

How the 1969 World Series Caused the Deaths at Kent State

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The Underdog has traditionally been the object of great empathic emotional transference in American history and culture. but a peculiar combination of events in the latter part of the 1960s contrived to raise that figure to especially great heights. Indeed. three events of those years - the Jets-Colts Superbowl, the Mets-Orioles World Series. and the communal celebration at Woodstock - served to thrust the underdog figure into the public light in a

manner theretofore unimagined. For not only was the underdog celebrated as an underdog, but the underdog was celebrated as an underdog even after “winning” all three of these events. Traditionally, once an underdog has overcome its worthier opponent, it ceases to be an underdog. Witness the Philadelphia Phillies of the late 1970s, for instance. The American press, though, far from reversing the psychic positions of the pairs of opponents - the underdog Mets vs. the establishment Orioles, the upstart Jets vs. the establishment silent majority - acted after the facts to raise the underdog to even greater mythic heights.

Thus, in a complex process of winning-as-product transforming into winning-as-process, magnified through the unprecedented media glorification of the underdog’s role in the process, and the articulation by the underdogs themselves of the process-is-everything aspect of competition (e.g. Joe Namath’s pronouncements regarding the futility of results), the American public - or at least a not-insignificantly large segment of it - came to believe that not only could the underdog actually “win” any confrontation, no matter the odds, the underdog was actually “favored” to win, a contradiction bordering on the paradoxical. But such were the attitudes common in Kent, Ohio, in May of 1970. This paper will show how the deaths at Kent State can be directly attributed to media coverage of a World Series, a Superbowl, and Woodstock.