

Stephen D. Mosher
Ithaca College

Creating Sport Mythology in the Post-Modern Media

David Q. Voigt (1978) has argued eloquently that myths are essential to understanding sport history. In this paper, I examine three specific sport video essays presented to the American television-viewing public in order to show how the media is essentially responsible for creating the new postmodern sporting myths. I also offer an interpretation of the essays for the purpose of demonstrating how teachers of sport history can use them in their classes.

The first essay considered is the Fox television network's closing coverage of Mark McGwire's 62nd homerun (breaking Roger Maris' record). I argue that the use of specific pieces of popular and classical music creates an argument that by hitting this homerun, McGwire has essentially risen above an heroic athlete status and been transformed into a patriotic and even religious savior of the American nation. The second essay considered is the CBS opening video essay to the 1991 NCAA men's basketball championship game. I argue that the incorporation of President George Bush's invocation to the armed forces of Desert Storm, overlaid with John Mellencamp's political protest song "Small Town," serves to confuse the viewer and positions the basketball players of Duke and Kansas in the untenable position of being patriots while violating their right to free speech. The final essay considered is the CBS closing video of the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympic Games. I argue that the incorporation of Carl Orff's "Carmina Burana" to support the mythic message "fate crushes the brave" is an example of rendering the Olympic message best constructed by Leni Riefenstahl in the diving sequence at the conclusion of "Olympia: Festival of Beauty."

Through the display and analysis of specific moments in these video essays, I attempt to model an effective classroom strategy that is open to sport history teachers; as

well as inspire others to “capture” future myths as they appear through sport television programming.