



There's nothing quite like the intrigue of sports.

Recently, Netflix has capitalized on our thirst for all things athletics with a variety of sports-centered shows. Here is a closer look at why and how these stories are so captivating.

Americans have always loved a good sports story. To follow an athlete or team's journey through "the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat" is captivating, entertaining, and binge worthy. Streaming sites like Netflix have made older sports shows easily accessible while also producing their own sports dramas and documentary series.

During the pandemic, sports shows on Netflix have become increasingly popular among high school students. Netflix sports shows are multifaceted.

Not only are they entertaining, but they can shed light on lesser known sports, influence training techniques, and provide insight on the lives of student athletes.

While some people enjoy Sunday night football, others prefer fictional Netflix series, like "Friday Night Lights" and "All American," that chronicle the highs and lows of high school football. These shows don't require a deep knowledge of sports and instead

strike a balance between the game time intensity and off the field drama. The two sides are just enough to draw in football fans as well as viewers searching for a gripping plot line.

"Friday Night Lights" aired in 2006 and averaged 6 million views on both the first two seasons.

The show is based on a true story that was initially chronicled in a book written by H.G. Bissinger and

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-Karel '23

published in 2004. The show centers around the Dillon Panther High School football team in Dillon, Texas, but explores the narrative on a deeper level than the book. Not only does the show capture the football team's tragic losses and triumphant victories, but also dives into the home lives, relationships, and inner struggles of the players. In athletics, the players on the field aren't just stat lines and a game is never just a game. Netflix shows like "Friday Night Lights" reflect this universal element of sports.

Although "Friday Night Lights" is an older show, many Paly students have watched or even re-watched the show for its dramatic appeal on and off the field.

"Friday Night Lights is one of my favorite shows of all time," Natalie Hmelar ('22) said. "I don't even like football but I'm still super obsessed with the show and I've watched it five times."

Because "Friday Night Lights" shows the athletes in all settings like the classroom, on the field, and with friends, Paly student-athletes feel like they can relate to the players.

"Most student-athletes are the same," Ryan Lykken ('22) said. "They have to make time for school but also sports and they can struggle with balancing the two. I like seeing the drama in practices and games and I feel like I can relate to how the athletes feel."

More recently, Netflix aired a second fictional sports show, "All American," that gained popularity quickly among high school students. The show, which debuted in 2018, portrays a more modern take on of high school football in comparison to "Friday Night Lights".

"All American" is based on a true story of NFL player Spencer Paysiwonger and his high school football experience. It also delves into the vastly different worlds of central LA and Beverly Hills that come together in his life.

"I think that [Friday Night Lights] does a better representation of the sport of football than "All American," Danny Peters ('22) said. "But, for the most part, both the shows get it down really well, especially the roughness of the sport."

"Formula 1: Drive To Survive", a Netflix series based on the highest class of international auto racing, gives exclusive access and behind the scenes of some

of the world's premier drivers, owners, and F1 managers. This show has not only become extremely popular, but is also a gateway for people to discover Formula 1 and become fans of the sport.

Many Paly F1 fans discovered the sport through the show "Drive To Survive". The drama and behind the scenes component of the show has drawn in a number of

students.

"I like Formula 1 because it gives you a different perspective of what happens throughout a season," Sal Meehan ('23) said. "It shows you a lot of stuff you wouldn't find out or know about by just being a normal fan or spectator of the race."

There are 10 teams in each race, representing the company that sponsors the teams, with two racers on each team. As one of the most diverse sports leagues in the world, F1 has 15 countries represented within the 20 drivers.

Along with many other sport shows, Formula 1 consists of intense drama among the young men who participate in these races and the coaches of each team.

"The drama aspect of the show is very interesting because it gives you a lot of perspective on how the teams and crew members that are not in the car are able to create a flexible game plan during the race," Meehan said.

With the exclusive insight that the audience is able to gain from the show, viewers can also learn about the lives of the individual athletes. Having a behind the scenes look at the races allows the audience to better understand the process of each race and to get to know each driver. Some drivers are the sons of the extremely wealthy team owners while others have worked their way up to the top from diverse economic backgrounds. Like any great show, there

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are heroes and villains, but the fun of "Drive to Survive" is the viewers get to determine who those characters are.

"I get to see the personality of all the drivers which gives more meaning to the people behind the helmets," Sam Duong ('22) said.

The first season of this Netflix series had a significant impact on the viewership in

the United States. According to an article in the New York Times, race day ticket sales in the United States after the show debuted in 2019 rose 15% from 2018. The average number of viewers per race rose from 547,000 in 2018 to 928,000 in 2021.

"I hadn't watched Formula 1 before watching the show, but after watching [the show], I got really into it," Jack Haight ('22) said.

Netflix's platform is extremely popular and with the accessibility to watch "Drive To Survive" through it, it will be fascinating to see the viewership for Formula 1 grow as more people are exposed to this Netflix series and become consistent fans.

Another popular documentary sports show on Netflix, "Cheer", follows the nationally ranked Navarro

College Bulldogs cheer team in Corsicana, Texas. This series primarily focuses on five of the members of the

cheer team as they get ready to compete in the annual National Cheerleading Championship in Florida. Similar to "Drive to Survive", you get the exclusive backstage scenes of the members and dramatic aspects displayed in the show.

Here at Paly, the cheer team uses similar techniques that are seen in the show.

Natalie Karel ('23), a member of the Paly cheer team, was able to explain the similarities of Paly cheer and the show "Cheer".

"During our competition season, we have a similar "on mat/off mat" team," Karel said. "That means there are certain athletes who are in charge of learning the routine just in case someone who is "on mat" can not perform."

With the high risk of injuries that comes from cheer, having a backup person to take the place of any possible injuries on the team is extremely important.

"To be a great cheerleader, you need to have strength and balance for stunting and tumbling, flexibility for jumps, coordination to dance, and be fearless and able to perform in front of a crowd effortlessly," Karel said.

As the show "Cheer" became popular, it gave people the opportunity to really see what competitive cheer is really like.

"I loved the show "Cheer" on Netflix. I think it helped start to break the stereotype that has surrounded cheerleading"

"It really captures what being a cheerleader is all about and shows the hard work and time that goes into competing," Karel said.

Along with the show's exclusive access to the hard work and dedication demonstrated by being a cheerleader, it also gives insight into the team members' personal lives.

"I loved getting to feel so close to all the athletes in the show," Karel said. "Getting to see the lives of inspirational athletes that I look up to was really cool."

This Netflix series has been able to expose many audiences to an accurate representation of cheerleading. Not only has it helped form Paly's cheer team techniques, but it has given cheer the exposure it needs, and hopefully ended the stereotypes and false

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