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PONTIFICIUM CONSILIUM PRO LAICIS

# SPORT, EDUCATION, FAITH

TOWARDS A NEW SEASON FOR  
CATHOLIC SPORTS ASSOCIATIONS

International Seminar  
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## PREFACE

Sport associations of Catholic inspiration play a significant role in society as a whole. In fact, there are numerous countries in which much of the sporting activities, especially those of the youth, are organized and directed by institutions directly affiliated with the Catholic Church or by associations which are inspired by Catholic principles. It is enough to consider the actual number of boys and girls all over the world who, week after week, engage in sporting activities that are run by Catholic schools, parish youth centres, or other structures or organizations established by Catholic associations.

Cardinal Francis George, the archbishop of Chicago, recently wrote a book called *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture*.<sup>1</sup> In light of this title, we can ask ourselves: what difference does God make in the world of sport? What does our faith bring to the practice of a sport? What makes a Catholic sports association different from another one? What is its proper identity and mission? What contribution does the Catholic sports movement in general make to the Church's mission of education and evangelization? These are the questions which we sought to give answer to in the course of the international seminar, "Sport, education, faith: towards a new season for Catholic sport associations", promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Laity and the proceedings of which are now published in this publication. The seminar, organized by the "Church and sport" section of our dicastery, was held in Rome from November 6-7, 2009 with the attendance of about one hundred participants coming from

<sup>1</sup> F. GEORGE, O.M.I., *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion and Culture*, New York 2009.

five continents. The theme was approached with the conscious effort and desire to reinsert sport into an educational perspective.

Within Church environments, there are those who consider sport as a threat to the pastoral care of youth as its activities can conflict with times scheduled for catechism or faith formation or even infringe on Sunday itself, the Lord's Day. Others see sport as a type of hook that can attract the youth back to Church. Among parents, there are those who consider sport as a convenient after-school program for their children while others see it as an opportunity to push upon their children in order to make them rich and famous. All things being considered, there are very few who see any connection between the practice of sport and the practice of one's faith. Nonetheless, the attention that the Church has given to this activity has a long history. This is because faith does make a difference, even in the world of sport.

Pius XII, in his address to the Catholic *Centro Sportivo Italiano* (Italian Sports Centre) way back in 1945, stated: "...only the Christian attitude toward sport can effectively combat false concepts and pernicious tendencies, and prevent their evil influence. In compensation, it enriches physical culture with all which tends to raise the spiritual value of man. What is more, it directs sport towards a noble exaltation of the dignity, vigour, and efficiency of life fully and strongly Christian. When he remains faithful to the tenets of his faith, the apostolate of the sportsman consists in this."<sup>2</sup>

This affirmation – still so relevant for today – is echoed in a certain way by Pope Benedict XVI when he writes: "Among the various human activities is sport, itself awaiting to be illumined by God through Christ so that the values it expresses are purified and elevated both at the individual and collective level."<sup>3</sup>

In fact, sports organizations which are governed and motivated by

<sup>2</sup> PIUS XII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 20 May 1945 (our translation).

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Message to Cardinal Severino Poletto with occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympics in Turin, 29 November 2005.



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Christian principles should distinguish themselves by the following characteristics: by the intention to educate through sport; by dedicating energy and resources to forming its educators; by ample appreciation of sport's social dimension; by a proper hierarchy of values whose ultimate point of reference is God.

*Educational intentionality.* Historically, it is impossible to deny that there has been a longstanding relationship between education and physical exercise. In the classical period of Athens physical activity was an integral part of the *paideia*, the integral and demanding educational process that was imparted to the youth of ancient Greece. Sport in its modern form has its initial roots in 19<sup>th</sup> Century England thanks to the well known educator Thomas Arnold who instituted a pedagogical approach to sport at the prestigious *Rugby School*. In our time, the Second Vatican Council itself lists sporting activity among the various means that belong to the general heritage of humanity and which are of great influence in forming souls and moulding the person.<sup>4</sup> The Council Fathers express elsewhere the following desire that "...leisure [time] be used properly to relax, to fortify the health of soul and body [...] through sports activity which helps to preserve equilibrium of spirit even in the community, and to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races. Let Christians cooperate so that the cultural manifestations and collective activity characteristic of our time may be imbued with a human and a Christian spirit."<sup>5</sup>

Although sports activities primarily occur during one's leisure time, they are not superfluous activities. As Pope Paul VI observed, sport activities "must be a school of education and respect [...] a means of elevation of the entire person in their aesthetic, ethical, and religious components. In fact, when these are practiced in the right way, they are

<sup>4</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 4.

<sup>5</sup> IDEM, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61.

a fine school for the perfection of the human virtues, which are the irreplaceable foundation upon which to forge, with the help of God, the Christian virtues.<sup>6</sup> What are these human virtues? Pope Pius XII listed among others: loyalty that does not permit the use of subterfuges; docility and obedience to the rules that guide the exercise of teamwork; a spirit of self denial before the temptation to fraudulently seek your team's advantage; fidelity to one's commitment, modesty in victory, generosity towards the defeated, serenity before one's victors and adverse fortune, patience towards the immoderation of spectators, justice when highly competitive sport is linked to financial interests; as well as chastity and temperance which were already recommended in general by antiquity.<sup>7</sup>

An orientation that reflects the key principle of Christian anthropology, namely, the unity of the human person, is fundamental for sporting activities that seek the integral formation of the person in all of their dimensions, whether those physical aspects, or those that relate to the person's intelligence and moral conscience. But there is the risk that all of this will remain a dead letter if those who direct these organizations and sports programmes do not have this educational intentionality. And we know that when this educational scope is missing, these environments easily become a sort of "no-man's land" which is dominated by mere activism, with no formative dimension or purpose. Thus it is necessary to establish a type of educational alliance among the Catholic sport associations and the parents of these youth in order that the activities may be imbued with an approach that favours their overall development and reinforces the educational efforts of parents.

*Formation of the educators.* The predicament of how to restore the educational function to sports activity today is the question of the hour

<sup>6</sup> PAUL VI, Address to members of the soccer team *A.S. Roma*, 30 January 1974 (our translation).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. PIUS XII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 9 October 1955.

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and it places front and centre the urgent need of forming sports personnel in such a way that they can become true educators. Especially for the youth, what matters most is that these values that are spoken about are also incarnated in the lives of their educators. Thus, we can clearly see how necessary it is that the directors, coaches and sports staff are well equipped with the pedagogical skills that enable them to not only transmit mere technical skills but also seek to develop the cultural, social and moral components that also make up sport. It is also important that they have a vivid interest in their mission, a magnanimous spirit, and patient endurance. The same points also apply to the numerous parents and youth who volunteer their time to work within many of these sports associations and constitute, as is the case in countries like Italy, the very back-bone of the youth sporting movement.

Genuine sport raises interest and fosters a sense of belonging. Thus, one of sport's important functions relates directly to the difficulties that the youth face today. Sport can help give young people a sense of direction and purpose since many of them live in loneliness and a state of general disorder due to the disintegration of the family. In this regard, coaches and other sport personnel can be fundamental points of reference for the youth. Consequently, their presence is indispensable during the period of adolescence, when boys and girls tend to create a critical distance between themselves and their parents. It is often required that the sport educator assumes the role of an authoritative friend. This demands authenticity in both word and deed on the part of the educator and also a closeness to these children that is not simply limited to practice or to game time but extends to other facets of their lives. If it is to produce positive effects that endure in time, this closeness must take into account that the education offered is a free encounter and that Christian education itself is formation in true freedom.<sup>8</sup> In a word, it is

<sup>8</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants in the convention of the diocese of Rome, 11 June 2007.

a labour of love that requires much patience, trust and hope since the task of educating is a never-ending journey.

The above portrait of the figure of the Catholic sports educator helps us to see the challenges that are implied in forming a new generation of educators that have the stamina, motivation, and courage to go against the current, bringing to the most arid parts of sport a message of hope and giving the athletes the opportunity to improve themselves, not only perfecting their physical qualities, but also their spiritual qualities.

During his recent trip to the Czech Republic, the Holy Father, after recalling how the European encounter between the classical tradition and the Gospel had given birth to a concept of the human person and of society that was sensible to the presence of God, affirmed the following: “At the present crossroads of civilization, so often marked by a disturbing sundering of the unity of goodness, truth and beauty and the consequent difficulty in finding an acceptance of common values [...] of particular importance is the urgent task to encourage young Europeans with a formation that respects and nurtures their God-given capacity to transcend the very limits which are sometimes presumed to entrap them. In sports, the creative arts and academic pursuit, young people welcome the opportunity to excel. Is it not equally true that when presented with high ideals they will also aspire to moral virtue and a life of compassion and goodness?”<sup>9</sup> It is precisely this that the Church asks from its sport educators: to pursue with a greater purpose and sense of mission the goal of a more humane sport that may be a school of virtue and an instrument in the integral development of the person.

*Capitalizing on sports social building potential.* The Christian understanding of sport places it at the service of the human growth of the person. It cannot be denied that sporting activities, as other human

<sup>9</sup> IDEM, Address to civil and political authorities with members of the diplomatic corps, 26 September 2009.

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activities, are channels by which the human person can enter into contact with God. This is especially true when sports are approached within the broader horizon of the faith. Sport has a very social dimension which can favour community collaboration, friendship, solidarity and the sharing of such experiences as team work. Even in sport, all of these aspects provide a type of apprenticeship in “being Church” and constitute an antidote against the individualistic spirit that marks our modern epoch. As Cardinal George pointed out in his previously mentioned book, today’s society tends to forget that the human person is in relation to others, and the first and foremost relationship is one’s relationship with God. In fact, it is through this recognition that God exists that a person can relate properly to others: with our brothers and sisters in the Church and with our fellow citizens in society. On the contrary, a concept of the human person that does not take into account this fundamental rapport with God and with others is incomplete.

One other point should be made regarding the need to draw the youth nearer to the Church – young people, we might add, who are easily attracted to other things and to a life style that is far from the practice of the faith. Precisely in this world where people appear to have no need of God, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that “it is important that young people discover the beauty of faith, that it is beautiful to have a direction, that it is beautiful to have God as a friend who can truly tell us the essential things of life. This intellectual factor – the Holy Father added – must then be accompanied by an emotional and social factor, that is, by socialization in faith; because faith can only be fulfilled if it also has a body, and this involves human beings in their way of life. [...] However, given that social life has drifted away from faith [...] we must offer ways for a socialization of faith so that faith will form communities, offer vital spaces and convince people through a way of thought, affection and lively friendship.”<sup>10</sup> Sport that is organ-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Address to the clergy of the diocese of Aosta, 25 July 2005.

ized and carried out within the ecclesial context of an association of Christian inspiration can certainly be a valid means for a “socialization of the faith”, that is, a place where the youth can walk with Christ together with others, forming part of the Church. The sports associations can play a precious role in the work of an initial evangelization. In light of this, with all due respect to the universal dimension of sport as an activity open to all, nonetheless these Catholic associations need to take care to safeguard their own proper identity.

This educational potential of physical activity is not to be seen as a burden placed upon sport, but rather, that which can make sense of it and lead it to its human fullness. While it is true that we cannot speak of such a thing as a “Catholic sport”, it is just as true that one cannot affirm across the board that Christianity has nothing to say to the world of sport nor that sport cannot receive anything from the Church. Today, the world of sport is characterized by a search for both quality and meaning. Because of this, Catholic sport associations, parish recreation centres, and all those who run these, should – as the servant of God John Paul II hoped – “be in the front ranks in this area, in order to plan a special apostolate adapted to the needs of athletes [...] to promote sports which can create the conditions of a life rich in hope”.<sup>11</sup>

*A proper hierarchy of values whose ultimate point of reference is God.* Certainly a prerogative of Catholic sport associations is that of promoting a more humane sport. From the very outset, pontiffs have raised awareness of the Church’s twofold mission of safeguarding sport from degradation and of enlightening the sport’s culture with the light that only the Lord can give. As Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI tells us: “I would naturally add that in the end, the central point of orientation in every culture is God, God present in Christ. [...] A culture without a personal knowledge of God and without a knowledge of the

<sup>11</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Speech to participants of the Sport, Faith and Ethics Convention of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 25 November 1989.

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face of God in Christ is a culture that could be destructive, because it would have no knowledge of the necessary ethical bearings. In this regard, I think, we really have a profound cultural and human mission, which opens people to all the wealth of the culture of our time but also provides the criterion, the discernment to test what is true culture and what might become anti-culture.”<sup>12</sup>

In order to elevate sport and to be a leaven of Christianity, Catholic sport associations must not only propose a Christian way of practicing sport from within, it must also become an exemplary model for others in a field where the values of the spirit are easily neglected and those of the body are over exalted. Along these lines, these words that Pope Benedict XVI addressed to top athletes also can be applied to the Catholic mission in sport: “Many look up to you, not only for your noteworthy sporting achievements, but also for the virtues and values that are characteristic of your sport: perseverance, determination, spirit of sacrifice, internal and external discipline, attention to others, team work, solidarity, justice, courtesy, and the recognition of one’s own limits, and still others. These same virtues also come into play in a significant way in daily life and need to be continually exercised and practiced ...”<sup>13</sup> It is up to Christian athletes to embody these attitudes and convictions. Leading by example is especially helpful for the youth of today who are immersed in a society that is in a continual state of flux and manifests more and more the loss of values and a general disorientation.

The Apostle Paul used images from competitive sport as metaphors for the spirit of courage, discipline, and the rigorous demands that a life according to the Gospel requires and also for recalling our ultimate goal (cf. *1 Cor* 9: 24-25). It can also serve as a reminder for all of those who are engaged in Catholic sports – parents, directors, coaches, volunteer staff and even the athletes –, to put forth their best effort in

<sup>12</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address to members of the clergy of Rome, 26 February 2009.

<sup>13</sup> IDEM, Address to the Austrian National Alpine Ski team, 6 October 2007.

*Card. Stanisław Ryłko*

promoting a new season for sport which is truly human, rich in Christian values, ever more attentive to the authentic elevation of the person, and all the more committed to the Church's mission of evangelization. In fact, to reach the people of our time, we must actively go out to encounter them in the various facets of everyday life and make good use of every opportunity afforded us.

The seminar speakers, be it through the more pensive conferences or the personal testimonies of the panel discussions, provided us with a deep and rich reflection on the various opportunities that the Catholic sport associations offer in furthering the Church's mission of evangelization, especially among the youth in this historic moment marked by an "educational emergency".

Thus, it is our hope that the publication of these proceedings on the specific mission and identity of Catholic sport associations may serve to encourage all those who are engaged in directing Catholic youth sports to take full advantage of the opportunities that these activities provide in assisting the pastoral care of youth throughout the world.

STANISŁAW Card. RYŁKO  
*President*  
*Pontifical Council for the Laity*



## **Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the occasion of the International Sport Seminar**

To my Venerable Brother  
Cardinal Stanisław Ryłko  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

**W**ith real pleasure I send a cordial greeting to you, to the Secretary, to the collaborators of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, to the representatives of the Catholic institutions that work in the world of sport, to those in charge of international and national sports associations and to all the participants in the Study Seminar on the theme: “Sport, education, faith: towards a new season for Catholic sports associations“, organized by the “Church and sport” section of this Dicastery.

Sports have considerable educational potential in the context of youth and, for this reason, great importance not only in the use of leisure time but also in the formation of the person. The Second Vatican Council listed sports among the educational resources which belong to the common patrimony of humanity and facilitate moral development and human formation (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 4).

If this is true for sports activities in general, it is particularly true for sports in parish youth centres, schools and sports associations, with the aim of assuring the new generations a human and Christian formation.

As I recently had the opportunity to recall, it should not be forgotten that “sports, practised with enthusiasm and an acute ethical sense, especially for youth become a training ground for healthy competition and physical improvement, a school of formation in the human and spiritual values, a privileged means for personal growth and contact with society” (*Address to participants in the World Swimming championships*, 1 August 2009).

Through sports, the ecclesial community contributes to the forma-

tion of youth, providing a suitable environment for their human and spiritual growth. In fact, when sports initiatives aim at the integral development of the person and are managed by qualified and competent personnel, they provide a useful opportunity for priests, religious and lay people to become true and proper educators and teachers of life for the young. In our time when an urgent need to educate the new generations is evident it is therefore necessary for the Church to continue to support sports for youth, making the most of their positive aspects also at competitive levels such as their capacity for stimulating competitiveness, courage and tenacity in pursuing goals. However, it is necessary to avoid every trend that perverts the nature of sports by recourse to practices that can even damage the body, such as doping. As part of a coordinated, formative effort, Catholic directors, staff and workers must consider themselves expert guides for youth, helping each of them to develop their athletic potential without obscuring those human qualities and Christian virtues that make for a fully mature person.

In this perspective, I find it particularly useful that this Third Seminar of the “Church and sport” section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is focusing on the specific mission and Catholic identity of sports associations, schools and recreation centres managed by the Church.

I warmly hope that it will help people welcome the many valuable opportunities that sports can offer in the pastoral care of youth. As I wish you a productive meeting, I assure you of my prayers, invoking upon the participants and upon all those involved in promoting healthy sports activities especially in Catholic institutions the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the maternal protection of Mary. With these sentiments, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From the Vatican, 3 November 2009

BENEDICT XVI

## CONFERENCES



## **The Christian presence in sports in the light of the Church's teachings**

Bishop CARLO MAZZA\*

### PREMISE

This reflection limits itself only and exclusively to the linguistic, cultural, anthropological, and pedagogical expressions found in the annals of the Pontifical Magisterium. Thus it is a very specialized contribution, limited in its scope of research. My considerations reflect a sympathetic interpretation of the word “pontifical” and not a “critical approach” in the scientific meaning of this expression.

I would like to suggest that those who seek a more exhaustive study of this theme refer to the various texts that have already been published and which constitute a starting point and basic patrimony from which they may draw light, orientation, and practical ideas for their consideration. The foreseen risk seems to be that of being repetitive, or of having to start again at the top as if we were only at the beginning. However, it should be noted there is already a widely defused knowledge of the pontifical texts which are progressively enriching the discussion in this field. There is also willingness by some to consider these texts as foundational and to such a point that they have allowed them to be interiorly absorbed into their mode of thought.

As for my reflection today, it should be immediately observed that the present moment is marked by much confusion. Thus, there is great need for a new season of Catholic sports associations that can overcome

\* Bishop of Fidenza, Member of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, for many years he was head of the pastoral office for Tourism, Leisure and Sport of the Italian Bishops' Conference, besides being an Olympic chaplain.

the present cultural and organization fragmentation by establishing itself as a unified and unique movement. This is something that is essential if it wants to distinguish itself amidst the vast world of sports media and the complex territorial realities.

We seek our objective within the vast Magisterium of the Pontiffs regarding sport, where we are looking for some basic elements that justify and ground the efforts of Christians who, by means of association, are freely engaged in the world of sport whether at the ecclesial or civic level.

Our theme will be developed in two parts. The first will seek to give ample reason why Christians should be engaged in the so-called “sporting movement”. The second will touch upon the motivations for “re-launching” this same engagement in post modern society and within the Church’s pastoral care.

## 1. REASONS FOR THIS ENGAGEMENT

Throughout the last century, while sports have grown to the point of becoming a mass phenomenon, the Church has focused its attention to them in an ever more concentrated way. With conviction, precision and foresight, the Church has invited Christians to be a part of these activities in order to favour a significant and determining presence in sporting activities that is capable of delineating their nature, purpose and values.

This is a magisterial invitation to link faith with social action. This is to be accomplished by authentic efforts that reflect the Catholic social paradigm that is implemented in society by means of intermediaries, spurred on by the principle of subsidiarity as found in the social doctrine of the Church.

In this prospective, the “voice” of the Church creates a structured way of thinking about the sporting phenomenon. First of all, from a

“Christian” prospective, it seeks to point out all of the positive aspects of sport which favour the development of the person and of society. In second place, and in a more concrete way, it seeks to promote those structures and establish organizations that are competent and capable of rendering the “voice” of the Church effective within the sporting environment.

To summarize our thoughts so far, the true and urgent question that is being raised at this time of the rapid expansion of sport can be put thus: “How can we give sport a constructive and viable ‘educational and social’ purpose which prevents it from being distorted?” We all know that sports can either be helpful or detrimental for the younger generations with respect to the effects it may bear on their ethical and religious choices.

This question reflects the understandable and natural concern of the Church with enlightening those educators – with both theoretical and practical knowledge – who form the youth through Church-affiliated sports programmes. In all this, the Church has sought, on one hand, to avoid allowing Catholic youth from being dragged into a phenomenon that was becoming more and more monopolized by public education and government programmes, and thus causing the loss of the most promising energy of the Church. On the other hand, the Catholic Church sought to strengthen and expand the spiritual and ethical base of sporting activities across the board since they risked being tainted by a materialist ideology.

In a general way, but with sufficient arguments, we now focus on three guidelines given by the Church that specifically refer to the importance and the urgency of the active presence of Catholics in sports.

### *1.1. Christian principles liberate sport*

Above all, the Church’s conviction that Christian principles render sport more true, more in conformity with its nature, and more helpful

to society, in as much as they respect the athlete's integral development, now seems evident.

In the post war period, however, the most enlightening and complete papal discourse in this respect, with surprising points of reasoning that are absolutely innovative, was pronounced by Pius XII in an audience with the Catholic *Centro Sportivo Italiano* (CSI) in October of 1955.<sup>1</sup> The Holy Father offered a detailed examination of the various aspects of sporting activity that ranged from the technical order to that of the psychological and spiritual while placing all of these points within the context of safeguarding the dignity of the person and in directing all of its aims in line with the ultimate good of sport itself.

To better understand the novelty of Pope Pacelli's words, it might be helpful to consider the clear analysis offered by an eye-witness at this event, that of Giovanni Battista Montini (who would later become Pope Paul VI). In fact, Pope Montini, ten years later, recalls in an autobiographical way, the circumstances of that speech as he bears testimony to his predecessor's "great interest, benevolence and kindness, most bold and provocative support [of sport] that astonished and endeared his audience with his contemporary elucidation and vividness of expression; we, being employed in the daily service of the Apostolic See at the side of the Holy Father, were witnesses who were touched and moved by his solicitude for your well established institution".<sup>2</sup>

At the end of the gymnastic presentation in Saint Peter's Square that was organized in occasion of the tenth anniversary of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, Pius XII cordially expressed his gratitude for the "joy of spending this moment with them and of admiring this superb spectacle of the fresh energy of youth, offered by their throngs of athletes" which, as he noted with foresight, seemed "to represent all Christian youth".<sup>3</sup> In

<sup>1</sup> Cf. PIUS XII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 9 October 1955.

<sup>2</sup> PAUL VI, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 20 March 1965 (our translation).

<sup>3</sup> PIUS XII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 9 October 1955 (our translation).



such a way he highlights the theme of the pastoral care of Christian youth which is particularly dear to him, placing this at the centre of the attention of Catholic educators and formators.

In his address, Pius XII upheld a basic tenet for a Christian vision of sport, that is, the need to “draw in from the Christian principles the motivations and norms that are capable of safeguarding sport from the dire straits of materialism and of elevating it to the realms that are worthy of a spiritual and immortal soul”.<sup>4</sup> From this it can be seen how the Christian faith, far from being estranged or indifferent from the subject of sport, must be directly involved in sport and even become that which gives it meaning and authenticity by safeguarding the dignity of the person and favouring its inherent capacity for advancing human perfection.

It is worth noting how the Holy Father, with acute historical and social intuition, is solicitous to contextualize his reflections within the present state of affairs. He states: “With the arrival of this present century, sport has taken on such proportions [...] that it constitutes a typical phenomenon of our modern day society. This growing importance generated, in turn, problems and debate in the sphere of education, religious practice, morality ... which the Church cannot ignore, as She is always called to promote an organized response to these new demands”.<sup>5</sup>

In light of this, it is necessary that the Church strongly insist upon the presence of Christians within the sporting movement. By means of their active testimony and enhanced by their competence and know-how, Christians impact sporting activity by enriching it with “natural and Christian virtues, without which sport would not be able to develop to the full, but would inevitably be trapped in a materialism, closed in on itself”.<sup>6</sup>

From this ethical perspective, it seems necessary to employ initia-

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

tives that are directed at “saving” sport. According to the different aspects that pertain to each particular sphere of sport, these initiatives necessarily depend on the proactive, virtuous, and effective effort of Christian laity, who are called to be credible and persuasive intermediaries in the world of sport.

Consequently, the Pope openly indicated that one of the tasks, among others, entrusted to Catholics who belong to sport associations, is that of “being a Christian influence in the world of sport”; this expressed both an immediate goal for that moment as well as a “task for the future”.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the ideal that is to be sought is that of an efficacious and ongoing “presence” in the sporting activity of today and tomorrow.

### *1.2. The aims of the Church regarding sport*

Secondly, we see Pope Pius XII’s intention of clarifying the Church’s real aims in promoting a Christian presence in the field of athletic activities that is expressed and transmitted in the public sphere with a language proper to that of sport.

The Church’s concern is typically manifested as a prudential added value that is capable of correctly appreciating human activities and instilling in them their proper dignity. The Holy Father immediately clarified that with this enthusiasm in establishing a Christian sport association, the Church “does not seek to have a monopoly in determining activities”. Rather, it seeks that which “completes and integrates what is missing from many ideas, activities, and actions that at times, either out of excessiveness, defectiveness, or because they lack the foundation of an ideal, are not able to meet, and at times are even contrary to, the standards of Christian dignity [...]”.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, it is not a matter of distorting the essence of sport but of completing what might be lacking in the area of values. In fact, we can see how the Church is propelled to action by ethical and value-based motivations to accomplish a mission that is both complementary and supplementary and not out of a quest to dominate or “kidnap” sport for its own purposes. In the final analysis, the Church’s utmost concern is that of the human person in his and her completeness.

Pius XII made it clear that the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, by operating within the world of sport, “wants to be a model *ad extra*, in a field where it is easy to neglect the highest values of the spirit”; so much so that he insisted emphatically: “You must be Christian leaven there in the stadium”.<sup>9</sup>

The “motivations” for the Church’s call for specific action and a Christian presence in sport now seem clear. This explicit encouragement seeks to render sport worthy of man and his vocation. In fact, Pope John XXIII is very frank and to the point: “The Church wants to have an influence in sports, as a designated task that forms part of the multiple facets of her mission. The Church not only can but it must take into consideration the world of sport”.<sup>10</sup>

### *1.3. Sport at the service of the whole person*

The Pontifical Magisterium reveals an unavoidable “anthropological” concern for the world of sport: that of safeguarding the human person whose multiple dimensions and faculties are engaged in sporting activity. For, unless people are warned in a critical way of the “all-absorbing” fascination of sport, the hidden risk of being totally drawn into this activity without any reservations will always remain.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> JOHN XXIII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 13 December 1959 (our translation).

It should be recalled that the authoritative voice of the Magisterium is not exercised by way of general exhortation but is realized by motivating hesitant Catholics in specific circumstances to be more active in safeguarding sport from its possible deviations and in preserving the person from all risks that threaten his or her dignity and integrity.

The Magisterium's aim in this field can be understood as finalized towards highlighting and developing those human and spiritual values of sport that are within the horizon of the person. Far from reducing itself to mere moral admonitions, the words of the Church are a stimulus for the faithful to exercise its care of the world of sport since it directly touches, involves and engages the complex faculties of the person.

Almost as if to give example, the Pontifical Magisterium focuses on enumerating specific faculties of the person when it explains that “educating through sport will seek to develop the faculties of the intellect and will, especially in athletic competition”. Both coincide in the active formation of the person: “The first seeks to train the youth in their reflection and reasoning capacities, of learning how to conserve their energy and to grasp the strategy and tactics of their opponent”. The second trains them in “the exercise of a thorough and methodical preparation, in perseverance after a loss, in endurance before the stronger adversary, in tolerance in the face of set-backs, in valour and in self-betterment”.<sup>11</sup>

Here also, the Church's interest is in defending the anthropological truth of the person that would be compromised if he allowed himself to be overcome by a sport that tended to become an idol. In fact “sport must not be an end in itself that degenerates into the cult of the pure material. Rather, it must be at the service of the whole person”.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> PIUS XII, Address to the CSI, 9 October 1955 (our translation).

<sup>12</sup> IDEM, Address to the International Association of Sports Press, 11 November 1951 (our translation).

As we know, the world of sport is, above all, a world that belongs to youth. If one intends to offer young people a program of integral formation through sport, it is necessary that the sporting activities be directed with great responsibility and care. Consequently, “the noble enterprise of offering youth a moral and Christian association that makes use of the indisputable capacity of sport to favour an authentic spiritual life undoubtedly merits much praise”.<sup>13</sup>

From this there emerges the opportunity for Catholics to also be present and active within the international sport associations. In this way, they can “make their voice heard more and more in the heart of the great governing bodies of sport in order to remind them not only of sport’s educational value but also of its proper subordination to those spiritual values that alone provide the foundation for a true humanism”.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. CONDITIONS FOR SPORT’S REVITALIZATION

From what has been stated thus far, we can deduce some key points of orientation for the future. It appears evident that the primary and ultimate reason for a Christian presence in sport consists in activating the “principles” derived from Christ’s Incarnation and redemptive sacrifice. These can be succinctly translated into the field of sport as that of safeguarding, guiding, and developing the full potential of the person, whatever their stage in life.

Thus, the highest value of the person – within the context of Christian anthropology – applies not only to sport’s competitive and amateur levels, but also is to be constantly and adequately enforced at the coaching and organizational levels. This is the principle of truth for sport and is the substantial and effective reason of the Church’s – and especially the laity’s – engagement therein.

<sup>13</sup> JOHN XXIII, Address to FICEP, 29 March 1961 (our translation).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

I will now limit myself to some simple observations of a practical nature with regard to endorsing and sustaining a new season of Christian engagement in the world of sport.

### 2.1. *The person and only the person*

Without a doubt, given today's cultural climate and modes of behaviour, the Church's teaching regarding the centrality of the person in sport continues to be seen as something irreproachable and most necessary to sustain at all levels of sport as a *conditio sine qua non* that upholds the very meaning of sport itself.

In face of the threats of a practical nihilism and a frenetic consumerism, it is urgent to place once again at the centre of sporting activity the person, in his most valuable condition: "man in his entirety".<sup>15</sup> This precise and authoritative affirmation of the beloved Pontiff is a most determining and equivocal expression that deserves to be applied to all spheres of sporting activity.

Even today, while we are besieged by so many perils, sport continues to be considered as "an important moment for guaranteeing the balance and total well-being of the person".<sup>16</sup> It goes without saying that this principle declaration has need of being sustained and supported by a auxiliary program that should be known and practiced in accordance with the needs of the wide scale youth population, and the prerequisites of health, development and social aggregation.

For this purpose, we have need of an alliance between sport and the person that would be a Christian effort. Based upon their competencies and professional skills and made concrete through the vast network of connections, this alliance would be characterized by a solid spirituality

<sup>15</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), 17 January 1985.

<sup>16</sup> IDEM, Address to Track and Field World Championship, 2 September 1987.

that is both personal and communitarian and a true “passion” for the human person. Realistically, such an effort would have to be coupled with the necessary financial resources, while always being attentive not to allow it to degrade into a mere exchange of commercial goods. Sometimes, in fact, monetary intervention is necessary; nonetheless, this would be guided by basic ethical criteria of absolute transparency and exemplary management.

## *2.2. The “nurturing environment” of sporting associations*

Consequently, the importance of directing efforts towards the nurturing environment that sport provides becomes more evident. The microcosm of sport constitutes a living environment where different experiences of life intersect, are developed, are confronted, and are harmonized, whether those of the athlete or those who accompany him or her (*i.e.* trainer, technician, doctor...) or even those of the fan. It is a sort of laboratory of important human relations that, whether positive or negative in their result, are influential in the human development of the person.

If one wants to have a positive influence upon the character of youth, it is necessary to reformulate the identity of the role of the adult who stands alongside and accompanies these young athletes. In fact, the youth men and women “who can convey to them the zest for challenge, a sense of discipline, the courage to be honest and the joy of unselfishness”.<sup>17</sup>

In spite of its contradictions and negative aspects, the world of sport teaches young people many “lessons of life”; it is a place where they can look up to adults, make judgments about reality, and project their lives toward the future. Although it may be challenging, Christians are called to consider the world of sport as “a living community”. As John Paul II noted: “in recent years it has continued to grow even more as one of the characteristic phenomena of the modern era” and is

<sup>17</sup> IDEM, Address at Rome's Olympic Stadium, 31 May 1990.

“almost a ‘sign of the times’ capable of interpreting humanity’s new needs and new expectations”.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.3. *A new humanism in sport*

Lastly, amidst the anthropological and socio-cultural changes that are characterized by the fragmentation of social relations and the loss of a sense of belonging, there arises the need for a new humanism which will enable modern man to find himself anew, his purpose in life and a sense of solidarity and communion with the entire human race.<sup>19</sup>

This call for a new humanism inaugurates boundless horizons. It is an appeal to establish new and meaningful relationships and a way of living and behaviour that are inspired by an ethic of solidarity, fraternity, and responsibility; it is the life of a “new person” that knows how to harmonize local values with the global, discipline of the spirit with the corporal, and the person with society.

Sport possesses within itself a charism of unity that is valid for persons, cultures, and languages if it is proposed and developed in a way that is authentic, demanding and global. Of course, sport *per se* is not the whole of man. But it does have the potential to magnetize humanity’s diversities and differences in a dynamic and unifying way that is at once complex, satisfying, and gratifying without being oppressive, fundamentalist or monocultural.

It is precisely sport’s “flexibility” that enables it to offer manifold and multiform opportunities for people of every walk of life, while maintaining its ludic and perfection-seeking essence, inasmuch as it respects the person’s inviolability, integral purpose, and dignity.

<sup>18</sup> IDEM, Homily during the Jubilee of Sport, 29 October 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 19.



## CONCLUSION

The Church has always expressed a “natural” sympathy for the sporting phenomenon. It readily recognizes the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being that is benefited from it as the reason and motivation of this activity, and as such deems it an authentic instrument in the perfection of the human person.

Consequently, the Church has always sustained and does not cease to sustain and encourage – all the more so today – the organized efforts on the part of the Catholic laity so that the complex panorama of sport be monitored and be always placed at the service of youth and of all persons, including the weak, the disadvantaged and the handicapped, within an overall vision of life that is well-ordered, orientated toward the common good, and capable of recognizing the marvellous design of the love of God for all of humanity.



# Sport and virtue: integral education of the person

MICHAEL MCNAMEE\*

## INTRODUCTION: SPORT, VIRTUE AND THE MODERN WORLD

In Mediaeval Europe, the Roman Catholic Church was the dominant social and political institution as well as the seat of learning. The vast majority of the populace, however, were illiterate and so the possibility of their following or even understanding its principle ceremony, Holy Mass, conducted in Latin is unthinkable. One fairly widespread way of reducing the mysteriousness of religious morality was the enactment of morality plays. The precise details of this cultural practice is unknown, so I offer here the merest sketch to make the point I wish to at the beginning of this lecture on the ethics of sports. Around this time, travelling circuses not only brought entertainment to the masses, but typically included in their show a morality play. Here good and evil were played out on a stage where what was at stake was the very soul of the principal character: everyman. Though crudely analogous, it is my contention that sports, among other things, now fulfil this role or function on a global scale. In a world where the enlightenment myth of shared morality is assaulted on every side by anthropologists, cultural commentators and philosophers alike, sports offer a cognitively simple canvass of good and evil writ large in the everyday contexts of the arena, the court, the field, and of course the back pages of our newspapers and the screens of our televisions.

Just as the moralising point of the medieval plays was not dramati-

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cally dense, one needs neither complex cognitive nor moral vocabularies to understand cheating and courage, nor fair and foul play, in the varied fora of sport. Thus, sports offer us one of the best vehicles for moral education in the light of the clash of moral cultures that the present world throws up. But I can only briefly indicate what that large thesis might look like in this short essay.<sup>1</sup>

### SPORTS AND VIRTUE ETHICS

I maintain that in and through sports we can develop, promote, and ramify the virtues. They have sometimes been referred to, rather aptly, as moral laboratories.<sup>2</sup> I do not mean to say that sports are some kind of universal panacea as sports lovers sometimes maintain, merely that they are social sites rich in opportunities for ethical development. This sounds like a noble but nostalgic belief. But what does it mean? Virtue-based theories are commonly described as *aretaic* since their exposition is often traced back to the Ancient Greeks for whom virtue, or excellence, is translated as *arete*. Its first substantial expression is found in Socratic philosophy, but it is Aristotle who couches his writings on living well (or flourishing, to use the standard interpretation) in terms of practical wisdom supported by the well-disposed and relatively settled set of character traits that are typically called “virtues”. After him, as is well known, St Thomas Aquinas developed his specifically theological account of the virtues, the confluence of which largely forms our understanding of Christian virtues.

Why, it might be asked, ought sports coaches to reach back to antiquity in an effort to understand how they should coach or teach

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account, cf. my book, *Sport, Virtues and Vices: Morality Plays*, London 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. PARRY, “Physical Education, Justification and the National Curriculum” in *Physical Education Review* n.11 (2), 1988, 106-118; cf. also G. MCFEE, *Sport, Rules and Values*, London 2004.

better, or to better mould the action and character of young athletes? An answer to this question is partly revealed by a consideration of the nature of virtue as well as a consideration of the nature of sports contests. Let me take the former here, and only make passing reference to the latter. And even with this restricted aim I will talk almost exclusively of the coach and athlete in relation, largely ignoring other social and political institutions which are clearly implicated in the development, organisation and promotion of sports.

Sports talk is littered with reference to the achievement of excellence. So too is virtue ethics. *Arete*, in ancient Greek, meant just that: excellence. *Arete* could mean the excellence of anything. A standard example often used to explain this is that of a knife. A knife is an excellent one when it fulfils its purposes of cutting. A good knife should be sharp; its sharpness should be consistent over time; it should not be too flexible or it may cut the user as well as their food; it should not be so small or so large that it cannot be gripped firmly in the hand of its user; and so on. In human terms, a virtue, then, is a way of being humanly excellent. We do not think of people as being born with excellence but rather of learning to become an excellent human being. A human virtue then, is an acquired human quality. And sports, as I have said, present a rich arena for such acquisition. The Oxford literary scholar, author and Christian educator, C.S. Lewis, has given an excellent account of the nature of virtue and he used sports as the context for the purposes of illustration: “What you mean by a good player is the man whose eye and muscles and nerves have been so trained by making innumerable good shots that they can now be relied upon ... They have a certain tone or quality which is there even when he is not playing ... In the same way a man who perseveres in doing just actions gets in the end a certain quality of character. Now it is that quality rather than the particular actions that we mean when we talk of virtue.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *Mere Christianity*, New York 1977, 77.

What he offers is a dispositional account of virtue. A wine glass is brittle by disposition, so it will smash if I drop it; its nature is fragile. Human dispositions are more complex. We say that the courageous person seeks to achieve a valuable end in the face of danger or fear. And to call a person courageous is to say that they are typically so; that they are by nature disposed to courageous action in normal circumstances. Well, that is not quite accurate. It is better to say that a courageous person is by second nature disposed to act courageously. Now if we are to say that virtues like courage are acquired human qualities, we must say at least a little about how they are acquired. Here are but a few points that can be surmised from Aristotle regarding concepts such as initiation, emulation and habituation.

In the early stages of the development of ethically sound character, habit formation is critical. Practice does not make perfect, as parents and grandparents are apt to say. Rather, practice makes permanent, a point observed by Aristotle long before the psychologist's remark became a commonplace. He writes: 'It makes no small difference then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference.'<sup>4</sup>

Richard Peters put this point beautifully when he remarked that "the palace of reason is entered through the courtyard of habit".<sup>5</sup> Now the end point of secular moral education within a liberal framework is the development of rational autonomy which will entail moral autonomy; reasoning one's way to the right course of action free of external influences. Yet it scarcely takes an educator to point out that rational autonomy is not in the possession of the young, and takes more than enough time to flower in adulthood. It is therefore, the acquisition of good habits that we are crucially after in general, and in particular in sport. The pedagogical potential of sports as a moral laboratory rests

<sup>4</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. II, I; 1103b, 22-5.

<sup>5</sup> R. PETERS, *Ethics and Education*, London 1966, 314.

precariously on habituation. I say this because the habits that are fostered by the sports coach are as good and as bad as the coach himself. Children perceive quickly the dissonance between word and action. “Do as I *say* not as I *do*” is a poor – though not entirely useless – moral dictum often used by parents, educators and coaches. As the Duc de la Rochefoucauld once remarked, hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue. The coach with bad habits who exhorts young athletes is to be preferred to the coach who demands his or her players to cheat, foul, or spoil sports. But children fasten upon other habits of the coach: who they praise or chastise; who they select or put on the bench. More than this they focus on adverbial qualities too: how the coach praises or chastises; the language that they use; the manner in which they select and pull players from the field of play, and so on. His or her manners and actions which are sometimes deliberated and sometimes not, also have an influence on the habit formation of youths who have a keen eye on the distribution of reward and punishment. So, for example, long before children can theorise justice they can exclaim with righteous indignation “that’s not fair!” at the privileging of a team-mate over them for no perceived good reason.

It is true that youths model their behaviour, language, choices, postures, and so on, on the coach or sports star, emulating them within and beyond the contexts of sports. These processes of emulation (loosely: following role models) and identification (whom do we see ourselves in the light of) are not a fully rational affair. The beginning of moral education in general, or moral apprenticeship in sport in particular, is necessarily heteronymous. Children are literally at the mercy of those who are entrusted with their care and development in and through sports.

It is important to note that this process of initiation occurs over time. There may be *Gestalt* shifts – where learners make a sportive and moral leap in their progress – but the general picture is slower and less dramatic. The British philosopher of education, Ray Elliott, once gave a beautiful account of the phenomenological character of initiation and

personal development within a practice that is richly suggestive for sports: “ a child at school finds a subject attractive, takes delight in it, and begins to look forward to the lessons in which it is taught. The subject seems to welcome his attention, his work pleases his teacher, and he comes to think of himself as ‘good at’ the subject. It becomes ‘his subject’. During its lessons time passes with a strange swiftness. He believes it to be ‘better’ than other subjects, and is prepared to give up other pleasures because absorption in his subject pleases him still more. Perhaps he develops a passion for it, and begrudges time spent on anything else. In due course it dawns on the student that his enthusiastic interest in his subject is not enough. There are standards which have to be met, and to meet them he has to develop skills and abilities which he did not originally associate with his subject. He also has to do a good deal of work which seems to be commonly like drudgery. Pleasures do not come easily now, but he finds fulfilment in trying to satisfy the demands his subject makes upon him. He has become devoted to its disciplines and feels at times that he has been enlisted in its service ”.<sup>6</sup>

This story is very much in keeping with Aristotelian ideas of good living: first we pursue and repeat that which is pleasurable coming only to pursue the honourable only later, after (as it were) one has been enlisted or initiated into a certain virtue-laden conception of the practice as a worthwhile activity. A key point of the ethical development of children as they become youths (in what we might call the intermediate stage between heteronomy and autonomy), when they attempt to explore the limits of their bodies, identity and values, is the exemplars they choose to emulate. Clearly at this time their character is in transition. In the right circumstances children and youth learn to adopt attitudes less egoistically driven and come to care as well for other’s interests and needs. Here the knowing acceptance of the rules

<sup>6</sup> R. ELLIOTT, “ Education, the love of one’s subject and the love of truth ” in the Proceedings of the *British Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, (1974) Vol. 8 (1): 135-47.



of sport can play an important role in curbing excessive egoism. Games are contracts, and the players must fulfil their role as contestants. Crucially, youth is also a time for the formation of emotional sensibilities that are cognitively grounded. In this stage of development, moral emotions such as regret, shame, guilt as well as pride and loyalty come to be thought of as appropriate or inappropriate responses to situations and acts. Typically, these responses come to form patterns of more or less stable perception, emotion and deliberation. But they ought always to be grounded in right reasons of course. To act virtuously is indeed to act from a settled character that sees and judges things properly. But this is not the whole story. Nevertheless, as Aristotle remarked, to be virtuous is to feel the right emotions at the right time, to the right degree and in relation to the right objects. Thus emotional sensibility is part of the fuller model of virtue development, and it can only come with time and immersion into sports contexts where there is a strong moral atmosphere or ethos; where ethical considerations are a basic ingredient and not merely the icing on the cake.

In formal terms, moral exhortation and instruction will of course be critical in youth sports. Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the value of the things learnt while – in the locker room, or the parking lot – we are not explicitly coaching or teaching. The sociologists of education refer to this phenomenon as the “hidden curriculum” and it is a powerful shaper of the values and attitudes of young learners. Two further points are particularly noteworthy. The first relates to the powerful, though old-fashioned, notion of a role model I noted above. In Aristotelian thought, understanding the right thing to do, feel, and see is a product of our learning from wiser souls (*phronimos*) whose grasp of practical judgement (*phronesis*) or wisdom is more reliable and sure-footed than our own. But the adverbial quality of our action is crucial for it to be considered virtuous and not merely a simulacra or false veneer of such: “actions, then, are called just and temperate when they

are such as the just or the temperate man would do; but it is not the man who does these that is just and temperate, but the man who also does them *as* just and temperate men do. It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just man is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate man; without doing these no-one would have a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy”.<sup>7</sup>

This is why philosophers have stressed that sports can be an important arena for the development of virtue: by providing, in a very public way, occasions for good and evil. Creating relatively controlled, and sometimes contrived situations, we can afford opportunities not merely for sporting youths to “try out” moral action, but to think and feel it out too. It is rare, in sports at least, that one does not know the right thing to do. Doing it out of the right motivation and emotional states is what is to be aimed for. But we cannot swallow Aristotle hook, line and sinker as they say. Some points of caution need to be registered here. First, we must acknowledge the situated-ness of Aristotelian thought. It is clear that the practices of ancient Greece would be misogynistic by modern lights. For sports to become sites of moral education, no naive revival project is required. Aristotle talks of the good and wise ‘man’ and often of the ‘great-souled man’ when he is referring to acts of manly courage and nobility. Of course, our interpretation needs to be revisionist in this regard. The Athenian society of his day was class and ethnically biased (and he knew this well being an outsider: a Macedonian) and it is no historical insight to say that it was deeply sexist too. Nonetheless,

<sup>7</sup> ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. II, V; 1105-21.

his emphasis upon the absolute necessity of habituated action in the moral development of the young is as apt today as it was then. Often, perhaps mostly, we act according to our early habituation and only thereafter according to our reflective appreciation of what good people would do in such situations. Blind rule-following observance is in a clear sense not the same thing as following a rule wholeheartedly, where one's actions are predicated on a conception and dedication to do the right thing by being the right kind of person. Nonetheless, behaviour in youth sport is characterised by uncertainty and unreliability. Children and youths come gradually to resist their egoistic motivations and values under the appropriate guidance and support. Developing mature and reflexive attitudes in relation to their evolving value-scheme is a task that must often take place in relation to success or failure in spaces on and beyond the field of play. Some refer to these instances, rather beautifully I think, as “teachable moments” to be seized upon as precious opportunities.

Character training in this intermediate phase of ethical development, characteristic of youth sports, helps our evolving moral agent to reliably (re)produce the right acts at the right times while coming to feel appropriately about them. It is a mistake, however, to think of this habituation as mere rote learning in the way that early skill-psychologists believed we learned a set motor skill by constant repetition. Rather, like a schema, one learns the generalised responses to situations and then one must refine them coming ever more sensitive or fine-tuned to the particularities of each situation.

This youthful stage of life and moral development is often summed up by the phrase that one has learnt ‘the that’ of moral action. One appreciates that one must act according to the dictates of virtue. In order fully to mature, to reach the final stage of Aristotelian moral development, moral agents must also comprehend ‘the why’. As Tobin puts it: “Acquiring the why in ethics will help [those in the intermediate stage] to overcome the gaps, unclarities, and straightforward

mistakes in his moral awareness....”<sup>8</sup> But that of course is the project of a life time, not merely one for youth sport.

Although the talk of virtue in sport may feel somewhat anachronistic, I maintain that it is not. I have elsewhere developed a sustained account of the virtues and vices in sports. In doing so I have drawn from a variety of authors including Nussbaum and Pincoffs.<sup>9</sup> I shall now develop – without respecting important differences in their positions – a framework for a virtue ethics of sport here.

#### A CATALOGUE OF THE VIRTUES IN SPORT

While I cannot offer here a completed scheme or catalogue of the virtues, I think it would be an advance on bland exhortations to virtuous conduct to at least begin to delineate the different sorts of virtues that could instantiate sports ethics in athletic conduct.

First, the catalogue of all virtues is functionally various<sup>10</sup> but here I merely distinguish the non-instrumental virtues from the instrumental virtues; the latter relate specifically to elite sports where the sphere is essentially instrumental, goal-oriented action.

In speaking of non-instrumental or moral we might want to insist on a range of virtues that secured more than is minimally reasonable interpersonal conduct based loosely upon a core human value of not harming others. It may seem reasonable to claim that these moral virtues are most likely to have a trans-cultural reach. Such a list would include fairness, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness. Who would dispute these from the list of virtues expected of a great sports person (or

<sup>8</sup> B. TOBIN, “An Aristotelian theory of moral development” in *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* (1989) Vol. 23 (2), 195-211.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M.C. NUSSBAUM and A.K. SEN (eds.), *Quality of life*, Oxford 1993; and E.L. PINCOFFS, *Quandaries and Virtues*, Lawrence (Kansas) 1986.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E.L. PINCOFFS, *op. cit.*, 84.

anyone else for that matter) even though we might neither expect it nor find it in other elite sports arenas.

In elaborating the virtues of, say, an Olympian or a great professional sportsperson, we might wish to incorporate much higher than moral minimalism. The persisting ideal of sportspersons as honourable heroes would be sullied were they to take on so callous or cavalier an attitude to the constitutive and regulative rules of sports, the best traditions of those sports, and the standards of honesty and integrity we properly expect of (handsomely paid) professionals.

Without attempting to vilify unjustifiably any of the many sporting villains whose vices have corroded the ideals of sports, one thinks readily of the disgraced American sprinters Marion Jones and Justin Gatland. One difficulty for Olympic athletes is to be publicly held to account for higher standards of conduct and character. A corresponding philosophical difficulty would be the precise philosophical content given to the moral virtues which would underwrite the idea of positive, perhaps heroic, role models?

One of the chief moral educational powers of sport is I suggest, in the role modelling of elite sportspersons, such as Olympians, who engage in the kinds of behaviour where, against the grain of direct competition, they act in ways that are selfless, (such as assisting fellow athletes who are injured, or deliberately eschewing easy opportunities to win at the expense of incapacitated opponents) or super honesty where they indicate to the official that they have broken a rule where the official had not realised it. I recognise that this is setting the bar rather high and asking of athletes more than might be expected of others. But it is precisely because of their high profile, and the enormous financial endorsements or social prestige, that expectations of higher standards are justified. And the expectation is hardly a new one. Even at its roots in ancient Greek athletic struggles or contests (*agon*) we are aware of the myth of champions winning only laurel wreaths. To the contrary, we know that they were paid handsomely and were expected

to behave honourably. Clearly many and perhaps most people would seek to gain unfair competitive advantages under such circumstances. The fact that, with so much to win and lose, the vast majority of athletes ignore opportunities to cheat is one reason that we properly think of them as above everyday folk.

It is often said that sports focus on competition which fosters egoism. Logically speaking, this cannot simply be the case. Even the etymology of the word tells us that competition is a coming together to test each other.<sup>11</sup> And one can only share a test when one has agreed to cooperate. What is playing sport if not an appeal to suspend all differences of creed or colour in order to strive together for victory. The demonstration of superiority requires co-operation. Sporting contests cannot survive without this shared spirit we often call fair play. This point flows from the very structure of sports and places demands on the very characters of sportspersons. Note, I am not saying that the presence of contrary vices is not everywhere to be seen in sport, but that for it to reach the ideals captured in sport at its best, the virtues thus must be cultivated. Indeed the point can be distilled from a most general level. Nussbaum puts it thus: “The point is that everyone makes some choices and acts somehow or other in these spheres: if not properly then improperly. Everyone has some attitude and behaviour toward her own death; toward her own bodily appetites and their management; toward her property and its use; towards the distribution of social goods; toward telling the truth; toward being kindly or not kindly to others; toward cultivating or not cultivating a sense of play and delight; and so on. No matter where one lives one cannot escape these questions, so long as one is living a human life.”<sup>12</sup>

Nussbaum’s claim here is the noble and expansive one of unifying

<sup>11</sup> R.S. KRETCHMAR, “From Test to Contest: An Analysis of Two Kinds of Counterpoint in Sport” in *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* II, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> M.C. NUSSBAUM and A.K. SEN (eds.), *Quality of Life*, cit., 247.

all good human living under the same canopy of virtues. I am staking out a claim of much more modest scope. I am merely claiming that sports because of the very nature and purposes, place demands on all players. Their responses are obligatory in nature through rule structures and conventions. Observing them, and doing so not only because of a fear of penalty or sanction, still challenges us because of our weakness of will and the ready availability of (more or less substantial) external goods that give incentive to the ends of victory over the means of playing fair and well. The seriousness of the competition within and between individuals and teams heightens the stakes. The virtues, in their variety are a response to this problematic.

As was noted, there is little difficulty setting out the kinds of virtues that we might expect to cultivate in sports and sports teams. I note both these categories in order to reflect those virtues that belong to groups as well as individuals. While it is fairly obvious that one would need virtues such as discipline, determination, persistence and tenacity, as sportspersons whose endeavours are focused on a specified goal, one would also need “courage” and “prudence” in knowing when which levels of risk were really worth taking in one’s sporting life, which is usually only a microcosm of a life fully and wholly lived over the full course of one’s allotted years. Ignoring one’s future health by risk taking in one’s adolescent years (say by doping) represents a challenge that demands great prudence and moral imagination. It might also be important to recognise again the potential competitiveness of different virtues in addition to the heterogeneity even within virtues such as courage (both active as in the Greek *andreia* – whose context is military, and the Latin *fortitudo* which might be understood as withstanding pain or suffering and still holding on or keeping going).

There may be many pointers that we can take from this examination of the functional variety of the classification of virtues relevant to the assignation “sporting”. I shall note merely two. First, it would be

unreasonable to select a catalogue from the Non-Instrumental virtues and expect all sportspersons to instantiate them. Just as the virtues are functionally various, we must also recognise the enormous variety of sports and the radically different challenges they pose to contestants. Archery, basketball, hockey, judo, sailing, swimming, track and field, ... all share a competitive logic and a certain winning mindset. But this mindset is surely not a virtue but a compendium of them which is open textured. We can expect a much greater shared approach in relation to the instrumental virtues but even here there will be some context specificity which may lead to alternative interpretations of those virtues.

Secondly, a pedagogical point follows this philosophical one. Relatively few, if any, of these virtues have ever been targeted specifically in the policy documents and curricular outlines of coaches, physical education teachers and sport pedagogues in my limited experience. Yet in the UK at least, home to the Victorian legacy of moralistic sports, and what is known as “Muscular Christianity” which so inspired the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre De Coubertin, it was always thought that somehow, magically, the very playing of sports would inculcate in its practitioners moral qualities we think of as virtues. Nothing, it strikes me, warrants such confidence in amateur sport let alone professional or Olympian encounters.

It could be said, that the philosopher or pedagogue in attempting to establish a singular ethics of sports based upon the cultivation of virtues, is suffering from excessive nostalgia. There may be some truth in this claim. The shared identities, norms and purposes of the *polis* (or city state) are long gone and inapplicable to the modern multicultural world. Yet without some kind of conserving traditions it may be difficult to foresee the kind of sport whose best traditions we try in our coaching and teaching to preserve. And if sports, with their explicit rules and implicit ethos of fair play, cannot model human behaviour in all its glory (warts and all), it is difficult to see what modern practices can.



FINAL REMARKS

I have tried in today's short presentation to share with you a condensed and simplified ethics of sport based upon Aristotelian thinking. I have not attempted to develop any of its more subtle points, its moral psychology, the doctrine of the mean, the relationship to his metaphysical biology, nor many other interesting ideas in his philosophy. Instead I have tried to show a little of what moral educational prospects there might be in sports conceived of as an arena of human excellence, where virtue-ethical considerations are central to a conception of both sports performance and pedagogy.



## **Sport and the spiritual life: “Glorify God in your body”**

SUSAN SAINT SING\*

I am not a theologian. Any understanding of sport and spirituality I have comes from my own life experiences. So I must share some of these in order to provide a framework for this understanding. As someone with a Franciscan background and tradition, my telling will be in the form of stories.

That being said, for me, there are places where sport and spirituality intersect. I use my life, not pridefully, but in the spirit of the English poet John Keats, who is buried here in Rome. He once said, “Every person’s life is a metaphor for the larger life that we represent.”

With that, I would like to begin by telling you I was born in Pennsylvania in a small mountain town called Berwick. I was always in the woods. My parents never knew exactly where I was but they always knew I was outside in the woods. I loved to climb and be in the mountains and hike along the ravine we called “The Powder Hole”. I just loved being outside and alive. I loved to run, too. At a very early age I wanted to be an Olympic runner and asked my parents if they could get me a coach. We were very poor and didn’t have money for that, but they asked a local college student who ran track at nearby Carlisle University if he would coach me. And so I started running at around age twelve or so and have been coached nearly every day of my life in one sport or another since that time. My running course – the marathon

\* Author and rowing coach, with a doctorate in Sport History from Penn State University, Susan was a member of the US National Olympic Team that participated at the World Rowing Championships in Racice, the Czech Republic in 1993.

course I ran – took me out Bomboy’s Lane, down by a mud swamp and up the hill by the Baker’s farm.

Running is a great sport – putting one foot in front of the other orders your world and I loved it. I loved feeling the joy it gave me to have this “handedness” and “footedness.” I can understand the line from the movie, “Chariots of Fire”, when Eric Liddell, the great Scottish Olympic runner, said, “When I run I feel God’s pleasure.” Those words have stuck with me. Many of you must know what it feels like when you get those endorphins in your system, how you feel alive and full of life! Whether I was out in the woods or running alone out there on that marathon course, I felt there was something with me, something there, something good – a presence – that I started to call The Other. I never felt alone.

I dreamed of being a great runner. I loved all those ancient Greek Olympic ideals about *arete* and the pursuit of excellence. I loved all that and aspired to be an Olympian.

And at this time there was also, on another level in my life, something else happening. One night when I was about ten years old or so, I woke up and I knew, I just knew there was the presence of something evil in my room. In that moment I knew, as it was written indelibly in my mind, that evil existed. It is what I call “unwanted knowledge” as it is a burden – especially for a child of ten years old – to know some things.

Anyway, let us move on while keeping this in mind. I next went on to high school where I played five different sports and was captain on four teams. I was the only woman in my high school to be in both the sport and academic “hall of fame”. I loved sports and I loved playing basketball, skiing, track, and gymnastics – I just felt alive!

I went on to college after high school and was a double major in fine arts and physical education. To me, sport was like living sculpture so I didn’t feel these were diametrically opposing things to study, though most of my professors did. While in college my father had a

stroke and I got my first glimpse of a deteriorating body. Everyone in my family was athletic, and now we watched helplessly as our father's condition worsened. Seeing his body change and become blind and crippled by disease really hit me. So much so that I got mad one day and I tore up the chapel at Penn State – a small Catholic prayer room where the Blessed Sacrament is kept. I tore off the altar cloth and threw a few flowers against the wall, knocked over a few pews and when I was done, I noticed there was a priest sitting there, Fr. Leopold Kruhl, who later became an archabbot and my spiritual director. He was one of the Benedictines who was a chaplain at Penn State. He said, "Well, do you feel better now?" And I started crying and he held me there in the pew as I cried.

At the time I wasn't a religious person. I avoided church. My mom always had to drag me to church because I preferred to go skiing and hiking or do anything but to go to Mass on Sundays. But after tearing up the chapel, I sat down one night, after my dad had passed away, and took this picture of the Sacred Heart that funeral homes send to the family, and set it on a table and said, "Okay God. I will sit here and listen for one night. If you have anything to say to me, you have one night to say it." That's how arrogant I was!

So I sat there. And I sat there. At around two in the morning I was prostrate on the floor and I couldn't get up. And I tried to get up and as an athlete I was pretty strong. But it was as if I was in the presence of something so huge, so immense, so holy that the floor was the only place I could be, for I had to be humble, prostrate in worship. And it was an experience so full of light and energy and joy that I didn't want to leave it. So when I got up the next morning I went up to see Fr. Leopold and told him what happened. He just smiled and told me to go and buy a Bible and read Romans and it was then that I can say that I established a new relationship with God the Father or "Abba", my other "Daddy", in lieu of my father's passing away.

It was a point-counter-point to the sensation of evil that I had when

I was a kid. As professor Mike McNamee said earlier – there exists a distinctive energy source, good vs. evil.

So, as a new young Christian, for me, I was out of the starting blocks! I got it. I understood. It was all true. What the Bible said was true. There was good and there was evil. I was on fire to make a difference in the world. I just felt so close to God and I was so happy and bent on celebrating being a Christian and an athlete. It was a great time of happiness for me. But only six months later, I broke my neck and back. I got dropped in a gymnastics accident. I broke T-4 and C-7 vertebrae and had compression fractures at T-12, L-4 and L-5. I was hurt. Really hurt. In one instant, all the joy of movement that I had experienced my whole life was gone and I was stilled.

I was told that an injury of that type usually makes you a quadriplegic – but having been an athlete I was told that my strength saved me from this. But I was in incredible pain. I had a tremendous amount of soft tissue damage also. The root of my brachial plexus nerve was torn from the sheath and was rubbing my vertebrae. I couldn't bear the pain. Literally, I just wanted out of the pain, I wanted to “check out”, commit suicide and end it all. I was paralyzed for about three months and had pain that felt like someone slipping a hot razor or knife in several parts of my spine and upper shoulder. I couldn't live, I couldn't even feed myself or buy groceries or work.

But somewhere inside I kept searching for an answer... I couldn't believe this “new” God I had just started to believe in would allow this to happen! It was a terrible time of soul searching. I ended up for the next 10 years in the University of Cincinnati Pain Control Centre – you have to be really sick to get there. Your quality of life has to be so reduced that there are no more options.

Because of my training as an athlete I was used to pulling it out from deep within, and accustomed to toughness and never giving up. All those things that we teach athletes and that I learned from coaches over the years – discipline, focus, keeping anger in check and between

the lines – lines of a basketball court or a rowing venue, whatever. The things we tell athletes are important for the day when life comes around and bites them. They enter into these personal struggles – for me an injury, for someone else the loss of a spouse or death of a child, illness, disease. These are the moments for which what we learn and what we teach shape us as people, not just as athletes, though it is from athletics that skills can help us, toughen us.

I spent years going through procedures, and MRI’s, nerve blocks, EMG’s that in themselves were also painful at times. And I used many of my skills from my years of sports to help me. I used visualization techniques to take myself far away – all the way back to Mud Swamp and my running trails, until the procedure was over. Pain forces other skills upon you, like patience, dependence and humility. These are important skills too, though they aren’t often spoken about in sport practices, and maybe they should be.

But it was very hard to be in the Pain Control Centre and one day I told my doctors I had to go to Assisi and talk to St. Francis – a saint I had loved since I was a kid out there walking in the mountains and I loved animals. So, I just had to talk to him and find out why this happened to me. So when I got to *Santa Maria degli Angeli* at the base of Mt. Subasio, with Assisi up on the hill, I took off my neck brace and threw it in a trash can and I took off my arm sling as well.

I went to the “pensione” *Casa Papa Giovanni XXIII* where a priest named don Aldo Brunacci took me in. He was a holy priest who is considered a Righteous Gentile for helping to save the lives of Jews during the Second World War. I obviously couldn’t work much though I could clear the tables with one hand. Mainly I walked in the mountains and went up to the caves where Francis lived and walked the streets and went to the church of *San Damiano* to talk to him. I wasn’t physically healed there – when I left I was still in pain – but I was emotionally healed. I somehow came to understand that God was good and even in my pain He was with me!

While I was in Assisi I started to think about what it means to be a creature of God. I'm sure you know that St. Francis wrote the *Canticle of the Creatures*. The anthropologist Victor Turner called him a great liminal man – a playful saint! They say that St. Francis would wander the countryside playing an imaginary violin. Through contemplating his life, I started to think about myself as being created by God, that is to say, what it means to be part of creaturehood and to experience peace and play as part of an intended work of God's creation. This conviction that play was intentional and that it was part of that energy of God's creation as depicted in the very first pages of Genesis resonated within me as did the energy I felt that night in my apartment in Penn State.

Play also began to intrigue me. Victor Turner also said that all cultures play. Even primitive cultures took time from hunting and gathering to play, so play is an integral part of our creaturely status and was intended by God. God is the essence of joy, and we seek joy in play!

I started thinking about God being at play in creation. The book of Proverbs tells us, regarding Wisdom, that: "When he set the heavens in their place I was at his side, his darling, his delight, *playing* in His presence, *playing* on earth." (Prov. 8:28-31) And of course there are many instances in the Bible that reference play, such as Psalm 107 which refers to Leviathan playing in the sea or those verses in St. Paul regarding sport, etc.

One of the great sport philosophers, Scott Kretchmar, has defined play as, "A state of fundamental pre-rational spontaneity which is freely chosen and entered into for the simple sake of wanting to do so. It is of a nature outside of the reality of the present, yet is equally as real to the players as the present is to the observer."<sup>1</sup> That definition for me contains many elements of the spiritual.

<sup>1</sup> R.S. KRETCHMAR, *Practical Philosophy of Sport*, Iowa 1994, 210.



I started thinking of the energy I experienced that night years before and how the energy we feel inside moving us to play is the presence of God. I began to see play as the integral urge to participate in what, when it is more complicated and structured, becomes a game and then, with added competition, becomes sport: play, game, sport.

I started to understand that the pursuit of excellence was a total mind/body/soul achievement, not just mind, body, or soul. On any given day, on any field of play someone wins and someone loses. So winning is only a 50/50 proposition. Loosing is only a 50% proposition. But if you pursue excellence – then you are always 100%, you are as high as humans can aspire. Additionally, a great American football coach, Tom Landry, once said that we must learn to lose without losing our dignity. So these are valuable life lessons that athletes practice everyday.

The play philosopher Michael Novak talks about how we can share in the creativity of God not only through our work, but also through our play, because play is the exercise of freedom.<sup>2</sup> As he notes: "One does not play for the sake of *work*; one plays for the sake of excellence. The point of the excellence is that there is no point."<sup>3</sup>

We recognize excellence when we see it because I believe there is a kinetic blueprint or reminder within each of us from when our first parents were with God in the Garden of Eden. And this element of God is part of our fabric, part of who we are and when we see a play perfectly executed – we see and recognize something that lifts the players on the field and us to something beyond mortal, closer to the divine. I think as Catholics and as Christians we can see what Michael Novak is talking about when we liken his analogy to our own experiences of how when we see excellence we are drawn to it, we desire it, it gives us a momentary link to the Other who *is* Perfect. The former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI himself, considered the free action of

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. NOVAK, *The Joy of Sports*, Lanham (Maryland) 1993, 231 and 233.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

play as a sort of effort to return to paradise, as an escape from the wearisome enslavement of daily life.<sup>4</sup>

When I came back to the United States, I was poor and couldn't still really work; I was living in a garage. I mentioned earlier that I was a double major in college so I started to write. I had a great deal of nerve pain, neuralgia in my right hand, so I started to write left-handed. I worked as a free-lance writer and got a piece covering the Cincinnati Regatta, which was the College National Championships. I went to the boathouse, and the Brown University coach was there and said to me, "Susan, you are pretty small and our coxswain is sick; so if you want to jump in the boat, our crew will take you out and you can write from the boat."

And I knew, I just knew as soon as I got in the rowing shell, that this was a way I could finally be an athlete again! I didn't need my body; I only needed my hands and my mind. I had a good deal of watermanship skills and athletic competitiveness and here at least was a way to be an athlete again! I was alive! I wrote the story for the paper and started going back to the boathouse everyday for practice. I started coxing – the person who steers the boat and calls the race strategy – competed on a national level, and then coached, and finally made the U.S. National Rowing Team and went to the World Rowing Championships. And none of that would have ever happened, if I hadn't broken my neck and back. So God took something terrible and turned it around over time to maybe one of the best opportunities of my life.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. RATZINGER, *Co-Workers of the Truth: Meditations for Every Day of the Year*, San Francisco 1992, 262 where he states: "What is the fascination of play that it can have equal importance as food? One can answer that by looking back at ancient Rome, in which the cry for bread and circuses was really the expression of a desire for a paradisiacal life, for a life of satiety without effort, and of fulfilled leisure. Because that is what play means: action, that is truly free – without a goal and without a need to do it – while harnessing and fulfilling all of one's personal forces. In this sense, sport becomes a sort of foretaste of Paradise: a stepping out of the slavish earnestness of our daily life and its concerns into the free seriousness of something that should not be serious and is therefore beautiful. In that way sport overcomes daily life."

Rowing is an interesting sport – it has been a life-giving sport for me and I want to explain how we race. International rowing is done on a 2000 meter long, straight course. We divide the race into four 500 meter segments. The first segment is “the start” where all the crews go off the line at a very high stroke rate and speed, the second segment is called “the settle”, when the boats settle into a race pace, the third 500 is an area that I call “never-never land” because it is where your body is switching from aerobic to the anaerobic engine. Here the athletes are in agony – from the ancient Greek word *agon*. They are carrying huge amounts of lactic acid in their muscles. In fact, when muscle biopsies were taken at the Olympic Games, rowers had more milli-moles of lactic acid in their quadriceps than the athletes from any other sport. Rowers were second only to cross country skiers. The last 500 metres is “the finish” and the body at this point of the row is suffering, and feels that if it continues, it is going to die. The exertion is so great.

As a Christian, I have started to liken this 2000 meter race to how we must live our lives in Christ. Think of the cross and Christ’s arms outstretched. We start somewhere over here on the left hand of Christ and in our life we are traversing across to the right hand of God, hopefully! The left hand is “the start” and as with the experience that night of God in my apartment, I was on fire! I was out of the starting blocks and heading across and through the body of Christ. The second 500 meters, or “the settle”, was for me when I was injured; and here, still moving to the right hand, I reach the centre- the very heart of God. This is the moment in my life when I am in the long settle of day-by-day grind of the Pain Control Centre. It was a very hard moment in my life and it tried my spirit almost to the point of giving up at times.

Then there comes the third set of 500 meters- a moment when we look out beyond our problems to the horizon before us... to others. At this stage in my life I met someone and I fell in love with him. Unknown to me at first, this person was an alcoholic. Here came another crisis for me of Olympic proportion where everything I had known or practiced

as a Christian, as an athlete –faith, discipline, healing, focus, worship, “stick-to-it-tive-ness” was called into play. Here, in front of me, was someone I love. But, here also, was a body lying in ruins – the very opposite of my healed person! Here was a person filled with alcohol and disease, suffering in his own invisible bonds that I can “see.” I can see the chains upon him and yet everything I know as an athlete and a coach and a Christian is not enough to help him! And yet for years, sometimes a lifetime, we pray and we fast and we sacrifice and enter into that “last stretch” of hope and faith – the dark night of the soul – where God seems *not* to hear, nor to answer our prayer, nor to be so powerful. Yet we can only cry: “Abba! Father! Heal him!” as we live only in faith that God is listening. Without faith to bridge the gap these mysteries are like torture. And then maintaining faith can become the hardest race ever rowed.

These are the moments when athletics and spirituality become united in real life, and both body and soul are experienced. As I mentioned in my book on this subject, take away the soul and sport is flat, without passion – there is no crucifixion as there is no need for a resurrection. ...Body and soul have a constant and everlasting relationship. Even as in Christ’s body in death, it seeks, it waits, to rise. I think that this desire to rise is inherent to athletes and to sport, and in this desire they see something of God.<sup>5</sup>

These are those times when we hit those personal crises – and we all do as I said earlier – whether it may be a car accident, the death of a loved one, a disease. We struggle on, a mere human trying to understand what is seemingly a lack of compassion and action by God to heal and empower us. And *that* is why we coach and what we are really coaching when we stand in front of a team. We are teaching them to have faith, to trust, to believe and to go deep inside – into that energy of God, the soul – and pull out the faith needed in our own hour of need,

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. SAINT SING, *Balancing Body and Soul*, Cincinnati 2004, 111.

like Christ on the Cross. Thus, when we are dying to ourselves and our bodies are shifting from the aerobic to anaerobic – without oxygen – in the last part of the “good race” St. Paul tells us to run, we cross the finish line exhausted and lie flat in the boat or flat on the track. We should be completely spent after having become *agon*. In doing so, we are like the athlete whose spirit soars in victory but whose body lies flat, completely spent; we leave this earthly plane as our spirit soars, released, because we have given ourselves to one another. Then and only then have we truly entered the mystical body of Christ, and reach the right hand of God – because we have given ourselves.

Play matters – and we should play as if it matters! What we say and how we say things to athletes is important. Play, games, and sports and the lessons learned in them prepare us, if coached properly, for the good race we must run in Christ from the left hand of Christ crucified, to the right hand. In doing so, we join Christ on the cross and we glorify God in our body and soul.

Play matters and we should play as if it matters because we are playing at the feet of Abba our Father.



## New approaches and educational strategies for sporting environments

EDIO COSTANTINI\*

### THE EDUCATIONAL VALUE OF SPORT

A little over a half century ago, Pope Pius XII exhorted Catholic sport associations not to deprive youth of the educational value of sport.<sup>1</sup> This appeal remains just as valid today, as it was then.

No true educational endeavour is possible today if it does not seek to resolve the emerging need of anchoring our educational efforts in solid and lasting values. The challenge is that of proposing a radical alternative to that of squandering one's life in a wasteland bankrupt of values – as so many youth do – by means of quality sporting activities that can generate a life rich in hope.

In a social context that is so poor in offering educational and formative opportunities for younger generations, sporting associations certainly constitute a rigorous test and positive challenge; yet, they can be of enormous utility for civil society.

However, we must not only offer children sporting activities (which is already something of positive value) but we must also provide something still more precious: a source of hope that does not disappoint and makes one believe in the goodness of life itself.

Alongside the historical reasons for sporting activity, namely: the harmonious development of the body, its social function and health

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. PIUS XII, Address to the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, 9 October 1945.

benefits, there is another reason still more important: its educational function! Unfortunately, although it is often touted, educating through sport must not be taken for granted as it does not always occur.

Yet, we are dealing here with the most relevant aim of sport today as the task of educating youth has become most urgent.

A sport that does not have genuine concern for the formation of youth who constitute *the* capital investment for humanity's future, is a sport that has lost much of its primary purpose and social value.

What is more, as the vast operating system of youth sport becomes more and more fragmented and dominated by commerce, it faces serious difficulty in reinstating its educational role.

When we speak of 'educating through sport' or 'sport as a formative place for the person' we run the risk of pronouncing words that are purely exhortative, or even self-righteous.

Without wanting to make gross generalizations, it can be said that sport, instead of becoming a place of education, frequently becomes more a place for business, where sport services are "bought and sold".

If we do not have the courage to re-establish the original meaning and authentic human value to sporting activity and be dedicated to this cause, it will flounder in the anarchy of a "do it yourself" mentality.

In spite of all this, sport remains one of the contexts that have great potential to positively affect the education of young people. Those who practice sport take this commitment very seriously. Furthermore, coaches are still looked upon with great respect and esteem and can be very effective in educating these children. However, things are not so simple. Sport's educational function and its change for the better is always dependent on the real men and women who are engaged in sport.

Without a doubt, sport continues to attract; it fascinates us; it promotes such an energy that can affect the sensitivity and emotions of millions of people. It reflects on a symbolic level the realities of life: fatigue, struggle, suffering, defeat, anger, joy, satisfaction and happiness.

Competition and asceticism, participation and fun, consumption



and alienation, syndrome of success and failure, professionals and volunteers, education and culture,...are all aspects of this unique social and cultural phenomenon of our time.<sup>2</sup>

#### TODAY'S REAL SOCIAL QUESTION: THE EDUCATIONAL EMERGENCY

The real social question today surpasses all economic and political issues because it is an educational one.

The wide cultural crisis we are now witnessing finds specific repercussion and expression in the crisis of educating and training new generations.

Since we have to deal with both a widespread de-Christianization as well a complacently weak culture of education, everyone – family, school, the Christian community – struggle to respond with new proposals and means.

Pope Benedict XVI has repeatedly drawn attention towards this emergency: “Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priests and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great educational emergency, confirmed by the failures we encounter all too often in our efforts to form sound people who can cooperate with others and give their own lives meaning. Thus, it is natural to think of laying the blame on the new generations, as though children born today were different from those born in the past. There is also talk about a ‘generation gap’ which certainly exists and is making itself felt, but is the effect rather than the cause of the failure to transmit certainties and values”.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Cf. C. MAZZA, *Lo sport giovanile come luoghi di valori*, Rome 2005.

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Letter to the Diocese of Rome on the urgent task of education, 21 January 2008.

Before this emergency that faces us, sport must also lend a hand. Nelson Mandela said quite emphatically, but with a good dose of truth that “sport has the power to change the world”! The real challenge today for all of us is that of ensuring that no child or teen succumb to the void of “nothingness”. This “nothingness” is a life without meaning. It is a life that seeks satisfaction in half measures, in banality. It’s a life without “expectations” and without hope.<sup>4</sup>

What does it mean to educate young people today and to give meaning to their lives through sport? How do we find the educational treasure hidden in sport? How did we unearth it? By what means? Is there still room for educating in sport, outside of the common civil rhetoric? The answer is not obvious.

#### HOW SPORT PROVOKES QUESTIONS ABOUT THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE

The practice of a sport with its goals and self-betterment can initiate a quest for finding a sense of order and meaning in life. Therefore, sooner or later, this experience may trigger those essential questions that have always stirred within the human heart: Who am I? Where do I come from? What future awaits me?

Nevertheless, sport in modern Europe tends to exclude all interest in “the ultimate questions”, especially when it has anything to do with Christian revelation, because these questions are deemed unrelated to a rigorous scientific knowledge compatible with sport.

For many, the “sport sciences” should avoid any reference to the object of knowledge that is the truth, but rather, should concern itself only with methodology and techniques. An inevitable consequence of

<sup>4</sup> E. COSTANTINI, *Il Punto: Un percorso sociale ed ecclesiale nello sport*, Molfetta (BA) 2008.

this approach is that sport ceases to be a place of research and verification of ultimate truths. Instead of being a place of what the Greeks called *paideia*, it is reduced to a place for the mere transmission of skills aimed at practical utility.

Regarding the educational role that sport should play today, there are many studies and documents. In some European documents that refer to the social function of sport, there is expressed the desire that sport should teach: the social integration of disabled people, immigrants and other minorities; active citizenship; the tolerance of “others”, and therefore to multiculturalism and peaceful coexistence among people of different races and religions; social relations based upon ethics, solidarity and participation; physical well-being as manifested in prevention of disease and the eradication of doping and drug addiction; environmental protection.<sup>5</sup>

If we search into the Magisterium of the Church (from the speeches of Popes on various occasions to the documents of the various bishops' conferences), we find a framework that supports loftier goals where educating through sport places the person at the centre unlike a consumerism of sport where the focus is placed on entertainment, trophies and winning at all costs.<sup>6</sup>

## NEW EDUCATIONAL FRONTIERS AND STRATEGIES

If we want to make educating through sport the main thrust of this activity, we need to overcome the *homo oeconomicus* model and place the person back at the centre. In fact, ever since the sixties, the theory of human capital began to emerge in economic literature with negative consequences for the entire world system of sport.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Helsinki Report on Sport, December 1999.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. COMMISSIONE PER LA PASTORALE DEL TEMPO LIBERO, TURISMO E SPORT DELLA C.E.I., *Sport e vita cristiana*, Bologna 1995.

This paradigm can be traced back to the “Chicago School”, whose main proponents (Schultz, Mincer and Becker) advance a methodological approach and analysis that is fundamentally linked to a view of economic science conceived as independent from the person. Hence the assessment of the human being and, in our case of athletes, is viewed in terms of costs and benefits, damages and advantages, loss and gains. This marketing concept not only applies to professional athletes but also to youth sports and ‘sport for all’ programs where these activities are seen as implying ‘a cost’ and thus they seek to also economically quantify the benefit.

In reality, the *homo oeconomicus* paradigm is accepted everywhere: the sports manager is believed to possess all the information so as to take decisions based on a calculation about the cost and the useful benefits that can be derived from each decision. The manager is viewed as a robot, acting in a purely rational way, completely devoid of emotions, feelings, and relational needs. His only yardstick is utility, which is expressed in numerical calculations that easily determine a hierarchy among the options available. In applying this theory of human capital to sport, an athlete will be considered only and exclusively for his record and for his performance. In other words, the athlete is evaluated exactly like an asset: the investment you make will be depreciated on a straight line, given a conjectured mercantile life. It follows then that profit is the only criterion for judging reality and justifying the ‘cost’ of the athlete. In fact, in this system, any investment in human capital is characterized by an instrumentalisation of the person in order to achieve ulterior motives.

As already stated, we must place the personal relationship back into the picture. In fact, Aristotle’s well known definition of man as a “po-litical animal” indicates that he is inherently a relational being. Consequently, in his dealings with others, he experiences friendship or adversity, fraternity or opposition, disagreement or sympathy. There might be relationships that are based on the pure exchange of goods,

but there are also many that are based on friendly reciprocity and sincere gratitude. So, how can the educational dimension return to the front and centre in sports?

#### RETURNING TO A SOLID CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Behind this educational emergency that involves mainly the western world, we see that there are deeper anthropological issues that arise. Europeans now feel the effects of a widespread cultural boycott that has deprived them of that basic nourishment which is essentially human; they are now suffering the consequences of a blockade that has cut them off from that which lies at the very foundation of the person.

As Cardinal Camillo Ruini observed, “if we change our concept of man, we also change our concept of education and all our educational parameters fall into crisis”.<sup>7</sup>

The sociologist Emile Durkheim realized that if left to themselves, men are destined to fall victim to their own desires. Because of this, education is a dire must, as well as educators who are capable of teaching. Yet, it is difficult to teach without having in mind a model of the human person enriched with a sense of purpose and worthwhile goals to be pursued wholeheartedly.

Reviving a view of the human person – as well as a general reflection on our socio-cultural reality – consistent with Christian anthropology represents *the* challenge of the Church today. It is also *the* challenge of Catholic sport’s associations and all sports associations which are dedicated to preparing youth for their future.

In this regard, Cardinal Angelo Scola deems that it is opportune to re-launch the image of the human being as portrayed in the Bible: that

<sup>7</sup> C. RUINI, “Identikit di un'emergenza inevitabile”, in *L'Osservatore Romano* 2-3 febbraio 2009, 5.

of *imago Dei*. The perfect communion of the Trinity is the only appropriate paradigm for understanding human nature in its fullness.<sup>8</sup>

We need vision...only a sport with its eyes wide open can educate; a sport entranced by the *homo oeconomicus* cannot see. This requires two conditions: first, that the youth be properly led by good coaches and educators; the second, that we not forget our educational scope as the path to be walked. These are the two basic conditions that make educating through sport possible and credible.

Education is a process of assistance for those who have need of it. The teacher cannot predetermine the starting level, the qualities or values, nor give them that good which they already possess. Rather, they have to meet people where they are, with their flaws, limits, incapacities, disabilities and their abilities ... and help them move forward.

Just as “sport for all” is for everyone, so too, educating in sport is for all. In fact, education cannot limit itself to a select audience, because it has to reach everyone. If anyone must be given priority, it should be those in the “last” place, the rebellious, the lazy, and the unmotivated. In doing so, the “last” will become the first because we should give more to those who have less, and not more to those who already have so much.<sup>9</sup>

#### SPORT AS AN EDUCATIONAL “PLACE”

When we speak of the “places” of the sport we immediately think of the sport field, the gymnasium, the locker room, that is, those spaces equipped for the practice of a sport.

Yet, when we speak of sport as an “educational place”, we go beyond the sport disciplines. It is a meeting place where the human needs of youth intersect with the educational intent of adults. It’s a place that generates educational relationships and life experiences.

<sup>8</sup> A. SCOLA, *Ospitare il reale. Per un’idea di università*, Rome 1999.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. E. COSTANTINI, *Dio salvi lo sport*, Molfetta (Bari) 2009.

This central idea is the main thread that runs through the concept of sport education. In fact, it must be experienced as a journey, an itinerary, a path... that consists of physical activity, training, competing, inner search, sacrifice, and self-improvement.

By 'place' and 'instrument' of education, we are referring to the symbolic and the cultural and physical actions that sport, even in the midst of all the difficulties of our time, is able to express while giving a sense of meaning to the lives of millions of people who practice it every day.

Paradoxically, we can say that the places of sport are embodied in the culture and people's daily lives. There are four key elements that make sport an educational place:

1) a clear teaching purpose that is expressed in a genuine interest in the youth and their future; this must be a conscious effort firmly anchored in a Christian vision of the human person;

2) an educational program that is capable of accepting people as they are, giving them orientation, guidance and accompaniment, and above all, hope;

3) an ongoing formation of the educators themselves: the coaches, instructors, directors and volunteers;

4) a collaborative effort of all associative groups (sport clubs, societies, and associations, schools, parishes, and other initiatives...).

In contrast to the status quo and those traditional educational centres, the new educational places of sport must be able to "compete" with those crafty merchants, who, as vendors of illusions, sell sport as a drug or fad to be consumed.

We can say that sport is visibly represented by a physical place: the sports club, the sporting group, the soccer field, stadium, gymnasium, changing room, the street, the square ... These are places where children meet to play sports and to train; these are the places for meeting,

socializing, integrating with others and forming relationships. But at the same time, these are symbolic places, that, while being highly attractive for the youth, are also places of pedagogical action, and places where relationships are established, where educators meet pupils, and where a social network can be woven.

The lack of an educational vision in these sporting environments causes it to become a sort of no man's land, which you can frequent without being disturbed, do whatever you want, and even die there of starvation.

#### EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE AS THE VERY HEART OF SPORTING ACTIVITY

Sport is not only organization, competition, victory or defeat. Alongside these important and necessary aspects, there must be an educational purpose. Indeed, this is the very heart of sport and should be put first, while in tandem with all the other elements of its service.<sup>10</sup>

The intention of educating gives sport its soul and dynamism, generating a formative system, spurring people on to strive for higher ideals. It requires, however, that the deliberate education actions be rooted in a strong cultural setting that is capable of offering a vision of man and society that can withstand the commercial degeneration that is de-formative and entrapped in itself.

Indeed, this intentionality both inspires and sets up an educational framework for implementing values, new attitudes and a way of living. When approached with patient determination and a sense of one's limits, the unique dynamism of sporting activities can help support and order correctly the quest for achievement, for self-esteem, as well as the need for affiliation that lies at the very foundation of the workings of the human person.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. COSTANTINI - K. LIXEY, *San Paolo e lo sport. Un percorso per campioni*, Molfetta (Bari) 2009.



The motivation of sport propels us to test our skills and face new challenges, and this happens all the more with the support that comes from the family and those social and civic contexts which are rich in ethics, spirituality, solidarity, solid reasoning, and commitment. In practice, motivation needs a shared humanity and authentic guides, truly inspired by values that are innovative, clear, visible and imitable.

To play (sport) is a verb and this suggests an action to be done or a goal to be realized. At times, the focus on “the doing” causes one to lose sight of the deeper problem related to the intent of educating through sport which is that this action also needs to be accompanied by reflection which gives us feedback about our human experiences.

Unfortunately, if this “intentionality” is reduced to a way of packaging sport activity for consumption, then the educational purpose of this activity loses sight of the most authentic phenomenon of intentionality – the deeper motivations (for the educator has to deal specifically with the intentions of those who are educated ...). This is, in fact, a very delicate and very important part of the process.

#### THE COACH AS AN EDUCATOR AND NOT A MERE FUNCTIONARY

Every educational strategy in sport must be centred on the active and proactive role of the key players: the coaches, trainers, educators, parents, teachers, and athletes.

Sport has need of real “educators” and not mere “functionaries”. This requires determination and motivation on their part to go against the flow; it requires people who are willing to bring a message of humanity and hope to those arid desert areas of sport.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, the relationship between athlete and coach is the result of an intended purpose and never merely random. Even when the

<sup>11</sup> E. COSTANTINI, *Dio salvi lo sport*, Molfetta (Bari) 2009.

intent can be hidden or even distorted, it is still an intentional relationship that is based on specific choices, values and strategies.

This intentionality is always reciprocal; that is to say, it applies to both sides of the educational relationship. Education cannot be imposed (even in the name of ideals or values) unilaterally. For this reason, education is eminently dialogical. It always implies an exchange between a “me” (the teacher who proposes something) and a “you” (the student who is the receiver of something yet to be made a reality). This exchange takes place, constitutively, in the fabric of a relationship in which educator and student are always included.

St. John Bosco described well what constitutes the cornerstone of education: “If you are to really be a true father for your students, it is necessary that they occupy a place in your heart ... Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master, and that we can achieve nothing unless God teaches us the art and hands us the key.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, educational intentionality in sport should be expressed mainly in understanding what it is that the child or youth seeks in practicing a sport. That is, it is placing oneself in agreement with him or her, in an attitude of true understanding, about shared expectations, desires, anxieties, and enthusiasm. This commingling of intentions and expectations between the athlete and coach allows for the flourishing of a purposeful and transformative relationship.

The educational intent is the element that transforms sport into a real life experience. Yet, when the coach or educator abandons this educative dimension in order to fulfil mere technical roles, only a paradoxical relationship is maintained; the educational relationship has “failed”.

Sport is in fact always a “being-with-others” in a predominantly formative sense. Any educational program cannot reach its mark with-

<sup>12</sup> G. BOSCO, Letter on “The use of Punishments in Salesian Houses”, October 4, 1883, reprinted in *Keys to the Hearts of Youth*, P. Avallone, SDB, (ed.) New Rochelle (NY) 1999.

out the help of others. It is clear that we are not formed without the example, the help and the attention we receive from others.

These two dimensions of education, namely, subjectivity and intersubjectivity, are not to be separated. This means that the educational concern of all rightfully occupies an important role in the harmonious development of personality of the athlete.

It often happens that sport occupies every moment of a youngster's social life from school recess to after school leisure times (practice times, game times, even their holidays and summer vacation, etc.) while at the same time neglecting the educational relationship. All of this seems to resemble way too much an accommodation to the dominant consumer model of sport.

#### EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE

Education is a lived experience as no education is obtained without first originating in our senses and becoming part of our life. Experience is an essential part of life.

Jacques Maritain can help us better understand education as an experience that improves life. In his essay, "Toward a Christian Philosophy of Education", the French Catholic philosopher affirmed that "The most important thing in education is experience, which is the result of an indescribable pathos and of memory; it brings about the formation of the person which cannot be taught in any school or any course".<sup>13</sup>

Without a personal history life has no meaning. Without meaning, practicing a sport has no purpose. Without a purpose, sports associations and clubs ... are mere producers of sport services without any attention to the individual and his or her human development.

<sup>13</sup> J. MARITAIN, "Toward a Christian Philosophy of Education" in *The Education of Man: Educational Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, (ed. D. Gallagher), South Bend (Indiana) 1967, 9-36.

If a person does not engage in sporting activity with all the deeper aspects of his personality, all that he or she does will not constitute experiences that are capable of enabling growth and self-betterment. And if sport does not foster growth and self-improvement, it will not be an educational activity, but only the consumption of sport.

As the Committee for the cultural project of the Italian Bishops' Conference noted in their recent book about the educational challenge, this is "what gives life and vigour to that which is of value, this is what it seeks, namely, that which experience can do".<sup>14</sup>

We carry out many activities, but it is hard to understand their meaning and value. So it is today with the children and young people who do much sport, but have few experiences in this field. The activities themselves are not experiences. Experience means internalization. Experience means an understanding of the value, and the meaning of what you do. Experience becomes educational when it is made of assessments that are the result of reflection thus generating awareness and consciousness.

Education is a transcendental process. We must help people to go beyond themselves, to learn what you do not know, to know the unknown, to experience what they have not tried up until now in order to discover oneself as a person who is developing, a being who continually surpasses himself.

Education is transcendent because it helps people to change; change is vitality and stagnation is death. Education is transcendent because it forces us to come out of ourselves to meet the other, thus transcending our own individuality to arrive at an understanding of the other.

Transcendence in sport has a profound dimension because sport's very essence consists in "self-betterment" with its ongoing dedication to commitment, effort, sacrifice and repetition.

<sup>14</sup> COMITATO PER IL PROGETTO CULTURALE DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (a cura di), *La sfida educativa*, Bari 2009, 11.

Training is aimed at self-betterment: to go beyond the *status quo* in order to conquer themselves and to achieve more. When sport seeks to merely repeat actions without trying to improve it becomes a poor sport.

German-Swiss painter and musician Paul Klee, speaking about expressive values, said that things must have a form and a meaning and the function of this form is to express something.<sup>15</sup>

So too, sporting life must have form and meaning, to be grasped in its authenticity and this is the great task of education.

In this perspective, education in sport is shaped by this space of dialogue and of encounter, as it looks to develop human potential in a holistic manner, acting as a mediator between the resources of the person and the act of education.

The role of the educator makes the most of the faculties of the student, knowing how to assist the students own efforts to know and be known, to understand and to be understood, in giving direction and setting goals.

Thus, sport should aim at an “integral” formation of the athlete in the sense that he or she must form themselves physically and technically, but also in adapting to reality and in forming the values that will give orientation to their life.

Education harmonizes the physical with the spiritual, as matter has something in itself that is spiritual and vice versa. The mature development into an adult-athlete is to be found in the quest for this unity of the body with the spiritual.

The alternative to highly selective sport, so out of reach for a majority of children, is that of developing a sport that can offer significant experiences in terms of physical, social and cultural skills to as many boys and girls as possible. But how do we know when a sport can truly be considered a valid experience from the standpoint of the development of skills and self knowledge?

<sup>15</sup> Cf. F. PIRANI, *Paul Klee*, Firenze 2008.

AN EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL ACTION PLAN

Sporting activity must occur within an educational plan of action that is grounded upon the closely linked relationship between the practice of sport and the development of the human person. Two inseparable aspects of one and the same challenge are a passion for sport and passion for the integral development of the person.<sup>16</sup>

In order that this affirmation not remain a slogan, the sporting activity must not be reduced either to pure consumerism or to a brief weekend recreational moment.

Only a sport that knows how to transmit the ethical underpinnings of life – such as personal responsibility, respect in our personal dealings with others – can give a response to a growing number of youth, indicating to them the path of values and of ideals which constitute the foundation upon which to build a life that is not closed in on our own egoism but open to the needs of others.

In this way, sporting activity can serve as the backbone and as the heart of an educational plan. As mentioned, the deep reason for this principle lies in sport's innate capacity to allow the young athlete to experience the inextricable link between the practice of sport and the development and growth of their character.

The following five dimensions interact with each other when educating through sport:<sup>17</sup> 1) the cultural dimension, as it should promote a culture of life that is rooted in Christian anthropology; 2) the athletic dimension, as it should promote quality sporting activities that are well organized, disciplined and ongoing; 3) the ecclesial dimension, as sports should promote the practice of Christian values and respect the criteria of ecclesiality of associations; 4) the civic dimension, as these activities favour the establishment of a network of

<sup>16</sup> Cf. E. COSTANTINI, *Sport e educazione*, Brescia 2008.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Centro Sportivo Italiano (ed), *Progetto culturale e sportivo del CSI*, Roma 2002.

relationships with the local community; 5) the social dimension as every program is carried out within a group setting, whether a sports club, society, or association.

Before all of these conditions it is necessary that those formators who carry out these programs have a real passion for educating youth. Like a real calling, it is something that cannot be bought or sold. This passion for educating is their distinguishing trademark and it is what renders volunteer work in the field of sport so unique and is above all the greatest resource the entire world of sport has.

#### FIVE PRINCIPLE ACTIONS FOR EDUCATING IN SPORT<sup>18</sup>

Aware of the inadequacy of the sports structure alone for creating an educational place, it is urgent to “prepare” teachers to become sentinels who are ready to take on every new challenge that comes with all their energy. We must form a new generation of educators.

We need to invest, promote and train this new generation by seeking people who feel “called” to this service, and not just those who temporarily lend their time or services. This great mission requires people with enthusiasm and passion; it is not for bureaucrats or the sedentary. Otherwise, the “educational place” sooner or later will end up becoming just another commercial service provider ... maybe even a good one at that which pays attention to its “customers” but is never concerned about their education.

As mentioned, sport will educate if its necessary conditions are met. A foremost condition is that in sports there be passion in its educators. They must not want to settle for what is easy or already achieved, but rather, they must desire to go beyond, putting their best into the rela-

<sup>18</sup> Cf. COMITATO PER IL PROGETTO CULTURALE DELLA CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA (ed.), *La sfida educativa*, Bari 2009, 188-194.

tionships they establish with others. When this extraordinary passion mixes with generosity of heart, great things happen.

Yet, this passion for educating in sport needs to be channelled into concrete action. Thus, here are five principle actions that create an effective educational spirit: to accept people as they are; to orientate; to train; to accompany and to give hope. They are five key actions and principles that every coach, educator, parent and teacher must make in order to help a young boy or girl to give meaning and significance to their existence.

### *Accepting others as they are*

The first human action that forms part of this educational itinerary is that of developing the capacity of accepting the other, making him or her feel welcomed; it implies being a good listener.

Acceptance of the other is at the base of all reciprocal relationships. It is fundamental for all sporting activities just as it is fundamental for all civil coexistence.

Even if “the other” is the opponent whom one seeks to beat on the field, this other is still a person who is enriching my life by means of this new opportunity and who respects me by allowing me to be myself. Without the other, I could not measure my abilities and my limits, my efforts in sport as well as in other areas of my life.

Unfortunately, we live in a “disposable” age where things only have value when they serve some purpose and afterwards they are thrown out, and this even occurs with people in relationships. Thus, the art of accepting a person – regardless of what benefit they might bring me – is an action that definitely goes against the current.

Welcoming is something gratuitous; it brings our heart into play and makes every relationship significant. And only by means of significant relationships are communities of persons truly formed.

Establishing relationships requires the personal initiative of my response. Every new relationship sets in motion a process of change in



both the other person and me, making us both co-responsible for this new venture. We cannot pretend that nothing in me has changed.

Acceptance makes room in our heart for all the people that we meet, or rather, to all the 'faces' that we meet – because when we welcome the countenance we welcome the person as he or she is in that particular moment.

It is precisely this kind of human relationship that will change these peoples' lives. This is why we say that accepting people as they are is a process that opens a door to experiencing life, because only these real human experiences can transform us.

### *Orientation*

Orientation is both fantastic work and a difficult task. It means helping young people, the next generation, to build fulfilling ways to become adults. Orientation, however, doesn't mean telling a boy or girl what to do; nor does it mean organising their life.

Orientation means helping them to activate and even re-organise their cognitive, emotional and other key faculties, so as to live their lives and future in a structured way, while avoiding getting trapped in the mediocrity of this world.

Our task is saving young people from meaninglessness, from living life in a passive way, from being trapped into harmful lifestyles and false illusions.

The seriousness of today's educational crisis demands from us that we provide sport activities rich in these human qualities so as to guide young people on their path to becoming adults. Today, there is a sort of paper jam that is blocking the passage from adolescence to adulthood that requires our assistance to resolve.

Becoming an adult is hard work for it requires having emotional stability. It requires a spirit of constancy. Yet, since this maturation process requires much effort and discipline some think that it is better to not

even try! Yet for many others- for millions of young people, sport offers them the opportunity to try and to begin to give some structure and order to their lives.

### *Training*

The third action is that of training. We are experts at this! Yet we often limit ourselves to training only the body and its physical capacities or to refining sports techniques, but this is not enough. As we said at the outset, ability and technique are not everything.

First of all we need to train the heart. Training the heart implies training one's desires- that ability, that mysterious force, that curiosity within ourselves that leads us to be seekers of greater goals.

It is our desire that triggers this search! If sport fails to train a person's desires, it remains just a muscular exercise. If a boy who plays sport is not able to improve his life beyond technical results, for that boy the sport experience will be a failure from an educational point of view.

If we keep the heart out of sport, the educational process is incomplete, corrupted and loses its significance. The heart brings passion into play and without this passion sport is cold and lifeless.

Effort and fatigue are also essential to sports training and to life because I won't achieve anything unless I work and sweat, unless I give my best, unless I try and try again ten thousand times.

Effort is at the heart of training, at the heart of competition, at the heart of anything related to sport, as well as anything that is worthy or enduring in this life, because life is tough; life is sacrifice; life is an uphill race! The very idea of effort has been conveniently erased from educational vocabulary. Yet, a trainer or coach knows well that the words 'effort', 'sacrifice' and 'difficulty' must be part of our vocabulary as they are significant elements of every educational path.

It is also necessary to train young people to face difficulties in order to overcome them. Everyone must be willing to take risks and strive to

overcome mistakes. Mistakes ought not to be seen as something negative, but rather positive, as they are at the foundation of every progression and improvement. Therefore, making mistakes means improving! Life moves on through problems, mistakes, and so does competition. Performance eventually improves by overcoming mistakes as well as a thousand obstacles. Another lesson to learn from mistakes is that of starting all over again, of not giving up, of learning how to lose as well as to win. Training young people to overcome mistakes means helping them to strengthen their own lives from within.

Young people also need training in patience. We all must be patient in spite of the number of times we feel like throwing in the towel! A good instructor also recognizes his own educational failures... and knows that much patience is needed.

We also need to train youth in being happy, or at least to teach them that happiness is not something that we buy, nor is it something that just happens by chance. Happiness is a quest; it is fruit of personal achievement.

This task of a coach also implies teaching youth to believe in a greater good regardless of the circumstances that surround them. We can't always see things in a negative way. We must 'think' positively. To believe in the good regardless of circumstances, means not to fear evil. We need coaches who boldly believe in the good.

Lastly, training in confidence is also needed. We need to be self-confident and to transmit confidence even to those who might make mistakes. We need to train all to have confidence, above all, in God's providence. In fact, these educational efforts of ours cannot succeed without recourse to Divine Providence.

### *Accompanying*

The fourth action is that of accompanying: keeping an attentive eye on the youth within our care; it requires staying close to them. Accom-

panying means to be a ‘companion’ along the way; it consists in walking part of life together. Perhaps because it is a difficult job it is no longer practiced.

A young person needs to hear an adult say: “Go for it! Fight for it! Give it all you’ve got! Don’t worry. I’m here if you need anything.”

Accompanying is a silent presence. It is not a presence made out of pep talks and constant criticisms or words (“You must do it in this way; you must not be like this; you must not behave like that...!”). Rather, it is a subtle activity. Yet the youth, with their acute sensitivity, perceive and appreciate this presence.

True accompanying means helping the other person to believe in himself, because when an adult is interested in a young person, the latter gains a sense of self-confidence.

Accompanying is the discrete, yet authoritative and significant presence of an adult who, with an affirming glance, can guide a young life in its development.

As managers, coaches, parents, teachers, or priests, we must rediscover the art of exercising this significant presence with youth in our lives. Yet, as we know, it takes more than just our presence. Here is the difficult job of witnessing through our actions and being valid role models for them. We often say beautiful things but our own actions and behaviour undermine our words.

### *Giving hope*

The fifth action is that of transmitting hope. In this we truly perform our Christian role. Giving hope means building hope, a constructive hope that gives us all the strength to carry on when everyone else gives up; it implies keeping our head up when everything seems to go wrong. Coping with educational failures and starting all over again when everyone else runs away from responsibility...this is hope!

Hope is that type of “educational charity” that Saint John Bosco

mentions in his pedagogy. This is, in fact, the charism we have inherited from him: that of educating with our lives, displaying the values we believe in and for which we are ready to give everything to defend them with our very lives.

Educating in hope must be a leitmotiv that runs through all of our actions. It is a constant reminder that motivates us to integrate this into our own lives by proclaiming with our works and deeds the truth about the human person and life itself.

Hope helps us to believe in the good and to trust in others. Hope enables us to refresh that dry parched area that too often is the human heart that thirsts for motivation and love.

We must continue along this path of hope in order to re-invite the youth of today to “pull out into the deep and cast their nets once more”.

## CONCLUSION

John Paul II reminded us often that being a Christian requires heroism. For us, living in a heroic way forms part of our Christian identity... it is synonymous with sanctity. All this means that it is not possible to speak about a passion for educating without appealing to this heroism.

We have before us a world in a constant state of flux that often stands in contrast with the Gospel and at times shows outright hostility to our proposals. This is the difficult setting in which we must strive in order that this charism entrusted to us of educating through sport can bear fruit.

We are not called to be at the very back of the line with regard to sports. Rather, we must have the courage and the awareness of being called to be at the front, giving it direction and purpose at the national and international level.

We cannot be among those who only look back upon the past. We must be those who look ahead with boldness; those who do not give up

or succumb. In this affirmation lies the interpretive key for the present time.

This implies being a prophetic voice...and prophets are also somewhat revolutionary. The charism we hold is revolutionary. This educational sports project is revolutionary, precisely because it requires patience, endurance and vision.

If at times we do not feel this fire within it is because we are becoming too complacent with the *status quo* of the system adopted by various sports institutions. We need to recover this fire!

Today we need to proceed down a new path in order to bear fruit in our various situations. The time has arrived for constituting an international forum that can assist the development of a unified sports education effort that gathers together the best practices that Catholic sport associations, movements and educational institutions have to offer. It is not a utopia. It is a concrete possibility that is already beginning.

For all of these reasons, the Church and Catholic sport associations, while respecting the autonomy proper to each institution, must find more and more ways of collaborating with the entire international sports movement in pursuing those same general goals that favour the development of the human person but especially the youth.

## Towards a new season for Catholic sports associations

Bishop JOSEF CLEMENS\*

The title of our seminar refers to “ a new season of the Catholic sport associations ”. Are we now at “ new season ”? If, so, in what does it consist of and what are some of its distinguishing characteristics?

First of all, I would like to recall that in the Message of Pope Benedict XVI for this seminar, the Holy Father specifically and emphatically underlined sport’s educational value in contributing to the integral development of the person and subsequently the important responsibility of the educators in this process.

Along the same lines, Cardinal Ryłko – in his introduction<sup>1</sup> – pointed out some of the salient characteristics of Catholic sport associations in general. In the first place, there is the emphasis on sport’s educational potential with regard to fostering human qualities and virtues. Secondly, there is concern for the formation of the coaches and directors themselves, in order that they might have not only the technical skills for their particular field, but also the fundamental abilities of an educator. In this way, the sporting activities, especially those of the youth, will favour the growth and integral development of the person. These associations are also to be orientated towards God while rooted within the context of the community.

Precisely from this educational perspective, the various talks have analyzed the way sport is practiced today, trying to bring to light, on one hand, how sport’s educational dimension is being threatened from

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Preface of this volume.

interests that are purely commercial as well as a progressive abandonment of ethical and religious values. On the other hand, the seminar has also shown how sport still offers various opportunities to favour the mission of the Church among its youth.

A symbolic example of how secularism and relativism are not strangers to the world of sport occurred at the end of the Confederations Cup in 2009. The Brazilian team, after their victory over the United States of America, gathered together in prayer in order to thank the Lord for the game just played. Yet, a day later, the Danish Soccer Federation, sustaining that “there is no place for religion in soccer” (in this particular case, not even after the game had ended) demanded that FIFA take action in order to avoid the future “danger” that a game of soccer be transformed into a religious event. Consequently, Joseph Blatter, the president of FIFA, sent a warning to the Brazilian Soccer Federation, imploring them to use “moderation” and further declaring that any religious manifestation would be prohibited at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Unfortunately, this dominate secularism impinges upon the identity of those associations of Catholic inspiration, whether sporting or other. Thus, the Holy Father, in the last Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, which had as its theme, the twentieth anniversary of *Christifideles Laici*, stressed that our dicastery has the unique task “to welcome, accompany, discern, recognize and encourage” these lay and ecclesial associations, “favouring the knowledge of their Catholic identity, helping them to insert themselves more fully into the great tradition and the living fabric of the Church, and promoting their missionary development.”<sup>2</sup>

As we can see, this is the great challenge which faces us and to which we must respond with our best effort. We must not fear that

<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address to the participants of the 23rd Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, 15 November 2008.



affirming our Christian identity can take away something from the vitality of our sports association, as is being suggested by an erroneous idea of tolerance that is severed from truth, in which, in order to include all, it deems it necessary to strip off one's own identity.

On April 1, 2005, at the Benedictine Monastery in Subiaco, just two weeks before being elected Pope, Cardinal Ratzinger received the *San Benedetto* award. In his conference on this occasion, he noticed, regarding the question about making reference to Europe's "Christian roots" in the European Constitution, that: "The rejection of reference to God is not an expression of tolerance which wishes to protect non-theist religions and the dignity of atheists and agnostics, but rather an expression of the desire to see God banished definitively from humanity's public life, and driven into the subjective realm of residual cultures of the past. (...) Relativism, which is the starting point of all this, thus becomes a dogmatism which believes itself to be in possession of the definitive scope of reason, and with the right to regard all the rest only as a stage of humanity, in the end surmounted, and that can be appropriately relativized. In reality, this means that we have need of *roots* to survive, and that we must not lose sight of God, if we do not want human dignity to disappear".<sup>3</sup> This is because, as he mentioned previously, "a tree without roots dries up..."<sup>4</sup>

So, what must we do? Well, we can only give a response to this question if we know how to answer another question: who are we?

The referral to our Christian roots is not simply a defense of the past, but also the Christian contribution to the future, in order to offer a critical response to that "void in our heart", that, although it desires that which is true, good, and beautiful, so often is easily appeased with surrogate alternatives, especially in the lives of young people.

<sup>3</sup> J. RATZINGER, "Cardinal Ratzinger on Europe's Crisis of Culture", 1 April 2005, in *International Catholic Review Communio* (USA) 32 (2005), no. 2, 345-356.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

But, as Benedict XVI said at the 23rd World Youth Day in Sydney “Christ offers more! Indeed he offers everything! Only He who is the Truth can be the Way and hence also the Life.”<sup>5</sup>

The then Cardinal Ratzinger, at the above mentioned conference in Subiaco extended a clear invitation to all to become true witnesses, and to form this creative minority: “Above all, that of which we are in need at this moment in history are people who, through an enlightened and lived faith, render God credible in this world. (..) We need people who have their gaze directed to God, to understand true humanity. We need people whose intellects are enlightened by the light of God, and whose hearts God opens, so that their intellects can speak to the intellects of others, and so that their hearts are able to open up to the hearts of others.”<sup>6</sup>

In an interview with journalists while in flight to Prague, Pope Benedict XVI returned to this idea, affirming how “usually it is creative minorities who determine the future”. He invited the Church to better “understand that she is a creative minority who has a heritage of values that are not things of the past, but a very lively and relevant reality”.<sup>7</sup>

Consequently, in light of this exhortation by the Holy Father, it is necessary that the Church promote with greater decision its presence within the youth sporting environments, in order to fully value those most positive aspects of athletics, such as its capacity to foster important virtues, and in order to purify it from those destructive tendencies that tend to distort sport’s original purpose. Certainly for many of you, your experiences have proven that a young person who is seriously involved in sports normally possesses high ideals and has a potential for excellence that includes the ethical but must be further stimulated and

<sup>5</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Address to the youth at the World Youth Day Welcoming Ceremony at Barangaroo (Sydney), 17 July 2008.

<sup>6</sup> J. RATZINGER, “Cardinal Ratzinger on Europe’s Crisis of Culture”, 1 April 2005, in *International Catholic Review Communio* (USA) 32 (2005), no. 2, 345-356.

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Interview with journalists while in flight to Prague, 26 September 2009.

developed. If we, as Catholics do not offer them our perspective and our ideals they will look elsewhere to find this!

Thus, we urge Catholic sport associations to renew the consciousness of their Catholic identity with greater enthusiasm and earnestness. Primarily, this means placing the educational dimension of sport at the foundation of their efforts in order to give it this significant ethical dimension that seeks to form the youth in a greater sensitivity towards the most genuine human values while remaining focused on that transcendent objective that gives life its utmost meaning. Since the human person cannot live without points of reference and orientation, if they do not discover those that are deeply Christian and human, another system of orientation will “guide” them!

In the arduous task of educating, as in sporting activity itself, it is important to breathe deeply in order to endure. We need to have much generosity and patience. We should not expect to immediately reap the fruit of our efforts that are sown day after day, week after week. We know that every good seed must die in order to bear fruit and that every disinterested investment will bear fruit, although it might be only many years later.

Among the participants at this seminar, are some members of the Catholic Sports federations that have many years of history. For example, the FICEP will soon celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2011 and many national Catholic youth sport associations have more than 100 years of existence. These many years of service to the youth and the Church are a reserve of experience in order to face the current educational emergency and to respond to the hunger and thirst that the youth have with a proposal of a life more serious, profound, and satisfying.

It is my hope that this initiative can offer the Church an innovative reflection on the numerous opportunities that the practice of sport can lend to the pastoral care of youth. As we have heard more than once in these days, this valuable work is filled with many challenges and normally entrusted to those who are already overburdened with other

tasks. Furthermore, it can at times weigh on you as a great responsibility with very little personally gratification or appreciation on the part of others. Nonetheless, I know that the Lord's assistance will not be lacking. For you must recall that it is precisely through your work that this unequivocal sign of God's closeness to humanity as manifested in the Incarnation of his Son and his presence through the Church is realized.

At the end of our seminar, it is worthwhile to return to those words of Pope Benedict XVI in his homily in the inaugural mass of his pontificate: "Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us?" The Holy Father responded in this way: "No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. (...) Dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Homily during the Inaugural Mass of his Pontificate, 24 April 2005.

## **PANEL DISCUSSION I**

### **Training true champions**



## Introduction

KEVIN LIXEY, L.C.\*

What does it mean to be a *true* champion? We have added the adjective “true” as there seems to be many superficial if not illusory ideas about the stuff of champions. It is interesting to note that this concept appears in scripture at least a dozen times although in varying ways. In the first Book of Samuel (*1 Sam* 17: 4) a concept of “champion” as a strong warrior (*vir propugnator*) is applied to the six and a half feet tall Goliath. Yet, Saul also attributes this to David when he promises to give his oldest daughter Merob to him “if you become my champion (*vir fortis*) and fight the battles of the Lord” (*1 Sam* 18: 17).

In Psalm 19, the glorious sun that treks its lofty course across the heavens is described as a “champion (*ut gigas*) running his course”. It is no wonder this psalm is recited on the feasts of the apostles as they too – in ways analogous to the rays of the sun – make known the message of the Lord through all the earth. They too, we might add, run their course like champions! Here the words of St. Paul also come to mind: “I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith”!

So, in order to enrich an impoverished idea of champion that is only based on the number of wins or on how much money one makes, we have inserted this panel discussion to explore a deeper and broader meaning of being a champion and what it is that ultimately constitutes success. In doing so, we would like to help directors, coaches, parents, and especially the children engaged in youth sports to see that being a champion is based on interior qualities and virtues more than on the number of goals scored or fame acquired.

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In fact, regarding success, legendary college basketball coach John Wooden offers this definition: “Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming. (...) In the final analysis only *you* know whether you goofed off or not. Only *you* know if you took the shortcut, the easy way out, or cheated. No one else does. I know that I look back with regret on some things that seemed to be success to others!”<sup>1</sup>

So, while it may be that success is ultimately determined by the person who alone truly knows if he or she gave their best, we simply ask if we can objectively identify some of the qualities and virtues that constitute the enduring greatness of a champion both on and off the field. To help us with this, we have invited a special group of panellists with expertise in different areas.

To start off, we have with us Demetrio Albertini, who played professional soccer in Europe for such teams as *A.C. Milan*, *Real Madrid*, and *S.S. Lazio* as well as being a member of the Italian National team at the 1996 World Cup. Demetrio will help us to see that a key ingredient in becoming a champion is team work; not all depends on the individual himself but much can and should be attributed to the coaches, fellow players, and in his case, to his parents who sustained him along the way.

Along these same lines, we will then hear from a professional trainer of basketball in Europe, Valerio Bianchini, who is the first Italian coach to win three championships with three different teams: *Cantù*, *Virtus Roma*, and *Victoria Libertas*. He will offer us his insights on “forging champions on and off the field” through coaching the whole person and not simply the raw talent.

More than a hundred years ago, Pierre de Coubertin noted: “I have clearly perceived the danger run by athleticism in an atmosphere of advertisement and bluff, ...where athletic sports are likely to be commercially exploited by the organizers of public exhibitions.” Consequently,

<sup>1</sup> J.R. WOODEN, *They Call Me Coach*, New York 2004, 85-86.



## *Introduction*

Coubertin saw the necessity for re-establishing the Olympic Games “ as a supreme consecration of the cult of athletics practised in the purest spirit of true sport proudly, joyfully, loyally. ”<sup>2</sup> Commercialisation and cheating are all the more present today, but are not these tendencies contrary to the Olympic values? To help us answer this question, we have asked long time International Olympic Committee member from Portugal, Fernando Lima Bello to assist us.

To round off this panel, Sir Philip Craven, the president of the International Paralympic Committee, will speak to us about “ becoming a champion against all obstacles ”. His testimony will touch on something very particular to the “ stuff ” of champions: the capacity not to give up after the first or one thousandth set back. After falling ten metres onto rocks, Phil Craven was left paralyzed from the waist down while still in his teens. Shortly after his accident, while watching a game of wheelchair basketball he exclaimed: “ This is no big deal, I can still play sports! ” So while studying for a college degree, he joined the Stoke Spitfires Wheelchair Basketball Club and the rest is history. He is now regarded as one of the top wheelchair basketball players and is one of the world’s leading sports administrators, shaping the future of international sport on behalf of the world’s Paralympians. Not focusing on what doesn’t work, but, rather, focusing on what does work has been one of Sir Craven’s secrets to success.

<sup>2</sup> N. MÜLLER (ed.), *Pierre de Coubertin: Olympism Selected Writings*, Lausanne 2000, 543-544.



## What does it mean to be a champion?

DEMETRIO ALBERTINI\*

I think it very important during the course of this seminar, to be able to reflect on what it means to be a sports champion. Towards this purpose, I would like to share with you my experiences as a professional football (soccer) player. Above all, I do not think that I have been a champion. Rather, I think that I am a normal person who has been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity of playing a very special sport. I say “special” because it is a communal sport in which, in order to obtain victory, requires team work, collaboration and the united effort of all. A moment ago it was said that a champion is one who reaches success. In a football game, success can only be reached with the support and cooperation of all of one’s team-mates, and never on one’s own. Consequently, in order to become a champion in this sport great personal talent is not enough. One also has to build a relationship with the other players and to place himself and his own capacities at the service of the team.

Certainly, there are many definitions of a champion and, in this regard, the one offered above adequately describes this title. Nonetheless, I think that it is incomplete in as much as a true champion is one also off the field: he must be a point of reference for others and always a model to follow. “Who is a champion in the locker room?” is a question that should also be asked.

It is often said that football does not have among its athletes these positive examples. Perhaps this is because it is a sporting activity which

\* Professional European football player with teams such as *F.C. Barcelona*, *A.C. Milan*, and the Italian National Team at the 1994 World Cup in the US; since 2007 a Vice-President of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC).

is constantly given so much attention by the media, which tends to highlight the more sensational aspects of football including those more clamorous aspects of a player's professional and private life, the gossip that attracts attention, and overshadows those examples that are more genuine and exemplary.

Football, more than any other sport – precisely because of this media coverage – makes the professional player a celebrity, causes him to live in a world that is totally different from that which is normal and he loses sight of reality. Because of this it is important that each professional player make the effort so that his success does not blind him from his responsibility towards the public. He must not lose sight of the fact that his own triumph is the fruit of the formation he has received throughout his life from his coaches, and especially from his parents, who are the principle educators of the person. Thus it is essential that every coach and family help the youth who embark upon a sporting career to overcome the trials and difficulties so that this experience even if highly technical can remain solidly anchored in reality. Regarding this point, the FIGC has instituted a special sector for school children that is dedicated to the (athletic) formation of children from the ages of 5 to 12 (youth, we can say, who have not yet been “contaminated” by the media). The first article of the FIGC statutes affirms its goal of the propagation of football and its values. This aim is pursued primarily by being engaged in the formation at a non profit level of those youth who want to play football at a professional level.

To conclude, I would like to repeat that becoming a champion requires more than individual talent; it is a team effort. A champion bears the implicit responsibility of being an exemplary model for the youth on and off the field. These objectives can only be reached by maturing first as a man, and then as a football player and this occurs thanks to the help of all those who accompany him along the way, his teachers, trainers, coaches, and others who are guides to keep the player on the right path which is not only that of sporting success but also success in life.

## Forging champions on and off the field

VALERIO BIANCHINI\*

I must continue upon these excellent thoughts about being a champion that were just offered to us by the outstanding player, Demetrio Albertini. As a professional basketball coach, I have the opportunity to be with many champions and to coach them. But, I must admit that there are various types of champions. There is the type who uses his God given talent exclusively to affirm his own greatness. There are also those who are considered champions based on their public image: for being well paid and well admired by their fans. Lastly, there are those real champions who are first and foremost gentlemen. This is not simply because they are victorious on the field or because they are the recipients of praise or fan worship. True champions are those who have received a champion's education! In this aspect, I believe that the American education system is a leader in this field as many in the United States consider school sport as a real instrument in the formation of the youth who practice it. There, the aim is not simply that of providing sporting activities for youngsters but rather of favouring the full development of the person by fostering a sense of team work and discipline. These objectives are pursued to the point that students who have serious disciplinary problems or who have poor grades are expelled from the team. In such a system, it is not only the athlete who matures, but also the entire human person! Within the Italian school system, on the other hand, instead of seeing sports potential as an effi-

\* Former professional basketball coach who has won championships with several Italian teams and has been the coach of the Italian National Team for World and European tournaments.

acious means for the students overall development, many are of the opinion that the practice of a sport robs a student of important study hours.

As a coach, and therefore, as an educator, this is certainly a matter that concerns me a great deal. It is up to me as a coach to help these young people embrace a mission which is much bigger than that of winning a championship because it is a mission that entails being a role model for others. The professional system too must aspire to greater ideals by seeking not only to turn a profit but, above all, to offer the youth – who are the main followers of these sports – the good example of upright citizens: men and women athletes who know how to get along with others and who are capable of carrying out their responsibilities for the benefit of others.

Based on my personal experience in coaching, I would like to briefly consider within the itinerary of athletic formation that children receive from their participation in sports, the importance of promoting an integral education of the person that is capable of forging true champions. I owe my own passion for sport to my mother and the sports program offered in my parish in Milan. As a kid I was very shy and preferred reading instead of playing with others on the playground. I lived in my fantasy world of Emilio Salgari and Jules Verne. One day my mother – who had a modest cultural background but a strong faith and much common sense – obliged me to participate in the parish “oratory” youth programme. In the parish oratory, I discovered an extraordinary world: a world of social interaction with various activities and opportunities; a world where the older boys would assist the younger ones with much patience; a world where sport was played with gusto. It was there where I fell in love with basketball. In fact, basketball changed my life, as this love matured to the point of becoming my profession! Unfortunately, in the wake of the youth revolt around the year 1968, many parishes abandoned the practice of offering sports for the youth, and committed – according to me – a serious error as it was precisely by

means of the parish basketball program that I found my path in life. Through the motor skills that I acquired through this sport, together with its experiences of physical suffering, fatigue, and hard work, I became more aware of my personal identity that was being forged. I discovered that it was not only my muscles, my nerves, and my bones that were involved in guiding my actions, but something still even greater: my will power and my capacity to make decisions in relation to those around me. But, the greatest discovery that I made in those years was that of possessing within me a real passion for sport which became an exceptional force that completely transformed me. This passion was akin to that of falling in love for the first time. It was something that brought me out of myself and motivated me to become the person whom I wanted to become and to reach those goals that I wanted to reach: it gave me a sense of direction and purpose.

To become a member of a team is an extraordinary thing for a child. This experience of being “called” or chosen to be a part of something greater than oneself can transform a person. One gains access to the reality of forming part of a team in which all its members, guided by a coach, seek the very same goal. Consequently, every individual decision is made in relation to one’s teammates as no one can opt for themselves alone. Through this, one perceives a new energy: the dynamism of team play. In basketball we use the eloquent metaphor of the hand where the five fingers are equivalent to the five players. One finger on its own can do little, as it takes at least two fingers to grasp an object. And when all five fingers form a fist with the purpose of striking an object, it becomes an incredible force. So too is the case with the team: when each member unites his will to the common goal of the team, it creates a tremendous potential.

One fantastic element in this process of development is the fact that every sport has its set of rules and an official who is appointed to see that they are respected. Obviously, alongside those written rules, are also the indications of the coach and the advice given by the team cap-

tain and other experienced players; all of this forms an ensemble of expertise that is to be observed. Indeed, solid points of reference are fundamental in a child's development. This is succinctly affirmed in the old pedagogical adage: *serva ordinem et ordo servabit te* (keep order and order will keep you). Sport, like life, is full of turbulence and challenges. At times, the strategy one uses in a game just doesn't work, or the referee might not be so impartial. In these moments, it is essential to follow the rules of the game which indicate the specific way that the players are to behave and serve to guide the decisions of the referee.

With the savvy and expertise gained on the court, a handful of these young athletes will make it to the professional level. At that point things change as they are now "looked up to" by others and followed by fans and spectators. Thus, it is necessary that they acquire a great sense of responsibility and never forget that professional athletes are held up as role models, especially to the youth. This awareness of their new responsibilities as a professional player will depend more than anything else on the formation they have received up until this point. This is one more reason why every coach must be concerned not only with developing the player's physical talent, but also with developing the athlete's human virtues.

I would like to conclude with an anecdote from my professional career. As a young coach, I would often spend part of my summer in the United States assisting at one of the youth basketball camps organized at those American universities with a strong basketball program. Typically, the high school basketball coaches were called upon to be instructors at these camps. In general, we would always find a warm welcome from these great American coaches. I would come over from Italy to Indiana University because I enjoyed spending time alongside the famous coach of the *Hoosiers*, Bobby Knight. Certainly, I can't deny that Coach Knight has quite a temper. Nonetheless, he has a brilliant speculative mind regarding the inner workings of basketball and is an exceptional instructor. Although some of his players would change to



another university because they could not handle his demanding temperament, those talented players who endured all four years under him would have excellent possibilities of being signed by the best of the professional teams. One day while at Indiana I had the opportunity of visiting the *Hoosiers'* locker room. Please note that for those seriously involved in competitive sports, the locker room holds a certain air of fascination. It is the very nerve centre of the team that forms an almost sacred inner sanctuary that few are allowed access. Upon entering this locker room, all the latest high tech weight machines and physical therapy devices immediately attracted my attention, as it was well advanced for its time (this was in the seventies). Afterwards, I saw a typed notice that hung on the wall; it was a poem dedicated to the athletes at Indiana University. I cannot recall the exact words of the poem, but it read something like this: "Remember that you are a *Hoosier* and that you wear the uniform of Indiana. When you step out on the court, among the twenty thousand spectators, are also the eyes of a young boy watching all that you do. He will imitate every one of your actions: he will dribble the way you dribble, and he will pass the way you pass... He watches you with great attention for you are the man that he wants to become. But remember, he not only observes the way you handle the ball and shoot, but also the way you deal with your opponent, your teammates, your coach, and the official. Remember to set a good example for him, help him to become a champion as you have become a champion."

I think that these few lines express well the mission of a champion athlete. In first place, before popularity, fame, and earnings, an athlete must be concerned with being a just person. He must not ever forget that his talent is a gift from God and with this gift comes a great responsibility.



## Do shortcuts produce real champions?

FERNANDO LIMA BELLO\*

When I received the invitation to participate in this seminar and address this topic, I asked for some time to decide, due to doubts about my ability, because I am a layman, and neither an expert in philosophy or theology. Although it is possible to come to contest with minimal preparation, this negates the spirit of commitment to be a “worthy” opponent<sup>1</sup> and I wanted to be a worthy player in this seminar. However, I decided to accept because the answer to the interrogation “Do shortcuts produce real Champions?” is actually quite easy: No! A real champion has to have integrity and doesn’t cheat!

There are no shortcuts to becoming a champion. The only thing cut short in high level sport is time- as an elite athlete has a very short life span: 10 to 20 years of hard work in preparation that may yield less than 5 to 8 years of good results, at least in very physical sports. This is a reality that every athlete (and coach as well) should be prepared to mentally and practically foresee.

I wish to now develop some ideas related to this topic to show positive aspects of sport as well as many of the dangers involved. To start it is important to clarify my concept of sport.

Games were played in all cultures, as a legitimate entertainment, some within a religious context, others with abuses we wouldn’t tolerate now, but more for fun than to win.

\* Sailing World champion who participated in the Olympic Games in 1968 and 1972. He has been president of the Portuguese Olympic Committee and a member of the I.O.C. since 1989.

<sup>1</sup> C. THOMAS, *Sport in a Philosophical Context*, Philadelphia 1983.

It was the ancient Greek culture – which I much admire- that had the capacity of abstraction leading to the development of philosophy, science, art, architecture, and so on. (My astonishment is that it didn't also lead to a more superior form of religion).

It was also the ancient Greeks who started “ real ” sport, even if it was played originally in a religious context. It was practiced periodically, with set rules and with the finality of the development of body and mind.

The honours, the benefits and the prestige for the winner, as well as the shame brought upon cheaters were quite similar to what happens in sport today.

After the French defeat in war with Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Pierre de Coubertin, a man of multiple interests, sought to improve the general weakness of the French soldiers. He thought that sport for everyone would be a good means to do so. Plus, sport had the added benefit of bringing people from different cultures together offering opportunities for understanding mutual differences, eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and the overall unity of the human family, as well as contributing to the promotion of peace.

He proposed an event that was inspired in the ancient Greek tradition of the Olympic Games and kept many of its ceremonials. This was readily and enthusiastically accepted due to the interest developed in Europe at the time and because of recent archaeological discoveries in Greece.

Although Coubertin was from a Catholic family he was not a practicing one, and – given the French spirit of separation of church and state – he promoted sport as secular activity with its own set of ethical values. Perhaps this was done so also to avoid religious conflicts.

Today, the Olympic philosophy is practically the ethical standard for modern sports.

Currently sport is divided into different “ games ” or disciplines each with their own international organization which sets their rules and organizes their respective competition calendars.

In our competitive society, sports are everywhere, appealing to the

public in general and especially the youth. Sports can be practiced as a simple competition where you try to do your best, or as a passion that is taken extremely seriously and “professionally”, and can even grant prestige or financial advantages.

Yet, sport should seek the harmonious development of the human body. While recalling that it’s not the final purpose in itself; sport has to be used in order that the mind be prepared to exercise dominion over the body.

According to the Catholic Church’s teaching, sport’s physical strain “thus become almost an exercise of human and Christian virtues”<sup>2</sup> and we can’t forget that the human body is the temple of God (cf. 1 *Cor* 6: 15).

Yet others consider sport as a mere fad, a frivolous activity, or a form of alienation of the masses, with the sole purpose of generating profits or increasing personal prestige (and sometimes it is) or to create new idols. Yet, sport has really become a social phenomenon with sociological, economic, educational, political and even chauvinistic implications.

Saint Paul – one of the Apostles I most admire for his universal vision that was not only valid for his time but still very relevant today – considered sport so important that he used it several times as an analogy for spiritual matters in his letters to the Greek converts, in words that all of you know, and with great emphasis in fair-play.<sup>3</sup>

Or, to express this in a simple phrase with a twist, told half a century ago by a Scottish soccer player and manager, Bill Shankly: “Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I assure you, it’s much more serious than that.”<sup>4</sup>

I consider that the words of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*, and recently mentioned in *Caritas in Veritate*, (n. 11) can be aptly applied

<sup>2</sup> PIUS XII, Address to participants of the Italian Scientific Congress for Sport and Physical Education, 8 November 1952.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. St. Paul’s letters: Corinthians I, Philippians and Timothy II.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted in D. WINNER, *Those Feet*, London 2005, 146.

here: “ Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension ”.<sup>5</sup>

For those with special physical and intellectual capacities, dexterity or passion for a sport, the natural tendency is to try to advance to sport at a higher level, more or less informally. This move causes a personal paradigm shift, for better or worse.

The aspiring athlete has to be prepared to have a coach that gives orders to follow; he has to spend most of his free time in training while extremely organized in order to go on with his life outside of sports and be prepared to put up with the constant repetition of certain movements. In order to persevere, certainly, he has to get personal satisfaction from winning or from the feeling that he has done his best.

As you see, it is an austere program that can improve one’s character, but it comes with a number of dangers or unpredicted costs: be prepared to select friends, because you will meet new ones, and sacrifice a great part of your leisure; obey your coach, without losing the capacity to understand orders and disagree if you feel necessary; accept slow progress and be prepared to lose; it should be an opportunity to rethink what you are doing.

Sport can have a great social impact in the integration of athletes in social networks with shared interests, micro communities, and communicating among themselves through modern technologies. Unfortunately, it has not yet received proper attention as an opportunity to overcome the social exclusion of prisoners or the unemployed.

He (or she) has to be humble so as to respect adversaries and to accept advice in choosing a coach, because some can be far too demanding and suffer from what is known in the U.S. as “ toxic jock syndrome ” (a combination of risky and aggressive behaviour that is prevalent in coaches and players).

<sup>5</sup> PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*, n. 14; BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 11.

*Do shortcuts produce real champions?*

On the other hand, a lot of dangers loom in sports as a mirror of society and human nature in general.

LIFE AFTER SPORT

It is not easy to prepare for or to accept, among those who have attained public notoriety, suddenly finding themselves forgotten, at an age when normally a person is professionally at his or her peak. It can be very depressing and provoke jealousy and a lack of objectives or aims in one's personal life, sometimes with terrible consequences.<sup>6</sup>

PRIDE AND HAUGHTINESS

Contemptuousness should be combated, learning and living the concept of fair-play and understanding that a defeat is not always the other's luck but perhaps your own limitation or sporting inferiority.<sup>7</sup>

An athlete will always face temptations to improve, forcing his normal physical development with unforeseen health problems and certainly bad consequences; prize money can be another factor causing

<sup>6</sup> Recently, a former Olympian defended himself in court by blaming elite sport for his subsequent drug abuse after he was not readily prepared for life after sport. When his career ended, he was left with nowhere to go. In his sentencing hearing for being accused of supplying a prohibited drug (in order to earn money for his addiction), this former athlete emotionally recounted that after reaching the highs of becoming a dual Olympic medallist he hit his nadir. "Since 2004 my career was over and I didn't know what to do with my life. It was to numb the pain of being finished that I started smoking marijuana daily and popping ecstasy pills and partying, and it became part of my life." He said drugs had ruined his life, including any chance of using his sporting success to build a career. "I'm devastated. It's devastated my family. I've embarrassed myself and I feel ashamed," he said. "This is as low as it gets. My value in the community has been massively tarnished". His voice wavered as he told how he's "still struggling" with life after competing, which he began as the youngest ever person admitted to the Australian Institute of Sport at age 15 and 10 months.

<sup>7</sup> Remember that a great champion has to first possess great physical talent and natural ability.

you to train and compete too much in a way that is detrimental to your health with possible irreversible damages.

#### STARTING TOO EARLY

Every prospective athlete should also have a full medical appreciation to be aware of any congenital deficiencies that could be dangerous for their lives.

Let me also talk clearly about some really shocking facts, inhuman and against all human rights.

Exceptionally there are coaches that can be very dangerous to youngsters without a solid moral formation. The ascendancy that they have over the young athletes can even lead to paedophilia which is, unfortunately, more frequent than it is perceived.

In some dictatorial regimes it is even official government policy to go through the country to find promising very young people, with special aptitudes for some sport and to take them away from their families in order to develop their skills in special training schools; if they don't fulfil their expectations, they are simply dropped from the team and sent back without any concern about their readjustment.<sup>8</sup>

#### DOPING

It is a very juridical and technical process that is very dangerous to youngsters and can have terrible consequences on the health of high level athletes.

<sup>8</sup> We know about their existence but they are governments not subject to control although suspected of using brutal methods. For instance, in gymnastics, their growth is controlled and the flexibility of the joints is forced (as it is said to be done in the circus with contortionists). They may possibly be using doping methods but because they are not yet federation athletes they are exempt from testing; its physical trace disappears after some years (but what about the psychological and health side effects?). They do all of this so that they might obtain national prestige!



### *Do shortcuts produce real champions?*

At the beginning he can try to go too fast, thinking that doping is only tested on high level competition and he will never be discovered if taken only in small doses. Yes, he quickly will become better than the others but starts to slide down an addicting slope (as with the so called “social” drugs) with unforeseen problems and certainly bad consequences for his health. There are always people around pushing “vitamins” that really mask drugs. What he is not aware of is that this starts that fall, with negative consequences in the long run.

The drugs can have negative effects because they become capable of more effort than the individual’s bones, heart or articulations can support, and they can affect some organs with illness (many die relatively young), and have a large likelihood of being discovered with the consequent shame, loss of revenue and left aimless.

### BETTING

Recently, a new issue has come up; that of athlete betting, to influence the results in order to generate a personal profit; due to its recent nature this problem is yet to have a set solution or form of avoidance.

Should we consider elite sport a harmful activity? No! But it is a very tempting and risky “business” if considered only as a way to achieve glory, fortune and rewards.

### CONCLUSION

Let me return to what it takes to make a real champion. Nothing important in life is attained without effort, perseverance and sacrifice. There are no shortcuts or substitutes for hard work!

A great champion is generally an icon, and most of the time is grateful and disposed to help with his presence, speaking to children of his

experience or just by his example leading many people into the practice of sport. Simply ask him and his reaction will be one of gratitude for being remembered and he or she will be heard with full attention.

However I beg you, pay attention! He or she may be an example of perseverance, but remember that all athletes are human, and susceptible to temptation and sin. It would have the contrary effect to promote a competing athlete as an example later discovered to have cheated.

It is different, for those that have already given proof of integrity. Champions are not those who win consecutive championships and then are easily forgotten, but those who in their life, in their sport or publicly, are recognized for a long time for having charisma and a life that constitutes an example. Those are the true great Champions.

The Church also avoids canonizing a living person a “ saint ” ...only time will tell.

## Champions against all obstacles

PHILIP CRAVEN\*

When I was asked to speak on “champions against all obstacles”, I thought, perhaps the title really ought to be “champions *because* of all obstacles” as it is precisely the obstacles that make us champions. Do you really become a champion when everything is given to you on a platter? Or, rather, is it not through the effort you put into achieving your goals that you become a true champion, which it seems is what the previous panellists were indicating.

In the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), we have written down four basic values of a champion. However, I don't like to speak of values as being written down, because they are not to be found on paper but out there in the air and in people. Nevertheless, a champion should show determination; courage ... – although I have to admit that I have difficulty with this because I do not necessarily consider myself to be a courageous person; maybe others do, so that may be a perception; champions can inspire; and our fourth value – and perhaps a key objective of our champions – is that of creating equality of opportunity around the world.

Today, I would like to tell you about the vision of the IPC and how we arrived at these above-mentioned values. Then I would like to briefly describe what sport is. I stress the word “describe” as we do not have time to discuss this in great detail; it perhaps could be the topic for another seminar altogether. Finally, I want to tell you what constitutes a Paralympic champion.

So, what is the Paralympic movement's vision? The IPC's goal is

\* President of the International Paralympic Committee.

“to enable Paralympic athletes to achieve sporting excellence and inspire and excite the world”. This was written in 2002 and is pretty clear and straightforward. They tell me that it is my job as president to make sure that the vision is still relevant for today. For the moment, I think it is. Let me now take you through the vision, breaking it down, in order to tell you why it is written like it is.

The first word, and perhaps the most important, is that word “enable”. We are not about doing things for others. We are not about “caring” for another individual who is “in need”. Rather, we are about the self determination of every individual. We are not about the collectivization, and thus the marginalization, of some “group” which is a perception in some people’s mind (of people with a so-called “disability”). No. We are about individuals and athletes deciding and acting on their own individual development with the movement. This self determination does not just apply to the athletes and the players, but also extends to the members of the IPC. Take for instance Luca Pancalli who was with us earlier who is the president of the Italian Paralympic Committee and Vice President of the Italian National Olympic Committee (It seems that he has also had a little bit to do with Italian soccer in the not too distant past). It extends as well to others, including the volunteers and staff. All of this is part of this strength or this spirit that constitutes who we are. In fact, our motto is “spirit in motion”! Thus, as you can see, the spirit of sport is fundamental to Paralympic sport.

The second part of the vision is “achieving sporting excellence” and this is very straightforward. But achieving sporting excellence doesn’t only mean winning a gold medal! I think this has already been discussed by our other panelists. Let me just say that it is up to each individual to decide what is excellence in their view. It may mean playing for the local wheel chair basketball team – something that I do about three or four times a year even though I am three times as old as some of the fellow players! For others, excellence may mean winning a gold medal in the pool. But the Paralympic movement doesn’t adopt

what I would term an “American view” – even though it is the view of other nations as well – which claims that the only person who counts is the gold medalist. For if we do so, we forget about 90% or 99% of the other athletes who are competing. We need to think of everybody and not just the gold medal winner.

However, regarding the achievement of excellence, let me give you an example of some of the times that can be achieved by Paralympians. Oscar Pistorius, a Paralympic athlete from South Africa, who is amputated below the knee on both legs, can run 200 meters in just over 21 seconds! Or consider the example of wheelchair marathoners who can complete a marathon in less than one hour and thirty minutes! And an even more staggering example is given by those people who have broken their necks....: twenty years ago they were not allowed to even push themselves or operate manual wheelchairs as they were obligated to use electric wheelchairs; now they can finish a marathon in one hour and thirty-two minutes while not even being able to grip the wheels with their hands! They have to push the wheel with the back of the hand. These are people who were told: “Hey, you have to be in an electric wheel chair!” And they responded. “No, I don’t, I can push my own chair!” These are but a few examples of Paralympic sporting excellence.

The third part of the vision is that of inspiring and exciting the world through Paralympic sport. Inspire and excite are the key to this phrase because this is what happens when people go and see the Paralympics either live or watch it on television. They feel this strength beyond belief. Perhaps, before being inspired, they are even surprised as they might have thought that this could never happen; it is beyond their initial belief. As for exciting the world...sport does excite; we know that and everybody knows that. Just consider one of the panelists here, soccer player Demetrio Albertini. He has had fantastic moments on the pitch! I am sure that there have been moments in his career when he has been very excited, especially after a win. And there have also been moments when he might have felt let down or depressed after

a loss. These are the emotions of sport; sport does excite. This does not only apply to the athletes, but also to the coaches, to the spectators, and to the volunteers. It should also apply to sponsors as they also should be excited by what they are doing. This is part of the strength that is within our spirit that produces excitement beyond expectation.

The final part of the vision of the IPC, which isn't written down, – but maybe it should be – is about the legacy: Paralympic athletes changing the world. The action of athletes, volunteers and staff can change and are changing the public perception about individuals, who might be viewed by some at the present moment as “possessing” a disability. But, in my opinion, this is purely a perception from someone on the outside looking in.

Let us now reflect on “what is sport?” We have all heard about Pierre de Coubertin and it has already been said that yes, sport is elite competition. There is no doubt about that. But Coubertin also said that sport is education. I think what he meant by this is that it teaches life skills in a very natural way. In fact, the creation of champions consists in the teaching of these life skills. Coubertin also said in the 1920's that the greatest threat to the Olympic movement is over-commercialization or, to state it in another way, the threat of “the contamination by the mass media” as was mentioned by Demetrio Albertini a few moments ago. I think these two things go together.

But what are these life skills? Many of them have been mentioned already in this panel. Let's start with playing within the rules... In life we all have to play within some rules, and this has already been said by coach Bianchini. Sport, when it is practiced properly, when it is true sport, is the antithesis of war. There are no rules in modern warfare. Sport harnesses aggression and frustration. I remember my first international game of wheel-chair basketball. I took the court with an attitude of a total player, and I got sent off in the first half with five fouls! I soon learned my lesson as I didn't get sent off again in at least the next few matches. Sport is also about practicing fair play and honesty, about cre-

ating team and life long friendships, and learning to be able to trust someone (going back to the team concept). Money plays no part here in any of this! It is learning to communicate, and communicate often with human beings face to face, and not with a computer screen or a television screen.

With preparations for the Olympics and Paralympics in Beijing, I had to travel to China seventeen or eighteen times. Once, in October 2005, I was trying to recover from jet lag by watching television. (When I am traveling, I always watch the *TV5 Monde* news channel as I find it far superior to the *BBC*.) At that time, there happened to be a lot of civil unrest going on in France: rioting in the streets and cars being set on fire. This had been going on for two or three days, and then they did a piece on Marseille, in which the reporter asked a community worker: “Why is there no trouble in Marseille?” And the man responded: “Well in this community everybody knows each other”. Every few weeks they will play soccer or table tennis together, and in this way the people in the community interact with each other and they know about their world and they are not influenced by things that they don’t know about. So here we see how sport facilitated in this communication and community building.

Giving rather than always taking: the principle of volunteerism. Giving oneself to the team and receiving back from this teamwork. It is true that there are team sports and there are individual sports but teams begin with two people: two people make a team!

Whereas winning is good, losing doesn’t mean you are a failure. You can and should learn from your losses. This is another obstacle that must be overcome in order to learn how to win.

Another lesson to learn: make sure you have fun! My favorite sport in school, before my accident, was soccer. I was no good at it but I loved it all the same. I was a natural tennis player and swimmer and cricketer – which is a great English game that none of you know anything about!

So, if you are interested in getting kids interested in sport in the parishes, don't always look at their physical appearance and say: "This boy is 6'6" so he must play basketball". Maybe this tall person doesn't like basketball. One should first see what is most interesting and fun for them, and not predetermine this based on their physical stature. Only in this way, will they like sport. And don't emphasize purely winning. Avoid the mantra: "You must win, you must win, you must win!" This should come naturally.

Remember that these life skills cannot be acquired by downloading them off the internet, by watching TV, or by reading about them in a textbook. They have to be regularly practiced in long term practice on the field of play. As Prof. McNamee said earlier, quoting Aristotle: "practice makes permanent" in the acquisition of good habits.

From this seminar and what has been discussed today, I get the impression that the Catholic Church wants to reinvigorate and re-energize its sports programs around the world and at the local level, "educating" through sport. So what is education? Is it simply math or chemistry? Or does it not also have to be balanced with these life skills? As we have quoted much from Aristotle this morning, I want to go back 2500 years ago to Beijing and quote something from Confucius regarding the importance of life skills. A disciple of Confucius, Zi Xia (Tsze-sha) said, regarding men – and I am sorry to say that women didn't count much in those days, but what he said applies equally to men and women –: "If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere – although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has."<sup>1</sup> So, they have been thinking about these topics two and a half thousand years ago, so nothing is new.

<sup>1</sup> *The Chinese Classics: Vol. 1. The Life and Teachings of Confucius: Analects, Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean*, (translated by J. Legge) London 1869, 18.



Very briefly, I want to explain why sport is even more important for someone with a perceived disability. What are the extra benefits? Well you know it is about realizing that you can be good at something. Because most people look at you when you are in a wheelchair and think that your brain doesn't work just because your legs don't work. So at times you have to prove to yourself that you can be good at something. Practicing self determination helps you to realize that you can map out your future. A great Paralympic track athlete from the United States, Linda Mastandrea, said: "My participation in sports has not only benefited me in terms of my physical health, but it also helped me to develop life skills that have in turn assisted me on the path to becoming a successful attorney, author, and speaker."

You can also experience great joy in sport, feel good about yourself and also gain an appreciation of your body. Like Father Kevin said, not caring about what doesn't work, but being proud of what does work. I had some pretty big pectoral muscles when I was younger from swimming and I was proud of that. So you can be proud of your body; don't think that you can't! You can also be proud of being part of a team. So all of these life long benefits contribute to making up the Paralympic spirit which is the source of our inner strength.

To conclude, I would like to go back to the Paralympic values and its vision, and the benefits that can be achieved from sport. I can see that Paralympians are true champions in the broadest sense of the word. For it could be argued, as I have said before, that true champions only appear after having surmounted multiple obstacles. One of the key roles of the IPC and its members is to encourage Paralympic athletes to surmount all obstacles... and there are many out there in this modern, money centered, and non humanistic world! So, at the end of the day-coming back to the Paralympic values, Paralympians are courageous, they inspire all of those around them by their determination, but they are only really there to seek a chance to bring equality of opportunity to the world. Thank you.



## **PANEL DISCUSSION II**

**Opportunities to witness  
to Christ in Catholic sports**



## Introduction

GUZMÁN CARRIQUIRY\*

After an enriching reflection on the Magisterium of the Church and the much appreciated cultural and spiritual considerations and personal testimonies from the world of sport that we have heard thus far, we now would like to reflect on what God might be proposing and suggesting – or “the difference that God makes” as Cardinal Ryłko mentioned – with regard to the present mission of Catholic sport associations.

The Holy Father, in his message to Cardinal Ryłko and to all of us, wanted to affirm that he finds it “particularly useful that this third seminar of the “Church and sport” section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity is focusing on the specific mission and Catholic identity of sports associations, schools and recreation centres managed by the Church.” In fact, as Bishop Mazza pointed out yesterday, it is fundamental that these associations firmly bear witness to their Catholic identity if they wish to carry out their mission. Edio Costantini also stressed that the practice of sport can acquire its fullness of meaning and truly promote the full development of the person only when this goal is fully embraced and promoted throughout the environment of the sports associations.

The attention that the Church has given to sport can be seen in its continual appreciation of sporting activities in the parish youth centres, schools, and in the establishment of a variety of Catholic sport associations at the local, national and international level in order to give a Catholic approach to this growing phenomenon that is made more and more present in the daily lives of people and in society as a whole.

\* Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Today, we are witnessing a new era in the associative life of Catholic laity, which is referred to in the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. We must include among the list of the many associations that have recently come into existence, Catholic sport associations. Yet it would not make sense to call an association “Catholic”, or to offer to it the support of the Catholic community, if it does not respond to the “criteria of ecclesiality” that determine the Catholic identity of an association or if their efforts are not characterized by the Church’s teachings regarding sport that seeks to illuminate and properly value and promote its most noble aims.

*Christifideles Laici* establishes five “criteria of ecclesiality” in order to discern and recognize an association’s catholicity. The first criterion is recognized in the fact that each association is called to be an instrument of holiness. Someone pointed out that the sporting activities promoted by the associations, the parish oratories and the Catholic schools should be considered as places of holiness. This concept of holiness should not be considered as the stereotypical recitation of pious devotionals, but as the response to our vocation to grow to the fullness of human maturity as revealed in Jesus Christ; this human stature is based upon the fact that we have been created in the image of God and regenerated as new men and women through our Baptism into Christ.

The second criteria of ecclesiality as indicated in the exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, is the responsibility to profess the Catholic faith. Consequently, every association must be a place where the proclamation and tenets of the faith be respected in their entirety. When sporting activities are understood and practiced as an educational good, then Christian formation itself should not be pursued in such a way that it is completely disjointed from these, but rather, connected in a common purpose.

In third place, associations are distinguished as Catholic by their communion with the Catholic Church, as they are called to be a sign of the mystery of communion that is an essential characteristic of the Church. This communion – or sense of belonging to the Church – car-

## *Introduction*

ries with it also the participation in the ecumenical dimension that relates to other churches and Christian communities. Certainly, Catholic sport associations can offer a great contribution to ecumenism as their activities provide numerous occasions for coming into contact with people of other faiths and for reciprocal collaboration.

The fourth criteria spoken about in the apostolic exhortation is the association's conformity with, and participation in, the Church's mission of evangelization. Remember how Pope John Paul II spoke of a "Gospel of the family" and of a "Gospel of work" Cannot we, therefore, speak of a "Gospel of sport" or, at least of proclaiming the Good News in sport?

Lastly, Catholic sport associations are called to live, defend and promote human dignity, subsidiarity and solidarity which are the cardinal principles of the Church's social doctrine. They are called, therefore, to show charity towards the weakest and the neediest, and to do all that they can to foster a sense of fraternity and reconciliation and peace among different peoples, races and nations.

In the panel discussion that follows, we will hear about the experiences of various Catholic sport associations and other experiences that help to show how Catholic sports can contribute in different ways to advancing the Church's mission, enriching the world of sport in a unique way that is derived from their Catholic identity.





## Promoting Christian virtues

ALBERTO ASSAD\*

It's an honour to be present in this acropolis of Catholic sport intellectuals. During this seminar we have thus far philosophized about the greatness of man, the role of sports in his life and the meaning of virtue through the teachings of the ancients from Aristotle all the way up to the Holy Fathers. And though all this is necessary to establish a solid foundation in order to help us achieve a greater understanding of the role of sports in society, we must now proceed to embody this in specific practical principles that coaches can readily put into action in an effective way on a daily basis. These principles will ensure that we achieve our objective of considering sport *per se* as an excellent means for forging virtues.

In *SportsLeader* we have discovered that it is possible to improve an athlete's life both on and off the field into a virtuous man. Allow me to share a few stories to exemplify this.

As you may know, in general, Mexican coaches do not enjoy a great reputation due to the scarce opportunities they have to achieve a quality education and human formation. So our work in that country is dedicated to developing virtue on a basic level. I remember the testimony of a coach from Aguascalientes, Mexico. I was visiting the city giving a training course. As I was leaving, a coach came up to me and thanked me for changing his life. I stopped and asked him what he meant. He told me, "Before I was involved in *SportsLeader* I was a drunk, I was separated from God and my family. Now, thanks to this program for

\* Director of *SportsLeader* in Mexico, a formation programme for coaches that assists them in forming human virtues in the youth through sports.

coaches, I have curbed my alcoholic problem and I am now united once more with my family and closer to God.” I realized that this coach was now a better man because of this and one could say he was becoming virtuous.

Another example is that of a young athlete who had sprained his knee and so was out for most of the season. He was very sad and felt useless, not producing for his team. However, one *SportsLeader* coach noticed that something was wrong. So he approached him and helped him to open up. The coach got him to do exercises so that he could strengthen his body, he took him to adoration and Church, he helped him prioritize his life with school, family and so on. In a word, he mentored him and helped him not only become a better athlete but a better person. And this is what it is all about.

Finally, one other story is that of a young man who was travelling on a school bus with his three sisters and other passengers. As soon as he got into the bus he fell asleep with his mp3 on. Suddenly his sister woke him up and he realized that there was a 14 year old female student armed with a 380 semi-automatic handgun threatening to shoot and ordering the bus driver to pull over. She was pointing it back and forth at everyone on the bus. This young athlete, not concerned for his own well being, tried to grab her attention before she pointed the gun at anybody else. He selflessly did what he thought was the right thing in order to save the life of the others on board. This is the sort of person that can be formed through sports.

After hearing these stories we can deduce several principals which will allow us to promote Christian virtues in an effective way. In fact, the *SportsLeader* methodology is built upon the following four principles:

First, the principle of person to person: this in other words is Charity, the very essence of Christianity. If we want to transform a person’s life we cannot simply rely on a program; we need to establish a personal relationship because only relationships change people. This transforma-

tion begins on a human level and works its way up to a spiritual level in a progressive fashion. This is achieved primarily through what we call “man-to-man” mentoring: a simple five minute talk between the coach and the athlete where they review their commitment to living virtue.

The second principle is that of leadership. If we wish to impact society on a large scale, and this is something which our Christian vocation demands from us as leaven, we need to form quality leadership among both professional athletes and the youth coach who is with his players on a daily basis. By transforming one of these “sport leaders”, we are really transforming hundreds of people who are influenced by them.

A third principle is that of team life. When a group of persons are united in a team in living the same faith and are seeking the same objectives it makes it easier for each individual to live the demands of his personal convictions day by day. This creates a positive peer to peer support group that strengthens their will to improve as persons.

A last and fourth principle is that of integral formation. This is the virtue program that the athletes receive weekly. They are presented with stories of sports stars and players who embodied a certain virtue so that they might in turn, imitate it.

If we apply these four principles as we have done in *SportsLeader* we will be able to impact sports and impact life.



## Youth evangelization

JAVIER AGUDO GARCÍA, S.P.\*

We all know well the difficulties we face in opening doors to the proclamation of the Gospel, especially when dealing with the youth of Europe. In fact, any person of faith is seriously concerned about how our present society is forgetting its Christian roots and sliding unconsciously into an abyss of anti-values. We are facing these problems especially in Spain. Yet, these are the same problems all Catholic educators face when it comes to teaching and evangelizing the boys and girls who are a product of this age.

My talk deals with a unique area of sport. It is not that of the highly specialized professional sport that moves the masses and also large sums of money. Rather I wish to refer to that sport which can be understood as an important appendix to the work of education, and for this reason, I am dealing primarily with those educational environments, such as schools, parishes and Catholic youth clubs, as all of these are institutions that have objectives which transcend sport itself. Whether it be in an educational or recreational setting, in one way or another, these are at the service of the Gospel with the human formation they provide. This is because in as much as their mission is concerned with transmitting human virtues they help to fortify a Christian way of living among those engaged in their programs.

In this way, you can see how we understand and value these sporting activities as something which is complementary to the proclamation

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of the Gospel. We believe that the Gospel is a seed that needs to fall on fertile soil in order that it may germinate and bear fruit. While youth sports are not an immediate place for preaching the Gospel in a direct way, they do possess an extraordinary capacity for preparing the ground for the Gospel and for bringing people closer to the ideal of human perfection as proposed by Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nonetheless, any Church affiliated sports center partakes in the mission of evangelization since it forms part of offering the youth an integral education which is a concrete way in which so many of us respond and participate in the Church's mission. What is more, we feel called to renew our efforts and responsibility in fulfilling this task on behalf of the Church. From my personal experience in EMDE and FISEC, we typically realize and can contextualize our educational efforts in a way that is linked to the work of evangelization on three levels.

The first level is what I call the "threshold" area, which can be defined as a "boundary place or point of beginning; the outset of something new". Thus, this "threshold pedagogy" constitutes the outset, the first point or beginning of this work of evangelization. The goal is that of offering a method where the person is given a sense of direction and equipped with the capacity to make choices on their own so as to cross new thresholds in this maturation process towards that fullness of the faith in Jesus Christ.

This Catholic educational model is rooted in the values of the Gospel and with the aim of transforming society by means of these values, and in a special way, truth, justice, personal freedom and mutual respect. The pastoral guidelines in these youth educational environments presuppose these values. Yet other factors also enter the equation that need to be taken into consideration: the environment itself, the scheduled time of the activities, ones own ability for facilitating interpersonal dialogue and participation.

The second level is that of establishing a dialogue between culture and faith and the third consists in an explicit catechesis. Even if sport is

not the place most adapt for outright catechesis, it is the right setting in which to move from the threshold area pedagogy to a discussion about faith and culture. It is also an excellent way to accompany the youth in their personal growth and maturity that leads to direct evangelization.

Promoting Christian morality and evangelization are the principles that inspire the objectives we propose in our work with the youth. In sport these are made concrete in the following ways:

1. *Through the interpersonal relationship that is established between the educator, the pupil and parents.* Sport favours interpersonal relationships that are basic and indispensable in generating confidence and respect between coaches and youth.

2. *Through educating values embraced by the association.* As mentioned, the practice of a sport can provide many opportunities for fostering virtues and values that are compatible with Christianity as they provide the human person with a solid foundation and fertile ground for the seeds of the Gospel. Allow me to list a few: respect for others, honesty, justice, zest for life, acceptance of mistakes, effort, team work, and striving for excellence and solidarity. All of these are values which prepare the heart and the mind to receive the good news. To highlight the importance of these values, we select a winner of a fair play award or other such awards that go beyond the mere win or lose mentality of a tournament.

3. *Through specific religious moments.* The faith is also made present in an explicit way in a variety of ways, by a simple prayer at the outset of an activity, by a Eucharistic celebration to mark a special event or happening within the lives of the team, etc.

4. *Through complementary formation.* Whether for current or former participants, we offer workshops and courses of formation for former players, coaches, referees and other volunteer staff that give attention to the pedagogical dimension of their work with youth and that serve to motivate them to lead by example.

5. *Through the fostering of mutual respect at all levels.* Respect is essential for human and Christian relations. At times in competitive sports, one seeks to win at any cost and without respecting their opponent. Thus, there arises the need to be attentive to this aspect and to correct any deviations in this regard.

6. *Through the promotion of social action and solidarity.* The associative dynamism of sport can be tapped into and channelled into group efforts destined for the good of others. Here there is room for much creativity and personal initiative. By way of example, allow me to share with you that in the EMDE we recently had a “run for life” as a manifestation against legalized abortion. Thousands of youth, families, coaches and former players participated thus expressing their own witness in favour of life. There have also been held many solidarity basketball tournaments and the solidarity march whose proceeds have helped fund projects in developing countries. There is also an indoor soccer tournament that highlights the virtue of friendship. Lastly, I would like to call attention to the bazaar that has been a part of the FISEC games since 1997. To highlight the international nature of these games, every country is encouraged to bring cultural items that are typical of their country to sell. The proceeds from this bazaar benefit a work of charity while all of the participants are enriched by this multicultural experience. Another aspect of the games is the youth forum where a select group of these athletes reflect on different values in sport.

7. *Through “team building” activities.* Marcelo Roffé, a sport psychologist who has worked with professionals for many years affirms that both in the work place and on a sports team it is fundamental that each member feel that they are an integral part of the team. In the dynamic of a team, the “We” must always prevail over the “I”. In group dynamics, the ideal is that the leader has a genuine interest in the other members of the team. Often, teams fail because the leader does not know how to delegate responsibilities, whereas a good team is characterized by its *esprit*



*de corps*. All this goes to say that sport is an excellent means to help form the youth in the art of belonging to a group or community and not to remain overly centred on their own personal interests. This lesson in self giving is useful in other circumstances and very compatible with Christianity and active participation in the life of the Church community.

8. *Through the goal of forming mature Christians*. Someone said that sport as an integral activity is practice in the art of living well and in the joy of living. Furthermore, as it lends itself to an ongoing process of self improvement, it can also contribute to the process of physical, psychological and even, I dare to say, moral healing. As such, sport is a coefficient in the process of human maturity.

9. *Through spiritual experiences that transcend the common and ordinary*. Archbishop García Gasco of Valencia notes that: “the call to the new evangelization motivates us to avoid remaining enclosed within the walls of our churches and propels us to be in contact with the outside world so that sport and all expressions of the human person can become conduits of the Gospel message of peace and Christian love of which the world has such great need.”

As professor Bolaño said, play is a gift that God gave to people as well as animals: the wise know how to use it well and the foolish use it to ridicule others or for evil purposes. So, together with the prophet Baruch we can ask today, where are those just and peaceful men, those who play with the birds of heaven and are content with contemplating them without making fun of them? (cf. *Bar* 3:17).

I would conclude with the words from some professional athletes that help us to see how they view their sport talent as a gift from God and, in this way, make good use of this talent. Julio César Chávez said this in an interview: “As a child, I was more than just restless, I was hyperactive: always at play, enjoying football, baseball, volleyball, and basketball. By the grace of God, I was good at playing all of these sports (in addition to boxing) and they came naturally to me. I believe

that God gives every person their specific talents as he gave me this talent for boxing”.

Soccer player Ronaldinho also demonstrates his gratitude to God for life with these words: “I have to thank so many people, as so many people have helped me along the way. My family has always given me great support. And to God, in a special way, I wish to give thanks for my good health and for my family. For without these, I could not have achieved anything. I must kneel down and thank God for all that I have.”

The words of these athletes acknowledging their sports talent and health as gifts from God offers all of those in sport the opportunity to also reaffirm these spiritual values. As the ‘soccer king’ Pelé said on a certain occasion: “I am very thankful to God for giving me the gift of being able to play soccer. In doing so, he has opened to me the door to the world because through soccer I have made friends with people all over the globe. I will continue to be active in this world of soccer in order to help youth and children, especially to help young people escape from drug addiction”.

This idea that sport talent is a gift from God has also been expressed on various occasions by the Servant of God, John Paul II, as in his homily on the occasion of the Jubilee of Sport in 2000: “With this celebration the world of sport is joining in a great chorus, as it were, to express through prayer, song, play and movement a hymn of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord. It is a fitting occasion to give thanks to God for the gift of sport, in which the human person exercises his body, intellect and will, recognizing these abilities as so many gifts of his Creator.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us be mindful then that sport is a gift that God has given to us, and let us make good use of it; let us not use it to ridicule or to exploit others, but to use it wisely, serving God and humanity through it as a means to foster equilibrium of spirit, peace and other virtues.

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Homily during the Jubilee of Sport during the Great Jubilee, 29 October 2000.

# The Christian witness of coaches

Rev. ALESSIO ALBERTINI\*

The horizon in which we want to situate this present discussion is not that of a technical nature. It is not in our interest to evaluate the professional capacity of a coach or his competency in directing a team or running a practice.

We want, rather, to seek to respond to these questions: is it possible to envision the coach as one who is a credible witness in the world of sport? Is it possible to consider the coach a key player in Christian formation who is capable of making the beauty of the Gospel present in a world that seems that it can do without it? Is the coach even capable of recognizing this great responsibility as one who is called to help shape the athletes' lives for the better, and in a particular but not exclusive way, the lives of young people?

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE COACH

In general, the overall efforts of every coach tend to be fixed on achieving a result which is called victory, a new record, and the discovery of new champions. This fierce pursuit of "results" on the part of those who direct top level teams pre-conditions in some way the coach as he or she knows that one's earnings, job, or career are not guaranteed by right or recognition but, rather, are determined by winning or losing.

Modern sport tends to always drive the energies and capacities of a coach towards its maximum performance in order to "guarantee" the

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results of victory. In fact, “ a winning coach ” seems to be the buzz word of today’s sports.

“ In soccer what counts is winning ” states the owner of a professional team; “ I am not speaking about merely obtaining a division championship but of fighting to be among the top four in the classification. There are many coaches who, while being good, do not have the ability to be among the very best. I want a coach who speaks my language, that is, I want a winning coach ”.

Even the rule book determines the “ winner ” as the one who has obtained the best results. Thus, it is inevitable that the overall aim and purpose of the work of a coach – all of his dedication and effort – are going to be directed towards obtaining that objective.

At the end of the game, even the fans and spectators tend to applaud the coach of the team that has obtained the best result. On the contrary, when the outcome is negative, fans can easily protest and not always in a peaceful way. “ This is also a part of the game and when things do not go well, we must learn how to accept this as well. ” These are the words of a prominent soccer coach after listening to the jeers from disgruntled fans that lasted throughout the entire practice. The root cause: sustained losses during the season.

It seems that no one cares about the work or the method but only about the “ results ”. We can almost say that the final victory or defeat seem to completely erase from our memory all that was done prior to this moment in practice. One rejoices or weeps only in the present and it is seldom asked from where these results come.

#### THE WORK OF THE COACH

Even if the “ quality ” of a coach is, as we have seen, often determined by the final result of the competition, it is necessary to see that the principle work of a coach does not lie in the game itself, but rather, in preparing the athletes for the game. Even if it is the coach who does

the planning, only the players execute his tactics and strategy; only the players actually enter the field; the coach does not play! While the players are those responsible for the success during the game, the coach is responsible for what precedes the game in practice.

Noteworthy are the words of a successful volleyball coach, Gian Paolo Montali: “I have a great dream: that of winning a game without ever having to call a timeout. And if the opposing coach should call one, I would remain silent. To do so would indicate that I have prepared my men so well during the past week that they can face any situation and resolve or adapt to any type of technical or psychological problem”.

Thus, we can say that the great task of a coach is preparing the players for the game. It is a silent work that takes place before the meet or match, far away from the flood lights and the scrutiny of others. Eventually, game day will reveal the quality of the preparation. The coach’s task is that of preparing his players for each challenge, rendering them more “competent”!

The competence of an athlete is defined by these three characteristics: *to know*; *to know how*; and *to know how to behave*. Before the game, the coach has to work with and around these three elements.

First of all, *to know*: he must make sure that his players know well the rules, dynamics and techniques of the game.

Second, *to know how*: skill and talent are not enough; all must be orientated towards a common purpose. Thus the coach must also prepare the athletes by showing them how to use their skills within the rules in order to elaborate a strategy and game plan appropriate when facing the opposing team.

Last but not least, *to know how to behave*: all of this must also be put into action by a general sense of knowing how to behave or act in the heat of the game. Each player must be capable of facing various situations with poise, courage, honesty, self-sacrifice and respect for others. These are virtues that an expert coach knows how to instil in his players.

It is precisely this last characteristic that implicates a coach in a way

that is not simply by his expertise and competence on the technical level, but above all, as a person who imbues these same virtues. And this brings about a shift from being concentrated only on results to focusing on the necessary ways to reach these goals.

Knowing how to behave on the field and off the field brings into play the image of the man that the coach wants to transmit to his players. Besides the techniques and strategies that he teaches, what type of man does he want to see his players become? What type of champion does he envision?

A Christian coach who is called to guide these young athletes has a precise person in mind, Jesus of Nazareth, for “whoever follows after Christ, the perfect man, becomes himself more of a man”.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF GIVING GOOD EXAMPLE

Certainly it is not possible to transmit this idea on the soccer field or in the gym by means of a homily, sermon or catechism class about the faith. Whoever steps onto the field does so to play and to compete. Nonetheless, in Catholic sports settings, the youth should find in their coach a teacher and a guide; they should be able to see in their coach someone who has already assimilated certain values and principles into their being, someone who transmits a way of living that is rooted in their faith. The physical and technical preparation does not change. The desire to win equally motivates his or her efforts. Yet it is the coach’s way of being and acting that offers the players a way of being and acting to be imitated or tested.

Teaching another how to behave is not the transmission of informational baggage or a series of norms that the coach intends to communicate in a theoretical way (or maybe even by threats). No! On the contrary, this behaviour is gratuitously offered to all of those who enter into contact with

<sup>1</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 41.

the very life of this coach. Pope Benedict XVI affirms this in this way: “Every true teacher knows that if he is to educate he must give a part of himself, and that it is only in this way that he can help his pupils overcome selfishness and become in their turn capable of authentic love.”<sup>2</sup> Teaching is a personal involvement that demands our entire person.

The values that constitute the character of a person belong to the realm of experience and are transmitted by the testimony of real people. We can say that these values pass from one person to another in a contagious way, by a symbiotic relationship. Values are diffused by living them, practicing them, by making them, above all, part of one’s own life. Values are not demonstrated, they are lived.

As St Ignatius of Antioch writes: “It is better to remain silent while being who you are instead of speaking about how one should be and not to be so yourself. A good teacher speaks with deeds”.<sup>3</sup>

A coach must be a credible person for the athletes. Johan Cruyff once said: “One thing that should never be tolerated in the locker room is a system of injustice where double standards are employed. If a player arrives late for practice he pays the fine. If you ask your players: “What time should we start practice?” and they all respond “at 10:30”, then it is up to each one to arrive on time. Now if you who are the coach arrive late because your interview went overtime, you pay the fine as well. And it is better if you do so in public so that they see that you, as coach, are the first to obey the norms that you have stipulated.

#### WHAT TYPE OF PERSON?

It is precisely through the coach’s guidance, whether offered one on one, or to the whole team, that allows him or her to offer a certain

<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Diocese of Rome on the Urgent Task of Education*, 21 January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH, *Letter to the Ephesians*, XV, 1.

example of a person, a way of being a person with certain determining characteristics that are derived from a life of faith.

Particularly in sport, knowledge and know-how are part of a process that culminates in the knowledge of how to behave as a person. In this way sport emerges as a great opportunity not only to learn how to win but also how to live in this world.

Time does not allow us to go into greater detail, but I would like to at least indicate some of the values that a coach can bear witness to in his work.

### *1. Accepting people as they are*

In these times of championships and cutthroat competition where the only thing that seems to count is being awarded, a coach must know how to accept and take care of those who do not win or take the first place.

During the World Swimming Championship at Melbourne in 2007, an athlete from the Ukraine was physically abused by his coach for not giving his best in the pool – that is to say, for not having qualified for the finals. All of this, which took place in a waiting room, was captured on Australian television. The protagonists were father and son! A Christian coach knows that the value of a person is not determined by their results. Rather, this value is bestowed on all by God the giver of life by whom we are “wonderfully made” (*Ps.* 139:14). Consequently, every person should be protected and their dignity recognized. This is accomplished by placing the person at the centre and not the results.

### *2. Valuing each one's talents*

All of us have our own talents and limitations. The greatness of a coach lies in this ability to bring out the best of their players' potential while helping them to overcome and also accept their limitations and to develop their talents.



Coach Montali puts it this way: “Normally players are assigned to specific roles based on the competencies they possess; so the first challenge a coach faces is that of being able to bring each player’s talent in order that it be placed at the service of the team. But a good coach will take this a step further: he will allow his players to see an even broader horizon and help them fulfil their dreams. He will know how to awaken them from the slumber of routine and bring out potential they never thought they had, motivating them to overcome the very limits of their limitations”.

### *3. Placing the “I” at the service of the team*

We are marked by a system that exalts individual freedom and is quick to defend individual rights. Our society is immersed in an exasperated subjectivism.

The coach on the other hand is the one who is capable of showing that victory, this great satisfaction, is possible only through team work.

Renowned basketball coach Phil Jackson, who won three consecutive NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls, recalls that no other team understood better than the Bulls that altruism is the soul of the game. “It might be public opinion that the team is number one because of the spectacular feats of one man – Michael Jordan. But, the true reason why the Bulls won three championships in a row from ’91 al ’93 was because, instead of relying on solely one man, we created a team identity and overcome this egocentric tendency that has destroyed teams even with more talent than the Bulls.”

### *4. Eulogy to hard work*

In sport, just as in life, there are long periods of waiting. No one can have it all right away, and easily. Instead, in striving for that which is truly worth the effort one must undergo hard work and face fatigue.

One of the “Karate Kid” films is about a boy who wants to learn karate so he goes to a wise old Japanese master. This instructor accepts him as his student and tells him what day and time to come for his first lesson. But on the day of his first lesson the instructor asks him to paint the fence around his house and shows him how to hold and move the brush along the wood. The boy, while quite upset, does what his teacher says. Upon finishing the job, the boy expects to learn some karate. Instead, his instructor tells him to paint the other side of the fence, and then to give it a second coat. After that, he is asked to paint the driveway and shown how to use a different style of brush. This continues for many days. Right when the boy reaches the very end of his patience, the master gives him his first lesson, and shows him how he needs to move his arms. The boy already knows these movements as they are similar to the movements he was making with the paint brush. So, all at once, the boy realizes that his master had really been teaching him karate all this time when he thought he was wasting his time painting. There, within the monotony of repetition, fatigue and discipline lies hidden the goal that is gradually being achieved.

## CONCLUSION

We have wanted to sketch the ardent yet fascinating work of a coach. As we could see, it is not only technical ability that achieves results. The value of coaching cannot be judged only in terms of winning or losing, but rather, on the ability to transmit certain values and a certain way of living and dealing with others. In this sense a coach is a true master who possesses a knowledge that others do not have and for that reason offers this to others. Ultimately, the coach offers his or her very self in order to be of service and support in the lives of these athletes. The athletes, in turn, address this person who offers them this assistance with the respectful title of “coach”.

## Practicing Christian charity

GIANNI GOLLA\*

As I do not head up a Catholic sports association, but rather, a secular military sport association, some might wonder why I am taking part in this panel on the opportunities that sport offers for promoting such Christian values as peace, charity and solidarity. Allow me to explain. My own athletic experience – that of track and field – was nurtured through my participation in *Le Fiamme Gialle*, the Italian military sport association of the *Guarda di Finanza* which is a branch of the Italian armed forces. After finishing my athletic career, I was able to continue to be involved in sports via the Italian military. Through the years, my mission in the world of sport has on more than one occasion intersected with my life of faith. In particular, it has offered me some unforgettable encounters with the Servant of God, John Paul II.

While regional committee president of the Italian Track & Field Federation (FIDAL), I attended the “Jubilee for Sport” during the Holy Year of 1984 presided by Pope John Paul II in Rome’s Olympic stadium. Years later, during the Great Jubilee of 2000, as member of the National Committee of the Italian National Olympic Committee (CONI), and as president of the International Military Sports Council (CISM), I was able to experience the two days of another “Jubilee of Sport” in the company of this sporting Pope. Although I attended these events in representation of the offices that I held within the secular world of sport, I was also present as a Catholic and as a former athlete. Seeing first hand the enthusiasm of John Paul II for this world

\* Major General of the *Guarda di Finanza* of the Italian armed forces and former commander of their sports centre; President of the International Military Sports Council (CISM) from 1998-2010.

of sport, and the reciprocal appreciation by the athletes for this concrete gesture on the part of the Holy Father is something that I will always remember and treasure.

My military sporting career has also brought me to the responsibility that I now occupy, that of president of CISM. While founded in the aftermath of World World II with a few countries of the allied forces, this International Military Council is now one of the largest multidisciplinary sporting organisations in the world and bears the unique motto under which we operate: “friendship through sport”. We organise various sporting events for the armed forces of our 131 member countries. Soldiers, who may previously have met on the battle field, now meet in friendship on the playing field. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to world peace by uniting the armed forces around the world through sport.

This then is the first reason for my participation in this panel discussion: to tell you that peace – a very concrete form of Christian charity – can be promoted via sport. As we read in *Gaudium et Spes* (n. 61), sporting activity “helps to establish fraternal relations among men of all conditions, nations and races”.<sup>1</sup>

Because of this, I must share another fond memory of Pope John Paul II: his encounter with CISM on September 7, 1995, on the occasion of the first World Military Games that were being held in Rome. Packed into a crowded Paul VI hall, the Holy Father told us: “the participation of over 4,000 young military athletes from more than 100 countries on every continent gives this event a meaning which exceeds by far sporting competition itself and becomes an encounter of peoples who, through sport, desire to send a powerful message of peace to the world... I am pleased to note that your sporting events are a new form of dialogue between the world’s servicemen, a pedagogy as it were that creates a culture of peace.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 61.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Speech to participants of the First World Military Games, 7 September 1995.

Is not one of the beatitudes “Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the children of God” (Mt 5: 3)? Thus, to the degree in which the activities of a sport association like CISM or that of a Catholic institution promote respect and friendship, they collaborate in fostering the Christian virtues of peace, reconciliation, and mutual understanding.

Yet there is still another “Christian opportunity” implicit in sport, especially with regard to the large network of national and international sport associations, that I would like to mention. I am referring to the Christian concept of solidarity. With its network, manpower, infrastructures, and its capacity of initiative, CISM seeks to give a significant contribution in terms of solidarity that can especially benefit those countries in most need. A simple example of this solidarity can be found in a recent project of CISM entitled “Military Sport Aid”. It began a few years ago when the *Le Fiamme Gialle* military sports association collected and shipped, by means of their own military transport, sports equipment and other humanitarian aid to the African Republic of Burkina Faso to be distributed to needy children. Today, more and more solidarity actions are being organized by our member nations, with the aim of pooling together resources and concrete efforts for the benefit of less advanced member countries.

Whereas these efforts are being carried out by CISM, all of you know that the Catholic Church is a global network *par excellence*. Its international and national sport associations provide excellent opportunities for the sharing of ideas, resources and other kinds of humanitarian aid with our brothers and sisters who are in need. In fact, I was told that the Catholic association *Centre Sportive Camerounais*, represented in this panel discussion by Francis Kammogne, was initially started with the generous collaboration and help of the Catholic association *Centro Sportivo Italiano*. It is my hope that these examples may motivate all of you to carry out more and more projects of solidarity and Christian charity within your organizations.

Allow me one final word about the Vatican's "Church and sport" section. I have been following the activities of this office with great interest every since I met Father Lixey at a congress in Magglingen Switzerland during the U.N.'s "Year of Education and Sport". I was pleased to learn that the Holy See established this section as a type of observatory for the world of sport. What is more, I believe that the world of sport has need of an institution that is *super partes* and speaks with a recognized moral voice – that of the Holy Father. Because of this, I am pleased to be able to participate in this panel discussion and I wish to thank the Pontifical Council for the Laity for this opportunity to "collaborate" in this way in the pontificate of Pope Benedict XVI.

## Promoting ecumenical dialogue through sport

NORBERT MÜLLER\*

In John Paul II's encyclical letter on ecumenism, *Ut unum sint* (May they all be one), the servant of God notes that relations between Christians are not aimed merely at mutual dialogue and prayer, but “presuppose and from now on call for every possible form of practical cooperation”<sup>1</sup> while observing how “social and cultural life offers ample opportunities for ecumenical cooperation”.<sup>2</sup>

How do sports contribute to promoting this ecumenical cooperation? There are at least two simple ways among many others in which athletic activity can be of assistance to ecumenism. The first is that sports can help the youth overcome certain prejudices including those that stem from different religious practices. Another way sports can promote ecumenical cooperation is that they provide ample opportunities for Christians of different confessions to work together at the academic and pastoral level. I will briefly develop these points by drawing upon my years of academic work in sports at the university level where I have collaborated often with Protestant colleagues and students regarding Christian aspects of sport as well as by recalling some formal collaboration between Protestants and Catholics with regards to pastoral care at major sporting events in Germany during the past forty years.

Pierre de Coubertin writes: “We shall not have peace until the prejudices which now separate the different races are overcome. What better means to attain this end than to bring the youth of all countries periodi-

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical letter *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 74.

cally together for friendly trials of muscular strength and agility?”<sup>3</sup> Whether they stem from differences in religion or race, prejudices exist among the youth, especially with regards to their peers with whom they have little association. Yet, sports can provide an opportunity for youth to associate with people of different colours and creeds.

An American Christian sports writer notes that Sunday morning is perhaps the most segregated time slot of the week as a majority of Americans worship the Lord with people of the same race or social class, etc.<sup>4</sup> The same writer quickly contrasts this with the “un-segregated” Sunday afternoon time slot where the big sports event of the day immediately homogenizes masses of people of different races and religions as they unite to watch or play their favourite game. Thus, by its unique capacity of placing different people side by side, where players and fans alike can learn to respect one another as persons who share this same passion for the game, sport can help to foster a spirit of mutual understanding. In fact, isn’t this what is being implied in *Gaudium et Spes* where it states that sport “helps to establish fraternal relations among people of all conditions, nations and races”?<sup>5</sup>

There is no doubt that sports constitute a dominant part of today’s culture. Yet, there are also many deviations prevalent today that distort athletic activities and rob them of their recreational, formative and social potential. Even youth sport programs are threatened by commercialization and overambitious parents and coaches who want their child to become a champion at all costs. This should move all Christians to join together in counteracting these tendencies by safeguarding and promoting a sport that is enlightened by Christian principles, rich in hope, and at the service of the human person.

Allow me to share with you some ways in which academic and pas-

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in N. MÜLLER (ed.), *Pierre de Coubertin: Olympism, Selected Writings*, Lausanne 2000, 360.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. KLUCK, *The Reason for Sports: a Christian Fanifesto*, Chicago 2009, 141.

<sup>5</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 60.



toral “ecumenical” cooperation is being carried out in Germany, while keeping in mind that it is not easy to clearly distinguish the pastoral from the academic as many of the pastoral initiatives flow from the theoretical and vice versa.

When it comes to academic collaboration, Catholics and Protestants share a very similar vision for sport as a formative, recreational activity that must always respect the good of the person. Thus, in preparation for the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, Protestants and Catholics began discussing together sports themes as a new field of theological interest. The Protestant Union of Churches and the German Catholic Bishops’ Conference held a unique summit in 1966 with the President of the German Sports Association and the National Olympic Committee to discuss common interests and working perspectives. To solidify these joint efforts, the Protestant and Catholic Church both founded a “Church and Sport Commission” that produced a joint charter for sport which was mutually proclaimed. It sought, among other things, the promotion of a new leisure and sport movement and provoked an increase in membership in sport clubs.

Regarding the fight against doping and other deviations in sport, many times a “Joint declaration on Sport and Christian Ethos” has been signed by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference (DBK) and the Protestant Churches Union (EKD) of Germany. Some other themes confronted together have included the safeguarding of Sunday as the Lord’s Day and the influence of politics on sports.

One very academic effort that enjoyed much ecumenical cooperation was the publication in 1998 of the Lexicon “Ethics in Sport”<sup>6</sup> by the Protestant and Catholic Churches in Germany together with the German Sports Association and the German National Olympic Committee. This lexicon has entries from 68 scientific collaborators and a third edition was printed in 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. O. GRUPE and D. MIETH (ed.), *Lexikon der Ethik im Sport*, Schorndorf (Germany) 1998.

Lastly, there are also the “Church and Sport” dialogue weeks organised by the Churches and the German Sport Association on relevant topics every two years. (In fact, these still continue up to the present day, with more than 200 being held from 1970 to 2009). Personally, I have participated in these very open and engaging discussions at these weeks of study. The fact that over the years a Protestant bishop has dedicated a good part of his agenda to attend this week of study has helped to raise the level of importance, showing that this is not an area we can neglect as Christians.

On the pastoral level, there are also many opportunities for this “ecumenical cooperation”. There exists in Germany a Catholic youth sports federation called *Deutsche Jugendkraft* (DJK) and there also exists the YMCA-Sport Union which is an independent Protestant sport body within the German YMCA. In the 1950’s, a Catholic priest from the DJK played a decisive role in coordinating the re-founding process of the new democratic German Sports Association (DSB), an umbrella group for all existing sport associations, whether protestant, Catholic or non confessional. Ever since then, this association has enjoyed a fruitful and multifaceted collaboration between the Catholic and Evangelical leadership and this joint partnership has also provided the spiritual planning and impetus behind several “ecumenical” projects from 1950 to the present time.

As already mentioned, “ecumenical collaboration” in the field of sports was accelerated with occasion of Germany hosting the summer Olympic Games in Munich. One concrete result of these ecumenical sport discussions has been the joint publication of the official reports and spiritual booklets by the Catholic, Protestant and State Sport Association press services. In 1971, the proclamation of a “Program of Partnership” was established between the Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Protestant Church Union and the national and regional sport bodies, especially for activities on the local level in view of the Olympic Games.

Before the Munich Games, the Ecumenical Church Centre “Peace of Christ” was inaugurated together with Catholic and Protestant bishops and would serve as the worship space within the Olympic Village during the games. Another fruit of these joint efforts was the decision (taken in 1976 and continues today) that both a Protestant and a Catholic chaplain accompany the German National Olympic team during every summer and winter Olympic Games and Paralympics. Lastly, hundreds of activities and services were provided for visitors and guests of the Olympic Games in Bavaria and in many other places in Germany through the collaborative efforts of Catholic and Protestant volunteers. Personally, as chief of protocol for the Munich games, I witnessed the unique fraternal collaboration between the Protestants and Catholics regarding pastoral ministry and hospitality during this event.

Moreover, this pastoral attention is not limited only to the Olympics. Since 1974, Catholic chaplains and Protestant pastors accompany the German Football Team to the FIFA World Cups and ecumenical religious programmes have been held in conjunction with these events. In 1977, about 100,000 copies of an ecumenical brochure entitled “Together for all: initiatives for sport clubs and parishes” was published. Also in the same year, a permanent “Church and Sport” commission was founded on the national level, where representatives of the Protestant Church Union and the German Catholic Bishops’ Conference meet regularly together with the Board members of the German Sport Association every two years. This also ensured a very well coordinated collaboration between the Protestant and Catholic Church for the more recent 2006 World Cup and the 2009 track and field world championship in Berlin.

To conclude, I wish to offer some short points of action to remember:

- 1) Practicing ecumenism through sport is easier than engaging in theological discussions that involve much more preparation on the part of the laity.

2) Each one can and should seek – within their own scope of action- ways of living and professing their faith.

3) Justly appreciate the richness of the traditions and liturgy of the Orthodox Church and all the good in the other religious confessions.

4) Be especially attentive to respecting the differences in others while praying for unity.

5) Intensify moments of ecumenical dialogue and collaboration at all levels: local, regional, national, when your country hosts a major sporting event.

6) Intensify dialogue regarding the values and challenges facing sport among those who hold responsibilities in these Christian confessions (i.e., youth leaders, coaches, or the heads of sport commissions).

7) Besides sporting activities themselves, attempt to integrate aspects of this ecumenical cooperation in the following areas: study and formation activities; concrete initiatives; informal discussions with the occasion of sporting events; other shared experiences of prayer with people of other faiths.

8) Christians of all confessions should not be afraid of bearing witness to the Gospel and its values in and through sporting activities and physical education.

9) The spread of secularism and atheism should be all the more reason to join forces and not be discouraged in our efforts to evangelize through sports.

10) Lastly, keep things simple; don't complicate things unnecessarily.

Thus, for the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of all those who engage in sport, let us be attentive to the many opportunities we have to unite our efforts with our Christian brethren in order to safeguard, defend, enrich, and elevate these athletic activities so that they may be recreational and formative as well as a common field of Christian mission.

## Promoting inter-religious dialogue through sport

FRANCIS KAMMOGNE\*

Regarding the theme I was asked to speak about, I will refer to some concrete experiences related to my involvement with the *Cameroon Sports Centre* (CSC) and the recent “*Inter Campus World Cup*” that was held in Italy. This decision is inspired by the desire to investigate this theme of promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue through the practice of youth sports which is an area that I am most familiar with. Allow me to use the expressions “sport” and “physical sporting activities” to speak about one and the same thing.

Indeed, it is helpful to keep in mind that the concept of sport is not understood by all in the same way. It contains ambiguous connotations that depend on the degree and category in which it is practiced. Nonetheless, it is possible to find certain traits that are characteristics present in definitions, such as physical effort, trial, competition, play, performance, training and governance by rules when speaking about high level sport – which often can even degenerate into a form of instrumentalisation of the human person. On the other hand, the practice of physical activities and sport as stipulated in the statutes of the Catholic *Cameroon Sports Centre* embrace everything from elite sport (in as much as we participate in the *Inter Campus World Cup*), sport for all (directed to adults), special interest group sport (such as geriatric sport) and mainstream youth sport. The CSC, by means of these activities, seeks to promote a practice of sport rich in humanism and vitality, in the conviction that sport must be at the service of the person and all of the person, developing their individual capacities and improving

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their relations with others, which brings us to the case of inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, the focus of the present discussion.

#### INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE WITHIN THE CSC

Without seeking to justify or praise the CSC, I would like to present some concrete experiences within this association that show how the practice of sport can serve as a true catalyst for inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

It is an undeniable fact that sporting activities are considered among the most powerful influences within our modern culture. At the same time, these activities are closely linked to everyday life. Marcell Mauss affirmed that sport involves behaviours, rites, symbols, norms and values that pertain to the economic, ethical, aesthetic, pedagogical and political spheres. If this is true, then it can certainly be retained that because of its mobilizing dynamism, sport is capable of gathering individuals of different religious confessions. By means of this, people can better understand and accept one another and thus, as we say, “get along with” one another. In fact, one of the fundamental functions of sport and physical activity is precisely that of developing interpersonal relationships, and this has as a corollary benefit, the improvement of social communication.

THE CSC, which came into existence through the generous collaboration of the *Centro Sportivo Italiano*, the Italian Bishops Conference, and the Centre for Orientation and Education (COE), pursues this aim through its interaction with people from all social environments and through its educational efforts via its formation activities. I would like to demonstrate this by means of two concrete examples.

In Cameroon there are more than three hundred ethnical groups and tribes and more than four hundred national languages and dialects, and two foreign languages that are officially recognized, French and

English. In fact, after the wave of colonization, the country was divided into these two linguistic groups, French and English, and a certain antagonism between them is not uncommon. In addition, the religions practiced in Cameroon are Christianity, Islam and Animism. In this particularly unique multicultural and multi-religious context, sport can play an extraordinary role of unification and of national integration of the Cameroon people. For example, we can take the case of 1990 when there was much political and ethnic unrest and the country was on the verge of civil war; it was precisely the participation of the Cameroon team in the World Cup of Soccer that year that helped unite us and save us from this turmoil. Sport, and soccer in a particular way, provides a common thread for uniting a country and is one of the few points in common for a developing nation.

In this light, the Catholic CSC is carrying out various initiatives among its 3000 members, organizing sporting, cultural, social and religious activities to which are admitted all people without discrimination of class, tribe or, even less, religion. This involvement of the youth and adults is generating a new way of perceiving one's neighbour; it is instilling in people a greater sensitivity in their social dealings with others.

At the same time, the project "Mobilization of an education in citizenship through sport", has given life to a popular educational campaign focusing on "living together as citizens" that was directed towards reconciling people with ethnic and religious differences. By means of these social-cultural and sports related activities among these different groups, the youth can learn that the basis of any dialogue is derived from mutual acceptance, understanding and tolerance of the other; they can come to learn that these differences are not necessarily a cause for division, but an occasion for mutual enrichment. The other example that I would like to mention is that of the Cameroon children who participated in the "Inter Campus World Cup" tournament for boys thirteen and under that was held in Florence in September of 2009. The delegation from Cameroon which I headed up was com-

posed of boys of various religious affiliations: seven Catholics, five Protestant Christians, four Muslims and one agnostic. While in Florence, all of these youth from Cameroon – unlike many other teams – expressed their interest in attending the Sunday Catholic mass that was celebrated for the participants of the tournament. Besides this, the Cameroon team also took part in the gatherings in the morning for prayer that was led each day by a different group of children. Their interest and openness to participate in the liturgy and other moments of prayer supports that which Msgr Chidi Denis Isizoh of the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue once observed. He said that in Africa religion is not something off to the side that is separate from the other activities that make up one's existence. Rather, it is an essential part of our way of living.

#### INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE AS AN EXPERIENCE OF HOPE

The “*Inter Campus World Cup*” in Florence has, without a doubt, revealed how sport with its universal language can be an effective way of promoting inter-religious, inter-cultural, inter-racial, and ecumenical experiences. The goal that is being sought through this international competition is that of overcoming prejudices among the children by giving them the opportunity to come into direct contact with boys from other delegations through organized mixed team play and other group activities. They have organized eighteen encounters so far with representation from the following countries: Romania, Colombia, Cameroon, Angola, China, Paraguay, Israel/Palestine, Bolivia, Iran, Morocco, Bulgaria, Uganda, Poland, Slovenia, Lebanon, Bosnia, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. By means of special rules of play adapted to this age group, all of the players actively participate in the games as those who do not start eventually play as well.



Additionally, it was a true and proper cultural exchange for these children, who were able to come to know so many others through this campus experience, whether in travelling on the bus, in the games or other activities. There were also some recreational events held in the evenings in which the children placed their creativity and skills to work in presenting skits, performing dances or singing songs particular to their native land. These were appreciated so much that they were imitated the following day by boys from other countries and in this way friendships were being established among participants from other countries. In fact, this reciprocal knowledge of each other whether through these activities or those of a ludic nature helped the participants to form a special bond with the Italian children who hosted them and to learn more about the country of Italy.

In light of this experience, I do not think I exaggerate in affirming that sport can be for people of every race and social condition one of the most efficacious means of drawing people closer together, of overcoming xenophobia, of learning from an early age how to encounter, learn and welcome others. The “*Inter Campus World Cup*” is a precious opportunity for all the participants to live in harmony with people who are different from them. Authentic sports activity can break down artificial barriers and contribute to the world’s moral and cultural construction and the renewal of values that the youth are to develop in opposition to these false values that are too easily accepted.

Therefore, Catholic sports associations like the CSC offer an opportune field to promote solidarity in establishing a world not based on rivalry, but rather, where religious and cultural differences contribute to the integral development of the person. For this reason, these associations offer its members and the youth in particular, the possibility of living a true Christian experience, helping each other discover and build in accordance with the Gospel, a just and humanly rich world that is open to the values of other religions and cultures.

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude to the “Church and

sport” section of the Pontifical Council for the Laity for this present seminar that will without a doubt bear fruit in the lives of the corresponding Catholic sports associations. I invite this Section to give sufficient attention to the African continent where the majority of countries are still in the process of developing as this offers the Church rich opportunities for evangelization. The Cameroon Sports Centre, taking its lead from the Bishops’ Synod for Africa held in Rome, has as its theme for 2010, “Sport at the service of reconciliation, and of justice and peace” for we are of the profound conviction that sporting activities continue to be particularly apt for the development of solidarity, and inter-religious, inter-cultural, and inter-racial dialogue. I end by uniting my hope to that desire expressed by Msgr. Isizoh that Africa might become an example for the rest of the world of peaceful coexistence and dialogue among the different religions, and especially with Islam.

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