

I love sports! Part 1

I've grown up playing a good variety of sports: basketball, football, rugby, racquet games... Not forgetting swimming, jogging, cycling, judo, karate and my attempts at golf.

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In high school also, my coach introduced me to the idea of virtues: those good and stable habits that generally make you a good human being, a dependable worker, a loyal friend and cheerful colleague.

With this kind of background, you can imagine with what great interest then that in a talk I attended in a recollection not so long ago, I heard a quotation from none other than Pope Pius XII! Let me mention first that I was surprised that a whole Pope would be writing something on sports... I knew Pope St. John Paul II loved skiing and canoeing and I have to admit I found that very cool! Then I heard this quotation from Pope Pius and I was impressed!

“Sport, properly directed, develops character, makes a person courageous, a generous loser, and a gracious victor; it refines the senses, gives intellectual penetration, and steels the will to endurance. It is not merely a physical development then. Sport, rightly understood, is an occupation of the whole person, and while perfecting the body as an instrument of the mind, it also makes the mind itself a more refined

instrument for the search and communication of truth...”

Impressive! Right!?

“...develops character...” I think I was fortunate – even blessed – that one of my coaches in high school was very clear that being called up to play in his team meant that he would make many hard and irritating demands on me, more than my own mentor in school and perhaps even more than my own parents. Playing for his team in his view was not just about skill and scores, but about the kind of person myself and all the other drafts would become. And sure enough, he would really push us physically in each training session and in the workouts he expected us to do on our own at home; in our general conduct in school and in our performance in our academic work. I thought this was all a joke until during the April holidays he had us

report to school at 7am, run laps for 45min, freshen up, change and then study for 5 hours. After lunch we had training for 3 hours. That's how serious he was as a coach. And my teammates and I quickly got the idea of the kind of men he expects on the pitch.

“...makes a person courageous...” The number of instances I've seen teammates and young sports men dig in for that extra kilogram of courage or fortitude to overlook some overwhelming pain or discomfort and focus on the matter at hand could compile a whole entire book! One coach from Eastlands College of Technology narrates of a Form 3 boy who broke his left hand in a tournament and he had to move around with the boy hopping from one hospital to another. Eventually at 8pm they landed at Kiambu Level 5 Hospital where they would charge 250,000/- for surgery! The boy simply

could not afford that kind of money!
So we opted to have the hand
stretched manually – and painfully! –
and cast it. We had to excuse his
mother and pin him down during the
operation... To cut the story short, a
lot of fortitude was needed and the
young man did not want his mum to
see his weakness. He wants to go
back to rugby and even more he is
encouraging others who fear the
sport and telling them of his
experience.

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