

Name: _____ Date: _____

6B- _____ Writing: Sample Compare-Contrast Essay — **Feature-by-Feature Form**

Task: Write an essay in which you compare and contrast baseball and basketball.

Say the word “baseball” to a casual sports fan and you’re likely to hear “slow” or “boring” in response. But “basketball” tends to elicit a different reaction. People think, in the best cases, of March Madness, seven-foot giants, and miraculous dunks. But are these responses fair? How do these sports really compare? With this in mind, many fans ask themselves which sport to watch on television during the spring, baseball or basketball? Interestingly, while these sports are different from each other, they have more similarities than people might think.

The major difference between baseball and basketball is the pace of each game. According to Mike Zuckerman, a reporter for the *Washington Times*, “In 2009, only one of the thirty [Major League Baseball] postseason games was completed in less than three hours.” That’s approximately ninety hours of baseball, just for the post-season! What’s worse, many people probably feel this would be the longest three hours of their lives, with pitchers swanning around the mound, runners calling time out to swipe dust off their uniforms, batters playing cat-n-mouse with pitchers, stepping out of the batter’s box, stepping in, stepping out, adjusting their batting gloves, tapping mud from their cleats, and so on, forever. Meanwhile, compared to the average baseball game, the average basketball game is shorter, usually lasting around two to two-and-a-half hours in length. Regardless of the shorter game time, though, the pace of the game is much different from that of baseball. Basketball players are in a state of nearly-perpetual motion, running plays, moving without the ball, and sprinting full-court on fast breaks. All of this makes for a dazzling display of quickness, tempo, and almost non-stop action. While baseball players call time out repeatedly — and seemingly without limit — basketball referees prohibit teams from taking more than seven time-outs per half. Of the 24-second clock, which speeds up play in the National Basketball Association, or NBA, Danny Biasone, a

former team owner, said, "Pro basketball would not have survived without a clock." In other words, in the past the game was too slow to have any integrity, but now it's exciting enough to keep fans' and viewers' attention.

While the pace of these games is clearly different, both involve strategy. For example, baseball is a game where pitchers carefully devise which pitch to throw each batter in almost all conceivable situations: Slow runner on third base, one out, late in the game against a left-handed pull hitter? Change-up, low and away. Likewise, the batter must strategize, anticipating his adversary's next pitch, perhaps inching inward, toward the plate, while at the same time keeping his front hip closed. Like baseball, basketball is a sport won, in part, with clever strategy. Coaches call offensive plays, such as a pick-and-rotate or a give-and-go; they switch from man-to-man to zone defense, often forcing their opponents to shoot outside shots instead of driving to the basket; and they run a press, pressuring their rival to penetrate the defense to get the ball over the half-court line before running out of time. In addition, coaches isolate defenders, praying on the weaknesses in the opposing team; they call for post-ups, exploiting their strength near the basket; and they make substitutions, taking advantage of key moments in the game that call for a sharp-shooter or perhaps a good ball-handler off the bench.

Not only do baseball and basketball share strategy, but they also share a high degree of skill. For example, *The Sporting News'* Mark Bonavita, in his article entitled "Baseball's Five Tools," describes a "five-tool" baseball athlete as one who "excels at hitting for average, hitting for power, base-running skills and speed, throwing ability, and fielding abilities." And these are the top performers in the sport, the people who embody all of the essential skills of baseball, each of which is made up of its own body of sub-skills. For example, a hitter, whether he bats for average or for power, must demonstrate eye-hand coordination, balance, and quickness in his swing. Regarding these skills, Ted Williams, one of the best hitters in baseball history, supposedly claimed that "without question the hardest single thing to do in sport is to hit a baseball." Similarly, whether they are agile point guards, muscular power forwards, or shooting guards specializing in finesse and accuracy, basketball players, as a whole, are a talented group of athletes. In fact, in a

discussion with Steve Nash, a prime example of dexterity, coordination, endurance, and timing, Dan Patrick of ESPN said, "I tend to look at basketball players as the best athletes in the world." To earn this praise, basketball players, many reaching 6'6" in height and 220 pounds in weight, sprint back and forth, stopping and starting repeatedly, while at the same time they give and receive passes, set punishing picks, and spring lithely like deer through the air, some, like Iman Shumpert of the Knicks, recording vertical leaps as high as 36.5", according to Top End Sports (www.topendsports.com), an online sport and science magazine. That's a three-foot lift-off! A skill no mere mortal can deny.

Not surprisingly, with all this strategy and skill, both baseball and basketball history are brimming with memorable moments. For those who would debate the magic of baseball, mlb.com presents its "Top Ten Most Memorable Moments," as voted by fans, including these top three thrillers: "1. 1995 - Cal Ripken breaks Lou Gehrig's streak with his 2,131st consecutive game; 2. 1974 - Hank Aaron breaks Babe Ruth's all-time home run record; and 3. 1947 - Jackie Robinson becomes the first African-American Major Leaguer." These few moments represent not just baseball drama, but human drama, too! One man, Cal Ripken, man shows resilience and commitment; another, Hank Aaron, surmounts a seemingly insurmountable mark of greatness; and a third, Jackie Robinson, re-defines the playing field as "a diamond no longer in the rough." For basketball, the same is true. Especially in the last seconds of a close game, as coaches manage their talented players, along with the clock, squeezing victories out of seconds, and as players take dazzling buzzer-beaters or make steadfast stops on defense, basketball fans leap from their seats with the enthusiasm of a pitcher who's just thrown his first no-hitter; with the elation of a center-fielder who's just leapt over the fence to catch the final out of a game; with, one might argue, the delight of a baseball fan. Think of any free throw to tie the game; precision bounce-pass, in traffic; cross-over dribble followed by a pull-up jumper; or half-court hurl to beat the clock. This is NBA drama, and it happens every night!

So maybe, despite the obvious distinction between baseball and basketball, these sports are comparable after all. Needless to say, the games move at different

speeds, but — when it comes to strategy, skill, and drama — both pack a punch. Ultimately, the similarities and differences between baseball and basketball illustrate that sometimes our first impulse can be negative, but, with deeper analysis, we can see beyond stereotypes and appreciate the nuances that make sports grand.