

Andrews University

Leadership Program

WHY COMPETITIVE SPORTS IN THE RIGHT CHRISTIAN ENVIRONMENT AND WITH  
THE ADEQUATE LEADERSHIP AND COACHING IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE  
TOOLS TO PREPARE OUR YOUNG LEADERS OF TOMORROW

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Course

LEAD 645-999 Ethical Leadership & Organizational Integrity

by

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

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 a mission is 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, who will not only become coaches and sports trainers, but trend setters for new strategies and practices in order to continue the mission of preaching the gospel in any profession and endeavor the choose to follow.

The commission found in Mathew 28:18-20 not only allows but challenges and exhorts leaders to use sports as a way to reach out and attract people to the gospel as an evangelistic tool, “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). It is interesting that several of these words are the heart of a competitive Christian Sports Ministry, where there is training, instruction and practice, not only of the sports being played but also of other virtues needed to be a witness for heaven and a leader for others. That is why we are different than sports clubs and other competitive sports organizations where the only purpose is to win games, championships and produce revenue. The Bible also describes the commandments (Peterson, 2005, p.1807) from Jesus found

in Matthew 22:37 “Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence...and Love others as well as you love yourself”. Passion is probably the key word here. If there is a characteristic of competitive sports most people see not only from those playing but from those coaching and watching the contests, is passion. It is not a coincidence that this word is the condiment of serving God and serving others. If there is no passion there is no commitment, no desire for growth and achievement. In order to accomplish this Commandment, there has to be training constantly in the love for God and for people, as a way to make disciples by sharing the gospel with the example on and off the court and field as players, coaches, parents and supporters of competitive Christian Sports Ministries. But what are the Moral and ethical virtues and character traits we expect from the leaders of these programs and the leaders we are forming for tomorrow?

### **What makes a great moral leader?**

Ciulla (2013) mentions some virtues that can describe a great moral leader like Altruism, Authenticity, Integrity, Trustworthiness, while developing relationships, balancing their authority and avoiding conflicts of interest. Hackett & Wang (2012) also describes other virtues linked to leadership like Courage, Temperance, Justice and Prudence as well as Humanity, and Truthfulness. Johnson (2013) describes Ethical Accountability, not just for the team members but also for the leader. He goes on to describe the benefits of cooperative groups and competitive individualistic ones and the challenges every organization faces when pursuing a common goal. There are other virtues that make a leader a great moral example for his family, friends and the organization he or she works for. My personal definition of a great moral leader is the one who understands and practices servant leadership, because there is no greater feeling than witnessing others better their lives because of our influence on their lives.

On the contrary, we can also identify a great moral leader by describing the opposite of greatness. We are living in times where dictators die and some people are glad for that chapter in their countries/organizations to be over, while others defend what for them was just and fair. When we talk about politics and religion, Haidt (2012) clearly describes why there is so much division, hate and suffering in our world because of bad moral leadership. What is morally right or wrong? Why morality appears to “bind and blind” (p.189) entire civilizations to accept what for other cultures is completely unacceptable? Why racism, bigotry, justice department/emails scandals covering and other dark elements of our reality seem to be acceptable just because someone else is worse? How can we agree to policies that are not fair just because they do not align with our race, religion or even the sports team we support? Bad leadership to me is everything that goes against the moral growth of the leader and the individuals that are a part of the organization, no matter how financially prosperous the reality may be.

### **What are the top virtues needed for leading?**

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”.

### **Who can be role models with the moral virtues as leaders for our young people?**

I have seen these virtues in my parents 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 see hundreds of our young people today complaint, and they have everything, from food and clothes to the latest technological toys, sports equipment, gymnasiums, name brand uniforms and shoes, great tournaments out of state and even out of the country, expensive vacations and so much more. I also see many members of the organizations I worked for complain and murmur about what they do not have, simply because they never had to work with limited resources.

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, 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.

### **What Moral Virtues are 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.

### **What competitive leaders from Biblical times and from today are an example for the leaders of tomorrow?**

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. We also have several Christian coaches today who have developed entire philosophies of coaching and mentoring not only for their players but also for those around them for the future. I chose King David and Rick Pitino as examples for the next section.

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. Those are key ingredients for any leaders and individuals to win, to accomplish a goal, to face adversity and challenges and come victorious.

The problem starts when corrupted power and ambition becomes the goal of any competition instead of probing a moral and ethical point. Dewey and other pragmatists (Johnson, 2013) believe that applying the scientific method to solve human challenges and dilemmas will lead to conclusions and actions based on the evidence. We see that in sports a lot too. There are many coaches and Athletic Directors that I personally admire for their passion for leadership, moral values and success.

Rick Pitino, a famous basketball coach at the collegiate level and in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and leadership expert, had to face several times in his career the challenges all leaders face when they do not have enough talent, resources, team spirit and other elements needed to be successful as a basketball team. How do they relate with King David? Pitino (2001) in his book *Lead to succeed: 10 traits of great leadership in business and life*, describes similar challenges David faced in his journey becoming a great leader. From trial and error to finding the essence of great leadership, Rick Pitino always knew he had to have a vision, and work tirelessly to get rid of doubts, fear and uncertainty while providing an environment of growth for those around him. Just like David, he led by example, empowering those around him, being disciplined and putting great effort while at the same time owning some mistakes in the process of growth while working together. Both of them were more than just good motivational speakers. They both addressed small groups when they started their leadership revolutions. David with a small army of followers and friends, and Coach Pitino with his players and assistants.

Moreover, cooperation and competition had to live together, while working as a group but developing and growing individually. Just like David had his generals and leaders he trusted in his own group/army, Coach Rick Pitino developed leaders within his teams who applied

leadership traits (Pitino, 2001) to accomplish shared goals. There were individuals in a team, but individualities were respected and skills were developed. Pitino (2001) mentions in his book the following traits for success in leadership; to have a concrete vision, to be a good messenger, to build a team ego, to act with integrity, to act decisively, to be adaptable, to be consistent, to maintain focus, to live for the future, not in the past, and to act selflessly. King David somehow had similar traits as a successful king and leader, and when he lost his integrity, his consistency, his capacity to focus on the consequences of his actions and acted selfishly, his nation, his friends and family and his future reputation got damaged forever.

Furthermore, many people avoid using King David as an example because of his mistakes and weaknesses. Coach Pitino also faced criticism when he could not win some tournaments, when he chose some players over others to play certain games he lost. However, both King David and Coach Pitino left a legacy of resiliency and alignment between what they believe and what they lived. They both owned their flows, they continue to serve those who they were leading and built a bridge between the past and the future, sharing their accomplishments and errors with those they mentored. Do we see that today in our political and sports leaders? We certainly do.

Haidt (2012), when describing what sports as a religion can cause for good and bad, he mentions the reason why thousands if not millions follow sports and political parties. We all want to “simply be a part of a whole”(p.248). This interesting need humans have to belong, to win, to be socially accepted and included can be the perfect factor to transform any sports program into a Sports ministry. We are building one at Forest Lake Academy, in order to take advantage of the competitive and resilient traits King David and Coach Pitino had, while also utilizing it as an evangelistic tool. Linville (2014) extensively explains why and how the use of

sports and competition can be one of the most effective strategies for evangelism and discipleship. He goes on to mention how 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. Coach Pitino left a legacy of service, work ethics, a concrete vision on what is right and good for individuals, teams and organizations. I just continue to discover why and how sports ministries in a pragmatic way can help solve the immense lack of mentorship from male role models in many homes, by mentoring and coaching our young people to find Jesus through individual and team sports while getting ready to compete very soon for a job, good relationships, scholarships and above all, their eternal salvation. We must face our weaknesses, own them, learn from them and share the pain and suffering they bring with those around us so they will not make the same mistakes, while at the same time we build each other up in our journey to heaven.

**How can a Competitive Sports Ministry develop those currently involved as well as future leaders?**

I believe in formal instruction as well as experience, not separated from each other. Theory is good, but without actual practice it does not work. From a sports point of view, you cannot expect others to give their best on a court or a field if you are not willing to do the same as a leader or team member. I feel tired most of the time because my job requires long hours and a lot of energy, but I am happy because I can see how God can use me when I am willing to develop the skills and talents he gave me to serve others. I really like all the reading we have

shared for this ethics class and the conversations I am able to have with the other participants of the class, with Dr. Covrig, with my students and with other colleagues about moral values and ethics. I also see several coaches and leaders who are committed to help others because of what Competitive Sports Ministries and programs have done for them in the past when they were younger. I was invited last Friday to become a member of a committee for the Florida Conference to help other teachers develop their moral and ethical values while empowering them to become better at what they do. It is an honor to me to be considered to be a part of that team, and I am sure this will help me to continue develop the virtues that will make me a great leader. As a result of that, I am also committing myself and the Sports Ministry I lead to continue making a difference for those who are also leaders in the program (coaches, trainers, etc.) as well as preparing the leaders of tomorrow.

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