

SPORTS

Does Jesus care who wins the Super Bowl?

IMPORTANCE

What is the level of importance given to sports in the US? Around the world?

Why is so much fervor kindled by sports?

Do people look at sports as battles between good and evil, or just us and them?

Why are the Super Bowl and World Cup so popular?

What influence do athletes and coaches have on us? Who are our heroes?

KEEPING THE SABBATH HOLY?

Why is football mostly played on Sundays, as well as many other sports?

Do sports pre-empt church attendance?

CHARIOTS OF FIRE

Chariots of Fire is based on the true story of three British athletes who took part in the 1924 Summer Olympics at Paris. Andrew Lindsay and Harold Abrahams are both undergraduates at Cambridge University, one an aristocrat representing the amateur tradition, the other a Jewish student who shocks the sporting establishment by hiring a professional coach. Eric Liddell, on the other hand, is a devout Scotsman who runs for the glory of God, and he startles the world (and threatens British sporting ambition) by refusing to run when his race is scheduled to take place on a Sunday.¹

Should there be private or public prayer before games? By players? By fans?

Why do many professional and college teams have chaplains?

"Lois Daly posits that Bob Knight's hard-line coaching methodology resembles that of a Benedictine abbot. Perfection, whether spiritual or athletic, is the supreme goal of both the abbot and Knight. Next, Price discusses similarities between college basketball's Final Four tournament and the Christian notion of final judgment. Both ventures require dedication, sacrifice, and grace in order to actualize the ultimate *telos*." - a synopsis of Pt. 4: *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion*, Price, Joseph L., editor. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001.

"Perhaps the most amazing crossover between religion and football began a couple of years ago, when a group of local residents in Rosario, Argentina founded the first 'Maradonian church' or the 'Hand of God Church'. With an original congregation of about 50, the Religion now boasts upwards of 20,000 members who live in the year 43 AD (after Diego) and whose most holy of days is celebrated on the 30th of October, Diego Maradona's birthday. Members of the congregation are very offended when people suggest that the religion is purely humorous as they feel as if Maradona has created such exposure for their country and for the whole of South America. Alejandro Veron, the religion's founder has said that 'just because it's a new religion doesn't mean it should be laughed at. It may have not have such legendary tales as other religions but it is after all a sporting religion.'²

THE BIG PICTURE

If both teams have praying fans and players, how does God decide which team to help win?

Is it safe to say that God does not appear to be a Cubs fan?

SOME THOUGHTS FROM THE BIBLE

1 Corinthians 9

²³Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. ²⁴Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. ²⁵And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.

Hebrews 12

¹Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The Underdog: David vs. Goliath - I Samuel 17



¹ http://www.movietome.com/movietome/servlet/MovieMain/movieid-428/Chariots_of_Fire/

² <http://www.squarefootball.net/content/article/article.asp?aid=536>

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From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion.

Price, Joseph L., editor. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2001. 240 + ix pp. \$29.95 US. ISBN 0-86554-694-0.

[1] For some, the topic of religion and sport simply refers to expressions of faith on the field of play (i.e., a touchdown prayer, religious mascots, etc.). The authors in Joseph L. Price's edited volume *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion* cast religion in connection to athletics as a more complex enterprise. The religious and cultural perspectives of Mircea Eliade and Catherine Albanese inform much of this discussion. Also receiving due consideration are noteworthy scholars of religion and sport such as Johan Huizinga, Michael Novak, and Robert J. Higgs. Overall, Price's effort is both a helpful resource and a provocative rethinking of the relationship between two of America's most important institutions. Scholars of religion and sport, as well as those interested in the broader topic of popular religion, will find this volume valuable.

[2] The first of the book's four main sections surveys the intersection of sports and religion. Price begins with a brief American history of the topic. Countering Allen Guttman's thesis (in *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* [Columbia University Press, 1978]) that modern sport lacks its religious origin, Price concludes that "institutionalized sports at the beginning of the twenty-first century have once again begun to exert the force of faith for fans and players" (36). Next, Lonnie Kliever maintains that "play" is an inherently transcendent quality of sports that professionalism does not foster. The ideal athlete, therefore, is the amateur who truly plays his or her sport "for the joy and fun of it" (47). Finally, Price discusses mythical time and the sports calendar; with each regeneration of an athletic season comes "the possible newness of life, of teams, of players, and of fans" (56).

[3] The three essays in part two address baseball. First, Price explores the implicitly religious quality of baseball by comparing it to other notable cultural myths. The Greek "omphalos myth" and the pitcher's mound, for example, both focus on a sacred and elevated mythical center (66-8). Second, Paul C. Johnson attempts to explain the fetishlike cultural mania surrounding Mark McGwire's seventieth homerun ball in 1998. According to Johnson, the ball, amid President Clinton's sexual scandal, became a symbol of America's mythically pure past. Third, Peter Williams writes about three "martyrs" of baseball: Roberto Clemente, Lou Gehrig, and Christy Mathewson. These men were heroes, Williams proposes, because as regular people, they were moral exemplars who "reached the idealized state and Edenic state that is our own fondest wish" (101).

[4] Football is the subject of three articles in part three. Bonnie Miller McLemore focuses on the game's many mythical elements. Football's liminality, she says, provides momentary "encounters with the sacred" for fans wishing to transcend their human limitations (132). Next, Price outlines how the spectacle of the Super Bowl resembles that of a major religious gathering. Finishing the section, James A. Mathisen uses the idea of folk religion to explain why the 1987 N.F.L. players' strike lacked popular support. The "anonymous and average" replacement players, with their unadulterated love of the game, embodied the most cherished values held by the members of football's folk religion (157). The regular players, who argued over money, symbolized a corrupting threat to this faith.

[5] Part four presents two brief essays on basketball. Lois Daly posits that Bob Knight's hard-line

coaching methodology resembles that of a Benedictine abbot. Perfection, whether spiritual or athletic, is the supreme goal of both the abbot and Knight. Next, Price discusses similarities between college basketball's Final Four tournament and the Christian notion of final judgment. Both ventures require dedication, sacrifice, and grace in order to actualize the ultimate *telos*.

[6] In an unexpected - yet perhaps fitting - combination, part five looks at hockey and professional wrestling. Tom Faulkner applies Thomas Luckmann's model of "invisible religion" to Canadian hockey. For Faulkner, Luckmann's model works as both "a useful heuristic device in the general study of religion" and "a helpful tool for reflection upon the experience of Canadian hockey fans and players" (186). On professional wrestling, Charles S. Adams explores how this popular form of entertainment ritually reenacts the concerns and values of American popular culture.

[7] Taken as a whole, this volume begins to demonstrate how athletics in America is, as Price writes, "a form of popular religion" (229). To advance this claim, the authors draw comparisons between the structural features of sports and religion. The essays rightfully point to transcendence as a common theme. In sports, mythical time, heroes, rituals, and myths all create an environment wherein individuals transcend daily life and experience the otherworldly. Missing from the articles, however, is ethnographic data to show how the actual fans and players construct this experience. Without such evidence, the sports-illiterate reader may see the fan/athlete as a victim of "group think," rather than a spiritual pilgrim searching for meaning in the stadiums of America. Even for the sports-literate reader, an excavation of various voices would draw a tangible link between sports and religion. Also missing is variety. The essays only look at America's marquee spectator sports, and with an emphasis on the spectator, athletes in general receive little attention. Like the religions of America, the sports of America are diverse and complicated. Consider endurance athletes (runners, bikers, and triathletes) who compete in a sport where oxygen deprivation is the norm, and spectators are rare. How would their experiences contradict, ally with, or differ from the ideas discussed by Price and others? Indeed, while the articles are informative and entertaining, they only begin to unearth the complex relationship between sports and American religion. This volume confirms, therefore, that future scholarship in this area will need to explore new territory, and ask new questions.

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Football and religion

Scott Stephens investigates football and religion.

Having grown up and lived in a very multicultural area of London, I have been exposed to many forms of religion. Personally, I am not religious and would like to avoid the cliché of saying that 'football is my religion'. I'll leave the notion of what qualifies something to be a religion, to those better placed to do so. If it is faith and worship, then I'm sure that most reading this article, find that through football. I have a Church; only mine doesn't have a roof, the 'pews' are plastic and it has a 110 by 71 yards piece of turf in the middle!

However, I'm not trying to divide the two phenomenon's but rather see the amazing ways in which the two crossover; agree and disagree. One particular image that will stick in my mind for a long time was walking home from a party late one Friday night and cutting across my local common. Having not have drunk that night, I knew my eyes were not deceiving me as I made out two 11 a-side teams of Orthodox Jews, in full religious dress, chasing a football around in complete darkness! I couldn't help but to enquire as to what was going on! One of the goalkeeper's informed me that an important religious festival had just ended and they wanted to celebrate it with a 'kick-about'. Unbelievable! Anyone for a game on Christmas morning?

I also remember being at school and college, where some Muslim friends would 'skip' Friday prayers to come and play football at lunchtime and can also recall a boy who got withdrawn from my Sunday League Team by his mum for missing Church too often!

Religion is however, a major part of football for many of the world's top players. We are very accustomed to players, especially from Spain and South America, 'crossing' themselves as they run out on to the pitch. But for what are they crossing you have to ask? Is it a plea to keep evil spirits at bay or a plea to score a hat-trick. For many players, it is a matter of course, but with all due respect, the same players wouldn't 'cross' themselves as they entered a shop or a restaurant would they? I think it's the hat-trick they're after!

In many countries, religion is crucial to a team's pre match routine, especially at National level. It is common for South American teams to bring a priest into the dressing room, prior to kick off who will read sections of the bible as all the players hold hands, often shedding tears in an amazing display of emotion and team solidarity.

Before each game of their very successful world cup campaign in 2002, members of the Senegalese team would read sections from the Muslim holy book ' the Qu'ran, in an attempt to get each other fired up for the game in hand. The teams shock victory in their first game against France was marked by amazing scenes in the country's capital, Dakar, where only a handful of worshippers attended a Friday prayer at the city's Grand Mosque; all clearly watching the game, a fact welcomed and encouraged by the mosque's Imam. What 's more, the teams French coach, Bruno Metsu, actually converted to the religion as his team progressed to the knockout stages.

French World Cup winner Emmanuel Petit, turned to Zen Buddhism to help him through his footballing career. At the tender age of 17, his older brother Olivier died on the pitch whilst playing for the French side, Dieppe. Olivier had a fatal brain haemorrhage after heading a ball. Petit went on of course to score a goal in the world cup final and believed that his brother had a big role to play in the goal and duly dedicated the goal to him.

Perhaps the most amazing crossover between religion and football began a couple of years ago, when a group of local residents in Rosario, Argentina founded the first 'Maradonian church' or the 'Hand of God Church'. With an original congregation of about 50, the Religion now boasts upwards of 20,000 members who live in the year 43 AD (after Diego) and whose most holy of days is celebrated on the 30th of October, Diego Maradona's birthday. Members of the congregation are very offended when people suggest that the religion is purely humorous as they feel as if Maradona has created such exposure for their country and for the whole of South America. Alejandro Veron, the religion's founder has said that 'just because it's a new religion doesn't mean it should be laughed at. It may have not have such legendary tales as other religions but it is after all a sporting religion.'

As I said in my introduction, I wanted not to separate religion and football but rather see how the two crossover and work together. Clearly here, with the notion of a 'sporting religion', they are one and the same thing.

<http://www.squarefootball.net/content/article/article.asp?aid=536>

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