

Andrews University

Leadership Program

USING CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP VALUES TO CREATE A CONTEXT THAT  
TURNS SPORTS INTO CHRISTIAN MENTORING

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Why do we engage in competitive sports as Christians? Is it because we are just “groupish”, like Haidt (2012) argues, or are we acting on selfishness and we use groups and sports to satisfy egocentric needs? We do play them, watch them, talk about them and use them as a social excuse to get together with friends and family. Some use sports to build character and to foster ethical virtues like fairness (Covrig, 1996), fair play, sportsmanship, respect and team work, while others just use them for amusement. However, Evangelism and Discipleship may be the two main reasons why Linsville (2014) consider the use of competitive sports as the fulfillment of the Great Commission from Jesus, the leader and founder of Christianity. His leadership style and mentorship that started by recruiting a team of 12 followers and other friends and family members to complete and become victorious on a mission, is to me the essence of the definition of competition, which derives from a Latin root that means “to strive together toward a common goal” (Linville, 2012, p.12). The main purpose of a Sports Ministry which includes competitive sports is to prepare young leaders for tomorrow, knowing that losing is a possibility for growth, for harder work and refining of skills. Growth through adversity is not just related with sports and games, it may be also associated with leadership, discipleship, evangelism, mentoring, coaching and disciplining too.

The commission found in Mathew 28:18-20 exhorts leaders to find ways to reach out and attract people to the gospel. I believe sports can be both, an evangelistic tool and a mentoring tool for young people. Evangelism is, “training everyone you meet, far and

near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you” (Peterson, 2005, p.1822).

In this paper I argue that Christian leaders can create Sports Ministries for children and youth (even adults) as well as fostering the Christian virtues while they promote sports development. My argument will have five steps. First, I will summarize the great commission of Evangelism and the role of leading. I will include in this step the needs of discipline, mentoring and their connections to a Sports ministry, as well as analyzing the cautions needed to avoid distractions in the process of evangelizing others. Secondly, I will review my understanding of moral leadership, and the values that should characterize a Christian leader, where the win-at-all-cost and self-aggrandizement is constantly warring for our attention. In this step we will also review the history of Christianity in Sports, as well as the Philosophical and Theological aspects in Sports Ministries. We will answer some of the questions several authors and Christian church leaders have about why sports can be a blessing or a problem while accomplishing the Mission. Third, we analyze the virtues needed to lead a Christian Sports Ministry, as well as the virtues that we are trying to develop in those who will become the leaders of tomorrow as a result of participating in competitive sports. Fourth, we describe the fostering leadership environment needed to get the best out of a Sports Ministry that will be used for evangelize and discipline. In this step we will also mention what Christian Leadership is not, and the temptations it must resist. In our fifth and last step, we will describe the Moral context of Sports Ministry on how to keep competition and self-aggrandizement from swamping the soul of a Christian with temptations.

## **Christian Call to Follow and Lead; Evangelism**

Competitive Sports Ministries are one of “the most strategic and effective evangelistic and discipline methodology currently available to the church”, says Linville, (2012, p. 56). Sports Ministries nurture the participation in games with rules and some required levels of skills to build social and emotional bonds as a positive result. Still, many authors, leaders and experts do not support competitive sports, or suggest other forms of participation in organized cooperative physical activities. The reason may be that there are many leaders and organizations at the amateur (high school, college) and professional levels who have been using sports for financial gains, selfish goals and egomaniac ends. Others exploit them as a distraction from real problems and just like religion for others, to also become somehow the opium of the people, (Marx & Engels, 1990), a false hope of winning and fake happiness through the excitement they bring. I know religion and sports are not the same, but it is interesting to see how sports as a passive entertainment and American favorite past time have taken the essence of simple play, social interaction and the healthy benefits that come from playing sports outside or in the gym and turned them into a money making machine just for spectators. That is why I see the need for Sports Ministries, a way to bring together young and old to be active with the sole purpose of becoming closer to God and to one another while staying healthy, away from drugs, alcohol and other poisons that are attacking our youth. These ministries can as well develop the determination, time management, self-control and servant leadership skills the young generation needs to make a difference in our world.

Coaching and mentoring play a key role in the development of leaders that will be qualified to evangelize the world through Sports Ministries.

### **Defining Coaching and Disciplining**

The origins of coaching as a concept are related to sports, argues Whitmore (2002). Relationships between coaches and players firstly were based on pursuing performance improvement through discipline. Moreover, according to Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck (2014), coaching is a human development method that includes intensive, organized collaborations and the use of fitting tactics, tools and methods to promote desired and justifiable change for the advantage of the coachee and possibly for other participants. Also, for Patterson, Grenny, McMillan & Switzler (2012), coaching involves seeking improvement in skills, performance and final results by affecting behaviors. This process develops due to open and honest dialogue as a free flow of meaning between two or more individuals with strong discipline. At Forest Lake Academy Sports Ministry Department, this relationship occurs between the administration, coaches, parents, student-athletes and other members of the community who are a part of it with the goal of preparing future leaders. As a process, we had the chance to coach and mentor those leading our students, as well as designing new strategies and practices related to physical, emotional, social and spiritual growth while expected behavioral change occurs.

Correspondingly, this goal of behavioral change to improve performance also relates to moving from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, that allows constant improvement through discipline even after successful results, says Dweck (2006). Furthermore, coaching and mentoring while disciplining may bring this desired

behavioral change since development of a growth mindset as a process is more significant than talent development when seeking results enhancement.

Michael Jordan was not a natural. He was cut from his Junior Varsity and Varsity teams. He was also initially denied the chance to play for his favorite university (North Carolina), and he was not even chosen first when joining the NBA, he became the number three overall pick. All his success came as a result of hard work, coaching and mentoring and a growth mindset, according to Dweck, (2006), even after facing rejection multiple times. The same story happened to Babe Ruth, Tiger Woods, Maury Wills, and many others. This reality of mental and physical improvement through proper practice, mentoring and coaching may have changed the belief that innate talent is not important. However, there are other ways to test innate talent and skills as well as multiple methods to realize the potential of an individual or an organization seeking performance improvement when a growth mindset is present. Additionally, when competition is added to the coaching process, it is almost impossible to attain behavioral change with a fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset.

### **Defining Mentoring**

Mentoring has roots in Greek mythology. According to Butler (1944) in the famous work by Homer *Odyssey*, the main character, Odysseus, left to fight in the Trojan War. Before leaving, Odysseus left his young son Telemachus in the care of a friend named Mentor. In ancient Greek, the word mentor means ‘advisor’. The term mentor has developed, becoming the type of relationship practiced outside of parental relationships in which a novice is guided through daily challenges by an individual with more experience. In 1931, the Jewel Tea Company used the first recorded organizational

mentoring program (Russell, 1991). The 1980s saw the advent of significant growth of formal mentoring programs within organizations and a significant change in the scope of those programs (Douglas, 1997). Currently, many companies and educational institutions have formalized programs for mentoring, says Scandura & Pellegrini (2007).

Moreover, I had the chance to be mentored and also to be a mentor to others throughout my professional experience at Forest Lake Academy and many other organizations in 14 different countries. Both journeys of coaching and mentoring enriched my understanding of development and personal growth utilizing honest conversations and applying the strategies suggested by my mentors and coaches, as well as helping others to find their solutions when I had the chance to mentor them. Mentoring continues to be considered a long time relationship instead of the coaching concept which refers to a short process related to just one specific goal, says Garvey, Stokes & Megginson, (2014).

### **Connection to Sports Ministry**

How coaching and mentoring impact the personal and team development today in a Sports Ministry? Apparently, those who receive mentoring and coaching tend to improve their performance, as well as staying with the team or company providing mentoring and coaching, states Scandura, Tejada, Werther & Lankau, M. J. (1996). Moreover, the things we fear the most in organizations--fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances--are the primary sources of creativity, says Margaret Wheatley (Matuska, 2011). These fluctuations disturbances, imbalances and change as a source of creativity, generally happen as a result of crucial conversations, some confrontation and a decision making outcome. We see that repeatedly in sports, where coaches work hard on

designing strategies based on the individual and collective talents and skills of their players and teams preparing to face the strengths and weaknesses of the player or team they are competing with.

However, teams and individuals who excel in their field of competition, often utilize their instinct, improvisation and unexpected quick decisions that may be outside of the game plan. For some conservative and traditional coaches, when players apply their critical thinking with actions outside of the coach's game plan is wrong and unacceptable. For them, players or members of the organization should always act based on the model the leader decides.

On the contrary, for skillful coaches and mentors, that is the final result of a successful process, where individuals can perform on their own within a system, since the final decision in crucial times is always on the individual. According to Whitmore (2002), coaches hardly provides or recommends solutions, since as a management behavior process, coaching lies at the contrasting end of the spectrum to command and control. This process requires meetings with individuals as well as with other members of the team. Lencioni (2010) describes this process that is painful for some leaders when he said that if he did not have to attend meetings, he would like his job even more. How to turn these meetings into productive coaching and mentoring processes? Empathy and respect with the ultimate goal of collaborative work beneficial for the organization, the individual and the leader, according to Purkey and Siegel (2002).

In other words, empathy begins with openness argues Nichols, (2009) and for Scott, (2004), the conversation is the heart of the relationship. In this conversation,

Whitmore, (2010) describes the positive effect of coaching when it focuses in future possibilities and not just past mistakes.

As a golf coach, Gallwey (2009) defines coaching as helping others to overcome fears, doubts and frustrations through the game of golf. It is a game that you cannot beat. The reason many leaders like golf is because golf is a game of control. In order to accomplish a good round you need to be in control of your body, your emotions, the natural elements and above all, you own limitations. Over instruction can be the number one enemy of reaching the full potential of an individual. The prime causes of error are in the mind of individuals where fear, doubts and tension overtake the knowledge of the right mechanics needed to play the game and have fun. Golf has an uncanny way to endear itself to us while at the same time evoking every weakness physical, mental or emotional no matter how well hidden.

Similarly, in organizational development as well as individual growth, coaches and mentors should be able to help others to develop successful plans and forget mistakes and failures of the past. This help is better understood through a process of where individuals and organizations can learn how to adopt to the changes and suggested interventions from coaches and mentor. That is why we will explore in the next chapter the different learning theories related to coaching and mentoring that directly impact behavioral change and performance improvement.

**Caution: We Need Intentional Godly Leadership to Make Sports Evangelistic and Disciplining**

Paul says in Philippians 2:2-4 “Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but (in humility) think more of each other than you do of yourselves. None of you

should think only of his own affairs, but should learn to see things from other people's point of view". This Bible verse challenges the core of competition in our present understanding of practicing and playing to win. However, it is also the core belief of Godly Leaders who aim to gain followers for heaven through Sports Ministries. Coaches, mentors, Athletic Directors and Youth leaders who lead in Sports Ministries have to deal with players and parents who come to our programs with the only selfish goal of winning medals, trophies, banners and any other award they can find for their children. Also, Baker (2000) when arguing against sports as one of the most dominant of false gods in which people invest, challenges all Christian leaders to avoid making competition itself as well as the compensations, scholarships, awards and selfish public recognition the ultimate goal of sports. Some of the strongest oppositions to sport in Christian organizations may come from Thomas Aquinas as Hoffman (1992) argues. He exhorts young people "first, do not to take pleasure in indecent or injurious play. Second, do not lose your mental or emotional balance and self-control. Third, do not play in ways ill-fitting either the hour or the man..."play should have positive moral and other consequences" (Hoffman, 1992, p.251).

We continue to combine our intramurals, Physical Education classes as well as other recreational opportunities we offer at Forest Lake Academy with our Sports Ministry. Many students and parents are happy with just the recreational-cooperation type of activities, but others are pursuing a higher level of commitment and desire to represent our school by playing with other schools in the area as well as out of state. We have meetings and contracts to explain the Spiritual philosophy of our Sports Ministry and everyone agrees with the terms, but when some parents see their son/daughter on the

bench for more minutes than other players, they start putting pressure on every member of the leadership team involved in the process.

The caution and solutions to these and other challenges and dilemmas will be explained in later sections of this paper.

## CHAPTER II

### CHRISTIANS AND SPORTS

#### **History of Christianity in Sports**

The origins of Sports Ministries and the transition from considering sports a waste of time (Kimball, 2008) to almost bringing them to the level of importance of religion in America, has been a theme of study for decades. How Sports Ministries started with the purpose of more muscular and masculine citizens in America in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is intriguing. Furthermore, some ministers from England started a movement called “Muscular Christianity” (Old, 2008) in public schools because of the increasing number of young men who moved from rural areas to big cities and changed their physical activity habits to a more sedentary life. Besides the concern of a lack of exercise, there were other Christian leaders who were concern with the increasing effeminacy of these new urban men (Old, 2008) who were not exposed to hard manual labor anymore. This Muscular Christianity did not spread all over America until later decades, when the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) became a popular place for young men to meet and exercise, have Bible studies, prayer and commit to other missionary work. By the beginnings of the twentieth century, the YMCA started to promote competitive new sports that included teams, rules and audiences, still promoting Christian values and service for others.

Likewise Higs (2015) in his book *God in the stadium: Sports and religion in America*, narrates the origins of several other pioneers (Stagg, Naismith and Spalding)

from Springfield, Massachusetts, who also utilized the YMCA setting to invent and develop competitive sports that became a key cultural element in America, like Basketball, Football and Baseball. After the civil war, several organizations began to aim to develop citizenship and character especially for boys and young men. Sports and military training became very popular. William Earl Dodge, a philanthropist and merchant was another creator who in 1886 added the word “Physical” to the goals of the YMCA locations, turning the whole object of this association into “the improvement of the spiritual, mental, social, and physical condition of young men” (Higs, 2015, p. 189). We use similar phrases to develop our Mission and Vision statements at several Christian institutions, including churches. This process started through Sports Ministries. Other organizations also embraced this goal of character building through Sunday Schools (Macleod, 2004) and other clubs, like the Boys Scouts of America (the Adventist version is called Pathfinders), and other Sports and activity based programs from 1870-1940 began. The relationship between sports and religion became a weekly dynamic, and that is how and where many Sports Ministries were born.

Haidt (2012) even describes the present reality of team sports as a Religion, where its followers are so passionate and committed to it while cheering for their favorite teams, that the collective emotions resemble what America used to express about religion. Furthermore, he describes and enhances Durkeim’s definition of morality as a source of solidarity, regulating our actions by something other than our own ego.

### **Philosophical and Theological aspects in sports**

Linville (2014) outlines the timeline of human history based on the Bible from Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. Starting with his Christian Worldview,

he argues that during Creation, God created all things, including competition. In the Fall, Mankind corrupted the creation, including competition. He also defines Redemption of the created world as well as persons (spiritual redemption, salvation) of “individuals involved in competitive endeavors and a general, corporate redemption of the world and culture of competitive sports” (Linville, 2014, p.20) as the previous step of Consummation, in a future day where everything will be perfect in heaven, including competition. Who were the first Christian competitors in history?

From Peter, Paul and Barnabas and many other Christian leaders of the first followers of Jesus, the competition among themselves and against the forces of evil through leaders of their time was constant. They had to share the news, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Paul considered Barnabas too young to do that, and Barnabas had to prove him wrong, as well as other young leaders of the initial Christian church. There was a healthy competition about who could do the job and who had the blessing of God to do it. They were not doing it for a trophy or an award, they just wanted to share a gift that was given to them while at the same time being a part of a special group who traveled, run, hid and survive several catastrophes. They understood that this competition made them better, “iron sharpening iron”. The common adversary was evil, and unless we know evil, we cannot understand Good, God, hope. This process of competition between evil and good requires individuals to work in teams, improving their skills, making progress and growing in knowledge as well as socially, mentally and emotionally.

Paul utilized sports metaphors to narrate his own spiritual, moral and ethical journey in life; “I have run the good race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7) “I have become all things to all men, so that I might reach some” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23),

opening the door to freedom in methodology on how to reach people for Christ. David showed God's power by facing giants and defeating them, by competing at countless battles and wars with the enemy while showing leadership and resiliency.

### **Lingering Questions About Sports for Christians**

1. Are Competitive Sports Ministries beneficial for our Christian churches and schools today?
2. How competitive sports instead of cooperative activities can shape and develop the characters of those involved in the process of Sports Ministries?
3. What is better, Competition or Cooperation?
4. Can they work together or are they antagonistic concepts?
5. Do we share Tiger Woods statement in our Christian beliefs that “winning takes care of everything” (Lee & Kwak, 2016).
6. Do we care more for others than ourselves when competing or do we need a place, a program, a structure to help us develop the teamwork habits and character needed to make Christ-like ethical and moral decisions?
7. Alfie Kohn (1992), also argues that our struggle in America to defeat one another at work, at school, at play and at home may turn all of us into losers.
8. Is it possible to have pleasure in losing, just because it is a learning opportunity for growth and harder work and skills development?
9. Do we play sport to build character or just for amusement?
10. How can we please and reach as many people as possible in a Sports Ministry
11. How can we have competitive sports where a team/individual may not win and at the same time avoid pain, frustration and anger?

## CHAPTER IV

### GETTING THE BEST OUT OF SPORTS; VIRTUES GAINED IN SPORTS

#### PARTICIPATION

#### **Sports Ministries Designed to Develop the Virtues of Ethics of Fairness and Fair Play**

Covrig (1996) believes that there are two approaches to ethics and fairness and they are ethics of principle and ethics of virtue. The first one seeks to establish and norm universal principles, and the second one focuses on the fact that character and virtue are essential facets of morality. The ethics of virtue also goes deeper into motivation but it faces the challenge of hurting others when the principle of nonmaleficence (Covrig, 1996) suggests that one should avoid anything that may restrict someone else's development. Is it just for a person to not get what he/she wants when they want it? John Rawls (2009) defines a just system where participants have equal access to opportunities while at the same time acknowledging that a principle of efficiency or Competition is a part of a just system. This principle allows those who strive and work hard for their goals to attain them, but also presents a challenge for those least advantaged, bringing the need of restrictions and rules.

Covrig (1996) claims that sports help youngsters to understand and embrace the concepts of sharing, taking turns, obeying rules and develop the sense of community, bringing several groups together. However, the distortion of the concept of fairness when animosity, envy of stronger and better competitors, while feeling weak and in distrust of everyone, just because of competition. Some even argue that sports may promote a

“lower level of reasoning on Moral issues” (Ibid., p. 276). That’s a problem! Especially if we end up desiring the failure of others and by result blocking the desire of an ethic of service, as well as promoting cheating and fostering the idea that winning is right and losing is wrong.

### **Virtues needed in Leadership for a Christian Sports Ministry**

Altruism and servant leadership, as well as integrity and honesty. These are hard virtues to find in our world today where every leader appears to have a price, someone to please, providing to certain sectors of the organization privileges others do not have. This is not new. Selfishness twisted the concept of success, progress, productivity and even love. Where can we find true love? What kind of love? We talked about Agape Love earlier this semester, and I just brought some of what **Tinder (2000)** brilliantly explains about what Agape love is all about: “To lift someone else above the process of mutual scrutiny is to stand above that process oneself. To act on the faith that every human being is a beneficiary of the honor that only God can bestow is to place oneself in a position to receive that honor... This is the mark of agape. It is entirely selfless. If one could love others without judging them, asking anything of them, or thinking of one's own needs, one would meet the Christian standard.

## CHAPTER V

### FOSTERING A CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP THAT GETS THE BEST OUT OF SPORTS TO USE FOR EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLINING

#### **Christian Moral Leadership in Action**

I have seen these Moral Leadership Virtues in action in my missionaries and coaches for decades, who left literally their lives in the hands of God to help others in many poor countries around the world. We did not have many shiny toys/facilities/equipment growing up, but I do not remember being bored or sad, or frustrated for not having everything.

I have also seen these virtues in several principals, pastors, administrators and teachers who love the Lord and always go the extra mile to help others by supporting Competitive Sports Ministries by doing things that are not in their job description, after hours, just to make others better or to help someone in need. That is why I am still a teacher, coach and Athletic Director after having many other options and offers to work in other organizations and governments.

**Moral Virtues essential for current and future leaders of Competitive Sports Ministries**

I think once again Altruism, Agape Love and Servant Leadership are the signs of how Christian leaders manifest themselves and mentor others to be like them. These leaders I admire love what they do passionately. They desperate try and do anything in their power to help those around them to grow and become even better than them by challenging the young generation to become better at what they do constantly. There is

also humility, dedication, mentorship, sharing the load when the days and challenges are tough.

### **Biblical Examples**

We have several heroes in the Bible who were very competitive, who will risk their lives for their beliefs and at the same time mentor and train others to follow them. I chose King David and Gideon. Why King David? Because of his competitive and inquiring personality from a young age, making his moral and ethical decisions based on the God he trusted and on previous experiments he faced and tried in different settings. When nobody was willing to fight a giant who was defying his God, the pragmatic philosophical David asked: who is that guy? Why nobody wants to fight him, can't you see he is insulting our God? He accepted the help of those who with good intentions gave him heavy armor and a big sword but he decided to go instead with the strategy that worked for him on his previous victories when facing lions and bears.

That was his scientific method, after applying the hypothesis of the chance of killing them with a slingshot and stones instead of the traditional war weapons his brothers and other soldiers had. He was successful with unconventional leadership methods. That is probably why God chose him to be King instead of his brothers who apparently were more qualified. He did not follow the war logic of others, but he knew he could win the battle and the war with the help of God. It was a combination of training, courage, faith and skill. Gideon also challenged thousands to compete in a public setting to probe war readiness to defend a whole country, and after some discouraging "try outs" he came out with only 300 men ready to fight thousands...but his faith and decisiveness to face adversity, challenges and dilemmas made him a great leader and his soldiers

celebrities for the rest of their lives. Allowing God to work through us makes our leadership journey limitless. They were pragmatic and altruistic by caring for others and at the same time willing to die and serve their needs, in this case the lives of thousands.

### **Moral Leadership Examples: Ethical Pragmatism and Altruism**

Ethical Pragmatism and Altruism, argues Johnson (2015) are some of the ethical perspectives or systems of Leadership when we are “motivated by a concern for others,” (ibid., p.156). These two perspectives will determine the ethical and moral decisions of the leader focusing in the process of decision making using inquiring and philosophy to solve practical problems and dilemmas. John Dewey (1859-1952), who focused his writing on education, philosophy, science and politics, believed that the scientific method of developing hypotheses and testing them through experiments can help leaders to solve dilemmas after analyzing the results and modifying the practices with “Humility and Openness to other points of view” (ibid., p.165). Another critical element of Pragmatism is acknowledging limitations and allowing democracy in the process of decision making, while engaging our imagination, embracing our emotions and looking for creative solutions as leaders and followers recognize that the decisions made will shape the characters of those involved (Johnson, 2015). How do Altruism and Pragmatism work together?

Altruism is linked to Pragmatism, since the core value of Altruism is Love for our neighbor as the “ultimate ethical standard”, (ibid., p.170). Even though Altruism is considered a universal value (not only in Judeo-Christian ethics), by putting the needs of others before the leaders’ own needs by using compassion, this perspective and Ethic goal is impossible to meet, since we can never please everybody or fall into conflicting

forms when the love some leaders profess is not reflected in their actions. Both Perspectives, Pragmatism and Altruism are philosophically at the center and essence of what we expect from a Sports Ministry, since our main goal is to reach and serve others while working together in a process of discovering what works and what needs change, growth and improvement.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT CHRISTIAN SPORTS LEADERSHIP IS NOT AND THE TEMPTATIONS IT MUST RESIST

#### **Win at all Cost Leadership from a Coach's Perspective**

Coach Rick Pitino, a successful college as well as NBA basketball coach, just like many other Christian coaches and Athletic Directors who committed their lives to help others, had to face several times the reality that losing some games meant losing their jobs. For some other leaders it meant losing their reputation, their value, their motivation to go on. The same situation is being faced by Christian leaders of Sports Ministries when the pressures from participants and parents go beyond the goals and philosophy of the program. What a Sports Ministry is definitely NOT is a place where winning at all cost is the only option to measure success and accomplishments. It is not a program just for the physical and talent development of players and coaches, but more importantly to build a Christ-like character and leadership skills through mentoring.

Moreover, some of the most common errors we are exposed to in the decision making process of a Sports Ministry, says Nisbett & Ross (1980) are as follows. There are 8 different errors in the decision making process. They are: Availability errors (making decisions on available information), Representative errors (making decisions based on stereotypes, bad labels, and misrepresentations), Faulty theory errors (making decisions solely based on what we believe is right), Cause and effect errors (making decisions on what we think is the true cause and the only effect), Vividness errors

(making decisions after ignoring the evidence, just following the popular belief), Naturalistic errors (making decisions based on the principle of “it has been done this way for many years, why change it now?”), the belief that nature, the status quo/establishment is always right since it looks natural), Relativistic errors (making decision with a mindset where anything goes!! You pick your moral values, I will pick mine and we will all agree on whatever we decide...), and finally, the Utilitarian errors (making decisions where ends justify the means, even if that means using ineligible players in a sports contest, or utilizing enhanced drugs and other substances to improve performance).

### **Parental Pressures**

Sadly, we continue to experience in every Christian Sports Ministry the challenge of Parental Pressures when it comes to playing time and eligibility. Several parents resist to accept the reality that their children have the chance to play recreational sports as well as sign up for several sports classes offered for Physical Education but not to play competitive sports just because their children have a lack of talent or commitment. Those are probably the biggest factors why some students do not make some competitive teams. This year alone we had several cases where we had to have long conversations with students and parents who disagree with the reality of not making the team or not playing as many minutes as they would like, just because they do not have the talent or experience yet to play more or they are just simply interested in other activities and missed practices and training. We provide several options at Forest Lake Academy for those who love sports, from recreational to competitive games class vs. class and other intramural type competition. We also select a group of students to register for sports classes to represent the school around the state of Florida as well as out of state. This is a special group that

commits not only to practices and games, but to also help others, maintain the academic and citizenship requirements, but also become leaders for other younger students they mentor and help. Parents want their children in these groups, but sometime they are not willing to drive them to practices and games as well as behave accordingly to the code of conduct and handbook, where are values are clear and where they sign and notarize the fact that they have been informed of the rules.

### **Value Stands**

Johnson (2013), mentions moral sensitivity, or recognition of an ethical issue, which may lead to empathy, an emotional response to the needs of others. The Main Purpose of the Sports Ministry at Forest Lake Academy is to prepare our students, coaches, parents and volunteers to become better citizens of this world and to be ready to go to heaven while impacting our community in a positive way. We also have our Mission and Vision statements and they go as follows:

#### **FOREST LAKE ACADEMY ATHLETIC DEPARTMENT MINISTRY**

“Victory is in Christ” 1 Corinthians 15:57

#### ***Our Vision***

“To impact the world as Christian student-athletes, parents and coaches with the message of Jesus while becoming fit for eternity”.

#### ***Our Mission***

To nurture Christian student athletes to develop the critical thinking skills needed to be successful spiritually, academically, physically and socially as a result of learning respect, time management and determination through competitive sports”.

organizations, but the one I am more familiar with is the sports world, both recreational and highly competitive kinds. The Bible in Romans 12:2 challenges us to “by the mercies of God...present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”. We changed the name of our Sports Varsity Program to Athletic Department Ministry (flpanthers.org). We believe that the real “Victory is in Christ” 1 Corinthians 15:57. Students need to commit to our ministry, to its beliefs and goals, and to be willing to accept their role in it, big or small, as an opportunity to grow closer to the spiritual ideal of our Real Athletic Director, Jesus Christ. Anything off that target should not be a part of our Athletic Department Ministry.

Since we started this ministry we have seen criticism and discouraging comments right and left about how short we are coming from our goals. Probably the individual ethical accountability (Johnson, 2013) is lacking in some of our student-athletes. I believe they are trying real hard to follow Jesus and live his commandments, but now many parents and other students tend to see their smallest spiritual flaws. It is a difficult task to represent Jesus in an organization when the American individualistic culture only rewards MVPs and first places instead of the whole team. This is where the development of Emotional Intelligence along with comprehensive/critical listening, productive conflict management, effective argumentation and respect of the minority opinion (Johnson, 2013) comes in place as the biggest challenge for us as leaders of teams and groups.

“And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.” (Romans 5:4,5). Just one word: LOVE!! I am just giving back to others what has been given to me. Sports and music saved my life. I was one of those

pastor's kid who everyone criticized for being hyperactive, always running after a ball, organizing tournaments and events instead of studying longer hours, and here I am, the first in my family pursuing a PhD because is the right Moral Thing to do. Why? It is not for financial reasons; my salary will not change. I left a job in a middle school four years ago where I made more money and had more time for my PhD, but God had other plans for me. I am working harder than ever in my life, longer hours, more criticism and complaints, but at the same time developing more endurance, building my character, depending more than ever before on the promises of the Holy Spirit who fills my heart with hope and shows me His hand working in miracle after miracle. We had 324 students trying out for our programs last year (out of 392 in our school). That is over 80%, and if we add the free training during the spring and summer, as well as free pre-season open gym, the percentage may be even higher. We won 4 national championships in Volleyball, Girls soccer and Basketball and this year made it to the championship in division 1 in boys' soccer for the first time in schools' history in a tournament with teams from all over the country in Dayton, TN.

We came second out of 28 teams. Our school was also the only one to defeat one of the top schools in the area (Montverde) in golf back to back years. I said it before, it is not just about trophies and banners, it is about witnessing what we believe and working hard to improve what we have day by day. I am attaching the links of the volleyball National Championship we won 2 years ago after deciding not to play the second final for double elimination since that game would have to be played during Sabbath hours. We came through the lower bracket after losing one game in play offs rounds and defeated the team that came from the upper bracket 3-0. We were supposed to play

another match since the rules of the tournament were double elimination matches. It was 40 minutes before sunset. I explained to the other coach and the tournament organizer that we were not going to play the match before the tournament even started. Some of our parents and students who are not Adventist disagreed with my decision, and they made it very clear that I was going to pay the price for my decision.

My Moral compass was tested to the limit. It was a very uncomfortable time after winning the match and giving away the first place by forfeiting the match. Our girls were crying, half of our parents were really angry at me, and then the miracle happened. The girls from the other team did not know why we were not playing the second match. They went to the coach to ask what was going on. They saw our girls crying, sobbing. They were told by their coach that for religious reasons we were not going to play since we were Adventist and we keep the Sabbath. More than 2000 people in the stadium also received the same explanation. Some coaches from other teams came running asking me to call my pastor or my principal for permission, that I was crazy. Our principal was there with me, we both agreed what we had to do. It was only about 2-5 minutes of “confusion, tears and anger”. The girls from the other team got together in the middle of the court after receiving the first place trophy and banner and they started to cry too. We did not know what was happening.

All of a sudden they started walking toward our girls and gave them the trophy and the banner. They started to hug each other for minutes while crying together and celebrating life, love, beliefs and accomplishments. Long story short, for the first time in tournament history, two teams were named CHAMPIONS. It is still in the website.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/71ih00avxtnux0z/AABQ-1brY0fOK9sZDBFOeDvAa?dl=0&preview=Volleyball+Champions+List.pdf>,

and I will attach at the end the links to what the newspapers said about it as well as an Adventist Review article. Needless to say, we received many letters and emails from churches and schools who used our miracle to show how God is always faithful to His promises. I also received a lot of criticism for playing so close to Sabbath hours. We never thought we were going to make it that far, we were just a small Christian school playing club teams of phenomenal volleyball players.

The commitments today are many but the heart is simple. I will say and do anything to serve my God. I will work and fight for young people who loves sports and choose to follow the Lord while practicing and playing, on and off the court/field. Watching football and other sports on a Sunday night are probably what I would be doing right now if it wasn't for several coaches and mentors who chose to help me and others I know on a 24/7 commitment to service. They challenged me to grow, to never stop helping while at the same time growing academically. Those are the Moral and Ethical reasons why I am writing this paper. Those are the Moral and Ethical reasons I am in this program. I am in debt with God for saving my soul and for showing me how enduring challenges, criticism and dilemmas together with Him will make my character acceptable for heaven, and in the process help as many as I can to do the same.

### **General Christian Leadership**

The moral expectation from my administration, parents, coaches and students vary. I am blessed to have an extremely empathetic administration who understands the benefits of our program as a ministry and supports my decisions and suggestions. Not

only we serve our students, but we allow middle schoolers to practice and play with our teams in order to showcase our academy the whole year. This is probably one of the moral expectations some parents question when it comes to playing time. High school interscholastic programs do not require a minimum playing time for all members of the team like in middle school and elementary levels. Therefore, each minute on the court and field has to be earned by the students who are a part of the teams. This takes a lot of work and good judgment on behalf of the coaching staff to determine who is ready to represent the school while playing in one of our teams, since the “hedonism of consumer culture” (Covrig, 2000) from professional teams has infected the perspective of some of our parents who put a lot of pressure on the coaches to play their son/daughter just to have some public exposure. My moral challenge with coaches, usually comes when I see things differently than the head coaches when it comes to who should play more. I always share my opinion with my coaches, but making sure it is not perceived or understood as a request or an order for them to follow, since they are the ones who see every minute of practice for each participant in their teams. I currently try to avoid these suggestions since some coaches automatically assume that I am expecting them to play certain students more than others, and they may play them just to please me, and I never liked micromanaging at any level.

## CHAPTER VII

### CREATING THE MORAL CONTEXT OF SPORTS MINISTRY

#### **Keeping competition and self-aggrandizement from swamping the soul of a Christian with temptations**

There are creative ways of achievement to meet the moral expectations of a Sports Ministry when facing the temptation of behaving and acting like a club or professional franchise where the main and only goal is to win games and championships at any level. This dilemma, argues Linville (2014), are related to the fact that the expectations to win are proportional to the time players and coaches spend training and practicing. This commitment to countless hours of work tends to distract from the Mission of evangelism and discipleship to those who are a part of Sports Ministries and to consider winning the only option.

The Apostle Paul, who understood competition and used it in several occasions, dare all humans when faced with dilemmas to “let God remold our minds” in Romans 12:2. The mind of a competitive athlete is wired to win, to become better at whatever endeavor they face. How to handle loses and mistakes is a process where Christian leadership takes place to palliate the temptation of self-aggrandizement. Sacrifice for the team, the organization, others in general pushes competitive persons to also do their best but not with the goal of winning at all cost but with the objective of helping others. The biggest challenge is how to positive learn and grow from loses, especially after giving our best.

## **Questions to Ask with Regard to Youth Leaders for Middle and High School Sports**

**(Linville, 2014)**

- Are the coaches trained psychologically, emotionally and theologically to lead and coach?
- What is the philosophy of playing time for each level?
- How proactive are coaches obtaining training and certifications to coach better?
- How important are sports in relation with the students' academics?
- What plans have the coach to mentor students to become leaders?

For every challenge and dilemma coaches and administrators of a Sports Ministry face, the principle of Love should lead any achievement as well as problems and confrontations, argues Linville (2014).

### **Other efficient Suggestions to Avoid Distractions in a Sports Ministry**

We developed a handbook for students, coaches and parents. We also have contracts that need to be signed and notarized, as well as several mandatory meetings where the schools' expectations are explained, as well as repeating over and over that playing time is not guaranteed for anybody, and that expected academic performance are needed in order to be eligible to play, as well as behavior and spiritual involvement in different school activities. We make it very clear that if the expectations from them are not aligned with the competitive "performance based" philosophy of the program, they have other recreational options like intramurals, after school sports free time, lunch leagues, classics (class vs. class sports), etc. We also turned our Athletic Department Ministry teams into classes, where the students receive .25 credit for participating, adding

to involvement another list of requirements like attendance, academic performance, attitude, behavior, citizenship, responsibility (bringing and wearing the right uniform on game days, which includes white dress shirt, tie, team vest, khaki pants and dress shoes).

After all, it is not only about winning at all cost and collecting trophies and banners. Luongo, P. (2007) in his book *10 Truths About Leadership:... It's Not Just About Winning*, describes how he found out that more important than winning is the process of motivating others to grow and become better at anything they do. There are some limited research based on historical and contemporary perspectives, says Watson & Parker, (2012) when studying and empirically analyzing the impact and relationship between Sports and Christianity, but we see every day at Forest Lake Academy the impact of positive outcomes thanks to our Sports Ministry.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### **Recommendations**

First, we recommend and suggest for coaches and administrators involved in Sports Ministries, to downplay the winning-at-all-cost mentality (Covrig, 1996) which is ingrained in our society today, where instead of just training and practicing, we can have more time and allotted resources for mentorship, discipleship and servant leadership training. Secondly, we should continue combining and linking our Physical Education classes as well as intramurals, lunch leagues, recreational options and classics (class vs. class games) with our more competitive teams who represent the school in order to not only increase the school spirit for amusement and entertainment but to grow as an evangelistic team. Third, Leadership should be taught with Christian Values through Sports Ministries to prepare our young participants of today in leaders of tomorrow to continue making disciples for the Lord.

We started this paper asking ourselves why we love sports so much in America, and if the reasons we have to love them had to do with our “groupish” or “selfish” tendencies we have as humans. After reading and talking with many experts in the area of Sports Ministries, ethics and moral decision makers, we conclude that we are both, we love to be a part of the group, but we also have our personal needs out of Sports Ministries and programs. Many coaches who are right now coaching for Forest Lake Academy went through a Sports Ministries programs either here or somewhere else, and

now have decided to come back and coach, to do for others what it was done for them. They are the spiritual leaders several of our students follow as role models and mentors for life and for heaven. However, the reality of the challenges and struggles we face every season with those who do not understand the full concept of competition as “to strive together toward a common goal” (Linville, 2012, p.12), while accepting the reality of limitations and bench time because of a lack of talent, bad attitude, practices missed or just because of low academic performance is enormous.

The mere fact that there is plenty of evidence suggesting that competitive sports should not be one of the Christian Ministries offered by our churches and schools, is why I take it as a personal challenge. I would love to demonstrate with facts that Sports Ministries have been and will be one of the most effective tools to reach young people who are passionate about sports, life, Jesus and the needs of others, but that currently are facing severe emotional and spiritual challenges. With the presence of the Holy Spirit, we can succeed where other sports organizations and clubs are failing to prepare young people to become servant leaders, since all that matters for those programs is the winning-losing record and championships won at the end of the season. The effects of these Sports Ministries that changed my life and the lives of many other leaders I know do not end when the season is over. That is just the beginning of a new chapter for new young leaders, coaches and pastors, principals and superintendents who will do for others what has been done for them. Is this the best way to prepare the leaders of tomorrow and to evangelize those who have not accepted Jesus as their personal Savior? I believe so.

There are books and documentaries on ESPN about how teams and groups have helped leaders to develop their Christian moral and ethical values while at the same time

challenging them to perform and accomplish success. The world of sports can be a blessing for a world that is seeking desperately hope, belongingness and care. Violence, drugs, broken and fatherless homes, unmet personal expectations and a long list of consequences of evil's presence on earth are the reasons why we have to offer options for our young people as well as leaders/coaches who want to help them. That is why today more than ever I recognize that we need more Sports Ministries around the world with a Pragmatic and Altruistic philosophy to become Jesus's hands to heal, teach and preach. However, there is a temptation through that small voice of the enemy that is telling us day after day when we feel that our efforts are in vain, to quit, to stop trying to continue building servant leaders for tomorrow and just keep our sports organizations as clubs and competitive entities whose only purpose and goal is to win games and championships at all cost. After all, there are many other options out there for Physical Education Teachers and youth pastors that do not bring so many complaints and criticism.

However, after experiencing challenges for over twenty-five years as a Sports Minister, I have to confess that God never leaves us alone when we dedicate and surrender ourselves to His cause. I try to learn from this criticism all the time. I listen and take notes of everything I can do better, knowing that perfection will only arrive when we see the face of our Jesus. Until then, I'll continue to seek individual and team growth for me and for everyone else around me through our Sports Ministries.

There are still lingering questions to be answered about how to make losing a positive experience for our participants, our parents and our coaches. More research is also needed to measure the percentage of participants who go on and become leaders for

others around the world as a result of the mentoring and coaching they received as members of any Sports Ministry that included competitive sports.

Improved practice is also needed to start a Sports Ministry, like a clear handbook, guidelines, contracts, organized and scheduled community outreach projects and mission trips with teams and coaches, as well as Bible studies and other activities with the team on daily and weekly bases. There is also the need for being pragmatic and altruistic while at the same time applying the Ethic of care, empathy, Agape Love and Altruism in every decision that is made from administrators to participants, parents and other members of the Ministry.

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