

I love sports! Part 3

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...”

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"...steels the will to endurance..." Or in other words, fortitude! And if there is nothing else that a sportsman or woman will learn at the hands of a good coach, at least they will learn fortitude! Both physical and mental.

There are two stories narrated to me recently. This first was by a rugby coach speaking about how his sport in particular demands a lot of physical and mental fortitude. *"At one moment there was a Form 3 boy who broke his left hand in a tournament and I had to move around with the boy hopping from one hospital to another. Eventually at 8pm we landed at Kiambu Level 5 Hospital where they wouldn't charge 250,000/- for surgery [that the boy simply could not afford] but would stretch the hand 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.”

And the fortitude is not all physical bravado. Mental fortitude is perhaps even more necessary in sports. One young athlete in university mentioned he'd “...wake up at 5am on season and off season, be in the gym by 6am, out by 7.15am, in class by 8am and then in the gym in the evening after class. This took a toll on me: I started losing friends since didn't have time to socialize, there were many days I just didn't feel like training, when I felt like taking shortcuts and so on. This was especially true with those coaches who were more demanding than I was

used to in other teams or schools. And I had to learn to force myself to work harder and better..."

A soccer player also regaled me with one unexpected show of fortitude he witnessed from his stand-in coach.

"We were playing in a 4 week round-robin football tournament. Our team with one other were perhaps the youngest in age. In one particular match, a drizzle started as kick-off time approached. And a few minutes into the first half, the heavens opened. The ref kept the game running. We were losing. And on the sidelines, in his suit, drenched in the rain, was our stand-in coach. There wasn't much we could do to outsmart the older team, the rain and the wet pitch didn't help our efforts... but seeing our coach on the sidelines trying to give encouragement and a few directions for the entire 60 minutes of play was certainly something!"

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