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Game a microcosm of American life Class studies baseball history

By Eden Godbey
Emerald News Editor

Baseball and American History (HST 200) is a new course offered by the Innovative Educational Development program, which attempts to compare the respective histories of baseball and America.

The class "is designed to show how baseball has reflected the general experiences of American history," said instructor Jon Cash.

Students can take the class graded or pass/no pass. The class is worth three 200-level history credits. Students can register through the history department. A \$10 film fee and a \$14.35 book fee are charged.

The class includes lectures, discussions, readings and films. Students who take the class for graded credit must write a research paper in addition to

taking the midterm and final exam.

Cash said the book "The Ultimate Baseball Book" is "the best single work covering the entire historical span of American professional baseball." He added its 800 pictures make it easily readable.

Jack Maddex, history professor and faculty advisor of Cash's class said of the course: "The class is important, first as a significant subject in American culture itself, and second as one of the subjects that reflects changes in American society and culture through the generations."

The course deals with a broad spectrum of relationships between baseball and American history. It will explain how baseball, on a small scale, has served as a melting pot for immigrants and how it represents America as "the national game," according to Cash.

It will also explore how

baseball serves as a "safety-valve" for Americans by offering underprivileged people a financially better way of life, he said.

Cash added he believes baseball precedes history in some respects. As an example he cited the signing of Jackie Robinson by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1946. Before this point blacks were the only ethnic group were not permitted to play in the major leagues and Robinson's hiring preceded the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Cash is a graduate teaching fellow working toward a doctorate degree in history. He feels teaching the class will help him with his dissertation.

His dissertation is on the "Gashouse Gang," otherwise known as the 1934 St. Louis Cardinals. His thesis will explore how the diverse personalities and backgrounds of its members reflected the lifestyles of Americans as a whole during the Depression. His class will also focus heavily on this idea.

The Gashouse Gang was "not the best team but they were the most colorful and the most historic," Cash said.

Rip Collings, 1934 Cardinal first baseman, was a coal miner who became a player when the union went on strike. Third baseman Pepper Martin was from Oklahoma where 42-percent unemployment existed at the time. Pitcher Dizzy Dean was from a migrant sharecropper family and left-fielder Ducky Medwick was the son of an Hungarian immigrant.

Cash described these four players as "rags-to-riches" stories in the tradition of Horatio Alger and said the players represent the hardships many Americans faced during the Depression. He added they have gained notoriety in baseball history as "pranksters."

While Cash sees teaching the class as a way to help with writing his dissertation, his strong interest in baseball also motivated him to teach it. He says hearing Dean announce baseball games in 1964 made him a fan of baseball, specifically the Cardinals.

"Anybody of my generation remembers Dizzy doing the games. He was the best baseball announcer," he said.

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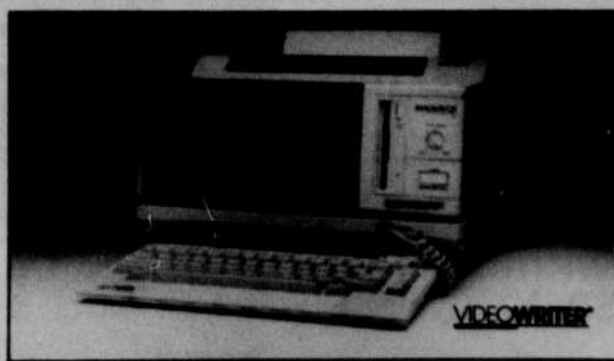
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