

## MAKING “TEAM” WITH GOD!

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### **Summary:**

The Bible does not dispute the importance of practice, but on the contrary, it encourages it. Sports help people discern their own motility and mental capacities as if it were a gift from God. The great athletes admit that they have a gift from God and because of that they use it for His glory.

### **Introduction**

The difficulty of trainings, the pressure of intense competitions, the victories or the medals obtained, all those things brought fame, success and popularity. But, not once, most of those who climbed up on the highest level of the platform, discovered that their life must be situated on an unbending base of a personal relationship with God. To be the first in your profession is a justified ambition, Jesus Christ himself putting the “grandeur” as a perspective. He once asked his disciples: “What did you talk about on the road?” The disciples have quieten, because they were arguing, being unable to decide on who was the greatest among them. Settling down, Jesus called the twelve disciples and told them: “If somebody wants to be the first, he must be the last one and servant of everybody.” (Mark 9:33-35)

Great athletes have understood that the Bible is the Word of God, a guide to a fully lived life: “All the Scripture is inspired by God and it is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction on the right side, so that the man of God to be fully qualified and equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Jay Coackley (“Sports in Society: Issues and Controversies”, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2007, 590 p.) says that “religious beliefs and rituals are called in order to be an aid for the athletes and an adjust to match the sports ways and defined, organized and played, as coaches and players have more reasons to use religion: eliminate uncertainty, the desire to dodge the issues or the desire to give effective sports participation, or

even to strengthen solidarity in the team and reaffirm expectations, rules and social control in the team.”

### **Material**

To illustrate spiritual truth, Bible makes reference to the practice of competition and exercise through virtues which characterize this activity: tenacity, spirit of sacrifice, interior and exterior discipline, sense of justice, conscience of ones own limits, respect for opponent. In this sense, the Holy Apostle Paul using a “picture of the stadium” to highlight the high vocation of man to God, said: ”Do you, those who run in the race, not know that, everyone runs but only one wins the prize? Run, but so that you get your own prize! All those fighting games of society are a subject to all sorts of restraint”. ”And that who fights in games, is not crowned, if he did not fought by the rules.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

In fact, the Bible tells us clearly that we must take care of our own bodies “Because nobody has hate for his body, but feeds it, it always cares about it...” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20); or: ”I fight with my fist, not one that hits in the wind. But I behave severe with my body, and dominate it, that somehow, after having preached the others, I be shed.” (2 Timothy 2:5).

In time, many have taken over and many have expressed their love for sports even in the Olympic arena, some of them even managing exceptional performance. Thus, for example, the Olympic Games in London in 1908, gold medal in the 110m sample fences was won by American pastor Forrest Smithson. There is a photo of it at the International Olympic Museum in Lausanne (Switzerland), showing him running over fences, with the Bible in his right hand (the contest took place on Sunday).

Then English pastor Eric Liddell, Olympic champion in 1924 in Paris, in the 200m sample, said the following words: ”God made me for a purpose, and He did me fast, and when I run, I feel I’m running in His will.”

Also at Olympic Games, but this time in 1952, in Helsinki, American Bob Mathias “is teeing with angels”, and they “are pushing him back”, like in London in 1948, when he got the Olympic decathlon gold. At the same edition of the same games, Protestant pastor Bob Richards prays to win the salt with the pole, and then he prays again, in order to thank for the winning of the gold for USA.

The love for the practice of sport has been permanently cultivated among believers by Pope John Paul II who said that: ”Always be witnesses of brotherhood in sport and in all contexts”. All-holy Parent

lessons have been taken, and Pope Benedict XVI underlined that: "If it is just living in spirit, sports helps to the promotion of a person's development". Even when sport was to be practiced at a high level, the Pope warned, it should preserve internal harmony between body and spirit, sports is the only one used for pure search results.

Eric Liddell felt that if he sensed God when was running, why a footballer would not feel the same way when he scored an important goal? Thus footballer Juan Carlos Valeron affirmed: "With Jesus Christ in my life, I know that whatever may happen with me everything will be good for me and I will always gladly accept the problems."

Then, when Ze Roberto had some serious injuries he said: "God allows this kind of things in our lives to test our faith and makes us stronger. We must be prepared for this kind of hard times. In this moments God makes me much stronger. Man didn't just live with bread, but most of all with God word-Bible. Life is not just a joy, but also sadness. Starting from this moment, in these difficulties, I put my faith and hope in God because I know that He makes me stronger, and my faith grows more and more". Ze Roberto reads the Bible constantly and he had a favourite verse: "I can face all these situations through that who gives me strength". (Philippians 4:13) "These words are really useful for me as a footballer, because I remember that I can get everything by keeping faith in God. With Him everything can be possible."

Another great footballer, Brazilian Lucio, always thanks God for his scored goals. He confesses that the Bible plays an important role in his life, and the passage from the Psalm which says: "Glad be the man who didn't go after the advice of the bad ones, he didn't stop on the way of the sinners, and he don't sit down on the floating chair! Find pleasure in God laws; day and night think about His law! He is like a tree planted next to a spring, which bears fruits on his own time, and whose leaves are always green: everything that it starts, goes to an end" (Psalm 1:1-3) reflect the life itself. "I think this passage reflects my life because everything happened on the right time. I also had discrimination and guidance from God which helped me not to trespass against Him. I think everything is very important in a professional's footballer life, but in other professions, one must know that there is only one way which leads to the sky and this way is Jesus Christ!"

Gavin the English footballer felt that football is part of God's plan for his life like any other thing: "I believe that to be Christian in sports - in football - is to be an example by the way in which you live, and the things that you think people see in this. Come on 15, Saturday at the game and you will see that my return is 110% because I have a new

perspective on life. A game requires aggression and if it is necessary, I agree with a little touch, but I would never hurt an opponent because he is on the field and not outside it". "We have to fight the practice, to give all we have best in us, to win and reach the top performances in sports. We have to be real models for those that will follow our steps. To live with God is a guarantee for both present and future. Sports are beautiful, but it does not guarantee us happiness in a constant. Today you are on top; tomorrow you can be in the hole. Competition in sports is more to those who lose than to those who win. But with God we can all be winners, winners in the competition, especially beyond it, in life."

A verse from the Bible that I like very much is: "Thus, if anyone is in Christ is a new creation. Old went there, they become new". (2 Corinthians 5:17)

The great future of American NBA, three times winner of the Olympic medal, the one said to be the best marker in the history of Olympics with an exceptional record, David Robinson Jar, stated that he attended the Games in 1996 because "I can present Christ in a miraculous way in front of crowds, the way I play and how I behave". "My love for Jesus Christ is what motivates me - not my success on the basketball field. People can see God through the eyes of others, but if we don't show them how Jesus Christ is they will not learn from society. I like to play along with my teammates and my heart beats for them. I want them to enjoy life the same as I enjoyed it - I mean having Jesus Christ in my heart".

Michael Chang played tennis professionally since 1988, winning over 30 tournaments worldwide. The best ranking was the 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the world, and the most important victory of his career was the French Open in 1989. At the age of 17 and three months, he was the youngest winner of a competition for Grand-Slam. In 1996, he came to the great contest in the final Australian Open, losing in front of Boris Becker, in the finals, and at the US Open where he was defeated by Pete Sampras. Faith shows a clear perspective on life: "I think it's very relaxing to know that everything is in the hand of God. See how many things happened in my life and know that everything is not just a mere accident or coincidence. I know God loves me and that He always goes with me. I feel very encouraged and happy to know that, regardless of what might happen, He is with me".

Multiple world and Olympic champion in triple jump, English athlete Jonathan Edwards, said that reading the Bible takes an important place in his life: "The Bible is the word of God. He tells me what my actions and attitudes should be, how I should train and how I should live

my life. I take from the Bible the things that I try to make - to glorify God in every aspect of my life”.

Kurt Steven Angle, American wrestler, awarded gold at the Olympic Games in Atlanta in 1996, at wrestles, acknowledged after the Olympic competition: "I knew I wouldn't hurt my neck...I knew when I went to fight in the Olympic Games as He watched over me. I knew when I won the gold medal that he wanted me to win. He wanted someone like me to send word and be a model to follow for the children”.

Olympic champion with team USA in gymnastics in 1996 in Atlanta, Amanda Borden, stated that the biggest influence in her life was taken by her coach Mary Lee Tracey, but not in terms of sports, but in terms of faith: "She taught me that living for Christ must be more than going to church, it should be a way of life”. The Bible says in the epistle to the Philippians 4:13: "All these situations can be faced by the one who strengthens me”, and on that he says: "You don't have control over what will happen, so you need your faith in God that things will be solved in a good manner”.

Englishman Jason Robinson, superstar in rugby, confessed that before becoming a Christian, money was his life. The Bible says: "No one can serve two masters...you can not serve God and money”. (Matthew 6:24). When he returned to faith, to thank God, Jason worked for two years with a group of people, helping people in need in Manchester. Jason's favourite verse is: "Come to me, I will have all those tiring heavy burdens and I will give you a rest!" (Matthew 11:28). "This happened to me when I became a Christian. I felt released from a large heaviness. I felt just how God took my weight that was pushing on my heart”, said Robinson.

Athletes have refuge in religion to achieve autonomy in the face of power, as sports journalist Andrew Corsello said: "Religion helps the player to acquire an identity outside the rigid, hierarchy in sports and organized to resist such power in front of coaches and team owners, who control their lives”.

### **Discussions**

Great athletes remain worthy examples to be followed for all the young people and sports fans. They have always said that the connection between God and sport is so normal, natural, as that between parents and children, so that is why they thank Christ and live by it, because He helps them pass their dream followed by the Olympic triumph in the arena, in order to get the glory of God.

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**Titlu:** Făcând echipă cu Dumnezeu!

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Biblie, Dumnezeu, sport, concurență, întrecere, jocuri olimpice, victorie

**Rezumat:** Biblia nu contestă importanța practicii ci dimpotrivă o încurajează. Sportul ajută oamenii să-și înțeleagă propria motricitate și capacitățile mentale ca și cadou de la Dumnezeu. Marii atleți admit faptul că sunt înzestrați cu un dar special de la Dumnezeu și îl folosesc întru gloria Sa.

**Titre:** Faisant la « équipe » avec le dieu!

**Mots clés:** Bible, Dieu, sport, concurrence, combat, jeux olympiques, victoire.

**Résumé:** La bible ne conteste pas l'importance de la pratique, mais au contraire, elle l'encourage. Les personnes d'aide de sports discernent leur propres motilité et capacités mentales comme si c'étaient un cadeau de Dieu. Les grands athlètes admettent qu'ils ont un cadeau de Dieu et en raison de celui ils l'emploient pour sa gloire.