Elizabeth Hale, "Entry on: Mount Olympus Basketball by Kevin O'Malley", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elżbieta.Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1105. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Kevin O'Malley

Mount Olympus Basketball

United States of America (2003)

TAGS: Achilles Argonauts Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Eurystheus Greece Hades Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Jason Minotaur Nike Odysseus / Ulysses Olympus Poseidon Prometheus Theseus Trojan Horse Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Mount Olympus Basketball
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States of America
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2003
First Edition Details	Kevin O'Malley, *Mount Olympus Basketball*. New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2003, 30 pp.
ISBN	9780802777287
Genre	Picture books
Target Audience	Children (6–10)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
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Creators



Kevin O'Malley , b. 1961
(Author, Illustrator)

Kevin O'Malley is an American illustrator and writer of picture books, based in Baltimore, Maryland. He has published over twenty self-illustrated picture books, and illustrated over twenty picture books by other writers, including the *Miss Malarkey* series by Judy Finchler. He was inspired to write and draw when he read Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* as a child. He graduated from the Maryland Institute College of Art, and worked as a commercial illustrator before moving into picture books. His work is known for a wry sense of humour, in which he exploits unexpected meanings in common phrases and ideas. Classical material is not a feature of his work, though he also wrote and illustrated *Mount Olympus Basketball* (2003).

Sources:

Official website (accessed: March 13, 2020)

"Kevin O'Malley," in Something About the Author, Vol. 320, Gale 2017, pp. 146-151.

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Summary

Mount Olympus Basketball presents a basketball game between two teams: the Gods (Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Hades) and the Mortals (Hercules, Achilles, Jason, Theseus, Odysseus). Narrated by two sports announcers, Fred and Chet, the game shows the gods and mortals tricking and outwitting one another. The book is full of puns and allusions to the myths. Jason is supported by a troupe of cheerleaders, the "Dancing Argonauts" (p. 4). Zeus fouls Hercules while persuading the referee, Eurystheus, to ignore what he sees (p. 6). Zeus passes to Hera, who claims she's been fouled by Hercules, Achilles and Jason, turning the referee into a cow (p. 8). One of the announcers tells the crowd that the Gods are playing without Zeus's cousin, Prometheus, who's serving an "eternal team suspension for helping to save all of mankind." (p. 7). The Mortals get hold of the ball, passing Poseidon, who summons a great wave (p. 8) and swamps Jason (pp. 9–10). Zeus dries the sea and the game continues. Hades takes the ball and creates a huge hole in the court, into which the Mortals fall. "You never know what the god of the underworld is going to do next, but you can bet it won't leave you standing on top of the world" (p. 11). Zeus pulls Hades off the court and substitutes the "mighty Atlas," who holds the ball out of reach over everyone, until Achilles tricks him into letting "me hold the ball for you" (p. 12). As Achilles scores, the buzzer sounds for halftime.

During intermission, Chet and Fred gives a little context about "what makes ancient Greece such a fabulous place:" its beauties, its mountains, hills, villages, seas, fishing, art, religion and innovations in thought, politics and science (pp. 13–14).

As the referee tries to restart the game, an interruption comes in the form of Helen of Troy pulling a giant wooden horse to the Gods' end of the court. A trapdoor opens, and Odysseus climbs out, shooting a basket from the top of the horse (pp. 15–16). Enraged, Zeus brings in four Cyclopes and the Minotaur, but Theseus ties a rope around his waist and makes "his way through the maze of legs and arms." Climbing up on the Minotaur, he leaps and slam-dunks the ball (pp. 17–18). The Mortals are in the lead (pp. 15–16). Zeus has now "had enough" (pp. 19–20), grabbing the ball, opening up the heavens, and scoring basket after basket. The final score, (Gods: 2,678,352, Mortals: 6) reflects that this is "yet another win for the all-powerful Gods of Mount Olympus." (p. 30). As Nike the goddess of victory flies

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above the ruins of the court, the dazed Mortals survey the wreckage, and the commentators sign off (pp. 28–29).

A final page, titled *Greeks Rule, Romans Drool*, offers some resources for readers interested in mythology.

Analysis

This picture book provides a light-hearted introduction to the Gods and Heroes of Greek mythology, pitting them against one another in a comedy game of basketball. It uses the narrative device of the sports commentator to identify the different figures. It imagines what role each might play in a basketball game. The bright illustrations represent both Gods and Mortals as solid and dynamic but also comedic figures, each carrying their iconic image (Zeus carrying a thunderbolt; Jason wearing the Golden Fleece). For the most part all figures are Caucasian, with the exception of Theseus, who is Black. Zeus has a cheesy grin; Athena is missing a tooth; Hera is curvaceous and haughty. Red-bearded Poseidon wears a scuba mask. Hades is small and balding; Odysseus is skinny with large spectacles, in the traditional manner of a "nerd."

Casting the competition between the Gods and Mortals as a basketball game is a conceit that allows O'Malley to present the figures from ancient myth in a way that may intrigue young readers – making the tussle for power more relevant, and as part of an amusing game (suggesting that life is a game with arbitrary rules where cunning and trickery are as important as skill.) None of the figures, God or Mortal, comes across as an honest player: indeed, trickery is the name of the game, reflecting the often dubious morality of the major players in the ancient myths.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Achilles Argonauts Athena Cyclops / Cyclopes Eurystheus Greece Hades Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Jason Minotaur Nike Odysseus / Ulysses Olympus Poseidon Prometheus Theseus Trojan Horse Zeus

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant

Adventure Sport

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