

Summer, 2006  
Office Hours, MTWTh, 12:30-1:00  
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Professor Michael Rockland

### **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*

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

The highlight of the course, however, will be the distinguished roster of guests who will be with us. I want to say right now that attendance is **compulsory** on all days when there are guests. Those days, and the guests who will be here, follows:

Note: Other figures from the world of sports may be added. We are still hoping for confirmation from some of them. If there is someone you know who would make a worthy addition to our list of guests, please speak with me.

Thursday, June 8, Greg Schiano, Head Coach, Football, Rutgers University

Tuesday, June 13, Fred Hill, Jr. Head Coach, Men's Basketball, Rutgers University

Wednesday, June 14, Scott Walker and Mark Peterson, with the Scholarly

Enhancement Program for Athletes, Rutgers University

Wednesday, June 21, Robert Mulcahy, Athletic Director, Rutgers University

**Attendance** will be taken throughout the course. With only 22 meetings, you will be allowed only one absence without penalty, though that absence may not be when we have a guest. More than one absence--or an absence when a guest is present--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

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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 6. It will be based on all readings, films, and class discussion (including the remarks of our guests). 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 29. My hope is to return the graded projects to you the day of the final, July 6. I must have your projects on June 29 so that I can read them over the ensuing weekend. Anyone not submitting their term project on June 29 will 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 to be enjoyable to read and, for them to be such, you must concentrate on telling a story well. **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.

**SYLLABUS**

- Tuesday, May 30 INTRODUCTION: Sports, Games or Politics?  
Excerpt from film "Olympia"  
film: "American Athletics: The American Hero"
- Wednesday, May 31 IS SPORTS ABOUT SPORTS OR SOMETHING ELSE?  
film: "Field of Dreams"
- Thursday, June 2 IS SPORTS ABOUT SPORTS OR SOMETHING ELSE?  
film: "Field of Dreams" (concluded)  
read: Introduction and Chapter I, "A Variety of Religious Experience" in Mandelbaum pp.xviii- 39
- Monday, June 5 FIELD OF DARKNESS  
film: "Eight Men Out"
- Tuesday, June 6 FIELD OF DREAMS VS. FIELD OF DARKNESS  
"Eight Men Out" concluded  
discussion of the two baseball films.
- Wednesday, June 7 IF BASEBALL IS THE "NATIONAL PASSTIME, WHY ISN'T IT SO AT RUTGERS?"  
read: Chapter 2, "Baseball: The Remembrance of Things Past" pp. 40-117 in Mandelbaum
- Thursday, June 8 FOOTBALL: DOES IT AND OTHER SPORTS ENCOURAGE OR SUBLIMATE VIOLENCE  
Guest: Greg Schiano, Head Football Coach, Rutgers University
- Monday, June 12 BASKETBALL: MOVING WITHOUT THE BALL  
read: chapter 4, "Basketball: The Chemistry of Teamwork" Mandelbaum, pp. 199-271

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Tuesday, June 13 HOOPS

guest speaker: Fred Hill, Jr. head Rutgers basketball coach

Wednesday, June 14 THE STUDENT ATHLETE

guest speakers, Scott Walker and Mark Peterson from the Athlete Scholarly Enhancement Program

Thursday, June 15 HOOP DREAMS OR NIGHTMARES?

film: "Hoop Dreams"

Monday, June 19 HOOP DREAMS OR NIGHTMARES? II

"Hoop Dreams" (concluded)

Tuesday, June 20 MEN'S ROLES AND SPORTS

films: "Men's Lives"  
"Ballet with Edward Vilella"

Wednesday, June 21 WHY AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES COMPETE IN ATHLETICS

guest speaker, Robert Mulcahy, Athletic Director, Rutgers University

Thursday, June 23 SOCCER, THE #1 SPORT IN THE WORLD EVERYWHERE  
BUT HERE. WHY?

(discussion)

Monday, June 26 WHAT'S "FAN" SHORT FOR?

read: Joe Queenan *True Believers: The Tragic Life of Sports Fans*

Tuesday, June 27 WHAT'S "FAN" SHORT FOR? II

film: "Sporting Fever"

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Wednesday, June 28 WHAT'S "FAN" SHORT FOR? III

film: "The Fan"

Thursday, June 29 WHAT'S "FAN" SHORT FOR? IV

film: "The Fan," concluded

**note: term projects due this day**

Monday, July 3 SPORTS AND GENDER

films: "Playing Unfair: Media Images of the Female Athlete"  
"Evening the Odds."

Wednesday, July 5 AMERICAN SPORTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

film: "American Game, Japanese Rules"

read: "Conclusion: The Future of Sports," pp. 272-284, Mandelbaum

Thursday, July 6 FINAL EXAMINATION