready themselves for competition, it gives us great comfort and a sense of security to know that, because of you and this committee, we can begin planning for the next quadrennium [sic] knowing we have funds from the coin bill. The legend of Jesse Owens is more than 50 years old, but there is nothing so revered as the memory of this great athlete. His achievements for the United States in 1936 at the Berlin Olympic Games have been a source of inspiration for thousands of our finest athletes.

By any definition, Jesse Owens is among the greatest athletes of all time, one of the greatest Americans of the century and a role model for athletes and all young people. His Olympic accomplishments are well known to most Americans: four gold medals in Berlin in 1936 while Adolph [sic] Hitler watched this supposedly “inferior” human being beat his own German sprinters and jumpers. And earlier in 1935 he set five world records in 1 day at the Big Ten track and field championships at the University of Michigan.

Jesse Owens should be given special recognition because he contributed his talent, his patriotism and his legend to this Nation, despite the discrimination and hardships he experienced at the hands of his fellow Americans.

Henry Kissinger tells a story about Jesse Owens and the impact he had on his life and how the accomplishments of this athlete were turned into inspiration and courage that may have changed the course of history.

As a young Jewish boy growing up in Germany in the early 1930s, Henry Kissinger gradually fell victim to the cancerous brutality that slowly crept across his fatherland. Hitler first separated and isolated the Jews from the rest of the country, then he took away all their legal rights, and finally he denied them even the right to be treated as humans.

The year was 1936 and the Olympic games were being held in Germany. Hitler was hoping to use them to prove the superiority of his so-called Arian [sic] race. Meanwhile the world was not aware of the mounting horror this man was orchestrating.

Somehow, in some way, this isolated and oppressed Jewish boy named Henry Kissinger and others like him learned of something very special that happened during those Olympic games. They heard about an American athlete, a black American athlete, who did better than all the others, who won honor and gold for his country, and they then realized that if the United States could have a black athlete as the honored leader of its winning team, then surely the USA was a country where there was hope, where there was opportunity for everyone. (1–2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8)

ATHLETES AND THE AMERICAN HERO

Janet C. Harris, a university scholar of sports and athletics, studied athletics and the hero and in the course of her study she determined the values of the society as they are revealed in the public's choosing of sports heroes. Harris contends that “part of the reason for the prominence of spectator sports in many societies—including American society—is that they are cultural performances” (ix). And the high value that many cultures throughout history have placed on entertainers tends to make a hero of the athlete entertainer. The kinship between athletics and performance can even be seen in The Odyssey when exhibition dancing and sports go together in the courts of the various Greek kings.

Statistics from the first table, gathered from schoolchildren in Greensboro, North Carolina, shows the total number of heroes named by the participants and how many among that total were athletes.


FROM JANET C. HARRIS, ATHLETES AND THE AMERICAN HERO DILEMMA

(Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics Publishers, 1994), 29

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>Hero Selection from Athletics and All Walks of Life</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Frequency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Walks of Life, Including Athletes</td>
<td>791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics Only</td>
<td>510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2.2

#### Rank Orders of the Most Frequently Selected Praiseworthy Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Athletes</th>
<th>1978</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1982</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muhammad Ali</td>
<td>Eric Heiden</td>
<td>Tony Dorsett</td>
<td>Reggi Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks Robinson</td>
<td>Sugar Ray Robinson</td>
<td>Kurt Thomas</td>
<td>Ralph Sampson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julius Erving</td>
<td>Terry Bradshaw</td>
<td>Julius Erving</td>
<td>O.J. Simpson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bert Jones</td>
<td>Jimmy</td>
<td>James Worthy</td>
<td>Sam Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.J. Simpson</td>
<td>Bjorn Borg</td>
<td>Julius Erving</td>
<td>Danny White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Connors</td>
<td>Arthur Ashe</td>
<td>Kareem Abdul-Jabbar</td>
<td>Sam Perkins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Havlicek</td>
<td>John Havlicek</td>
<td>Muhammad Ali</td>
<td>Muhammad Ali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billie Jean King</td>
<td>Willie Stargell</td>
<td>Muhammad Ali</td>
<td>Kareem Abdul-Jabbar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pete Maravich</td>
<td>Billie Jean King</td>
<td>Pete Rose</td>
<td>John McEnroe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe Namath</td>
<td>Billie Jean King</td>
<td>Pete Rose</td>
<td>Babe Ruth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnny Unitas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Roger Staubach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris Evert</td>
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</table>

#### PROJETS FOR WRITTEN AND ORAL EXPLORATION

1. What conclusions can you make about values and the criteria for choosing heroes by examining the poll excerpts above?
2. Conduct a similar poll of most admired athletes. Engage in your own class discussion to determine which of the figures named deserve to be accorded heroic status, and why. Compare your own poll with the ones included in the documents.
3. Each member of the class should write an essay on his or her conclusions about social values based on the lists collected.
4. Conduct a class debate on the validity of the following assumption: athletic competition has had a beneficial effect on current society.
5. Conduct a class debate on the validity of the following statement: it is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.
6. Have a separate discussion of how coaches you know regard the statement in theory and in practice. Be prepared to support your point of view with specifics.
7. On the basis of your own additional research on Jim Thorpe, debate whether he should have had his medals taken away, and whether he deserved to be called a hero.
8. Make a report on any one athletic figure you consider to be a hero.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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