Sacred space and communal purpose: an exploration of athletics, learning and spirituality

Description:
Thesis (M.A.L.S.)--Georgetown University, 2009.; Includes bibliographical references. As a life-long athlete privileged to compete at the collegiate and international levels, and as a teacher and coach for nearly twenty years, I am fairly conversant in the realms of athletics and learning. The integration of spirituality provides an inviting challenge, as I came to realize over my course of study in the Liberal Studies Program that there has been an underlying but unarticulated spiritual dimension to my pursuits as athlete and educator. Thus, my objective in this thesis is to fuse the realms of athletics, education and spirituality.; While I define myself without hesitation as a "team-sport athlete," I am interested in exploring what this requires of an individual within a community of teammates. This concept of an individual's role in a team setting is especially compelling in its comparison with an individual's relationship to a spiritual community. The lives of fourth-century Christian hermits--known as the "spiritual athletes"--in The Desert Fathers, and the Carthusian monks of the film Into Great Silence serve as extraordinary examples of individual effort and sacrifice in support of God-centered community. Additionally, the "marathon monks" of Japan's Tendai sect of Buddhism demonstrate that they are individually accountable not only to themselves, but also to others who have embraced a like calling. Despite the fiercely solitary nature of the monks' practice--training for a 1,000-day marathon--they need one another to survive and to flourish.; In the secular world, philosophies of sport present the connection between a life "excellently lived"--grounded in values of respect, honor, decency, self-awareness and humility--and the "practice" of athletics. I believe sport teaches these shared principles of ethical living as powerfully as any vehicle, through the education of the "whole person." Through contrasting this ideal with the controversy surrounding the role of athletics in higher education, corruption in both amateur and professional ranks, and a crisis in youth sports, I hope to illuminate the danger inherent in these values becoming distorted. This thesis provides an opportunity to explore and articulate a foundation of spirituality that is my own, born through my experience in sport and education, and infused with my strong sense of identity as an athlete.; The writing incorporates a multi-disciplinary approach. Touchstones from contemporary sport are interspersed with analyses from philosophical, sociological, theological and pedagogical perspectives. From the role of the gods in the funeral games for Patroklos in Homer's Iliad to the presence of a "presence" in the arena of sport today, Chapter 1, From Nike Athena to Touchdown Jesus, seeks to establish a link between sport and spirituality. Chapter 2, Sacred Spaces for Individuals and Groups, defines "sacred space" as a deeply personal devotion to a purpose or discipline, an inviolable "place" where one "goes" either alone or communally. The relationship between an individual and her or his community is expanded upon in Chapter 3, Communal Purpose and the Team. By focusing on diverse "guides," Chapter 4, Spiritual Athletes as Guides, explores the idea that within a religious community one may actually become a "solitudinarian" in order to achieve solidarity. This concept has powerful connections to team-building. Chapter 5, Implications for an Integral Education, presents the potential of athletics to teach accountability and encourage self-knowledge, and underscores the fundamental roles of both coaches and parents. While sport per se is not a substitute for an articulated value system, profound opportunities exist for spiritual education through sport.

Permanent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/10822/553285

Date Published:
2009
Recreational and spiritual users of Bear Butte [a sacred Lakota site in the Black Hills] continue to co-exist but native people are concerned with the growing numbers of visitors, some of whom show no respect for religious practices” (Corbin). As the land continues to be used for many differing purposes, the Lakota plea for the return of the land endures. According to Corbin, the result of mining, logging, development and recreation in the Black Hills has resulted in the destruction of all but 3% of the untouched wilderness.