

Redeeming sport?

By Calum Samuelson

Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.

Zechariah 8:4–5 (ESV)

Summary

Sport is a distillation of the God-given impulse to play. It is experienced within a microcosm of self-imposed rules, which points beyond itself to a grander reality. This microcosm of sport can lead to various ills if idolised or violated. For Christians especially, sport raises difficult, perennial questions. We approach this complex topic with a biblical worldview, which helps differentiate between what sport *should be* and what sport *currently is*. Ultimately, we argue that sport should be engaged as a conduit for common grace and a symbol of redemption.

Introduction

From Mesoamerican ballgames and Roman chariot racing to medieval jousting and early modern golf, sport has a long, dynamic and worldwide history. Globalisation and technological advancements enable modern sport¹ in particular to have an undeniable impact on contemporary societies, thus making the phenomenon of sport potentially more influential now than ever before. This paper was written during the FIFA World Cup, a tournament which directly engages nearly *half* of the entire global population as viewers.² If we consider society as a whole, even most of those who are not directly involved in sport experience indirect contact through family, friends, or colleagues.³

Ever since Michael Novak wrote *The Joy of Sports* in 1976, there has been a steady growth in a variety of sub-disciplines seeking to analyse the complex phenomenon of sport. These include investigations of masculinity/femininity, ethnic diversity, urban geography, social status, and disabilities, while approaching sport through different lenses such as instrumentalist, performance, and performer theories.⁴ Academic consensus remains elusive, but that has not prevented many generations from finding considerable value in the rich traditions of sport.

Christian leaders have often been keen to comment, sometimes as stark opponents of their contemporary sports (e.g. Tertullian) and sometimes as staunch advocates (e.g. Victorian Muscular Christians⁵), but surely most familiar are the analogies employed in the New Testament itself.⁶ The inspirational sporting imagery found especially in Paul's letters leads many Christians to perceive and experience sport positively in general ('it develops character and discipline') but it can prove inadequate in addressing many of the more difficult dilemmas associated with the actual consequences of sport. Indeed, sport has long been 'a topic neglected by Christian intellectuals'⁷ and despite several admirable contributions in recent years,⁸ Christians are still largely unsure how to approach

1 For the rest of this paper 'sport' primarily denotes modern sport. A great deal can and should be noted about ancient, classical, medieval, and early modern forms of sport, but such a discussion is beyond the remit of this paper.

2 www.fifa.com/worldcup/news/almost-half-the-world-tuned-home-watch-2010-fifa-world-cup-south-african-1473143.

3 According to a recent House of Commons briefing paper, about 63% of men and 58% of women are actively involved in sport. Furthermore, England has the second highest rate of sports workers in all of Europe (behind Sweden). Lukas Audickas, *House of Commons Briefing Paper*, Number CBP 8181, 14 December 2017.

4 See Arthur L. Caplan and Brendan Parent, eds., *The Ethics of Sport*, Oxford University Press, 2017, especially pp.6–16.

5 Cf. Dominic Erdozain, *The Problem of Pleasure: Sport, Recreation and the Crisis of Victorian Christianity*, Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010.

6 See 1 Cor. 9:24–26; Gal. 2:2, 5:7; Phil. 2:16; 2 Tim. 2:5, 4:7; Heb. 12:1.

7 Shirl J. Hoffman, *Good Game: Christianity and the Culture of Sports*, Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010, p.20. Although slightly dated, one of the best reviews of Christian writing on sport is found in Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker, eds., *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, New York: Routledge, 2012.

8 Two of the most significant Christian studies are: Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, London: SCM Press, 2014; and Ellis, *The Games People Play: Theology, Religion, and Sport*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014.

sport theologically.

Consequently, this paper aims to survey modern sport in a way that can help Christians engage critically and perhaps even inspire fresh initiative. Generally speaking, our threefold approach parallels the grand narrative of Scripture: Creation ('Celebrating sport'), Fall ('Lamenting sport'), and Redemption ('Redeeming sport'). First, however, we must clarify what sport actually is.

Classifying sport

Sport can be understood as a distillation of the impulse to play, which the Bible takes for granted as a good feature of God's creatures⁹ – especially since it will be preserved in the New Creation.¹⁰ As such, sport seeks to maximise certain facets of play (e.g. enjoyment) while limiting or precluding others (e.g. simplicity, spontaneity).¹¹ From this explanation it is apparent that sport is both similar and dissimilar to play.

Sport is also related to games. While acknowledging the overlapping and fluid boundaries involved with these terms,¹² games can be distinguished from the informality of play (e.g. dancing with delight or skimming stones on a lake) because of their clearly established rules (e.g. in chess the black bishop must move diagonally on the dark squares).¹³ Thus, organised rules are the main element games have in common with sport. Sport has two final features which distinguish it from games: it is aimed at victory and physically involved.¹⁴ The relation between play, games, contests, and sport can be seen in Diagram 1.

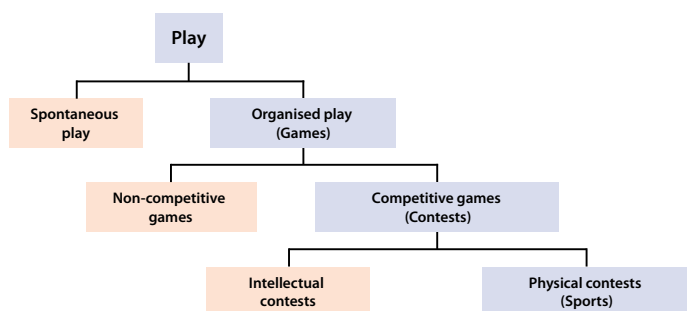


Diagram 1¹⁵

Activities that produce pragmatic 'benefits' should be understood as recreation rather than play. Recreational activities have clear outcomes for which they are performed,¹⁶

but it is impossible to explain the inner workings of play with 'outside' reasons since the point of play is inherent within play itself.¹⁷ In an attempt to articulate the self-contained importance of play, the term autotelic ('self-purposed') has become fashionable in sport literature.¹⁸ Everyone should be familiar with the type of transcendent experiences possible during play, when time itself often seems completely irrelevant. In fact, much of sport literature discusses the 'flow state' of athletes,¹⁹ and the very term sport implies being 'carried away'.²⁰

One shortcoming of much writing about sport is the inadequate explanation of the relationship between contestants and spectators, which can have on occasions an almost spiritual effect on both parties.²¹ Considering this effect and the prominence of 'flow states', it is no wonder that discussion of sport often wanders into religious territory. For this reason and others, it is necessary and illuminating to evaluate sport from a theological perspective.

Celebrating sport: what sport should be

God's act of creation was not required but is nonetheless deeply meaningful and important. Similarly, we can understand sport as unnecessary but full of its own meaning.²² Due to the non-necessity of creating the universe, some theologians have written about the 'God who plays', and as creatures created in his image we can understand our play as a derivative or shadow of his play;²³ our play is free but ultimately constrained by our own finitude. This reality mirrors the experience of the first humans in the garden of Eden,²⁴ who participated in a type of *bounded liberty*. In sport, we experience a unique microcosm of bounded liberty in which all players freely agree to play according to important (though non-necessary) rules. There may be superficial coincidences in some sport rules, but there is no reason *per se* why only eleven players per team are allowed on a football pitch or why an over in cricket comprises six deliveries. The non-necessity of sport symbolises our nature as contingent creatures and our enjoyment of it symbolises a loving God who delights in the goodness of his creation.

What is more, the intrinsic physical nature of sport serves as an important affirmation of our originally good, God-designed bodily existence – but sport should never be viewed as merely physical.²⁵ In fact, sport can seriously engage our

9 Three main Hebrew words are translated into English as 'play'. The most straightforward is *nagan*, which involves playing an instrument (e.g. 1 Sam. 16:18; Ps. 33:3; Ezek. 33:32); *sachaq* can also mean 'to laugh' or 'to dance', and is used for both humans (Job 41:5; Jer. 31:4) and animals (Job 40:20; Ps. 104:26); *sha'a'a* is most often translated as 'delight' (e.g. Ps. 119:47), but can also be interpreted in a playful sense (Isa. 11:8, 66:12).

10 See Isa. 11:8 and Zech. 8:5.

11 It is worth noting that the New Natural Law Theory associated with Roman Catholic moral theologians treats play as an irreducible basic good. For example, see John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, p.87.

12 Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001, pp.14–36.

13 Allen Guttmann, *Sports: The First Five Millennia*, Amherst and Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004, pp.1–3.

14 Guttmann describes sport as an 'autotelic physical contest'. Guttmann, *Sports*, p.3.

15 Taken from Guttmann, *Sports*, p.2.

16 Amy Hurd and Denise Anderson, *The Park and Recreation Professional's Handbook*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2010, pp.9–10.

17 The boundary between recreation and play is flexible and fluid, as shown by terms such as 'recreational sport'; someone can ride the same bicycle as a means of transportation and/or as a form of exercise, but only when they are competing with others for an arbitrary goal can it be called a sport.

18 Johan Huizinga was one of the first to argue that play is 'pointless'. See Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1955, pp.2, 19; Allen Guttmann, *Sports*, p.1.

19 The concept of 'flow' was coined by Mihály Csikszentmihályi in the 1970s. For an excellent treatment see Susan A. Jackson and Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Flow in Sports*, Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999.

20 'Sport' derives from 'disport', which is made up of *dis* ('apart') and *portare* ('to carry'). See Steven Conner, *A Philosophy of Sport*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011, 20.

21 Another weakness has to do with the awkwardness of trying to incorporate the playing of music, which we can't rightly call a 'game', but nonetheless takes place with very clear rules (e.g. correct pitch and notes) even when spontaneous.

22 Cf. Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, p.88.

23 Hugo Rahner has been one of the most prominent to develop an anthropology of play from a theology of play: 'Since God is a God who plays, man too must be a creature that plays: *Homo ludens*.' See Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1967, p.25.

24 Cf. Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, p.66.

25 Although space does not permit a thorough analysis of the growing phenomenon of eSports, the holistic experience of sport involving physical effort should raise serious doubts about the classification of these games as 'sport'.



minds and test our spirits, causing it to resonate as a holistic anthropological experience.²⁶ This helps explain why some people can genuinely feel more alive within the microcosm of sport than within the monotony of daily existence. The strategy, perseverance, and victory that take place across lifetimes and generations can somehow be symbolically condensed into a mere 90 minutes of sport.

A final creational good active within sport is the centrality of relationships. Although men and women may play sport for different reasons, all humans can flourish in sport by reflecting the image of the perfectly relational, trinitarian God who created them. Even the most individualistic sports depend on relationships with their competitors, adjudicators, and spectators to challenge, monitor, and inspire them. Here we can speculate that observers may be more important for the flourishing of individual sports where competitors are without teammates to spur them on. Nonetheless, even though it is possible for sport to function without spectators, it is somehow incomplete without them. Just as human play points towards a playful God, the playing of sport fundamentally flows outward to non-competitors as a concentrated symbol of relational creatures imaging a relational God.

Because we speak colloquially about ‘playing’ sports as opposed to ‘working’ or ‘performing’ them,²⁷ it seems proper to celebrate sport as something belonging within the category of rest and separated from our common labours throughout the week.²⁸ Such separation further explains our experience of sport as a microcosm and may also reveal why sport is interestingly often interpreted as something sacred. Indeed, the connection between sport and the sacred has led several scholars to describe sport as a type of liturgy, and it is well-known that early Christian monks borrowed the term *áskesis* (‘training’) from Greek athletes to describe their own strict spiritual practices. In the end, it seems that the best way to decipher the ‘sacred’ quality of sport is in relation to

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the way that it magnifies the image of God within us. This is accomplished as sport maximises certain facets of play by means of non-essential rules. Below are some of the most prominent facets:

Maximum enjoyment

Every sport has been intentionally constructed to distil the enjoyment of some basic and particular thing. Many of us, for instance, have experienced something like the enjoyment of neatly hitting a target with a stone in the course of simple play. Basketball distils this basic feat with carefully constructed rules, so that sinking a three-pointer at the buzzer after dribbling past multiple defenders can be one of the most intense forms of hitting a target that we currently know. The fact that we continually employ our best ideas, technologies,²⁹ and resources to amplify the enjoyment of play in sport is a testimony to the powerful goodness of God’s creation that is still evident in this world.

Maximum competition

True competition involves striving or struggling together.³⁰ After all, sport involves competitors agreeing to oppose each other within a common rule-bound microcosm. Therefore, we should view co-striving³¹ and not rivalry as the originally created thrust of competition in sport. Within the closed microcosm of sport, this can certainly feel like antagonism,³²

but when viewed from the outside one can easily perceive the shared purpose. By struggling together, teams and athletes can develop strong relationships as they participate in something much bigger than themselves. As Francesco Duina aptly notes, ‘Victory itself is not very interesting. Without close competition, very few of us would be eager to compete.’³³ The established, universal rules of sport create an extended community in which

experiences can be shared, compared, and challenged, and through competition humanity experiences things it could experience in no other way. The co-struggling of sport can remind us of the story of Jacob wrestling with God,³⁴ and ultimately resonates with our striving existence as fallen-though-forgiven creatures.

Maximum excellence

When Usain Bolt won the 100m sprint in the 2008 Olympics, he became not only the fastest athlete at the competition, but the fastest human in the world! This feat and others like it are possible because of the way humanity has engineered specific but arbitrary obstacles (100m as the distance) and thereby continues to stretch itself towards unprecedented accomplishments. The aim of maximising excellence in sport

26 See §2 of the *Declaration from Sport and Christianity*: <https://sportandchristianity.com/declaration/>.

27 See Jackson and Csikszentmihályi, *Flow in Sports*, p.142.

28 See Gen. 2:2–3.

29 Just one example is the way that instant replays and slow motion have elevated the enjoyment of sport.

30 *Com* (together) + *petere* (seek, strive).

31 ‘Cooperation’ is not an ideal term in this context because it implies working (*operari*) together, and is easily conflated with business and task-oriented

settings. The same is true for ‘collaboration’ (*col + laborare*). Other possible terms such as ‘collude’ (*ludere* meaning ‘to play’) are even worse due to their modern meaning.

32 The *Declaration from Sport and Christianity* helpfully uses the phrase ‘playful antagonism’; see §5.

33 Francesco Duina, *Winning: Reflection on an American Obsession*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011, 16.

34 Gen. 32:22–32. NB the name ‘Israel’ itself conveys the sense of struggling with God.

can be viewed as one fulfilment of the original command to steward and develop the earth because it demonstrates moving or excelling beyond previous achievements and standards.³⁵ Fitting examples of this type of competition can be found in the sport of skateboarding, where skaters are incessantly expanding the sport by inventing new tricks, and also in swimming, where stroke technique is being revolutionised to break many old records.

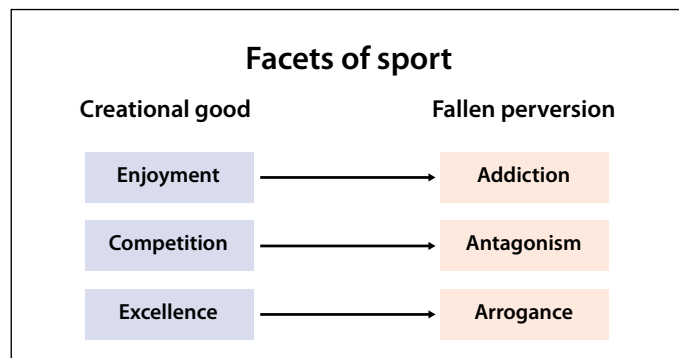


Diagram 2

Lamenting sport: what sport shouldn't be

Although we are still captivated by the creational goodness of sport, our fallen nature perverts and distorts sport in many ways. Anyone who has watched brothers wrestle knows how quickly it can turn from fun into fight, and the same fissure runs through all of sport. Thus, we can perceive how the three good facets of sport explored above often mutate into perversions (see Diagram 2). Enjoyment of sport flowing out of freedom can subtly slide into addiction. The wonder of competition can be twisted into aggressive antagonism, rupturing the good relational community of sport and creating silos of envy and jealousy. Excellence can awaken arrogance when individualistic aspirations for fame trump the desire to reach new heights as a grand community. At their core, these distortions arise when the microcosm of sport is idolised above other areas of life. In truth, sport functions as a false god for many people today.

Along with being idolised, the microcosm of sport is regularly violated when 'outside' interests are smuggled in and thus becomes entangled with a litany of other ills found in contemporary society. Female athletes are sexualised and players are mocked for their race; but the majority of violations can be linked with the age-old vices of money and power. Greed for money has influenced sport for millennia and continues to do so today in many ways, including gambling, match-fixing, bribery, and exorbitant athlete contracts (with several American Football players earning over \$1 million for each game³⁶). Lincoln Harvey has even

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Protest against the World Cup in Copacabana

argued that 'The professional sportsperson is simply an actor or prostitute.'³⁷ Our consumeristic culture has caused almost every dimension of sport to become commercialised and even the most amateur levels of sport are impacted. Regarding the desire for power, stereotypical examples are easily found in communist countries which have used athletes to advance political agendas. George Orwell (among others) famously considered sport a domesticated form of war,³⁸ but given our inspection of competition above, we could actually understand war as a corrupted form of the co-striving found in sport.³⁹ Consequently, it is hardly surprising when egotistical competition degenerates into violence in sports of all kinds. The growing popularity of violent Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) is one of the most obvious manifestations of a suppressed citizenry expressing the desire for power through sport.⁴⁰ Ultimately, violations of the sport microcosm contribute to a broader sport culture

with far-reaching harmful effects. Families in favelas have suffered displacement due to the indulgent, consumer-driven empire of the 'non-profit' FIFA (found guilty of arranging over \$150 million in bribes in 2015⁴¹), and thousands of young people have been victims of human trafficking connected to major sporting events such as the Olympics and the NFL Super Bowl.⁴²

Beneath the spotlight of these structural evils, sport falls short every day in a myriad of less scandalous ways. Selfish play excludes others from participation; cheating and flagrant fouls frequently lead to injuries; and verbal abuse is spewed from players, parents, and coaches alike towards each other and the 'governing authorities' – usually the referee. Even subtle perversions can significantly tarnish the overall spirit of a sporting event: some athletes compete merely to impress or attract a boyfriend or girlfriend, some people join teams primarily to lose weight, and many are forced into sport due to social and cultural pressures. Robert Ellis rightly critiques a narrow view of sport's autotelic nature, pointing out that people frequently do things for multiple reasons.⁴³ But although it is

35 See Gen. 1:28.

36 www.forbes.com/athletes/#4e3c20f655ae.

37 Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, p.105.

38 George Orwell, 'The Sporting Spirit,' *Tribune*, December 14, 1945.

39 Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, p.104.

40 See Nick Watson and Brian Brock, 'Christianity, Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts: Reflections on Morality, Vocation, and Well-Being,' *Journal of Religion and*

Society, vol. 17, 2015.

41 www.justice.gov/opa/pr/nine-fifa-officials-and-five-corporate-executives-indicted-racketeering-conspiracy-and.

42 <https://refugeereseach.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bowersox-2016-Sporting-Events-and-Human-Trafficking.pdf>.

43 Ellis, *The Games People Play*, p.266.

not wrong for someone to be partly motivated in sport by an external factor (e.g. playing rugby to keep fit), we encounter the player who is *only* motivated by external factors as a spoilsport.⁴⁴

Redeeming sport: what sport could be

What can be done about the serious gap between what sport currently is and what it should be? Thankfully, although we still live in a fallen world, we can participate in the Kingdom of God which has been inaugurated by Jesus himself. Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit within us, we can work towards redeeming sport by emphasising the ways it testifies of our Creator and points towards the New Creation. The verse from Zechariah quoted at the beginning beautifully illustrates the importance of play in the peaceful New Creation, and some have argued that our play now offers a genuine taste of that awaited future.⁴⁵ While it is certainly possible that sport will cease to exist in the New Creation, it may be more accurate to anticipate instead some new, perfected forms of sport which flawlessly express our blissful and harmonious existence as contingent creatures dwelling in perfect peace with our Creator. Such a view should simultaneously humble successful athletes and also encourage those who are either unable or unwilling to compete in this life.

One way to understand how sport provides a 'genuine taste' of the New Creation now is that it acts as a conduit for *common grace*. For instance, we can perceive how players are able to experience a sense of order, peace, and shared humanity even in the midst of chaos and calamity.⁴⁶ Most of the time, however, sport acts as a conduit for common grace simply by being freely and fairly played with others for its own sake. This assessment suggests a basic picture for how Christians can approach evangelism *within* sport. Rather than risking violating the microcosm of sport by importing 'outside' ideas through proselytising, Christian athletes should strive to play sport in a pure manner for its own sake, which maximises various impulses of play. When this is done sincerely with our entire being, the creational goods and eschatological symbols inherent in play will be magnified, allowing the sportsperson organically to point towards God.

Taking the example of war discussed in the previous section, we can also argue that God has used sport throughout history – fallen and corrupted as it is – as an outlet for urges that might otherwise build up and manifest themselves in full-out war. Communities all around the world can vicariously vent their frustrations through participation in a sporting event and it may be that the unprecedented peace of the post-war period owes some credit to the tremendous success of global sport as exemplified in events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

Although it is important to examine the position of elite

sportspeople and the needed reforms in professional sport,⁴⁷ most people find themselves involved in sport as spectators or amateur players. Notwithstanding some similarities, amateur sport should not be conflated with 'recreational sport', for problems can arise if recreational players perceive that others are 'only trying to win' or if more committed players perceive that others are 'only having fun'. Below are three general suggestions about how Christians might join God's work of redeeming sport, which are loosely related to the three facets of sport discussed above and should be understood on a spectrum rather than as binary polarities.

Enjoyment: local over professional

The close relationships that are characteristic of local sport can preserve it as an enjoyable activity in spite of its various shortcomings. One way they do this is by enabling



participants to enjoy sport even when victory is not personally experienced. Within the microcosm of sport, both elation and despondency are common, but the rush of victory is fundamentally incomplete without a close acquaintance with the pangs of defeat. This does not mean we should simply 'make everyone a winner', which ends up diluting enjoyment for all. Rather, true empathy with our opponents facilitated by sincere relationships is the best way to ensure that enjoyment remains a possibility for all participants – regardless of the final score.

It is important for us to remember that professionalised sport is ultimately a derivative of child's play and not vice versa. This suggests that children should not devote inordinate time in their play to 'being like the pros', because they will, in fact, never realise a fuller experience of play than they do in their childhood. This may mean that 'professional' rules and standards should be relaxed for younger players without criticism, which will hopefully prevent many injuries and obsessive habits. Finally, Christians can challenge the notion of sport as mere entertainment, which mostly occurs when spectators are not personally committed to any team or participant (as illustrated by the loss of excitement about the FIFA World Cup in the UK this year after England were

44 Cf. Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, p.90.

45 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972.

46 The best example of this is the 'Christmas Truce', during which British and German troops played a football match in no-man's land on Christmas Day, 1914.

47 Most needed reforms have more to do with economics than with sport itself (e.g. sport as a 'positional good' in limited supply). Some have argued that professional sportspeople should be given a stipend rather than a salary.

knocked out by Croatia). We can resist the entertainment culture by emphasising the need for familiarity and consistency in our communities through the support of local sport.

Competition: corporate over individualistic

One of the reasons the biblical exhortation to 'run the race with perseverance' is so powerful is because it is immediately preceded by a monumental description of 'a great cloud of witnesses'. It is not our intention to demean individual sport, which can still act as a powerful means and symbol of grace, but Christians should work against the individualistic tendencies that can undermine any type of sport. Sadly, many athletes can find themselves faced with the option of individual success at the expense of deeper and more fundamental relationships elsewhere.

Some possible implications for families may include playing sport together at weekends rather than transporting different children around to different sporting events. Churches with sport teams might seek to include more players rather than allowing a talented few to try to claim glory for the parish. Lastly, respect for referees as the rightful authorities in sport will help remind both players and spectators that the game is about more than them as individuals.

Excellence: participation over perfectionism

Provided that excellence is a good thing to strive for in sport, a fear of failure is never far from the mind of great athletes. One way to resist tendencies towards this type of perfectionism may be to remind ourselves that sport fundamentally falls into the category of rest and not work. As we realise that sport is intended for our own wellbeing, the idea of excellence can be seen in a new light. Simply put, if we anxiously obsess over performance in sport, we are no longer playing. An additional insight is that God does not pick sides in sport, so although our striving for excellence certainly brings him pleasure, it

does not persuade him to grant our team victory.

Though often interpreted as a mere negation of activity, the Sabbath instructions given to the Israelites applied to every part of society and thus facilitated a type of dynamic rest which was never possible under slavery in Egypt.⁴⁸ In high-

In high-income societies increasingly typified by intellectual work, it may be that physical sport is more needed as rest than ever before.

income societies increasingly typified by intellectual work, it may be that physical sport is more needed as rest than ever before. Perhaps our view of 'grown-up' play has become too disembodied. On this analysis, it seems that family and community sport could be an ideal form of participatory, dynamic rest when balanced alongside weekly times of worship. Excellence at these gatherings might include a young player scoring for

the first time, a new tactic being implemented successfully, or even more cheering than ever heard before.

Conclusion

Sport captivates humanity because of its participation in and movement towards something greater than our present reality. These two aspects can be realised as forms of common grace and as tastes or symbols of the New Creation. Given the inherent creational good in sport and our responsibility to usher others into the Kingdom of God, Christians should seek to celebrate sport as a divine gift whenever possible.



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⁴⁸ Cf. Deut. 5:14.

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