



Competing for time: Church or Sunday sport? -

Nowadays much sport takes place on a Sunday, which raises issues for the church-going family. For some there is an intrinsic problem with playing sport on a Sunday. For others this is only problematic if there is a clash with service times. Innovations such as Messy Church offer alternative ways for families to worship, as do mid-week services.

Conclusion - In competitive sport as in all aspects of our lives, we are called to follow Jesus' command to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' and to 'do to others what you would have them do to you'. Competitive sport can provide an arena for giving thanks to God for talents, opportunities to compete, and for relationships fostered through sport.

Competition involves *striving together* while also *striving against* one's opponent. Much is lost when competition is seen solely as 'striving against' others. Playing against an opponent who is well matched pushes competitors to reach a higher level. In the true spirit of *striving together*, we should:

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

"Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel."

Technology and science - The desire to win drives competitors and the industry which supports elite performers to maximise performance through a variety of means. Science and technology have led to improved equipment and have also influenced competitive performance through understanding of human physiology. The use of genetics to change or improve competitive performance ('gene doping') is of interest to many, although the technology is not yet available. There is a fine line between the legitimate use of physiological, technological and psychological strategies to gain advantage and those which infringe legal and morally acceptable practice. Using banned substances not only carries health risks for the competitor but also constitutes cheating.

Discussion Points

- Is competitiveness in sport a good thing or not?
- Which sportsmen and women would you identify as good and bad role models and why?
- What issues can arise for families when a child shows a particular sporting talent?
- What does the phrase 'Winning at all costs mean to you'?
- What lessons can be learned from losing?
- In a sporting context how might we interpret Jesus' command to do to others what we would have them do to us (Luke 6: 31)?
- In what ways do you think that money influences sport?
- In what ways has technology impacted on ethical dimensions of sport and competitiveness?
- In what innovative ways might churches resolve the dilemma of sport coinciding with Sunday worship?

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Striving Together:

celebrating competitiveness in sport





Striving Together: celebrating competitiveness in sport

Introduction - Sport in its many forms is enjoyed at many levels by many people in Scotland. Competitiveness in sport can draw out the best in people, but can also give rise to unworthy behaviour. So how can we enjoy sport, loving our neighbours and treating others as we would want to be treated, and still give expression to the competitive spirit?

Christianity and sport - In the early church, sports were often regarded with suspicion, but in the 19th century movements such as 'Muscular Christianity' embraced sport more fully. More recently, some argue that, while competition can elevate the character of those involved, there can be unhelpful pressures on athletes that may encourage them to enhance their performance through any means.

Competitiveness -The word competition can mean both '*striving together*' and '*striving against*'. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul invokes an image of *striving together and against*, to highlight both our interconnectedness and interdependence. Both elements of striving are important. Remembering the command to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, competitors *strive together*, with God and others, pushing themselves to perform to the best of their abilities. Competitiveness between individuals or teams, where there is mutual respect, exemplifies '*striving together*'. Whether winning or losing, sport can encourage a sense of belonging, co-operation and teamwork, fostering self-control, persistence and self-discipline. We believe that all involved in competitive sport can be guided by Jesus' words: '*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.*'

Winning and losing -The thrill in achieving one's goal is a major part of the reward for a game well played. However, it may be that despite playing well, the opponent's performance is superior and we don't win. In competitive sport, we are responsible for pleasing God first, before everyone else. Those who are defeated may feel they have lost face, or have let others down. It may take time to come to terms with losing, but defeat can provide valuable lessons.

Relationships

Families - Seeing a family member excel provides great joy. However, the families of sportspeople may need patience and compassion during difficult training schedules or disappointing results. Sport teaches vital life lessons, including discipline and working as part of a team, working hard to achieve success and accepting defeat graciously. Those supporting young people in sport should uphold high standards of behaviour. However, in our enthusiasm it is easy to push boundaries- shouting abuse at officials or opponents, for example.

Coaches - Coaches seek to encourage and inspire, challenging athletes to push their limits to perform to the best of their abilities, helping them deal with success and disappointment. While it is important that coaches address the ethical dimension of competition, this is an area where sports chaplains could complement their role.

Sports chaplains - Chaplains are concerned with the holistic wellbeing of people in sport, helping players to recognise that there is more to life than winning, adulation and money. Whether one has a religious faith or not, chaplains can help people to recognise the importance of esteem, love, and hope.



Opponents - We should treat our opponents in the way that we want to be treated: with respect, playing hard but not seeking an unfair advantage. In Hebrews 10 we are encouraged to '*consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*'. This idea of encouragement to excel translates well to the context of competition - opponents motivate each other to rise to the challenge of the contest while playing fairly and respecting each other.

Equality - While women's sport in Britain has never been stronger, inequalities in earnings between the genders remain. Those from minority ethnic groups are significantly less likely to participate in sport, particularly at club level, than their white counterparts. The 2012 London Paralympics showcased disability sport in an unprecedented way, but more needs to be done. For people with a disability, participation can help rehabilitation both physically and socially, reducing stigma and discrimination. In many countries there is little access for disabled people to appropriate sports facilities or technological aids. Opportunities to compete are compromised by insufficient funding to train or to travel. People who live in remote areas in Scotland, too, may have limited access to the kind of facilities that are available to city-dwellers.