

Rel. 241: Sport, Play, and Ritual

Winter term, 2004
6:30-9:30, Daily
M, W, TR, F—Hoover 100
Tuesday—Deihl 118

Joseph L. Price
Professor of Religious Studies
Office Hours: TuW: 1:00-3:00

Office: Platner #112
Phone: 562-907-4803
E-mail: jprice@whittier.edu

Description:

The course analyzes the functions and significance of sport, play, ritual, and religion in ancient and modern cultures, focusing on contemporary sports in American society. The sorts of questions that will be addressed include: What do sport and play, religion and ritual do or accomplish? How and why do they establish or generate meaning? For whom do they function and bear meaning: participants (e.g., players and priests) and/or observers (e.g., fans and worshipers)? Is there a uniform function or meaning for the participants and the observers? Is the spirituality of sports different from the religion of sports?

Texts:

Ninian Smart, *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 3rd Edition
Allen Guttmann, *Sports Spectators*
Joseph L. Price, ed., *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*

Requirements:

Attendance: Attendance at all class meetings is required. Three or more absences will lower your grade and, probably, result in the failure of the course.

Readings: Completion of reading assignments as scheduled is required in order to participate adequately in class discussions and in order to understand the lectures and films most comprehensively.

Exams: There will be a mid-term exam on January 13 and a final exam on January 27. No make-up exams will be given without the prior consent of the instructor.

Paper: A short research or analytical/interpretive paper, approximately 8-10 pages long, will be due on Monday, January 26, at 6:30 p.m. The paper will focus on one of the connections between sport and religion that are enumerated in the paper guidelines.

Oral Report: Each person will be required to make an oral presentation of his or her paper during the final week of the term.

Quizzes: Unannounced quizzes will be given over assigned readings and class presentations.

Accommodations: Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make the necessary accommodations. Students should present appropriate verification from Learning Support Services Office. No requirement exists that accommodations be made prior to completion of this approved College process.

Plagiarism and Other Forms of Cheating: Any student who commits plagiarism on the paper assignment or who commits some other form of cheating on tests or quizzes will fail the course and will be subject to other sanctions identified in the section on “Academic Honesty” in the *Student Handbook*.

Policy on Lateness and Class Participation: Late arrival to class will be counted as half an absence. Similarly, early departure from class will be counted as half an absence. Late papers will be penalized one full letter for each day late.

Class participation includes the quality of contributions that students make to class meetings. It also incorporates classroom manners, which include showing respect for each other, and being alert and attentive.

Grading:

Mid-Term Exam	25% of final course grade
Final Exam	25% of final course grade
Research/Interpretive Paper	30% of final course grade
Oral Presentation	10% of final course grade
Class Participation, Quizzes, & Webwork	10% of final course grade

Daily Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Jan. 5	Identifying Sport, Play, Ritual, and Religion Muscular Christianity and "Chariots of Fire"	Smart Price, 3-38
Jan. 6	Ancient Religions and Sports: The Olympics, The Game of Ball, and Sumo Wrestling	Guttmann, 1-34
Jan. 7	The Seven Dimensions of Religion	Smart, 1-54
Jan. 8	The Seven Dimensions of Religion Basketball as Faith and "Hoosiers"	Smart, 55-103 Price, 163-181
Jan. 9	NO CLASS	
Jan. 12	Animal Sports and "Seabiscuit"	Guttmann, 35-82
Jan. 13	Ancient Religions and Sports: Redlands vs. Whittier	Guttmann, 1-34 Price, 163-181
Jan. 14	The Intersecting Faiths of "Bull Durham"	Smart, 104-162 Price, 61-112
Jan. 15	Ritual Space and Places of Reverence "Field of Dreams"	Price, 115-135
Jan. 16	Take Home Mid-Term Exam #1 Due	
Jan. 19	Rituals of Consecration and Deconsecration	Webwork
Jan. 20	Ritual Time and Game Time "The Super Bowl as Religious Ritual"	Price, 49-58 Price, 115-159
Jan. 21	The Development of Faith or Fanaticism Occidental vs. Whittier	Guttmann, 52-146 Price, 215-232
Jan. 22	Ethics and Sports Fanaticism: "The Fan"	Guttmann, 147-185
Jan. 23	NO CLASS	
Jan. 26	Conclusions: Sports and Religion in America	Price, 3-11, 39-48
Jan. 27	Final Exam	
Jan. 28	Student Presentations	
Jan. 29	Student Presentations	
Jan. 30	Student Presentations	

Paper Topics and Guidelines

Your analysis or research paper for the course is due at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, January 26. Your paper must be typed, double-spaced, and stapled. Include a “title page” or “cover page,” but do not use a plastic or cardboard folder. The length of your paper should be about 2000-2500 words (about 8-10 pages in most 12-point type), although length is not the most important factor. Your paper topic must be approved by the beginning of the second week of the course; suggested topics and subjects are listed below. For research options, the paper must draw upon at least three other sources other than the texts for the course. For analysis/interpretation options, the paper should utilize either the framework of Smart’s *Worldviews* or concepts from Mircea Eliade’s *Sacred and Profane* or Ronald Grimes’s *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*.

Your paper must have proper scholarly documentation for notes (i.e., parenthetical references, footnotes, or endnotes) and references (i.e., bibliography, or works consulted). The form for citation of books and journal articles can be found on the blue page of guidelines available in the library. The form for citation of electronic sources (including websites) can be found on the lime colored sheet of guidelines available in the library. Unless specific permission is given by the instructor for you to use an alternate form of citation, the reference forms and styles identified above must be followed.

Your paper will be graded on the quality of content (the extent and precision of the information presented) and style (the form of your argument, the clarity of your writing, and the accuracy of your grammar).

- The religious dimensions of a sport (e.g., an analysis of the religious significance of basketball or football) or sports event (e.g., the religious significance or function of the World Series).
- The history of the connections between a sport and a religion (e.g., the religious origins of lacrosse in Native American religions or Sumo wrestling in Japanese Shinto).
- The attitude of a particular religious tradition toward a specific sport (e.g., Southern Baptists’ scorn for horse racing).
- The practice, use, or function of religion by a particular team (e.g., the Chicago Bulls saying the Lord’s Prayer prior to opening the champagne in celebration of their world championship, or the practice of players from opposing teams kneeling and praying at mid-field following an NFL game).
- The attitude of a particular religious tradition or group toward sport (e.g., the Puritans’ disdain for—if not prohibition of—sport; or Muslim restriction of female track athletes or swimmers from participating in competitive “uniforms”).

- ❑ The use or support of sport by a religious group (e.g., the use—religious and political—of basketball or softball as a means of evangelism for certain church leagues; or the play of The House of David baseball team as a way of pursuing religious perfection; or the witness dimensions of “Athletes in Action”; or the evangelical and theological implications of Fellowship of Christian Athletes; or the religious and social function of the *Jewish Sports Review*; or the religious and social function of the Muslim female “Olympics” or of the Muslim female basketball league).
- ❑ The practice, use, or function of religion in a sport (e.g., a history and analysis of Baseball Chapel, the NASCAR chaplaincy, Athletes in Action, or Fellowship of Christian Athletes).
- ❑ The religious significance of a sport or sporting event for a particular culture (e.g., bull fighting in Spain; cricket in South Asia; or football or *futbol* in Great Britain or Brazil).
- ❑ The religious significance or spiritual characterization of a sport in a specific literary work (e.g., the religious significance of baseball in *The Brothers K* or the religious significance of high school football in *Saturday Night Lights*, the spiritual characterization of basketball in *Glory Days* or *Where the Game Matters Most*).
- ❑ The religious significance of a sport in a specific film (e.g., the religious aspects of ice hockey in “Slapshot,” or the religious dimensions of fly fishing in “A River Runs through It,” or the religious fascination with hoops in “He Got Game,” or the spiritual portrayal of golf in “The Legend of Bagger Vance”).
- ❑ Religious experience and its importance for sports performance as told by a sports hero (e.g., the autobiography of Orel Hershisser).
- ❑ The phenomenon of apotheosis (e.g., the reverence for—if not worship of—Michael Jordan or Nolan Ryan or John Elway or Rebecca Lobo).
- ❑ The spiritual dimension of the martial arts (e.g., the spirituality of discipline in karate or the discipline of spirituality in T'ai Chi).
- ❑ The superstitions of players, of teams, and of sports (e.g., the superstitious diets and gestures by baseball players such as Wade Boggs, Nomar Garciappara, and Sammy Sosa; the Babe’s Curse in Boston; or the jinx of appearing on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*).

- ❑ The religious significance of “the Big Game” as a pilgrimage goal or festival center (as in Edwin Cady’s *The Big Game*).
- ❑ The religious significance of rivalries, especially arch rivalries (e.g., Whittier against Oxy, UCLA vs. USC, or the Dodgers and the Giants).
- ❑ The religious significance of “mascots”—and team colors—for the identity of a team, its fans, and its “host” community (e.g., the issues of mascots for Indianapolis Colts, the Cleveland Browns, and the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame).