

**HIST 355 | Sports, Games and Spectacles in the Graeco-Roman World  
Spring Semester 2025**

**Course Instructor: Dr. John Karavas**  
**Email:** john.karavas@cyathens.org

**Course Description**

The aim of this course will be to explore the emergence and subsequent development of both athletic competitions and sports-based games and spectacles from the Bronze age through to the period of late antiquity. Within this wider spatial and temporal context, the course will subsequently focus on two separate thematic entities: Ancient Greek Athletics, with particular attention to the development and evolution of the main Ancient Greek athletic events over the ages, as well as an in-depth investigation of the particularities of Roman public spectacles and gladiatorial games. Drawing on a variety of disciplines and available (primary) sources, from history and archaeology to modern sports studies, the course will primarily seek to examine the main purpose and function of these games and spectacles within the wider social, political, religious, cultural and intellectual context of the times, as well as their overall significance in the daily lives of the ancients. In addition to in-class lectures and discussions, the course will also include a substantial on-site teaching component, with field trips to archaeological sites and museums of athletic significance (such as Olympia, Isthmia, Nemea, Delphi and Messene) where sessions will center on the interpretation of the physical evidence.

**Course Requirements**

**Assignments:**

Students will be expected to write one research paper, not more than 2.500 words, on subjects/topics relevant to this course. Details will be provided on the first day of classes. Assignments for topics will be decided by lot, one month before the deadline for the submission of essays. Papers must be properly documented and should include an appended bibliography. Credit will be given for originality, i.e. illustrations, maps etc, personal observation and evidence of independent reading-research. Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own, original work. Any excerpts from the work of others must be clearly identified as a quotation, and a proper citation provided. (Check Student handbook, pg 9).

**The deadline for the submission of the final essay is Friday, May 16. No extensions will be granted.**

**Exams:**

**Midterm:** Monday, March 10

**Final:** TBA

**Class Attendance - Absences**

Student attendance is mandatory. All absences must be excused by the administration and not the instructor. Each unexcused absence will result in a lowered participation grade.

**Grading and Evaluation**

The mid-term grade will be calculated on the basis of the mid-term exam (70%) and with regard to student's attendance of and participation in classes (30%).

The final grade will be an average of the grades assigned for the midterm exam (25%), the final essay (25%), the grade assigned for the final exam (35%) and of that assigned for class participation and attendance over the course of the semester (15%).

**Books, Course Materials, Moodle**

The standard prescribed textbooks for this class include:

- A. Futrell, *Blood in the Arena* (1997).
- A. Futrell, *The Roman Games: A Sourcebook* (2006).
- D. Kyle, *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient world* (2006).
- A. Mahoney, *Roman Sports and Spectacles: A Sourcebook* (2001).
- S.G Miller, *Ancient Greek Athletics* (2004).
- Arete: Greek Sports from Ancient Sources*, ed. by S.G. Miller (2004).

In addition to the above, further background or specialist reading material will be introduced to students at the beginning of each separate thematic entity.

All readings and resources, including the relevant powerpoint presentations are available on the Moodle page of this

class.

## **Class Schedule**

### Monday, January 27

General Introduction. Establishing the main parameters and aims of the course within its wider spatial and temporal context.

### Wednesday, January 29

Flashback: Sport in the Bronze Age and the Homeric tradition.  
Miller (2004): 20-30; The earliest days of Greek Athletics (off prints-moodle).

### Monday, February 3

Documentary: The Ancient Olympics: Myth and Reality.

### Wednesday, February 5

The Origins of Ancient Greek Athletics – The Archaic period.  
Kyle (2006), 72-93; Miller (2004) 20-30.

### Monday, February 10

In Focus: What did it mean to be an athlete (or competitor)?  
Van Wees, "Bodies of Men" prints; Class will take place in the Panathenaic Stadium.

### Wednesday, February 12

The Olympic Games.  
Miller (2004) 87-95; Scanlon, Greek Athletics and Religion (moodle); Kyle (2006), 110-135

### Monday, February 17

Other Games and athletic events throughout the Classical and Hellenistic period. Miller (2004), 95-112; Olivova, "The Panhellenic games" (off prints-moodle); Kyle (2006), 136-149

### Monday, February 24

The Panathenaic Games:  
Miller (2004), 129-149; Kyle, "Athletics in the Athenian Agora", (off prints-moodle).  
Class will meet at the Athenian Agora.

### Wednesday, February 26

Citizen/youth training and the role of the Gymnasium in Ancient Greece.  
Miller (2004), 176-195; Kennel, "Training Citizens in the Gymnasium", (off prints moodle).  
Class will meet at the supposed "School of Aristotle".

### Wednesday, March 5

Women in Greek Athletics.  
Miller (2004), 150-159; Kyle (2006), 217-228.

### Monday, March 10

## **MID-TERM EXAM**

### Wednesday, March 12

Individual Competitions: Track and field events. (Re-enactments): Stadion, Diaulos, Dolichos, Hoplitodromos.  
Miller (2004), 31-46  
Class will meet at the Panathenaic Stadium

### Monday, March 17

The "Heavyweights" I: "Hand to Hand" athletic competitions (Re-enactments) Wrestling, Boxing.  
Class will meet at the Pankrateios Martial Arts Club. Miller (2004), 60-84

### Monday, March 24

The "Heavyweights" II: Pankration.  
As above.

Wednesday, March 26

Track & Field Day I (re-enacting the events of the Ancient Pentathlon) Javelin, discus throw, Long jump.  
Miller (2004) 31-46; Miller (2004), 46-60.  
Class will meet at the Ethnikos Sports Club.

Monday, March 31

Other games and communal athletic activities in the Ancient Greek World. Class will include the re-enactment of two team sports, Faininda and Harpaston.  
Class will meet at the Fokianos Sports Complex.

Wednesday, April 2

Equestrian competitions.  
Miller (2004), 60-84

Monday, April 7

Roman public spectacles: The beginnings and subsequent development.  
Mahoney (2001), 1-10; Kyle (2006), 279-346.

Wednesday, April 9

Chariot races and other games/sports in the Roman World.  
Mahoney (2001), 24-36; Kyle (2006) as above, Futrell, (2006), chapter 6.

Wednesday, April 23

Gladiatorial games in the Roman World (I). Myth and Reality.  
Mahoney (2001), 11-23, 91-99; Kyle (2006) as above; Futrell (1997), chapter 1.

Monday, April 28

Gladiatorial games in the Roman World (II).  
Futrell (2006), chapter 4.

Wednesday, April 30

The end of Greco-Roman sports and spectacles; the advent of Christianity.  
Class Handouts; Futrell (2006), chapter 5.

Monday, May 5

Between Ancient and Modern; the Revival of the Olympic Games.

Wednesday, May 7

Review session.