

EC 495 – Sports Economics

Sample Syllabus (Upper-Division Undergraduate)

Course Title: Sports Economics

Course Number: EC 495

Credits: 3

Prerequisites: Principles of Microeconomics (or equivalent)

Format: Lecture + Discussion

Level: Upper-division undergraduate (juniors/seniors)

Course Description

This course examines professional sports as an economic system, with particular emphasis on labor markets, incentives, competitive balance, globalization, and institutional decision-making. Using professional basketball as a primary case, the course integrates canonical sports economics theory with applied frameworks that illustrate how economic forces operate across players, organizations, and supporting labor markets.

The course combines traditional economic analysis with applied readings that provide institutional and industry context.

Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Analyze professional sports as structured labor markets
 2. Apply economic theory to player compensation, incentives, and career outcomes
 3. Evaluate competitive balance and market design in sports leagues
 4. Assess globalization and labor mobility in professional basketball
 5. Identify non-playing career pathways within the sports economy
 6. Integrate theoretical and applied perspectives in written and oral analysis
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Required Readings



Core Text (Companion)

Williams, D. L. *The Basketball Economy*.
Chicago Basketball Academy LLC.

(Selected chapters; not read sequentially)

Canonical & Supplementary Readings

Selected journal articles and textbook chapters, including but not limited to:

- Rottenberg, S. (1956)
- Scully, G. (1974)
- Fort & Quirk
- Rosen (1981)

(Readings assigned weekly)

Course Structure & Weekly Schedule (Sample)

Week 1 – Introduction to Sports Economics

- Overview of sports as economic systems
- Why sports economics matters

Readings

- Rottenberg (1956)
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Section 3: “Basketball Really Has Its Own Economy?”
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Week 2 – Labor Markets in Professional Sports

- Player labor supply and demand
- Bargaining power and contracts

Readings

- Scully (1974)
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Sections 2 & 9
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Week 3 – Incentives and Competitive Balance

- League structure
- Revenue sharing and parity



Readings

- Fort & Quirk
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Section 8
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Week 4 – Human Capital and Career Investment

- Superstar effects
- Risk, reward, and career length

Readings

- Rosen (1981)
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Sections 1 & 10
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Week 5 – Globalization of Basketball

- International labor markets
- Migration and opportunity

Readings

- Selected globalization literature
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Sections 4–6
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Week 6 – Technology, Analytics, and Innovation

- Data, performance evaluation
- Competitive advantages

Readings

- Selected articles
 - *The Basketball Economy*, Section 8
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Week 7 – Post-Playing Labor Markets

- Transition economics
- Non-playing roles in sports

Readings

- Selected transition studies
- *The Basketball Economy*, Sections 10–11



Week 8 – Student Presentations / Applied Analysis

- Applied labor-market memos
 - Group discussions
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Assignments & Evaluation

Sample Assignments

Applied Memo (5–7 pages)

Students analyze a segment of the basketball economy (players, front office, analytics, international leagues, or post-playing careers) using economic theory and applied frameworks from the course.

Discussion Prompts

- How does framing basketball as an “economy” change policy decisions?
 - Which actors hold the most power within sports labor markets?
 - How do incentives differ between players, teams, and leagues?
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Instructional Notes (Faculty-Facing)

- *The Basketball Economy* is used as a **companion text**, not a substitute for traditional theory.
 - Chapters may be assigned independently.
 - The course is adaptable for economics majors, sport management students, or interdisciplinary cohorts.
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Academic Integrity & Accessibility

(Standard institutional language applies.)

