

# Rel. 241: Sport, Play, and Ritual

Winter term, 2010  
9:00-12:00 Daily  
Deihl 118

Joseph L. Price  
Professor of Religious Studies  
Office Hours: TuW: 2:00-4:00

Office: Platner #114  
Phone: 562-907-4803  
E-mail: jprice@whittier.edu

## Course Description:

The course analyzes the functions and significance of sport, play, ritual, and religion in ancient and modern cultures, focusing on sports in America today. 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? How are they structurally and functionally similar? 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?

## Learning Objectives:

- To develop the ability to distinguish and articulate the characteristics of religion and play
- To develop the ability to identify and analyze the intersections of established religions with sports
- To develop the ability to apply religious studies concepts to sports interpretation
- To develop the ability to recognize and analyze the spiritual dimensions of an athlete's experience and the public's response

## Texts:

Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*  
Susan A. Jackson and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in Sports*  
Joseph L. Price, *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*  
Arlynda Boyer, *Buddha on the Backstretch*

Additional posted and linked readings on the Moodle course website, as announced daily

## **Requirements:**

Daily Engagement: Your daily engagement with the course will be manifest in several ways, particularly attendance, preparation, homework, web-work, attention, and professional classroom decorum. 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 each day's reading assignments before class is required in order to participate adequately in class discussions and in order to understand the lectures and films most comprehensively. Additional readings on-line will also be routinely assigned.

Exam: There will be a single exam on Thursday, January 28. No make-up exams will be given without the prior consent of the professor.

Papers: Two papers are required for the course. Both papers 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).

1. The first essay will be an autobiographical reflection of an experience of "flow." (See *Flow in Sports*, page 8, for instructions, and page 11 for an abstract of "flow.") The autobiographical reflection should be 500 words long (about 2-3 pages in a typical 12 point font), and it will be due on Wednesday, January 20 at 9:00 a.m.

2. A short research or analytical/interpretive paper, approximately 5-7 pages long, will be due on Monday, February 1, at 12:00 noon. The paper will focus on one of the connections between sport and religion that are enumerated in the paper guidelines (below). The submission of topics will be due on Thursday, January 21.

Oral Presentation: Each student will be required to make an oral presentation (5-8 minutes) of his or her paper during the final week of the term. In preparation for the presentation, each student will identify a significant website related to his or her project, and will submit (via email) the URL of that website on Friday, January 29.

Quizzes: Unannounced quizzes will be given over assigned readings and class presentations. No make-ups will be given for missed quizzes.

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. If for reasons of illness or emergency, it becomes necessary for you to leave class, you will not be allowed to return until an established class break or the following class session. As part of class manners, the use of cell phones during class (for receiving or placing calls, or for engaging in text messaging) is not permitted. Use of cell phones will result in a minimum penalty of an assessed absence.

**NB: All submitted assignments, papers, quizzes, and exams must be on 8 ½ x 11 paper unless otherwise specifically instructed.**

**Grading:**

Exam	40% of final course grade
Flow Reflection	15% of final course grade
Research/Interpretive Paper	25% of final course grade
Oral Presentation	10% of final course grade
Class Participation & Quizzes	10% of final course grade

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topics</u>	<u>Reading</u>
<b><u>WEEK 1</u></b>		
Jan. 11	Defining Sport, Play, & Ritual	Price, 3-14 Moodle links on play
Jan. 12	Religious Dimensions of Ancient Sports: Game of Ball, Olympics, Sumo, Lacrosse	Moodle links Price 39-48; 203-211
Jan. 13	Muscular Faith <i>Chariots of Fire</i>	Price, 15-38 Moodle selections
Jan. 14	The MEMBERS of Religion Hoop Dreams and <i>Hoosiers</i>	Moodle selection Price, 163-181
Jan. 15	The Fundamentals of Flow Running as Religion: <i>Running the Sahara</i>	<i>Flow</i> , 3-76 Moodle selections
<b><u>WEEK 2</u></b>		
Jan. 18	<b>NO CLASS: Martin Luther King Holiday</b>	
Jan. 19	Control and Destiny <i>Miracle</i>	<i>Flow</i> , 77-164 Price, 185-202
Jan. 20	<b>FLOW EXPERIENCE ESSAY DUE</b> He Got Faith and <i>He Got Game</i>	
Jan. 21	Rituals of Consecration and Deconsecration <i>Field of Dreams</i> Scheduled appointments for paper preparation	Eliade, 8-113 Price, 49-60; 99-114
Jan. 22	The Intersection of Nature, Religion, and Sport <i>Trout Grass</i> Scheduled appointments for paper preparation	Eliade, 116-213

### **WEEK 3**

Jan. 25	Buddhism, NASCAR, and Faith	Boyer, 1-79, 153-164
Jan. 26	Buddhism, NASCAR, and Faith	Boyer, 80-152
Jan. 27	Exam Review	
Jan. 28	<b>EXAM</b>	
Jan. 29	The Faith of Fans <i>Big Fan</i>	Price, 3-11, 141-159 215-232

### **WEEK 4**

Feb. 1	<b>RESEARCH PAPERS DUE AT NOON in PLATNER 114</b>	
Feb. 2	Baseball as Civil Religion <i>Bull Durham</i>	Price, 61-98
Feb. 3	Research Presentations	Moodle links
Feb. 4	Research Presentations	Moodle links
Feb. 5	"The Super Bowl as Religious Ritual"	Moodle selections Price, 137-140

## Paper Guidelines

Your analysis or research paper for the course is due at **12:00 p.m. on Monday, Feb. 1**. 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 1500 words (about 5-7 pages in most 12-point type), although length is not the most important factor. Your paper topic must be approved by the end 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*, concepts from Eliade’s *Sacred and Profane*, or insights from Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*.

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 guidelines posted on the course Moodle site. 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).

### Suggested Research and Project Topics

- 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 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).
- ❑ The practice of “muscular faith” 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 functions of the *Jewish Sports Review*; or the Buddhist monk thousand-day marathon; or the religious and social functions of the Muslim female “Olympics” or of the Iranian female basketball league).
- ❑ The function and growth of “Faith Nights” at ballparks (e.g., the expansion of the evangelical phenomenon from minor league games to the faith night events at Braves and Diamondbacks games, to the mass honoring the Virgin of Zapopan before the Chivas game, and to Mormon Night at Fenway Park).
- ❑ The threats of hooliganism (e.g., by fans at British, French, and German soccer matches or by players in Los Angeles city football rivalries or by NHL teams or by NBA players).
- ❑ Legal efforts to curb hooliganism (e.g., the 1991 Football Offences Act in Great Britain)
- ❑ The ethics of trash-talking, referee-complaining, or celebrative-taunting (e.g., NBA and NFL players jeering and jawing each other, Rasheed Wallace or Roger Clemens or John McEnroe complaining about officiating, or Terrell Owens taunting opponents by excessive celebrating).
- ❑ The ethics of steroid use (e.g., the physical benefits and damages to players, the legality of their acquisition and use, and the challenge to the integrity of the game or sport).
- ❑ 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, Christians in Sport, or the Fellowship of Christian Athletes).
- ❑ The history of Sabbath restrictions on sports (e.g., the conflict between professional baseball and Sunday games, or the scheduling issues related to for Sunday NFL games or NBA games in Salt Lake City or the desire of Tamir Goodman to play NCAA Div I basketball).
- ❑ The religious significance of a sport or sporting event for a particular culture (e.g., bull fighting in Spain; cricket in South Asia; ice hockey in Sweden; or *futebol* in Brazil).
- ❑ The power of sport to transform a caste culture (e.g., the reconciliation of races in South Africa afforded by rugby)
- ❑ 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 Hershiser).
- The phenomenon of apotheosis (e.g., the reverence for—if not worship of—sports heroes, such as Michael Jordan, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Nolan Ryan, Roger Clemens, John Elway, Peyton Manning, Muhammad Ali, Babe Didrikson, or Rebecca Lobo).
- The significance of heroism (e.g., as described by Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*) as compared to sports celebrity (such as the prominence and athletic superiority of, perhaps, Terrell Owens, Barry Bonds, Kobe Bryant, Zinedine Zidane, Dale Earnhardt, Marty McSorley, or John McEnroe).
- An examination and photographic analysis of the gravesites and memorials for sports heroes (including, in the Los Angeles area, Chuck Connors, Chick Hearn, Cory Lidle, Roy Campanella, Leo Durocher, Frank Chance, Don Drysdale, etc.).
- 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 and what those beliefs and habits mean (e.g., the superstitious diets and gestures by baseball players such as Wade Boggs, Nomar Garciaparra, and Sammy Sosa; the Babe's Curse in Boston; or the jinx of appearing on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* or Madden's).
- The religious significance of "the Big Game" as a pilgrimage goal or festival center (as in Edwin Cady's *The Big Game* or Eric Bain-Selbo's *God and Game Day*).
- The religious significance of rivalries, especially arch rivalries (e.g., Whittier against Oxy, UCLA vs. USC, or the Dodgers and the Giants).
- The association or fusion of sporting events with religious holidays (e.g., NBA games on Christmas, NFL games on Thanksgiving Day or the Indy 500 on Memorial Day).
- The consecration or de-consecration rituals for sports fields and facilities (e.g., the routine field preparation and pre-game ceremonies for baseball and football fields, ice rinks, and basketball courts, or the Opening Day ceremonies to begin a baseball season, or the First Game or Last Game ceremonies to open or close a stadium).
- The history and analysis of para-church organizations (e.g., Christian Power Lifters or Christian Bowhunters Association or the Christian Wrestling Federation)