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Impact of various religions on sports

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to look at the two concepts Sports and Religion as an essential tool for development, unity and peaceful co-existence. Both of them have laid down rules and encourage team work and discipline among others. The paper will also focus on the relationship between sport and religion regarding the use of prayer in athletics and church related sporting activities. The paper further show the co-operative tendencies which exist between sports and religion and how sports could be used by religion and other related organizations.

Keywords: Christianity, sports, religion, prayer

Introduction

Sports and religion are essential tools for development, unity, stability, togetherness and peaceful co-existence among sports men and women as well as spectators i.e. sports lovers. According to Omali (2006), it is not uncommon among sports men to gather in circles to offer prayers before the commencement of the game. The players more often call on God for success. The only time Nigerians come together without any religious and ethnic sentiment or bias is when there is competition between our great country Nigeria versus other Nation and African country against other continent. Eitzen and Sage (1997) ^[10] proposed that religious values are inherent in sport ideology. In this sense, "sport embodies religious values including character development, hard work, and perseverance, and, like religion, it promotes and inculcates these qualities and behaviours". Religion and the role of religion as it pertains to sports involvement remain an area of concern throughout the nation. Today, there is great controversy surrounding issues pertaining to the appropriateness of bringing forth components of religion in workplaces, classrooms, and playing fields throughout the country. The issue of the legality and appropriateness of issues such as prayer within sport settings and the upholding of a "wall of separation" between religion and sports have been engulfed in a variety of legal battles in our country. Though there are differing views on the matter of sport and religion's involvement with each other, it should be apparent that sport and religion do have various common bonds. Putnam (1999) stated that the association of sport and religion "can be found in nearly every part of the sports world... Religious scholar Charles Prebish (1992b) ^[9] claimed that it is both necessary and expected to look at the revolution in sport, the growing relationship of religion and sport.

Role of Religion

Religion fosters friendship; most societies see it as a means of recreation. People converge in churches and mosques on days of worship to meet friends and business associates. Some regard it as a form of leisure. There is no racial prejudice as it knows any bounds; religion advocates for love, brotherhood and social cohesion: the Roman Catholic Church used Latin as a medium of worship to promote this co-existence up to mid twentieth century. This is a manifestation of religion acting as a guide to society's moral values and winning people's souls to the creator. Religion promotes discipline; the mind is always put to rest in a state of relaxation during the examination of conscience. This serves as an antidote to stress and depression. Processions and pilgrimages are a way of exalting God's name and relaxing the body and mind. The role of religion could thus be summarised in the following:

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1. Is concerned with the sacred and supernatural realm.
2. Its purpose is to transcend the circumstances and conditions of material life in the pursuit of spiritual goals.
3. It is fundamentally rooted in faith.
4. Emphasis a spirit of service and love.
5. Its rituals are essentially expressive and process-oriented.
6. It is fundamentally mystical and pure.
7. Emphasis asceticism; stress discipline, self-denial, repetition and the development of character.

What role does religion have in sports?

Historically, religion and sports were closely intertwined. Sporting events often had ties to religious ceremonies or festivals. These events acted as powerful symbols or metaphors of the transcendent. For example, the Olympic Games, held by ancient Greeks, were more of a festival or a celebration for their gods rather than merely a sporting event. While sports have become more secular today, religion still continues to have an impact. On a psychological level, studies have shown religion and spirituality enhance performance in sports. As with any human beings, athletes face their fair share of challenges and often cite religion as a key factor in overcoming their adversities.

Stories of devoted athletes who hold fast to their faith, even when there may be a conflict between the two, demonstrates the importance of religion in sports today. Additionally, observers are noticing the parallels of the fanaticism of modern-day sports to religion itself, asking the question “are sports a religion?” And while religion in America is in decline, the number of sports fans is on the rise. While cathedrals once were the primary spaces for communal gatherings, they have since been replaced by modern sports stadiums.

How does religion affect sport participation?

Are there instances when religion may affect sport participation and have there been cases when religion requires an athlete to sit out of a game? This issue of religion and sport participation ultimately boils down to the belief and values of the athlete.

Most religions have some sort of restrictions and expectations. These can include

- Clothing restrictions
- Days of worship
- Religious festivals and holidays
- Periods of fasting
- Interactions between different sexes

As we'll see from some of the real-life examples below, each athlete made their own decision how they responded when faced with a conflict between their sport and religion.

Effects of religion on sports: Some examples

Hakeem Olajuwon

As a devout Muslim, Hakeem Olajuwon observes the Islamic festival of Ramadan by fasting for an entire month. In 1994 and 1995, the Houston Rockets were playing in the NBA championships during Ramadan. Despite his fasting, Olajuwon still helped lead the Rockets to back-to-back championships.

William Hopoate

William Hopoate gave up a million-dollar contract in 2011 to pursue missionary work for the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints. After two years of missionary work, he continued his career in professional rugby. At first, Hopoate announced he would not practice or play any games on Sundays due to his faith. However, he later reversed his decision and decided he would play on Sundays.

Sandy Koufax

In 1965, the Los Angeles Dodgers' star pitcher and future Hall of Famer sat out Game 1 of that year's World Series to observe the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur. The Dodgers went on to lose the game to the Minnesota Twins, 8-2, although they ultimately won the Fall Classic in seven games. Koufax was named World Series MVP after throwing two shutouts in Games 5 and 7.

Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards was a British triple jumper having won Olympic, World and European championships. At the time, he held strong Christian beliefs and refused to compete on Sundays. Because of this belief, Edwards lost out on the 1991 World Championships. Interestingly enough, in 1993, he changed his mind after discussions with his father, a clergyman, and decided it was not against his faith to compete on Sundays.

Brigham Young University/Eli Herring

Brigham Young University (BYU) is owned and run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and does not permit any of its sports teams to practice or compete on Sundays in observance of the Sabbath. In 1995, Cougars offensive lineman Eli Herring penned a letter telling NFL teams not to draft him because he wouldn't play on Sundays. The Oakland Raiders drafted Herring anyhow in the 6th round and offered him a contract worth \$1.5 million, which he declined.

Organizations using Modern Sports and Religious Belief

The prevalence of sport's relationship with religion can be seen in the form of various organizations that have been centred on linking sport and religion. Groups such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Athletes in Action (AIA) are among the various commonly found organizations. A rise in the link between evangelical Christianity and sport has occurred over the past few decades. As Aitken (1992) ^[2] coined the phrase, “Born-Again sport” is quite prevalent in various levels of sport, where numerous Born Again athletes can be found in most Christian denominations throughout the World. The joint union between sport and religions has also taken place through the use of sport. Among such movements have been the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and Jewish Community Centers (JCC). Despite important differences between the organization and stated goals of modern sports and those of religions, many people have combined these two spheres of life in mutually supportive ways over the past 150 years. Among the varied uses that have been embraced include utilizing sport as a function of social service. Churches sponsoring recreation and sport programs have been provided to members, potential members, and guests, as well as members of the community at large. In line with these purposes of church sport, churches have used sport for functions such as evangelism, fellowship, church growth, and discipleship.

Conclusion

The combination of sport and religion strengthen national unity, church membership, self-discipline and character moulding to cope with uncertainty, to stay out of trouble, to give meaning to sport participation and Christianity, to put sport into proper perspective, to establish solidarity and cohesion among teams, and to reaffirm the rules and authority of coaches and the faith of Christians. This paper revealed various aspects pertaining to sport and religion's union, including measures by which sport makes use of religion. Such associations and their implications will continue to leave strong implications on the world of sport.

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