

Statement of Philosophy for Christian School Athletics

“And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned,
except he strive lawfully.” (*II Timothy 2:5*)

The inspired writers of Scripture leave no doubt that athletics were a part of the context in which they lived. References to sport, physical training, and competition suggest that they are not off-limits to followers of Christ. References to boxing, training, wrestling, and running a race confirm that athletics are legitimate in a Christian's life. Paul acknowledged in I Timothy 4:8 that there is, indeed, profit from bodily exercise. He then reminds believers that bodily exercise, like other areas of life, pales in comparison to godliness. The believer's body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, and bodily exercise, properly undertaken, IS an exercise in godliness. Physical conditioning for God's glory, for health and development as “good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and not for sensuality or show, is a spiritual exercise.

As the Christian school movement developed in the 20th century, athletic programs became part of most school programs. Those entrusted with the oversight of Christian school athletics have great influence on a highly visible aspect of the ministry. This includes the Christian school administrator, athletic director, and coaching staff. When a school offers intramural or interscholastic athletics participation to its students, it embraces a process that may serve to be a great blessing and useful tool of instruction. Often overlooked and/or neglected, however, are the perils that are ever-present in the realm of athletics. Following are a few of those perils:

*We reside in a sports-dominated society. Consider how much our conversation, television viewing, radio listening, and reading are related to sports. October focuses attention upon the World Series. From September through February, professional football dominates Sunday afternoons and Monday nights. Have you heard the expression “March Madness,” a time when collegiate basketball consumes most of America's attention? Every two years, the whole world watches as elite athletes from many nations compete in summer or winter Olympics. These examples only begin to reveal the influence of sports and athletics on our culture. Over-emphasis is a continual peril to be avoided.

*Another danger of athletics is acceptance of the world's norm in areas of attitude and behavior. Consider items that have become the norm in modern athletic competition.

-Spectators question, criticize and taunt officials, umpires and referees. Taunting and hazing an opponent before, during and after the performance has become part of the sport.

-Players transgress established rules and it is deemed acceptable, as long as those officiating the game do not see the infraction or enforce the rule. It is often acceptable for a player to retaliate against an opponent if the other engaged first, and abusive body language or speech against a referee is expected if a call is not favorable.

-Coaches are expected to "work" the officials in an effort to sway their judgment. Winning is everything, and that end justifies the means. Temper tantrums directed toward officials are deemed not only permissible, but necessary in certain circumstances.

To various degrees these behaviors and attitudes are accepted within modern sports and athletics. These professional and collegiate models "trickle down" into youth sports programs of all ages.

From this list of "normal" attitudes and behaviors, what can the Christian school administrator, athletic director, or coach accept? If we are to scrutinize our actions and attitudes in the light of biblical principle, the answer should be clear. The Christian cannot accept any of these!

Christian school leaders speak much of testimony and of being light in a dark world. Yet, too often Christian school athletics harms the cause of Christ and is far from being light to a dark world. Lip service is easy, but holding our athletic programs to biblical standards is hard work. Diligence and discernment must characterize those who administer sports programs.

What then is a biblical philosophy of athletics in the Christian school? At the foundational level Christian schools should recognize that sports programs are a means to an end and not an end in itself. Athletics is a tool by which many valuable lessons can be taught. Lessons include self-control in adversity, the value of hard work and practice, sportsmanship regardless of circumstance, consideration of opponents, and respect for authority. These opportunities for learning far exceed the importance of a winning season or league championship. "Athletes first, winning second" should be the mode of operation for every coach. Recognizing that each athlete is a multi-faceted individual who

needs not only physical development, but spiritual, emotional, social, and mental, as well.

“Humble winning and gracious losing” should characterize the Christian school athletic team at the end of every contest. There is no room for pragmatism (whatever works, use it). Blatant or subtle breaking of rules to gain an advantage over an opponent is not striving lawfully. Officials, referees, and umpires are the designated authority over the athletic contest. Our response to their authority and decisions should look and sound no differently than what a student response should be to a teacher or a child’s response should be to a parent. Expressions of criticism and displeasure (verbal or body language) directed toward the officials/referees are expressions of disrespect and insubordination towards authority. Christian school athletic programs must have integrity and principle regarding what is right.

It is essential that adolescent energies be channeled into wholesome recreational development activities. This done “all to the glory of God,” has a necessary place in the lives of Christians. Regrettably, the passion of the moment and desire to win often obscure the “big picture.” Biblically, the Christian’s goal is to glorify God in everything. That primary goal must not then be pre-empted amid the heat of athletic competition.

If a Christian school has an athletic program, it must never become a microcosm of society’s norms. It must never bring reproach upon the name of our Savior. Christian school athletics must be characterized by lawful striving in order to be that light to a dark world. There must be a difference!