

# Breaking Stereotypes in American Sports

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni diplomski studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i hrvatskog jezika i književnosti – nastavnički smjer

Dario Kožić

## **Rušenje stereotipa u američkom sportu**

Diplomski rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Jadranka Zlomislić

Osijek, 2023.

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the significance and perception of stereotypes on American athletes both in the United States of America and in the Republic of Croatia. The paper contributes by raising awareness to the most common stereotypes in sports which are analyzed and exemplified on the three most popular American sports (baseball, basketball, and American football). Through analysis of scholarly research on stereotypes, Kobe Bean Bryant's biography and the survey conducted for the purposes of this study, it is evident that sports stereotyping is on the one hand, still widespread in American sports, while on the other, some stereotypes are being broken. Bryant's biography in particular exemplifies certain stereotypes, while at the same time this literary work provides numerous examples that contribute to breaking of stereotypes in American sports. It is interesting to note that the findings of the conducted survey show that the most dominant stereotypes in American sports occasionally overlap and at times completely differ among Croatians and Americans. The findings in the paper demonstrate that sports stereotyping is still very present both in the United States of America and in the Republic of Croatia, but the positive influence of athletes and the recognition of their qualities contribute to the overall reduction of stereotyping in sports.

Key words: stereotypes, sports, biography, Kobe Bryant, baseball, American football, basketball

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## **Introduction**

Many factors have shaped the significance and popularity of the United States of America. Among them, in particular, sports have greatly impacted the habits and behavior of many Americans as well as their perception worldwide. Therefore, the question of the importance of sports tends to be highly relevant in all aspects of American life. Particularly baseball, American football, and basketball represent top-notch, i.e., the most famous American sports that attract millions of people not only in the USA, but from the rest of the world as well. As a result, it is not surprising that numerous stereotypes closely related to American sports have developed although Americans and foreigners tend to perceive them somewhat differently.

For the purposes of this paper, a comparison between the perception of stereotypes in American sports among Americans and Croatians will be explored in greater detail. In addition, the impact of stereotypes on American athletes will be discussed, with a particular focus on how the athletes are perceived by others, how they see themselves in relation to stereotypes, and how they are breaking the stereotypes.

The first chapter of the thesis provides definitions of a stereotype obtained from dictionaries and research findings. Also, it explores the significance of professional sports and professional athletes for the American way of life based on the three most popular sports in the USA: baseball, basketball, and American football.

The second chapter reports the results of research on the most represented stereotypes in the aforementioned sports (baseball, basketball, and American football) which are the subject of scholarly articles and reliable surveys on stereotyping in sports.

The third chapter conjoins literature and stereotyping in American sports through the biography of Kobe Bean Bryant. In this part of the paper, the most common stereotypes in American sports are discussed and broken down by using the available data from the biography. In addition, Kobe Bryant's reflection of himself regarding stereotypes related to his personal life and career is analyzed as well with a particular focus on examples pertaining to the breaking of stereotypes.

The fourth and final chapter explores attitudes towards the stereotypes in American sports among Americans and Croatians based on findings of a survey conducted with participants from the United States of America and the Republic of Croatia. The perception of ten deliberately chosen stereotypes in sports are examined and compared between the survey participants of these

two countries to determine whether Americans and Croatians perceive stereotypes in American sports differently.

## 1. Stereotypes and Sports

### 1.1. Stereotypes

In order to fully understand the most common stereotypes in American sports and to determine their perception, it is necessary first to establish the general meaning of a stereotype. According to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, stereotype is defined as a “a set idea that people have about what someone or something is like, especially an idea that is wrong” (“Stereotype”). Similarly, the *Oxford Learner’s Dictionary* states that a stereotype is “a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality and may cause hurt and offence” (“Stereotype”).

According to the dictionary definitions stereotypes appear in all contexts but for the purposes of this paper the focus is on stereotypes that pertain to sports. One of the most popular and widespread stereotypes is that professional athletes are less intelligent and insufficiently educated. It is very likely that this stereotype is adopted because their athletic abilities and physical appearance are highlighted as opposed to their intellectual capabilities. Therefore, it is of particular interest to establish whether this common stereotype is true and what other stereotypes have been discovered in research on this topic.

Thus, in addition to the above-mentioned dictionary definitions, stereotypes remain a point of interest for the general public as well as numerous researchers. Among them is W. Edgar Vinacke, who in his article titled *Stereotypes as Social Concepts* explains that: “Neutrally regarded, stereotypes are thus any collection of trait-names which are found to be appropriate in characterizing a class of persons” (230). Vinacke claims that stereotypes as social concepts are a result of social learning, which means they are acquired and learned, just like any other concept. However, although there is nothing inherently wrong or immoral with stereotyping, the question of its trustworthiness is quite debatable. Therefore, Vinacke considers stereotypes to be a social reality that is closely related to prejudices even though these two terms are not the same concept. The distinguishing characteristic between stereotyping and prejudices is that prejudices normally have a negative connotation, while stereotypes are, in the simplest terms, generalizations or beliefs about a certain group (Vinacke 229–43).

In terms of trustworthiness associated with stereotypes, Judd and Park examined whether stereotypes are erroneous or not. According to them, there are three crucial aspects of stereotypes that are relevant to determining the accuracy and inaccuracy of stereotypes: firstly, it is important

to know whether a certain stereotype is far-fetched, secondly is there evidence that contributes to the stereotype's reliability, and thirdly how widespread the stereotype is (109–19).

In other terms, the relevance and reliability of the source of information determines the difference between a stereotype and a fact. For instance, it is a well-known fact that professional basketball players are predominantly tall, but it is a stereotype that every tall person excels in playing basketball.

The participants of Judd's and Park's survey were divided into two groups: in-groups (people who belong to the group they identify themselves in) and out-groups (people who do not belong to the group they identify themselves in). Based on their results, the in-group's answers tend to be quite accurate, while the out-group's answers tend to exaggerate and over generalize (119–28).

This insight could indicate a potentially massive discrepancy in the comparison of American and Croatian perceptions towards the most frequent stereotypes in American sports because not all-American sports are well-known in Croatia. For example, baseball and American football are rarely played or watched in Croatia, which would classify Croatians as the out-group.

## **1.2. The Significance of Sports in the USA**

The most appropriate way to shed light on the importance of sports in the USA, as Michael Mandelbaum stated in the introduction of his book, *The Meaning of Sports: Why Americans Watch Baseball, Football, and Basketball and What They See When They Do*, is to be aware of two key aspects regarding the role and significance of sports in American society. According to Mandelbaum:

One is that competitive team games play a significant role in the life of the nation. Millions of Americans devote considerable time, money, and emotional energy to following baseball, football, and basketball. The other is that, for many of their fellow citizens, their interest in sports defies rational explanation. Their intense preoccupation with men performing odd, combative group exercises all centered on a mere ball seems unaccountable. (xiv)

Therefore, while examining and culturally determining both stereotypes and perceptions of stereotypes in American sports, it is important to emphasize the importance of sports on the consciousness of an average American. Mandelbaum assessed and thoroughly elaborated the

significance of sports in the USA, and clarified why Americans choose to religiously follow basketball, baseball, and American football. It is essential to acknowledge this national passion for the purpose of understanding how sports shape strong and non-negligible emotions, opinions, and habits in the modern American society.

Mandelbaum claims there are several developmental reasons that explain why Americans tend to admire and even identify themselves through basketball, baseball, and American football. Firstly, the modern era, influenced by the French Revolution and the need for manpower, regulates people's view of team sports. In other words, it happens that team sports evoke a certain amount of nostalgia for childhood, which reminds grown up people of the carefree days when they played these sports on a regular basis. These sports have been present in the lives of Americans as a form of entertainment from an early age, so they tend to reminisce about them through constant involvement in contemporary sports contests. Secondly, institutions of education, primarily public schools at all levels nurture the concept of team sports, shape a strong bond between students and sports. This is seen in the fact that American schools have their sports teams which compete in school competitions at city, state and national levels and their intercollegiate games have grown from being a series of student activities to a multi-billion-dollar commercial enterprise. Thirdly, the urbanization of cities has led to a large number of residents in a relatively small area, which is a steppingstone for the spread of team sports. In terms of urbanization, it is important to point out the development of public transport between the cities, which is an immensely important factor for conceptualizing of sportsmanship and competitiveness in sports (1–4). Fourthly, Mandelbaum connects team sports directly with religion, i.e., with the three fulfilments it provides “a welcome diversion from the routines of daily life; a model of coherence and clarity; and heroic examples to admire and emulate” (4).

Furthermore, the characteristics of modern sports are compared to drama because of their frequent tensions and realizations. Even the verb “play” (e.g., play basketball) is closely associated to drama, and it is well-known that drama equals entertainment. Perhaps modern sports could also be compared to art, but unlike art, that is somewhat available only to wealthy people, sports have managed to become easily accessible to almost everyone. This quite relevant comparison points to the fact that modern sports offer a noticeable amount of entertainment to the masses. For example, according to statistics, approximately 50 percent of the USA's population tunes in to watch the Super Bowl (Mandelbaum 4–9).

Since being hard working is considered to be one of the most desirable and highly appreciated virtues, especially in the USA, it is easily detected in professional sports. Modern athletes are role models who cope with a lot of pressure and work hard to achieve their dreams.

Many people look up to them and emulate their pattern of behavior, which, in terms of work ethics and sportsmanship, is greatly desirable. At the same time, a professional athlete's performance is not scripted, and it tests the actual abilities, which contributes to the athlete's authenticity (Mandelbaum 10–16).

Numerous former and current professional athletes motivate millions of people around the world with their can-do spirit, discipline, and willingness to reach their goal regardless of obstacles. Kobe Bryant's obsessive work ethics that included waking up at 3 a.m. to practice, Vincenzo Pazienza's dedication to return to the boxing ring after suffering the horrifying neck injury in the car accident, or Jimmy Butler's tumultuous life story from growing up as a homeless child to becoming one of the best NBA players cannot go unnoticed in the sphere of sports.

From an anthropological point of view, the essence of baseball, basketball and American football is recognized by three elements: "in their origins; in the way the participants dress; and in the principle at the heart of all three games" (Mandelbaum 17). This implies that Americans have a strong feeling of national pride towards the sports they invented, i.e., the sports that originate from the USA. Also, the purchase of jerseys and fan props in order to be fully equipped for the long-awaited sporting event is part and parcel of almost every fan's routine. Lastly, sticking to the fundamental rules, strategies, and values contributes to the importance and reputation of sports. In addition to the anthropological approach to sports, with an emphasis on the origin background, Klein claims that the symbiosis of sports and nation can be affected by globalization: "The politics of globalization are most immediately seen in the context of whether or not national sporting traditions can withstand the global sports juggernauts" (7). Accordingly, a certain sport is well preserved when it has not been significantly influenced by globalization and has kept its core.

Besides, sports in the USA are a dominant factor of the economy as well. Every year billions of dollars are spent by millions of fans who buy tickets and sporting equipment, which is exceedingly profitable for managers, athletes, and sports agencies, who earn a large amount of money from that revenue but are also obliged to pay taxes to the state. This perpetual cycle of the money flow has established and contributes to the maintenance of economy ("Not Just A Game").

In terms of supply and demand of sporting goods, one of the most lucrative ways to earn additional money as a professional athlete is to release a certain product in collaboration with a prestigious brand. Arguably the most profitable collaboration happened in 1984 when Michael Jordan signed a shoe contract with Nike. Nowadays, four decades later and approximately 20 years after Jordan's retirement, Air Jordan shoes are still one of the most worn shoes in the world. Bottom line, even though it is not blatantly apparent, professional sports are a massive accelerator of the economy and they dictate the pace of spending money to an enormous extent.

The latter proves that modern professional sports shape and influence the American lifestyle on many levels. To put it differently, sport is a national religion that preserves old customs, unites and inspires people, and creates an identity and a sense of pride, but on the other hand it is one of the most lucrative methods of earning money and maintaining the stability of the economy.

## **2. Stereotypes in American Sports**

As stated in the introductory part, one of the aims of this paper is to determine the most represented stereotypes in American sports and examine their impact on American athletes. Consequently, the following chapter takes a more detailed look at stereotyping in baseball, basketball, and American football.

### **2.1. Stereotyping in Baseball**

#### **2.1.1. Racial Stereotyping in Baseball**

Ferrucci et al. discuss racial stereotypes in baseball that can be observed in how broadcasters describe the players during their game commentaries. On the basis of research in how the “members of the sports media writes and talks about the races differently, using racial stereotypes (e.g., Angelini & Billings, 2010; Billings 2003, 2004; Billings & Eastman, 2002, 2003; Billings, Halone, & Denham, 2002; Stone. Perry, & Darley, 1997)” the authors observe a particular pattern (101). Ferrucci et al. claim that the studies show that during their commentaries the broadcasters refer to White athletes using stereotypical expressions as “intelligent and hardworking” while when they refer to Black players, they use stereotypical expressions such as “physically strong and naturally gifted” (101).

The observations given above show the unquestionable presence of racism in stereotyping in sports. Ferrucci et al., demonstrate how stereotyping in baseball influences sports journalism and the spectators. In other words, they examine how sports journalists present and how spectators of baseball perceive Black and White players (terms *Black* and *White* will be used throughout the chapters for the purposes of coherency, without any intended incorrect political or racial connotations). The mentioned studies confirm that racial stereotyping is present in contemporary baseball and is still a topic of interest of research. Firstly, the studies provide relevant discoveries in the field of racial stereotyping in sports in general. Accordingly, it is clarified that Black athletes are praised for characteristics that cannot be controlled, such as natural ability and physical strength, while White players are acknowledged for controllable characteristics, such as intelligence and hard work. Secondly, a new questionnaire was conducted by Ferrucci and



associates and, interestingly, the findings actually resemble all the previous results regarding racial stereotypes in baseball (Ferrucci et al. 101–21).

Thus, the participants of their survey stereotyped Black players more often than their White counterparts. Moreover, the participants find the media source more reliable if it attributes stereotypes to Black players and they find media sources less reliable if they attribute stereotypes to White players. In addition, the journalist that mostly stereotypes Black baseball players has the highest credibility rating (e.g., if the Black player is attributed physical strength or natural ability, the source of information is more likely to be perceived as reliable). These results insinuate that sports journalists moderately contribute to creation of the perception of White and especially Black players. Bottom line, Ferrucci et al. prove that racial stereotypes in baseball still exist and significantly determine how baseball players are perceived (101–21).

The abundance of information regarding stereotyping in baseball is implicitly seen in sports magazine coverage of MLB players. Consequently, Eagleman examines and explains stereotyping of baseball players through the framing theory to determine the difference in the framing of athletes belonging to different nationalities and races. She examines their stereotypical portrayal in sports magazines and observes that American athletes tend to be characterized as concentrated and committed, while international athletes are perceived as more experienced (157). Also, when it comes to failure, Eagleman finds that American athletes were more likely to fail if they lacked focus and self-control while international athletes are more likely to fail due to a lack of physical strength or athletic ability (157). This differentiation of players continues to insinuate the physical supremacy of American players. In terms of racial stereotyping, it is brought to light that Black athletes usually dominate with great physique and speed, while White athletes mostly rely on facilities and coaches, and Latino athletes are a mix of all elements. In addition, it is emphasized that for a long time baseball has been predominantly intended for White Americans, which surely contributes in development of stereotypes that have yet to be eradicated (156–68).

As previously stated, Eagleman compares portrayal of four different groups of athletes in *ESPN The Magazine* and *Sports Illustrated* sports magazines between 2000 and 2007: White MLB Athletes, Black MLB Players, Latino MLB Players, and Asian MLB Players.

White MLB players are analyzed first. More precisely, magazine coverage of White American baseball players is compared to magazine coverage of White international baseball players. Overall, White American players are portrayed in a significantly more positive manner than their international counterparts. In general, both American and international White players are characterized as hard working. International White players are usually presented in relation with their off-the-field hobbies, while American White players are often presented alongside with

their fathers. American white players are normally depicted as good-looking and attractive, which is not recorded in the characterization of internationals. Intellect seems to be attributed to American players, in contrast to international players who are occasionally called controversial nicknames such as “B.D.A.,” which stands for *Big Dumb Animal*. Finally, knowledge of the English language is somewhat neglected in the portrayal of international players; for example, some athletes are depicted in a way that suggests that they still have not mastered the English language (Eagleman 156–68).

Black MLB players are analyzed second. There are many Black American baseball players who are framed in sports magazines. On the other hand, there is only one example of a Black international baseball player. Black American players are presented as a group of athletes that must overcome many obstacles in order to succeed in baseball. The only non-American Black player, who is Canadian, is described as both hard working and destined for success because of his privileged background, which indicates a huge discrepancy between the portrayal of Black American players and Black international player(s). Black American players are also described as naturally talented rather than hard working and their statistics are far more emphasized than those of the White players. The controversial physical appearance and the impact of the mother as a role model on a player’s life is also a dominant factor in the portrayal of Black American players. There is the emphasis on the Black single mother who overworks herself by taking on several jobs to keep her child off the streets and support the Black athlete to make something of himself Eagleman (7). Eagleman’s description of Martin Russel, a single Black international player is interesting because his portrayal differs greatly from that of American Black athletes and resembles more how the average White players are portrayed. His French-Canadian privileged background is emphasized and he “is portrayed as a mythical figure with nearly unattainable qualities—high society, perfect body, and akin to racehorse great Seabiscuit” (Eagleman 162).

Latino MLB players are analyzed third. American Latino players are attributed strong work ethics and excellent on-field performance, i.e., statistics, are strongly emphasized. International Latino players are described as physically powerful and very talented, which is the crucial reason of their success. Coverage of various family stories of Latino players is a common practice, but the difference is that the American Latino players are usually portrayed next to their wives, while the international Latino players are associated with a tragic family history, or a misfortune related to family. U.S. born Latino players are presented as team leaders, unlike their international teammates, whose behavior is interpreted as troublesome and controversial. The knowledge of the English language, just like in the case of White international players, is subtly neglected while

portraying international Latino players. At last, international player's nationality is usually pointed out (Eagleman 156–68).

Asian MLB players are analyzed fourth. Interestingly, there is not a single article that presents U.S. born Asian baseball players. Consequently, the analysis of portrayal of Asian MLB players is based on international Asian players only. Asian internationals are frequently referred to as the “others”. In terms of behavior, habits, and traditional values, the Asians players are described to be quite different from the Americans. Isolated examples such as different techniques of warming up, disliking the taste of bubblegum or sleeping in a peculiar environment confirm the aforementioned statement. Furthermore, they are described as physically small, and their nationalities are always mentioned. Lack of knowledge of the English language is strongly emphasized and occasionally criticized, especially because certain Asian players need an interpreter in order to provide an interview. Their on-field performance is constantly included in the coverage and the reason for their success is found in a mixture of talent and hard work (Eagleman 156–68).

### **2.1.2. Game Oriented Stereotypes in Baseball**

The game of baseball itself, as one of the national sports, gathers thousands of Americans in stadiums and it is a highly valued pastime activity on the territory of the USA. However, its popularity and representation in the rest of the world is quite debatable, possibly because of its lack of dynamics. The article *Why is Baseball So Boring (Six Undeniable Reasons and Solutions)* points out six reasons that explain why baseball is periodically boring.

The first reason is that baseball is not a timed sport, which means it lasts nine innings and the match is not over until those nine innings are played, resulting in occasionally long matches that last for hours. The second reason is that so-called *home runs* are overrated, i.e., they are usually the most exciting part of the game, but they do not happen often and the game itself is more complex than simply focusing on *home runs*. The third reason is there are numerous gaps during games when nothing noteworthy happens for a long time, which is mundane and monotonous. The fourth reason is that there are not that many memorable and stunning celebrations like in basketball or football. The fifth reason is the length of the season in the MLB because it consists of exhaustingly many games, which gradually leads to the loss of interest by the fans. The final reason is the lack of knowledge of the fundamental rules; people who do not watch baseball regularly can have a hard time trying to understand the game (“Why is Baseball So Boring”).

## **2.2. Stereotyping in Basketball**

### **2.2.1. Racial Stereotyping in Basketball**

Racial stereotypes are arguably the most represented ones in the game of basketball and the reason for that could lie in the fact that more than 75% of the players in the NBA are Black. Therefore, several assumptions on why so many Black players excel in basketball have developed. The article, and at the same time the study, titled *White Men Can't Jump: Evidence for the Perceptual Confirmation of Racial Stereotypes Following a Basketball Game* was conducted in order to determine the perceptual confirmation of racial stereotypes in basketball. Before conducting the experiment, it was pointed out that, based on certain studies that took place in the past, people in general perceive Black players to be more athletic and better at the game itself while White players are perceived as more intelligent and prepared to hustle. These prior studies set the foundation for the experiment's starting point, which explicitly denotes the White players' incapability to outclass the Black players in the physical aspect of basketball (Stone et al. 291–306).

More precisely, the main aim of the article and the experiment itself was to examine the perception bias of racial stereotypes in a controlled environment where participants were familiar with the player's race and athleticism. Participants were simply instructed to rate the attributes and performance of the chosen player after listening to a radio commentary of a college game. However, 50% of the participants were told that the targeted player Mark Flick was Black, while the other 50% of the participants were told that Mark Flick was White (Stone et al. 291–306).

An analysis of the answers has shown that the perception of Mark Flick as a White player was due to the fact that he stood out with high basketball IQ and hustle, which resembles the aforementioned perceptions of White players from the previous studies. His contribution to the game is seen in an above average understanding of the game and willingness to put forth effort. Participants who evaluated Mark Flick as a Black player perceived him as a better team player and believed that he contributes through position play, which means he is a better player overall. Furthermore, there was an extension to the experiment that included examining the perception of White athletic and White unathletic basketball players versus Black athletic and Black unathletic basketball players. The participants believe that an athletic Black player would contribute to the game more efficiently than an athletic White player. In addition, athletic White players are perceived as less team oriented while unathletic White players are believed to have high basketball intelligence (Stone et al. 291–306).

The straightforward name of the study *White Men Can't Jump* lived up to its reputation. The findings indicate a huge perception divergence between Black and White basketball players. Black basketball players are perceived as physically superior and more valorized on the court. White basketball players on the other hand are ascribed high basketball intelligence and the ability to understand the game at an enviable level. Interestingly enough, in 1992 the comedy movie titled *White Men Can't Jump* had its premiere and one of the most represented themes of the movie is racial stereotyping in basketball because the main White protagonist Billy Hoyle embodied the breaking down of racial stereotypes simply by playing street basketball at the elite level among African Americans. The final scene of the movie depicts a memorable moment of Billy Hoyle who finally managed to dunk, thereby disproving that White men do not have the leaping ability.

The NBA, as the most popular and watched basketball league in the world, brings together professional basketball players from all continents. Its great diversity of players originate from different ethnic and racial backgrounds, and as a result perceptions of their masculinities vary. As previously stated, Black athletes make up approximately 3/4 of the league's roster, which is why Black masculinity, in comparison to the White masculinity, remains a point of great interest. Lavelle discusses the display of racial masculinity in basketball: "Racial issues are more contentious in the NBA than other professional sports because players are more visible. NBA players do not hide behind protective equipment. There are only 10 players on the court at once, and fans are close to the action" (Lavelle 297).

Commentary plays a pivotal role in the NBA, as it both entertains the spectators by providing important information regarding the game and it shapes public opinion about the players both as individuals and a group (teams and coaching staff). Occasionally even former athletes take the role of commentators, which additionally impacts people's perception of the players seen through an additional lens.

The above-mentioned stereotype of Black basketball players' superior masculinity is frequently found in sports commentators in the NBA. An example of illustrative evidence are the commentaries on six Houston Rockets nationally broadcasted games from 2003 and 2004 which were particularly selected by Lavelle. Lavelle analyzed the public perception of the masculinity of four All-Star NBA players: Dirk Nowitzki (White European), Tracy McGrady (African American), Shaquille O'Neal (African American), and Kobe Bryant (African American).

The German 7-foot power forward Dirk Nowitzki was globally recognized as a top scorer and had participated in two All-Star games. Although he did not have any U.S. product endorsement contracts, he garnered a lot of attention and was described as superior to two Black players that guarded him (Lavelle 2010: 294-314)

Commentary of the African American player Tracy McGrady focused on his All-Star team status, his endorsement collaboration with Pepsi and Adidas, his material status, his wealth displayed by being the first NBA player to possess a jet and his clout to request a trade to the Houston Rockets. Thus, commentary on him emphasized his masculinity on and off the court. (Lavelle 2010: 294-314)

Similarly, the commentary of the African American player Shaquille O'Neal was focused on his success in three championships, 13 All-Star appearances, and 3 Finals MVP awards, commercial endorsements and even a starring role in the movie titled *Kazaam*. His physical appearance was quite intimidating due to his height (216cm) and weight (147kg). Broadcasters described him as an unstoppable force on the court because he used his masculine raw strength to push through, score, rebound, and defend. It was even mentioned that he represents a potential danger for opposing players and emphasized the set idea that Black players are absolutely domineering in basketball. (Lavelle 2010: 294-314)

The third African American player, Kobe Bryant, was praised for his winning of three championships, six All-Star appearances, and many commercial endorsements with Nike, Coca Cola, and McDonald's, which had been terminated after rape accusations. Even though Kobe was under scrutiny because of the rape scandal, he managed to play games and dominate on the court. Commentaries were referring mostly to his on-court abilities, while his dramatic off-court activities were accompanied with a lot of empathy and without any criticism. It is assumed that calling out Kobe Bryant for alleged rape would have a harmful effect for the reputation of the NBA, which is why it was avoided. To be more precise, the league did not want to encourage the infamous stereotypical portrayal of a Black man who is accused of rape, so they tacitly preserved Bryant's honor and masculinity (Lavelle 2010: 294-314).

Based on Lavelle's analysis of the above-mentioned commentaries, it becomes evident that the commentary of Black players' performance and physical appearance is visibly biased. All the shortcomings of Black players' actions both on and off the court are minimized while their assets are emphasized to secure the vitality of their masculinity. As has already been stated, commentaries influence how fans perceive certain players or groups of players and in this specific case it is implied that Black players are physically superior both on and off the court. Thus, Lavelle's findings confirm the use and transmission of racial stereotypes in basketball.

### **2.2.2. Gender Stereotypes in Basketball**

In addition to the racial stereotypes in sports, there are also gender stereotypes. Eastman and Billings research of gender related stereotypes in college basketball finds that various studies suggest that women's basketball is, for the most part, perceived as too slow and less skilled in contrast to men's basketball and attracts less spectators. It is interesting to note that where gender is concerned, research has focused not only on the gender of players but broadcasters as well. Eastman and Billings focus on research conducted "to find out whether the traditional racial and gender stereotypes of sports announcers persist in spite of many more Black and female announcers" (188).

After analyzing the announcements at 66 college basketball games, a handful of conclusions related to gender stereotypes in basketball were drawn upon. Interestingly, not a single announcer mentioned or implied anything about female basketball players as being slower or less entertaining. Furthermore, sportscasters tend to comment on male and female players equally and without any biases. However, personal backgrounds (coaches, fathers, and families) of 13% of female players were brought up, which is non-existent in the announcing of men's college games (Eastman & Billings 188).

It can be argued that gender stereotypes in commentary and announcing have been almost completely eradicated, while the attention-grabbing opinion that women's basketball is slow paced, less skilled, and lacks amusement compared to men's basketball possibly still exists among the wider sports audience. This stereotype will be examined and discussed in the survey conducted for the purposes of this thesis.

### **2.3. Stereotyping in American Football**

Stereotyping in American football, just like in the previous two sports, is perpetually present. The belief is that Black professional athletes excel in physical dominance and natural ability on the one hand, while White players exceed in intelligence and leadership on the other. These stereotypical features contribute especially to the controversial perception of quarterbacks in the NFL. Namely, the quarterback position requires high football intelligence, leadership characteristics, ability to make quick and efficient decisions, and strong work ethics. Consequently, this position is usually stereotypically associated with White players.

According to Ferrucci and Tandoc, in *Race and the Deep Ball: Applying Stereotypes to NFL Quarterbacks*, many Black American high school quarterbacks are persuaded to switch their position after being characterized as too physical and inadequately intelligent to play quarterback. The opposite approach is applied to White players, who are encouraged to leave physically oriented positions in order to play positions that require a deeper intellectual understanding of the game. Also, approximately 67% of NFL players are Black, but only 15% of NFL quarterbacks are Black, which means that this position is mostly played by White players. It has also been revealed that White quarterbacks earn more money than their Black counterparts even if they play at the same level and contribute to their team equally. Ferrucci's and Tandoc's study even proves that football fans have more faith in White quarterbacks than they do in Black quarterbacks even if the Black player is incredibly intelligent and possesses leadership qualities (41–57).

Ferrucci and Tandoc claim in their other joint collaboration "*The Spiral of Stereotyping: Social Identity Theory and NFL Quarterbacks*," that NFL broadcasters are more likely to characterize a mistake as "dumb play" if a Black quarterback is the one who made it. In addition, broadcasters do not explicitly state that Black quarterbacks are inferior, but subtle descriptors in their speech are used instead. There is also the evidence that many young adolescent Black players are influenced by the public image of Black quarterbacks to the extent that they do not see themselves as adequate quarterbacks, which alters the way they approach the game. A study conducted by Ferrucci and Tandoc among both Black and White participants demonstrated that sympathizers of American football perceive stereotypical descriptions of players as more credible. In other words, Black participants mostly do not dispute the stereotype that White players are better quarterbacks (107–25).

Mercurio and Filak addressed the same issue regarding racial stereotyping of NFL quarterbacks, with a specific focus on the progress of young players. In order to give talented players regardless of race an opportunity to become quarterbacks, efforts are being made to correct the misconceptions of perceiving Black players with an abundance of needed talent, as incompetent quarterbacks (56–71). The prejudiced misconception has a negative outcome in terms of developing versatility of both Black and White players. As Mercurio and Filak point out: "With a constant framing by the media that Black and White quarterbacks have certain traits, it will be extremely difficult for individuals in both of those races to be seen for anything other than those traits, even if they possess other skills" (68).



### **3. A Literary Representation of Stereotypes in American Sports Through the Career of Kobe Bryant**

#### **3.1. Biography of Kobe Bryant**

Sports biographies not only offer insight into the lives and experiences of players but are also a valuable source of inspiration for all individuals who are searching for ways to overcome challenges in life and become successful. This genre is also characterized by the fact that the main protagonists are humanized, thereby presented as more relatable to readers. Moreover, sports biographies ensure that the legacy of the targeted professional athlete is remembered and commended.

According to Thing and Ronglan, the popularity of sports biographies is flourishing in contemporary literature and the trend of selling personal stories to the media is skyrocketing. It is well-known that the entertainment industry draws nourishment from the feelings and provocative situations of famous people, and biographies can meet that criterion. Athletes usually express their feelings, confessions, and reflections on many appealing topics, which instantly makes a high-quality biography worth reading and is considered to be an interactional ritual between the reader and the athlete himself (Thing and Ronglan 280–88).

The biography of the late Kobe Bryant, a former African American professional basketball player, will serve as a representative sample for the purposes of determining how professional athletes are perceived, how they perceive themselves in relation to stereotypes in American sports, and how they contribute to the breaking of stereotypes. The name of this literary work is *Showboat: The Life of Kobe Bryant*, written by Roland Lazenby. It was first published in 2016 after Bryant's retirement from professional basketball and its content chronologically delves into the career and life of Kobe Bean Bryant on many levels. In other words, the book provides an insight into Bryant's childhood and upbringing, his love for the game of basketball and relentless work ethics, individual and team accomplishments with the Los Angeles Lakers, relationships with former teammates and coaches, numerous struggles and affairs in private life, and many life lessons Kobe Bryant shared about the adversities he faced. The focal point for this paper will be how stereotypes in sports affected Bryant's everyday life and the way he was perceived by the media and how he perceived himself. Since Bryant was a top-notch NBA player who gained both admiration and resentment during his 20-year-old career, his biography is an information-rich source of exposing and breaking stereotypes in basketball and American sports in general.

Bryant's life story covered in the biography ends at the end of his prolific NBA career and is carefully and astutely narrated mostly using third-person point of view. The omniscient narrator Roland Lazenby relies on basketball statistics and other reliable sources of information such as Bryant's former teammates and coaches, family, friends, sports journalists, acquaintances, etc. There is no sign of the first-person point of view even though Bryant's quotes occasionally appear, and their temporal and causal context is explained. The text is written in both formal and informative manner, with a few exceptions in quoting when sports slang or vulgarisms are used.

### **3.2. Stereotypical Features in the Biography *Showboat: The Life of Kobe Bryant***

One of the most represented stereotypes in the biography is the already mentioned racial stereotype that Black athletes are physically superior, remarkably athletic, and more talented than other athletes. More precisely, Bryant grew up in Italy, a country whose population is predominantly White, because his father Joe Bryant played professional basketball for several Italian teams, resulting in the family moving to Italy. Therefore, Bryant's early beginnings on the court started in Europe where he stood out as a Black kid who seemed to be an above average talent. To support the evidence of this stereotype, it is noteworthy to mention that even Bryant himself pointed out several times during his career that he often relied on his strong athletic ability:

“‘He was really selfish,’ recalled Giacomo Vittori, Bryant's childhood friend from Italy, adding that the selfishness came from the fact that Kobe was so much better than all the other players. ‘Everybody noticed. He was the only black kid there. Everybody noticed. He was very skilled.’” (Lazenby 82)

Sam Rines, one of Bryant's coaches remarked: “‘He was phenomenal, especially being in ninth grade playing with twelfth graders. Obviously he didn't have the strength at the time to battle inside, but he had the athleticism, the shot.’” (Lazenby 125)

In the chapter on stereotyping in baseball it was stated that Black athletes are stereotypically portrayed as a race that must face a lot of adversity and hardship in order to succeed in sports. This mainstream opinion is also addressed in the biography while narrating the career of Kobe Bryant's father, Joe Bryant. Namely, Joe Bryant grew up in Philadelphia, a city known for its problems with gang violence. Young Black men were often involved in illegal activities, which resulted in dropping out of school, going to prison or even gang-related deaths. The only escape from the harsh reality of Philadelphia at the time was to engage in sports. Luckily, Joe Bryant was

a prosperous athlete: “Jellybean Bryant somehow managed to be one of the lucky ones. ‘If you weren’t an athlete, you were in trouble,’ Julius Thompson said.” (Lazenby 23)

The stereotype of superior Black masculinity of the NBA players is also strongly emphasized as Kobe Bryant in his prime with the Los Angeles Lakers really embodied the role of the alpha male on the court. Bryant had always wanted to be the best player and the leader of his team. The ultimate goal was to become, as he said, “the Man” which he eventually succeeded in becoming. The ball on offense was mostly in Bryant’s hands and the plays were based on his execution. In addition, even though it has never been officially revealed, it is believed that Bryant periodically took part in trades and the change of coaching staff. In light of the above, it is obvious that Bryant’s urge to be the macho alpha male among his teammates set the tone of his career. According to Rines: “Kobe had to have the fifteen extra shots to develop. The coaches and others players would have to understand that Kobe was the top of the team’s hierarchy” (Lazenby 123).

Bryant’s unmatched competitiveness, obsession to win multiple championships, and desire to be the Man created various perceptions of him in the media. He did not talk much in public, he practiced a lot, he constantly required maximum effort from his teammates, and he had a tendency to repeatedly alienate himself from others. Over a period of time, multiple basketball stereotypes closely related to Bryant’s personality had developed. His demeanor on the court was judged and perceived as arrogant, self-centered, spoiled, and narcissistic. The peak of hostility happened during the All-Star game in Philadelphia, his hometown, in 2002 when fans booed Bryant every time he touched the ball. Bryant seemed to be unbothered, but later he would confess that it was so heartbreaking that he cried after the game. Over the years his attitude towards the infamous perception of his presence created by the fans and media had matured. When asked about fans booing at him a few years later, his response was very confident, claiming that he loves it and feels comfortable under pressure. In his last couple of seasons Bryant simply embraced the role of a villain and used the negative public perception as a source of motivation. He even attributed himself a nickname *The Black Mamba* and let his performance do the talking: “Bryant knew it was time to draw on his dark side, a concept he would eventually articulate as ‘embracing the villain’ within himself in order to vanquish opponents.” (Lazenby 510) The longest period of Bryant’s career was marked by playing under the coaching staff led by Phil Jackson, one of the most successful basketball coaches and players of all time. It had taken several seasons before Jackson and Bryant finally found a common ground and started gaining mutual respect for each other. Before finding that mutual chemistry, Jackson tried to reach out to Kobe simply by giving him a book to read after a practice session. Interestingly, the topic was of a stereotype-racist nature because it was about a White man who was pretending to be Black in 1960s. Kobe found it to be

racist and attributed it to Jackson's mind games. However, there was no extra context to this Jackson's mind game and his true intentions at time have never been revealed: "That was a bad one. Kobe told me, 'What the fuck?'" (Lazenby 344)

Rumor has it that professional athletes, especially the ones who play for the Los Angeles Lakers, have a tendency to be promiscuous and commit adultery. Even a decade or two before Bryant's debut in 1996, the roster of the Los Angeles Lakers was known for controversial sexual activities, with an emphasis on Magic Johnson, one of the first famous people diagnosed with HIV. Unfortunately for Bryant's public image, he embodied this infamous stereotype by committing adultery and being accused of rape. The rape charges were dropped eventually, but that did not change the fact that he engaged in an extramarital affair. As has been stated earlier, some of his endorsement agreements were terminated due to his tainted public image: "The Lakers, of course, had long inhabited a hypersexual environment in Los Angeles. The team's history and character weren't an excuse for this but merely an explanation of the culture and tradition Bryant had come to rule." (Lazenby 534)

### **3.3. The Breaking of Stereotypes in Bryant's Biography**

As plentiful discoveries suggest, many sports stereotypes have been shaping the public opinion regarding athletes. However, Bryant's contribution to the game of basketball and sports overall impacted the breaking of certain sports stereotypes.

To reiterate, White athletes are usually stereotypically perceived as hard workers, hustlers, and highly intelligent players, while Black athletes are believed to be naturally talented, and their success depends on it. Firstly, Kobe Bryant, an African American, despite his immense natural talent, was a surreal hard worker in terms of practice. He did not rely on his genetic potential, but rather on hard work and dedication, a quality that is associated with White athletes. He would wake up early in the morning just to get a head start and complete more drills than his teammates and opposing players. Also, he uncompromisingly disliked the laziness and lack of determination of the players he shared the locker room with. Even when he was severely injured, Bryant was seeking possibilities to practice and play games while rejecting to undergo unnecessary surgeries: "It was amazing," Schafer explained. "A game could end, and we would fly to the next city. We'd get in, it would be three in the morning, and he would want me to come do a stretch with him or something. Instead of just going to bed or whatever, he couldn't switch it off." (Lazenby 470)

He enjoyed the night life but that did not keep him from his diligent routine: He would stay out until 1 a.m., but no matter how late Bryant stayed out, he was up early and going through unbelievably demanding workouts each day.” (Lazenby 210)

The previously mentioned basketball stereotype mentioned that basketball vision and overall intelligence is stereotypically linked with White players also was broken by Bryant. He had an extraordinary understanding and vision of movement on the court to the extent that he was able to predict plays and moves before they even happened. For instance, a complex triangle offense that many players struggled with was easily acquired by Bryant: “Before the first practice he knew. He certainly knew the right spots on the floor. He knew the right actions. He knew what he wanted to get out of it. It was amazing.” (Lazenby 333)

His every reaction was well thought out: “His neck would arch oddly as he prepared to flex his fake and locked in his peripheral vision, surveying the floor without giving up his intention.” (Lazenby 302)

Unlike his father who grew up on the risky and potentially dangerous streets of Philadelphia, Bryant’s growing up had tangible distinctions. In other words, he did not have to go through hardships that many of his fellow peers had experienced. It is stereotypically perceived that Black athletes usually have a more disadvantaged childhood and face more obstacles on their way to success. In contrast, Bryant grew up in a harmonious family in Italy and had an opportunity to spend every day among professional basketball players since his father played professional basketball in Europe. He also learned Italian as his second language and acquired a high level of formal education. The reputation of his father helped him get into several prestigious basketball camps as well. Therefore, it is evident that Bryant got a head start due to his privileged family background and even in this aspect broke the common stereotype that Black athletes go through more adversity and experience an unenviable family situation: “So Joe Bryant literally begged Vaccaro, on the eve of the invitation-only camp, to allow his son in.” (Lazenby 145)

Finally, Bryant disproved the stereotype that juvenile sports stars are arrogant, egotistical, and pompous. It is a very common thing that athletes, especially the young ones, start spending money on luxurious merchandise, crave for perpetual attention or simply lack manners. Kobe Bryant, on the other hand, during his rookie season was down-to-earth and did not attract any unwanted attention. Even though many basketball pundits expected him to act as a stereotypical young star, Kobe proved them wrong by being relaxed, elegant, and good natured: “Kobe didn’t take on all the usual aspects of an NBA star, as we would think of them or the stereotype of them. He didn’t have an entourage. He didn’t wear jewelry. He didn’t have tattoos back then. He didn’t have a piercing.” (Lazenby 307)

Additionally, as the previous resources imply, in contrast to Black players, White players are often perceived as physically weaker and less dominant. On the example of Pau Gasol, a White Spaniard and former center of the Los Angeles Lakers, we can observe that this stereotype is a misconception. Gasol was tall, strong, competitive, and used his physical prowess cunningly, proving that White European players are anything but soft. His strong presence on the court significantly contributed to winning two NBA titles in 2009 and 2010. Kobe Bryant's impact regarding breaking of this stereotype lies in a fact that he was Gasol's teammate who motivated him and expected magnificent performances from Gasol: "At the same time, Gasol also managed to save the reputation of European basketball. There was a time when NBA insiders could hear the whispers around the league, complaints that European players were soft." (Lazenby 502)

### **3.4. Kobe Bryant's Self-reflection and Stereotypes**

The previous section provided an insight into the widely spread stereotypes, rumors, facts, and perceptions of Kobe Bryant as a player, teammate, husband, family member, etc. A divided public image created by the media presented him as an amazing player and father on the one hand, and a tough-to-handle teammate and inept spouse on the other. Bryant's strong mindset and character definitely helped in preserving his inner common sense. As previously addressed, his demeanor had matured over years in a way that the negative comments and perceptions about him only made him thrive, eventually resulting in an increased number of supporters. The following statements vividly describe how Bryant perceived himself regarding the stereotypes, public condemnations, and criticism that had developed in his career and personal life:

"People don't know my game and what I need to do for myself to get better. Sometimes what they say may be true, but you get to a point where you hear and you don't hear." (qtd. in Lazenby 318)

"You know what, the whole thing is I can't help what people think about me. That's not what I'm trying to do. They can say whatever they want to say about me. But the fact of the matter is I come from Philadelphia. It's where I honed my basketball skills. You can take that however you want to take that. If you still think of me as a sellout, then think of me as a sellout.'" (Lazenby 383)

"You can't imagine what it's like going through what I've gone through, what I'm still going through," he said. "But I come out here to play, this is my job. I'm going to come out here, I'm going to do it well.'" (Lazenby 423)

“I love it. I love it. I mean, I love it. This is where it all began for me.’ What else could he say? He loved it perhaps only in that it fed his competitive anger and determination.”  
(Lazenby 461)

As Bryant’s statements confirm, his everyday life was significantly influenced by public expectations, sports stereotypes and criticism. It is reasonable to claim that well-known professional athletes cope with burdens that people who are not famous cannot understand. Luckily, Bryant’s unquestionable mental strength that had developed over the years helped him perceive himself as the best player and individual he could possibly be. Bottom line, Bryant was aware of how stereotypes and constant pressure work, but he did not let negativity to get the best of him. In fact, he used it as a source of motivation and perseverance. Based on Bryant’s example, it is evident that stereotypes regarding professional athletes certainly influence the way they are perceived and evaluated, but it is also up to the individual athlete to prove or disprove the latter, just as Bryant has done.

## **4. Breaking Stereotypes in American Sports among Americans and Croatians**

### **4.1. Survey Methods**

In order to test the hypothesis that Americans and Croatians perceive stereotypes in American sports somewhat differently, a survey was conducted among 30 Americans and 30 Croatians between 20 and 30 years of age. The survey is interesting particularly because it was carried out among respondents living in these two culturally and geographically distinct countries. Confirmation of the hypothesis would reveal which stereotypes are present in which region and where and to what extent sports stereotypes are being broken. Ten different stereotypical statements based on the information from selected scholarly articles were selected and tested. The survey was carried out using a Likert scale questionnaire with five different answers ranging from 1 to 5 (1 - I completely disagree; 2 – I mostly disagree; 3 – I don't know; 4 – I mostly agree; 5 – I completely agree). The following stereotypical statements were offered:

1. African American (Black) athletes are more naturally talented/physically superior to Caucasian (White) athletes.
2. Caucasian (White) athletes have better understanding, i.e., higher intelligence for the game than African American (Black) athletes.
3. Baseball is a source of entertainment only in the USA and perceived as boring in other countries.
4. White basketball players struggle with leaping ability (White Men Can't Jump).
5. Basketball played by women is less skilled than basketball played by men.
6. Basketball played by women is less interesting than basketball played by men.
7. White athletes are more determined and work harder than Black athletes.
8. Black athletes are more likely to go through adversity on their way to success.
9. White football players are better quarterbacks than Black football players.
10. Black basketball players are the most masculine and the best players overall.



## 4.2. Results of the Survey of Americans

The statement that Black professional athletes are more naturally talented (physically stronger) than White athletes is perceived as predominantly accurate by Americans because only one participant disagrees, one participant mostly disagrees, five participants do not know, but the majority (19 participants) mostly agree, and 4 participants agree completely.

That White professional athletes have a better understanding (intelligence) of the game than Black athletes is strongly negated by Americans since 21 participants completely disagree, 4 participants mostly disagree, 3 participants are neutral, and only one mostly agrees. Not a single participant agrees completely.

It was addressed earlier in the paper that baseball is frequently perceived as a boring sport, especially outside the USA. However, Americans do not agree with the statement and strongly believe that baseball is a source of entertainment not only in the USA, but in other parts of the world as well, which is evident in their answers; 12 of them completely disagree, 8 mostly disagree, 4 are neutral, while only 6 participants question baseball's attractiveness and popularity on a global level.

The already mentioned infamous stereotypical speculation that White men cannot jump, which insinuates that Black basketball players are athletically superior and have more developed leaping ability than White players, makes an imposing presence in the game of basketball. Regardless of this stereotypical belief, Americans are mostly neutral (11 participants) when it comes to White basketball player's leaping abilities, while 15 of them mostly or completely disagree. Only 4 participants mostly or completely agree with this controversial statement.

Even though the researched domain of stereotyping in basketball does not expose nor has any evidence regarding inferiority of basketball played by women in comparison to basketball played by men, it is intriguing to examine this point of view among young sympathizers of the sport. The stereotype that basketball played by women is less skilled than basketball played by men is perceived in many ways. Only 2 participants are neutral, 13 of them mostly or completely agree, while 15 disagree. In terms of amusement, 18 participants agree that basketball played by women is less interesting than its men's counterpart. Two participants are neutral, and 10 participants disagree with this statement.

One of the most represented stereotypes in American sports is that White athletes are allegedly more determined and work harder than Black athletes in order to succeed. Interestingly, Americans dispute this stereotype without any hesitation. The vast majority (23 participants)

completely disagree with this statement, 2 mostly disagree, 3 are neutral, and only 2 participants mostly agree with it.

The belief that Black athletes go through more adversity and face more obstacles on their way to glory, both on and off the court, was noted earlier in the paper. American survey results imply that this stereotype is reliable to a certain extent since 15 participants agree with it, 9 are neutral, and only 6 disagree.

Even though only 15% of Black football players play quarterback, American attitudes do not seem to be biased. 22 American participants claim that race does not play a role in evaluation of quarterbacks, 5 participants are neutral, and only 3 of them believe that White quarterbacks perform better than their Black counterparts.

Arguably one of the most spread stereotypes in sports is that Black basketball players have paramount skills in terms of basketball capabilities in general. In addition, they tend to be perceived as more masculine. However, Americans mostly take the neutral attitude (13 participants) with slight indications of agreement with the stereotype (8 participants mostly agree and 2 agree completely). Seven participants disagree completely.

### **4.3. Results of the Survey of Croatians**

Croatian participants, just like Americans, mainly perceive Black athletes as physically superior and more talented since 14 participants mostly agree and 5 of them completely agree with this stereotypical statement. 10 participants disagree and only one is neutral.

Results regarding intelligence and understanding of the game are once again similar to the Americans. Croatians also agree that sports intelligence is not determined by the color of the skin. 17 participants disagree, 7 are neutral, and only 6 agree with this stereotype.

A significant difference in the perception of stereotypes is exemplified in the area of baseball. Only one participant thinks that baseball is not popular only in the USA and 7 participants are neutral. On the other hand, 22 participants believe that baseball is popular only in the USA, therefore it is perceived as boring and unpopular in other parts of the world.

The claim that White men cannot jump is moderately negated by Croatians. The majority is neutral (10 participants) while 16 participants disagree, completely or partially. Only 5 participants agree with the stereotypical assumption that White players lack leaping ability.

Croatians strongly believe that basketball played by women is less skilled than basketball played by men. 19 participants support this controversial statement, 3 participants are neutral, and

8 participants disagree. In terms of attractiveness of this sport the opinion is almost identical. 23 Croatian participants agree that basketball played by women is less interesting, 3 participants are neutral, and only 4 participants disagree.

The Croatian and American attitudes are similar with respect to the claim that White athletes work harder than Black athletes. To be more precise, 16 Croatian participants completely disagree that White athletes work harder than Black athletes and 8 participants mostly disagree. Only one participant agrees with the statement and 5 participants are neutral.

In contrast to the Americans, who occasionally tend to believe that Black athletes face more obstacles and disadvantages in their careers, Croatians have a neutral (10 participants) and negating attitude (13 participants) towards this stereotype. Only 7 Croatians believe that Black athletes struggle more frequently before they reach final success.

Croatians, for the most part, have a neutral attitude on the impact of race on the performance of quarterbacks. The largest number of respondents, 19, are neutral, 7 participants negate the stereotype that Black players lack the skills required to play this position and only 4 participants perceive White quarterbacks to be more capable.

Lastly, the belief that Black basketball players are more masculine and supreme is slightly far-fetched, but not excluded. Opinions are divided, but 50% of the respondents agree with this stereotype fully or mostly, 5 are neutral, and 10 do not detect any trustworthiness in the statement.

#### **4.4. Discussion of the Findings of the Survey**

The analysis of the joint results indicates that American and Croatian point of view gravitates towards the breaking of three sports stereotypes. Both Americans and Croatians are prone to disregard that White players possess a higher IQ and better understanding of the game than Black athletes; that White athletes have stronger work ethics than Black athletes; and that White American football players are more competent quarterbacks than Black American football players. The stereotype that White athletes cannot jump has gotten mostly neutral results by both sides with slight indications of supporting the statement, which is worth noting, too.

The hypothesis that Americans and Croatians perceive stereotypes in American sports somewhat differently has not been confirmed. The three above mentioned stereotypes garnered similar views but the following three differ in the two nations: Firstly, Americans and Croatians perceive baseball completely differently. Namely, Americans believe that baseball is an amusing and globally popular sport while Croatians perceive this sport as boring and questionably famous.

The main reason for different attitudes could be the fact that Americans invented baseball and Croatians have practically no exposure to it.

Secondly, Americans perceive Black athletes as a subculture that has usually the most challenging path to success, while Croatians, a homogenously White nation, disagree. Thirdly, since American football, just like baseball, remains mostly unknown in Croatia, Croatians are mostly neutral (do not have a formed opinion) when it comes to evaluation of quarterbacks in American football. Americans on the other hand strongly disprove that race plays a role in the quality of quarterback performance.

It is noteworthy to emphasize that the different ethnical backgrounds, different sports habits, and different mind frames of these two countries (Americans as an in-group and Croatians as an out-group) contribute to the establishment of opposite attitudes towards baseball, NFL quarterbacks, and development of Black athletes' talent.

The prevalent stereotype that Black athletes are more talented and physically stronger, as well as that the best and most masculine basketball players are usually Black, is either supported or simply not denied by the participants. That White athletes cannot jump has taken a predominantly neutral standpoint, which is not enough to break the stereotype entirely. Finally, both Americans and Croatians believe, to a greater or lesser extent, that basketball played by women is somewhat less skilled and less entertaining than basketball played by men.

## Conclusion

According to numerous scholarly articles and surveys, Kobe Bean Bryant's biography and the survey conducted for the purposes of this study, it is evident that sports stereotyping is present in American sports and that some are being broken while others still persist. The paper contributes by raising awareness to various sports stereotypes in particular to those associated with the three most popular American sports: basketball, American football and baseball. Stereotyping White athletes as intelligent and hard-working harms the perception of Black athletes as does stereotyping of Black athletes as naturally talented and physically superior. Also, by labelling Black athletes as those who face the biggest number of adversities before they become successful, such as a difficult childhood or family tragedies, does not empower them but victimizes them. Furthermore, since baseball was originally intended for White Americans only, this sport is occasionally influenced by racial stereotypes, with an emphasis on the harsher treatment of other races which sometimes have to go the extra mile in order to prove their worth in the game. Also, with regard to baseball, non-Americans perceive this sport to be boring and popular only in the United States. Basketball is also stereotyped racially in that there is an overall belief that White basketball players cannot jump, i.e., that they lack athleticism as well as that Black players are more masculine and better basketball players. In a similar fashion, stereotyping in football results in the questioning of the intellectual capabilities of Black players, which results in the preference for White football players as quarterbacks.

*How do the professional American athletes see themselves in relation to stereotypes in sports*, is exemplified and represented through the example of Kobe Bean Bryant's biography. Bryant's biography reveals that professional athletes are fully aware of stereotyping in sports and public conceptions and misconceptions that determine their estimated qualities and shortcomings. The sequence of events in the career of Kobe Bryant shows two aspects of the athlete's perception of himself in relation to stereotypes. In other words, at the beginning of his NBA career, Bryant was influenced negatively by stereotypes, sometimes to the extent that made him reconsider his capabilities and purpose. However, as Bryant matured, he embraced the criticism and turned stereotyping into his strong suit. To uncompromisingly dominate the basketball court, he disproved the stereotypes, particularly through his diligence. His performance on and off the court showed that an African American athlete did not have to be from an underprivileged background, that he had the brains, willingness to work hard, the vision and all the other stereotypical attributes associated usually with White players.

The hypothesis of the paper that Americans and Croatians perceive stereotypes in American sports somewhat differently turned out to be partially true. Despite the ethnic and geographical diversity, American and Croatians are similar in some respects and vary in other. Some of their views were expected, especially regarding stereotyping in baseball and American football. Croatians are rarely exposed to these two sports so the differences in their perspectives regarding these two sports were not surprising.

Additionally, Americans perceive Black athletes to be the most likely to face various setbacks and obstacles, while Croatians, a homogeneously White nation, do not share the same standpoint. As was already mentioned, the different ethnic and geographical background of these two countries leads to different preferences and perspectives as well as views on the stereotypes in sports.

Lastly, as the title of the paper suggests, it is necessary to determine Which stereotypes in American sports have been broken? Players like Kobe Bryant, whose work ethics are depicted in the biography, provide hope that stereotyping in sports can be broken. In addition, the survey also showed that even countries with people of vastly different ethnic and geographic backgrounds, are forming mindsets that are supportive of the breaking of stereotypes in sports. In conclusion it is worth mentioning that sports are an integral part of life in the United States and Croatia and that the more the two cultures interact globally will hopefully result in bridging the gap in their perspectives of sports and stereotyping.

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