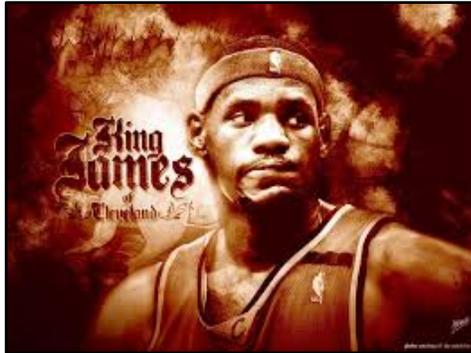


## Writing response: Branding, commodifying an athlete to sell stuff

We're going to try to weave together LeBron-Nike and our discussions these past two weeks on gender in sports and media. Your assignment is to draft a 2-page strategy memo outlining how you propose to brand (or co-brand with the athlete) U.S. women's soccer phenom **Alex Morgan**, using the Mocarski reading as a sort of template for things to think about.



At the top of your list is to **identify a narrative**, just as LeBron tapped into biblical narratives for his The Chosen One-King James-Witness-Promised Land myth. What "story" will you create for and with Alex? **Second**, as Nike considered race and stereotype, you have to consider gender and

stereotype. Are you going to play up Alex's sexuality, attractiveness, and sex appeal, risking stereotype? Or are you going to de-feminize her in ways comparable to Nike's de-racializing of LeBron, in order to appeal to a wider audience? **Third**, anticipate criticism for whatever you choose to do on gender. How will you anticipate and neutralize this criticism? **Fourth**, think about the emotional promises you want the Nike-Alex Morgan brand to communicate (see Mocarski for more on this). If a brand is a company's or brand's personality, what personality are you going to try to engineer/create and communicate for and as the Nike-Alex Morgan brand? **Fifth, and last**, consider media choices. For LeBron, Nike used (primarily) TV ads, co-creation with ESPN of TV programming ("The Decision"), and webisodes of The Lebrons. What media might you leverage to "sell" the Alex Morgan brand, and what kinds of content might you create or co-create to communicate the narrative(s) you chose up top?

In conceptualizing your mythic narrative, you will want to avoid the **Scylla and Charybdis** challenges of, on the one hand, objectifying Alex as sex object and on the other de-gendering her altogether. The first would be sexist, something you as an advertiser do not want to for moral and ethical reasons but also just plain stupid. So, no princesses or queens, please, and no overtly sexualized approaches. The second would be to edit out of your narrative the fact that she is a woman, which would be to ignore and, therefore, fail to capitalize on her crossover appeal to both boys and girls. These two might seem paradoxical, but they aren't. Your riddle is to figure out how. Also, no more "girl next door" narratives. It's been done too many times for too many athletes, especially female. Let's get the creative juices flowing.



Finally, be sure you have a big idea, like Nike's redemption-salvation-Chosen-King-Promised Land mythic narrative for LeBron. You are trying to achieve myth here; a

vague idea and a snappy tagline won't be enough. And don't spend most of your two pages describing the TV ad you would produce. A TV ad isn't a mythic narrative; it's a TV ad. 30 seconds. "And then you see her breaking out of the scrum and charging toward the goal." No. Focus on the big picture, not a storyboard for 30 seconds.

You will want to do a bit of research. Know Alex's story, her resume of achievements, her "personal meaning." I've put some resources on the course webpage: <http://cubanxgiants.com/berry/205>. Remember, I'll have to read 20 of these. Make them good, even great! (And read them out loud before hitting, PRINT.)

The bottom line is selling stuff: The swooshification of American culture. Profits for Nike. What you come up with is in service to that profit motive. To do this, Alex has to become a commodity of herself, as MocarSKI writes on page 18. She has to be safe so that she may be consumed by the masses. She will converge the independent, multi-mediated female athlete; the narrative-authoring advertising machine; and our cultural obsession with winning, physical attractiveness/sex, and sports celebrity.

Formatting: 12-point Times New Roman, 1-inch margins, double-line spaced. Writing counts, so proof your work.