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Together We Make Football

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Together We Make Football

Abstract

"We have paid the culture of sports the ultimate compliment--we study it, we talk about it, we give some of our treasures to it, and we too often imitate it."

Posting about Christians and the role of sports and athletics from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/together-we-make-football/>

Keywords

In All Things, football, athletics, sports, Christianity

Disciplines

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Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Together We Make Football

 [all in allthings.org/together-we-make-football/](http://allthings.org/together-we-make-football/)

Timothy Van Soelen

“TEDDY, TEDDY, TEDDY” was the chant of the crowd on a beautiful Sunday afternoon in Minneapolis last month. Teddy Bridgewater was making his debut as starting quarterback for the Vikings. People leapt to their feet when the kick-off was sent spiraling toward the Vike’s return specialist, Cordarrell Patterson. The anticipation of a big return to start this contest against the rival Detroit Lions could be felt by everyone present at TCF Stadium. Fans dressed in purple with faces painted, total strangers high fiving one another as Patterson brought the pigskin back to the 40 yard line so Teddy could begin his offensive revival of the Vikings. Together We Make Football.

This simple slogan for the NFL Network might say more about the role sport has assumed in society than the rest of this post. Whether it is football, basketball, baseball, soccer, hockey or whatever athletic activity you choose to end this short statement, I think it is safe to say that sports play a disproportional role in society. At a recent panel discussion with college athletic directors, high school coaches, and school administrators, there was unanimous agreement that the role of athletics in our schools reflects that of society, and therefore is also out of balance. Some random facts and numbers for your consideration:

- With eight domestic cable network channels, ESPN produces more than 30,000 hours of live event programming a year.
- According to [SeatGeek](#), the average cost for a World Series ticket in Kansas City will run about \$1500, not including a hot dog and Coke.
- A study done by [Challenger, Gray & Christmas](#) (2014) estimates that 18.3 million employees play fantasy football on the job each week, costing employers up to \$13.4 billion a season.



Photo by [Don Johnson](#) . CC BY NC 2.0

We have paid the culture of sports the ultimate compliment – we study it, we talk about it, we give some of our treasures to it, and we too often imitate it. Personally, I have spent countless hours engaged in the culture of sport. From little league baseball to college golf, from coaching three teams per year as a middle school teacher to chasing my own kids around the youth soccer fields, I am very aware of the culture of sport. But being athletically aware is different from being athletically responsible. If I really want my life, my whole life to matter because of the Gospel, how do sports and athletics fit?

Two questions need be asked...repeatedly. First, how are we (or how is my school) being transformed by the culture of sports and athletics? Another way to ask this same question might come from applying Jamie Smith’s liturgy of the mall analogy to sports.¹ Are the liturgies of sports fostering habits and practices

that are “unjust, so it does everything it can to prevent us from asking such questions. Don’t ask; don’t tell; just consume.”² Or, do the liturgies of sports foster habits and practices that are just, behaviors that celebrate being created in God’s image and the incredible physical gifts that are given to us as humans in order to give glory back to the Creator?

Second question, what are we doing as culture creators in the arena of sports and athletics? Are we taking what we have been given and creating a culture or are we participating in the one that has been created for us? An N.T. Wright quote might be helpful if you decide to engage in this discussion. “We honor and celebrate our complexity and our simplicity by continually doing five things. We tell stories. We act out rituals. We create beauty. We work in community. We think out beliefs.” Do we tell the stories of athletics that promote the flourishing of the kingdom or is it simply a win-loss record? Are the rituals that find their way into our gymnasiums bringing honor to the sport, our team, and our opponent or do they demean the other team and its fans? Can we appreciate beauty in performance, even if it from someone on the opposing side of the court? As an athletic community, are we showing hospitality to all and fostering discipleship amongst our athletes? And finally, if someone watched a practice or observed one of us in the stands, could they peel back our behaviors to identify our beliefs?

The NFL Network actually has it right... Together We Make Football.

Readers of in all things, do you agree? Does sports play a disproportional role in society? If your whole life matters because of the Gospel, how do sports and athletics fit?

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Footnotes

1. Smith, James K. [Desiring the Kingdom. Vol. 1.](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009.) ↩
2. Smith, 101 ↩
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