

Something I Love, Someone I Love

Olamide Akinyede, a pharmacist and a basketball coach, talks about her passion for training students and how she combines sports and faith.

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Basketball has always been just a sport to me – a sport I truly love, but only a game.

Then I came across the book, *The Way*, and encountered St. Josemaría's message about elevating every aspect

of our lives to God, transforming every human activity from within. It dawned on me that even while shooting hoops, I could find God's presence. So I told our Lord, "Lord, from now on... we will do the balling together!"

Now, when I make a shot, I tell Him, "Lord, this basket is for you." And even when I miss, I say, "Lord, this effort I put into this shot is for you." Nothing given to God is ever wasted.

At first, this was just a personal discovery, something useful for me. I started playing basketball more purposefully! It wasn't long before I realized that it provided an opportunity to cultivate solid human virtues, which serve as a foundation for developing supernatural virtues. Values like obedience, loyalty, self-control, discipline, optimism, integrity, self-awareness, emotional stability, stress management, and

teamwork became integral to my game. It struck me that sports could be a remarkable channel for personal formation, and if it worked for me, why shouldn't it help others?

A few months later, my friends and I approached the principal of a nearby secondary school with a proposal: to start a leadership and sports club. Our aim was to help young girls learn about and grow in virtue through sports. The principal agreed and the club took off.

Of course I was excited. I had the chance to share something I love with others, which was wonderful. Even better, the girls would get to grow into better versions of themselves. And it was an opportunity for me to introduce them to someone I love: Jesus.

We have a little less than two hours of practice once a week. We kick off each session by discussing the

central theme for the day, such as teamwork, and I provide practical examples of how they can apply it on the court with their teammates. This discussion lasts about ten minutes. Afterward, we dive into the planned drills for the day. Depending on how the practice is going, we may need to call a team meeting during the session to reevaluate our progress. At the end of practice, we reflect on how it went, and everyone is encouraged to share their thoughts and set personal goals or targets for the next practice.

I've come to realize that periodic one-on-one mentoring sessions with the girls are crucial. These sessions help them internalize the lessons from the club and provide a space for them to discuss any topic they wish.

This has been our journey over the past three months, except during school holidays. Even though we've

only just begun, I can already see how much good it's doing. It has been such a learning experience for all of us. I'm learning to be more patient with the girls, and they, in turn, are learning to expect more from themselves. The team's unity is growing, as is their consideration for each other. They listen more attentively and focus better, and I've developed a deep affection for these girls.

I've learned that every single aspect of our lives can be elevated to God and transformed into something more beautiful. I'm so excited about the endless possibilities that lie ahead.

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