

ATHLETICS

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Introduction

Athletics can and should play a pivotal role in any effort to position Santa Clara University among the nation's elite Catholic universities. Athletics has been inextricably linked with elite higher education for centuries, originating at Oxford and Cambridge,¹ and with Catholic and Jesuit higher education specifically for well over a hundred years.² While any discussion of the identity of the nation's elite Catholic schools is bound to generate extensive and passionate debate, certainly Georgetown, Notre Dame and Boston College for a variety of reasons each merit mention in that illustrious group,³ and it is no accident, I would submit, that each fields an aggressive and vibrant athletics program.⁴

Athletics and the Church

The Church and its educational institutions have long been very closely associated with athletics in America. Take a glance at the landscape of high school sports in virtually every major or even mid-sized metropolitan area of our country and you will find one or more elite Catholic sports leagues fielding athletics programs that rank among the best programs in that city. At one point this year at least ten Catholic schools appeared in the top 25 nationally ranked high school basketball programs in the country, including Jesuit High School in Portland.⁵ Millions of American school children received their first exposure to athletics through participation in Catholic Youth Organization (“CYO”) sports leagues associated with their Catholic grade schools.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that commitment to athletics lies squarely within the Catholic tradition of glorifying God through the pursuit of excellence in the world. Vatican II’s foundational document, *The Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et Spes*), recognized the intrinsic worth of athletics in the development of the whole human person. Addressing the broader concept of “cultural education,” the Conciliar writers extolled the personal and communal benefits that are available “from physical exercise and sports events, which can help

¹ Steve Estes, *Abbreviated World History of Exercise and Sport Science*, Department of Exercise and Sports Science, East Carolina University <http://personal.ecu.edu/estesst/2323/readings/history_readings.html>.

² Fr. James DiGiacomo, *The Game’s the Thing, The Sports World and the Jesuit World*, Company Magazine, Spr. 2000, vol.17.

³ *America’s Best Colleges*, US News and World Report, Mar. 28, 2005. Respectively, the following Catholic Division I institutions received the following national ranking: Notre Dame #18, Georgetown #25, Boston College #37.

⁴ National Collegiate Athletic Association (visited Mar. 28, 2005) <http://www.ncaa.org/champadmin/champs_listing/html>. This cite provides a comprehensive list of NCAA Championships won by each division I collegiate institution.

⁵ Christopher Lawlor, *Super 25 Boys’ Basketball Rankings*, USA Today (March 28, 2005) <<http://www.usatoday.com/sports/preps/basketball/super25.htm>>.

to preserve emotional balance, even at the community level, and establish fraternal relations among [persons] of all conditions, nations, and races.”⁶

Pope John Paul II, himself a life-long dedicated athlete, has spoken even more directly about the value of sports to the Church:

The Church approves and encourages sports, seeing in it a form of gymnastics of the body and of the spirit, a training for social relations based on respect for others and for one's own person and an element of social cohesion which also fosters friendly relations.

Sport, because of the wholesome elements it gives value to and exalts, may become more and more a vital instrument for the moral and spiritual elevation of the human person and therefore contribute to the construction of an orderly, peaceful society.⁷

Athletics and Jesuit Education

Athletics can comprise a key component within the Jesuit philosophy of the "education of the whole person", first articulated by St. Ignatius Loyola almost 500 years ago. In fact, even the early Jesuit educators centuries ago included athletics in their school curriculum, thereby influencing education in Western culture tremendously.⁸ Mary Helen Walker, Head Women's Basketball Coach at Loyola University of Chicago, echoes the thoughts of many current Jesuit educators when she preaches that athletics, with all the life experiences it provides, is a vital element of the Jesuit philosophy of education.⁹

Many of life's most valuable and enduring lessons can be learned through participation in athletics - the value of hard work, discipline, teamwork, sportsmanship, preparation, growth through sacrifice, coping with adversity, and trust in others, to name just a few. Moreover, participation in athletics can instill confidence and develop character. For these and a host of other reasons, Jesuit universities have traditionally chosen to field strong athletics programs.¹⁰ The value that participation in athletics imparts to students, whether through intercollegiate programs or recreational sports, certainly more than justifies the continued existence of a vibrant and well-funded Athletics Program at Santa Clara.

The Case for an Ambitious Athletics Program

1. Enriching the campus culture

⁶ His Holiness Pope Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes*, II Vatican Council, Dec. 7, 1965, at 61.

⁷ Oakland Diocese Catholic Youth Organization (visited Mar. 28, 2005) <<http://members.aol.com/oakdiocyo/philosophy.html>>.

⁸ Fr. DiGiacomo, *supra* note 2. at 9.

⁹ *Id.* at 5.

¹⁰ Malcolm Moran, *Jesuits Weigh Hoop Dreams, Reality*, USA Today, February 28, 2005, <http://usatoday.com/sports/college/mensbasketball/2005-02-27-jesuit-schools-cover_x.htm>.

While there is no denying the benefits that accrue to the actual participants in intercollegiate and recreational sports on campuses, I believe that some of the most significant justifications for an ambitious athletics program may lie in the countless other ways in which athletics can enrich the campus and the culture of the University.

Athletics can add critical diversity to the student body, both in terms of economic background and ethnicity. A broad-based athletics program draws student-athletes from every ethnic background, and the scholarships provided by the Athletics Department enable student-athletes with little or no financial means to have the opportunity to attend the University.

Athletics can add life and excitement to the student-body experience. Nothing can quite match the student pride and school spirit that emanates from a jam-packed student section at a sold-out Leavey Arena, forming a sea of white or red, standing all game at midcourt of a hotly-contested men's basketball game with Gonzaga, USF or St. Mary's, their voices hoarse from two hours of virtually non-stop screaming. It is what makes college fun, and provides a much-needed respite from the academic demands of student life. For this reason, high profile athletics done consistently can counteract the recent trend on many campuses like Santa Clara's heavily favoring women enrollment and creating a gender imbalance among the student-body.

Moreover, athletics can provide a continual connection back to campus for so many alumni, which often continues throughout their lives, keeping everything else about Santa Clara alive and at the forefront of their memory. It is invaluable as a means of achieving that lifelong relationship the University strives to build with its constituents.

Finally, it certainly merits mentioning that athletics often provides the impetus for an alum's first donation back to the University, thereby creating a pattern and practice of giving that may benefit many other facets of the University as the years go by.

2. Enhancing the image, reputation and prestige of the University

The single most compelling rationale for an ambitious athletics program, in my estimation, is the role it may play in enhancing the image, prestige and reputation of a Catholic university. The increased visibility and national and international recognition engendered by successful intercollegiate athletics often triggers increased applications and a higher quality applicant pool, allowing for greater selectivity in admissions, and thereby boosting a University's academic reputation. At Santa Clara, which does not offer football and which already enjoys a fine reputation in many lower profile sports such as women's soccer, this would primarily entail ratcheting up the two basketball programs, potentially the most high-profile sports at Santa Clara, and funding scholarships across-the-board in the other sports to outpace the other schools in the Conference and compete nationally. This, to me, is by far the most significant manner in which athletics can considerably enhance the core mission and the national standing of the University.

According to the Sports Journal as well as a host of other published sources, there is "considerable evidence" in support of the notion that success in an intercollegiate athletics

program can bring about significant increases in applications.¹¹ Perhaps the most famous instance of athletics success leading to greater applications and thus enhancing the academic profile of a University may well be Boston College in the period following Doug Flutie's years. Flutie led the BC Eagles to three bowl appearances, their first in thirty years, and capped his career with a Heisman Trophy in 1984. This success, coupled with other visible athletic successes including an NCAA tournament berth in men's basketball, contributed to an enhancement in both the quality and quantity of the applicant pool, which grew in the two years that followed from approximately 12,000 to approximately 16,000.¹² The New York Times Magazine went so far as to credit Doug Flutie with transforming Boston College from a regional into a national university. It also helped distinguish Boston College from Boston University for much of the country that had not previously known there was a difference.¹³

Boston College is by no means the only Catholic university to see its visibility and reputation enhanced through athletics. According to the Wall Street Journal, Gonzaga University owes its substantial growth in applications, enrollment and donations directly to its recent success in men's basketball. Gonzaga President Father Spitzer admits that success in basketball deserves a good deal of credit for the University's overall success. On the brink of financial difficulty in 1998, the next six years, coinciding with Gonzaga's appearances in the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, saw applications more than double. The University increased enrollment by 65% during that time period.¹⁴

It is hard to argue that Notre Dame's national standing and reputation (US News and World Report #18 in 2005)¹⁵ has not been enhanced significantly by its athletics success over the last century. Applications and donations to Notre Dame increase significantly in the years that follow high profile athletics successes. Similarly, Georgetown benefited from the exposure its basketball team attracted in the mid-eighties following several successful NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament campaigns. This phenomena, of course, is not unique to Catholic institutions (A few very notable examples include Northwestern, which saw applications surge by 30% following its Rose Bowl appearance in 1995, and George Washington, where applications jumped 23% following its appearance in the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament in 1993.¹⁶). However, these and other Catholic schools have certainly shown a remarkable ability to enhance their reputation through athletics success and a willingness to continue to field strong programs to maximize that benefit.

Santa Clara itself may have had an athletics-aided spike in admissions related to the remarkable career of men's basketball student-athlete Steve Nash. Nash, who graduated in 1996, led Santa

¹¹ Michael J. Lovaglia & Jeffrey W. Lucas, *High-Visibility Athletic Programs and the Prestige of Public Universities*, Sports Journal (visited Mar. 28, 2005) <<http://www.thesportjournal.org/2005Journal/Vol8-No1/index.asp>>; Andrew Zimblast, *Unpaid Professionals*, at 169-171 (Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹² Bill McDonald, *Phenomenology: The "Flutie Factor" is now received wisdom. But is it True?*, Boston College Magazine, Spr. 2003.

¹³ Michael Sokolove, *Football is a Sucker's Game*, New York Times Magazine, Jan. 2003.

¹⁴ Ron Lieber, *The Score! Gonzaga University was Struggling Financially. Then it Started Winning Basketball Games*. Wall Street Journal, March 14, 2004.

¹⁵ *America's Best Colleges*, *supra* note 3.

¹⁶ Zimblast, *supra* note 11. at 169.

Clara to three NCAA tournament berths, advancing to the second round twice. One of his NCAA Tournament teams defeated #2 Arizona as a #15 seed in perhaps the most heralded single Santa Clara athletics victory of all time. Applications increased by a whopping 36% between 1995 and 1997, and then leveled off until 2003.¹⁷

Success in athletics alone does not guarantee a surge in applications or reputation. Miami's emergence as a national athletic power in football, for instance, and UNLV's in basketball, while creating considerable national exposure for those universities, arguably did little to enhance their academic reputations. It is critical, in my estimation, that success in athletics not be achieved by sacrificing anything in the way of integrity or academic standards, as is all too often the case when schools seek to emphasize athletics. I would argue that this is particularly important at Santa Clara, which enjoys a very unique and enviable niche in the world of intercollegiate athletics, fielding highly competitive teams across the board, coupled with stellar graduation rates (the second highest west of the Rockies behind Stanford), lofty academic standards for student-athletes and an outstanding compliance record.

The success that Santa Clara enjoys in many lower profile sports is furthering the academic reputation of the University, albeit on a much smaller scale than Boston College in football and Gonzaga in men's basketball. This year the Santa Clara women's soccer program that advanced all the way to the College Cup boasted not only the Player of the Year in the NCAA for that sport, Leslie Osborne, but also the Scholar Athlete of the Year, Megan Kakadelas - a rare feat for any school. Santa Clara routinely places student-athletes on Academic All-America teams (such as Alumni Director Kathy Kale, a former women's soccer student-athlete), and its academic reputation in the world of soccer truly extends nation-wide - a fact I can personally attest to after spending time with parents of soccer recruits from all over the country. Even those soccer families residing on the eastern seaboard know that Santa Clara is a Jesuit university located within the Silicon Valley, as opposed to another UC or California State school. They would not know that if it weren't for Santa Clara women's soccer.

The exposure that athletics currently provides in terms of print column inches, television time and web hits is priceless, but it can be so much more. The wins over North Carolina in men's basketball and women's soccer this past fall were mentioned in virtually every major paper in the country. Both the San Francisco Chronicle¹⁸ and the San Jose Mercury News¹⁹ mentioned Santa Clara's women's basketball berth in the NCAA tournament on the top of the front page of the front section after the defeat of Gonzaga in the WCC Tournament, and both ran an above-the-fold color photo of the post-game celebration on the first page of their sports section. Broadcasters covering Santa Clara's televised sporting events, which typically involve men's and women's basketball, volleyball or women's soccer, frequently refer to its academic reputation, its graduation rates, the beauty of the campus, the location in the Silicon Valley and the

¹⁷ Statistics provided by the Admissions Department, Santa Clara University.

¹⁸ Dwight Chapin, *Santa Clara wins NCAA bid thanks to 3-point attack*, S.F. Chron., Mar. 7, 2005, at D1. The front page of the San Francisco Chronicle issued a headline stating: "Santa Clara Women Surprise Gonzaga, Get into NCAA Tournament." A large color photo displayed the women's team celebrating their victory and upcoming trip to the NCAA Tournament.

¹⁹ Dylan Hernandez, *Santa Clara Women Win Tournament, Get into NAAs*, San Jose Mercury News, Mar. 7, 2005, at D1. The front page of the San Jose Mercury News issued a headline stating: "Santa Clara 77-66 win over Gonzaga."

Catholic/Jesuit affiliation. Each televised game also runs the University-produced public service announcement. Former student-athletes who achieve additional athletics success following graduation such as Steve Nash and Brandi Chastain continue to draw attention to the University in ways that would be difficult if not impossible to replicate. Additionally, the success of soccer led to the inclusion of Santa Clara in the film “Bend it Like Beckham.”

Athletics is enhancing the image, reputation and prestige of the University. I believe it can do so on a much broader scale as well, by investing additional time, effort and resources in men’s and women’s basketball, and by fully funding the remaining sports.

Conclusion

Athletics has long been embraced by the Church, and more specifically, by the Jesuits as a key component of their philosophy of the education of the whole person. Athletics at the collegiate level can have a profound and lasting effect upon a college campus. In addition to the unique and wonderful rewards it instills upon its participants, whether they be student-athletes engaged in intercollegiate sports, or students and other members of the campus community involved in recreational sports, it enriches the life, character and vitality of the campus, and creates wonderful traditions and points of pride along the way. When done properly, a highly successful athletics program can also play an invaluable role in enhancing the national image and prestige of a University. Given the opportunity, it can certainly assist Santa Clara in distinguishing itself among the nation’s elite Catholic universities.