

God is Greater than the Game

By Anthony M.J. Maranise

The Brothers of the Christian Schools have a phrase by which they open all of their prayers: "Let us remember that we are always in the Holy presence of God!"

Certainly, this call to reverence invites all the faithful to recall Jesus' own words from St. Matthew's Gospel. Jesus said to the Apostles – as well as to all of us, His faithful followers – "Behold, I am with you always, even until the end of the ages" (cf. Matthew 28:20).

He is with us always, whether we want Him or not, feel Him or not – makes no difference against the simple and irrefutable fact that we are always in the Holy presence of God through the Blessed Trinity. For several years now, I have been privileged to work with athletes and coaches in a variety of athletic disciplines and continually, I work to "drive home" the meaning of Jesus' promise. He is with us always – even in athletics, even in the world of sports.

Hall of Fame basketball coach John Wooden once said, "Sports do not build character. They reveal it." With these seemingly simple and brief words, the great coach seems to implicitly mention some sort of higher ideal, perhaps even a higher presence dwelling not only within the hearts of the athletes who participate in various sporting events, but in sport itself. Let us examine, in detail, two words from Coach Wooden's quote: the words "charac-

ter" and "reveal." Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines "character" as "moral excellence and firmness" and of "reveal," the definition reads: "to make known through divine inspiration." Based on this closer examination of the great coach's quote, it seems that participation in sports essentially allows for morality to become known or developed... but how? As Christian believers, we know that our lives in faith (as well as in sports) do not come "made-to-order" or already perfect. It takes athletes days of practice to become ready to face their next competition. It takes practice for us to become the people of "character" God wants us to be. It is the very interior desires we have to "aim for the higher goal" or "be the best we can be" that helps us to develop our character. Sports reveal our "character" by forcing us to work past failures and adversities that we may overcome them. Similarly, in our spiritual lives, we will stumble and fall into sin, but it is our "character," or our "moral excellence" that will keep us trying not only to better ourselves, but most importantly – to please God. Any athlete will testify to the fact that the road to victory is not always easy, but then again, the hard fact of the matter is that God is not so much concerned with our comfort as He

is with our character. All that is necessary to understand this idea is to look at a Crucifix.

In the Catholic-Christian life, we are so blessed to have individuals who can set us back onto the proper path toward eternal life with Christ after we have fallen into sin. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the priest grants the truly contrite absolution from their sins. Through the Communion of Saints, all of us – living and dead – are linked together as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church through the mystical



Anthony M.J. Maranise

body of Christ. Similarly, in the world of sports, when an athlete struggles in a competition, he or she has their entire team to support them. Although never in competition with anyone, it might be helpful to view all faithful Catholics as members of one massive team who support one another with prayer and good works. The unity and togetherness found amidst athletic teams is often referred to as "team chemistry" or more simply as "friendship." The workings of this "team chemistry" or "friendship" can be understood in greater spiritual depth by viewing athletic teams as operating "in the image of the Blessed Trinity." As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all separate beings, vested with different responsibilities, they are all One Divine God. Never does any member of the Holy Trinity act apart from the others; they are all always One. Think now upon athletic teams. Although there are different individuals who make up the team, when the team acts together in competition or

in simple presence, they are recognized as one team.

Finally, the Holy presence of God amidst sports may be most implicit, but also most meaningful by the ways in which team friendships as well as all human friendships develop "in the image of the Cross of Christ." As human beings, we often undergo a horizontal (East to West) type growth with one another in friendship. In essence, we grow closer to each other through sharing mutual interests and personal details of our lives. This is especially true of athletes who spend much time together training and who share victories and losses together. We also, simultaneously, undergo a vertical (North to South) type growth as we deepen in our relationship to God through the Blessed Trinity by means of prayer, frequent reception of the Sacraments, and a constant awareness of His presence. Together, our horizontal growth towards one another and our vertical growth towards God form the image of the Holy Cross and thus places God at the epicenter of our human lives. All together, these are merely a few of the ways we can come to recognize the world of sports in a different view; one that is not isolated, but rather that is pervaded by His presence. God has and will continue to keep His promise to "remain with us always, even until the end of the age" and in so doing, we can come to realize, with relevance to sports and "the game of life," that God is Greater than the Game!

Anthony Maranise is the Director of the Faith Development Program for Athletics and a Graduate Assistant basketball coach at Christian Brothers High School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Catholic Cemeteries Diocese of Memphis IN TENNESSEE

These Are Holy and Sacred Places

ALL SAINTS
7500 E. Holmes Rd.
Memphis, TN. 38125

CALVARY
1663 Elvis Presley Blvd
Memphis, TN. 38106

Mount Calvary
419 Hardice St.
Jackson, TN. 38605

Does Pre-Planning Make Sense? A Gift to the Living from the Living

The staff of the Catholic Cemeteries of the Diocese of Memphis stand ready to offer guidance in the "Catholic Way" of funeral planning and burial, be it Pre-Need or At-Need. Working with a parish priest and local funeral homes, we are honored to respectfully assist your family in all cemetery arrangements.

For information and counseling with no obligation
Please contact our Cemetery Office Ph: 901-948-1529
Visit Us On The Web @ www.cdom.org

Member National Catholic Cemetery Conference

KISER'S FLOOR FASHIONS

Serving You Since 1950

Carpeting, Hardwood,
Ceramic, Laminates,
Vinyl, Linoleum and Rugs

7980 Fischer Steel Rd.
Cordova, TN 38018
Phone: 901-754-6161
Fax: 901-753-4422

Marty Kiser
marty@kisers.com
Patty Kiser Anderson
patty@kisers.com

Ask about our 30 Day No Regrets Guarantee
Lifetime Residential Carpet Installation Warranty

Family Dentistry

Stephen C. Alsobrook, D.D.S.
280 German Oak Drive
Cordova, TN 38018
(901) 522-6640

We offer preventive, restorative and cosmetic dentistry. We accept most dental insurance and credit cards. The CareCredit® payment plan is also available.

New patients are welcome.
Office hours are by appointment.

Near the Agricenter
From Germantown Parkway, off Walnut Bend
Serving the Memphis community for 25 years
www.DrAlsobrook.com