Sports

Christian Reflection

A SERIES IN FAITH AND ETHICS

BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

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ISSN 1535-8585

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Christian Reflection is published quarterly by The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University. Contributors express their considered opinions in a responsible manner. The views expressed are not official views of The Center for Christian Ethics or of Baylor University.

The Center expresses its thanks to individuals, churches, and organizations, including the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, who provided financial support for this publication.

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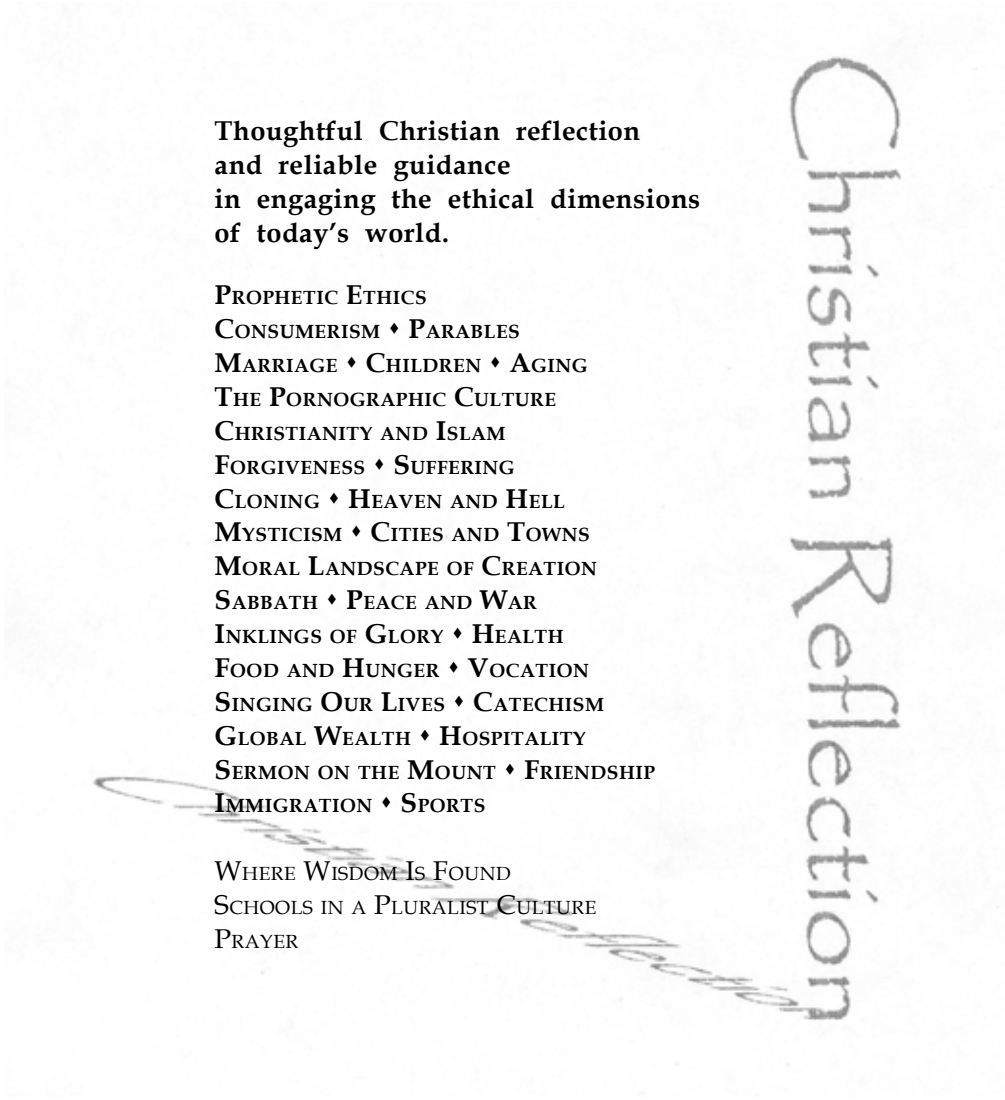

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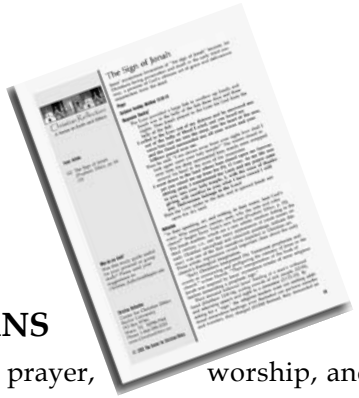

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Study Guides & Lesson Plans

These six study guides integrate Bible study, prayer, worship, and reflection on themes in the *Sports* issue.

Play On!

If sports have become the playthings of irresponsible corporations, and being a fan often turns into a hollow, pseudo-religious semblance of true belonging, there yet remains the undeniable beauty of the sports themselves and the creatures of God who find themselves so irresistibly drawn to them.

Exploring the Joy of Sports

Sports offer the simple joy of using the physical body as part of an abundant life. Yet only part of sports is physical. Through them we form a refreshing connectedness to nature, the self, others, and God.

The Grace of Neighborhood Ballparks

Something is essentially right about a culture that produces a thing so fundamentally good as the game of baseball. Yet in our suburban sprawl we have built "stadiums on steroids" to fund the runaway economics of professional sports. How can we return to building neighborhood ballparks, from the big leagues to Little League, which are centers of community life?

Would Jesus Wear Face Paint?

Being a fan captivates our imaginations, brings us great joy, and partly constitutes our identities. The satisfaction of victory is intoxicating and the camaraderie with other fans in defeat is ennobling. But are there moral limits to the exuberance of fandom?

Sports in the Christian Life

Sports, physical exercise, and recreational activity contribute to our development as spiritual beings composed of body and soul. Today as sports take on an increasingly large role in popular culture internationally, they are becoming a new field for twenty-first century Christian mission.

Upward Sports

Church sports, recreation, and leisure programs invite members to be the Body of Christ in their community. Participants mature as disciples as they learn to live out their faith through sports competition on the field, court, gymnastics mat, or in the swimming pool.

Introduction

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

Playing, watching, and fantasizing about sports have become defining features of modern culture. Are we just enjoying more leisure time together, or have sports become an unhealthy obsession?

From the vacant lots-turned-playing fields to professional stadiums, from pick-up games to organized leagues, from entire newspaper sections to 24/7 network broadcasts, from Olympic record seeking to fantasy-league deal making—playing, watching, and fantasizing about sports have become defining features of our culture. For many people, Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko has noted, sports are "a way of life, an essential element for meeting basic needs, such as self-esteem and self-fulfillment, and a factor that not only determines a sense of identity and belonging, but also the meaning of life itself." Our contributors, as athletes and fans, reflect on this phenomenon of modern sports: Are we just enjoying more leisure time together, or have sports become an unhealthy obsession?

When we watch our favorite school and professional teams compete, "the swell of admiration, the giving of affection, the ennobling of sacrifice: it all reminds us so sweetly of who we finally are, and where we are bound" as children of God, writes Eric Miller in *Play On!* (p. 11). Yet, hidden within the history of football—the American sport he most loves—is a "mangled, unholy relationship" with racism. "If sports have become the playthings of irresponsible corporations, and being a fan often turns into a hollow, pseudo-religious semblance of true belonging," he concludes, "there yet remains the undeniable beauty of the sports themselves and the creatures of God who find themselves so irresistibly drawn to them."

In *Sports in the Christian Life* (p. 19), Michael Kerrigan, C.S.P., builds on the insights of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005), who was both an athlete and avid sports fan, to articulate a Christian perspective on sports in modern culture. The Pope believed athletic competition can reveal "the wonderful

structure of the human person created by God, as a spiritual being, a unity of body and spirit," and in this spirit Kerrigan urges us "to see sports as the new field for twenty-first century Christian mission."

Hannah Elliott's *Long-Distance Running* (p. 67) is a meditation on "the simple joy of using the physical body as part of an abundant life." As a long-distance runner she enjoys a lifelong sport without "obsessively overtraining to achieve superfluous goals." She concludes, "Achieving a personal goal in a race or enjoying a long slow jog down a wooded path brings such joy that I wish I could keep running long after that day's time limit or my body allows. Few activities match running's ability to form a refreshing connectedness to nature, the self, and God."

Geoff Bowden looks at modern sports from the perspective of an avid fan in *Would Jesus Wear Face Paint?* (p. 40). "Being a fan captivates our imaginations, brings us great joy, and partly constitutes our identities. The satisfaction of victory is intoxicating and the camaraderie with other fans in defeat is ennobling," he admits. "But are there moral limits to the exuberance of fandom?" Comparing modern sports to theater, he explores those moral lines a sports fan who follows Christ should never cross.

You can believe Philip Bess is a big fan of baseball—"there is something essentially right," he muses, "about a culture that can produce a thing so fundamentally good as the game of baseball." Yet this new urbanist architect realizes not all is well with baseball at its highest levels: we have built a generation of "stadiums on steroids" to fund the runaway economics of professional baseball. In *The Grace of Neighborhood Baseball Parks: Guidelines for Urban Baseball after the Era of Cheap Petroleum* (p. 28), Bess describes how we can return to building neighborhood ballparks, from the big leagues down to Little League, which are centers of community life.

The grace of sports in bringing participants together into community is a prominent theme in the genre paintings of Baroque artists Jan Steen and David Teniers the Younger. In *Joyful Recreation* (p. 48), Haley Stewart and I review Steen's *Skittle Players outside an Inn* (cover) and Teniers's *The Game of Bowls* and *The Trio of the Crossbow*. In these images, the simplest of sports like skittles, bowls, and archery contests—in part because they require no expensive equipment or highly specialized training of participants—become potent symbols of village life and freedom from oppressive work

A deeply Christian perspective on modern sports—that they are good, but fallen, yet redeemable through God's grace—informs the worship service (p. 58) by Sharon Felton. As we gather in God's presence "to celebrate sports, and the hard work, training, and sacrifice displayed in true athletic competition," we confess the false allegiances, misplaced priorities, and petty dissensions that corrupt our sports lives. The healing remedy is named in a prayer of community: "Let us not forget that *together* we are the Body of Christ." The service includes a new hymn by Terry York and David Bolin, "We Give Our All to Christ" (p. 55), which is based on the Apostle Paul's

use of running a race as a metaphor for discipleship. It concludes: "We race to move the wreath / from our heads to his feet; / the winner's crown, both prize and gift, / returns to Christ, complete."

How do our longings for community and transcendence turn so quickly into an idolatry of sports? Roger Ward, in *God in the Gym* (p. 81), sounds a warning about the uncritical use of sports figures and themes in church programs. The three books he reviews—William J. Baker's *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport*, Clifford Putney's *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America 1880-1920*, and Tony Ladd and James Mathisen's *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport*—carefully examine the nineteenth-century vision of moral character, physical strength, and a bodily engaged Protestantism that became known as "muscular Christianity."

"The many links between organized sports and religion in our culture today sometimes do more harm to our faith than good," Philip Wise agrees in *When Religion and Sports Mix* (p. 71). With stories of his own formation as a college athlete and experiences as a pastor, Wise invites us to consider more "healthy ways of relating our sports lives, as participants or spectators, to our Christian discipleship." Above all, he writes, "we must remember we are not called to proclaim Jesus as the greatest athlete, but as the Savior of the world. To the extent that sports stories in sermons, testimonies by faithful athletes and coaches, or church-based sports camps and leagues help us share that good news, then they can be useful in our ministry."

In *Upward Sports* (p. 75), Jordan Cox offers an appreciative look at some congregation-based sports, recreation, and leisure programs that use the athletic gifts of members "to build up the body of Christ through *koinonia*" and share the gospel with others in a setting where they feel comfortable. Cox has seen many "participants mature as disciples as they learn to live out their faith through sports competition on the field, court, gymnastics mat, or in the swimming pool."

"If organized sports have become something undesirable—and all indications are that they have—can we rediscover the enjoyment and fun that initially drew us to them?" Rick Hoyle asks in *When Playing Becomes Sports* (p. 87). He reviews Shane Murphy's *The Cheers and the Tears: A Healthy Alternative to the Dark Side of Youth Sports Today*, which recommends shifting from "talent-development" to "participation-promotion" as a goal in youth sports programs. Parents receive wise advice from Joel Fish in *101 Ways to Be a Terrific Sports Parent: Making Athletics a Positive Experience for Your Child.* John Garner's anthology, *Recreation and Sports Ministry: Impacting Postmodern Culture*, contains a wealth of information for congregations. These books give us "reason to believe that sports can and should be a positive aspect of people's lives across the lifespan," Hoyle concludes, and they offer prominent roles for "parents, coaches, and local churches…in the rediscovery of play in sports."

Play On!

BY ERIC MILLER

If sports have become the playthings of irresponsible corporations, and being a fan often turns into a hollow, pseudo-religious semblance of true belonging, there yet remains the undeniable beauty of the sports themselves and the creatures of God who find themselves irresistibly drawn to them.

I did not want to move to Brazil. The reasons were many, and readily discernable to anyone with a whit of insight. But the one that played most painfully upon my day-to-day longings had something to do with this: the Pirates had won the World Series the previous fall. The Steelers had won the Super Bowl four out of the previous six Januarys. A native of western Pennsylvania, thirteen years old, I loved sports. And I knew victory. Both were *sweet*. Indescribably sweet.

Within two years I would be swept up in a sports storm that even now bursts from my memory with titanic force. Upon hitting that red Brazilian dirt, in the summer of 1980, I began what turned out to be a shockingly rapid conversion to *futebol*, trading glove and cap for *kichute* and *camisa*, the soccer cleats and team-shirts my new friends wore. They were *Americanos*, yes, but where it mattered they were Brazilian: on the field. They took me and my brothers into the wonder-world of Brazilian soccer—*futebol arte*, as the Brazilians joyed to call it—where legends lived and heroes danced, sweeping across the field with delicacy and force, with vibrancy and focus and delight, magicians with a ball, making magic for the world.

And the world was watching. This I discovered early on, as the national team—known simply as the *Seleção* ("selection")—played its way into the 1982 World Cup, the storm that would take my past experiences of vicarious participation to new degrees of intensity. As the Cup neared, the sense

grew, game by game, that this Brazilian team was unusual, even by Brazil's standards. It was armed with a midfield quartet as creative and dominant as any since the fabled days of soccer's undisputed greatest player ever, Brazil's own Pelé, who had led the country to World Cup championships in 1958, 1962, and 1970. I was scrambling to learn Portuguese by reading, dictionary in hand, the weekly sports magazine *Placar*, trying to absorb the scene as fully as possible. By the time the world's soccer powers converged upon Spain that June, anticipation had turned to climax, a month-long climax, filled with mystery, stars, jubilation—and defeat.

But first came the victories. Brazil, led by fabulous athletes with mythical names—Zico, Sócrates, Falcão, and Leandro—dispatched each of its early opponents with such potent *joie de vivre* that the final victory lap seemed only a blink away. Russia, Scotland, and New Zealand fell in the first round, mere apprentices. All Brazil swelled with glee. Argentina and Italy awaited in the second round—past champions both, always dangerous. But the Brazil-Argentina showdown proved to be simply one more Brazilian show. Now a victory over Italy would mean a semi-final berth.

To that point Italy had played drab, uninspired soccer. Suddenly it found inspiration. Brazil went for broke, putting its *jogo bonito* ("beautiful game") on brilliant display, with an unending medley of fluid passes and pounding shots. But in what turned out to be the greatest game of the tournament, Italy held them to two goals and managed three of their own, taking advantage of the ever-attacking Brazilian midfield and a surprisingly weak goaltender. The all but certain coronation never came. Italy went on to win its third *Copa*, creating legends of its own.

The anguish of the loss was exquisite, the precise opposite of the overwhelming, samba-fired joy that had rumbled and raged through the country the previous two weeks. All Brazil—*all Brazil*—had shut down for its five games: no shoppers served, no mail delivered, no gas pumped. The *festa* seemed eternal; the joy at victory called up weddings and homecomings. The defeat they greeted with abject disbelief, a mourning echoing deeply down the soul of a long-floundering, ever-rising nation. The dream abruptly died—for a time, at least. But although Brazil has since won the *Copa* twice, its victorious sides have never equaled the grace and verve of that 1982 *Seleção*. Even in defeat, it made history.

It was the public nature of the joy that so affected me. I'd had a taste of it the previous February, when I watched the miraculous USA hockey team skate to the gold in the 1980 Olympics, Cold War passion and sporting love coursing through the nation's heart, and my own. When the United States defeated the Soviets, I had marveled—and, instinctively, rejoiced—at seeing the news clips that showed cars pulled off along the roadside and people spontaneously breaking into "God Bless America." This was my point of reference for national celebration and patriotic unity. But what had happened in Brazil during those two weeks completely eclipsed it.

I was changed forever. When I entered Brazil in July of 1980, I was wearing the brassy yellow t-shirt an uncle had given me at a farewell party. It featured a muscular eagle wrapped in stars and stripes, with a banner waving beneath it that read *American and Proud of It*. When I re-entered the United States four years later, I was sporting yellow again. But this time it was the shimmering, golden, green-trimmed jersey of the *Seleção*. I was all-American no more.

It is striking that this is the title we drape across the shoulders of our athletic champions: *All-American*. The 1940 film *Knute Rockne, All-American* suggests, with blunt but sweet directness, how this came to be. "The life of Knute Rockne," ran a prefatory declamation as the film began, "is its own dedication to the Youth of America and to the finest ideals of courage, character, and sportsmanship for all the world. Knute Rockne was a great and vital force in molding the spirit of modern America…."[1]

America, an invented and enlightened nation, always required this molding, this worried attention to spirit and shape. But by the turn of the twentieth century something new had to be found to ensure that the recently electrified, urbanized, imperial nation had a great, upstanding citizenry to match—especially in view of the massive, darkly kaleidoscopic movement of migrants and immigrants that was transfiguring cities from Boston to Los Angeles. Modern industry had made modern cities. But it was still human beings—energetic, anarchic—who would inhabit them. Once outside the factories, what would people do? This was the troubling question.

Sport became the city's way of preserving the ancient field, and sports teams a means of preserving the venerable village, both so necessary for any vital experience of the good life. As the maelstrom of modern living wove people into a colossal tangle, open space and communal impulses took new forms, and anxious gatekeepers were left hoping that, despite the ruckus of it all, something like a dance might emerge. Sport—closely tied to religion—was one of the dances they turned to, and with an intensity that can only be called innocent.

In the twentieth century, sport became the city's way of preserving the ancient field, and sports teams a means of preserving the venerable village, both so necessary for any vital experience of the good life.

The movie *Knute Rockne, All-American* gives a taste of this innocence. The child of parents who immigrated from Norway in 1895, young Knute, jammed with thousands of other children into Jane Addams' Chicago, even-

tually finds his way onto a football field, and soon after declares to his parents that "We're all Americans now—especially me: I'm a left end!" Years later, after he had become head coach at the University of Notre Dame, Rockne wins his players' allegiance with a passionate, gruff, principled approach to coaching, and to life. The film is now remembered as a Ronald Reagan movie, and Reagan's George Gipp delivers the tribute to Rockne that reveals precisely what "All-American" was to encompass."He's given us something they don't teach in schools," Gipp tells Mrs. Rockne. "Something clean and strong inside—not just coaching but a way of living, something we'll never forget."

It is a jock-flick best seen as a dream, a species of all-American romance. Like all romances, but especially those of this variety, it seeks to preserve cherished ideals—virtue, harmony, joy, fraternity—but, it turns out, at the expense of the person. We cannot believe in these characters; such nobility and fellow feeling and all-around jollity go down way too easily. We know there must be another side of the American story, however dreary and dark.

In her book *The Real All Americans: The Team that Changed a Game, a People, and a Nation*, Sally Jenkins gives it to us, revealing, among other things, the mangled, unholy relationship between modern sport and modern America that *Knute Rockne* will not probe. And she shows us why we, in our times, must be on guard even against sport.

Jenkins's tale centers on the remarkable and forgotten connection between the game of football and that part of American history that *Rockne*, Reagan, and any number of other all-Americans have so easily elided: the fate of the indigenous people who fell before the mighty all-American engine. Her candor intensifies pathos. If she too tilts steeply toward romance (of a distinctively postmodern variety: not the romance of the conqueror, but of the conquered), she writes with subtlety and even-handedness, with a pleasing sympathy to all sides of this ugly, beautiful story.

In the midst of the great modern change, Jenkins shows, the feverishly popular game of football indeed helped us define ourselves as a nation—but not necessarily in ways we can be proud of. "The game, like the country in which it was invented, was a rough, bastardized thing that jumped up out of the mud," she notes.[2] By the late nineteenth century, the annual Yale-Princeton match-up was so huge that churches in Manhattan held services an hour early to ensure that fans could make it to the game; 40,000 showed up at Polo Grounds in 1890 to watch these Ivies slug it out. The era of the mass spectacle was underway, though even football, remarkably, was an arena that reflected the persisting grip of old-stock elites on the nation's public life: it was Harvard, Yale, and Princeton that were the titans of the gridiron.

This is where the lowly Carlisle Indians come into the story, and where the marriage of nation and sport is revealed in all its corrupt complexity—as well as its redemptive worth.

Carlisle was a team of actual Indians, students at an experimental school just outside of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, founded in the fall of 1879 when its earnest, quintessentially inner-directed architect, Captain Richard Henry Pratt, corralled a pan-Indian collection of youngsters (including many who were the children of chiefs), back East for (re)education. His sympathy for and devotion to the Indians are just as evident as his own repellant cultural stamp; among his mottoes was "*Kill the Indian, save the man*." It is no wonder that Jenkins describes Carlisle as a "violent social experiment," where English was required, braided hair (on boys) was shorn, and members of tribes were separated (p. 5).

And yet Pratt loved the Indians, Jenkins makes clear. When several years after the school's launch some boys asked permission to start a football team, he, nervous about the violence of the game, cautiously said yes, and then watched in wonder. "Their grace and exceptional speed in getting all over the field was a revelation," he recalled (p. 32). In 1900 Harvard's coach (as it turns out, the grandson of Ralph Waldo Emerson) declared that football was "the ultimate expression of Anglo-Saxon superiority"—precisely the kind of culture-defining conceit that irked Pratt. When he gave the go ahead to football, he did so with two utterly characteristic conditions: first, that the players practice charity and self-control in the face of provocation; second, that they prepare themselves to shortly "whip the biggest football team in the country" (p. 123).

They fulfilled both conditions amply, and managed to change history, too, creating in effect the game we know today. In the face of the steam-rolling, bone-crunching Anglo-Saxon style, the Indians, with the same poise, mystery, and wit that gave Colonel Custer and friends fits, showed the now-watching world another way to play. "They had invented a whole new brand of game," Jenkins writes. "Carlisle football, mixing the run, pass, and kick with elements of surprise, was the game of the future. The traditional powers would cling to their old tactics at their peril" (p. 230). Between 1911 and 1913, taking on the most dominant, best-financed teams in the country, the team would pile up thirty-eight victories against only three defeats. After the climactic episode in the book, the 1912 Jim Thorpe-led defeat of the powerhouse Army Cadets, the *New York Times* itself declared Carlisle's "the most perfect brand of football ever seen in America" (p. 286).

Sally Jenkins reveals the mangled, unholy relationship between modern sport and modern America that Knute Rockne will not probe. And she shows us why we, in our times, must be on guard even against sport.

Their innovating coach, Glenn Scobey "Pop"' Warner, had helped channel the genius of the Indians' own place, people, and time into a form that has stood the test of time (including, contra the blatantly false claim of *Knute Rockne*, the perfecting of the forward pass as a primary offensive weapon). And it was Warner who lauded their achievement most poignantly. "Whenever I see one of those All American teams," he mused in his memoirs, "I cannot help but think what an eleven could have been selected from those *real* All Americans who blazed such a trail of glory" (p. 295).

Can the trail of glory ever truly emerge from anything so tangled in the thorns of this corrupt world? For as readily as *Knute Rockne* applies varnish, Jenkins strips it. She forces us to confront the malign motives, the violent impulses, the idolatrous yearnings—often on a grand, national scale—that modern sport has been mixed up in since its birth.

This seedy reality is bound to trouble those charged with setting themselves apart as a holy nation, those Christ himself described as "not of the world any more than I am of the world." Sports, like so many other of the social forms concocted in the modern world—from the shopping mall to the stock market to the U.S. Congress to the United Nations—seem coated in compromise, lethal to body and soul. These social forms attract a degrading kind of allegiance, effected by both brazen seduction and sickly dependence, and leave decent folk longing for far truer forms of membership, of belonging, of citizenship.

Yet, as all of these stories make evident, it is both wheat and tares that fill our fields, tares that invariably choke life, wheat that miraculously gives it. There is no escaping this tangle. There is only the persisting need to dedicate ourselves to preserving the good that is miraculously here, and by that preserving expose the evil that threatens it. If sports in our day have become the playthings of catastrophically irresponsible corporations, and if becoming a fan so often turns into a hollow, pseudo-religious semblance of true belonging, there yet remains the undeniable beauty of the sports themselves to uphold, and the marvelous reality of the actual human beings, the creatures of God almighty, who find themselves so irresistibly drawn to them.

Consider the story Jenkins tells about the Carlisle-Yale game of 1896, in the early years of Carlisle's football history. The Indians were coming off of a brutal 22-6 loss to Princeton, after which the *Philadelphia Press* had chortled, "The race with a civilization and a history won the day. It was a clear victory of mind over physical force" (p. 142). Just a few days later Carlisle was to take its grandest stage yet, Polo Grounds, to play mighty Yale. The team was a curiosity in a nation of citified consumers, and the game attracted a huge crowd, including Russell Sage, the railway magnate, philanthropist, and sometime politician, who played host to Pratt for the occasion.

After Carlisle went up by a score early on, Yale came back, and took a 12-6 lead into the closing minutes. But near the game's end the Carlisle left end broke away from a pile-up with a mighty burst of strength and spurted down the field for a touchdown. The unthinkable was happening.

And then it happened again—this time in the other direction. As Carlisle was lining up to kick the extra point, a late whistle sounded. One of the referees—a Yale alum and also (in a situation not uncharacteristic of the day) the Carlisle coach—was calling the play back. The players were stunned. The crowd started to boo, louder and louder. The Indians threatened to leave, talked out of it only by Pratt himself.

The clock wound down, and the game ended. But as it did the crowd, breaking into a mighty ovation, took a completely unexpected step—one giant step for mankind, as it were: it stormed the field and carried the Indians off the field. The *New York Sun*, as did most of the press, hoisted the players as well, declaring, with sudden historical clarity, that the now infamous call was "characteristic…of nearly all the crimes committed against the Indians by the whites, for it was accomplished by the man of all men who should have looked out for their interests and their rights" (p. xx). After the game Mrs. Sage herself took off her corsage and pinned it on the Carlisle quarterback Frank Cayou, who had scored the first touchdown.

How we glory in exceptional play, we creatures of God. We delight in honest, fierce competition. We thrill to witness the fruit of difficult, demanding training. We watch, enchanted, as our athletes hurtle themselves toward their dreams, wholehearted, full-spirited, focused on the prize, acting together, giving all. We sense our spirits rise. It is just a game, we know, we know. But it hints, somehow, at that which lies beneath the game, yet is also deeply integral to life on this wondrous earth. The swell of admiration, the giving of affection, the ennobling of sacrifice: it all reminds us so sweetly of who we finally are, and where we are bound.

How we glory in exceptional play, we creatures of God. We delight in honest, fierce competition. The swell of admiration, the giving of affection, the ennobling of sacrifice: it all reminds us so sweetly of who we finally are, and where we are bound.

We are certainly bound for a land that transcends these particular identities—American, Brazilian, Norse, Lakota—even as it redeems and honors them. And it is this difficult but wonderful tension, the tension between the universal and the particular, that is perhaps the most redemptive effect of modern sport. It previews a day when we will know ourselves for what we at root are: human beings, distinct but united, many but one, destined for an

eternal dance—destined for play—in the kingdom of God.

Until that day, those who know that hope can surely honor it with beautiful dives, bravura goals, and bountiful cheers. Somewhere, some confused teenager, or marginal man, or aged woman, will see.

And will know.

NOTES

1 *Knute Rockne All American*, DVD, directed by Lloyd Bacon (1940, Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2006).

2 Sally Jenkins, *The Real All Americans: The Team that Changed a Game, a People, a Nation* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 1. As I summarize the story Jenkins recounts, further references to quotations will be in the text.

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Sports in the Christian Life

BY MICHAEL P. KERRIGAN, C.S.P.

Sports, physical exercise, and recreational activity contribute to our development as spiritual beings composed of body and soul. Today as sports take on an increasingly large role in popular culture internationally, they are becoming a new field for twenty-first century Christian mission.

Seeing "the world of sport today" as "a field of Christian mission" may be a novel concept for many people. On the superficial level, the spiritual values of Christian discipleship would seem to conflict with the ideals of sport, which are viewed primarily as a secular activity.

Sports are taking on a larger role in popular culture internationally. Some scholars claim they are a universally recognized aspect of contemporary society as evidenced by their ability to engage both participants and spectators and to exert significant influence upon societal values.[1] The fact that sports can draw huge crowds to competitive events demonstrates their potential influence upon the masses of humanity today, like no other time in human history. As a social phenomenon characterized by globalization and instantaneous Internet communication, sports can overcome social classes, cultural differences, linguistic barriers, and geographical boundaries among peoples.

On the other hand, sports have been used to promote political agendas, national ideologies, and economic gain. The restoration of the modern Summer and Winter Olympic Games as a way to bring the world together in peaceful international competition have been used on occasion for divisive demonstrations such as boycotts and displays of triumphal nationalism on the athletic playing fields.

A CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Over the last thirty years, Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) and his successor Pope Benedict XVI have seen sports as a way to promote positive values and foster the human potential for athletes who compete.[2] On numerous occasions they have addressed the role of sports in society and observed how the Christian life and sporting activity complement one another. Their insights were offered primarily in informal meetings with athletes—such as soccer players, ski teams, Ferrari driving team members, youth group athletic associations, and Olympic athletes visiting Rome—rather than articulated through formal teachings or official papal pronouncements.

Through the metaphors the Apostle Paul used in both exhortations and autobiographical references, he drew attention to an affinity between athletics and the Christian life.

The personal interest that Pope John Paul II took in sports and his penchant for engaging in recreational activities made him an ideal Christian spokesperson on this topic. Prior to his election as pope, he was renowned for being an avid hiker, skier, and swimmer. He had a swimming pool installed at the Vatican residence and was known for slipping away incognito to go skiing. His lengthy pontificate provided him with many opportunities to address the topic of sports and the Christian life.

Pope Benedict XVI has spoken on several occasions about this topic—most notably during the August 2005 World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany; while blessing the Olympic torch in St. Peter's Square as it made its way toward Turin, Italy, the site of the 2006 Winter Olympic Games; and greeting various athletes during papal audiences. In his message to the 20th Winter Olympics he stated, "Sport is one of the human activities which is also waiting to be enlightened by God through Christ, so that the values it expresses may be purified and elevated at both the individual and the collective levels."[3]

While he is more renowned for being a scholar than an athlete like his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI avails himself of summer holidays in Alpine locales for walks and time for reflection in the beauty of God's nature as a way to balance physical recreation with academic scholarship. Continuing in the tradition that Pope John Paul II established, the present pope frequently addresses the role of sports and their influence on society. Most recently on May 7, 2008, at the conclusion of a Mozart concert given by the China Philharmonic Orchestra and the Shanghai Opera Chorus, he extended his greetings and prayerful best wishes to "all the people of China as they prepare for the Olympic Games, an event of great importance for the entire human family."

These interactions between the sacred and the secular helped lay the groundwork for the first major international symposium, "The World of Sport Today: A Field of Christian Mission," convened by the Church and Sport Section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome from November 11-12, 2005. The meeting took place seven months after Pope John Paul II's death, a clear indication that Pope Benedict XVI would continue the work his predecessor had begun.

Scholars, leaders of sports associations, professional athletes, coaches, and representatives from the Bishops' Conferences of Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland took part in this "spiritual sports summit." Two Americans offered valuable input into the discussions: Clark Power from the University of Notre Dame addressed the topic of "Sport and Business" while Major League Baseball pitcher, Jeff Suppan, then a member of the St. Louis Cardinals and now with the Milwaukee Brewers, offered reflections on "The Challenges of Being a Christian Athlete" in a roundtable discussion.

Archbishop Stanislaw Rylko, the president of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, noted the significance of this historic meeting by observing that this seminar is "a palpable sign of the Church's concern for this important dimension of contemporary culture and in recognition of sports' educative potential in the development of the human person…. [as] the Seminar also dealt with sport as a 'field of mission' for Christians and for all men and women of goodwill, seeking to encourage the search for pathways that can truly restore the true face of sports, and lead it back to the lofty ideals in which sport has its roots and which have animated it throughout history."[4]

"The World of Sport Today: A Field of Christian Mission" culminates many years of a developing tradition as well as setting a trajectory for future discussion on this topic. Somewhat similar to Paul addressing the Athenians at the Areopagus with a new spiritual insight (Acts 17:22-31), this conference and its published proceedings encourage twenty-first century Christians to envision athletic competition and the sports playing fields as new opportunities for Christian evangelization. The roots of this contemporary vision, however, lie deep within Scripture and tradition.

DEEP ROOTS IN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

Through the metaphors the Apostle Paul used in both exhortations and autobiographical references, he drew attention to an affinity between athletics and the Christian life. He warned the Christians of Galatia, "You were running well; who prevented you from obeying the truth?" (Galatians 5:7); and he urged Timothy to "Fight the good fight of faith" (1 Timothy 6:12a). About his own pilgrimage he wrote, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14) and "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). In his reflections on Christian commitment in 1 Corinthians

9:24-27, Paul combined the images of running a race, boxing, and training properly for an athletic contest.

The early Christian theologians resisted two exaggerated viewpoints on sports in the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman "cult of the body," sporting events and games were primarily ritual celebrations to idols. Developing the physical body, promoting attractiveness, and placating the gods were emphasized while the spiritual significance of sport was downplayed. At the opposite end of the spectrum another ideology emerged: the Gnostic tendency to emphasize the spiritual by downplaying the significance of the physical body and to see the soul as "trapped in a body and yearning to be set free." These popular perspectives challenged the Christian understanding of human nature, which strove for an appropriate balance between the physical body and spiritual soul. By the early third century Tertullian advised Christians to shun such athletic competitions altogether, but Clement of Alexandria coined a phrase to nuance a Christian understanding: "physical activity, yes; cult of the body, no."[5]

Athletic competition, in the words of Pope John Paul II, can reveal "the wonderful structure of the human person created by God, as a spiritual being, a unity of body and spirit."

Almost two centuries later when Christianity emerged as the religion of the Roman Empire, Emperor Theodosius I resolved this dilemma by banning pagan rites and by outlawing the Ancient Olympic Games in 393.

During the Middle Ages the excessive brutality in athletic contests that became "tournaments fought until the death" before stadium crowds created another problem for Christians. "The Church would later criticize the medieval tournaments on account of their gory aspects," notes Maria Aiello, a specialist in sports law, "yet the idea that sport could be a useful means, under certain conditions, of achieving the overall education of the human person remained firm."[6]

This balanced understanding of sports, physical exercise, and recreational activity as contributing to the development of the human person as a spiritual being composed of body and soul formed the Christian viewpoint that shaped many centuries of thought.

Two recent events have had a profound impact on the contemporary Christian approach to sports. The inception of Modern Olympic Games at the end of the nineteenth century tried to promote the classical Greek ideals of appreciating physical activity as an educational value while fostering peace among peoples of various backgrounds. Unlike the ancient Olympics that were limited to men and the elite of those times, the modern Summer Games (from 1896) and Winter Games (from 1924) broadened the focus. The

Olympic Charter recognized the ecumenical character of sport, affirming that all individuals had the right to practice it based on the values of equality, fraternity, and fair play. With technological advances in travel and communication, the possibility of sports being played and athletic competition taking place on an international venue offered greater visibility than before.

Then a renewed sense of Christian mission occurred during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) with an understanding to "read the signs of the times" and foster dialogue between the Church and the modern world. The important role of leisure for the relaxation of the spirit and the positive benefits of sports events in the ongoing development of the human person were explicitly addressed in *Gaudium et Spes* (*The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*:

> The widespread reduction in working hours…brings increasing advantages to numerous people. May these leisure hours be properly used for relaxation of spirit and the strengthening of mental and bodily health…. These benefits are obtainable too from physical exercise and sports events, which can help to preserve emotional balance, even at the community level, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races.[7]

The ideals stated by both the Olympic Charter and the Second Vatican Council offered positive ways for seeing sports as benefiting the international human community in terms of fostering peace, respect, and better understanding among peoples. The coinciding of these two events played an important role in the Church taking interest and expressing concern about sports. An important dialogue was about to begin between the Church and the modern world.

KEY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Among the many occasions on which Pope John Paul II addressed the role of sports in the Christian life, two are most significant for the development of the teaching that culminated in "The World of Sport Today" Seminar. During a 1987 address to participants of Athletic Championship, he noted:

> Sport, as you well know, is an activity that involves more than the movement of the body; it demands the use of intelligence and the developing of the will. It reveals, in other words, the wonderful structure of the human person created by God, as a spiritual being, a unity of body and spirit. Athletic activity can help every man and woman to recall the moment when God the Creator gave origin to the human person, the masterpiece of his creative work.[8]

In an October 28, 2000, address on the occasion of the Jubilee of Sports People, he observed:

> In recent years [sport] has continued to grow even more as one of the characteristic phenomena of the modern era, almost a "sign of the times" capable of interpreting humanity's new needs and new expectations…. Sport is not an end, but a means; it can become a vehicle for civility and genuine recreation, encouraging people to put the best of themselves on the field and to avoid what might be dangerous or seriously harmful to themselves or to others.[9]

As the 2004 Summer Olympic Games approached, Pope John Paul II called for a worldwide truce to all wars and civil conflicts in anticipation of the Athens game. In a concurrent development that summer, it was announced that a new section of "Church and Sports" for the Pontifical Council for the Laity was being established as "a new tool for evangelization." This ministry has five goals:

> To insure more direct and systematic attention to the vast world of sport on the part of the church that fosters a renewal of pastoral work in and through sports.
>
> To diffuse the teachings of the Church regarding sport and to promote the study and research of various themes of sport, especially those of an ethical nature.
>
> To promote initiatives that can serve to evangelize the world of sport, especially those which foster the witness of an authentic Christian life among professional athletes.
>
> To promote a culture of sport in harmony with the true dignity of the human person through youth education.
>
> To favor collaboration among the various sporting organizations and associations on the national and international level, serving as a point of reference and dialogue with the various national and international entities.[10]

The new "Church and Sports" section will encourage an ongoing dialogue about the role of sports in society, and continue to develop an optimistic view in which the values of Christian discipleship complement, rather than compete with, the intrinsic values of sports and athletic competition. This newly envisioned tool for evangelism already is producing important results, like the aforementioned international seminar "The World of Sport Today: A Field of Christian Mission."

The trajectory set in that meeting is evident in an address given on October 31, 2007, by Archbishop Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio of the Holy See to the United Nations, to the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly on sport for peace and development. In anticipation of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, he noted that the Olympic motto

"Citius, Altius, Fortius" ("Swifter, Higher, Stronger") is a clear example of how the secular and spiritual intersect, for it was adapted from the nineteenth-century French Dominican priest, Father Henri Martin Dideon, the headmaster of Arcueil College in Paris who used these words to describe his students' athletic achievements. Archbishop Migliore concluded his speech by remarking, "The Olympic Creed reminds us that the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle."[11]

SUMMARY OF THIS PERSPECTIVE

I have sketched a developing contemporary Christian perspective on sports. Let me now summarize its key insights.

The dignity of the human person is grounded in our creation in the image and likeness of God, a unity of body and soul. Each person is unique and gifted with various talents and abilities, including athletic ones, to develop in loving service to God and others.

The human body is an instrument for full human life, and it should not be viewed as an end in itself. The shortsighted view of "winning at all costs" reflects a "cult of the body" in which the spiritual dimension is downplayed with the primary emphasis given to immediate results to succeed. Human life is more than an immediate, physical, and transitory existence.

In order to succeed in sports and athletic competition, *discipline and at times personal sacrifices are necessary*. A regimen of physical activity and regular practice is an ascetic life that mirrors a form of Christian discipline; it is a way in which one learns to how to deal positively with balancing human passions, intelligence, and the will.

Through sports we can learn important values for life. Participation, not solely winning results, should be the primary focus of sports. Learning the rules of the game, fostering respect for the values of honesty, integrity, and fair play, along with developing skills to deal with adversity on the playing field offer potential for positive formation of life skills in other areas such as family, community, and work.

Sports can enrich the social dimension of human life. Learning how to play as a team member shifts the focus from "me" to "we." Rather than individual success, the importance of contributing to a group effort is emphasized. As an alternative to competitions on computers that foster a more passive and impersonal lifestyle, sports and physical recreation offer a more active lifestyle that involves other people, offering opportunities to form friendships based on similar interests.

Nevertheless, sports and athletic competition, like other aspects of our culture, are in need of redemption. The temptation to "win at all costs" dominates sports, as evidenced by the current scandals of athletes fixing results for gambling purposes, using steroids and other performance enhancing substances, and stealing team signals on the field to gain an advantage. Another temptation is to commercialize sports so that athletes and specta-

tors are reduced to commodities, exploited for financial gain (by team owners, corporate sponsors, and so on), and not respected for their human dignity. Yet with Paul we may proclaim, "where sin increases, God's grace abounds even more" (Romans 5:20); our sports can be transformed with Christian values.

Thus, *we should see athletic competitions as opportunities to witness to Christian faith.* Christian athletes must live "in the world" of contemporary sports, but not "of that world." In sports (as in other human cultural endeavors such as the arts, sciences, academia, political life, and so on), opportunities abound to witness to the gospel way of life. Christian athletes can be role models of sportsmanship, fair play, discipline, and integrity.

A helpful evangelization perspective comes from an adaptation of a prayer "Christ Has No Body Now but Ours" from the sixteenth century Christian mystic Teresa of Avila:

> Christ has no body now on earth but ours,
> no hands but ours, no feet but ours.
> Ours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ
> looks out upon the world;
> ours are the feet with which he goes about doing good;
> ours are the hands with which he blesses us now.[12]

In this spirit, we are called not to close our eyes to the unique evangelization opportunities and challenges that contemporary sports offer, but to see sports as the new field for twenty-first century Christian mission.

NOTES

1 Toby Miller, Geoffrey Lawrence, Jim McKay, and David. Rowe, *Globalization and Sport: Playing the World* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2001), offers the viewpoint that culture is the focal point for understanding sports.

2 Monsignor Carlo Mazza identifies almost two hundred occasions when twentieth-century pontiffs have publicly addressed the topic of sports, in simple greetings to more elaborate speeches: Pius X (1903-1914), 3 times; Benedict XV (1914-1922), 1; Pius XI (1922-1939), 5; Pius XII (1939-1958), 20; John XXIII (1958-1963), 9; Paul VI (1963-1978), 35; and John Paul II (1978-2005), 120. He notes the need for a comprehensive collection and systemic study of these papal discourses. See Carlo Mazza, "Sport as Viewed from the Church's Magisterium," in *The World Of Sport Today: A Field of Christian Mission* (Vatican City State: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2006), 57. *The World of Sport Today,* the collected proceedings from the international symposium described below, can be purchased from The Pontifical Council for the Laity (*pcpl@laity.va*).

3 Pope Benedict XVI, "Message for the 20th Winter Olympic Games in Turin, Italy: A Light for Sports," *L'Osservatore Romano,* 6 (8 February 2006), 2.

4 Archbishop Stanislaus Rylko, "Preface," *The World Of Sport Today*, 11.

5 Dietmar Mieth, "Towards an Ethic of Sport in Contemporary Culture," *The World Of Sport Today*, 30.

6 Maria Aiello, "A Brief History of Sport," *The World Of Sport Today*, 16.

7 Walter M. Abbott, S.J., ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966), 268.

8 Pope John Paul II, "Address to Participants of Athletic Championship: Be Examples of

Human Virtues," *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly English Edition) 36 (7 September 1987): 5.

9 "Jubilee of Sports People," Address of Pope John Paul II to the International Convention on the Theme: "During the Time of the Jubilee: The Face and Soul of Sport" (October 28, 2000); available online at *www.vatican.va.*

10 Kevin Lixey, L.C., "The Goals of the Church and Sport Section" in *The World Of Sport Today*, 75-76.

11 Archbishop Celestino Migliore, "Holy See's Address on the Values of Sport" (4 November 2007); available online at *www.zenit.org/article-20907?l=english.*

12 "No Body Now but Ours," *Living with Christ* 12 (June 2006), 43.

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The Grace of Neighborhood Baseball Parks

Guidelines for Urban Baseball after the Era of Cheap Petroleum

BY PHILIP BESS

In our suburban sprawl we have built a generation of "stadiums on steroids" to fund the runaway economics of professional baseball. How can we return to building neighborhood ballparks, from the big leagues down to Little League, which are centers of community life?

Prefatory Note: Professional baseball is not a charity. Indeed, not only is professional baseball not a charity, it is a billion dollar industry that has not hesitated to throw its weight around in local politics at both major league and minor league levels to gain public subsidies for new stadium construction. Whether and how much tax money should help pay for new sports stadia is a political argument best argued locally; but with respect to the quality and character of the new stadia themselves, the fact that two Major League Baseball teams—the Boston Red Sox and the Chicago Cubs—provide clear evidence that it is possible to be both profitable in small neighborhood ballparks *and* to be good neighbors is (alas) insufficient to turn today's suburban culture, culture of baseball, and culture of architecture away from the current paradigm of stadium construction not inaptly called "stadiums on steroids." That paradigm routinely results in new baseball stadiums on average some fifty to seventy-five percent larger in both interior square footage and building footprint area than the exceptionally profitable Fenway Park and Wrigley Field (see opposite page), which opened in 1912 and 1914 respectively. From unscientific observation, the current operative rule seems to be that every team building a new stadium—especially in big market cities—wants all the bells and whistles of the most recently built stadium; plus ten percent more area "for comfort;" plus an illusory allusion to some local historic predecessor (for confirmation of

Above: *FENWAY PARK AND ENVIRONS. Boston, Massachusetts. Photo: © Philip Bess, 2003. Used by permission.*

Below: *WRIGLEY FIELD AND ENVIRONS. Chicago, Illinois. Photo: © Philip Bess, 2008. Used by permission.*

this, see the plans for the new stadia that will replace Yankee Stadium and Shea Stadium respectively); plus all the government subsidy that it can negotiate. So let it be acknowledged at the beginning that the current model of stadium construction is unlikely to change unless and until economic and political circumstances dictate a change. That said, a change in economic and political circumstances is not inconceivable, particularly if we

are at or are soon approaching worldwide Peak Oil. Being neither an economist nor a geologist, I have no way of knowing (other than observing the rising price of crude oil) whether Peak Oil is on the immediate horizon or perhaps even here; but four-dollars-per-gallon gas is already having measurable effects upon American driving habits. When the price of gas gets to six dollars per gallon at the pump the American suburban lifestyle is in big trouble, and at eight dollars per gallon it is probably over; and the commercial aviation industry is in for some big changes as well. The effects of this shock to the national and global economy will entail social changes far more significant than changes in how we build baseball parks; but it is unlikely that the construction of baseball parks will be unaffected.

Consider what follows therefore as ideas to file away until needed.

How *ought* we to think about cities and baseball parks—of their nature and purpose, and of our nature and purpose? Gilbert Chesterton once wrote that out of the preponderance of evidence that led him to believe that the orthodox Christian story is true, perhaps the most basic is that Christianity precisely illuminated why he was correct in feeling simultaneously both at home and uncomfortable in the world; for in the Christian view, both the world and our selves are (in this order) *good*, *fallen* (i.e., in a state of disorder such that on our own we are incapable of fulfilling the purpose for which we have been created), and *redeemable and perfectible through the agency of divine grace*.

I mention these fundamental Christian truths because what is true of life is true of baseball; and although the flaws of America are many, there is something essentially right about a culture that can produce a thing so fundamentally good as the game of baseball. Though, as is evident to anyone who has been paying attention, baseball at its highest levels is also vulnerable to the flaws of the American culture that invented it and in which (its growing worldwide popularity notwithstanding) baseball remains embedded. There is indeed a fundamental goodness—a goodness both democratic and meritocratic—to baseball, a game that can be played well by persons of virtually any body type, and that also requires the most careful balance between both highly visible individual responsibility and achievement, and the communal purposes of a team.[1] A complex economy that allows good baseball players to both devote themselves to baseball full time and to make a handsome living doing so creates both opportunities and incentive for good baseball players to become better and to achieve excellence. So let me here acknowledge with gratitude that the professionalization of baseball is unquestionably related to the high level of excellence that today characterizes the sport.

And yet, not all is well today either with America or with baseball at its highest levels. Founding American ideals of ordered liberty and equality of opportunity are mocked by our rampant consumerism and individualism at home, and by our mindless imposition of these latter vices abroad in the name of our allegedly most blessed way of life. We have become a therapeutic culture that values celebrity and privilege over virtue; and this is reflected in the recent state of our National Pastime. This is so most famously in the steroid scandal of the past ten years, in the course of which Major League Baseball (MLB) turned a blind eye to the use of performance enhancing drugs, a fateful disinterest motivated in part (it must be recalled) by a desire to revive baseball's popularity in the aftermath of years of unjust and ruinous labor relations that entailed among other things: racial segregation until 1947; baseball's notorious "reserve clause" that bound players to the team that signed them for a year after their previous contract had expired; the 1970s rise of the Major League Baseball Players Association, arbitration, and free agency; collusion on the part of wealthy team owners in the mid-1980s; and four work stoppages in twenty-two years, including an August 1994 season-ending strike by the then arguably equally wealthy players.

It is against both this background of baseball's economic history and the post-1945 suburbanization of America (of which I will say more below) that one has to understand not only the past twenty years of new baseball stadium design and financing, but also the last fifty years of stadium design and construction, which has entailed *two full generations* of baseball stadia. Where the multi-purpose publicly-financed stadiums-and-parking-lots of the 1960s were driven by suburbanization, the new publicly-financed baseball-only stadiums from the 1990s have been driven above all by the recent economic history of the baseball industry. Beginning with Chicago's New Comiskey Park (which opened in 1991, and is now U.S. Cellular Field), the new stadium construction of the past twenty years must be understood above all else as prompted by Major League Baseball's need to identify and create new sources of revenue to meet rising player salaries; and to this day—though increased revenues from television, merchandising and naming rights have temporarily outpaced the rise in player salaries—Major League Baseball (unlike the National Football League and the National Basketball Association, whose players and owners have agreed to both salary caps and revenue sharing) has yet to find a legal way to bring player salaries under control. And though some will no doubt argue that in a free

Although the flaws of America are many, there is something essentially right about a culture that can produce a thing so fundamentally good as the game of baseball.

market there is no need for MLB salaries to be "under control," among the historic consequences of that lack of the baseball industry's self control has been the public funding—often under duress—of new baseball stadiums.

Suffice it to say therefore that professional baseball as it operates today is problematic. Nevertheless, here I am going to argue that baseball remains an intrinsically good thing; and that baseball's intrinsic and self-evident goodness is *best* when it occurs within the confines of an enclosed park in a traditional city neighborhood.[2] Moreover, although baseball is *not* religion, like all complex and intense play it is what sociologist and theologian Peter Berger has termed a "signal of transcendence." In all kinds of play, if only for a while, we step out of ordinary time and into eternity—at the very least into an altered sense of time, but sometimes into a genuinely blessed state of timelessness. It is this transcendent dimension of all play, including baseball, which makes us care about our games—even makes us willing to sacrifice for them, often at the expense of prudential and pragmatic judgments. Play is an antechamber to the sacred; and being in the presence of Sacred Mystery is ultimately what all of us really want, and where we want to be.

So, the past two decades have witnessed a boom in new, allegedly traditional, stadium construction. Nevertheless, the baseball parks built in the first two decades of the early twentieth century were manifestly superior to the new downtown stadiums of the past two decades; not in every detail, but rather and primarily because the old ballparks were located in city neighborhoods.[3] The older ballparks were part of and manifested an urban culture, in which cities were first and foremost places to live, places where even persons who were not rich could live well. The cities of this traditional urban culture included within pedestrian proximity residences and businesses, schools and churches, recreations and entertainments; and ballparks were buildings designed in and at least partly for these traditional city neighborhoods.

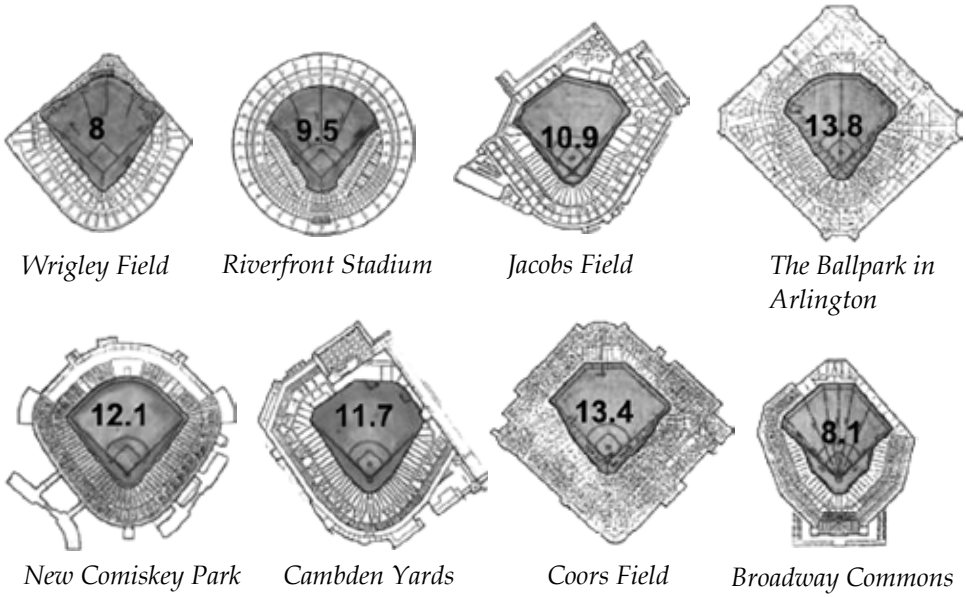
America since 1945 has become a suburban culture. Like most of my generation, I grew up in a suburban environment; and, as they say, some of my best friends continue to live in post-WWII suburbs. But without wishing to suggest the moral superiority of city dwellers over suburbanites (or vice versa), I do say two things about post-war suburban sprawl: first, that sprawl is *the* foremost physical manifestation of our individualist culture; and second, that suburbia is a cultural conspiracy catering to an illusion—the illusion that unpleasantness in life can be avoided. In the second half of the twentieth century, the power and appeal of this illusion drained many cities of their middle class residents; and one consequence of this is that for the past twenty years many cities have been trying—foolishly, desperately, mistakenly—not to become good places to live but rather to remake them-

selves as entertainment zones. The generation of downtown baseball stadiums that have been built since the early 1990s are prominent elements of this strategy, and are best understood less as places for baseball than as expensive government-subsidized-and-sponsored architectural instruments to help baseball teams separate suburbanites from their money.

For some twenty-five years, and more than a little quixotically, I have used baseball parks to illustrate an argument on behalf of traditional architecture and urbanism. The argument goes something like this: the primary symbolic import of architecture is not as an emblem of its *time* or its *structural honesty,* but rather as a symbol of its commissioning institution; and ultimately, of the *legitimate authority* of the community represented by that institution. I have looked at ballpark design as an example of this once intuitively understood but now largely forgotten sensibility because there truly is—still—a *community of baseball* of which baseball parks are and remain tangible architectural symbols. Nevertheless, the community of *professional* baseball is now in my opinion every bit as disarrayed as the community of architecture; and stadiums have become weapons wielded by the professional sports industry to extort state and local governments, acts justified by both the sports industry and public agencies by appeals to what remains of this communal sensibility about and affection for baseball and other sports.

That is the bad news. The good news is that to the extent that stadiums such as Baltimore's Camden Yards, Cleveland's Jacobs (now Progressive) Field, Denver's Coors Field, San Francisco's PacBell (now AT&T) Park, and Pittsburgh's PNC Park are located in urban rather than suburban locations, this is an improvement over the generation of stadia that were built in the 1960s and 70s. But there are two huge differences between the former and the ballparks such as Wrigley Field and Fenway Park that they are supposedly emulating. First, Wrigley and Fenway are both much smaller in scale (and hence more intimate) than the newest generation of urban stadia (see p. 34). Second (and more importantly), Wrigley and Fenway are located in traditional *mixed-use neighborhoods*, whereas many of the new downtown stadia are typically located where they are so as to be a destination component of a downtown *entertainment zone*. In other words, the former were (and are) components of traditional cities. The latter still reflect the suburban cultural bias that cities are good places in which to be entertained, but only poor people and childless adults would actually live there. But I take it as evidence of the

The older ballparks like Fenway Park and Wrigley Field were part of and manifested an urban culture, in which cities were first and foremost places to live, places where even persons who were not rich could live well.



COMPARATIVE BALLPARK FOOTPRINTS

From Top Left: Wrigley Field, Chicago, Illinois (1914), 8.0 acres; Riverfront Stadium, Cincinnati, Ohio (1970), 9.5 acres; Jacobs Field, Cleveland, Ohio (1994), 10.9 acres; The Ballpark in Arlington, Arlington, Texas (1994), 13.8 acres; New Comiskey Park, Chicago, Illinois (1991), 12.1 acres; Camden Yards, Baltimore, Maryland (1992), 11.7 acres; Coors Field, Denver, Colorado (1995), 13.4 acres; Broadway Commons, Cincinnati, Ohio (unbuilt), 8.1 acres.

continuing vitality of traditional urbanism that Fenway and Wrigley arguably remain the two most popular venues not only in baseball but in all of professional sports, and the value of residential and commercial real estate in their immediately adjacent neighborhoods is very high and continues to appreciate.[4]

How then would we build professional baseball parks if we were to do so sanely? Here I take no doctrinaire position on whether they would be publicly financed or privately financed, which is properly a prudential judgment to be made by local communities; rather only that they would be traditionally urban in character, and part of the physical form of community embodied in traditional towns and urban neighborhoods, *which have always entailed a mix of private and public funding for important community institutions*. My only doctrinaire position here is formal: that first and foremost, we would cease looking at ballparks in isolation and instead look at them as a component of mixed-use traditional neighborhoods.[5] We would do this because there is a historic reciprocity between good city neighborhoods and

good baseball parks, and therefore this reciprocity should be normative. But to speak normatively about cities and about baseball parks implies that we understand what cities and baseball parks both *are* and are *for*, as well as their essential characteristics. No doubt most of us have at least some unarticulated sense of what cities and baseball parks are for, but it may be that many of us have never thought about either of these particular subjects in a systematic way. Here then is a brief characterization of good traditional towns and city neighborhoods, followed by some suggestions for how to make ballparks in an urban neighborhood context.[6]

Cities and towns are cooperative human enterprises and artifacts that exist to promote the best life possible for their citizens, and the fundamental unit of town planning and urban design is the neighborhood. The moral, economic, and environmental benefits of traditional neighborhoods are greatly influenced by certain formal features that accommodate cars but are nevertheless designed primarily for *the walking human being*. Good neighborhoods exhibit most or all of the following ten characteristics, which may also be regarded as guiding principles for good neighborhood planning.

A good neighborhood has a discernible center—usually a main street and sometimes a public square—typically bordered by buildings containing shops, offices, or residences, and sometimes civic buildings (see the final characteristic below). A transit stop (in small towns usually a bus) should be located in or along this center, with stops occurring not more than one-half mile apart.

A good neighborhood is pedestrian friendly, and accommodates not only automobile drivers but also those who choose to walk or who are unable to drive. Most of the residences in the neighborhood are within a five-to-ten minute (one-quarter to one-half mile) walk of the neighborhood center.

A good neighborhood has a variety of dwelling types. In addition to detached single-family houses, these may also include row-houses, flats, apartment buildings, coach houses, or flats-above-stores. The consequence is that the young and the old, singles and families, the working classes and the wealthy, can all find places to live. Small ancillary buildings are typically permitted and encouraged within the back yard of each lot. These small buildings may be used for parking, as one rental unit of housing, or as a place to work.

A good neighborhood has stores and offices located at or near its center. These stores should be sufficiently varied to supply the weekly needs of a household.

A good neighborhood has an elementary school to which most young children can walk. This walking distance generally should not be greater than one mile.

A good neighborhood has small parks and other recreation facilities dispersed throughout. These generally should be located not less than one-quarter mile or greater than one mile apart.

A good neighborhood has small blocks with a network of through streets. This network would include major and minor streets, commercial and residential streets, arterial and local streets; but is emphatically *not* a system of feeder roads and dead end *culs de sac*. This network provides multiple routes to various neighborhood destinations and *helps disperse traffic congestion*. Streets within the neighborhood have curbs and sidewalks, are relatively narrow, and are lined with trees. Such arrangements slow down traffic and create an environment well suited for pedestrians as well as moving and parked cars.

A good neighborhood places its buildings close to the street. This creates a strong sense of the neighborhood's center and streets as places, and of the neighborhood itself as a place.

A good neighborhood utilizes its streets for parking. Parking lots and garages rarely front the streets, and are typically relegated to the rear of buildings, accessed where possible by lanes or alleys.

A good neighborhood reserves prominent sites for civic buildings and community monuments. Buildings for religion, government, education, the fine arts, and sports are sited either at the end of important streets' vistas or fronting a public plaza or square.

Presuming therefore the existence or creation of a traditional neighborhood environment as the most desirable context for baseball parks, I offer the following eight imperatives for new ballpark design and construction, applicable from the scale of the Major Leagues to the Minor Leagues to Little League (see p. 37):

Think always of ballpark design in the context of urban design.

Think always in terms of mixed-use neighborhood rather than entertainment zone or cultural district.

Let the site as much as the program drive the ballpark design—not exclusively, but more than is usually done.

Treat the ballpark as a civic building warranting appropriate architectural attention and embellishment.

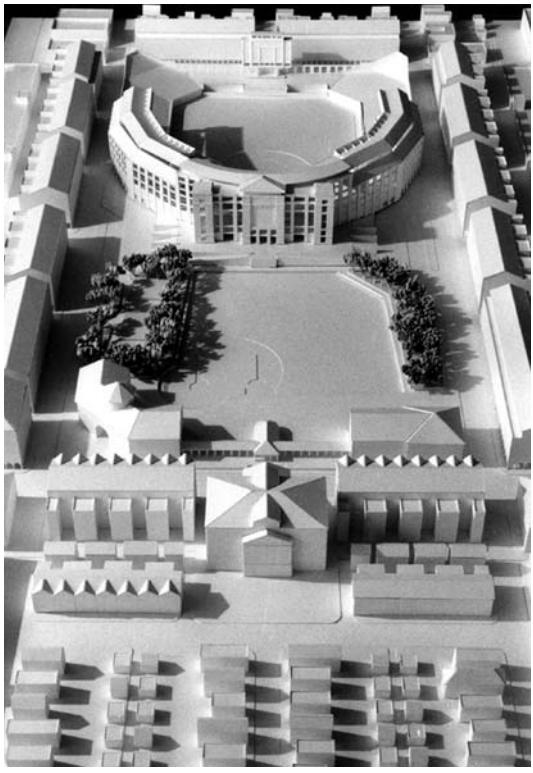
Make cars adapt to the culture and physical form of the neighborhood instead of the neighborhood adapting to the cars.

Maximize the use of pre-existing on- and off-street parking, and distribute rather than concentrate any new required parking.

Create development opportunities for a variety of activities in the vicinity of the ballpark, including housing and shopping.

Keep the ballpark footprint smaller and more neighborhood-friendly by locating non-ballpark specific program functions in buildings located adjacent to rather than within the ballpark.

No one knows just how much longer either baseball or modern society can sustain the paradigm of infinite growth. In nature, rather than growing forever to colossal proportions, living things tend to grow to a certain mature size and then re-produce. But as we wait to learn the fate of the par-



Above: ARMOUR FIELD (UNBUILT COUNTERPROPOSAL TO THE NEW COMISKEY PARK). Chicago, Illinois. Photo: © Philip Bess, 1987. Used by permission.

Below: NEIGHBORHOOD BASEBALL PARK IN BAYVIEW, MICHIGAN. Photo: © Philip Bess. Used by permission.

adigm of infinite growth, let us not forget our most basic cultural pleasures and what we already know from long human experience. So to any reader here inclined, I encourage you to cultivate the local flame of baseball. Play ball with your children; help coach their youth baseball teams; teach them how to score a game in the stands or from the airwaves; teach them to appreciate baseball excellence both achieved and observed. And when you get the chance, take them to baseball's great places and hope that the magic is working.

And here I will end with a brief story, one that has recurred in essentially the same form many times during the past quarter century that I have lived in and near Chicago. A friend came to visit me from out of town, and we arrived early to see a night game at Wrigley from my regular upper deck behind-home-plate cheap seats. The weather was warm, the ivy on the wall was green, the active twilight sky was purple and orange and pink, Lake Michigan visible to the east was turning a steely gray, the grills were fired up on the rooftops across the street, the el-train would clatter past every five minutes or so, the teams were just about to begin play, and the ballpark and the neighborhood were working together like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. And my friend, taking it all in, turned to me after a long silence and said, simply: "This is perfect."

So it was and is and at God's pleasure shall be, world without end.

NOTES

1 An appreciation of baseball's fundamental goodness and excellence in playing it was the true (though ultimately unheeded) intuition of 1960s student radical Ted Gold, who alleged that he could never become a true revolutionary so long as Willie Mays continued to play professional baseball. Alas, in 1970—three years before Willie Mays' retirement—Gold died in a Greenwich Village townhouse when a bomb being made by two of his associates in the Weatherman faction of the Columbia Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) accidentally exploded.

2 The relationship of baseball to its landscape is a subject I discuss and illustrate at greater depth in *City Baseball Magic* (St. Paul, MN: Knothole Press, 1999) and in chapter one of *Inland Architecture: Subterranean Essays on Moral Order and Formal Order in Chicago* (Oxford, OH: Interalia/Design Books, 2000); but in spite of the truth and romance of great pitchers who grew up as farm boys throwing baseballs against the side of a barn, baseball in both its origins and evolution is essentially a traditional, as opposed to a modernist, urban game.

3 I develop this argument concisely in a September 15, 1998 ESPN on-line essay "The Old Ballparks Were Better" (available on-line at *www.thursdayassociates.net/Texts/oldballparks.html*) that gives fifty reasons why the old neighborhood ballparks were superior to their new downtown counterparts.

4 This underscores another reality, which is that *prima facie*—i.e., not factoring in items such as transportation costs—good urban neighborhoods are expensive; and the main reason for that is because people like living in them. One way to make traditional urbanism less expensive is to make it less rare.

5 Against the proposition that choosing between traditional neighborhood form and post-1945 sprawl is *itself* a matter of prudential judgment, see "The Polis and Natural Law," chapter IX in my *Till We Have Built Jerusalem: Architecture, Urbanism, and the Sacred*

(Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2007), 157-188. There I argue at length that the cultural habit of post-1945 sprawl, like the twentieth-century novelty of totalitarianism, sharply limits the choices available to individuals; but that this no more allows for a moral equivalence between post-1945 sprawl and traditional neighborhoods than between totalitarianism and subsidiarity.

6 These "Ten Principles for Good Neighborhood Planning" are variations and developments of traditional urban design and town planning ideas most recently re-popularized and articulated by the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU).

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Would Jesus Wear Face Paint?

BY GEOFF BOWDEN

Being a fan captivates our imaginations, brings us great joy, and partly constitutes our identities. The satisfaction of victory is intoxicating and the camaraderie with other fans in defeat is ennobling. But are there moral limits to the exuberance of fandom?

I grew up loving sports. My parents encouraged me to play football, basketball, and baseball, and only rarely did they miss an opportunity to watch me. I played year-round—never missing a season, and never hearing a complaint from mom and dad. At the time they seemed to enjoy sports and my success as much as I did. Yet looking back on my childhood now, I realize their real concern in these activities was for me; otherwise they had only a passing interest in sports.

The one sport that proved the exception, that quietly occupied them through a television broadcast here and a radio broadcast there, was stock-car racing. We lived in the South, after all! They never pushed the sport on me, and I never asked them when the next race was. I was committed to the "big three" sports that I played. Besides, I did not want to be saddled with any of the cultural baggage I associated with stockcar racing fans: most of them, it seemed to me, were shirtless and sunburned, with dirt on their faces, holding a beer can, and displaying a smile with a few missing teeth. No thanks.

When I went away for a college education, I left my athletic career behind. I was "burned out" by twelve years of non-stop athletic activity. I played some intramural sports during those years and followed my college football team, but I did not watch a single baseball game, professional or otherwise.

My relationship with my parents underwent significant changes as well.

Being an only-child, family life had essentially revolved around me, and because I played sports all of the time, our relationship was consumed with sports-talk. When I went to college, all of that changed. After my college's football team played each week, I would call mom and dad to ask what they thought about the game. "Didn't see it," was their response in those first few weeks. "Oh," I replied, not sure what to talk about next. In what came as a gigantic shock to me, for the first time in my life I did not know how to talk to my parents. Our conversations became awkward and short.

In my absence, my parents began to recover a life they had once known without me. With friends who were not my teammates' parents, they took outings to places that were not ballparks. "Who are these people?" I wondered. As the semester went on, mom and I made the transition to a post-sporting relationship. She would ask about life at college with my new friends, and would keep me up-to-date about the family and how all of my high school friends were doing. But dad was a different story. He and I would sit with phones to our ears for minutes at a time in silence, wondering what to talk about. He seemed uninterested in my college life. I had no idea what he liked, and so I had no "in" with him.

The next February came around and one of my roommates, with a lot fewer hang-ups about being stereotyped as a southerner, invited me to watch the Daytona 500 with him. Desperate for something to do besides study, I agreed to watch the famous race on television from green flag to checkered flag. About halfway through the race, in one of those rare moments when God's voice speaks clearly, I decided to call my dad. We talked for at least thirty minutes as he explained the nuances of bump drafting, restrictor plates, camber, the slingshot move, and the elusive phrase "rubbin' is racin'." I became genuinely interested in stockcar racing for the first time in my life. After a week or two of lively conversations with dad, it occurred to me that I had found an "in" with him.

Dad and I talk about a lot more these days; but when we cannot figure out where to begin, we always discuss the last race. Being fans has helped reinvigorate a relationship that had lost its way.

Being a sports fan, then, can be a very good thing in life. The joys of fandom may lead us toward more important goods—as my enjoying stockcar racing has led to a deeper relationship with my father. It is this connection with other higher goods that establishes many of the moral boundaries for fandom: whenever our actions as sports fans become destructive to those higher goods to which being a fan can contribute, something has gone morally wrong. But before we explore the moral implications of this instrumental connection with higher goods in the third section below, let me reiterate that being a sports fan is intrinsically good, that it is valuable in itself. To think otherwise would be to deny the obvious! The reason being a sports fan is such a powerful way to connect with other people is that sports are a load of fun to watch, especially if one is emotionally invested in a team. We

are fans because we love play, we love competition, and we love to win, and these joys are valuable in themselves.[1]

LOYALTY AND IDENTITY

There is another reason that being a sports fan is morally significant: being a fan can be a powerful part of our identity. Fans of a particular professional or college team often identify with its local culture, even if they are not from that city or state. They become more and more ensconced in the social, political, and economic contours of a place as they identify with the local team. How could a person be a fan of the Pittsburgh Steelers and not at least sympathize with the plight of the local steelworkers? Does it seem possible to cheer for the Milwaukee Brewers and not, at a minimum, question one's stance as a teetotaler? Can a die-hard New York Yankees fan ever be at ease in Beantown, the home of their nemesis Boston Red Sox? Not likely. Of course, as the cities and regions of the country are becoming increasingly similar and generic, there is less and less local color to identify with. Nevertheless, the remaining peculiarities of places and cultures are heightened in the world of the sports fan. Along with being a fan of a particular team come a host of other identities that inform our moral identity. So, being a sports fan is not simply something we do; it is (partially) who we are.[2]

Yet as Christians, all of our local identities should be subordinated to one moral identity—being a disciple of Christ. All of our specific loyalties, including those to sports teams, must be properly ordered so that loyalty to God and commitment to following God's will for our lives takes priority.[3] In the Gospels, Jesus subordinates local identities to one highest loyalty. For instance, in Nazareth, the people scoff at the thought that this young man who grew up in their village could perform miracles and constitute the incoming of God's kingdom for Israel. Recognizing the tension that exists between his local community identity and his higher moral calling, Jesus wryly observes, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor" (Matthew 13:57, NIV).[4] Even the great good of commitment to his biological family must take a back-seat to doing the Father's will:

> While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50, NIV)

Is Jesus saying that we should no longer consider our local identities, and especially our biological family relationships, as important or special in any way? Absolutely not! Jesus is redefining who the true nation of Israel is, contending that being of the genetic lineage of Abraham will no longer suf-

fice to make one a "brother." Rather, the most important variable of our identity is whether or not we do the will of God. God's claim on our lives takes precedence over the claims of family.[5] Certainly, God wants us to care for our particular communities and our families, and we should never despise or mistreat them because of differing religious commitments or different positions on ethical matters. But the implications of Jesus' redefinition of what it means to be a member of Israel are clear: what matters to God should be our biggest concern.

THE HIERARCHY OF GOODS

So what place does our loyalty to a sports team take within the hierarchy of goods? We have already seen that loyalty to a sports team can be a good thing indeed. Competitions, comradeship with fellow fans, and developing our ability to appreciate athletic excellence all have the capacity to enhance human character. In addition to these, being a sports fan is a lot of fun. Anticipating the big game, strategizing with other fans before the game, watching our team play well under pressure, experiencing the sense of unity with all of the team's fans, celebrating after their wins, and even debriefing or complaining after their losses can be a blast. It is my experience that being a fully committed fan of a team in a partisan, competitive atmosphere is a lot more fun than being lukewarm or relatively uncommitted. Games are much more fun when you are fully invested in the outcome. But is there a moral line that Christians should not cross?

Our highest good in this present life of discipleship has been variously described in theologically sophisticated ways—e.g., as being fully devoted to God's ways, participating in a right relationship with God, or becoming Christ-like in all our activities. But for the purposes of evaluating our actions as sports fans, can we be a bit more specific? What does it mean to be "the light of the world" or "a city built on a hill" (Matthew 5:14) when we are sitting in the grandstands?

Games are much more fun when you are fully invested in the outcome. But is there a moral line that Christians should not cross?

We are to model God's love, first and foremost, for *others*. Character formation in Christian communities should nurture the impulse to put the needs of others before our own concerns, to serve the neighbor *and the enemy*. Reciting an early Christian hymn, the Apostle Paul says that Jesus, in order to love others fully, "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Philippians 2:7a). Becoming Christ-like means taking the form of a slave, or servant.

Second, a missional Church proclaims the good news that God is once again king over his people, that the kingdom of God is at hand, and now all

are called to submit to the rule of God, not just Jew, but also Gentile. Our basic calling as Christians is to convey this message in both deed and word to all whom we encounter.

Finally, and this is organically related to the second point, we must not act or speak in any fashion that places obstacles for others to hear the good news. If we preach service, but only consume, we have muted the good news. If we preach justice, but ignore the maimed and oppressed, people will not see the rule of God operate in our lives.

Jesus does not prep us to dominate opponents, but to help others survive. So, how can we be ardent sports fans and his disciples at the same time?

Okay, now we have a problem: even the most die-hard fan will sense that this Christian understanding of our highest good is in serious tension with competition, the very essence of sports. Sporting events are supposed to create winners and losers, but how does this jive with us serving our enemies? Is this not justice on the gridiron: the home-team player knocks an opponent flat on his back and the fans cheer as it happens?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not prep us to be successful in a competitive environment, to win at all costs, to dominate opponents. The opposite is true: he teaches us how to help others survive. So, can we even be ardent sports fans and Christians at the same time?

SPORTS AS THEATER

I think we can conceptualize athletic competition in a way that is compatible with being like Christ, and it is not altogether foreign to the manner in which sports are perceived in our culture today. Sports are theatrical dramas, and athletes, coaches, and fans play roles within those dramas. In much the same way that patrons go to the theater to see a play, sports fans go to competitions to see players assume roles, act within the confines of a given set of rules, and engage in dramatic conflict. While we may know the outcome of a theatrical play or opera (because we have read the script), in sporting events the outcome is always unknown, which greatly heightens the sense of drama.

Like the theatrical play, a sporting event is an "artificial" environment, a scenario created for the purpose of showcasing the particular skills of the players in a dramatic plot. In both cases we know that the players will emerge from the stage or arena to once again engage the "real world" and we expect, if all goes well, as they return to the normal course of life they should suffer no consequences as a result of their participation.[6] We no more think the defensive end who blindsides the opposing quarterback should be arrested for assault after the game than we expect the actor whose

character commits murder on stage should be tried for the crime in a real court of law.

Just as athletes play specific roles in sporting events, so do we as fans. Our role is to love our teams and players because of their performances on the field of play, and not (usually) for the ways in which they live the rest of their lives. We engage in the drama along with the players, and our passions should be restricted to the artificial confines of the competition itself. Our hostility toward the other team is contrived, a product of the artificial drama in which we engage.

Now we can see the point of this reconceptualization of athletics as theater. Outside the boundaries of the competition, our moral responsibilities to our opponents—the other team's players or their fans—is to serve them in pursuit of the highest good. Inside the artificial drama, we do not suspend Christian ethics; rather, we clearly remember that the joy of the drama of competition is not the highest good, and must be subordinated to the highest good.

This explains why it is when injured players, for either team, show partial recovery as they leave the playing field, the true fans cheer. They should not want to win so badly that they hope for permanent injury to opposing players. It is true that managing injuries has become a part of the drama of competition itself, but, deep down, true fans do not want to see injuries on the field of play to have effects that permeate players' lives off the field. When it comes to injuries and passions and hostile partisanship, what happens on the field should stay on the field. That is the moral nature of the theatrical dramas that are sports.

In another sense, sporting events (like other theatrical events) are a part of real life and our activities as fans are perfectly continuous with the ethics of Christian discipleship. Sports (like theater) are practices that athletes and fans engage in to cultivate the virtues. As fans we can engage in charity to the neighbor and enemy during a sporting event. We may develop courage when confronted with insurmountable odds, and learn to deal appropriately with a heartbreaking defeat. So, while the hostility and animosity generated among opposing fans at a sporting event should live and die with the event itself, the habits of character that they develop during a sporting event, like courage or charity or the ability to put loss in the larger perspective of hope, can transcend the boundaries of the event.

THE ROLE OF A FAN

With this understanding of sports as a form of theater, let us return to the issue of how the intrinsic goods of being a sports fan—both the joys and the loyalties that it brings to us—can fit into a life of Christian discipleship. We have learned that the question is: How is the particular practice of being a fan of this sport and that team to be properly ordered under the higher Christian goods of love toward neighbor and enemy and service to the

dispossessed? For instance, good-natured competition and light-hearted ribbing of opposing fans and referees constitutes a moral practice that is healthy for us, but only if we keep it properly ordered within the larger hierarchy of human goods. When we begin to think being a fan is an activity that can be wholly separated from being Christian, we have crossed a line. No activities, relationships, or practices are outside the lordship of Christ. Our every activity should cultivate virtues that enhance our Christian moral lives, and none of our activities should undermine those higher goods of discipleship for ourselves, or others.

Would Jesus wear face paint? I think he would. But he would also walk an extra mile to show opposing fans and athletes that the importance of victory pales in comparison to the riches of God's kingdom.

I add that our being a fan should not undermine *others'* discipleship because the advice of the Apostle Paul regarding our responsibility for the "weaker" disciples applies in this situation as well. Though he agreed with the "stronger" Christians at Corinth that there is nothing inherently wrong with eating food sacrificed to idols, Paul worried that eating the food would be a problem for the younger Christians, causing them to lose their emerging faith. The freedom we possess in the Christian faith must be restrained by sensitivity to others' weakness, for in carelessly exercising our freedom we may inadvertently destroy the faith of others. "When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience," Paul warns, "you sin against Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:12, NIV). Isn't there a parallel to this in the ethics of fandom? We are free to cheer vigorously for our team at the game and let others know where our sporting allegiances lie, but when the opportunity arises to chide a referee or mock opposing players and fans (even if it is in the spirit of playful competition), we must beware of how others perceive our actions! Our highest moral obligation is to Christ and to the fulfillment of the ethics of his kingdom, and not loyalty to our team.

Being a fan captivates our imaginations and partly constitutes our identities. Our favorite athletes pull us to the edge of our seats as we watch them push the boundaries of physical and mental exertion. The satisfaction of victory is intoxicating, and the camaraderie with other fans even in defeat is ennobling. All this is very good, as long as it exists in a larger context of concern for the well-being of others.

Would Jesus attend a professional or college sports event? Would he wear face paint? I think he would. But he would also walk that extra mile to show opposing fans and athletes that the importance of victory pales in comparison to the riches of the kingdom of God.

So, let us cheer for our team as loud as we can, but let us end the game with a handshake and a gesture of charity, that while we have a serious commitment to our team, our commitment to Christ and those he loves, including enemy fans, reigns over all else.

NOTES

1 While some intrinsically good things are much more valuable than others, all of them can contribute instrumentally to a "good life" overall. Ralph McInerny has an accessible discussion of the relationships among intrinsic and instrumental goods in chapter two of his *Ethica Thomistica*, revised edition (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

2 Christopher Evans warns that the unreflective collective identity engendered by being a sports fan can contribute to a civil religion that supplants Christianity. See his "Baseball as Civil Religion: The Genesis of an American Creation Story" in Christopher H. Evans and William Herzog II, eds., *The Faith of Fifty Million: Baseball, Religion, and American Culture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 13-33.

3 McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 70-71.

4 Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®. Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

5 See N. T. Wright's discussion of this passage in *Jesus and Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 277-278.

6 Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Too often athletes are heckled, stalked, and otherwise poorly treated by their own disgruntled fans or by fans of opposing teams. But this bad behavior expresses a fundamentally wrong view of sports, which is at the heart of the moral issue I am trying to address.

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This image is available in the print version of *Christian Reflection*.

For Baroque artists Jan Steen and David Teniers the Younger, the simple sports like skittles, bowls, or archery contests were potent symbols of community life and freedom from oppressive work.

Jan Steen (1626-1679), SKITTLE PLAYERS OUTSIDE AN INN, 1660-1663. Oil on oak panel. 13.1"x 10.6". National Gallery, London, UK. Photo: © The Bridgeman Art Library. Used by permission.

Joyful Recreation

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ
AND HALEY STEWART

The simple sports of skittles, bowls, and archery contests—in part because they require no expensive equipment or highly specialized training of participants—became fashionable leisure pastimes for kings and peasants alike in the early modern era. For Baroque artists Jan Steen (1626-1679) and David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690) who often depicted the joyful recreation of these games, they were also potent symbols of community life and freedom from oppressive work.

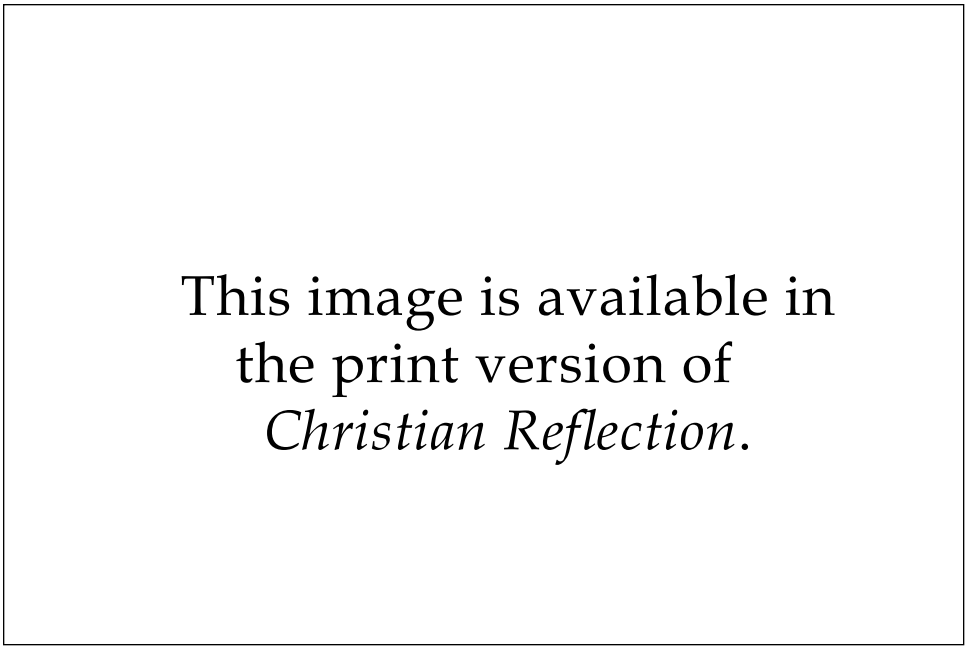
The prolific Dutch painter Jan Steen never planned to be a full-time artist. The son of a brewer in Leiden, he attended college for one year before dropping out to study in the new painters' guild in his hometown. His wife Grietje's father, the landscape painter Jan van Goyen, may have been one of his teachers. Meanwhile, Steen's father attempted to bring the artist into the family business by purchasing a small brewery for him in Delft. This project failed and the family's brewing business eventually declined and collapsed. Steen's career as an artist was riddled with financial problems, too, and we know that near the end of his life he supported himself by operating a tavern in his house. It was not until after the artist's death that his work became very popular in Holland.[1]

While Steen painted diverse subjects—including portraits, and mythological and biblical scenes—he is best known for genre scenes, depictions of common people in everyday activities, like *Skittle Players outside an Inn*. In this image the young man in the foreground is bowling a ball toward nine cones, or "skittles," arranged in a square. Several players can enjoy the game of skittles (or, *kegelen* in Dutch) on any reasonably flat piece of ground. They take turns rolling a ball down a short lane in order to topple the wooden pins, with the winner being the first one to knock over a pre-arranged number of them. The modern game probably derives from fourth-century German monks tossing rocks at a *kegel*, a small club, which in the context represented a sin or temptation to be avoided.[2] By the seventeenth century skittles had migrated from the gardens of monasteries to the lawns of pubs, as depicted in Steen's idyllic scene.

Steen usually developed his compositions more impulsively than most artists and did no due preparatory drawings; rather, he added features and characters as he went along to tell a story.[3] In *Skittle Players outside an Inn*, a sign behind the fence on the left establishes the location as the yard of the inn in the background called "The Swan." Two men from the inn (notice the younger one holds a Delftware tankard) stop to observe the skittles player's throw; a barefooted child with a bright red hat and yellow shirt watches too. The art historian Wouter Th. Kloek notes that these spectators were a late addition to the composition, as they are painted over the background. In the lower left foreground, a man and woman in common dress enjoy their own conversation; they are joined by a wealthy man (seen from the back), with a smoking pipe in hand and dressed in fashionable attire. To squeeze all of this activity into the foreground, Steen has positioned the skittles player much too close to his target—he should be throwing from near the plank fence. The background figures also were added later to complete the composition: the horse is painted over the plank fence; an additional fence, a peasant woman with a red blouse, and a fisherman in a blue hat are painted on top of the background trees.[4]

This startling mixture of villagers—men and women, old and young, wealthy and poor, leisured and working people—are drawn together on a carefree afternoon. The game of skittles, while vital to the scene, is not its theme. It is not so much a contest—indeed, where are the other players?—but an occasion for relaxing play and community gathering. In the final composition, bold splashes of bright red draw the viewer's eye not to the figure of the wealthy man, but to the two women and barefoot child. Unlike many of his contemporaries who preferred to embellish the wealth and status of their subjects, Steen celebrates his figures' commonness.[5]

While Jan Steen struggled financially in his on-and-off career in art, David Teniers the Younger flourished in Antwerp and his paintings were lauded in Flanders and abroad. This may be due in part to the fact that the local art dealers highly respected the work of his father, David Teniers the Elder, with whom he studied and collaborated. Teniers the Younger also made an artistically advantageous marriage: he wedded Anna, the daughter of Jan Breughel the Elder and granddaughter of Pieter Breughel the Elder, two of the most eminent painters in this period. While Teniers crafted many religious scenes, his depictions of everyday life—like *The Game of Bowls* and *The Trio of the Crossbow* discussed here—were the basis of his reputation. Elite patrons in Antwerp commissioned his works. In 1651 Archduke Leopold William, Governor of the southern Netherlands, appointed the artist to be his court painter. Later Teniers was made a noble.[6] The *Museo Nacional*



David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), THE GAME OF BOWLS, 1650-1660. Oil on canvas. 16.5" x 30". Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photo: © Scala / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

del Prado in Madrid, Spain, displays many of the artist's finest paintings today because, living in seventeenth-century Flanders, Teniers was a subject of the Spanish crown.

The sport Teniers depicts in *The Game of Bowls* is still a popular outdoor pastime throughout Europe. Its many variations, from lawn bowling (Scotland) and bocce (Italy) to bolle (Denmark) and petanque (France), share some common features: players take turns rolling or tossing balls at a target, either a fixed stake (as depicted in the painting) or a smaller ball (called a "jack") that is tossed first, and the player with the closest placement at the end of the round wins the point. Unlike skittles, bowls is a game filled with subtle strategies—like knocking away an opponent's closest ball, "hiding" one's own ball from the opponent, or, when a jack is used, repositioning the target altogether.[7]

In the foreground of *The Game of Bowls*, one player bowls a ball as his opponent waits anxiously by the stake. A boy walking by is engrossed by the game and is tempted to stop, but his little dog trots eagerly onward. Leaning from the tavern door a woman serves the men who have gathered around an upturned barrel to drink and converse, while four other patrons are drawn into watching the game of bowls nearby. Teniers employs a simple compositional device here: he balances the mass of shapes on the left with a large object on the right, in this case a picturesque crumbling obelisk. The smaller buildings of the village in the center give a sense of space and depth.[8]

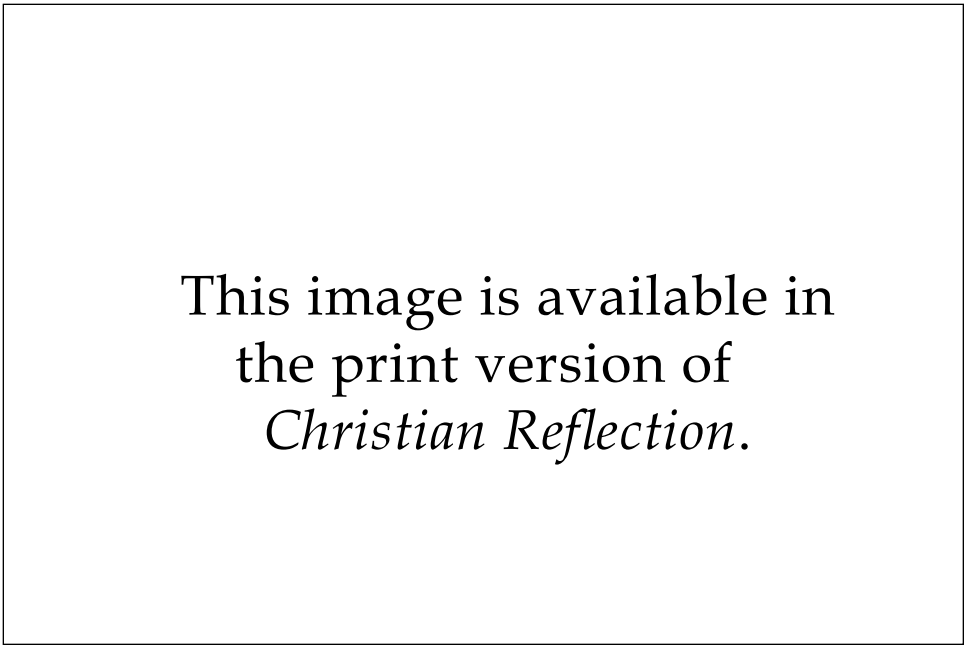
The same device is employed in *The Trio of the Crossbow*. Two large ruins of wall on which a group of villagers have mounted their targets flank the action in the foreground. Space and depth are suggested by the smaller buildings of the village on the right and by two figures, one on each side, who walk through the hills. Yet the composition is far from static: the stance of the archer, the expectant glances of the spectators, the angle of the benches, the walking figure in the center (Is he not a bit careless to walk so close to the archer's line of fire?), the orientation of the dog, and the flow of evening sunlight suggest motion from left to right. The unusual horizontal layout of the images reinforces this idea of movement.[9]

While neither of Teniers's paintings is as intimate or socially complex as Steen's *Skittles Players outside an Inn*, they share the latter's warm respect for country life and the peasantry. Teniers developed this positive view of the peasantry slowly over his career; his early paintings are filled with "sinister and satirical distortion" of country people depicted in the "smoky, half-darkened interior" of buildings, much in imitation of the work of Adriaen Brouwer.[10] In the two later paintings discussed here, Teniers employs a palette of warm colors to depict his figures in the bright outdoor light.

Early in Thomas Hughes' novel *Tom Brown's School Days* (1857)—the nostalgic account of English schooling that so greatly influenced the development of "muscular Christianity" in England and North America—the narrator describes a village feast from the days of Tom Brown's youth in the Vale of Berks. Everyone in the community, rich and poor, old and young, gathered in the churchyard (on the occasion of some forgotten saint's feast day) to enjoy local food and drink and to share in gossip and games. Tom joined the other boys in silly contests of "wrestling,…jumping in sacks, and rolling wheelbarrows blindfolded."

Tragically, the English country holidaymaking of such "veasts" is a thing of the past, the narrator opines, because the wealthy and educated young men no longer mix company with the working class boys. Will the people of England ever be whole again? Can the destructive class distinctions of modern capitalist industry—"buying cheap and selling dear, and its accompanying overwork"—be reversed? "Well, well, we must bide our time. Life isn't all beer and skittles," the narrator notes, "but beer and skittles, or something better of the same sort, must form a good part of every Englishman's education."[11]

The moment of grace in the simple sports of the English country "veast" came because all the people could play, and all did play. They met on a pleasant evening in the churchyard or around the village inn and celebrated nothing more important than one another's company. This is the enduring meaning of David Teniers and Jan Steen's paintings of the games of skittles,



David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690), THE TRIO OF THE CROSSBOW, c. 1645. Oil on canvas. 21.25" x 34.6". Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. Photo: © Scala / Art Resource, NY. Used by permission.

or bowls, or archery contests.

We have inherited a certain distrust of simple games: they are lollygagging, terribly unproductive activities. In the fourteenth century, King Edward III and parliament banned the game of bowls because they feared it would interfere with more important sports like archery, which developed skills of war essential to the nation state. King Henry VIII adjusted the ban in 1511 to allow other gentlemen aficionados, like him, who owned a bowling green worth over £100, to play the sport at any time. The poor and middle classes were prevented from wasting their precious working time on bowling, except in celebration of one season—Christmas. This ban was not officially lifted until 1845.

On the other hand, the story is told that when John Knox, the leader of Presbyterianism in Scotland, visited John Calvin in Geneva on a Sunday afternoon, Mr. Calvin was playing a game of bowls.[12] We like to think he invited John Knox to play a round with some of his working class friends.

NOTES

1 Lyckle de Vries, "Steen, Jan," in *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, accessed September 12, 2008, *www.oxfordartonline.com*.

2 "Skittles—History and Useful Information," in *The Online Guide to Traditional Games*, accessed September 11, 2008, *www.tradgames.org.uk/games/Skittles.htm*.

3 "[Steen's] rapid execution seems to have been rather careless in some cases," de Vries reports. "Aesthetic concerns were never uppermost in his mind, and creating forms never became an end in itself. Steen did not master even the most basic rules of linear

perspective, was careless about human anatomy and seems to have trusted to improvisation rather than careful planning in his compositions. The almost complete absence of drawings from Steen's hand reinforces the impression that most of his paintings must have been executed directly on to the support." (de Vries, *op cit*.)

4 Wouter Th. Kloek, "Skittle Players outside an Inn," in H. Perry Chapman, W. Th. Kloek, and Guido Jansen, *Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 169-171.

5 de Vries, *op cit.*

6 Hans Vliegh, "Teniers," in *Grove Art Online, Oxford Art Online*, accessed September 12, 2008, *www.oxfordartonline.com*.

7 "Bowls," in *The Online Guide to Traditional Games*, accessed September 11, 2008, *www.tradgames.org.uk/games/Bowls.htm*.

8 See the discussion of this painting in the online gallery of *Museo Nacional del Prado*, where it is oddly titled *The Skittles Game,* accessed September 12, 2008, *www.museodelprado.es/en/ingles/collection/on-line-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/the-skittles-game/*.

9 The online gallery of *Museo Nacional del Prado* discusses this image under the title *The Archery Contest*, accessed September 12, 2008, *www.museodelprado.es/en/ingles/collection/on-line-gallery/on-line-gallery/obra/the-archery-contest/*.

10 Vliegh, *op cit.*

11 Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 41-42.

12 On the checkered history of bowls, see "Bowls," *Classic Encyclopedia* based on the eleventh edition of *The Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911), accessed September 11, 2008, *www.1911encyclopedia.org/Bowls*.

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We Give Our All to Christ

BY TERRY W. YORK

We give our all to Christ;
our all, 'til all is his.
With heart and soul and mind we run.
The prize is all there is.

The prize is Christ, himself,
whom all who finish win;
the first and last are last and first
for both have Christ within.

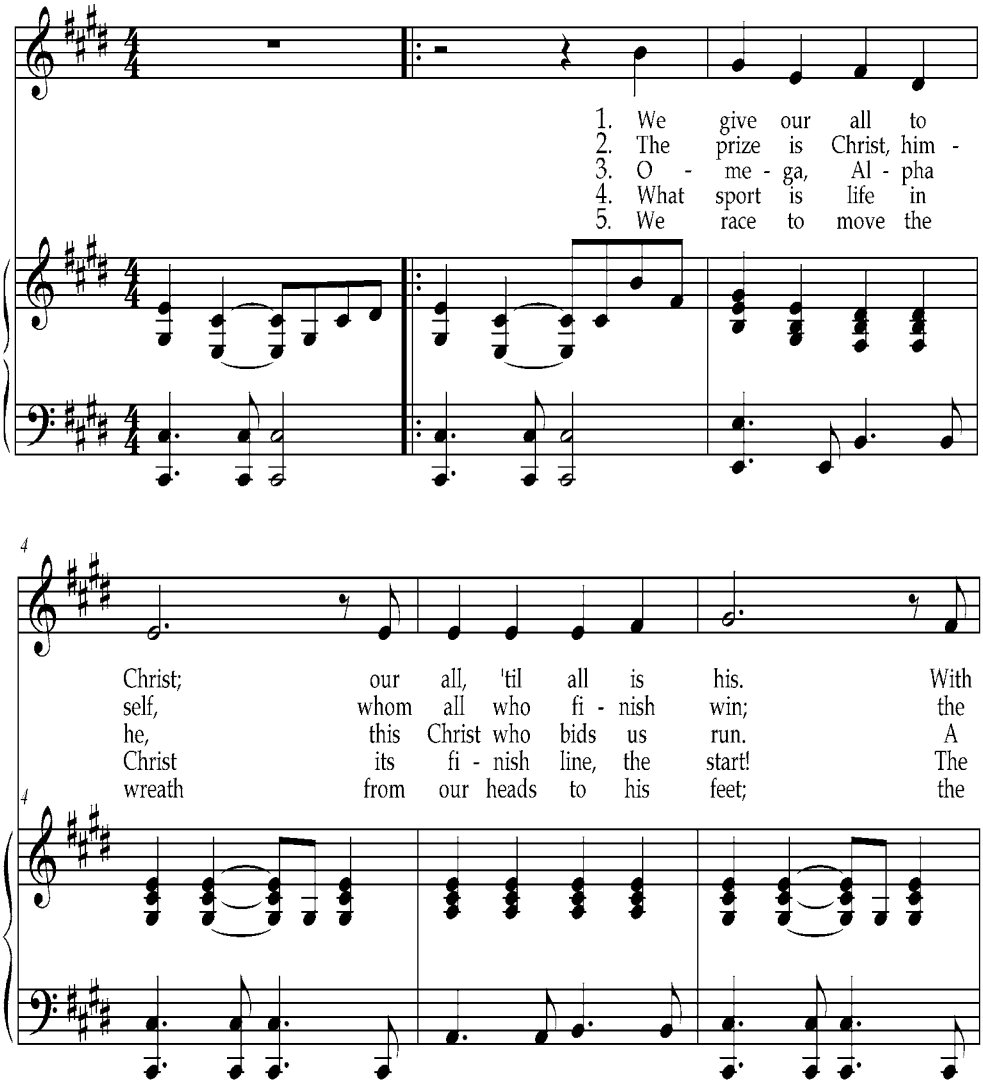
Omega, Alpha, he,
this Christ who bids us run.
A growing crowd of runners cheer
the Christ, through whom they've won.

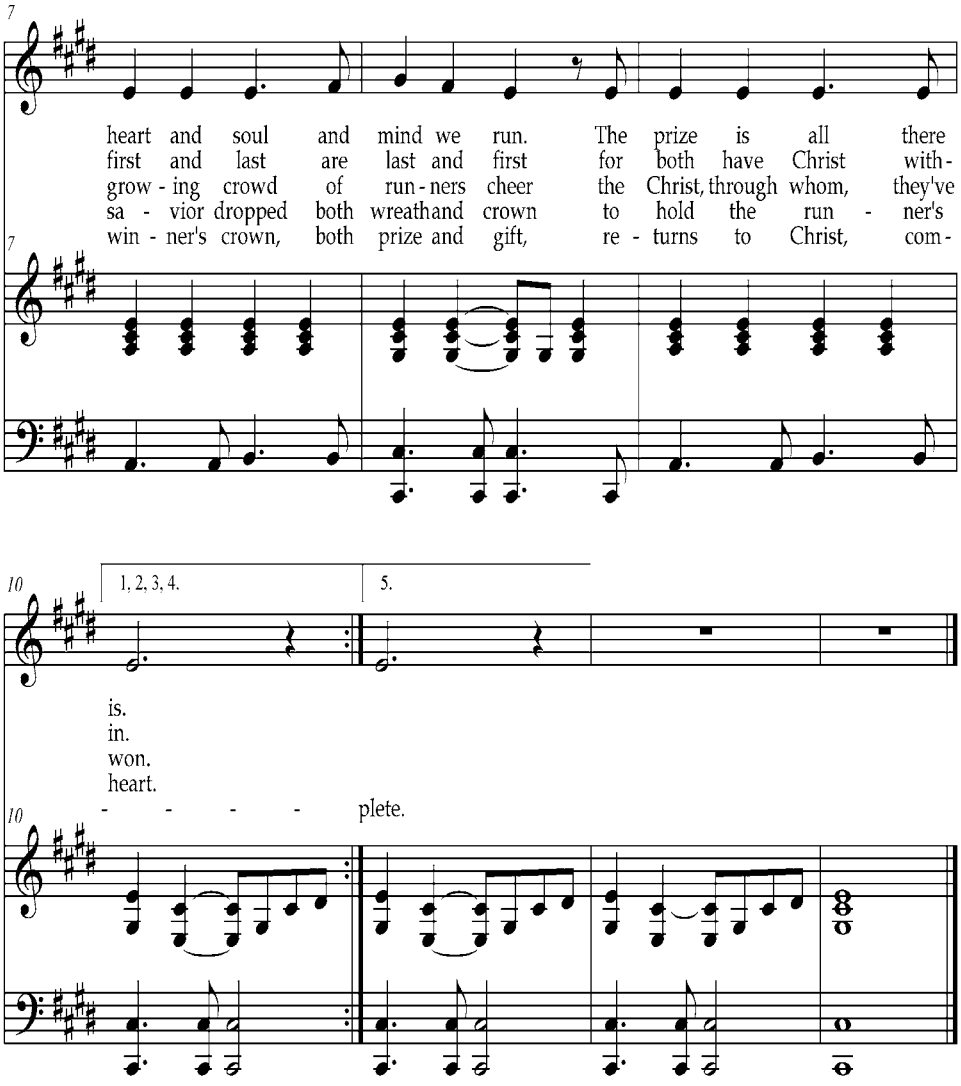
What sport is life in Christ—
its finish line, the start!
The savior dropped both wreath and crown
to hold the runner's heart.

We race to move the wreath
from our heads to his feet;
the winner's crown, both prize and gift,
returns to Christ, complete.

We Give Our All to Christ

TERRY W. YORK C. DAVID BOLIN





TEAFF HART
6.6.8.6.

Worship Service

BY SHARON KIRKPATRICK FELTON

Call to Worship

"Take Time to Be Holy"

Take time to be holy, speak oft with your Lord;
abide in him always, and feed on his Word.
Make friends of God's children; help those who are weak;
forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like him you shall be;
your friends in your conduct his likeness will see.

Take time to be holy, let him be your guide;
and run not before him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow your Lord,
and looking to Jesus still trust in his Word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in your soul,
each thought and each motive beneath his control.
Thus led by his Spirit to fountains of love,
you soon will be fitted for service above.

William Dunn Longstaff (1882), alt.
Tune: HOLINESS

Invocation

God, you created us to use our bodies
to run and jump, to throw and catch;
you created us to use our minds
to think and feel, to reflect and express;
you created us to relate our bodies and minds
to connect with ourselves, each other, and you.

In sports and athletic competition
we can engage our bodies and our minds,
we can connect with ourselves, our community, and you.
God, come near to us now
and enjoy your creation as we worship you, the Creator.
Amen.

Hymn

"All That I Am I Owe to Thee"

All that I am I owe to thee,
thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me;
I give my Maker thankful praise,
whose wondrous works my soul amaze.

Ere into being I was brought,
thy eye did see, and in thy thought
my life in all its perfect plan
was ordered ere my days began.

Thy thoughts, O God, how manifold,
more precious unto me than gold!
I muse on their infinity,
awaking I am still with thee.

Search me, O God, my heart discern,
try me, my inmost thought to learn;
and lead me, if in sin I stray,
to choose the everlasting way.

The Psalter (1912)
Tune: FEDERAL STREET

Prayer of Confession

God, we spend more energy, time, and money on our sports culture, than we do in service to you. We even worship favorite sports stars and teams.
We fail to see you because of our blind allegiance to our team. Our priorities and focus are out of sync with your calling.
God, help us see sports and the gifts of athleticism as ways of creating community, caring for our bodies as your temple, and serving you.
Help us through sports and athletic competitions serve one another and your kingdom rather than our own. May we glorify you and not ourselves.

Forgive us, God, for using athletics to divide rather than unify, to tear down rather than build up.
Giver of all good things, may we be faithful to answer your call to care for your world through love and kindness.

Hymn

"We Give Our All to Christ"

We give our all to Christ;
our all, 'til all is his.
With heart and soul and mind we run.
The prize is all there is.

The prize is Christ, himself,
whom all who finish win;
the first and last are last and first
for both have Christ within.

Omega, Alpha, he,
this Christ who bids us run.
A growing crowd of runners cheer
the Christ, through whom they've won.

What sport is life in Christ—
its finish line, the start!
The savior dropped both wreath and crown
to hold the runner's heart.

We race to move the wreath
from our heads to his feet;
the winner's crown, both prize and gift,
returns to Christ, complete.

Terry W. York, ASCAP (2008)
Tune: TEAFF HART, *C. David Bolin* (2008)
Words and Music © 2008 TextandTune.com
(pp. 55-57 of this volume)

The Witness of the Old Testament: Isaiah 40:28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.

Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Sung Response

"Courage, Brother, Do Not Stumble"

Courage, brother, do not stumble,
though your path be dark as night;
there's a star to guide the humble:
"Trust in God and do the right."

Let the road be rough and dreary,
and its end far out of sight;
foot it bravely, strong or weary,
trust in God and do the right.

Perish policy and cunning,
perish all that fears the light;
whether losing, whether winning,
trust in God and do the right.

Trust no party, sect, or faction,
trust no leaders in the fight;
but in every word and action
trust in God and do the right.

Simple rule and safest guiding,
inward peace and inward might,
star upon our path abiding,
"Trust in God and do the right."

Some will hate you, some will love you,
some will flatter, some will slight;
cease from man, and look above you,
trust in God and do the right.

Norman McLeod (1857)
Suggested Tunes: RESTORATION or STUTTGART

Prayer of Community

God, we gather in your presence to celebrate sports, and the hard work, training, and sacrifice displayed in true athletic competition. Though we may face one another on athletic fields and courts as fans and

competitors, coaches and athletes, we always come back together as a community, a body of believers, a family of faith. We are better together—stronger, wiser, more generous, more truly human—than when we live for ourselves and on our own.

It is so easy to lose ourselves in the joys of competition and the fanfare of our games. Let us not forget our first and final identity is in Christ alone. Let us not forget that together we are the Body of Christ. Amen.

Sung Response

"Blest Be the Tie that Binds" (vv. 1, 2, 3, and 6)

Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like that to that above.

Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.

We share each other's woes,
our mutual burdens bear;
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

From sorrow, toil and pain,
and sin, we shall be free,
and perfect love and friendship reign
through all eternity.

John Fawcett (1782)
Tune: DENNIS

Response of the Community

God, we cannot race through this journey alone.
We need each other.
God, we cannot sustain ourselves throughout this race.
We need each other.
God, we cannot finish this race on our own.
We need each other.

Witness of the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes

exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.

Sermon

Hymn of Commitment

"Take My Life, and Let It Be"

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.
Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine, it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart, it is thine own, it shall be thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Frances R. Havergal (1873)
Tune: ST. GEORGE'S WINDSOR or MADRID (Carr)

Unison Benediction: Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

Amen.

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Other Voices

Think about this: *Sports Illustrated* sells as many copies in a month (13.2 million) as *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold since its first publication. When a society's national newspaper (*USA Today*) allocates approximately one-fourth of its pages to sports; when the *World Almanac* devotes one-tenth of its pages to sports (more than allocated for business, science, or politics combined); when a new American history text for fifth graders treats the Depression and the presidency of Franklin Roosevelt in thirty-three lines, but devotes two pages to baseball star Cal Ripken Jr., it is fair to say that sport has a firm grip on our society.

SHIRL JAMES HOFFMAN, "TOWARD NARROWING THE GULF BETWEEN SPORT AND RELIGION," *WORD & WORLD* (2003)

Sports is simply a grace: a minor grace, but a grace nonetheless…. Sports relieves the weight of life. It satisfies, in an innocent way, our competitive urges. It reminds us, precisely in its absurd elevation of the trivial, not to take ourselves too seriously. There are those, it is true, whose preoccupation with sports becomes so all-consuming as to constitute a moral disorder. A life lived in a sports bar is a life ill spent. But for the great majority of us, sports provides a pleasurable interlude in life for which we not only need not repent, but for which we should offer continuing prayers of gratitude.

JAMES A. NUECHTERLEIN, "THE WEIRD WORLD OF SPORTS," *FIRST THINGS* (1998)

Sport does for some people what music or art does for others. It's not "just a game," any more than Van Gogh's *Starry Night* is "just a painting." The game, like a great painting, can become a signal of transcendence, a window into a world full of mystery and meaning.

This vague and elusive "signal of transcendence," has a name for the Christian, who is not at all surprised to find this One even in the corrupt world of sports: "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist" (Colossians 1:16-17). He is the one who "fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:23).

The mind reels at the image of Jesus trafficking with violent, self-centered, greedy athletes, immersed in an institution infamous for steroids, multi-million dollar contracts, trash talk, and indecent end zone celebrations. It's a scandal.

It's also the gospel. Indeed, if the grace and presence of God cannot be discerned in modern sports, then it will not be found in the modern world. No, sports does not bring us a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, but like many other aspects of creation, it does allow us to touch the hem of his garment from time to time. And when that happens, it opens people up to considering a deeper dimension to life.

MARK GALLI, "THE GRACE OF SPORTS," *CHRISTIANITYTODAY.COM* (2005)

The word fan, a shortened form of fanatic, comes from the Latin word *fanaticus*, meaning "inspired by a deity, frenzied." That word derives from *fanum*, Latin for "temple." The word's use continues to be true to its etymology.

BRIAN D. ELLISON, "THIS IS MY BRATWURST, BROKEN FOR THEE," *RE:GENERATION QUARTERLY* (2001)

The notion of "let the best person win" is, I suppose, an old-fashioned one, but Christians are bound by an old-fashioned religion. Surely we sports fans best display our love of neighbor when we try to create in the stadium conditions in which the athlete with the greater skill and dedication is the one who will prevail, rather than adding to the opposing team the artificial impediment of our catcalls and jeers. True, there will always be a degree of home field advantage—we will always root harder for the team that has for so long commanded our affections—but there is a world of difference between buoying up one team and dragging down the other.

STEPHEN L. CARTER, "SPORTS MOBS AND MADNESS," *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* 47:9 (2003), 70.

In many people's lives, sport has acquired an importance that goes beyond that of mere amusement or entertainment. For many of our contemporaries sport has become a way of life, an essential element for meeting basic needs, such as self-esteem and self-fulfillment, and a factor that not only determines a sense of identity and belonging, but also the meaning of life itself. And that is not all: sport has become, in every respect, a surrogate for religious experience. It is a paradoxical fact that, in our secularized society, sports events have taken on the character of collective rituals, fraught with emotion. Stadiums and gymnasiums are like temples to this "new religion"….

Far from being used to achieve the healthy growth of the individual person, the practice of sport is increasingly threatening people; rather than directing them towards freedom, it is increasingly enslaving them, to themselves, to imposed fads and fashions, and to the [economic] interests which are concealed behind sports events.

ARCHBISHOP STANISLAW RYLKO, PREFACE, *THE WORLD OF SPORT TODAY: A FIELD OF CHRISTIAN MISSION* (2005)

In America, from 1850 to 1900 liberal Protestants and a few evangelicals adjusted their theological and institutional commitments to the newly emergent attractions of organized sport. Roughly from 1900 to 1950, more moderate Protestants joined Roman Catholic, Mormon, and Jewish endorsements of sport. Finally, in the 1950s fundamentalist evangelicals baptized sport just as some American athletes started giving Allah the credit for knockouts and touchdowns.

WILLIAM J. BAKER, *PLAYING WITH GOD: RELIGION AND MODERN SPORT* (2007)

There is a sense in which [football] reflects a certain muscular type of Christianity that is going to be attractive to men. Where it can mislead is in giving the impression that God is always allied with the strong, the successful and the winners of the world, where in fact the Scriptures tell us that God often uses the weak to shame the strong

HENRY BRINTON, QUOTED IN MARK A. KELLNER, "GOD ON THE GRIDIRON," *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* (1999)

American muscular Christianity has been unable to confront the anti-Christian structures of big-time sports. At one level this has been inevitable, given the symbiotic relationship that has developed. Nevertheless, it is striking that muscular Christianity has largely avoided challenging the racist, sexist, dehumanizing, anti-academic and drug-permissive structures of big-time sports.

JAMES A. MATHISEN, "FROM MUSCULAR CHRISTIANS TO JOCKS FOR JESUS," *THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY* (1992)

I think the church, rather than scratching for ways to harmonize its message with the present state of affairs, needs to roll up its sleeves and change sport, at least change sport that proceeds under its auspices…. Properly organized and played, they can amplify our understanding of ourselves as God's children in a genuine faith-revelation experience. Moreover, they can help us understand what the church fathers understood so clearly: that play is an expression of both body and soul; that in play we become imitators of the Logos, the "Heavenly Wisdom who plays upon the earth, co-fashioner with God." But this will require the church to approach sports with loftier views, expecting sport fields to be places where we imitate the Logos by rehearsing and enacting spiritual truths until they are played into our bodies of which they are a part.

SHIRL JAMES HOFFMAN, "TOWARD NARROWING THE GULF BETWEEN SPORT AND RELIGION," *WORD & WORLD* (2003)

Long-Distance Running

BY HANNAH ELLIOTT

Achieving a personal goal in a race or enjoying a long slow jog down a wooded path brings such joy that I wish I could keep running long after that day's time limit or my body allows. Few activities match running's ability to form a refreshing connectedness to nature, the self, and God.

In the classic film *Chariots of Fire*, Eric Liddell tells his sister, who worries that his training for the 1924 Olympics has deferred plans to work at a mission in China, that cultivating his God-given talent is a way of honoring Him: "I believe that God made me for a purpose—for China. But He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure."

I know what Liddell meant. The fabled runners' high is no misnomer. Training diligently and then achieving a personal goal in a race, or enjoying a long slow jog down a wooded path, often returns such joy, contentment, optimism, and confidence that I sometimes wish I could keep running long after that day's time limit or my body allows.

Running is perhaps the purest expression of human physicality in the world. Anyone can do it, almost anywhere, and with no special equipment required—some of the best runners on the planet do not even wear shoes. Few activities can match its ability to form a refreshing connectedness to nature, the self, and God.

In a professional sports culture where tailgate parties often sink to gluttonous booze fests, millionaire crybabies defy referees, and amped-up man-boys refuse to listen to their coaches (or obey the law), the solitary life of the long-distance runner provides a welcome respite from the hype. When athletic contests become about entertaining an audience, creating a celebrity image, or making money, the true nature of sport dies, and with it

the joy that naturally results from using a body and mind created by God.

But long-distance running, thankfully (and not surprisingly), has escaped the circus that accompanies sports more easily commandeered by publicity.

On high school and collegiate cross country teams, one of the first things coaches emphasize is that the season is made mostly in the first weeks and months of training—how well we train in August affects how fast we run in November. We learn that there are no shortcuts to quicker legs, stronger arms, and ever more efficient lungs.

That emphasis on daily discipline, wise training, and soundness of mind and body reverberates throughout the Bible, especially in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. We are exhorted to rejoice in our youth, to let our hearts be pleasant during the days of our young man- (and woman-) hood, and to follow the impulses of our heart—all the while knowing that God will judge how we devote our energy (Ecclesiastes 11:9). We are told that if the axe is dull and its edge unsharpened (or, say, if we are out of shape), more strength and skill will bring success (Ecclesiastes 10:10); a wise son accepts discipline (Proverbs 13:1); the precious possession of a man is diligence (Proverbs 12:27); and the hand of the diligent worker will make him rich (Proverbs 10:4).

I understand now that these life lessons instilled in me by coaches and running mentors—lessons that I once thought were common-sense ideas—are not so common. In the professional world showing up on time, following through on a commitment, and diligently finishing projects to the best of one's ability are often the exception, not the rule.

Running offers the simple joy of using the physical body as part of an abundant life. Runners tend to develop healthy practices. The habits of waking early, eating whole food, stretching, meditating, and learning the limits and possibilities of the human body, I attribute directly to a background in running—and running with people of the same persuasions.

The loneliness of the long-distance runner is well-known, but it may be more of a myth than anything. I have met my closest friends while running. An hour-long run leaves a lot of room for conversation, and scenic views make one susceptible to philosophizing about life's mysteries with whoever happens to be nearby. Plato said it best: "You can learn more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."

Only part, maybe even the lesser part, of running is physical.

Running—especially long-distance running—requires a certain centered sense of self, a groundedness that does not get ruffled by detractors, or early-morning wake-up calls. A calm wherewithal that accepts, even embraces, inclement weather. A physical courage that is not diminished as another hill comes into view. If runners do not have those attributes when they start running, all the better: they will develop them through miles and miles of road, wood, and trail.

Running is a simple, quick mood-booster with no ill side effects. If I leave the doorstep feeling agitated, depressed, or angry, I almost certainly will not feel that way when I return.

Consistent runners can point to specific runs that somehow conjured up novel insights about themselves, their spouses, parents, or friends. In the words of author and cardiologist George Sheehan, "There are as many reasons for running as there are days in the year, years in my life. But mostly I run because I am an animal and a child, an artist and a saint." So are we all, if we can find "a self-renewing compulsion to call [our] own."

Learning about who I am as an individual lets me relate more fully to other individuals and to fulfill my role as wife, friend, sister, and daughter. Staring down the prospect of a two-hour trail run teaches me a lot about myself: How will I handle the prospect of something I am not sure I can complete? How will I perform under adverse conditions when things physical or environmental do not go my way? What is my pain threshold, and how will I react when I get there?

Competitive running brings its own set of mental, emotional, and psychological challenges. One of the best long-distance runners who ever lived, Steve Prefontaine, had real insight when he said "most people run a race to see who is fastest. I run a race to see who has the most guts."

Training for track or cross country gives a window to our character, or the lack thereof. We discover how far we can, or will, push ourselves. We quickly find out whether we have the courage to exert maximum effort on that last repeat, or if we will let ourselves peter out five feet in front of the line. We learn whether we will run that ten-minute effort, or do nine minutes of it and call it enough.

Running offers the joy of using the body as part of an abundant life. Yet only part, maybe even the lesser part, of long-distance running is physical.

UCLA coaching legend John Wooden is only half right when he says that sports do not *develop* character, they *reveal* it. I have found that strength of character can be molded on the sweltering afternoons, winding trails, and muddy inclines that make up a cross country season.

I did not deliberately choose to become a long-distance runner (for, as my dad used to say, most people do not chose to run distances if they can do some other sport—any other sport—better). But gradually it has become a part of my daily life, and I have become a better person because of it.

The concern about incorrect prioritization of athletic goals, expressed to Eric Liddell by his sister, is a valid one. We are all familiar with athletes,

especially endurance athletes and triathletes, who obsess about their chosen sport. Their undue focus on training, nutrition, and racing may alienate them from others, making it difficult for them to form or maintain meaningful relationships.

There is a distinct line between enjoying a lifetime of activity and obsessively overtraining to achieve superfluous goals (or, we might add, sedentarily agonizing about the batting average of a particular icon while sitting in front of the TV at home). Either of the latter obsessions is a form of idolatry—a substitute for God used to pursue, develop, and affirm self-worth—which can never honor the Lord. But just as God takes pleasure in His creation—in eagles soaring, in lions roaring, in bees buzzing—He takes pleasure in athletes performing.

Steve Prefontaine said that to give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift. I think Eric Liddell would agree.

> But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength
> they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
> they shall run and be not weary,
> they shall walk and not faint.
> *Isaiah 40:31*

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When Sports and Religion Mix

BY PHILIP WISE

The links between organized sports and religion in our culture sometimes do more harm to our faith than good. Are there healthy ways of relating our sports lives, as participants or spectators, to our Christian discipleship?

Growing up in a small town in South Alabama, I knew two verities—sports and religion. More specifically, we enjoyed the choice to support the University of Alabama or Auburn University and the choice to join the local Methodist or Baptist church. All other schools and denominations were understood to be inferior.

I grew up in a bifurcated family. My father was not a Christian and did not attend church. My mother was a devout Baptist Sunday School teacher. They differed on the relative importance of religion and sports. My mother made church attendance mandatory. My father thought sports *was* a religion. He would have agreed with Methodist minister Bill Floyd on the subject, as former Alabama coach and ESPN commentator Bill Curry recalls the story:

> When I first arrived in Tuscaloosa as the head football coach in 1987 there were death threats—some folks really did not want a Georgia Tech man as their coach. Our minister in Atlanta, Bill Floyd, called our home, concerned about our well-being. My wife answered and he asked, "Carolyn, are you and Bill OK?" My brave girl answered, "Oh we are fine. We have learned that football is a religion over here."
>
> "Oh, no, Carolyn," exclaimed Reverend Floyd, "It's a lot more important than that."[1]

Religion did get mixed with sports at church. During my teenage years our pastor, Dr. Robert Marsh, told lots of stories about sports heroes who were fine Christians. One especially memorable summer revival featured Bill Glass, the former Baylor University and NFL player, as the visiting

evangelist. It was an accepted truism that the lessons learned on the playing field could be translated into Christian virtues. I cannot remember a lesson or illustration that suggested sports might diminish one's religious fervor.

As a teenager in the 1960's, I was enthralled by athletes. Baltimore Orioles third baseman Brooks Robinson was my favorite baseball player. The Celtics' Bob Cousy was my basketball hero. Well-known university athletes from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes spoke at local religious events. I remember Steve Sloan, the Alabama quarterback, speaking to an overflow crowd in the local elementary school auditorium.

Sports, like many other practices, can work like a Rorschach test for Christian character. Do we quit too easily? Are we resistant to discipline? Are we too individualistic?

I played all kinds of organized sports—football, basketball, baseball, and tennis. Because I had been called to become a minister and was a good high school athlete, I began to "give my testimony" in churches. Athletes have a religious currency in our culture that non-athletes simply do not have, and as an all-state basketball player, my currency was growing. I received an athletic scholarship to play basketball at Samford University, where I became a member of the FCA and spoke (preached) at high school gatherings. Ironically, it was my father's sports fanaticism that prompted the realization of my mother's religious hopes.

When I returned to Alabama after completing my theological training in the late 1970s, this linkage between sports and religion was still strong in the state. It was a big plus for a pastor to be able to play sports and talk about sports. In the three churches that I served in Alabama, I invited coaches and players to speak from the pulpit.

I will never forget having Florida State head football coach Bobby Bowden speak at my church in Dothan. Arriving a few minutes before the evening service, he congratulated me on having evening service ("Most churches have quit doing that," he lamented) and asked how many people would attend. He guessed thirty or forty, but I predicted that the sanctuary would be full. As I expected, all the seats—fourteen hundred of them—were filled, and even more folks stood throughout the service. It was the largest crowd in my thirteen years at the church. Bobby had not prepared his talk; he spoke extemporaneously and repeated himself frequently. As I greeted people after the service, one after another said, "Wasn't that great?" The truth is that it was not a great sermon, but it was given by Bobby Bowden.

What are we to make of this amalgam of religion and sports? The novelist and commentator Robert Lipsyte worries that an infatuation with sports has permeated every area of American life, especially for males. "Jock Culture," he writes, "is the incubator of most definitions of manly success,"

which has done at least as much harm as good.[2] If that is true, what has been the effect of sports mania on Christian faith and institutions?

In the New Testament we find little direct guidance on the role of sports in discipleship. The Apostle Paul alludes to the ancient Olympic athletes:

> Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable garland, but we an imperishable one. So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.
>
> *1 Corinthians 9:24-27*

He uses similar athletic analogies in describing his ministry (Galatians 2:1-2) and Christian discipleship (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

While a linkage between sports and the Christian faith can be made (and I would contend that it is not wrong to do so), it certainly can be overdrawn. A line of Jesus Sports Statues show the robed Christ playing modern sports. "Your favorite young sports enthusiast will enjoy receiving one of these statues which features Jesus playing a popular sport with the children He loves!" one online marketer exudes. "Choose from Jesus playing many sports including hockey, baseball, and more…."[3] These statues imply that Jesus played sports, enjoys our sports, wants us to play sports, but none of these statements can be proved and all of them are at least partially false.

What are some healthy ways of relating our sports lives, as participants or spectators, to our discipleship? First, we can use sports to learn about ourselves. When we lose our temper or cheat while competing in a sports event, it reveals a character flaw that needs addressing. Sports, like many other practices in life, can work like a Rorschach test for Christian character. Do we quit too easily? Are we resistant to discipline? Are we too individualistic? One does not have to compete in sports in order to answer these questions, but athletic competition often reveals the truth about our inner lives.

A second way that sports can be helpful in the Christian life is to provide an opportunity to develop genuine friendships. Some of my best friends are people I met as competitors, coaches, fans, or teammates. With them I can talk about what really matters to us, including our faith. I have had the opportunity to share my faith on the golf course, in the locker room, and while sharing a meal with a friend I made through athletics. For many of these friends, I am their "unofficial" pastor.

Sports can also provide opportunities for ministry. Many congregations have opened their family life centers to their neighborhoods as a way of showing love and concern for non-members. Through sports camps, leagues, and coaching clinics they reach out to those around them. Sports are one of the most effective ways to connect with people in other cultures;

for this reason many mission trips now have a sports focus.

Athletes and coaches can affirm their Christian faith in public ways. Some people will scoff at athletes who talk about Jesus when they are interviewed after a winning game or a successful round of golf. It is easy to understand their skepticism since some of these athletes have very public failings. Nevertheless, I am thankful for those athletes and coaches whose faith goes beyond a sound-bite. I have known many who are solid churchmen and churchwomen, whose faith is not a public posture, but a sincere personal commitment to Christ. When people like that speak positively about how their faith has shaped their lives, it can make a difference to the people who hear or read their words.

Finally, sports stories can be used in sermons. While some congregants wish their preacher would never use another illustration from the world of sports, others cannot get enough. My own judgment is that sports stories should be carefully chosen and sparingly inserted in sermons.

We must remember that we are not called to proclaim Jesus as the greatest athlete, but as the Savior of the world. To the extent that sports stories in sermons, testimonies by faithful athletes and coaches, or church-based sports camps and leagues help us share that good news, then they can be useful in our ministry.

NOTES

1 Bill Curry, "Bama-Auburn a Year-Round Affair," *ESPN.com* (November 18, 2004), available online at *sports.espn.go.com/ncf/columns/story?columnist=curry_bill&id =1925995*.

2 Robert Lipsyte, "'Jock Culture' Permeates Life," *USA Today* (April 10, 2008), 11A, available online at *blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2008/04/jock-culture-pe.html*. For more on "Jock Culture," see Mr. Lipsyte's Web site, *www.robertlipsyte.com*.

3 The statues are sold by many online stores. This advertisement is on the Jesus Sports Statues page at *www.stpatricksguild.com.*

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Upward Sports

BY JORDAN COX

Sports, recreation, and leisure programs like Upward Unlimited® invite people to be the Body of Christ in their community. Participants mature as disciples as they learn to live out their faith through sports competition on the field, court, gymnastics mat, or in the swimming pool.

Curly blond hair was his most notable physical characteristic at first glance. His knock on my open office door was rather faint, although his tone and manners were seemingly bold and confident. "May I have a moment of your time, please sir?" After being seated, this boy of nine or ten years said, "My name is Montana and I wanted to say 'Thank You' for allowing me to play Upward basketball on Saturday. It really meant a lot to me. The doctor just cleared me and I wasn't sure I was going to get to play basketball this season."

The boy's unique first name and subsequent message had the hamster in my head turning the wheel quickly to recall a phone conversation a few days earlier with a mother desperately seeking a chance for her son to play youth basketball. The details came back rapidly because it was one of the few times in my ministry when I had not said exactly what I was thinking. After we'd spent thousands of dollars on television, radio, and newspaper advertisements, distributed brochures in every elementary school in the city, and even rented a billboard on the interstate highway, this woman was calling, seven weeks into a ten-week season, to see if she could register her son to play basketball in a league! She explained the doctor had just a day before cleared her son to play. Amateur Athletic Union (A.A.U.) leagues were closed and almost over, select-team programs did not have space for anyone this late in the season, and the city program was almost completed. I wondered to myself if the boy was a "hot-shot" all-star player who had broken an ankle or sprained a wrist, and a church program was his last option.

Nevertheless, I allowed him to practice that night and play on Saturday. Extra uniforms had been purchased for just such an occurrence.

Now on Monday morning, here was Montana—one of 855 children in a basketball program sponsored by three local churches to reach the community—seated in front of me, offering a word of gratitude. "See, the doctor just cleared me to play after this round of treatments," he said. "The chemo makes me really sick and weak and I didn't think I was going to get to play this year." The lump in my throat felt about as big as a basketball. Tears were beginning to form. This third grader calmly continued, "I know the only reason God has allowed me to live this long is because he wants me to tell other kids about Jesus, and playing basketball is a great way for me to do it."

THE UPWARD UNLIMITED® PLAN

The not-for-profit organization Upward Unlimited® offers one of the most popular formats for church-based sports programs.[1] Children of ages five to twelve are the target audience for the company's programs because current research indicates that nearly half (43%) of all Americans who accept Jesus Christ as their Savior do so before reaching the age of thirteen.[2] In a "family friendly" schedule of just one hour of practice and a single one-hour game on Saturdays for up to eight weeks, these Upward sports plans include a biblically based devotion during a five-minute break at the midpoint of a team's practice. Players learn a verse from Scripture during this time as well. Each player is given a green star or sticker to represent "growth"; other colored stars that represent various character traits are awarded following every game, including a white star signifying "Christ-likeness."

If sponsoring congregations do not have a gymnasium or athletic field to conduct these ministries, they may borrow or rent space from a local school or the community. Church members volunteer to serve as league commissioners, coaches and assistant coaches, referees, team parents, halftime speakers, and prayer partners. By encouraging involvement of congregations from many denominations and attracting participants from the entire community, including individuals who are not members of any church, Upward sports leagues open avenues to develop and deepen relationships across the community. At the conclusion of the season, every child receives the same postseason award in the festival atmosphere of a special rally for all participants, their families, and volunteers. The "awards night" ceremony provides a ready-made platform for presenting an invitation to respond to the gospel story.[3]

Combining sports programs with evangelistic efforts is not a new idea. "Churches are waking up to the realization that leisure is a new frontier to be claimed for the Lord," Agnes Pylant, the first director of the Church Recreation department of the Baptist Sunday School Board of the Southern

Baptist Convention, observed half a century ago. "Never before have so many ministers and church members recognized the important place of recreation in the total program of the church."[4]

So, even though sports programs like the Upward leagues may not be "cutting edge" in their purpose, their cultural relevance today is sharp. Sports and leisure outreach programs are helping congregations realize Christ's great commission to be his "witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Because people simply love to play, these programs can unite members of different churches in ministries to see God change lives. Also, they can train young people to be witnesses through their sports activities. "They are trying to meet the needs of their student-athletes," one Presbyterian minister notes, "and helping young athletes see their sportsmanship as an opportunity to demonstrate Godly values."[5]

THE BRIDGE FROM SPORTS TO EVANGELISM

Not only can sports and leisure programs build up the body of Christ through *koinonia*, or the congregation's internal life and fellowship, they are a ready-made bridge to the lost. "Some people will be reached for Christ because they will hear the gospel preached from the pulpit. Others will 'hear' the gospel because they see it lived out in the context of sports ministry or because the athlete uses the 'pulpit of competition' to declare Christ," notes Rodger Oswald, leader of Church Sports International. "The ministry potential of sports and recreation can be an effective tool for the church and a powerful vehicle for the gospel."[6] This is similar to the Apostle Paul adapting his ministry to reach the unconvinced: "To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

Upward sports leagues develop and deepen relationships across the community by involving congregations from many denominations and attracting individuals who are not members of any church.

Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church, relates a personal story that illustrates the point I am making. When he had just purchased a used sailboat but "was pretty green in the whole sailboat racing deal," he struck up a conversation with a man behind the counter of a little marina in Michigan because he "was obviously a boater himself." One question about sailing led to another and soon Hybels sensed they would have many future conversations as they shared the joy of their sport. "To make a long (and remarkable) story short," he writes, "several years and hundreds of incredible, God-

ordained conversations later, [my friend] chose to give his life to Christ." Sharing their heartfelt interest in sports opened doors to a spiritual friendship with one another and God. "Based on my experience," Hybels concludes, "most people who wind up in the kingdom of God can trace their salvation back to a single, life-changing conversation with a Christ-follower. This is the power of staying the course until you uncover mutual interests with the people you're talking to."[7]

"The Lord has been doing some incredible things," a friend has told me about an Upward basketball program at his church in Virginia. "Not only have players brought their family and friends to church and are seeing them come to know the Lord, but one grandfather of a player who attended our games recently was saved. He passed on three weeks later and I had the privilege of performing his home going with eleven others coming to a saving knowledge of Christ. It was said by many of the family if it were not for Upward, his heart would not have been tendered. Praise the Lord."[8]

The bridge ministry of sports programs may even extend to countries where more traditional avenues have been ineffective. In 2000, the Islamic Egyptian government began partnering with a group of Christian churches, the International Sports Coalition, to host the annual Kids Games in Cairo. "Prior to that there were no options for the church to use any government facilities such as stadiums and other venues," a friend tells me. "Because of this other cities across Egypt were able to get stadiums from the government in their areas. This year there will be over 100,000 kids participating in the Arab world alone. There will be two and a half million kids worldwide participating in Kids Games because of what was started in Egypt in 2000."[9]

Thus, to "play with a purpose" can be an appropriate mantra for members of the body of Christ.[10] Using sports, recreation, and leisure pursuits to impact people's lives spiritually—whether we call such church recreational programs "bridge ministries," "crossover ministries," or even "life-style evangelism"—can be fully integrated into the church's central purpose. "That purpose," N. T. Wright observes, "is clearly stated in the New Testament: that through the church God will announce to the wider world that he is indeed its wise, loving, and just creator: that through Jesus he has defeated the powers that corrupt and enslave it; and that by his Spirit he is at work to heal and renew it."[11] A church recreation ministry can help achieve this purpose, Ray Conner writes, by being "a catalyst in outreach, an aid to worship, an instrument for missions action, an opportunity to practice discipleship, a vehicle for ministry, a channel of service and support, an environment for fellowship, a tool for teaching, an avenue for abundant living and a place of service and an opportunity to serve."[12]

MORE THAN A SPORTS LEAGUE

In sports programs like Upward Unlimited®, church members from different denominations practice working together in common ministry.

"Two basic models of church cooperation have existed in communities since Upward began," states Shane McKenzie, Vice President of Operations for Upward Unlimited. Sometimes several congregations work collectively to sponsor a single program. In other cases, the congregations operate their programs independently, but cooperate with one another on scheduling, planning, equipment, or space. "We are hoping another model [for a city-wide league] is emerging from one of these two scenarios to reach even more children and their families," McKenzie reports. "For example, we are meeting right now with pastors of seventeen different churches in Birmingham, Alabama, to explore how to reach the approximately 98,000 unreached youth there."[13]

Another valuable aspect of these programs is that many volunteers develop skills and passion for sharing their faith. I challenged a "travel team" baseball coach, who had served for several years in a church sports program in Arkansas, to continue his outreach with his players and their families. "We have always kept the Lord in the forefront of this team, but I know we can take this to another level," he replied, and he decided at each practice he would invite "a boy to share his testimony, how accepting Jesus has changed his life, or any other life changing event they wish to cover. That will then allow me to praise the boy and expand on the importance of a direct relationship with Jesus Christ. I will discuss at our next practice and lead off with my own personal relationship with Christ."[14] The day before the coach was to share his own story with his team, via a telephone conversation he led a woman to a saving knowledge of Christ. "I'm convinced I was willing and able to share my faith with this person because I was preparing to do so at baseball practice with my boys the following night. I didn't want to ask them to do something I wasn't willing to do."[15]

"Play with a purpose" becomes an appropriate mantra when sports, recreation, and leisure programs that impact people's lives spiritually are fully integrated into the church's central mission.

When volunteer coaches, referees, score keepers, and administrators, and participants and their families embrace the Christian-walk embodied in church sports programs and apply those practices in their athletic lives "outside" the walls the church, then an ultimate victory scenario has been created.

Sports, recreation, and leisure programs like Upward Unlimited® invite people to be the body of Christ in the community. Believers who participate in these programs mature as disciples as they learn to live out their faith through sports competition on the field, court, gymnastics mat, or in the swimming pool. They develop a lifestyle that permeates their congregation

and community, and God's kingdom expands because the church and her people are on mission.

NOTES

1 Caz McCaslin, a recreation minister at a church in Spartanburg, South Carolina, began Upward Basketball in 1986. New programs in soccer, cheer, and flag football were added in 2000. Almost half a million young people participated in Upward Unlimited® programs in 2007 (*www.upward.org/about.aspx?coll_id=62&id=122*).

2 "Evangelism is Most Effective among Kids" (Ventura, CA: The Barna Group, October 11, 2004), available online at *www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=172*.

3 Upward Unlimited® (*www.upward.org*) offers detailed materials and training for volunteers to support the ministry-focus of these leagues.

4 Agnes Durant Pylant, *Church Recreation* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1959), 7.

5 Neil MacQueen, "Are Kids Too Busy for *Sunday* School?" revised version (September 2007), available online at *www.sundaysoftware.com/stats2.htm*.

6 Rodger Oswald, "Why Should a Church Have a Sports Ministry?" MP3/Compact Disc A2 (San Jose, CA: Church Sports International, 2001).

7 Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 86-87.

8 Jim Fryer in personal correspondence (February 3, 2001).

9 Maged Fawzy in personal correspondence (June 18, 2007).

10 I am borrowing the phrase "Play with A Purpose" from the theme for the 1997 National Recreation and Sports Ministers Conference.

11 N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006), 204.

12 Ray Conner, *The Ministry of Recreation* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1992), 73-74.

13 Shane MacKenzie in an interview with Jordan Cox (May 12, 2008).

14 Gary Harris in personal correspondence (April 7, 2007).

15 Gary Harris in personal correspondence (April 16, 2007).

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God in the Gym

BY ROGER WARD

A Christian perspective on sports must critique the competing "folk theologies" that develop around sports. Three books reviewed here examine the nineteenth-century vision of moral character, physical strength, and a bodily engaged Protestantism that became known as "muscular Christianity."

When Tiger Woods eagled on the eighteenth hole of the 2008 U.S. Open Golf Tournament forcing a playoff round the next day, our sports-enthused nation took a deep breath and made plans to skip work that Monday. Television viewership was through the roof. Joking references to the 'golf gods' smiling on Tiger were mixed with appellations of the near divinity of Tiger himself. Compared to other professional golfers, not to mention the rest of us hackers, this one transcends the limits of the game, a model of what a golfer, an athlete, a person, can do.

Sports and games are deeply connected to religious practices and ideas, formal and folk theologies, and the shape of society. *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, 336pp., $29.95), by William J. Baker, provides a wide ranging story of the interrelation of cult and sport from Mayan and Native American games, to the Greek Olympiad with its ritual purification and sacrifices before the games, to the Medieval monastic roots of tennis and handball.

Organized sports as we know them originated in England. On the British exportation of sports during the colonial era, he notes: "Britons not only taught the world to play; they also taught the world *how* to play with moral purpose" (p. 33). Yet, he worries that today sports "has lost the moral compass that for more than a century taught Americans to honor boundaries, play by the rules, and work together for a common good" (p. 257).

Baker is attentive to the intellectual history of sports myths and metaphors as well as the generation of organizations that emerged in response to leisure time, increasing urbanization, and the perceived feminization of Victorian religion. These organizations were sometimes associated with the idea of "muscular Christianity," a late nineteenth century religious movement promoting the virtues of masculinity and bodily strength. Two writers in particular, Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, influenced Victorian Christianity to reconsider the value of the human body and sports. In the novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857), Hughes transformed his alma mater, Rugby School, into a vision of moral character, physical strength, and a bodily engaged Protestantism. Baker notes that muscular Christianity "originated simultaneously in Great Britain and the United States, largely because moral leaders in both countries responded similarly to similar urban problems of physical congestion, poor health, and changing attitudes toward religion, work, and play" (p. 35). This movement gained traction in the United States primarily through the influence of Thomas Higginson, whose review of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* in the *Atlantic Monthly* popularized the term "muscular Christianity," and Moses Coit Tyler who expanded the programs of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) from a social and religious gathering function to include physical recreation and organized sports. Baker follows the trajectory of muscular Christianity in its multiplicity of forms. He notes, for instance, The University of Notre Dame's emergence as a focal point of Catholic identity through sports against the violent backdrop of the Ku Klux Klan, and the popularity of Christy Mathewson—a squeaky clean baseball player who stood out against mean-spirited players like Ty Cobb—who was "the first professional athlete to function as a role model for America's youth" (p. 160).

Baker also discusses Jewish and Islamic perspectives on contemporary sports—for instance, the programs that lead to a large percentage of Jewish professional baseball players in the United States and the increasing prominence of Muslim faith in collegiate and professional sports. The scheduling dilemmas that Muslim athletes face in regard to faithfully practicing Islamic rituals make an interesting counterpoint to the total accommodation of Christian practices to the sports clock and calendar.

In *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003, 310 pp., $22.00), Clifford Putney suggests the profound interest in masculine virtues and bodily strength represented in "muscular Christianity" corresponds to a Protestant worry that Christianity was over-feminized after the Puritan era. For years passive virtues like love, patience, and tenderness had been exalted, and women comprised a majority of church membership, active

attendance, and leadership. Sermons extolled strength and masculine virtues, but theologians and intellectuals fretted that if male participation did not increase, Christianity would "go to the wall." Christian socialist F. D. Maurice, who accused Christians of "fleeing from the world instead of trying to mend it," inspired Hughes and his *Tom Brown* books (p. 12). Among the staunchest advocates of Hughes' vision "were Victorian educators, who liked its propagation of the muscular Christian values of fellowship, honor, and service" (p. 15). For Moses Coit Tyler, author of *The Brawnville Papers* (1869), "muscular Christianity" meant simply "Christianity applied to the treatment and the use of our bodies." But for the *North Carolina Presbyterian,* the phrase was "suggestive of force and that high-strung, nervous energy which by constant exercise has developed its possessor into the stature of a perfect man in Christ Jesus" (p. 22). Beginning in the 1860s organized sports and gymnasiums were used both to develop male bodies and attract their attendance to church. This partnering of sports and religion shaped cities like New York and St. Louis, where the finest sports facilities were church-run (p. 62).

Putney's primary story is related to the YMCA's influence on muscular Christianity. Significant figures include Robert McBurney, who directed the New York YMCA and made it into a model for other "Y's," and Luther Gulick, "the greatest of YMCA philosophers" who originated the phrase "body, mind, spirit" after Deuteronomy 6:5 (pp. 69-70). "Before Gulick, the 'Y' had kept gymnastics subordinate to evangelism," Putney notes. "After him, it held physical fitness, no less than religious conviction, responsible for leading men to Glory" (p. 72). The intentional formation of young men in aggressiveness and the rejection of sentimentality is evident even in the YMCA hymnbooks; one titled *Manly Songs for Christian Men* features hymns that encourage "heroic, active masculine qualities rather than…the passive virtues and states of mind and feeling" (p. 96).

What is most satisfying about this book is Putney's attention to the interplay among politics, literature, and cultural iconography in Protestant efforts to direct and develop sport. He draws out voices that are critical of evangelical Protestants who seemingly are unaware of their own sexual insecurities on a grand scale. Examples abound of theological language engaging metaphors of masculine power that are grotesque by current standards, and during this time of male insecurity, women are intentionally excluded from sports. The most significant event undermining muscular Christianity, however, was the disillusionment with Christianity caused by the horrors of World War I and its aftermath. In post-war America there was open "disdain for the ideals of Christian chivalry," not only among writers like Ernest Hemingway and George Santayana, but also the general public. Muscular Christianity appeared to be "mindless strenuosity tied not to social reform but to what cereal king J. H. Kellogg called the new religion '*of being good to yourself*'" (p. 200). The post-war crowd was not receptive to

saving the world, advancing civic values, or personal salvation. It was excited by "such newly accessible leisure-time pursuits as automobiling and listening to the radio" (p. 201).

Putney's discussion of gender insecurities behind the development of muscular Christianity is a welcome and powerful check on the Protestant tendency toward triumphalism. Nevertheless, he downplays the significance of revivalism and the positive influence of Christian devotion among masses of young men during this crucial stage in the development of our national identity. The revival movement was real and formative, and sports programs aimed at men played a vital but not exclusive role in that formation. Putney's thesis that gender concerns were the driving force behind the muscular Christian movement verges on a fallacy of emphasis. It obscures the significance of denominational organizations that superseded sports programs, like the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program for mission and education. I am less convinced than Putney that any insecurity can have the institution-forming power exhibited by muscular Christianity.

The First World War undermined muscular Christianity, which appeared to be "mindless strenuosity tied not to social reform but to what cereal king J. H. Kellogg called the new religion 'of being good to yourself.'"

Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999, 288 pp., OOP), by Tony Ladd and James A. Mathisen, recounts the people and organizations connected to muscular Christianity in a more honorific tone. The sense of this book is the success of the evangelical message through the adoption, development, and dynamic interaction with sports. Focusing on the American reception of Hughes's *Tom Brown's Schooldays,* the authors track the subsequent engagement, disengagement, and re-engagement of evangelicals with sports. For the early years they focus on evangelist D. L. Moody's support of the YMCA's sports initiatives. "Moody was the champion of an indigenous, American brand of muscular Christianity in the final decades of the century," they note. "While scholars have firmly established Moody's role in American revivalism, his association with muscular Christianity has been largely ignored" (pp. 32-33). As America changed rapidly due to immigration between 1865 and 1900 that increased the population from thirty-one to seventy-six million people, "Muscular Christians living in an industrialized,

urban culture capitalized on this development and served as catalysts to help make modern sports possible" (p. 17).

Ladd and Mathisen follow high profile personalities like C. T. Studd, the famous Cambridge cricketer and missionary to whom we are obliged for the admonition "to play for the glory of God" (p. 45), and his brother, J. E. K. Studd, who toured America and influenced thousands of college students toward "Keswick holiness, personal Bible study, and missionary outreach" (p. 51). The golden age of the movement, however, began in 1887 at Mt. Hermon, Massachusetts, where Moody "formalized" the union of sport and religion (p. 52). A prime example of this union was James Naismith's creation of basketball at the behest of Luther Gulick. The game was an effort at "social engineering" by placing individuals in a situation where they can engage in self-instruction (p. 71). This attitude corresponds to the Social Gospel hope of improving the conditions of society, or "making the good better," as opposed to the more pre-millennial conception of "making the bad better."

The authors note a later shift in theological basis for Christian involvement in organized sports from a post-millennial Social Gospelist effort to perfect humans and society, to a pre-millennial evangelical model of human corruption that will be cancelled only by the return of Jesus. This shift resulted, they argue, from the tragedy of World War I as well as the burgeoning power of professional sports. "Not only were [Christian sports advocates] stymied by a culture they thought they were leading, but they were also carrying the baggage of unfulfilled idealism of what sport could do in and of itself. The burden became too great, and many muscular Christians may have abandoned social agendas for strictly spiritual ones" (p. 84). In this era, evangelical Christians turned to sports figures like track star Gil Dodds as exemplars of fidelity, and to sport itself as a "cultural legitimizer" for marginalized fundamentalists (p. 119). I suspect, however, this interpretation is too simple, for it overlooks distinctions between the Social Gospel and other cultural reform efforts, as well as the tension created by the Southern rejection of Northern models of sports.

Ladd and Mathisen conclude on the note of re-engagement of evangelicals with sports, citing programs such as Overseas Crusade, Athletes in Action, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and chaplaincy programs in major league sports including NASCAR racing. Once again, Protestant evangelicals seem to be somewhat at home in the world of sports. The authors suspect, however, this relationship is grounded only in superficial similarities between sports participation and the gospel rather than "a systematically theological approach among evangelicals to their mission and self-understanding." Appeal to these similarities—sports' usefulness in spreading the gospel, the inculcation of self-control and other virtues, and the role of heroic models—have come to "constitute a kind of 'folk theology of muscular Christianity'" (p. 219).

The reference to "folk theology"—the widely-held, unreflective beliefs about God and salvation in a culture—is significant for understanding sports and religion, particularly in the United States. "There are no purely profane festivals," theologian Josef Pieper has reminded us. "A festival without gods is a non-concept."† The collective response to significant sports moments like Tiger Wood's comeback at the 2008 U. S. Open Golf Tournament, or to major championships like the Super Bowl, the World Cup, and the World Series demonstrates our longing for an experience that transcends daily concerns and common abilities. Indeed, organized sports—the players and organizations, the media's analysis and promotion, the marquee events and audiences—often overwhelm the influence of (other) organized religion on the direction of our society. This simple fact is one reason these books and others like them are of interest. For whatever gods we are serving in sports that have such a pronounced hold on our attention, they are not the God we worship in church. How do our theologically grounded longings lead to their antithesis—idolatry? A Christian perspective on sports must include a critique of the competing "folk theologies" that develop around sports.

But there is another reason to study these books. The beauty and joy of bodily movement, defined either by limits of nature, limits of competition, or participation in sacred or secular ritual practices, are the basis of much of our human identity. Through organized physical activity and play, we relate our bodily existence to God. Many modern sports originated in Christian visions of the good life, and these influential social and cultural practices remain a field ready for harvest.

NOTE

† Josef Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity* (Notre Dame, IN: St. Augustine's Press, [1963], reprinted 1999), 34.

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When Playing Becomes Sports

BY RICK H. HOYLE

If organized sports have become something undesirable—and all indications are that they have—can we rediscover the enjoyment and fun that initially drew us to them? The three books reviewed here suggest how parents, coaches, and ministers can return sports to their roots in play.

When tempers flare on the playing field or in the stands during an athletic event, it is not uncommon to hear echoes of "It's just a game!" as someone attempts to put the event and its outcome in proper perspective for the unruly participants or observers. But are sports, particularly those involving children and adolescents, "just a game" and, if not, what have they become? If sports have become something undesirable—and all indications are that they have—can we rediscover the enjoyment and fun that initially drew us to them? The three books reviewed here offer a sobering account of the current state of organized sports programs and suggest how parents, coaches, and ministers can return sports to their roots in play.

Here is the problem in a nutshell. Youth sports participation in the twenty-first century is highly organized and almost entirely controlled by adults. Ironically very few young athletes—primarily those with above-average ability and a taste of competition—continue to play sports as adults. Yet, physical activity is an essential component of good health across the lifespan. If we are to increase the number of adults who remain physically active, we must ensure that they play during childhood and that their initial forays into organized sports are positive and rewarding.[1] The likelihood of this sort of experience—and a lifetime commitment to physical activity—is increased when the adults who create and control youth sports programs are committed to the overall health and well-being of young athletes.

YOUTH SPORTS IN CRISIS

In *The Cheers and the Tears: A Healthy Alternative to the Dark Side of Youth Sports Today* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1999, 240 pp., $19.95), Shane Murphy draws on his experience as chief sport psychologist for the United States Olympic Committee, sport psychologist in private practice, and parent of children who participate in sports to detail what is wrong with youth sports programs and how they might be salvaged. The presentation is frank and at times unsettling, but ultimately optimistic and hopeful. Murphy asks us to deal head-on with what sports programs have become, and then commit ourselves to reclaiming the essence of play that draws our children to them. "There is something wrong with youth sports today," he writes, "and we owe it to our children to change things for the better" (p. 7).

Although it may be true that "after religion, sport is the most powerful cultural force in American society,"[2] youth participation in sports has not been as thoroughly discussed as other aspects of children's lives such as education. Yet, estimates indicate that between twenty and thirty million youth in the United States participate in nonschool sports programs that, during season, occupy them an average of eleven hours per week. At their root, these programs have two overarching goals: to promote talent development and to contribute to the promotion of lifelong participation in sports and physical activity. Arguably, these programs are reasonably successful at promoting talent development, but they are, in the author's view, a "huge failure" at promoting lifelong participation. For instance, youth sports dropout is high, with more than one-third of participants indicating that they do not intend to continue the following year. Some find their way back to sports and physical activity as adults. Many do not.

Murphy avoids the "sugarcoated portrayal of sports for kids" typical of many treatments of youth sports participation, bringing to light the "dark side" of adult-organized sports for youth. Evidence of a dark side includes troubling levels of emotional abuse by parents and coaches, high risk of injury, burnout, family conflict, interpersonal violence, and the general unhappiness of many young athletes. What is at the root of these problems? Although the author gives appropriate attention to trends such as externalization of motive and incentives, his primary focus is many parents' tendency to overidentify with their young athletes.

Murphy asks parents to consider carefully their motivation to enroll their children in sports programs, providing a self-administered test to facilitate this introspection. He reviews a number of positive motives (bonding with one's children, promoting social development, teaching self-control and respect) and negative motives, primarily those that stem from overidentification (dreams of glory, young athlete as an investment, competition with other parents). Underlying the positive motives is a general view of sports participation as a means to making the young athlete a better person. The pleasure inherent in sports motivated by this goal raises the likelihood

of lifelong participation.

A strength of the book is the author's detailed treatment of the development of competitive orientations. He draws heavily on the academic literature on motivation to argue that sports participation at its best fosters a mastery orientation, characterized by self-motivation and striving for excellence. Although an additional, modest dose of ego orientation serves competitive athletes well, it is the internal drive provided by a mastery orientation that makes for longevity in sports participation. The best coaching and parenting use mastery-oriented strategies such as skill development, focus on progress, and general love for the game to keep participants motivated and engaged.

The book closes with a chapter devoted to larger concerns such as cultural attitudes toward competition and how youth sports programs are structured. Murphy encourages a shift away from the talent-development model that currently pervades youth sports programs to a participation-promotion model that "can do a lot of good for children, for families, and for communities" (p. 190). Many of the recommended strategies will sound familiar to readers whose children have participated in purposeful church-sponsored sports programs such as Upward. Strategies that promote positive parental involvement, a focus on teaching, respect and support for coaches, and adults who model good behavior can return sports participation to its rightful place as an enjoyable, lifelong activity.

PARENTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Parents committed to changing the tenor of youth sports participation will find concrete and specific advice in *101 Ways to Be a Terrific Sports Parent: Making Athletics a Positive Experience for Your Child* (New York: Fireside, 2003, 320 pp., $14.00), written by Joel Fish (with Susan Magee). Like Murphy, Fish is a licensed psychologist who has counseled adult athletes who compete at the highest level as well as young athletes and their families.

The best coaching and parenting use mastery-oriented strategies such as skill development, focus on progress, and love for the game to keep participants engaged.

As the title indicates, the book is a compilation of 101 pieces of advice for parents of children and adolescents participating in sports programs. These are thematically aggregated into ten "chapters," which are sets of one- to three-page elaborations on suggested strategies for managing common problems faced by young athletes and their parents. Themes range from those primarily concerned with sports participation (e.g., managing competition, managing injuries, and risk of injury) to those that primarily concern the health and well-being

of the young athlete and his or her family (e.g., sports participation and family life, managing sibling sports rivalry). Advice ranges from the commonsensical—"15. Encourage positive thinking"—to the incisive —"46. Treat your child's coach the same way you would treat his teacher." When appropriate, specific suggestions are offered by age of child athlete—elementary, middle, or high school.

Although the focus of this book is, by and large, on parents doing what is right by their young sports participants, the authors set the stage by noting the trends elaborated by Murphy. Extending the age range into high school, they note that forty million children participate in sports programs. This number is skewed toward the elementary and early middle school range because, by age thirteen, more than twelve million will have stopped playing. Thus, although children used to start their own games and play them until adults stopped them, now they are reliant on adults to start and manage them. This is done with limited success. The authors note that no more than two percent of young athletes will go on to win an athletic scholarship, and fewer still will ever play professionally; thus, as argued by Murphy, youth participation in sports should focus on the intrinsic qualities of enjoyment and positive social relations as opposed to extrinsic outcomes such as championships, scholarships, and contracts.

This is not a book that one would read from beginning to end. There is no inherent order in which chapters should be read, and parents are likely to vary in terms of which chapters are relevant to their own experience. This is a book to be consulted—by parents of young children who hope to avoid the problems they have seen in other families and sports settings, and by parents of longtime sports participants who need to solve the specific problems, often unforeseen, that inevitably arise as one season follows another. Particularly strong are the chapters on relating to coaches, dealing with the desire to quit, and managing self-image concerns. The latter will be especially useful for parents whose children are gymnasts, wrestlers, or participants in other sports in which body weight is a salient concern. There is something here for any parent who wants a positive, healthy experience for his or her child athlete.

A ROLE FOR THE CHURCH

Is there a role for local churches in addressing the crisis in youth sports participation and promoting physical activity across the lifespan? The contributors to *Recreation and Sports Ministry: Impacting Postmodern Culture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003, 243 pp., $24.99), edited by John Garner, believe there is and provide a blueprint for using recreation and sports to achieve the broader aims of the church while addressing the need for sports experiences that are positive and constructive. Among the contributors are faculty at secular and Christian universities and individuals who have successfully developed and managed free-standing recreation and

sports ministries. Most have served as recreation and sports ministers at one or more churches. Garner has been involved in such ministry for more than thirty years and now directs recreation and sports ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention.

This well-edited book is comprised of ten chapters that offer comprehensive coverage of recreation and sports ministry in the church setting. The chapters are short and focused, covering a broad range of topics. Background and context are provided by chapters on biblical foundations and the history of the church recreation and sports movement in the United States. The heart of the book is a set of practically-oriented chapters that cover topics such as the recreation and sports minister as a professional, administration of recreation and sports programs in a ministry setting, and a framework for developing such programs. A strength of the book is the collection of seventeen appendixes that range from sample permission forms to worksheets for projecting event and total ministry costs.

The first three chapters provide justification for viewing recreation and sports as a context for ministry and the history of this idea in the modern church. In the opening chapter, Garner indicates surprise that, given the connection between fellowship, outreach, and sports, churches do not routinely use recreation and sports as tools for ministry. He touches on the trend toward regular participation in leisure activities, observing that people often drive past churches on Sunday morning on their way to the lake or a sporting event. He argues for a view of leisure as a component of the abundant life we have in Christ. If congregations are to compete with other leisure options, however, they must move beyond the pick-up games that sufficed in the past to formal programs that rival those outside the church. Such is the task of recreation and sports ministry, which Garner defines as "activity that takes place during leisure time with the stated purpose or intention of helping people become aware of their need for a relationship with God, his daily role in their lives, and their place in the kingdom work" (p. 10). This view of sports and recreation is in stark contrast with the current state of sports participation described by Murphy and Fish, and has the potential to return athletic participation to the desire for play that initially attracts participants.

Recreation and sports ministries help people "become aware of their need for a relationship with God, his daily role in their lives, and their place in the kingdom work."

Further background and context is provided in contributions from Rodger Oswald and Brad Wesner. Oswald notes that sports and recreation are neither condemned nor encouraged in Scripture. In their support are frequent references to play in the Old and New Testaments. He concludes

that recreation and sports are "culturally strategic means of reaching people with the gospel" (p. 35). Wesner traces the history of recreation and sports in churches, emphasizing the vacillation over time between viewing them as unwise pleasure seeking and simple ways to promote fellowship (and, on occasion, raise funds!). Perhaps as a reflection of a cultural trend, recreation and sports currently are in favor in churches. It remains to be seen if and how they will be integrated into church programming.

The remaining chapters provide a wealth of practical advice for churches considering a recreation and sports ministry and ministers charged with developing and overseeing those ministries. Dale Connally sees these ministers as "leisure-services providers" who, along with their secular counterparts, are charged with helping people improve their quality of life. At present, this charge is pursued without benefit of designation as a profession and the structure and safeguards this designation provides. Garner provides a blueprint for developing a church-based recreation and sports ministry. Dale Adkins offers advice for administering such ministries, emphasizing the need to keep the focus on "growing people, not simply doing things." Chapters by Paul Stutz and Greg Linville touch on issues related to programming. Stutz is concerned with the nuts and bolts of programming, whereas Linville focuses specifically on programming for the purpose of evangelism. Following a second chapter by Linville, this one focused on the ethics of competition in the church setting, Judi Jackson closes the volume by addressing the issue of maintaining physical activity across the lifespan. She concludes that leading a balanced life across the lifespan is critical, and church recreation and sports ministries can and should contribute to this goal.

CONCLUSION

In these volumes is reason for concern about the current state of sports participation in the United States—especially programs for youth—but reason to believe that sports can and should be a positive aspect of people's lives across the lifespan. The authors provide guidance for correcting what is wrong with organized sports, including a prominent role for parents, coaches, and local churches. The focus of these books, particularly the parent and family oriented books by Murphy and Fish, is the sports experiences of youth. As Garner and colleagues make clear, however, sports participation is not just for youth. Indeed, adult needs for exercise, challenge, and camaraderie make recreation and sports an ideal vehicle for bringing people onto the church campus and sharing the gospel with them in an environment in which they feel comfortable. There is a role for all in the rediscovery of play in sports.

NOTES

1 Allen Kraut, Samuel Melamed, Daphna Gofer, and Paul Froom, "Effect of School Age Sports on Leisure Time Physical Activity in Adults: The CORDIS Study," *Medicine &*

Science in Sports & Exercise 35 (2003), 2038-2042.

2 American Sports Data Staff, "Sports Participation: The Metaphor of Youth Development," American Sports Data, Inc., available online at *www.americansportsdata.com/pr-recreation-leisure.asp*.

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