

Institute for Christian Teaching
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**PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SPORT
FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE**

by

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Seventh-day Adventist have long espoused the development of the whole person--mentally, spiritually and physically. (32: p. 13) While the church has given considerable attention to one's mental and spiritual growth, we have done relatively little with regard to a person's physical being. Too often we think that being a vegetarian and drinking eight glasses of water each day will fulfill our commitment to "the physical." While attention to one's physical being is important during the elementary and secondary years, it is imperative that we also include it in the curriculum of higher education.

Research has shown that sufficient physical activity has a positive effect in controlling cardiorespiratory diseases, cholesterol (increases HDL and lowers overall), triglycerides, obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and certain cancers. (21: pp. 702-720) Exercisers are less tense, depressed and fatigued than non-exercisers. (25: pp. 304-332) Students who are more physically fit consistently earn better grades and miss fewer days of school. Good health and physical vitality both enhance intellectual vitality and thus ensure greater academic achievement. A fit student will be more productive, more vigorous and live a more rewarding life. (18: pp. 49-63) Ellen White also expressed the close connection between a person's physical fitness and spiritual capacities. (33: p. 24) Without a doubt, then, the contribution that one's physical condition makes to our academic and spiritual growth is unquestionable.

This paper, while recognizing that physical activity can take many forms, will primarily concentrate on the medium of sport. Several questions need to be addressed: (1) Is there a place for physical education and sport in Seventh-day Adventist higher education? (2) Is there a difference between Christian sport and sport as engaged in by public universities and professional teams? (3) Is sport an acceptable activity in the curriculum of Seventh-day Adventist colleges? In addition to addressing these questions, Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship will be analyzed to determine if it is a model that can be utilized in Christian sport

Definitions

In this paper sport will be defined as those activities that are both intramural and extramural in nature. It is synonymous with the term athletics.

Intramural activities are games that take place between students of the same school.

Extramural activities include:

- (a) an occasional "friendship" game between two schools;
- (b) sports clubs where the entire structure such as organization, finance, travel, leadership, etc., is provided by students;
- (c) varsity sports which are under total control of the school and may include 2-3 games or a full schedule.

Delimitations

This paper presents a theoretical construct and deals with practical application in a limited way. The "how to" is beyond the scope of this paper and must be dealt with at another time.

Christian Higher Education

Christian higher education has an opportunity and a responsibility to open the human mind. This commitment is to touch one's entire being. Education is more than the classics and the sciences--as important as they are. Included in this charge is the divine imperative to "make every thought captive to the obedience of God." (6)

The Christian college enables one to relate all things to the Creator and from this focus an integrated approach to living emerges. The Christian college does not fall into the same trap as does the secular school of compartmental education but rather provides a worldview so that every facet of one's life can be governed by Christian principles.

Included in this charge is the inclusion of how boy meets girl, how we relate to government and the laws of the land, how we use our leisure time and how we relate to movement experiences. A Christian college cannot ignore these aspects of a person's education. They are not "outside" the parameters of the educational process but are an integral part of the "every thought" imperative of 2 Corinthians 10. If the Christian college is to produce a graduate who will provide leadership in all facets of life than it must include more than the arts and the sciences.

Whole Person Education

The mandate of the liberal arts college is to educate the whole person--academically, spiritually, physically and socially. In addition to intellectual development one should be exposed to ethics, social problems, various cultures, athletics, etc. A liberal education helps one become more fully human and better capable of integrating religious principles into one's life. (15: p. 34)

DeJong (8: p. 130) suggests that church related colleges pay considerably more attention to the total growth of the student and that the organization of colleges reflect this focus on the total person of the student. The entire milieu and ethos of the school--people, books, laboratories, work, chapel, athletes, concerts are all part of the growth process. Christian colleges must educate not train. Students must learn to make value judgments, to analyze activities and events to determine if they should be a part of his/her experience.

God has given us rational, moral and artistic powers that are to be invested in His cause. Holmes (15: p. 16) proposes that we have God-given, God-preserved, God-restored potential to be developed, disciplined and invested in response to God which is the Christian's responsibility and stewardship. This suggests the development of the whole person and allows for no dichotomy between what is secular and what is sacred. . In this context, playing a musical instrument, repairing an automobile or preaching a sermon are all religious activities. God does not ask us to honor Him on the Sabbath day only, but to image Him in whatever we do.

Matthew 25:13-30 advocates that all endowments and talents are gifts from the Spirit and are to be employed in Christ's service. (31: p. 328) "Our first duty toward God and our fellow beings is that of self-development. Every faculty with which the Creator has endowed us should be cultivated to the highest degree of perfection, that we may be able to do the greatest amount of good of which we are capable." (30: p. 395)

Religion and sport are not two separate entities; they are one. Biblical principles are to be woven into all we say and do. (5) We must cooperate with divine agencies in our acts of play as well as in our acts of Christian work. (31: p. 350)

A Substitute

Most educational institutions only dimly mirror what Ellen White prescribed for the church. At times this is due to necessity--but all too frequently it is by choice. We must recognize that dedicated individuals who are trying to follow God's leading in their lives have not attained perfection and still may make poor choices. Our obligation to God is to do the best we can with the resources that are available. Such is the situation with education in the 90s.

I am convinced that a small school located in a rural setting provides the best atmosphere for our youth. It is unfortunate that few students experience working with the soil and learn wood-working, dressmaking and cooking as part of their formal education. We lost much when we terminated our manual training programs. Influenced by being located in large metropolitan areas and touted as old fashioned and out of touch with modern society, this hands-on education has been replaced by different curricula and methodologies that many feel are more relevant to the needs of modern society

Physical education programs came into existence as a result of the demise of manual training and physically demanding work experiences. There was no necessity for physical education classes in our early schools as students obtained sufficient exercise through practical work experiences.

Physical education as we know it today is a substitute! It is not ideal but it has become essential as this is the only medium whereby students can learn the necessity of exercise, the avenues whereby it can be obtained and the skills necessary so they can continue movement experiences throughout their lives.

While this substitute is not ideal we must, with God's help, make it the best that it can be. We must keep foremost in our minds that we are developing citizens for the Kingdom--as well as citizens for this world. It is important that these "temples of God" be fine tuned and that all our activities be planned and administered in a way that will further His cause and contribute to our preparation for Heaven.

Physical Education and Sport in the Christian College

As there is more to life than work, so there is more to education than preparing for a career. Work involves less than one-fourth of our waking hours in a week. Education must also be concerned with educating a person for the other three-fourths of his/her waking hours. This is why we promote general studies in our curriculum and an important part is developing an understanding of and improvement in movement skills. We must educate individuals how to use movement properly in leisure time pursuits and in developing and maintaining physical vigor. (15: p. 37)

It might appear to some that Christianity has no direct impact on performance arts such as music and sport. On the contrary, it may be that it is in this area that the Christian attitudinal approach is especially important. (15: p. 37)

Just as Trueblood has said that the "Christian scholar is likely to be a better scholar for being a Christian than one would be otherwise," (15: p. 47) so should the Christian athlete be a better athlete than he/she would be otherwise. Not in the sense that one is a better performer, that one wins more games or championships, but in what motivates a person and in his/her approach to the activity. One is truer to the spirit of sport, to fulfilling the essence of sport. (28)

The same could be said for the Christian as spectator. Christian spectators should be different than the typical fan. They should relate to opponents and officials in the same manner as they would relate to their neighbors. Christian institutions might include sport so that their graduates may be better able to participate in the culture of their society. This participation must be grounded in a God-honoring perspective so it does not become a breeding ground for selfishness and indulgence. (2: p. 191)

Gaebelein (13: pp. 90-91) demonstrates how athletics fit into the curriculum when he states, The place of athletics, though always subsidiary to the main business of school or college, is a vital one. It is once more a question of method; especially in sports, the manner in which they are conducted is all important. Team-play, the heart of which is self-restraint and self-sacrifice; the moral courage that is good sportsmanship—these can be learned on playing fields in such a way that they become lasting character traits to the glory of God. And the benefit of athletics under Christian leadership is by no means confined to participants; the whole school community may learn group lessons in encouraging the defeated, being generous to rivals, and showing under all circumstances the courtesy that is an essential by-product of the Gospel.

Beck (2: p. 203) present another interesting look at athletics as he writes,

It is essential that health and sports be articulated in a Christian university. In every discipline a biblical view of what human beings are must be presented in such a way that the spiritual dimension is seen as a critical component. Sport is necessary to provide an avenue for the select who will discipline themselves in order to achieve high levels of health and skill development. Because of the high visibility of sport at a university, God can use it to bring some to salvation and to promote Christ-like character with individuals who may never identify with God in any other way.

The Christian and Culture

Seventh-day Adventists have long held the position of Williams (8: p. 121) in that the church must take seriously the task of making Christians a peculiar people. In the past this has usually meant abstinence from many things--sport being one. Its schools were typically placed at some distance from metropolitan areas so that students could be isolated and their activities better controlled.

We tried, and in places are still trying, to stand outside culture and develop our own subculture. All too often we have become observers of culture rather than participating in it and helping to influence it.

Rasi (22) has written a fine paper where he discusses how we should relate to culture. I would like to apply some of his ideas to sport.

He suggests that we can view culture as controlled by Satan producing only negative experiences whereby we should have nothing to do with it. If we take the stand that sport is an evil part of culture, then under this premise we should renounce all involvement in sport, be it active participation or as spectators. In fact, the "truly converted" would have no interest in sport, would not read about it, not talk about it, not even think about it. Were we to subscribe to this philosophy we would warm the hearts of many, but in all practicality this is impossible.

A second possibility, and one espoused by Rasi, is that we test cultural activities and hold on to the good and separate from that which is not good. (29) In this approach three biblical themes must be followed: (1) separation from those things that are contrary to God's will; (2) affirmation of those activities that are compatible with God's principles; and (3) transforming human beings so

that they relate to the event and, if you please, effect the activity so that it results in a positive experience. I would like to suggest that Christians have the opportunity to do this with sport.

It appears to me that sport is such an integrate part of our culture that it is impractical and even impossible to ask our youth, as well as our adult membership, to abstain from this activity. What is left then is to change the way that we participate in sport.

The Pervasivness of Sport

Possibly no other phenomenon, save politics, war and religion is as ubiquitous as is the subject of sport. One has only to reminisce to the weeks surrounding the World Series, the Superbowl, or basketball playoffs to realize that few individuals in the United States are untouched by these games. Almost every newspaper of any size has an entire section devoted to sports. In fact, more space is devoted to sport than to any other single event. A large percentage of radio and television time is devoted to sport. Even the basic cable television subscriber can tune in to 20-30 athletic events during a weekend. Indeed, with the right television equipment, one can watch sport 24 hours a day if the desire and stamina are there. Sport personalities sell everything from cars to undergarments. I think it would be safe to say that our youth know the names and statistics of athletes to a far greater extent than they know names, events and dates pertaining to the history of our country or of the Bible. In fact, sport is so intricately woven into our lives that seven out of ten individuals converse, view, listen to or read about it some time during each day of their life. (4: pp. 4-7)

Our economic structure is affected by the billions of dollars spent each year on sport. It has made millionaires out of individuals who can run with speed and evasivness, put a ball through a metal rim, or hit a small ball successfully. It has affected our educational system to such an extent that national reputations are gained through the success of a school's athletic program. Coaches earn far more than the president of our most prestigious universities--even more than the president of the United States.

With sport so entrenched, seemingly in the very cells of our body, we cannot escape the necessity of studying it, analyzing it, and critiquing it to see how the Christian should relate to this passion that surpasses all passions!

Where Are We With This Thing Called Sport?

While it's impossible to come to a consensus dconcerning the way in which all individuals relate to sport, I believe that the following will paint, at least with broad strokes, the manner in which the typical athlete--and spectator views this unique world.

For years we have lived with such clichés as "Nice guys finish last," "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing," "Show me a good loser and I'll show you a loser." Sport literature is full of quotes such as these from a football player who said, "My style is to play mean and nasty, and I am going to beat people physically and mentally." Another said, "I'm paid to be a brute. My idea of a good hit is when my victim ends up on the sidelines with train whistles blowing in his head." (7: p. 9) Isolated feelings? I think not. All one has to do is to watch the watchers on any Saturday or Sunday as they cheer on those savage hits. We are not just talking about non-Christians; "good loyal" Seventh-day Adventists are in this group--even the deacons and elders of our churches.

Former President Reagan told the Chico State football team that theirs was a game in which you could have "a clean hatred for your opponent." (23) While these examples may seem extreme, it's interesting to note that individuals clearly perceive a difference between morality in sport and in everyday life. Some find it hard to tell right from wrong in athletics. It appears that moral norms are often suspended during competition. In sport you do what you want; in life it's more restricted. One player said "It's harder to make decisions in life because there are so many people to think about, different people to worry about. In sports you're free to think about yourself." (16: p. 4)

In America we are obsessed with winning and top-billing. From beauty queens to network ratings to baptisms. From Little League to spelling bees to Pathfinders. Ours is a philosophy possessed with being on the top. Listen to almost any conversation and the question is, Did you win? Who is the richest? Who is the strongest? Who is the smartest? Who sold the most books? Who is number 1?

While we usually reserve such comments for professional sport and big-time college athletics, this infectious disease has also infiltrated youth sports. I remember seeing a 130 pound runner "take out" a 75 pound second baseman with a vicious block as he was attempting to make a double play. I was sitting close to the player's bench, and as the runner returned to the bench he received a pat on the back, and a humorous, "Way to take him out Mike." Mike and his Little League teammates learned a lesson that day. Unless these youth come in contact with a Christian coach along the way, they will grow up to be just like the typical professional athlete.

The very nature of sport, any sport, is criticized by a number of individuals. They suggest that a person's success depends on somebody else's failure. One cannot do as well unless another doesn't do as well. It's survival of the fittest. Sport is a gladiatorial model, inherently antibiblical for it idealizes an adversarial view of, and relationship to other human beings. (1: p. 3)

Is There An Alternative?

If there is no alternative then the sports critics are correct. We must immediately discontinue all sports activities in our schools, hospitals and churches. We must initiate a nationwide campaign to convert Seventh-day Adventists to a total anti-sport lifestyle.

Is what we have expressed the nature of a game--or merely a perversion of what might exist? It seems rather that sport and competition are amoral--they are neither right nor wrong. It's like atomic energy; it has potential for tremendous good or devastating destruction. The choice rests within us.

I would like to suggest that there is something better. There is an alternate approach to competing. Sport is not to be condemned but can result in a growing, maturing, self-actualizing experience.

But change is not easy, especially from an addiction. It requires that we recognize the present state of affairs, are convicted that a change is needed and have the courage and stamina to change our behavior. And as Alcoholics Anonymous has discovered, it needs the presence of a "higher power." The process is long and arduous. It might be impossible to change the behavior of some who are steeped in their habitual behavior. But start we must. We must develop new behavior patterns in our young people so that they will be able to possess a new Seventh-day Adventist Christian approach to sport. It may be that we can even learn something from early sport history.

Good and Bad Strife

The Greeks are said to have invented organized sport. In the *Iliad*, Homer gives an account of what took place as early as possibly the twelfth century B.C. Funeral Games.

They thought that one honors the gods, and yourself, by being "the most of what you are." This is why Achilles, and his friends, played games during the funeral of his dearest friend and hero, Patroclus. It was to tell the gods about Patroclus' glorious deeds. He was good at throwing the spear, wrestling, running after the enemy, etc. Since Patroclus could not do this for himself--the living would do it for him. They acted out what Patroclus did in his lifetime.

The Greeks had many interesting concepts. One centered around the word Hubris. A person was to use the talent that the gods gave him. He was to take pride in what he did, but he was not to be arrogant and feel that the gods had been more favorable to him than to others. If he had an arrogant attitude he was guilty of Hubris--and the gods certainly would punish him.

On the Senior Bench at the University of Southern California is inscribed, "The palm we give to him who merits it." Not because he has talents but because of how he has used the talents that the gods have given him. As an indication of a person's accomplishments, the early Greeks gave to the victor a wreath. The wreath had significance as in a short time it withers. It is temporal. It suggested the concept that glory is not in the prize (or in the winning) but in the striving.

Another concept of the Greeks can be identified by the words cum petere. The Greeks had two different words for strife. They recognized two kinds: good strife and bad strife. Cum petere has become associated with the good strife. This means to strive together. It is a cooperative venture. Each offers himself to the other as a testing ground. I offer myself so you can test yourself. We make this effort together. One still plays to win as you cannot provide a good test unless you do what the game is set up to do. You strive for the mutual development of both parties. The noble athlete is to compete utilizing the concept of cum petere or the good strife.

Bad strife is war, conquest. A person strives to exalt him/herself by trying to get others to submit his/her will. One tries to belittle, to destroy if you please, to BEAT them until they recognize their own weakness and the other's superiority.

Bad Strife Exemplified

This idea of demonstrating our superiority at the expense of others appears to be one of the accepted rules of our culture and considered by many to be the most effective motivator of our society. Caillois suggests that games are created particularly due to, "The need to prove one's superiority." (19: p. 8) Ernest Dichter, President of the Institute for Motivational research, indicated that humans need competition: "Most of us need enemies because they offer a way to establish our own superiority." (19: p. 8) To many, then, sport provides a medium whereby we can identify our enemies, hate in an acceptable manner, put others down so that our egos can be inflated and we can establish a good self concept, and engage in legal violent acts. It appears that we are obsessed with the goal of developing ourselves. I am what is important. I will do what I wish.

Another Way

Fortunately there are other writers who have recommended alternate ways to approach life and individual development. One of these approaches is given to us by Martin Buber and the suggestion that ours is a world of relationship between person and person in community. A well known Jewish existentialist, he presents a unique Christian idea of relationship in his book *I and Thou*.

We have two primary attitudes and relations. These postures are a way of setting the self toward the world and beings with whom we meet. These two attitudes are what Buber calls I-Thou and I-It. The I of a person comes into being in the act of speaking one or the other of these primary words.

The true meaning of the I-Thou relationship cannot totally be explained. In a sense it's as a sunset; we can provide indications as to its essence, but to fully understand, it must be experienced. The I-Thou relationship is not located within the soul but exists in meeting and in relation. The atmosphere of I-Thou is one of relation and togetherness. It is the "between," the mutual relationship of active beings. The Thou cannot be sought, yet one must go out to meet the Thou and enter into direct relation with another, and the Thou then responds to the meeting.

Interestingly, it does not matter if the Thou is aware of the relation. The I-Thou relation penetrates the world of It without being determined by It. One can still relate to another in a loving and accepting posture without those feelings being reciprocated. This does not negate the reaching out in an I-Thou attitude. (12: p. 58)

One may say "Thou" to another but it is not the saying of the word that is critical. The important factor is that the self is engaged by an other. The concept stresses creative bonds between person and person.

The I-Thou relation is more fully realized in love between man and wife and the ultimate relation is with the eternal Thou or God. I suppose in a certain sense it could be said that we address the eternal Thou in each Thou, as God is the supreme partner of the dialogue and the power underlying all other I-Thou encounters.

I-It is the primary word of experiencing and using. It takes place within a person rather than between person and person. It is the typical subject-object relationship. It's an attitude of detachment and can readily be seen in scientists as they attempt to gain objective insights into humans and things. This is not necessarily an evil attitude as people must live with organizations and institutions, and they require materialistic forms to facilitate their life. However, the I-It attitude can become a source of evil whenever a person becomes so addicted to it that one becomes absorbed in one's own purposes and concerns when one might better be reacting dynamically to the beings one meets. "Without It man cannot live." However, Buber warns that "he who lives with It alone is not a man" (3)

One might reason that the I-It posture is one which a person ought to assume toward things, whereas the I-Thou posture appropriately describes the relationship between persons. However, in Buber's world, both attitudes are manifested in one's relation to any and all beings, to things as well as persons.

The "I" of the I-It differs fundamentally from the "I" of the I-Thou. In the I-It concept the "I" holds back--measuring, using, and even seeking to control the object of its attention--but never as in the I-Thou relation, affirming the other just as it is in itself. The I-Thou posture is the one in which the deeper meaning of existence is disclosed. (10: pp. 21-22)

I-Thou and the Sporting Experience

Many individuals promote the idea that athletes should be a special breed, in that they need distinctive abilities which are necessary for a successful sporting experience. To be successful they must be tough-minded, obsessed with being the best, aggressive and possess a killer- instinct. It helps to see their opponent as a temporary enemy. In fact one athlete says that "Most of us need enemies because they offer a way to establish our own superiority." (11: p. 18) Stuart Walker suggests that good competitors should "feel no concern for the opinion and feelings of others... The lack of concern for the feelings of competitors is useful because it eliminates a distraction." (14: p. 18)

Jimmy Connors certainly has made a living with this philosophy. Connors has said "Maybe my methods aren't socially acceptable to some, but it's what I have to do to survive. I don't go out there to love my enemy, I go out there to squash him." (14: p. 18) Players need that "competitive animosity" toward the opposition. You need "fire in you, and nothing stokes that fire like hate." (14: p. 19) You have to put any relationship that you have with an opponent in the back of your mind and forget it; make believe it doesn't exist.

Is Slusher right when he says that "To even hint that the 'Christian Ethic' is to be maintained in modern sport is to contradict the very existence of sport as we know it... In sport, traditional Christian ethics are dead." (27: p. 148) Must we treat our opponents as enemies; must we hate and attempt to humiliate them?

If the answer is in the affirmative then we must discontinue sport as an activity in the curricula of our schools and universities. Our responsibility is to build noble character, to educate the mind, to move the spirit within a person which motivates him/her to make society a better place in which to live and the most important, to help prepare him/her for the hereafter. Far more important is the development of the whole person than to win such a simple unimportant thing as a game.

I would like to suggest that it is possible to participate with a different spirit; a spirit in the Greek context of playing with rather than playing against. A spirit that is influenced by Buber's I-Thou relationship.

Sport and the I-Thou

Sport provides a realm where the I-Thou or I-It relationship can be identified and used to influence one's behavior. While sport is a suspension from the real, it functions as a time machine in that it speeds up our experiences so that time and life-type experiences are compressed. Opportunities, challenge, stresses, decision making, which normally are encountered in a time frame of weeks, are experienced in a few minutes or in a few hours. One is forced to make scores and possibly even hundreds of decisions as they encounter their teammates and their opponents in the sport experience. What is provided, then, is a marvelous laboratory for self analysis and self actualization. Our actions and even our very emotions are on center stage for all to see. Decisions are made so rapidly that there is no time to think about whether their behavior is acceptable or will fit a given standard. One acts spontaneously--one's very soul is open for inspection. We are given an opportunity to see ourselves as we really are. The philosopher was correct when he suggested that "You can learn a lot more about an individual in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." How better can one's I-Thou and I-It relationship be analyzed.

The essence of humankind is contained only in community, in the unity of person with person—a unity which rests upon the reality of the difference between I and Thou. Sport provides a look into the community—it is individual relating with individual as few other experiences permit. (9) Had Buber been an athlete he most certainly would have interpreted sport as a medium whereby the interaction of the I-It and I-Thou relationships can be marvelously examined.

We all determine if our existence is driven by a "person with person" or a "between person" focus. Sport provides significant encounters whereby we determine which force will be our motivator. We determine how we will relate to others. We may see people as object and things to be used, or our being may be permeated by the I-Thou concept. Likewise when we enter a sport contest we can be controlled by attitudes of selfishness, or compassion and love for the sanctity that resides in all of creation.

I can chose to exclude people from my history and treat them as non-things; or I can consider them worthy of relationship. We can play on the same court, bounce the same ball, but this does not create community. But as we strive for similar goals, as we struggle for success, as we sweat together, we bear ourselves to the other and ask for understanding and acceptance. Words may not be spoken but communication takes place. When we become aware of the spiritual presence of those around us, we become I-Thou for each other—even in a limited way.

Gabriel Marcel, (24: p. 46) in attempting to show the authentic meaning of this relationship says;

This community, still embryonic but capable of growing, of becoming infinitely rich, is created between beings each engaged in a certain adventure; but this adventure itself may be undertaken at a variety of levels, according to whether or not it touches the heart of the matter. Here we verge, I think, on something essential, but also well protected, well guarded against the possible assault of reflection. The heart of my existence is what is at the center of what we might also call vital interests; it is that by which I live, and which moreover, is usually not an object of clear awareness for me. The community between Thou and Me, or the co-belonging, is the more real, the more essential, the closer it is to this heart.

Is this merely an idealistic way to approach sport? Are we simply playing with words and ideas? Can a person apply these principles in the real world?

We can criticize professional sports and I think rightly so. There is much to change in this world of entertainment as well as in the world of college and high school sport. But let's give credit where it is due. Occasionally there are events, even in professional sport, which demonstrate that the I-Thou relationship is possible. This philosophy can penetrate sport and there are individuals who live by this dictum.

I-Thou In Action

In 1989, near the end of the season, the California Angels were vying with the Oakland Athletics for the division championship. In this tense atmosphere, where the Angels were just two games out of first place, came these comments during a pre-game meeting held by manager Doug Rader.

"We're not fighting hunger out there. We're not going through a divorce, we're just playing baseball. Its not life or death. Just go out there and have fun. At no time when you compete should winning be paramount. Win or lose, a game like today should be a pleasant situation." (20) Can you believe this from the dog-eat-dog world of professional sport! What a breath of fresh air.

I still remember watching a game on television and observing the last few seconds of that game. With nearly 50,000 spectators and millions more watching on television, and with only thirteen seconds left in the game, Mike Michel tried to kick a 33-yard field goal for the Philadelphia Eagles against the Atlanta Falcons and missed by inches. Had the kick been good, the Eagles would have won the game 16-14 and gone on to meet the Rams in Los Angeles. As it turned out the Falcons were 14-13 winners.

Immediately after missing that try Michel was instantly transformed into possibly the unhappiest, most anguished man in America. Acting purely on instinct, he clutched both his ankles with his hands as if he somehow could invest some divine direction into them after the fact. Then he simply kneeled and kept staring at the ground.

While he was doing that, completely oblivious to the pandemonium around him and some of the crowd beginning to spill on to the field, one of the Atlanta players, linebacker Greg Brezina, walked over to Michel's side. As I watched I remember that I thought this player was taunting Michel. How terrible I thought; shows you what professional athletes are really like.

It was reported in the newspaper the next day that Brezina's only purpose was to try and console the completely devastated Eagle punter. Seeking to comfort Michel, Brezina bent over him and extended his hands toward the kneeling player without actually touching him. He said "Look, I don't know if you can understand what I'm about to say, but it doesn't really matter if you made the kick or missed it. What matters far more is if you have peace in your heart which comes through Jesus Christ." (17)

Given the particular circumstance and time, that anyone would have the presence of mind to voice those words was truly amazing. To do what he did when people were yelling and there was craziness all around was a real example of a true brother, someone who took the trouble to go far beyond the meaning of the game.

Does this I-Thou relationship exist only in theory? Is it something we only talk about at conventions and hear during prayer meetings? Ask Mike Michel.

Making It Work

There is an enormous difference between sport at the University of Nebraska or UCLA and sport offered at a small Christian college. Adventists, both young and old, have acquired their sport attitudes by reading about sport in newspapers and periodicals, listening to it on the radio or watching it on television. As a result, the approach that most of our membership take to sport results in an unacceptable stance. This is certainly understandable as we seldom educate our membership as to the proper place of sport in a Christian's life. This provides evidence to the desirability of including sport in the curriculum of Seventh-day Adventist institutions. If we are going to have knowledgeable adults we need to have knowledgeable youth.

The key to a successful athletic program is Christ-centered, competent leadership. We must have leaders who emphasize the thrill of participation and the challenge of doing one's best. We should be known for our outstanding sportsmanship. We should display Christian principles in our play such as offering a hand to an opponent who has fallen, recognizing good play, relating to officials in a positive manner, etc. Our schools, players and spectators alike, must learn that sport does not present an activity whereby we can suspend Christian principles, but rather offers a wonderful opportunity to display a new approach to sport.

We must also remember that not all schools should have an athletic program. It should be permitted only where it can be demonstrated, after careful investigation, that it can make a positive contribution to the curriculum. The program should be evaluated periodically to ensure that the established objectives are still being met.

Above all we must insist that athletics not be overemphasized in our schools. Students are in our schools to obtain an education, not to become athletes. When sports and religion are properly integrated they can aid in developing a person--mentally, physically and spiritually

Conclusion

Christian education is concerned with educating the whole person. The integrative approach necessitates the inclusion of physical education in the curriculum of colleges and universities. Where applicable, athletics can assist in fulfilling the mission of Christian higher education.

As the secular world has a selfish, win-at-all cost attitude toward sport, the Christian must learn to relate to sport in the context of competing with rather than competing against.

Sport pervades American society. As it is an integral part of our culture, rather than isolating ourselves from sport and ignoring it, we should educate our youth to relate to sport from a Christian perspective. We should participate with the good strife, and as far as possible, relate to teammates and opponents in the context of Buber's I-Thou relationship.

Life cannot be separated into the religious and the secular. Therefore, while we remain on this earth waiting our Lord's return, we must integrate Christian principles into every facet of our life.

Postscript

From Alice In Wonderland.

"What I was going to say," said the Dodo in an offended tone, "was that the best thing to get us dry would be a Caucus race."

"What is a Caucus race?" said Alice.

"Why," said the Dodo, "the best way to explain it is to do it."

First it marked out a race course, in a sort of a circle. ("The exact shape doesn't matter," it said.) And then all the party was placed along the course, here and there. There was no "One, two, three, and away!" but they began running when they liked and left off when they liked, so that it was not easy to know when the race was over. However, when they had been running half an hour or so and were quite dry again, the Dodo suddenly called out, "The race is over!" and they all crowded around it, panting and asking, "But who has won?"

This question the Dodo could not answer without a great deal of thought, and it stood for a long time with one finger pressed upon its forehead...while the rest waited in silence. At last the Dodo said, "Everybody has won, and all must have prizes."

My prayer is that we can all become Dodos!

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