

Homework: Sports and Spirituality

This session focuses on the subject of sports and spirituality.

Sports are at their heart a matter of deep and joyous spiritual significance.

—Pat Toomay, *Dallas Cowboys*

Sports . . . exert a great “purchase on the soul” . . . They can open us to a selfless awareness that expresses our deepest nature.

—Reb Anderson, *Tenshin Roshi*

All human bodies are things lent by God. With what thought are you using yours?

—*Shinto scripture 3.41*

Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules, and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence. In other words, it is war minus the shooting.

—George Orwell

To me, boxing is like a ballet, except there's no music, no choreography, and the dancers hit each other.

—Jack Handey

To play is to yield oneself to a kind of magic . . . to enter a world where different laws apply, to be relieved of all the weights that bear it down, to be free, kingly (sic), unfettered and divine.

—Hugo Rahner

Sport is where an entire life can be compressed into a few hours, where the emotions of a lifetime can be felt on an acre or two of ground, where a person can suffer and die and rise again on six miles of trails through a New York City park. Sport is a theater where sinner can turn saint and a common man become an uncommon hero, where the past and the future can fuse with the present. Sport is singularly able to give us peak experiences where we feel completely one with the world and transcend all conflicts as we finally become our own potential.

—George A. Sheehan

Questions to Ponder

- Most of us have had numerous experiences with sports, either as a participant or as an observer. Can you recall any that you would consider spiritual? If not, why not?
- Ask someone you know if they believe there can be spirituality in sports. If they say yes, ask if they have experienced it. If they answer yes to this also, ask them to describe the experience and why they felt it was spiritual.
- Some people like to use sports metaphors or phrasing in discussions of religion such as, “No pain, no gain.” List at least 10 you have heard. Circle the 3 you find most powerful. What do they mean to you? Where does their power reside? What qualities do both sports and spirituality require of those who choose to have them be important in their life?
- As you observe the life of professional sports figures, how would you rate them as examples of having a deeply spiritual life? Why do you think this is true?
- One of the appeals of sport is the existence of clear-cut rules and goals. What rules and goals in your life do you find clear cut? How do you achieve greater clarity when it is missing in your “game” of life?