

Summer, 2008
Office Hours, MTWTh, 12:20-1:00 with
exception of June 11, 12, and 18 (presently)
rockland@rci.rutgers.edu

Professor Michael Rockland
01:050:312

SPORTS IN AMERICAN CULTURE

"A stranger to American society might well suppose that more attention is paid to sport than to almost any other activity" [James Coleman]

"Sports is the only thing this country holds sacred" [Oscar Robertson]

"It has often been observed that the secret to American culture lies in understanding baseball" [Christopher Lehmann-Haupt]

"Quit playing like girls" [said by my son's Little League Coach] Note: There were two girls on the team and they were among the best players.

"What is really chilling is that there are a lot of smart people interested in sports. That just gives you no hope for the human race." [Fran Lebowitz]

"I am not a role model. I do not get paid to be a role model. Just because I dunk baskets doesn't mean I can raise kids. And even if I can raise my own, I don't think I should be responsible for raising yours." [Charles Barkley]

"Winning isn't everything. It's the only thing." [Vince Lombardi]

This course is not about sports; it is about American society. It is not about playing ball; it is about American ideas and values. We will want to discuss whence comes this near obsession with sports in American society, what does it tell us about Americans, and whether sports is a positive or a negative aspect of our society.

Our textbooks are available at the Douglass Coop Bookstore. Please obtain them at once. The bookstore is normally open till 4:30, but till 6:00 on May 30 and 31.

Michael Mandelbaum, *The Meaning of Sports*
 Joe Queenan, *True Believers: The Tragic Inner Life of Sports Fans*
 William Dowling, *Spoil Sport*

In addition to the readings, we will see a number of interesting films in class.

Attendance will be taken throughout the course. With only 23 meetings, you will be allowed only one absence without penalty. More than one absence—unless excused, whatever the reason— will affect your grade in the course. But I suggest you *never* be absent. You will fare better on the final if you miss no classes.

You will be graded on three factors:

I. Class participation: During the school year there have been as many as 150 students in this class. In the summer, we have the luxury of a small class, and I would like to take this opportunity to engage in regular and energetic debate. Don't think of this class as one where you arrive each day and listen to "the word." Sports is something you probably know as much about as I do and about which you may feel strongly. I will want to hear from you regularly in class. Being an athlete will not give you a leg up in this class. It is your analysis of the meaning of sports in American society rather than your familiarity with sports themselves that matters.

II. Final Examination This will be administered on the last day of class, July 3. It will be based on all readings, films, and class discussion. There will be an objective (multiple choice) part of the exam as well as essays

III. Term Project: This is perhaps the most important factor in my arriving at a final grade. It is due, without fail, no exceptions, in class on Thursday, June 26. My hope is to return the graded projects to you the day of the final, July 3. I must have your projects on June 26 so that I can read them over the ensuing weekend. Anyone not submitting their term project on June 26 may receive a T/F grade in the course which will remain on your record until at least fall. Projects must be submitted in class; they may not be e-mailed or faxed.

The term project is to be a personal essay rather than a research paper. If you have never played a sport—even if you hate sports--write about that. Since our course is about the changing perceptions of sports in America, about what sports *mean*, I want you to write about some event or experience or series of experiences in your own life, positive or

negative, that influenced your perception of sports and, by extension, American life. You should extrapolate from your experience to say something of significance about sports in America and, finally, about American society and culture. In other words, this paper is not about you, it's about our country. Wherever relevant, refer to our readings, films, guests, and class discussions in your paper so as to demonstrate the possible connection between your experience and what we have learned together in our course.

We will have ample time during the course to discuss the term paper and to help you generate ideas. These essays should ultimately be beautifully written and be enjoyable to read; for them to be such, you must concentrate on telling a story well. I recommend **3 drafts**.

All papers should be typed on regulation size paper. They should be stapled (no paper clips and no plastic covers, please). Your project should be given a provocative title that suggests what you are about to argue. Please proofread your papers carefully. I do not take kindly to papers full of obvious misspellings and typos. Make sure your papers are paginated, even if you have to put in page numbers by hand.

I'm always asked, "What about length? I hate to answer this question because then students tend to think any suggested length is mandatory. Remember: quality is much more important than quantity. But, if you insist, I'd say the recommended length is 8-10 pages.

Following is your syllabus. Readings should be done for the day for which they are listed. They will be the basis of discussion that day. You must always have with you in class a book we are considering that day.

SYLLABUS

Tuesday, May 27 INTRODUCTION: SPORTS GAMES OR POLITICS?

Wednesday, May 28 WHO SAYS THE OLYMPICS ARE PURE?

film: *Olympia*

Thursday, May 29 SPORTS AND RELIGION

Read Mandelbaum, from beginning through Ch. 1 "A Variety of Religious Experience" (up to p. 39)

Monday, June 2 WHY IS BASEBALL SPECIAL IN THE AMERICAN MIND?

Read Mandelbaum, "Baseball, The Remembrance of Things Past," pp. 40-118

- Tuesday, June 3
& Wednesday, June 4 IS SPORTS ABOUT SPORTS OR SOMETHING ELSE?
film: "Field of Dreams"
- Thursday, June 5
& Monday, June 9 FIELD OF DARKNESS
film: "Eight Men Out"
- Tuesday, June 10 WHAT IS "FAN" SHORT FOR?
Read: Queenan, pp. 1-125
- Wednesday, June 11 FANS (continued)
Read: Queenan, pp.125-236
- Thursday, June 12
& Monday, June 16 MORE ON FANS
film: "The Fan"
- Tuesday, June 17 FOOTBALL: GAME, WAR, OR BOTH?
Read: Mandelbaum, pp. 118-198
- Wednesday, June 18 FOOTBALL AND THE UNIVERSITY
Read: Dowling. First third of book.
- Thursday, June 19 FOOTBALL AND THE UNIVERSITY (continued)
Read Dowling, Second third of book
- Monday, June 23 FOOTBALL AND THE UNIVERSITY (concluded)
Read: Final third of book
- Tuesday, June 24
& Wednesday, June 25 BASKETBALL
film: "Hoop Dreams"
- Thursday, June 26 BASKETBALL (continued)
Read: chapter in Mandelbaum on Basketball, pp. 199-271.
- Note: Term projects are due without fail in class this day.**

Monday, June 30	SPORTS AND GENDER Films: “Men’s Lives” and “Ballet with Edward Villela “
Tuesday, July 1	SPORTS AND GENDER II, Films: “Playing Unfair: Media Images and the Female Athlete” “Evening the Odds”
Wednesday, July 2	SPORTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE Read Mandelbaum Conclusion 272-284 Film: “American Game, Japanese Rules.”
Thursday, July 3	Final Exam