

# Playing with faith

## HOW ATHLETES SHARE THEIR LOVE OF GOD

### TWO RECENT NEWS ARTICLES CAUGHT MY ATTENTION IN THE PAST MONTH THAT INTERSECT SPORTS AND FAITH.

In the first article, a star high school quarterback went to a Division III college because he was deemed too small to play in a Division I program. After his freshman year, he transferred to a Division I program and made the team as a walk-on.

In his senior year, he came off the bench to lead his team to victory over a nationally ranked team and remained the starting quarterback for the rest of the season. It seemed as if he had overcome his "small stature" to lead his team to one of its best seasons in years. With one year of eligibility remaining, he is forgoing football and entering the seminary. Having been successful on the athletic field, he wants to use his talents in service to our Lord.

The second article made reference to a group of journalists who gathered to discuss the most underreported sports story in 2018. After a few minutes of discussion, one journalist remarked that many athletes are people of faith and give honor and thanks to God for their talents.

We are all familiar with the post-game interview, where the first words out of an athlete's mouth are, "I want to give thanks to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior." Have you noticed that there is no follow-up question by the reporter, such as "Tell me about your faith?" or "How do you demonstrate your faith off the field?" The athletes' statements of faith seem to be dismissed by the reporter. Do

we think the same when we see this?

Catholic journalist Trent Beattie has written two books on the intersection of sports and faith. Both are must reads.

In *Fit for Heaven*, Beattie writes about professional athletes whose Catholic faith is instrumental in their sports and personal lives. There is no separation between the values their Catholic faith has taught them and the discipline and virtues they display on the athletic field and in their personal lives. In *Apostolic Athletes*, Beattie has 11 priests and bishops write their own stories about how the pursuit of athletic excellence brought them to know and love God in their personal and spiritual lives, which then helped them discern a vocation to religious life.

CYO has borrowed the phrase, "Apostolic Athletes/Apostolic Coaches" because it is a reminder for all of us that sports can be a ministry in which we develop our talents — not only to be all God has called us to be, but to use those talents in service to others and to praise and honor

God. We are called to be Apostolic Mothers and Fathers; Apostolic Sons and Daughters; Apostolic Husbands and Wives in the way we live our lives towards family, friends and the community at large.

Why should that stop when we enter the gymnasium or step on a field of play? The answer is simple — it shouldn't.

The intersection of sports and faith can be a mystery for some people. In 1904, when Pope Pius X had the Vatican host a youth gymnastics tournament, a member of the Curia asked the Pontiff, "To what purpose will this lead?" Pope Pius X responded, "To paradise!"

Sports asks us to give the best of ourselves, as athletes strive to achieve their individual and collective goals in a game. As parents, coaches, referees and religious, let us be mindful that the child who steps on the field or gym floor is looking to us to be examples of how sports is a metaphor for giving the best of ourselves to God on this side of eternity, so that paradise awaits us all. †

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