

CHAPTER 15¹

RELIGION, SPORT, AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Define religion and explain the various theories relating to religion.
2. Identify the similarities and differences between sport and religion.
3. Assess the usage of religion in the sport setting at the organizational and individual level.
4. Assess the conflicts that arise between sport and religion.

INTRODUCTION

From ancient times until the present, religions and religious institutions have played important roles in societies (Hulsether, 2007). For some, religious beliefs help them make sense of the events in their lives. For others, their religion serves as a social function that allows them to develop relationships with like-minded people. Current estimates suggest that 84% of the world's population claims to practice some form of religion, with Christianity (31.2%), Islam (24.1%), Hinduism (15.1%), and Buddhism (6.9%) comprising the largest percentage groups (Sherwood, 2018). However, there has been a rise in the number of people who have claimed no religious affiliation (16%; Sherwood, 2018), with the sharpest rise of in this group being young adults (i.e. those under 40 years old; Pew Research Center).

Yet in many countries, legal systems and governments have foundations in the religious precepts and principles of the dominant religion in the region. Religion was one of the primary factors in the discovery and settlement of the “New World” and the eventual establishment of the United States of America. The Puritans and Quakers settled in what is now the New England region to escape religious persecution from the Church of England. Even in these present times, many of the laws and foundations of the US government still reflect religious traditions despite the supposed “separation of Church and State.” Further, Islamic laws have historically governed many of the countries in the Middle East. In places such as Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (and numerous other countries as well), Islamic law dictates punishment for crimes, people's work schedules, and, in some cases, how people may dress. Finally, religious practices are outlawed in some countries. For instance, practicing Christianity and assembling for “church” has been illegal in various countries such as China, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Given the prominence of religion in numerous cultures, it is only natural to examine the intersection of sport and religion. In fact, sport and religion share similarities in how they are organized and sustained. Religion has also shaped various aspects of sport while sport has, at times, been a promoter of religion. Beyond the cultural overlaps, sport and religion have been sources of legal battles and have been at the forefronts of cultural conflicts and change. As such, it is appropriate to examine the sociological intersection of religion and sport.

In this chapter, we discuss the ways in which sport and religion affect each other. First, we examine religion from a sociological and legal perspective in order to establish a foundation for subsequent sections. We then examine the various ways people in sport use religion to enhance their lives and their sport. Further, we examine some of the ways religions and religious institutions use sport to advance their causes.

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WHAT IS RELIGION?

Prior to examination of the intersection between religion and sport, it is essential to provide a sociological foundation and definition for religion. From the sociological perspective, Durkheim (1965) defined religion as a set of common beliefs and practices of a community directed toward things that thought to be sacred which unite the collective members into a single community of faith (i.e., church) with all members following a common moral code. An important aspect of this definition is the collective nature of religion, wherein individuals live under the banner of an accepted view of a deity and the moral precepts that are theoretically drawn from their deity. For example, Judaism and Christianity have historically based their moral understanding on the Ten Commandments, which, according to tradition, were written by the finger of God on stone tablets presented to Moses. From the sociological and practical standpoint, religion serves as a means for maintaining order and good conduct among members of a given society. However, for members of communities of faith, religion is much deeper than a simple set of moral precepts governing a community. Through religion, people tend to feel they are somehow connected to something more mystical and powerful (i.e., God, see Exhibit 15.1) than they can ultimately explain. By this connection with God, many people find purpose and direction for their daily lives, and it is through this connection that people often attempt to make sense of the world in which they live.

Exhibit 15.1: Who or What is God?

The terms “God” or “god” can mean different things to different people. In the Christian and Jewish faiths, the consensus belief is that God is the eternal, spiritual being Jehovah. In the Islamic faith, God is known as Allah. Of course, there are also numerous pagan religions as well. The ancient Greeks and Romans were polytheistic (believing in many gods) in their religious views. The modern-day pagan religion, Wicca, adopts a dualistic view of God-ess, which is an impersonal deity that treats everyone as equal (www.wicca.org). Also, some religions are actually atheistic. Though many Buddhists do not necessarily deny the existence of gods or spirits, at its core Buddhism is a non-theistic religion. Thus, it is important to realize that the term “God” or “god” means different things to different people.

It is also important to understand the concept of spirituality, as spirituality and religion are often intertwined and sometimes used as interchangeable ideas. However, there is a distinction between spirituality and religion. Although many people have different definitions and conceptualizations of spirituality (see Cunningham, 2019; Mitroff, 2003; Schwartz, 2006), we have adopted the following definition for this chapter: spirituality is an individual’s connection with those things that she or he considers to be sacred. Simply, spirituality is the individuals’ connections with their deity, themselves, or nature. Although spirituality can be a part of religion, it is different in the idea that religion is a collective community and spirituality is more of an individual concept. Many religions call for their members to pursue their own spirituality as they practice their religion. For many, this is done through prayer, meditation, and acts of charity. Thus, not only does the pursuit of spirituality benefit individuals by connecting them with their deity, it also benefits the religious community as members tend to be more pious contributors to the faith.

An important aspect of Durkheim’s (1965) definition of religion is the idea of “sacred,” or those things that “inspire awe, mystery, and reverence” (Coakley, 2007, p. 531). The sacred are believed to offer some type of connection with God. In various religions, the sacred can be written symbols, crafted figures, buildings, and even geographic locations. For instance, the city of Mecca is considered to be sacred in the Islamic faith. For Catholics and Protestants alike, the symbol of the cross is sacred. Jews hold the Star of David as being a sacred symbol. In ancient Greece, the Parthenon was considered sacred, as it was the dwelling for the Greek goddess Athena. The meaning these examples provide for their religions are what make them sacred to their followers.

In contrast with the sacred is the “profane,” or those things associated with everyday life and culture that do not have any type of religious or spiritual connection with a deity (Durkheim, 1965). The profane can be morally neutral or can also be considered as a source of evil. Material possessions, such as vehicles, houses, stadiums, and works of art can be profane, as can money. Religion typically focuses on the sacred, not the profane, and sport typically falls into the latter category.

RELIGION AND THE US LEGAL SYSTEM

Religion was a prominent aspect of the founding of the US. The First Amendment of the US Constitution addresses religion as it relates to the entire public sector and private sector state actors. According to the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...” (US Const. Amend. I). In the court system, this initial portion of the First Amendment relating to religion has been divided into two clauses: the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The Establishment Clause (“Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion...”) determines a “freedom from religion.” Within the public sector, an entity cannot legally promote or inhibit a specific religion. For example, it is unconstitutional for a public institution such as Texas A&M University to promote or inhibit any form of religion. However, the Free Exercise Clause (“...or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”) is considered a “freedom of religion.” This clause allows individuals the freedom to practice their religion of choice, thus prohibiting a governmental body from forbidding an individual to practice her or his respective religion. For example, at Texas A&M (a public university) students are free to practice their chosen religion even amidst their attendance, assuming they are not disruptive of the university’s functioning. Due to their seemingly contradictory nature, these religious clauses comprise one of the most highly controversial interpretations and applications of Constitutional Law. As such, two primary questions concerning religious initiatives and sport warrant further understanding: (a) What are the boundaries of governmental involvement in religious activities, and (b) When is public religious activity allowed or prohibited?

As it relates to sport, particularly interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics, it is important to understand the difference in application within public institutions and private institutions. Public institutions receive government funding and act as representatives of the state (referred to as “state actors”), thus being subject to the Constitution. Private institutions, however, do not receive direct government funding and are usually not representatives of the state; therefore, they are not required to submit to Constitutional standards. For example, higher learning institutions, such as Florida State University, Clemson University, and the University of Arizona, are public institutions receiving government funding and are considered to be subject to the Constitution. These institutions are not at liberty to promote or inhibit a specific religion because of their public, state actor status. On the other hand, private institutions, such as Duke University, Texas Christian University, and Brigham Young University, do not receive direct government funding and are not required to abide by constitutional standards. Accordingly, these institutions have the freedom to establish and engage in their respective religious beliefs. For this reason, the application of Constitutional Law, and subsequent religious restrictions, is only applied to the public sector.

Having addressed the boundaries of governmental involvement with public-based religious activities, it is important to understand which religious activities are deemed constitutionally acceptable in the sport setting. Traditionally, professional sport teams and leagues have been categorized as private businesses, as opposed to public entities, within the legal setting (*Long v. National Football League*, 1994). However, with the intertwining of municipal resources and tax-payer funds, professional sport teams and leagues have occasionally been deemed private entity state actors, thus subject to Constitutional Law (*Ludtke v. Kuhn*, 1978). The majority of examples relating to religious activities and the sport setting primarily occur within the education system. With particular relevance to the high school and intercollegiate athletics contexts, such examples include public prayer, religious organizations access to public resources and facilities, scripture reading, and religious clothing. Student prayer within the institutional setting has not traditionally been a matter of much constitutional concern. Unless a student is vocally praying in a disturbing or distracting manner, student-initiated prayer has limited unconstitutional implications. Examples of constitutionally

permissible behavior include student-athletes meeting at center court to pray after a game, kneeling to pray after scoring a touchdown, or praying silently prior to an athletic contest. However, prayer initiated by authority figures (e.g., coach, teacher, administrator) is considered more ambiguous. Certainly, as established by the Free Exercise Clause, institutional authority figures have the freedom to pray individually within the confines of their office or classroom. Yet, authority figures who leverage their positions as a means of forcing or coercing student-athletes to pray is considered unconstitutional. Examples of such behavior would be a collegiate athletic administrator requiring student-athletes to bow their heads for a post-game prayer to God or a high-school coach requiring team members to attend a weekly Bible study at a Christian church.

Access to public resources and facilities by religious organizations is another example of religious activities within the public school setting. Organizations such as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) and Reformed University Fellowship (RUF) are widely known religious-based organizations within the collegiate setting. These student-led organizations are at liberty to constitutionally utilize public resources and facilities. However, such organizations are to be treated as any other campus organization, not receiving special or differential treatment. Additional examples such as scripture reading and displaying religious clothing are acceptable behaviors among students or student-athletes. As with student-initiated prayer, these displays of religious activity are constitutionally permissible behaviors unless they result in widespread distraction or disturbance.

COMPARING SPORT AND RELIGION

Many discussions of sport and religion focus on the influence of one or the other (discussed in later sections), yet there are also striking similarities and distinct differences between the two. Although they reside in different realms—religion in the sacred and sport in the profane—there are a host of similarities and differences between the two.

Similarities between Sport and Religion

There are five striking similarities between sport and religion. They both: (a) have a devout following; (b) bring people together; (c) use symbolic rituals; (d) have elaborate structures; and (e) have heroines and heroes. We outline each of these in the following sections.

From an initial economic standpoint, there is a devout following for both religion and sport, with the largest followings generating the largest revenues. Patrons of a particular religion devote time and money in order to sustain that religion. Comparatively, sport teams, particularly collegiate and professional teams, are sustained through the devotion of fans' time and money. Game attendance is comparable to attending religious services, and season ticket holders are similar to church members. Teams with the largest fan bases tend to have the highest paid players and coaching staffs. For example, some of the most valuable Major League Baseball franchises (New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Philadelphia Phillies, Chicago Cubs) reported the highest payrolls for players and coaches (Badenhausen, Ozanian, & Settini, 2011; USA Today, 2011). These teams further benefit from their popularity by earning revenue through the sales of their merchandise. This is similar to popular pastors and churches that benefit from book and merchandise sales.

Next, religion and sport are similar in their abilities to bring people into a focused social setting. In most religions, members have set times and days on which they gather in congregation to interact with fellow believers and worship their deity. It is through these gatherings that the traditions and messages of their religions are reinforced among the followers. The congregation also serves as a means to unite the followers with the purpose of continuing their religion. In sports, fans and spectators alike congregate at games and events to be entertained and to cheer on their favorite teams to victory. As previously mentioned, many teams have devout followings of fans who use sport as an avenue to socialize with people of similar interests. By their attendance at events, fans ensure the continued existence of the sport, much in the same manner as do religious patrons with their respective religions.

A third similarity between religion and sport is the symbolic rituals associated with both (Coakley, 2017). These rituals serve to unite the patrons and delineate “insiders” from “outsiders.” That is, the rituals are typically well known by the insiders, and this inside knowledge brings a sense of belonging to members and fans alike. In most religions, members must perform rituals at their gatherings and, in certain sects, during their daily lives. In most Christian churches, there is a set order of events constituting a proper service. Although these may vary by denomination, typical worship services include opening and closing prayers, some type of music, a message or sermon delivered by a clergy member, and the taking of the Eucharist. In the Islamic faith, members are supposed to perform five daily prayers and travel to Mecca at some point in their lives in accordance with their religious traditions. This is comparable to the rituals that are performed at sporting events. At most sporting events in the US, the National Anthem is played prior to the start of the event. Many college football programs have traditional ceremonies at their games. For instance, The Ohio State University band performs a marching maneuver where they form the “script Ohio.” It is considered a great honor at their school to be the person who dots the “i” during this ritual. Most sporting events on college campuses conclude with the singing of the school song. Another example is the singing of the song during the “7th inning stretch” at baseball games. When attending either religious or sporting events, a person can expect to see the performance of some type of ritual(s).

Another similarity between sport and religion is the elaborate buildings and structures in which events for both are held. Some of the most spectacular and beautiful structures in the world have been built for religious purposes. Some examples include the Cologne Cathedral in Cologne, Germany; Notre Dame in Paris, France; and Saint Patrick’s Cathedral in New York, New York. Islamic mosques, such as the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem, also contain some of the more spectacular architecture the world has ever seen. Although typically not seen with the same reverence, sport stadiums reflect the same manner of architectural marvel and signify the level of importance that people often give sport. For example, Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin, is a venue beloved by fans of the Green Bay Packers. The \$2.66 billion Los Angeles Stadium at Hollywood Park is one of the more recent elaborate multi-purpose sport facilities. Beyond premier experiential offerings to spectators, the facility is designed in an innovative manner to not require an HVAC system due to more than 30,000 perforated aluminum panels that respond to the local climate to produce a comfortable, more environmentally friendly facility temperature (Cheah, 2017). The Beijing Olympic games were also a showcase of some of the more spectacular works of architectural art the Olympics and the world have ever seen. The main stadium, which had a capacity of 100,000 people during the 2008 Olympic games, was built to resemble a bird’s nest (The Stadium Guide, 2004). The venue that was built for the water events, which was appropriately named the Water Cube, was built to resemble an ice cube (Mulvenney, 2008). Although these structures now house numerous non-sporting events, their initial purposes were strictly to house the Olympics in Beijing. Both sport and religion have some of the more marvelous venues seen in the world.

The final similarity is the presence of heroines and heroes in both sport and religion. Most religions have heroines, heroes, and legends who have either delivered transcending messages or who have fought against outsiders attempting to eradicate the religion. In the Jewish and Christian faiths, Moses is the hero who led the nation of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. Both faiths also hold King David in high regard because of the many battles he fought and won for Israel. Though rooted in Judaism, Christianity is based on the teachings of its hero, Jesus Christ. In the Islamic faith, the prophet Muhammad is one of the great heroes. His teachings and revelations from Allah are the foundations for the Qur’an. Gandhi is a renowned hero in India and the Hindu faith, and the Great Buddha is the hero and founder of Buddhism. As with religion, heroines, heroes, and legends abound in sport. Common examples are student-athletes on college campuses who have delivered legendary performances in athletic competition. At Texas A&M, former student-athletes Johnny Manziel and Breeja Larson are heroes on campus because of their athletic feats during their college careers. Further, soccer stars such as Messi are heroes in their home countries. National Basketball Association (NBA) stars such as Dirk Nowitzki and Luka Dončić stars are legends in their home countries of Germany and Slovenia, respectively. For followers of particular sport teams in the United States, each fan base has particular people that they herald as being legendary. Some well-known examples include Michael

Jordan, Serena Williams, Joe Montana, and Lindsey Vonn. As such, both sport and religion contain their respective heroines, heroes, and legends.

Differences between Sport and Religion

Although there are some striking similarities between sport and religion, there are, indeed, some pointed differences as well. We discuss two here: (a) the different realms in which they reside and (b) the nature of the experience.

Most notably, as highlighted previously, religion is considered to be a part of the sacred while sport is part of the profane (Coakley, 2017). Followers of any particular religion are typically seeking spiritual transcendence from the things of this world by connecting with their deity. Through their connection with their deity, religious people generally seek to live moral lives as they try to make sense of life in general. Sport is conceptualized as part of the profane because the end goal of sport is typically not connecting with a deity or attaining spiritual satisfaction. The goal of sport is generally entertainment and revenue generation. Although some athletes and organizations use sport to enhance their religious beliefs, most participants and consumers of sport are not typically seeking connections with the mystical and spiritual through the medium of sport. The one exception might be when people engage in sport or physical activity as a way to glorify their deity. This would especially be the case when people consider their body as a “temple” to do the Lord’s work. While morality is often a preached emphasis in sport, sport is not seen as the vehicle or instrument through which morality and spiritual transcendence are created or attained.

Religion also differs from sport in regards to the nature of the experience. That is, religion is often an intangible experience typically experienced by the five senses of the body. It is more of a mental and emotional connection with something that is spiritual in nature, which is not seen, heard, smelled, felt, or tasted. While the tangible can be used to stimulate a heightened sense of emotion or mental awareness, when stripped down to its purest form, religion is ultimately an experience that is intangible in nature. For followers of religions, the idea of “faith” plays a vital role in sustaining their beliefs. Faith refers to knowing or believing in the existence of something that is typically not experienced by the five senses of the body. It is because of its intangibility and reliance on faith that religion is often described as mystical. Sport, however, is essentially a tangible experience for participants and spectators alike. Although sport can include some intangible concepts, such as faith in a player or team, it occurs in the physical realm where faith in a higher power is not typically required for involvement. Our five senses are able to detect and comprehend sport. We are not forced to believe that sport is occurring without the presence of physically experienced evidence of its existence.

RELIGION IN SPORT

Religion and sport frequently intersect in societies across the world. Though religion is considered sacred and sport is considered profane, organizations and individuals alike have integrated the two entities for different purposes and for accomplishing different goals. In the organizational sense, religious institutions often use sport to spread and advance the teachings of their religion with the hopes of recruiting new members to the faith. At the individual level, sport participants often consider their performances in sport to be an act of glorifying their deities. These are just a couple of the many examples of the ways in which sport and religion have become intertwined with one another. In this section, we discuss the intersections of sport and religion at both the organizational level and at the individual level.

First, let us examine the ways in which sport and religion are intertwined at the organizational level. Often, sport is integrated into religious organizations with the purpose of using sport to spread the organizations religion to other populations. In the United States, different organizations have been formed using sport to spread religion across the world. One example of this is Athletes in Action (AIA), which is an extension of the religious organization Campus Crusade for Christ. David Hannah established AIA in 1966 with the purpose of spreading Christianity across the globe (Athletes in Action, 2011). AIA sends various sports teams across the world to play semi-professional and professional teams on what they call tours. These

tours usually last about two weeks, with the AIA teams playing as many as 10 games on a tour. During each tour, the AIA athletes often host youth camps where they focus on developing the sport among the local children, but they also use the camps as opportunities to spread their religion. Further, at some point during each game, the AIA athletes will convey their stories of how they came to follow their religion to the spectators at the event. This is just one example of an organization using sport to promote its religion.

The spreading of religion through sport also occurs locally in many communities across the country. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) is one of the more prominent religious organizations intended to provide a positive environment for family and children to enjoy sport. In 1844, George Williams founded the YMCA in London, England, with the hopes that young men would pursue religious activities instead of delinquent lifestyles on the streets of the city (YMCA, 2011a). Once the YMCA spread to the United States during the Civil War, sport became part of the YMCA. The YMCA claims to be responsible for introducing millions of people to sport as well as inventing some of the popular modern sports (i.e., basketball). YMCAs remain prominent in countless communities and still host numerous adult and youth sport leagues along with other sport initiatives to promote physical activity to their members. In recent years, the YMCA has deemphasized its religious traditions, yet their mission of building strong communities still exists (YMCA, 2011b). Other local organizations also use sport to promote their religion. Church sport leagues are common in many metropolitan areas throughout the US. Although these leagues may have numerous stated objectives for their formations, a common theme in most is the spreading of religion through participation in sports. These are all examples of the intersection of sport and religion at the organizational level.

There are also various intersections of religion and sport on the individual person level. Athletes and coaches use religion in their sport participation for a variety of different purposes. We highlight two common usages here. First, religion can be used for therapeutic purposes, such as reducing anxiety, avoiding troublesome behavior, and focusing the efforts and lives of the individual. Secondly, individuals have used their participation in sport as a means for glorifying their deities. Common examples of these behaviors include praying prior to and at the conclusion of games, reading religious texts during travel to games, and referencing religion during competition. There are numerous professional athletes who provide fitting examples for how religion can be used for both therapeutic purposes as well as for the glorification of God. Clint Dempsey, a former professional soccer player in the Premier League and Major League Soccer, is a devout Roman Catholic. While Dempsey regularly attended Catholic mass as a child, the tragic death of his sister due to a brain aneurysm resulted in several years of lost faith in God. Following this period of distance between God and himself, Dempsey joined a Bible study in college. During this time, he was reminded of what he believed was God's faithfulness and patience throughout many years of healing following his sister's death. To date, Dempsey believes his faith in God not only provides confidence for the future, but understanding that there is far more to life than soccer and earthly pursuits (Christensen, 2014).

Will Hopoate, a professional rugby player for the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs of the National Rugby League, is also well known for prioritizing his religion in all aspects of his life. As a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Hopoate believes God has given him a unique athletic ability to participate in this full contact sport for God's glory. In reverence to the church's recognition of Sunday as a day of rest (Sabbath), Hopoate spent a year of his career refusing to play rugby games on Sundays. Out of respect for his religious beliefs, the Canterbury-Bankstown club offered Hopoate contractual dispensation, thus allowing him to forgo participation in games played on Sundays. While Hopoate is no longer allowed this Sunday exemption, he maintains that participation provides him an opportunity to honor and glorify God (Lutton, 2017).

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali and NBA Hall of Fame center Hakeem Olajuwon were also known for incorporating their religious beliefs in the boxing ring. A devout Muslim, Ali would begin each match with a prayer to Allah prior to competing with his opponent (for more related to Ali and other athletes, see Exhibit 15.2). Olajuwon would honor the traditional fasting rituals of Ramadan during the NBA season

which required him to abstain from food or liquids from sunrise to sunset. Further, baseball legend Sandy Koufax, a devout Jew, did not pitch Game 1 of the 1965 World Series as the game fell on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur.

Exhibit 15.2: Athlete Name Changes

A particularly visible expression of athletes' religious beliefs is their name changes. A common practice of athletes who convert to Islam is for them to change their names. This can be for a variety of reasons. Some athletes, especially African American athletes, change their names as a symbolic rejection of their given slave names. Also, athletes change their names in order to glorify God. Many prominent athletes have changed their names. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who was originally known as Lew Alcindor, and Muhammad Ali, who was originally known as Cassius Clay are two of the greatest athletes in their sports of basketball and boxing that have garnered name changes. Other examples of people in sport that have changed their names include sports caster Ahmad Rashad (formerly Bobby Moore), Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (formerly Chris Jackson), and Bison Dele (formerly Brian Williams).

CONFLICTS BETWEEN RELIGION AND SPORT

As discussed in the preceding section, sport and religion intersect at the organizational and individual levels for different purposes. However, there are some apparent conflicts and contradictory occurrences between religious ideals and the world of sport. In this section, we will discuss some of the conflicts between religion and sport.

To begin, participation in sporting events on holy days presents a conflict for many religious people. In most religions, certain days, months, and times of year are considered particularly sacred. In the Christian faith, Sunday is considered the Sabbath day, while Jewish people hold Saturday as the Sabbath. In both faiths, the patrons are instructed through their teachings and writings to “remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy” (Exodus 20:8, NIV). Thus, performing in athletic competitions often poses conflicts for the athletes that subscribe to these particular beliefs. In fact, some athletic programs at certain universities do not allow their teams to participate on Sundays. Brigham Young University (BYU), an affiliate of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, is one such example. In the event that BYU's basketball teams make the NCAA tournament, they are always scheduled to play on the Thursday/Saturday games so that they do not have to participate on Sundays, which is in accordance with their Church doctrines. Will Hopoate, discussed earlier in the chapter, not only refused to participate in rugby games held on Sundays, but also gave up two years of his professional rugby career to serve on mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Lutton, 2017). Sandy Koufax, who is considered by many to be one of the greatest pitchers of all time in Major League Baseball, made headlines during the 1965 World Series when he declined to pitch in Game 1 because it fell on the sacred Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Koufax maintained that his personal religious beliefs outweighed his professional beliefs (Brody, 1996). For more information, see Exhibit 15.3.

Another conflict between religion and sport is the participation of professed religious athletes in violent sports or deviant behaviors. Most religions in the world place a general emphasis on living a peaceful life. Yet many professed religious athletes participate in sports that are especially violent. There are many professed Christians and Muslims who participate in boxing and football who routinely acknowledge God during their participation in these sports, and it could be argued that their participation in these sports is contrary to the teachings of their religions. Also, as discussed throughout this chapter, one particular function of religion is to provide a moral code for its followers. Problems arise when professed religious adherents engage in deviant behaviors that are contrary to the teachings of their particular religions. Many popular sports figures have struggled with maintaining the moral teachings of their religions, including struggling with infidelity and drug use. Some of these athletes have been included in various steroid scandals

and have been caught using other performance enhancing drugs. More serious examples are the athletes that have been convicted of violent crimes such as rape, manslaughter, and assault.

Exhibit 15.3: Prayer at Sporting Events

In the United States, a particularly heated topic has become prayer in school and prayer at school sponsored sporting events. Traditionally, sporting events have been preceded by prayers in locker rooms and in some parts of the country over the loudspeakers at games. There has been much debate over whether or not this is an act supported by the United States Constitution. Those against such prayers cite the idea of separation of church and state; while advocates claim that prayer at sporting events is well within their first amendment rights. Recent Supreme Court decisions have disallowed representatives of schools to lead their teams in pregame prayers and school equipment is not to be used as a means to broadcast prayers (Batista, 2002). However, students, athletes, and fans are allowed still to exercise their religious beliefs as protected by the First Amendment. Prayer at sporting events and in school has been and likely will continue to be an area of much debate.

Religious attire during sporting events has been a source of controversy as well. Ibtihaj Muhammad, a bronze medalist at the 2016 Rio Olympics (fencing), was the first Muslim-American woman to compete wearing a hijab (the traditional head covering for Muslim women; Alvarez, 2017). Her actions shined a light on challenges faced by Muslim women competing in sports where the governing bodies restrict the attire of athletes. In 2017, the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) lifted its ban on religious headwear (Ahmed, 2017). The NCAA has also dealt with controversies of religious symbology. Tim Tebow was prominent for displaying Bible verses on his eye-black during football games while he was the quarterback at the University of Florida. The NCAA banned such displays in 2010 (Kaufmann, 2010).

A final conflict between sport and religion is the self-promoting of individuals in sport. These days, even in team sports, a recent trend has been athletes trying to distinguish themselves as individuals. Although this may not be necessarily negative in today's society, self-promotion, from a religious standpoint, is typically not considered proper. Many religious teachings emphasize virtues of humbleness and humility. In the Christian and Jewish faiths, the scriptures devote many texts to the purpose of instructing followers of the faith to be humble and not self-serving. The Qur'an also speaks to the idea that humility and humbleness are the paths to greatness. These teachings are quite conflicting with the self-promoting nature of sport, especially in the United States. Athletes that actively promote themselves and their brands, while professing their religious beliefs, are the most common examples of this conflict.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we focused on the use of religion in the sport environment, beginning with a definition of religion and spirituality. Although sometimes used interchangeable, the concepts of religion and spirituality do have distinct meanings. According to Durkheim (1965), religion is a set of common beliefs and practices of a community directed toward things thought to be sacred that unite the collective members into a single community of faith (i.e., the Church) with all members following a common moral code. Contrarily, we defined spirituality as an individual's connection with those things he or she considers to be sacred. We concluded by acknowledging the difference between the sacred (i.e., religion) and the profane (i.e., sport). Following the introduction, we discussed religion and the U.S. legal system. Specifically, we discussed the religious freedoms provided by the First Amendment of the Constitution. We further provided objective sport-based examples of constitutionally acceptable and unacceptable actions.

This section was followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences between sport and religion. Among the similarities between sport and religion, we discussed how both sport and religion as institutions bring people together, the devout followings among sport fans and religious groups, symbolic rituals of sports fans and religious groups, places of gathering for sport fans (e.g., stadiums) and religious groups

(e.g., churches), and heroes/legends of sports fans (e.g., Michael Jordan) and religious groups (e.g., Jesus Christ). Additionally, we addressed the differences between sport and religion, focusing on tangible connections within the sport setting, as opposed to the intangible connections in the religious environment.

Following the similarities and differences apparent between sport and religion, we discussed the usages of religion in the sport environment from both the organizational and individual levels. We began by addressing the spread of religion in the sport setting by such organizations as Athletes in Action, the YMCA, and generic church leagues. In addition, we examined the usages of religion from the individual level, discussing the use of religion for therapeutic and glorification of God purposes. Finally, we closed with an examination of the conflicts between religion and sport, focusing on athletic participation on sacred days or periods of time, religious athletes who participate in violent sports, deviant behaviors of professed religious athletes, and the self-promotion aspect of the sport environment.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. After reading this chapter, do you think there is a difference between religion and spirituality? Describe the similarities and differences between both concepts.
2. The chapter describes several similarities and differences between sport and religion. Can you think of any additional similarities or differences between sport and religion? List and describe each additional similarity and difference.
3. In your opinion, what are the positives and negatives of the use of religion in sport? Do you think it is acceptable for athletes to use religion (e.g., prayer, glorification of a higher being) in the sport environment? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, do you think it is acceptable for professed religious athletes to participate in perceived violent sports (e.g., football, hockey, wrestling)? Explain.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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