

The Shared Language of Superstition

Lilee Woodruff

Department of English, University of Connecticut

ENGL -1007-Seminar and Studio in Writing and Multimodal Composition

Professor Hailey Palubicki

April 12, 2026

The Shared Language of Superstition

Picture this: you're on your couch sitting watching a sports game that you have absolutely no control over but somehow it feels as if everything depends on your next move. You stay seated in the same position. You wear the same good luck hat. You constantly repeat the same phrases. In the back of your mind you know it shouldn't matter but the feeling that it does matter can't go away. Scholars have studied fans' superstitious behaviors and defined them as coping mechanisms for fans to deal with uncertainty and emotional stress. While this is a strong perspective, the individual is the main focus point. This scrapbook builds upon that idea by highlighting how superstitions work socially through the way they are shared, passed down and a way to build connection and community between fans. These actions may start out individually, but their impact goes further.

Sports fandom falls into the category of social and cultural context where there is high emotional investment but the control is limited. Fans have intense connections to teams, players and outcomes, but in reality they have no direct influence over what actually happens during a game. This instability forces fans to find outlets — often rituals and superstitions — for them to feel involved in such an uncertain environment. For instance, on the Notre Dame Fighting Irish football team, each player touches the “Play Like a Champion” sign before every game. While a simple act of touching a sign has no direct impact on the outcome of the game it represents something bigger: tradition, expectation and shared rituals. Instead of it being a superstition performed by one individual, it is something carried out together strengthening a sense of unity and belonging among both players and fans. The culture this creates is rarely individual but rather something shared among friends, families and larger fan communities. It varies from wearing the same jersey, repeating the same phrases, or following strict pregame routines, these

actions have become normalized in fandom and have fostered an environment of belonging. As a result of this communal upbringing, superstitions are not just personal habits instead they are cultural practices that are built rooted on shared connection. Many scholars have discussed this topic during their research on sports fandoms.

Author Brendan Dwyer, in his scholarly article titled “A fans search for meaning: testing the dimensionality of sports fan superstition”, makes the point that superstitions are used by fans as a way to cope with the uncertainty and help manage emotions during a game. The interview I had with my dad supported this idea by saying superstitions do “put [him] at ease” and give comfort (Woodruff 2026, 1). To build on their point, I believe these behaviors extend to communal shared practices. For example, my interviewee described how superstitions are a tool to strengthen relationships and they can be performed with others — supporting my point that they are not just personal habits but also social experiences. This idea is mirrored throughout the scrapbook I created where I visually demonstrated how superstitions develop from individual thoughts into shared rituals. There are pages with repeated phrases such as “don’t move” and “keep it going” to highlight how many of these thoughts are not just unique to one person, but rather commonly expressed across fans. There are pages focused on routines, traditions and passed down behaviors showing how superstitions become something that connects individuals and builds community. By combining the information gathered in the article and using points from my interview, it becomes clear that a big part of superstitions is about creating a shared sense of identity within fan culture.

Works Cited

Dwyer, B. and Slavich, M. (2018) A fan's search for meaning: Testing the dimensionality of sport fan superstition. *Sports Management Review*, 21 (5) 533-548

https://drive.google.com/file/d/15hnUhUJl_16epo3vONdnqtMMSCpZeMw6/view?usp=drivesdk

Woodruff, Lilee "Lilee Interview 2, superstitions, baseball, routines, relationship bonding"

English 1007-26 Shared Drive, 2026

https://uconn-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/r/personal/hailey_palubicki_uconn_edu/Documents/ENGL%201007-26%20Shared%20Drive/Lilee%20Interview%202,%20superstitions,%20baseball,%20routines,%20relationship%20bonding.pdf?csf=1&web=1&e=JYUh0C